

# FRIDAY, 21 AUGUST 2015

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## ESTIMATES—AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE— AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES, SPORT AND RACING

### Estimate Committee Members

Ms JR Howard (Chair)  
Mr SA Bennett  
Mrs J Gilbert  
Mr R Katter  
Mr LP Power  
Mr EJ Sorensen

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### Members in Attendance

Mrs DK Frecklington  
Mrs JA Stuckey  
Mr AC Powell

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### In Attendance

Hon. WS Byrne, Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Sport and Racing  
Mr E Stein, Chief of Staff

#### **Department of Agriculture and Fisheries**

Mr J Noye, Director-General  
Dr E Woods, Deputy Director-General, Agriculture  
Ms M Hoffmann, Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services  
Ms L Brown, Executive Director, Finance and Asset Management  
Dr J Thompson, Chief Biosecurity Officer, Biosecurity Queensland

#### **QRAA**

Mr T O'Dea, General Manager, Program Delivery Services

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

Mr B Kinnane, Principal Executive Officer

#### **Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing**

Ms T O'Shea, Director-General  
Mr R Watson, Deputy Director-General, Sport and Recreation Services  
Ms N Conner, Senior Executive Director, Racing Transition Team

#### **Stadiums Queensland**

Mr K Yearbury, Chief Executive Officer

#### **Racing Queensland**

Mr I Hall, Acting Chief Executive Officer

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**Committee met at 9.00 am**

**CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of the Agriculture and Environment Committee open. Can I start first by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which this hearing is taking place today. I am Jennifer Howard. I am the member for Ipswich and the chair of the committee. Joining me on the committee are our deputy chair and member for Burnett, Stephen Bennett; Julieanne Gilbert, the member for Mackay; Robbie Katter, the member for Mount Isa; Linus Power, the member for Logan; and Ted Sorensen, the member for Hervey Bay. We are here today to examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2015 for the portfolios of the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Sport and Racing and the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef. We will be examining the estimates in that order.

The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 208. The committee has resolved that today's hearing will be broadcast in line with the conditions for filming and broadcasting the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly tabled on 21 May this year. Copies of the conditions are available from the parliamentary attendants. 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. The committee has authorised the release of answers from ministers to the prehearing questions. These will be available shortly on our website.

The estimates process is an important part of the parliament's scrutiny of the budget and the work of the departments. As laid out in the guidelines of 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 to on silent.

The first item for consideration is the estimates for the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Sport and Racing. Welcome, Minister Byrne, and advisers. We will examine estimates for your portfolio until 2.15 pm. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisers, if you are called to give an answer, to please state your name before you speak for the first time. Minister, the committee has granted leave to the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition and other opposition members to participate in today's hearing. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Sport and Racing open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you care to make an opening statement?

**Mr BYRNE:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair and good morning everyone. Today, I will be answering your questions across portfolio responsibilities for the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries as well as responsibilities for Sport and Racing within the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing. To assist the committee, I intend to give short introductions for each portfolio as we move through the day. I am joined at the table by Mr Jack Noye, the Director-General of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and my chief of staff, Mr Elliot Stein.

This morning, I am also pleased to announce that the Palaszczuk government is implementing our election commitment to create three new net-free fishing zones adjacent to Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton. I can announce that these zones will be in place before the end of the year. Today, I am releasing the final maps for these zones and the details of the commercial fishing voluntary buyout and settlement packages. I am happy to table a copy of the maps of those zones.

The government has consulted and sought feedback from more than 6,300 public submissions. Ninety per cent of those submissions were in favour of introducing net-free zones. The zones I announce today will be good for tourism, good for the Great Barrier Reef and great for the Queensland recreational fishing sector. To support the commercial fishing industry, \$10 million has been set aside to help industry adjust. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is writing to each netting licence holder and fishers who have worked in those licences to advise them of the details around the settlement and buyback schemes and offer to meet with them individually to explain what it means for them. I intend to engage in face-to-face discussions with impacted commercial fishers where necessary as the process moves forward. This is a key election commitment and a commitment of the reef 2050 plan and we are getting on with the job.

Across the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, we have been busy implementing the government's plans and working with industry to enhance opportunities for the future. For the benefit of the committee, I seek leave to table the recently released food and fibre plan, which sets out our agenda for the portfolio.

**CHAIR:** The minister is tabling some documents. He also tabled some earlier. Is leave granted?

**Mr BYRNE:** I welcome your questions.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The first question is from the member for Nanango.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, do you have procedures and protocols in place in your department to deal with public servants making either false statements or misleading declarations?

**Mr BYRNE:** I think it is probably appropriate that I call for our Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services.

**CHAIR:** Deputy Director-General, would you answer the question?

**Ms Hoffmann:** Yes, we do have procedures for governing the behaviour of public servants and they are all prescribed by virtue of the head of power, which is the Public Service Act, and the code of conduct for the public sector as a whole.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you. If I can refer my question then to the deputy director-general of corporate services. Does that protocol that you have then just alluded to require a public servant who would have made a false statement or a misleading declaration to be stood aside?

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, that question should probably be directed to the director-general.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Okay. I am happy for the director-general to answer that question.

**Mr Noye:** Thank very much. I will ask the DDG corporate to answer that, thanks.

**Ms Hoffmann:** The short answer is it depends very much on the circumstances of the case in each instance. There are set protocols for dealing with any kind of misdemeanour in the public sector.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** For example, deputy director-general, if a public servant were to make a false statement and you were to become aware of that, would it be standard practice for you to stand aside that public servant?

**Ms Hoffmann:** Not necessarily. Again, it is highly contextualised to the circumstance and the first step is usually to invite the individual to show cause as to the circumstances—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** So in the case that it was a serious misdemeanour—

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Welcome today for the protection racket.

**CHAIR:** Could you just explain how your question is relevant to the appropriation?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** The question is relevant to page 5, note 1 of the SDS. My question, through the director-general, is in relation to the procedures and policies in place in relation to public servants should they be making either false statements or misleading declarations. I am just seeking clarification from the minister through his department on what his protocols are in place.

**Mr BYRNE:** Madam Speaker, can you just illuminate what part of the SDS this line of questioning reflects?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Yes, sure. If you go to SDS, page 5, Minister.

**Mr BYRNE:** Note 1—

This is a new service standard introduced to assess the overall satisfaction of key stakeholders who were provided with opportunity to participate and contribute to development of policy and planning activities.

How does that relate to the line of questioning?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, how about I refer you to the first line of your SDS, which says that it—

... supports the vision of prosperous and productive agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors.

I am just seeking to get your understanding of your department. Would you have your public servants be stood aside if false declarations were made?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. As has been pointed out previously, the rules within the Public Service are well known, not something that is unclear, and—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** So you are being a party to a protection racket as well.

**Mr BYRNE:** I find that sort of language unhelpful to the examination of the agricultural portfolio—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Okay.

**Mr BYRNE:**—appropriations. If you want to have a discussion about the Appropriation Bill before the House, that that is what we are here for. If you want to play another game, that is a matter for you to deal with. I am here with my department and my staff to talk about the Appropriation Bill—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Okay, Minister. I have another question—

**Mr BYRNE:** I am more than happy to do that, but I am not interested in playing ping-pong over a political agenda.

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, if you have a question—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, do you have confidence in police minister Jo-Ann Miller to adequately resource and oversee the operations of the Stock Squad?

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, once again, could you explain how that question is relevant to the appropriation?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** In asking this question, I refer to SDS, page 2 and the overview statement about having a prosperous agricultural sector and optimising outcomes for the state. The Stock Squad, as the minister would well know, goes hand in hand with the department of agriculture, particularly in Far North Queensland and far western Queensland.

**CHAIR:** Minister, are you happy to answer that?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the member for the question. If the member were interested in ventilating issues surrounding the Stock Squad, perhaps the opportunity was yesterday when the portfolio responsible for that was just examined by a committee. The tone and tenor of this questioning is completely and utterly irrelevant to the Appropriation Bill before the House and this persistence does no credit to members of the opposition.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, given the police minister's questionable performance in other important portfolio related areas, I am just seeking your clarification or otherwise of support to her in continuation of her role. The Stock Squad plays a vital role in regional Queensland and if you wish I would seek for you to bring back the information that I am about to request and that is for a full report on resourcing and staffing and location of staff to be provided to this committee.

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, I would rule that out are order.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Do you have confidence, Minister? Yes or no.

**Mr BYRNE:** Madam Chair—

**CHAIR:** These questions have nothing to do—

**Mr BYRNE:** Again, I am waiting for a question that relates to my portfolio. We are now 15 minutes in. Eventually the opposition might ask a question about the portfolio—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** So you are not interested in protecting Queensland agriculture—

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, Order! The member for Nanango will ask a question that relates to the appropriations or I will move on to someone else. Member for Nanango, do you have a question?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** No.

**CHAIR:** Member for Mount Isa?

**Mr KATTER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, my question relates to page 2 of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries SDS. I ask: can the minister explain why the department overview neither mentions nor uses the words 'profitable primary producers' in its objectives and strategic plan?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mount Isa for the question. The member raises a very valid point about seeing increases to on-farm profitability and better farm gate prices. I agree that more needs to be done to support Queensland farmers to fully maximise their on-farm potential and reap better prices. I believe that the measures that this government is implementing through the food and fibre

plan, which I have just tabled, namely, the strengthening of drought management and responses, biosecurity reform, research and development investments, pest and disease responses and supporting growing trade markets will enable better profits for farms.

In fact, our Food and Fibre Policy quotes the need for profitability. I quote from page 1 of that plan—

Strong regional and rural economies in turn support local businesses, schools, hospitals and other services, creating prosperous, vibrant, self-sustainable communities. With the globalisation of our markets, it is important that Queensland industries enhance their profitability and growing Asian markets present significant opportunities.

Our policy that I have just tabled is available on the DAF website for the benefit of the committee.

**Mr KATTER:** Thanks, Minister. At the risk of inviting the same response, I see at page 3 of the SDS that the department's service area objective once again mentions productivity of Queensland's food and fibre businesses and fails to mention profitability. Could the minister explain why the department seems unable to recognise the need to maintain profitable primary producers, at least as the prime objective?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. The Food and Fibre Policy does include a section on profitability. On page 2 it talks about—

Whole-of-supply-chain approaches are critical, as input costs increase. Efficiencies must be sought from gate to plate to ensure the profitable supply of food and fibre products to markets.

I suppose my starting point is this: if farms cannot produce then they cannot be more profitable. The role the government plays is making sure farms are supported during times of drought and times of natural disasters so that when the drought ends they can emerge stronger and are able to capitalise on the opportunities that lie on the doorstep. It is this government's intention to have an industry which is both profitable but sustainable for the longer term.

I note productivity on page 3 of the SDS relates to agricultural business groups which includes AgriScience Queensland who specifically focus on lifting the productivity of the sector through investments in research, development and extension activities.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr KATTER:** Can I have one more?

**CHAIR:** Yes, one more for the member for Mount Isa.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, on page 4 of the DAF SDS I make reference to dot point 1 and ask: can the minister please elaborate the measures that will assist producers to improve climate risk management preparedness strategies and in particular indicate whether the minister and his department is indicating that they will begin to assist producers to adopt a multirisk insurance model capable of mitigating the various production risks associated with agriculture?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. There has been considerable work done with industry groups in the background about multirisk insurance issues. It is not an easy matter to move forward. Some sectors are being enabled in terms of those options. First and foremost the government recognises that an effective scheme in that multiperil insurance is a preferable place for industry to find itself. There have been many discussions, I suppose, over many years about the opportunities going forward and some have been, I suppose, waylaid by the upfront costs associated with multiperil insurance and that seems to have been a problem for some sectors in finding a price that they can actually engage with to deliver those outcomes.

So in principle, if you like, in policy terms I think that it is necessary for all sectors to be moving to a multiperil insurance model. We have been doing what we can in the background, but at the end of the day these are arrangements between those producers and the entities that would provide such insurance. But the fact is without over time general uptake in multiperil insurance, industry and the government more particularly is going to continue to be exposed to the cycles of drought et cetera and flooding et cetera. In a policy sense we are keen to move forward as an enabler, I suppose. I am well aware of the difficulties though, and the practical difficulties that some sectors have had in engaging in this process.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The member for Logan?

**Mr POWER:** Through you, Chair, my question is to the minister. Minister, given the documents tabled this morning, can the minister outline further the status of the three net-free zones as outlined in Labor's election commitment?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. As you have heard in my opening statement, the Queensland government is moving ahead with the three new net-free zones that we took to the last election. The government has been very transparent that our sustainable fishing policy, which included the establishment of three net-free fishing zones in North and Central Queensland, would be implemented. The three proposed zones we took to the election were Trinity Bay off Cairns, St Helens Beach to Cape Hillsborough north of Mackay and Yeppoon, Keppel Bay, Fitzroy River on the Capricorn Coast.

I can confirm to the committee that there has been enthusiastic response to this committee, with around 6,300 public submissions received during the recent consultation process. As I said earlier, 90 per cent of those submissions were strongly in favour of introducing net-free zones. There was some feedback in regard to the boundaries of the zones and the decision has been made to make some minor changes. In the case of the zone at Cairns no changes have been made. In the case of the zone at Mackay, at Seaforth the boundary of the zone has been amended slightly to align with the local dugong protection area. For the Capricorn Coast zone, based on our consultation there has been a reduction in the overall size of the area while still including waters of Keppel Bay and the Fitzroy River. The maps that I tabled in the opening statement will be available to Queenslanders on the DAF website.

This policy is designed to increase and generate tourism activities with charter boat fishing and recreational fishing in these net-free zones. Unlike the LNP, who say one thing before an election and then do something completely different after the election, Labor is delivering on its commitments for these net-free zones. It should also be noted that net-free zones are now a commitment as part of our Reef 2050 plan. This plan matters to the government of Queensland and as the Queensland government cares for and values the Great Barrier Reef we will deliver on our Reef 2050 commitment that we have signed. I am happy to table the relevant part of which both the Queensland government and the federal government had signed and I draw particular attention to the last sentence of that commitment signed by both Minister Hunt and Minister Miles saying the commitment to this plan is absolute.

I remind the committee that the LNP's own senator for Queensland, Matt Canavan, said that he did not believe that the federal environment minister supported the full plan, quoting, 'I have spoken to Environment minister Greg Hunt and he in no way, shape or form supports Bill Byrne's net bans.'—these very net-free zones Minister Hunt agreed, as signed to the document, and is fully aware of that. There has been no comment from Minister Hunt refuting any part or commitment to the Reef 2050 plan. I looked for and can no longer find the media release on the senator's website and I am happy to seek leave to table a copy of that release.

**CHAIR:** Is leave granted?

**Mr BENNETT:** I question the relevance of the tabling of the senator's comments, Chair.

**Mr BYRNE:** It is very important. As an aside, it is one thing to cut a document from a website but when the LNP—

**Mr BENNETT:** Point of order, Minister. It was a motion as to whether we accept the correspondence and I am actually dissenting that motion on relevance to the committee's inquiry here today on appropriations. Senator Canavan is not here, he is not part of these proceedings, and I ask that it not be accepted to be tabled.

**Mr POWER:** This is about a press release about general support across other governments for the policy. That is being discussed under the appropriations committee.

**Mr BENNETT:** Sure. I take that point. We are talking about the net buy back scheme, a Labor Party policy, and you have had a pretty fair run.

**Mr POWER:** Supported by the federal government.

**CHAIR:** I ask for order. We will consider this in our next break and get back to you.

**Mr BYRNE:** As an aside, it is one thing to cut a document from a website, but when the LNP were in government the LNP cut fisheries in Queensland by 77 staff and thus reduced its numbers by 28 per cent. To date I have not seen much of what the LNP proposes in regard to net-free zones or fishing in general, but I did see that there are some in the LNP who support Labor policy on net-free zones. The member for Whitsunday, for example, in his letter that was put to the MRAG review, supports these zones.

**Mr BENNETT:** Again relevance.

**Mr BYRNE:** It is incredibly relevant to the policy that we are moving forward with that is part of our appropriations bills.

**Mr POWER:** The appropriation has widespread community support including from the member for Whitsunday.

**Mr BYRNE:** I will quote from this letter from the member for Whitsunday that I am tabling—

I strongly commend the Mackay Recreational Fishers Alliance on the proposal and, as stated earlier, so long as the few remaining commercial operators who work in the area are given the opportunity to exit the industry with dignity by way of appropriate compensation then the net-free zone is something that should be embraced for the overall benefit of the region.

That is exactly what the member for Whitsunday signed up to as part of the MRAG review prior to the last election and that is the position he took to the election. His subsequent commentary has been all over the shop, but I simply say this: at a point where the member was asked to go to an election and preparing for an election campaign he was all on board with it. I also note that the member for Cleveland supports net-free zones. It is time that the LNP came on board and supported Labor in implementing these three zones that will be good for tourism, good for the reef and good for Queenslanders.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Can the minister clarify the number of employees in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and whether they have been sacked in light of some media reports?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the committee for the question. When I first became minister I did expect some scaremongering from the LNP on this issue so I welcome the chance to set the record straight. I remind the committee of what I said in the parliament. I have previously answered questions to this effect in the parliament. There are no job cuts in the Department of Agriculture. There are no redundancy programs as a result of this budget. The government is about employment security. I quote from what is in Hansard—

In the budget papers we have seen an accurate reflection of where we sit. I will go into a little bit of background on this. The number of full-time equivalents in the department fluctuates over a reporting cycle as DAF responds to government priorities and changing service circumstances. Over the past four reporting periods, from June 2012 staff numbers in DAF fell by 667 FTEs. That is the record they have across the table. That is what they have been saying across the table. There are no forced redundancies. There are no job cuts; none whatsoever.

I continued in the Hansard referring to page 15 of the SDS and looking at footnote 7—

It states that the overall cap of possible FTEs has been changed to better reflect the position within the department. For example, the cap in 2014-15 was set at 2,168 and yet there were only 1,981 FTE positions actually occupied. In the 2015-16 budget we have fully funded all current staff positions and are progressively building our capability and capacity to achieve a revised FTE level.

Staffing levels in Biosecurity Queensland remain stable and in keeping with usual protocols as they are supplemented by labour hire staff to respond to the tropical race 4 outbreak. As members would have seen in the budget papers, there is nearly \$10 million in additional funding. I am sure members opposite would be very appreciative of that funding.

If the opposition knew how to read the SDS they would not have asked me that question in the parliament. And now that I have further stated it I hope that the LNP will put to rest their scaremongering campaign on this matter. Let me say this about that scare campaign: I understand that since the reckless attacks by the member for Nanango and the Leader of the Opposition some staff in my department have become very concerned about the media reporting. I and the director-general have issued staff advices clearly explaining that there have been no cuts within DAF. It is a shame that the LNP has chosen again to scare the Public Service. This is the same party that said that the Public Service had nothing to fear when they came to government.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** We gave them the department back.

**Mr BYRNE:** I and this government are restoring calm in the Queensland Public Service. In fact, there has been no denying that the satisfaction of staff has improved since the change of government. So much for all the muckraking.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Member for Mackay?

**Mrs GILBERT:** Can the minister outline any achievements from trade trips that he has attended?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. The Labor Party committed to three government sponsored outbound trade missions as part of our food and fibre policy. To date, I have made two missions overseas, one to China and one to Indonesia. The trip to Indonesia was in conjunction with the Northern Territory government and I greatly appreciate their cooperation.

I undertook my first Queensland government trade and investment mission to Guangzhou and Huizhou in Southern China from 16 to 21 April 2015. The mission focused on strengthening Queensland's trade relationship with China and creating new business opportunities in the beef industry particularly, following the signing of the China-Australia free trade agreement in November 2014. I was

accompanied on the mission by the trade delegation from the North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils, which included Charters Towers Regional Council Mayor Frank Beveridge, Chief Executive Officer Mark Crawley and 20 industry and government delegates. During the trade mission, I met government and private sector representatives, including investors, buyers and retailers. We discussed the benefits of sourcing beef from Queensland and identified opportunities for future business collaborations between Queensland and Guangzhou. On 17 April I hosted an agribusiness investment lunch to promote investment in Queensland's agricultural sector and I was very warmly received. The event was attended by 50 guests, including key Chinese based businesses that are intending to invest in Queensland agribusiness sectors and/or import beef or fruit from Queensland. I delivered key messages promoting Queensland's expertise and reputation for producing high-quality beef. I highlighted that the Palaszczuk government welcomes foreign investment in the agricultural sector and is keen to establish an ongoing mutually beneficial trade of beef and high-quality slaughter cattle with China. I have made repeated comment to business and industry in China that Queensland is open to do business and is ready to trade.

Just last week I returned from a trade trip to Indonesia, accompanying the Northern Territory government, where we met with Indonesian ministers to discuss live cattle exports. It was pleasing that the Indonesian government took the decision to issue permits for an additional 50,000 head of slaughter cattle while I and the Northern Territory minister, the Hon. Willem Westra van Holthe MLA—Willem, as I call him—were there. As I have said in recent media, Labor is working with our Northern Australia colleagues on a unified front to ensure real benefits flow to our farmers and also to the region. We do not just talk about supporting jobs; we are actually delivering them. You can only hear these results first-hand if you have relationships and dialogue in person. That is why I am so glad that our state was represented in Indonesia, supporting Queensland jobs.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Can I ask a supplementary question?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, will the increase in Indonesia's quota be of benefit for Queensland producers?

**Mr BYRNE:** An increased quota is certainly good news for Australian and Queensland cattle producers. It is understood that some producers have already made business decisions in regard to their herd exports, but the revision of the quota is certainly good news for Queensland producers. When we were in Indonesia, as you would expect there was considerable discussion surrounding the quota and the stability of the quota going forward. Ultimately it is a decision for the Indonesian government and I am hopeful that there will be more stability in the quota going forward. I will add this point of view: we had fruitful discussions with both government ministers and industry about the prospects of stabilising quota requirements in the long-term. We were very warmly received and particularly the business sector in Indonesian understood the merits of the proposals put forward by Queensland and the Northern Territory. I see the prospects going forward for live exports to Indonesia as optimistic. There are fluctuations in quotas for a variety of reasons, but in the long term, and more broadly and strategically, the relationship between the northern cattle producers and Indonesia is on a very firm footing going forward and one that should give confidence to industry about their prospects.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr POWER:** Madam Chair—

**Mr BENNETT:** Excuse me, your time has expired.

**CHAIR:** I will go to the member for Nanango.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, I refer you to page 2 of the SDS, where it refers to DAF's recreational and commercial fishing education and compliance enforcement services. I also refer to a press statement issued by your department on 1 June. Chair, could I have leave to table that for the minister?

**CHAIR:** Is leave granted? Leave is granted.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** It is entitled 'Crew caught with concealed crabs find 20,000'. In this press statement issued by your department, it also said—and I refer you to the fourth last paragraph—that the boat drivers had been charged with making false and misleading statements. Can you advise this committee why there always must be strong penalties for people who make false and misleading statements?



**Mr BYRNE:** You are making an assumption that I am completely apprised of the circumstances around that press release.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** It came from your department, Minister.

**Mr BYRNE:** It is a press release put out—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Are you not in charge of your—

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, let the minister answer the question.

**Mr BYRNE:** It is a matter-of-fact report from the department on an enforcement action. That is what the press release reflects. It is a matter-of-fact report, a news report, on an enforcement action by the department. I am happy—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Do you agree there should always be strong penalties for people making false and misleading statements?

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, we will move on to another question.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Is this part of the protection racket still?

**CHAIR:** That is unparliamentary, member for Nanango. I ask you to withdraw it.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I withdraw. Through you, Madam Chair, I would like to congratulate Dr Beth Woods on her appointment as the new director-general of DAF. I note the Premier's comments on Dr Woods's very extensive experience in government policy development and program delivery at the highest level, in her media statement of July 17. Given Dr Woods's very distinguished career, high accolades and her three and a half years' experience as deputy director-general, can the minister explain why he has insisted on a six-month transition for the experienced Dr Woods to take over the reins?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. The member was just talking about false and misleading statements. The whole nature of the question is false and misleading. What was the last section of the question?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** How is it false that you have a six-month transition?

**Mr BYRNE:** You are suggesting that I have—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** It is in the Premier's press statement that there is a six-month transition. Are you saying that the Premier is making false and misleading statements, Minister?

**Mr BYRNE:** You are suggesting that myself as the minister has something to do with the selection of directors-general or the process associated with directors-general. The process associated with the selection of directors-general was clearly mapped out when we came to government, in contrast with the way in which—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Surely, Minister—

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, cease interjecting.

**Mr BYRNE:** Allow me to finish this point. Compare the merit based selection process embraced by the Palaszczuk government with that of the jobs for the boys that was run under the LNP. I am very proud of the process. I have no interaction with that process, because it is an arm's length merit based process. The decisions were made by the Premier. The Premier engages that process. She engaged a merit based selection process. To suggest that I as the minister had any role whatsoever in the merit based selection for directors-general is a complete and utter fabrication. It is wrong and it is a misleading statement.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, you agree that, whilst we have a very experienced deputy director-general in an acting role, you have a director-general in the actual role as well. I understand both have your full and wholesome support, as you have just alluded to. What benefit could there seriously be, Minister, for you to have two people fulfilling this very important role, given that you have just answered, in a previous question, how tight resources are for staffing? I understand that Mr Noye's salary is upwards of \$400,000. Therefore, keeping him on for six extra months would cost the taxpayers of Queensland some \$200,000. Minister, I ask: wouldn't this be far better used employing two FTE staff for a year in frontline biosecurity, where you have cut staff? I am certain industry—

**Mr BYRNE:** Is there a question here?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I have just asked you the question. Would you like me to repeat it?

**Mr BYRNE:** I know—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, why are you keeping—

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, you have asked the question and the minister is trying to answer it.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Struggling.

**Mr BYRNE:** I understand the sort of guillotine approach that applied in the previous government. As you said, I have complete confidence in all of the senior public servants who work in the Department of Agriculture—complete confidence. There is a transitional arrangement in place. We have one director-general until such time as he retires. We have a deputy director-general undertaking the duties that she has been tasked to undertake. When the transition happens at the end of the year, there will be one director-general and there will be probably a vacancy for a deputy director-general and the due process will be undertaken to fill those vacancies. There is no duplication here. There are no wasted resources. These are authorised positions within the Department of Agriculture. The transition is actually something to be commended where there is a decent handover and takeover process and it is one that I am quite proud of. Both officers have my complete confidence and are doing fantastic work for the taxpayers of Queensland. I find the logic that you are putting forward here to be bizarre in the extreme.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, you have talked about the staffing table and you said that the opposition cannot read an SDS. Minister, I ask: would it not be better employing at least two more FTEs, rather than having to be supported by two very adequate directors-general? Can you not do your job?

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, I think this is the same question.

**Mr BYRNE:** I have just answered it.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I do not believe it has been answered, Minister, and I seek clarification—

**Mr BYRNE:** There is a director-general of agriculture—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:**—as to why you need so much help.

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, cease interjecting.

**Mr BYRNE:**—and there is a deputy director-general. At a point in the future, one will retire and another one will be promoted to that position.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, even your Premier has said that Dr Beth Woods is able to do the job adequately.

**CHAIR:** Order, member for Nanango! I call the member for Mount Isa.

**Mr KATTER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. My question refers to page 23, point No. 1, of the DAF SDS and it references the emergency water infrastructure subsidy. I ask the minister: why are the costs included in dam de-silting not included in the emergency water infrastructure subsidy considering those facilities directly address drought preparedness?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mount Isa for the question. This is a matter that has been raised with me on numerous occasions in my visits to drought affected areas of Queensland. Although those calls have been made and include the emergency water infrastructure rebate, I highlight the greater accessibility of the Queensland program. In fact, it is much more generous than the equivalent program in New South Wales, where there is some component of de-silting, I understand, within their program. I know that New South Wales producers would very much appreciate having the program that is offered in Queensland.

The Queensland emergency water infrastructure rebate was introduced to address immediate animal welfare needs, although it does have, as you would expect, a long-term productivity and drought resilience benefit. While dam de-silting increases the water capacity of dams while they are obviously empty in drought and it is a prudent property maintenance activity at this point, it does not lead to an immediate increase in available water to supply livestock and thus cannot address the current emergency animal welfare need. It does not put water in the dams, so to speak.

The current conditions and terms for the emergency water infrastructure rebate are very specific and target animal welfare. That does not mean that I do not understand the argument put forward about desilting. I think there are probably other mechanisms, given some of the loan arrangements that are currently there, for producers to undertake those activities. We are really limited by the current construct and rules of the emergency water infrastructure rebate. I know how well that rebate has been received in the bush. Of all the drought assistance measures, that is the one that receives the most positive comment, for very good reason.

It was certainly regrettable that the Commonwealth government chose to remove what is a relatively small investment—that is, the 25 per cent top-up in that space—that they had been signed up to for a period. Of all the measures that were out there this had a tangible effect and was very well received and embraced by producers all through the drought affected areas. It has never made any sense to me that the Commonwealth would step away from what is a tiny piece of support. It is not big money for the Commonwealth to make a 25 per cent top-up to the state contribution, but they chose not to do so.

There are other loans out there that could be used by producers to do dam desilting. I think it is a worthwhile activity. I am advised that there are pipelines for sustainability under QRAA that would be suitable for producers to access going forward.

**Mr POWER:** I noticed with interest and read with interest the questions on notice regarding the Queensland government's drought funding. Can the minister expand on the questions on notice in terms of what to government has deliver with regard to drought funding?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I seek clarification in relation to the time.

**CHAIR:** Fifteen minutes.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I appreciate that, but I do not believe—

**CHAIR:** You spent quite a bit of time—

**Mr SORENSEN:** We have only spent 10 minutes of our time—

**CHAIR:** And five for Robbie.

**Mr POWER:** Do you want me to ask my question again?

**CHAIR:** I will just go by my time. I was keeping time. We will go to the member for Logan.

**Mr POWER:** I will repeat the question. I wanted the minister to expand on the questions on notice in terms of what the Queensland government has delivered with regard to drought funding? I was building on the previous question?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Logan for the question. As the committee is well aware, more than 80 per cent of Queensland is now in drought. In many parts of the state primary producers have not seen useful rain for over three years. The Labor policy going into the last election was very clear. Labor would continue existing drought arrangements until 2018. However, should the wet season again fail in some areas of Queensland, the Labor government would review that stance.

We could not have not been clearer on this policy. Yet, immediately after the election and for some months afterwards, the LNP tried to make mischief in the media by saying that there was no clarity past June this year. As we all know, the Queensland government has continued the existing arrangements. Our budget includes more than \$46 million in drought relief for primary producers and rural communities this financial year.

We also know that the wet season was poor. As a first step, the Palaszczuk government expanded to \$40,000 the limit for the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme for producers in their third year of drought who have a drought management plan. This extension was first introduced as a temporary measure in the millennium drought by the Bligh government in 2006 and we have brought it back. The government will continue to monitor and assess the assistance it is providing in line with producer needs.

Labor is clearly delivering on its policy to continue to support primary producers with drought relief. As well as \$32.925 million for DRAS, the budget includes additional funding for wild dog and feral cat control, money for primary mental health services provided by the Royal Flying Doctor Service, \$2.5 million in relief from electricity charges for irrigators, \$4 million to waive annual water licence fees and land rent rebates for producers in drought declared areas and \$4 million for the community assistance package to help drought affected communities impacted by the drought.

In addition to delivering its own drought assistance, the Queensland government will continue to assist the Commonwealth government in administering and delivering components of its drought package in Queensland. The department and a group of government and non-government stakeholders will be reviewing expressions of interest for the \$2.1 million of Australian government drought funding to support communities with feral animal management. I am also finalising arrangements with the federal Minister for Agriculture for further funding to support drought affected communities in Queensland with feral animal and weed management.

**Mr POWER:** I have a supplementary question. This committee knows that drought does not stop at the borders. How does support to drought impacted farmers in Queensland compare with support they receive in other states?

**Mr BYRNE:** As I have pointed out in my earlier commentary, DRAS in Queensland is deemed by producers to be far more beneficial and more attractive. Other states have various measures in place. There are different qualifying conditions going forward. The feedback that I have received from producers in regional Queensland, and particularly commentary that has been in the rural press, indicates that there is a certain admiration or preference for the way in which Queensland has been approaching drought relief.

The current drought is hitting Queensland the hardest. The state of Queensland is more affected than any other state at this point in time. New South Wales offers assistance comparable to that of Queensland, although New South Wales's assistance has been harder to access. Expenditure in New South Wales has been, therefore, much lower.

Other states and territories offer forms of decision support tools relating to climate risk management, such as drought, but offer very little in drought financial support to drought affected producers. The Queensland Drought Relief Assistance Scheme provides freight subsidies and emergency water infrastructure rebates. New South Wales does not provide general drought freight subsidies, but does provide a freight subsidy only when government animal welfare intervention occurs.

New South Wales originally copied Queensland's emergency water infrastructure rebate before ending it on 30 June 2014 and then reintroducing it temporarily as an election commitment. It has again ended as at 30 June 2015. The emergency water infrastructure rebate is no longer provided in New South Wales.

Under the emergency water infrastructure rebate New South Wales producers could access up to \$20,000 per year while in Queensland producers can access up to \$40,000 per year if they have a drought management plan and have been drought declared for three years or more. The New South Wales scheme had a cap of \$20 million until 30 June 2015 while the Queensland scheme has a current allocation of \$32.95 million if freight subsidies are included. Queensland has committed to continue drought assistance until 2018. The Queensland government will continue to adjust the allocations in line with demand.

The New South Wales scheme is much harder to access. To access emergency water infrastructure rebates in New South Wales a producer has to be in a one in 50-year rainfall deficiency while a Queensland drought declaration is based on a one in 10-year rainfall deficiency. Only \$3.6 million of New South Wales's \$20 million cap was actually spent.

The New South Wales scheme included dam desilting, as I have mentioned earlier, as an eligible activity while the Queensland scheme does not have that. New South Wales required a producer who wanted a desilting rebate to have no access to groundwater and thus very few producers were actually able to use the New South Wales emergency water infrastructure rebate for that purpose. Although there have been calls for dam desilting to be included in the emergency water infrastructure rebate, I would like to highlight that, given the greater accessibility of the Queensland program, it is much more generous than the New South Wales scheme was.

The Queensland emergency water infrastructure rebate was introduced to address the immediate animal welfare need, although it does have a knock on long-term productivity and drought resilience benefit. While dam desilting increases the water capacity of dams while they are empty and it is a prudent property maintain activity, it does not, however, lead to an immediate increase in available water to supply livestock and thus cannot address the current emergency animal welfare need. It does not put water in the dam, as I said earlier.

**CHAIR:** Can you detail the current federal-state government arrangements in place to support drought assistance? Has there been any change to these arrangements?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. As the committee is aware, and as I have said before, over 80 per cent of the state is drought declared, covering 32 local government areas and three part local government areas. For some parts of Western Queensland this will be the third year of being drought declared. There were some winter rains across much of Queensland that were welcomed, but they were not enough to be drought breaking.

The Queensland government is committed to continuing pre-existing drought relief arrangements until 2018. This was an election commitment that, as I said earlier, the LNP tried to obscure or deny. The estimated value of the Queensland drought assistance package measures over the next four years is \$52.1 million, excluding the wild dog programs in drought areas.

The Queensland drought assistance package is delivered by a number of agencies. DRAS is the main one for the Queensland government. DRAS is administered by my department, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. DRAS provides freight subsidies for moving fodder and water during drought and a 50 per cent rebate on the purchase of emergency water infrastructure.

The federal drought assistance package announced in May 2015 largely represents a continuation of many of its programs. Most of the package is drought loan programs administered on its behalf by the states and territories. In Queensland these loans are provided through QRAA. Previously the federal government provided a top-up as part of the emergency water rebate scheme, as I have mentioned earlier, but this ended in February this year.

**CHAIR:** Can you describe how that change will affect Queensland?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. Since the current drought commenced in April 2013 and until April 2015, the federal government provided a top-up for the emergency water infrastructure rebate. With the federal top-up the Queensland rebate of up to 50 per cent was increased to basically 75 per cent. The Australian government top-up was widely welcomed by farmers. From 2013 to 2015 the federal government contributed \$13 million. Throughout the process DAF kept the federal government informed of the demand for the rebate. Obviously, the loss of the federal government top-up has a direct and negative impact on Queensland producers.

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

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** This SDS that I have in front of me is an extremely bland document. This is a document that says as little as possible about what a government is doing to support and foster primary industries in Queensland. Did you specifically request such a bland document with no new initiatives for Queensland agriculture?

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango—

**Mr BYRNE:** Can I please answer this question, Madam Chair. The member for Nanango should think about it this way. Good government is boring. If you do not like bland you should not necessarily be in government. It is not all brass bands and colour and movement. This is a very considered, staid document, as it rightly should be. It is not about entertainment value. It is about delivering consistent, down to earth, considered policy through budgetary mechanisms. It is not a Van Halen concert.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** So the document in front of me is the same budget as was allocated in 2014? These are the same figures as last year except for the \$10 million in your initiatives. Where did you find that \$10 million? If I point you to pages 15 and 17 of the SDS, it is quite obvious that you take staff from your department and sack them—mainly in biosecurity, a few in forestry and a few in fisheries.

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, move on. What is the question?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** The question is: where did the minister find the extra \$10 million for his initiatives within the SDS? I point him to the table on page 17 of his SDS, if he needs assistance.

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. Let me dissect this. For the education of the member for Nanango, a budget is prepared by ministers and the department. It goes forward for CBRC submission—the budget preparation process—as I assume you would be aware. I am not sure how much engagement you had with the previous government's process. That budget then matures by way of the budget papers.

As I have said before, this underlying assertion that there are job cuts or job reductions in the department of agriculture is completely and patently false.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, I refer you to the document.

**Mr BYRNE:** Let me finish.

**CHAIR:** The member for Nanango will cease interjecting. The minister is entitled to answer the question.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** If he answers it.

**Mr BYRNE:** You have made assertions that in some way, shape or form that the \$10 million that you are referring to has been harvested from job reductions in DAF. It is a completely false statement. First, as I have said over and over, it is as though you do not understand when I say there are no job reductions. There are no job cuts. I have answered this in the parliament. I have answered this again this morning.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** So there are no physical people but why take the positions?

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, cease interjecting.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** The minister is not answering the question. It is quite clear in the document here that in 2014-15 the estimated actual for employee expenses was \$203,079,000. In this year's budget I point you to the fact that it is \$10 million less. That comes from employee expenses. Why not keep the positions open?

**Mr BYRNE:** I have explained over and over and over to the member for Nanango—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Why cut the positions from your department?

**Mr BYRNE:**—over and over and over that there are no job cuts in the department of agriculture.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, your explanation has not been adequate.

**CHAIR:** Order! I believe that the question has been answered. We will move on to the next question. I call the member for Nanango.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Chair, with the greatest respect, the minister is unable to answer why he took positions out of his department. Please, Minister—

**Mr BYRNE:** How many times, Madam Chair, do I have to say that there are no job cuts. There are no positions taken. There is no razor gang operating a la LNP inside the department of agriculture. I have said this 100 times. I have explained the positions in terms of the budget papers which accurately reflect—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** So you can't read a budget paper. I have just read out the figures to you. Can you not add up? There is \$10 million—

**Mr BYRNE:** I have made this position clear.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:**—in employee expenses less. Why as the minister have you decided to cut those positions from your department?

**Mr BYRNE:** Clearly—

**CHAIR:** Minister—

**Mr BYRNE:** No, please do not let this go. Rather than me state the bleeding obvious to the member, please allow my CFO to explain it to the member so that she is fully illuminated.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you, Minister.

**Ms Brown:** The difference between the 2014-15 budget and the 2015-16 budget of approximately \$10½ million in employee expenses actually refers to a \$7.2 million decrease in employee expenses which is offset by a corresponding increase in supplies and services due to the use of short-term labour hire providers of contractors which has enabled the department greater flexibility to meet the surge in seasonal emergency response demands across the state.

There is a further decrease of \$3.8 million in expenses for biosecurity pest and disease responses as reflected through the national cost sharing arrangements. Those arrangements are only done on an annual basis, so at the time of preparing this document the arrangements had not been finalised so they are not reflected in the budget. They will be reflected when we do our midyear review once the contracts have been developed with national cost sharing. That is approximately \$3.8 million around the red fire ants which would appear later in the year.

There is \$2.3 million in expenses where we have an arrangement where we have moved some of our staff across to the University of Southern Queensland under the broadacre crop alliance. So there is a \$2.3 million decrease there. This is then offset in turn by an increase in EBA of \$2.8 million. So that reflects the full \$10½ million variance.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Just for completion, Minister, I would like to refer you back—and then I will move on—to your SDS on page 15 where it clearly shows a deduction in staffing numbers in your department. How does this cut compare to other departments given your government's overall increase in the Public Service by some 3,000 and why have you singled out your department to offer up positions?

**Mr BYRNE:** I sort of thank the member for the question.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I understand the minister is unable to answer the question, so I am happy to move on.

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, you must cease interjecting. You are wasting the committee's time with your arguments, your imputations and your inferences. Cease interjecting and let the minister answer.

**Mr BYRNE:** I might just make a couple of observations. I have said repeatedly—repeatedly—that there are no job cuts in the department of agriculture. This inference that the numbers reflected here underwrite some form of subterranean culling process is just nonsense. But, in contrast, I might reflect on the record of the previous government just for a moment.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** At least we set up a department of agriculture.

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, that is your last warning.

**Mr BYRNE:** In June 2012, shortly after the Newman government came in, there was—

**Mr BENNETT:** I raise a point of order.

**Mr BYRNE:** No, this is a point—

**Mr BENNETT:** This is about the appropriations for this particular budget and 2012 has nothing to do with it. I ask you rule on my point of order.

**Mr BYRNE:** And the current financial year and the 2014-15 financial year. So there were 2,617 full-time equivalents. By May 2015, there were 638.7 FTEs gone out of the department of agriculture—638.7 FTEs. The last part of that was in the last part of this reporting period, the 2014-15 period. They are the real numbers from the legacy that has been left by the previous regime. This nonsensical, incorrect, continual assertion that there is some subversive part of this government that is seeking to cull FTEs or reduce jobs is completely and utterly false—completely and utterly false. I do not know how many times I have to say here, in the House—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I am happy to move on, Minister.

**Mr BYRNE:**—in the media that this is a false assertion and it is deliberately mischievous.

**CHAIR:** I will move on to the member for Mount Isa.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Madam Chair, I raise a point of order. I have another five minutes, if that is okay.

**CHAIR:** You have used 10 minutes. There is five minutes for the member for Mount Isa.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** No. We must be looking at different clocks and I think you acknowledged that last time as well.

**CHAIR:** We will go to the member for Nanango.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you. Does the minister believe Queensland fisheries should be sustainably managed on sound scientifically based data?

**Mr BYRNE:** The review of the fisheries piece is an ongoing body of work. We came to government with a sustainable fishing policy. That policy involved a number of net-free zones. We took it to an election. It is incorporated into our reef 2050 plan and it is a critical component of what we are delivering for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef and to derive greater economic benefit. That is the key issue here: the protection of the reef and it is the greatest economic benefit. It is a policy decision of government that the greatest economic benefit can be derived from the encouragement of tourism and recreational fishing sectors. That is a policy setting and that is the position that the government stands by.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, if that is your position then why is the latest research data from your department that shows that fish stocks along the Central Queensland coast are sustainably managed and not overfished being ignored by you? If you need help, I can table the document that I am referring to.

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is required under the Fisheries Act to ensure fish stocks are sustainable. There is a growing community interest in the sustainability of fishing activities including the status of the state's key fish stocks. Fishery management must be responsive because the natural systems including fish populations can be highly variable. Effective management requires timely, reliable scientific, economic and social data and information to ensure benefits of harvesting the resource are maximised while remaining within sustainable limits.

DAF has developed several tools to monitor and assess sustainability and the impact of fisheries activities on fish stocks and the broader ecosystem. Stock status assessments are conducted annually to determine the status of key fish species. These assessments combine catch, effort and biological data to assign a stock status to each species using the weight of evidence approach against clearly defined criteria.

In 2013, the Queensland government agreed to join other states moving to agreed national protocols for assessing the status of key fish stocks. The national protocols are referred to as the Status of Key Australian Fish Stocks, or the SAFS program. The SAFS program is coordinated by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences with financial support from the Fisheries Research Development Corporation and assistance from the experienced advisory group including delegates from Queensland.

SAFS provides an agreed and structured national stock status framework including the species to be assessed, status categories, data requirements and criteria for the assessments. Status determinations are made at a whole-of-stock level which may span multiple states or jurisdictions. DAF led or contributed to the determination of status in 36 nationally important fisheries species, totalling 54 stocks in 2014.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** So, Minister—

**Mr BYRNE:** Hold on. I know the point being made here, and I will make it very simple. Does the LNP oppose the net-free zones?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Given, Minister, it is your job to answer the questions, what I would like to hear from you is what is the point of you employing professional staff to collect this scientifically based data to manage our fish stocks sustainably if you are going to ignore them or are they part of your job cuts?

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, you are making inferences and imputations again. Do you have a question on the appropriations?

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, what do you say to the commercial and recreational fishers in the areas that are going to be now impacted by your decision? What do you plan to do to accept that displaced fishing effort from these proposed three net-free zones is likely to cause issues in other nearby areas as commercial fishers either move north or south to continue their businesses?

**Mr BYRNE:** I say what I have said all along. Now that we have completed the zones, we will be engaging with individual affected fishers to establish where what their options are, and there are a couple of options available to them which I have already gone through. But I find it pretty intriguing that in the public domain we have an LNP so strongly opposed to the introduction of these net-free zones in Queensland despite the fact that the federal minister supports them. However, my biggest surprise was the fact that—and this was a recent revelation to me—the member for Cleveland has drafted a private member's bill proposed for the introduction of net-free zones or as he likes to call it—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I raise a point of order, Madam Chair. We are actually talking about the SDS.

**Mr BYRNE:** No, this is an important piece. I am entitled to answer—

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, cease interjecting.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I actually asked for a point of order, Madam Chair. My point of order is: what is the minister on about? He is meant to be talking about the SDS of his own department.

**Mr POWER:** This is not a point of order. You asked for the community reactions and he has given you the community reactions.

**CHAIR:** I will let the minister finish answering the question.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** He hasn't listened to the community.

**Mr BYRNE:** The biggest surprise is the recent revelation that the member for Cleveland has drafted a private member's bill proposal for the introduction of a net-free zone, or what he likes to call a recreational fishing haven, in Moreton Bay. The member would be well aware of that. I was very surprised to receive this piece of correspondence that highlighted the hypocrisy of the LNP, and this is it: 'Private member's bill proposal—state opposition office. Recreational fishing haven, Moreton Bay. Stradbroke Island net-free zone, by Mark Robinson, 2 June 2015. The revised proposal—Stradbroke Island net-free zone.' The hypocrisy of the LNP coming in here and making commentary to me about a government policy commitment from the election campaign when its own membership is promoting the very same agenda. The member for Whitsunday was sitting there prior to the last election and hail friends to the recreational fishing sector and putting submissions to the MRAG review. He was quite happy to get on board with the proposals when his skin was on the line during the election campaign, and here we have the member for Cleveland promoting a similar program being run by the government. The hypocrisy of the opposition is breathtaking.



**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We will go to the member for Mount Isa.

**Mr KATTER:** My question refers to page 2 of the SDS, which states one of the department's aims is to develop its regions through new and strengthened agricultural zones. What are the government's plans for long-term growth and development in crops such as sugar cane, grains, sorghum, corn, soybean and cotton seed as part of a new and ever-strengthening agricultural zone to assist the growth of a sustainable biofuel industry?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. Can I unpack that a bit? Could you repeat the question?

**Mr KATTER:** What are the government's plan for long-term growth and development in various crops—and I mentioned those crops—as part of a new and ever-strengthening agricultural zone to assist the growth of the biofuel industry?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government sees considerable opportunity in biofuels and biodiesel issues. The Premier has made a number of quite public statements about her sentiments in this fashion. It is no surprise, therefore, that the Queensland government and my department are committed to being part of a biofuel energy economy. There is no question of that, and our intention is quite clear. The introduction of a biofuel mandate will enable industry to power the state towards a cleaner, greener energy future and create more jobs. I think everybody recognises that.

A discussion paper was released by the Department of Energy and Water Supply in June this year to gather views from industry stakeholders and the public on achieving a biofuel mandate for Queensland. The initial mandate of two per cent—and I know the views of the member asking the question—of the total volume of regular unleaded petrol and E10 fuel sold in Queensland has been raised as a first option. A mandate would provide certainty to the biofuel industry so that it can invest, innovate, grow and create jobs. A biofuel mandate aims to contribute to regional growth, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and take advantage of advanced biofuel production technologies which can use a range of feedstocks including waste.

The biofuel mandate will provide alternative markets and additional revenue streams for Queensland primary producers. At the same time, a mandate would create additional competition for feedstocks. Ultimately, the level of impact will depend on the percentage of mandate and the feedstock used. However, research indicates that the impact of a two per cent mandate is likely to be small. Queenslanders are already using ethanol in their vehicles. Last year around 350 million litres of ethanol blended fuels were supplied. This is an equivalent of about a 1.2 per cent mandate. A two per cent mandate would require around 60 million litres of ethanol to be produced. Queensland has installed capacity for 140 million litres of ethanol production, not including a 30-million litre biodiesel capability.

While a thriving biofuel industry is highly beneficial in its own right, it will also help create a foundation for a new high-valued, knowledge based biomanufacturing industry in Queensland. A prosperous biomanufacturing sector will have lasting positive effects for agriculture and regional Queensland. The Queensland government's Advance Queensland policy identifies areas where Queensland is considered to have a competitive advantage including clean energy production and storage, particularly with renewables and biorefining.

A 2014 report by Deloitte Access Economics and the Queensland University of Technology suggested that by 2035 a biomanufacturing industry could create up to 6,640 full-time jobs and generate \$1.8 billion for the Queensland economy. This industry will build upon Queensland's established primary industries and leverage our substantial scientific expertise to encourage investment, grow new jobs, generate export earnings and help diversify the state's economy. It can also provide value-added opportunities for agricultural outputs and create new revenue streams for agricultural producers.

**Mrs GILBERT:** My question is also about the diversification of industries. Can the minister detail what benefits to Queensland any new varieties of horticultural products have and whether any members of the public have been able to sample any of these new products?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. I know I have sampled a few at the Ekka. There is fantastic work being done by our scientists and the department of agriculture. It is one of the benefits, I suppose, of being the Minister for Agriculture. The research and development in DAF produces some surprisingly tasty results from time to time, and members of the public are the ones who will benefit from such R and D and have tasted some of these products. As I said, at the Ekka the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries had a stall that proved very popular with showgoers. It was not because they had some sort of special show bag. They were there to grab and taste an apple. The apple they were

given by DAF staff is the Kalei apple. I know because I ate one myself that it is a red apple, sweet and juicy, and it stays fresher. In fact, the apple retains its firmness, texture and crispness for up to three weeks.

**Mr POWER:** How do you spell it?

**Mr BYRNE:** K-A-L-E-I. The apple is 20 years in the making. That is 20 years of research and although it has not hit supermarkets at the moment those who were lucky enough to grab one at the show can hopefully buy one soon at our local shops. I apologise that I am unable to bring any here today. Maybe it would have toned down the temperament of the meeting. The apple is not the only new variety that DAF has played a part in. For the benefit of the committee, I will highlight some of the other varieties. The red rhapsody strawberry moved to commercial planting in Queensland this year, with around 500,000 plants in the ground. The strawberries are large, well-shaped fruit, have a consistently high yield throughout the season and are very easy to pick. Production has now commenced for a mutation of the Fremont mandarin, which is low in seeds and very easy to peel. There are about 2,000 trees being planted in the central Burnett this spring. Over 70 new tomato F1 hybrids have been developed for breeding which have five genetic resistances to diseases such as fusarium wilt, powdery mildew and tomato yellow leaf curl virus. The consumers of Queensland, farmers and other producers all benefit from these tangible results from our research and development efforts.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, can you outline whether there has been any budget allocation for DAF's Spyglass facility and in what areas?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. As the committee would be aware, a previous Labor agriculture minister announced the purchase of Spyglass and Lucky Break stations to become a new research facility. Spyglass is the premier research facility in northern Australia and has a leading role in beef cattle research, development and extension activity that supports Queensland's largest agricultural industry valued at \$4.87 billion in 2014-15. The research facility covers 38,221 hectares, has 13 kilometres of Burdekin River frontage and will run up to 4,000 adult cattle. There is a budget amount of \$650,000 for the facility at Spyglass.

The budget paper notes that this is for the construction of a new dam in the north-east of the property, an area that has previously had limited water availability. It is expected that the dam will have a capacity of 300 megalitres, with a three-year supply, improving the ability for cattle to fully utilise the pasture in that part of the property. For the benefit of the committee, Spyglass currently gets its water from multiple sources including bore water for domestic use and some stock water points, some stock water points are reticulated water from the Burdekin water, and some dams still have water in that they can access. The budget allocation for Spyglass is needed and will be well utilised.

**Mr POWER:** With jobs of the future being a priority for the whole of government, can the minister detail any further information on the status of the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance, known as the RJSA?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. Labor took a commitment to the people of Queensland that, in conjunction with industry, we would explore the concept of a rural jobs agency. This government is a consultative government and we consulted with industry on that election commitment. Specifically we consulted with the QFF, AgForce, Canegrowers and Growcom. As I announced recently in the media, our intention was to help rural enterprises meet their seasonal employment needs, help people acquire the skills required to satisfy potential employers, and get more young people in rural and regional Queensland into apprenticeships that enhance their chances of long-term employment.

I am delighted to say that, thanks to the spirit of partnership and collaboration we have found with the agricultural sector peak bodies, we can do all of that and more. I announced the establishment of the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance as a single point of reference for Queensland's agricultural sectors for workforce matters. The alliance will lead the collection, analysis and publication of jobs and skills data for primary producers across Queensland, and that information will be invaluable in filling the skills gaps. The alliance meets our election commitment.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I refer to non-government question on notice No. 1. Minister, following on from that question you were just asked from your government member, you clearly state that there is no allocation of funding to reviews, inquiries, task forces or committees to explore the concept of a rural job agency. Can you please elaborate what funding you have in this budget and where it sits within this budget for your rural jobs agency trial?

**Mr BYRNE:** The question was to provide a detailed breakdown of funding that has been allocated to reviews, inquiries, task forces and committees.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** That's correct.

**Mr BYRNE:** So I think the answer is quite correct. There is no allocation for reviews, inquiries, task forces and committees. We have sat down, as I said, with the peak bodies—QFF, AgForce, Growcom and Canegrowers—and what we are laying out today represents that support. I know that there is an allocation for that entity.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I am happy to take that on notice, Minister.

**Mr BYRNE:** There is an allocation to the commitment of about \$3.08 million over three years to deliver those activities.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I am happy to take that. Minister, can I move on to biosecurity. In the past seven months you have certainly had your share of exotic disease issues and gained an understanding of the importance of biosecurity and quarantine to Queensland agriculture. Indeed, biosecurity comes in as your second top point in your SDS on page 2. Can you please explain to the committee the point of conducting a review into Biosecurity when you have already dived in and slashed 10 per cent from—

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, keep the question relevant. You are making inferences. Just ask the question please.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Madam Chair, through you, I am just really puzzled why Biosecurity—which is very important and a top priority for the minister's department—has been affected, with the budget decision to reduce the FTE numbers out of Biosecurity although there seems to be ongoing issues?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. Again, there have been no cuts in Biosecurity Queensland staffing—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Just an allocation funding cut.

**Mr BYRNE:** Look, the CFO explained what is going on in terms of the employee expenses.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I am happy to move on, Minister.

**Mr BYRNE:** I do not need to re prosecute their argument. There are no cuts. Let us reflect on this. I came into this portfolio and very shortly thereafter of course we were confronted with quite a number of issues, including tropical race 4. I understand all of that. I am not trying to be unnecessarily brutal here, but you can interpret it the way you like. The fact is there was a 26 per cent cut in biosecurity numbers under the last government. In opposition, we said this is not prudent. Anyone looking at the threats to agriculture and more broadly to our environment, which we also have coverage on, would recognise that the risks going forward in the biosecurity space are considerable. Anyone with the most basic appreciation of the threats that this state faces would understand that. In opposition, our shadow made some pretty illuminating commentary, as it turns out, in the previous parliament about these reductions in biosecurity and in the department more broadly. Prudently, when we came to this place and were confronted with these enormous challenges, as we expected we would be, I discovered very rapidly just how stretched the department was in order to respond to the likes of tropical race 4. That \$4 million was absorbed from within the parliament, but we had staff being repositioned from other functions—there are no two ways about it—and we used contracted assistance, all to try to respond appropriately and thoroughly to this incursion.

In parallel to that, very early on as part of our process we said that I need, as the minister, to get a very clear independent sense of where we sit and what the future looks like and to do so from highly credentialed independent parties. Any prudent new government would take that step. I am very comfortable with the criticisms we made in opposition and the responses that have been managed by the department up to this point—which have been sensational. Despite the various criticisms out there, I have said we would respond and apply all resources that we possibly could to these issues. We have recognised that going forward. So while the review is underway, we have an additional \$9 million into the budget to deal with tropical race 4 also.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr BYRNE:** No, let me just conclude. The independent review is essential. The people involved are renowned experts, and I will be very keen to embrace and consider the recommendations they make. That is not to criticise anyone within the department making recommendations, but these things are prudently and at times best considered at arm's length. This is what we said we would do. I am very comfortable we are doing it. I am looking forward to receiving the results of the review.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, can you please inform the committee the total number of properties remaining under movement restrictions for BJD, compared with the original 170 trace forward properties in 2012? Further, can you please advise of this government's commitment or otherwise to maintain Queensland's protected zone status for BJD, which is so important for live export market access?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. It is actually an important question and one that has consumed a considerable amount of my thought. Again, I will give a little bit of history. When the original BJD outbreak occurred in 2012 in a property very nearby to my electorate, we as an opposition with the previous shadow, Tim Mulherin, met with the government and the minister of the day and said we would do everything we possibly could to support them and we would not turn it into a political football of any shape because the matter was too serious. We kept by that arrangement right through our period in opposition despite the increasing approaches that I know I received about some of the trace forward issues and quarantine issues. I had many representations from people that I am socially acquainted with, if you like. I can nearly call some of them friends, although I do not know if they still think so today. So I was well attuned to that simply from my exposure in my own electorate about the trace forwards.

I am advised that right at this moment only eight of the 254 properties assessed at risk as part of the response are yet to be resolved and that is expected to be completed this year. That, however, is the piece of data that you are seeking now. One of the first questions I asked of the department when I was appointed minister was what was going on with BJD. I had obviously had representations from those who had been affected, and there is considerable division in the beef industry particularly about the management of BJD. Prior to asking that question of the department, I had read the submissions to the national review. The national review submissions may be weighted in some fashion, but it clearly seems to me that there is going to be some shift in the way that BJD is managed and there is a great division of opinion in industry about what should be done with BJD going forward.

The member for Nanango is quite right. From my perspective, the red flag—the thing that has always stopped me from progressing these issues more rapidly—is any prospective threat to our export markets. I am highly sensitised to that, I can assure you. Even if the threat is synthetic rather than factual, it still could provide a synthetic environment for trade difficulties. I am well attuned to that. But my sentiment now and my sense is that the national review is likely to come down in favour of, if you like—and this is my language—a national management arrangement rather than a quarantine type arrangement that we have moved forward from. I do not want to prejudice those recommendations, but I would think that is more likely than not—a management arrangement. I know the dairy sector, for example, is pretty much opposed to any changes in the disease status, and I know some sectors in the beef industry are pretty much opposed. We have ventilated this issue, I can assure you of that. The way forward will be mapped first and foremost out of what the national proposal is. That is due I believe by the end of the year. Once that is mapped out, then some decisions are going to have to be made.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** So, Minister, you are committed to our protected zone status?

**Mr BYRNE:** No, you could not say that. I have asked questions from day one about our protected zone status. Let me assure you of this: if anything we do has the potential to even in an artificial way compromise our export options, then that is a red flag for me—complete and utter red flag. It always has been from day one. But I am highly sensitive to the knock on effects and some of the issues that have been presented to me by some producers who have been impacted by those trace forwards. There is no easy way out of this; there is no win-win. What we will do is we will take the information as it comes, we will consider it. On this issue, I am more than happy to be completely and utterly open to the opposition about what we do going forward. I have spoken to peak bodies repeatedly about it and I am pretty much aware of their sentiments. But, really, we are waiting to see what comes out of the national review. I cannot give you any absolutes out of that because I am not sure what the future holds. I am ambivalent—and I do not mean that I do not care; I mean that I am not dug in on either side. I want industry to be efficient. I know what consequences there are for BJD impacted producers—I can assure you of that; I have been barraged by them for three years—and I am sympathetic to them. I hate to say this, but we are going to wait and see what comes out of the national review and see what we can work with and what we cannot.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Mackay.

**Mrs GILBERT:** My question relates to a question on notice about the fire ant eradication in Queensland. Minister, can you further expand on what other actions have been undertaken?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. Again, there were cuts to front-line biosecurity defence, particularly around fire ants, as a legacy of the previous government. What I have done in government is write to each of the primary industry ministers in the Australian states as well as the Commonwealth. I am happy to seek leave to table that letter for the benefit of the committee.


**CHAIR:** Is leave granted? Yes. Thank you.

**Mr BYRNE:** This government has written to each of the ministers. They are cost-sharing partners for this program. I wish to update them and other governments on the successes of our Yarwun fire ant eradication program. Yarwun looks to be free of fire ants. The Queensland government needs to have the support of other territories and the Commonwealth to try to eradicate this pest. AGMIN has commissioned a review to outline options for achieving eradication or long-term containment in South-East Queensland. The importance of eradicating this pest cannot be overstated. As an example, in the United States, fire ants are estimated to cost the economy about \$7 billion a year. Over 20 million Americans are stung by fire ants each year and over 100 people are reported to have died from fire ants in the United States. In the case of Australia, over a 30-year period if left unchecked, fire ants could cost the economy \$43 billion and make Australian sporting grounds and some farm lands virtually unusable.

I will just add to that perspective. The technical advice says that the battle against fire ants is eradicable—that we can pull them up. But as you would know in South-East Queensland, this program has been running for a considerable period and there continues to be outbreaks identified as part of that. So it would be, I suppose, disingenuous of me to suggest that I am absolutely confident that these can be pulled up. We are doing everything we possibly can with the collaboration of other states, but the evidence to date is that this is a very, very difficult pest to pull up. In some areas where we have had these ants show up, we have been very successful in eliminating them—we know that—but this is a much broader scale issue in South-East Queensland. The department is entirely attentive to it and we are expending considerable resources with the cooperation of other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth. But I would not want anyone to leave this committee feeling as though I am absolutely certain we are going to win this. I think prudent and sensible analysis says that we are going to have a real go at it, but I do not want to be suggesting that I am absolutely 100 per cent certain. Some of my scientists behind me may be offended by me saying that because they are completely committed to this program and the eradication of fire ants, but the history demonstrates perhaps a more cautious assessment of our prospects.

**CHAIR:** Minister, given that we are very close to our break, the committee will now have a short break and the hearing will resume at 11.15 with further consideration of estimates for the department as well as the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges and QRAA.

#### **Proceedings suspended from 10.44 am to 11.17 am**

 **CHAIR:** Welcome back, everyone. I have an order of business. The minister tabled a media release titled 'Federal government does not support net-fishing bans' when he spoke earlier and there was some dispute around whether that document should be tabled or not. We had a meeting and leave has been granted to table that document. Member for Nanango.

**Mr BYRNE:** Madam Chair, if I can just have one moment. I need to correct the record. Just prior to the break I was asked how many properties remain under quarantine for the BJD instance from 2012-13. I replied that I had been advised that there were eight. I wish to correct that; there are actually seven including the indexed property and feedlots.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, I am happy to take this one on notice if required, but can you please explain why Forestry has been dropped from the department's official title and what cost was there to take the 'F' out of DAFF in terms of stationery, website and paperwork? I am happy to take it on notice, Minister.

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. I could refer the matter to my Deputy Director-General, Scott Spencer, who is the DDG for Fisheries and Forestry, to explain the title and DAF's role in Forestry, but I will not. Let me assure the honourable member—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** He was so keen, Minister.

**Mr BYRNE:** I am sure he would be keen. Let me assure the honourable member that the government is committed to the sustainable management of Queensland's forestry industry. I meet regularly on forestry matters and have had numerous forestry briefs across my desk. The Department

of Agriculture and Fisheries continues to administer the role of forestry with a change of name allowing for greater awareness of the core business of agriculture and fisheries. I am getting on with the job of delivering on our commitments. It is not really an issue of substance. I am interested in a productive sector. I am happy to call forward the DDG, Corporate to talk about any costs.

**Ms Hoffmann:** Thank you, Minister. The costs associated with the name change for DAF were very, very minor and probably a reflection of the times we live in now where so much is done electronically. The change to signature blocks on emails and letterheads is all able to be achieved electronically now rather than in hard copy. So there were minor amendments to letterhead, some signage costs but generally they are being dealt with progressively as signs need to be renewed from an RNM perspective rather than correctness of signage. A few people moved across IT systems. Again, that can all be done electronically behind the scenes. All of these costs were able to be absorbed smoothly and had very minimal impact within existing budgets without service delivery impacts.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you. Can the minister confirm his intentions for the support and maintenance of the cattle tick line through front-line staff, resourcing to hold the line and the level of inspections needed to maintain industry confidence in the management of ticks in this state? I refer the minister to SDS page 6.

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. Again, this is obviously a serious matter. As you are aware, there is ongoing consideration of this matter. Cattle tick control and management is recognised by everyone as an important issue for the Queensland cattle industry. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries through Biosecurity Queensland provides services to infected and at risk properties in the Queensland cattle tick free and control zones, to assist producers to control and eradicate infestations and to facilitate the movement of stock from restricted properties. Biosecurity Queensland provides monitoring and surveillance for legislative compliance and provides cattle tick inspection services to facilitate livestock movements between zones principally through approved persons. Biosecurity Queensland provides training, monitoring and audit of these service providers. Other services provided include a subsidy to impacted producers in the free or control zones, advice to producers on effective tick control dips and further management issues, resistance and facilities for the movement of stock under exemptions, and less stringent forms of inspection and treatment where appropriate.

The Biosecurity Act 2014 and subordinate legislation will provide the future regulatory framework for the management of cattle ticks in Queensland including maintaining part of the state as a cattle tick free zone. Cattle tick management, under the new legislation, will enable property or stock owners to meet their obligations through a variety of options in more flexible and responsive ways with a more equitable sharing of responsibility. Biosecurity Queensland will be undertaking further consultation with stakeholders to determine the most practical and effective regulatory provisions to control and manage cattle ticks.

I can add that it is a matter that has been over my desk on a number of occasions. There is no inclination from this government to step away from effective management of cattle tick knowing what the extent of the problem could be. I am well aware that there have been some difficulties with the current management arrangements and that is a matter that is subject to ongoing discussion with industry bodies and within Biosecurity Queensland.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you. Can the minister advise how many meetings of QDOG he has personally attended and also the progress of the rollout of commercial wild dog baits beyond Charleville and what rural supply outlets are offering these rural baits? Again, I am happy to take it on notice, Minister, if you do not have the figures in front of you.

**Mr BYRNE:** It is in my diary to meet with QDOG.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** So you have not met yet?

**Mr BYRNE:** No, point well scored. No, I have not managed to get there, but I am very keen—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you for acknowledging I have a point.

**Mr BYRNE:** It is 1-nil.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, given that you are going to meet with QDOG, can you also rule out the opportunity to reintroduce the previous Labor government's ridiculous requirement that wild dog bait meat be of human consumption grade?

**CHAIR:** I ask the member for Nanango to rephrase the question. You are making an inference.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, when you meet with QDOG to possibly discuss this, will you take the opportunity to rule out reintroducing the previous Labor government's requirement that wild dog bait meat be of human consumption grade?

**Mr BYRNE:** I am aware of those provisions, having been intimately involved in wild dog baiting programs in a previous life. I also understand that in some respects that does not make particular sense in certain circumstances. So I am amenable to any change. To get the most accurate expert advice, I might call forward my head of Biosecurity and he can give you the latest drum on where we sit.

**Dr Thompson:** There is no intention to change the processes for access to meat. The access to meat for baiting is something that is critical and changes that were made recently are ones that are going to stay. We are very keen to make sure that stays the way it is.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** I am satisfied with that answer. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** We will go to the member for Mount Isa.

**Mr KATTER:** The question to the minister is in reference to page 37 of the SDS, dot point one, and I ask: what efforts has the minister made towards simplifying the application system for the various loans available through QRAA given the strain already placed upon the owners and managers of drought declared properties?

**Mr BYRNE:** Can you run through that question again, thanks?

**Mr KATTER:** Would the minister explain what efforts have been made towards simplifying the application system for the various loans through QRAA given the strain already placed upon owners and managers of drought declared properties?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. I am well aware of some of the difficulties in accessing some of the loan provisions that presently exist. I have had representations from many producers to that effect. We are more than happy to talk about streamlining the processes. Some of the criticisms that I have received from growers on the ground or producers have really been about the financial circumstances that are required to access loans. In many respects the more overwhelming criticism that I have received has been about who can access the loans and what sorts of gates they have to pass through to get those loans. The process is probably secondary to the issue of whether they actually meet the requirements to go forward. That is a matter that is very actively discussed. I might call forward my General Manager, Program Delivery Services at QRAA, who can take you through this line and verse.

**Mr O'Dea:** As far as the application forms are concerned, that is something that QRAA is constantly working on to try to make the forms as user friendly as we possibly can, but bear in mind that it is very important that we get as much information as we possibly can. The more information we can receive from an applicant, the better the chances are that we are going to be able to assist them. Whilst our forms are quite detailed, the information that we ask for is necessary. It gives us some background information about how they have been travelling over recent years. It gives us an indication of their current financial position and how they believe they are going to be travelling into the future. We need that information to be able to assess their eligibility for the loans.

**Mr KATTER:** With reference to page 42 of the DAFF SDS, can the minister confirm that at the end of 2014 the balance sheet for QRAA holds \$307 million in equity and \$141 million in cash and perhaps tease out what that means and why that is sitting there.

**Mr BYRNE:** I understand the facts in the SDS, but again I will call forward the QRAA general manager.

**Mr O'Dea:** We obviously receive funding from both the state and federal governments. In that administration role we manage funds that are paid to us for us to forward on to producers and businesses. We are holding funds that relate to quite a number of programs, from the natural disaster programs through to the Australian government concessional loan programs, so at any point in time we do hold significant funds.

As far as the Australian government funds are concerned, at the end of the programs unspent funds are returned back to the Commonwealth. As far as the natural disaster programs are concerned, there is a set requirement for the return of those funds to the government over a period of years, so that is the situation there.

**Mr KATTER:** Given the very serious nature of the cattle industry and the drought, is that seen as a measure of the effectiveness of the scheme? Is it typical to have that amount in cash sitting there that has not been delivered when, I would have thought, there is a dire need for that to be rolled out?

**Mr O’Dea:** As far as the concessional loans are concerned, if I can give you an indication of what we have been able to provide for. In 2014-15 under drought concessional loans \$100 million was available from the Australian government, and as at the end of June we had approved just on \$81 million. The scheme closed at 30 June, so we still had some applications that were to be assessed at that point in time. We are up to around \$86 million of the \$100 million that has been allocated to producers under drought concessional loan schemes.

With regard to the drought recovery concessional loan schemes, there have been some difficulties in getting the funds out that we would like to because unfortunately the drought has not improved in too many areas around the state. Those loans are available for people to restock or to plant when seasonal conditions allow, so people have not really been in a position to access too many of those loans at this point in time due to their seasonal circumstances.

I think there were 12 applications that were received under the drought recovery concessional loan scheme and eight of those were approved. We are working at the moment with the Australian government as far as a continuation of those loans are concerned into 2015-16, both the drought concessional loans and the drought recovery concessional loans.

**Mr KATTER:** If that money is sitting there, does the minister consider that a loan of \$650,000 is sufficient to provide the necessary capital? There have been calls to lift that to \$1 million.

**Mr BYRNE:** A lot of what you are talking about derives from the federal domain. QRAA is the clearing house, the administrative body, which distributes that. I am well aware of the proposals and the plethora of criticisms that have come from some sectors about accessibility, timeliness and so forth. I know that. The best I can say is I am happy to take it up at the next ministerial gathering and to talk to our federal colleagues about what can be done in that space. Right now we are operating within the boundaries of the rules that are applied for the administration of those loans. We are effectively doing that, but the parameters are established largely by federal departments. I am aware of it. The best that I can do is to say that we can take it outside and talk at the next ministerial council meeting.

**CHAIR:** Can the minister clarify whether there are potential changes to the Shark Control Program in light of calls to have nets removed? Would you just give us some more clarity around any potential changes to the Shark Control Program?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. In recent months, as we would all be aware, there has been a significant amount of media regarding shark attacks on surfers and beachgoers in Australia and overseas. There has been concern across the border about the use of nets and their impacts on other species. I can confirm to the committee that the Shark Control Program will continue in Queensland and the Queensland government has no intention to remove shark nets.

For the information of the committee, this program has been in existence since 1962 and it has had bipartisan support during that time. It must be noted that the Shark Control Program has support from local governments, the Queensland surf lifesaving association, businesses and tourist groups. For over 53 years the Shark Control Program has provided safer beaches for Queenslanders. There has been some media about the extent of the program which I seek to clarify. I have been advised that the program protects 85 beaches across Queensland, from Cairns in the north to the Gold Coast in the south. There is a mix of drum lines and nets used. These nets are designed to catch sharks that will cause injury or death to swimmers.

With the recent media regarding shark attacks, I think it is appropriate that I highlight the Queensland program is not a cull in any way, shape or form. The program is not designed to decrease the shark population in Queensland waters. It is not designed to impact on the sustainability of shark populations in our waters. The program is purely designed to catch sharks that are in the vicinity of popular beaches. I want to make it clear that DAFF and the Shark Control Program continue to look at research into improving shark control effectiveness.

In terms of the number of whales that pass the Queensland coast, which is about 20,000 annually, there will always be some chance of whale entanglement. In the past 20 years 52 whales have been caught in shark nets, and I am pleased to say that 48 were released alive. There are marine animal rescue teams that are close at hand in Mackay and on the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast that assist with the release of captured animals.

The department will now also publish the incidents of non-targeted animals that are captured on the departmental website. Previously this was information that had to be pulled out of government under RTI, but as part of our commitment to open and consultative government this information will now be readily available. With such information available there will likely be a greater media awareness of the program, but I will not shy away from the fact that from 1 July 2014 to 30 June this year the program



has removed 621 potentially dangerous sharks, including: eight great whites, 251 tiger sharks, 111 bull sharks and 173 other whaler sharks. As the minister and a person who values human life first and foremost, the Shark Control Program will remain on Queensland beaches.

**Mr POWER:** My question is for the minister. Can the minister advise what senior executive changes have taken place at QRAA?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. QRAA has been going through a slight readjustment. The SDS notes Colin Holden as the previous chief executive officer of QRAA. Mr Holden retired as QRAA CEO on 14 August 2015, following 15 years as CEO and 28 years of service at QRAA. Mr Cameron MacMillan was appointed as QRAA's new CEO following a robust, independent merit based recruitment process.

As noted in the QRAA release, Mr MacMillan comes to the role from BDO Queensland, where he was the executive director of international business and agribusiness. He brings extensive experience in international agribusiness, including export and investment strategies and government engagement. Originally from Longreach, with an early career in stock and station agencies and living and travelling in western Queensland, Cameron's career includes 15 years as trade commissioner and state manager with the federal government's trade facilitation agency Austrade. He worked in the corporate sector connecting international capital with Queensland agriculture, offering strategic advice to investors and exporters alike. I look forward to working with Mr MacMillan in the years to come.

**CHAIR:** Minister, can QRAA outline what has been the outcome to date from the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Marcia and the Brisbane storm event?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. The Palaszczuk government works with local communities to provide support during times of natural disasters. I witnessed firsthand the impact of Tropical Cyclone Marcia on local agriculture and primary producers in my region. After the event I toured numerous properties and spoke to many producers. Let us not forget that TC Marcia had an impact over a huge area, including from Yeppoon on the Capricorn Coast through to areas such as Biloela and Thangool, which are many kilometres inland.

QRAA is a longstanding delivery partner of Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, the NDRRA, offering much needed support to primary producers, business owners and non-profit organisations. During 2014-15 QRAA processed NDRRA applications for Tropical Cyclone Ita and associated rainfall and flood events, and severe Tropical Cyclone Marcia and associated the trough. This included grants and loans, including essential working capital assistance and, of course, Tropical Cyclone Nathan and associated rainfall and flooding.

As at 30 June 2015, QRAA approved 525 applications totalling \$4.7 million across all schemes. Almost all approvals, 520 out of 525, related to Tropical Cyclone Marcia. QRAA processed 100 per cent of NDRRA applications within the standard response time targets set for these schemes. As the minister, I wish to thank QRAA for offering such timely service to Queenslanders when they most needed it.

It appears that I have to call my Deputy Director-General to correct a response.

**Dr Woods:** I have a further clarification in relation to the member for Mount Isa's question about the limit for loans. The \$650,000 limit is for the PIPES scheme, which is a Queensland government scheme specifically targeted for sustainability and new entrants. Its aim is to fill a gap in commercial loan availability and to be positioned so that it does not compete unnecessarily with the work of commercial lenders.

However, for the drought concessional loans the limit is \$1 million and the same \$1 million limit applies to drought recovery loans, so it is possible that a business could therefore attract both of those loans and therefore \$2 million of loan funding assuming, of course, that it was willing to take on that additional debt and able to service a debt of that size.

**CHAIR:** On the subject of loans, can QRAA outline its requirements for a loan application to be successful?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. QRAA, as I inferred earlier, does not set the eligibility criteria or dictate the terms and conditions of loan programs they administer. Each loan scheme has different objective and application requirements. That said, for any QRAA loan scheme applicants must generally demonstrate three key things: firstly, a need for government assistance in the form of concessional interest rates; secondly, adequate security to cover the loan; and thirdly, a viability and capacity to repay the loan. QRAA's approach to assessing loans is both fair and robust. Queenslanders should expect nothing less from an agency charged with managing public funds.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, what other jurisdictions does QRAA support and what are the admin costs that QRAA has spent?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. As we have alluded to, QRAA operates in a capacity to support Commonwealth assistance but we are also supporting other locations such as the Northern Territory. Queensland is very fortunate to have specialist administration of government financial assistance programs in the form of QRAA. For the past 20 years QRAA has managed the delivery of loans, grants and rebates to Queenslanders without delay and when they were most needed. This expertise and their cost-efficient service delivery model have not gone unnoticed in other jurisdictions or the Australian government. QRAA is currently administering the Australian government's Farm Finance and Drought and Drought Recovery Concessional Loans schemes. During 2014-15 \$92.1 million was approved under these schemes to assist Queensland farmers with debt restructuring, drought recovery and preparedness and to help cover the cost of much needed replanting and restocking. In recognition of QRAA's expertise and their robust but cost-efficient service delivery model, the Northern Territory government also engaged QRAA to deliver the Australian government funded Farm Finance and drought concessional loans schemes implemented to support Northern Territory farm business. The Northern Territory government should be commended for putting any state rivalries aside and recognising that partnering with QRAA was the most efficient way to support their farmers.

Unlike previous governments, this administration is committed to ensuring QRAA receives fair and reasonable compensation for their services. It was quite alarming to realise that in the case of the drought recovery loans scheme the previous government well and truly compromised that by allowing Barnaby Joyce to benefit from QRAA's expertise without paying for the administration costs. It seems only reasonable that when the federal minister asks Queensland government entities like QRAA to implement his policy initiatives the Australian government should also provide funds to cover the cost of delivering those services. Last year the previous government agreed that QRAA would implement the drought recovery loans scheme without receiving one single cent from the Australian government to cover administration costs. QRAA, as we can see, is a small agency with under 85 staff and the previous government's mistake cost QRAA and the taxpayers of Queensland quite dearly. I can say this to the committee: I will not be throwing unfunded hand grenades into QRAA or Mr MacMillan's lap. QRAA are the experts in this field and have demonstrated so and they demand respect and fair and reasonable financial compensation for their services.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr POWER:** I have a question about the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges. Minister, what works have taken place at QATC facilities to assist in animal welfare concerns?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. It is no surprise to anyone that dog attacks have a major impact on the welfare of animals across the primary industries sector, including the animals at the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges. The drought conditions at Longreach have required a complete destocking of Rosebank Station, which usually carries a majority of the Longreach Pastoral College's sheep flock. This destocking required sheep to be sold and the remaining required for training and breeding purposes were transferred to the college campus. Sadly, the proximity of the campus to the town resulted in an attack on livestock by the town dogs. The college is constructing a 7.2-kilometre dog-proof fence around the perimeter of the campus at a cost of approximately \$35,000. This will protect stud rams and ewes from basically domestic dog attack. The fence is currently 25 per cent completed and being built by students at the college as part of their training. Participants in employment programs managed by RAPAD Employment Services in Longreach are also helping with the construction. Remaining sheep flocks have been moved to the campus paddocks furthest away from the town to minimise the risk of injury from further dog attacks in the interim period.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Before we go to non-government questions, I might just ask you a very quick question. Has QATC investigated the benefits of overseas students attending QATC?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. I know that the QATC provides an excellent platform for engagement of overseas students. The Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges commenced establishing international training markets in 2014-15 and is planning on increasing its export revenues as a key strategy to increase revenues and student numbers impacted by the increasingly competitive domestic market. During 2014-15 QATC hosted students from Indonesia at both Longreach and Emerald colleges in partnership with the University of New England. Students received practical based training at the colleges in animal handling techniques and animal welfare standards and procedures. QATC provided a consultancy service to Qinghai vocational training in

north-west China to review their facilities and training programs with a view to considering Australian standards being implemented in their sheep husbandry programs. Instructors travelled to Mount Hagen agricultural college in Papua New Guinea to deliver training to Mount Hagen instructors in Australian standards for rural training. In the train-the-trainer model, Mount Hagen agricultural staff will be able to deliver qualifications that meet Australian qualification requirements, giving students the opportunity to improve productivity in their own country and maybe apply for work in Australia. Other potential opportunities are being explored with the central provincial government in Papua New Guinea.

Apart from the financial benefit to QATC, a key outcome from these programs is to establish closer links between agricultural leaders and enhance overseas relationships so that the future of trade opportunities may be developed over time. I can add that this matter of our capacity at the QATC was something that I raised particularly in the trip to Indonesia and there is recognition in Indonesia of the value that Australia and our colleges particularly can bring in their desire to improve the standards of their own agricultural sectors. I think the opportunities going forward over time will be advantageous to those institutions.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Minister.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, I acknowledge the work that needed to be done by the previous LNP government to reopen the ag colleges and get them back on track as highlighted from the Ernst & Young audit, which found a mountain of issues at those ag colleges—everything from a lack of regular painting to human health issues from asbestos—

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, could I just ask that you do not personally reflect on your question. Just ask the question.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** With respect, there has been no personal reflection but I can—

**CHAIR:** Please just ask the question.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Okay. There has been everything from a lack of regular painting to human health issues from asbestos dangers and a failed sewer septic system at the Emerald campus. What scheduled maintenance programs are in place to ensure adequate standards of upkeep and improvement of facilities at both Emerald and Longreach colleges?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. I receive regular updates on where we are with the colleges. I can state quite publicly that we are very sympathetic to the retention and development of those colleges as much as we possibly can in the current form. For the specific issues that you have asked, I will ask Brent Kinnane to come forward, Principal Executive Officer of the training colleges, and he can probably—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minister, I am more than happy to hear from your executive officer, but what I am chasing is an actual breakdown of those maintenance works, so I am happy to take that on notice if you like.

**Mr BYRNE:** I am pretty sure he has it with him, so here we go.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Okay.

**Mr Kinnane:** QATC is 18 months into a four-year capital works program. This four-year program took into consideration things like the Ernst & Young review as well as specialised reports from QBuild, a Farmsafe audit, risk management services and building asset services. To date over that 18 months we have completed the following works. We have installed new fire mains, fire pumps, fire hose reels, emergency lighting, exit lighting, fire detection and alarms throughout the EAC campus to ensure fire compliance. We have upgraded the main switchboard to the site and associated works. We have decommissioned old and unused asbestos buildings. We have rectified electrical hazards in feed sheds. We have installed and rectified safety guarding to our plant and equipment. We have installed exit and emergency lighting at our Berrigurra station located near Blackwater. We have rectified a number of maintenance hazards like OH&S trip hazards et cetera through guarding and we have also undertaken electrical rectification to the residences in the campus buildings for compliance purposes.

At Longreach we have undertaken some similar things in relation to the fire mains, fire pumps et cetera. We have upgraded air conditioning and storm water damage that has occurred to the dorms. We have desilted dams at Rosebank Station and on LPC land. We actually purchased a new centre pivot irrigating system for our farm at LPC so we can improve the productivity of the farm. Future works that are coming up in the 2015-16 financial year include upgrades to Berrigurra station, including their ablutions block, sewage system and water infrastructure, air conditioning, construction of new

cattleyards and decommissioning and rehabilitation of existing sewerage ponds. We are looking at new diesel storage facilities. We are purchasing new tractors, cotton mulchers and upgrading river supply waters. At Longreach we are constructing new stairs, disabled ramps, loading docks and veranda replacements to ensure they comply.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** It sounds like you had a lot of work to do.

**Mr Kinnane:** Yes, we have done a lot of work. We have had ceilings replacement, upgrades to the kitchen rooms, upgrades to the pools, replacement tractors et cetera.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you. Minister, I refer to QRAA's role in administering payments for natural disaster relief, BJD and the east coast inshore net fishing reduction scheme. Minister, can you advise what the plans are for QRAA to administer compensation for the commercial fishermen now displaced from your net closures without consultation?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. Naturally the normal mechanisms that apply for any schemes will be run through QRAA, but there are two pieces to the proposals that the government is putting forward. There is a compensation component that exists within the act presently. That is one option that some commercials may choose to avail themselves of, so that is a legislative framework that maps out a compensation mechanism for those that are impacted by these sorts of government decisions. The other measure will be a buyout program—voluntary—where we will be paying an attractive price for those licences plus an incentive to go with that. It will depend very much on the rate of exposure that particular commercials have to the zones in place. As I have said before, commercial operators have a bell curve of exposure. At one end of the scale there is as little as one day per year signature in those zones; at the other end of the scale it is more extensive than that. So the proportional incentives that go hand in glove with the voluntary buyout of licences is proportional to—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Excuse me, Minister, but it would be very difficult to be voluntary, would it not, when it is compulsory?

**Mr BYRNE:** There is no compulsory component to the net buyback scheme.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** So you are closing down areas—

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, this is not a venue for arguing. The minister is trying to answer the question.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** That would be good if he could; thank you.

**Mr BYRNE:** If an operator who has two days annual exposure to that zone wishes to continue to operate, which I would imagine they will, they will be able to acquire compensation under the act. They will be able to stay in the industry and they would need to operate in those areas that they are mainly operating in. For those commercial fishers who do not want to stay in the industry, the government is funding the buyback of licences on a voluntary basis.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Just so I can be clear, so you are telling commercial fishermen they are allowed to continue to fish should they wish to do so?

**Mr BYRNE:** They can. Some of the people who have been most aggressive in their criticism of these proposals, their logbook entries indicate minimal exposure to the zones. I assume—

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Minimal is not none, though.

**CHAIR:** Member for Nanango, I would ask you to cease interjecting.

**Mr POWER:** Point of order. If the member for Nanango does not get it, why does she not listen to the answer rather than advancing arguments through this process? Put your question, have the answer.

**CHAIR:** Minister, would you answer the question.

**Mr BYRNE:** As I have tried to map out, there is a variety of level of exposure based on a logbook data. There are two options that will be available to commercials that are affected. The first is compensation under the act. That sits there. It is quite viable. The other side is the voluntary buyback of licences with transitional payments to encourage that. But it is entirely voluntary and each commercial fisherman will make decisions based on their own circumstances.

The fact is that we did not know precisely who we were dealing with until such time as the boundaries have been clarified. Now that the boundaries are known, from logbook data we know who we are dealing with. We have written, as the government, to every impacted commercial fisherman as

of today mapping out the options that are available to them. I am confident that many will see this as an attractive set of circumstances for them in their own circumstances. So I am completely comfortable with the options that are available to people and the pieces that will be in play going forward.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The member for Mount Isa has a question. Would you be able to make it quick, please?

**Mr KATTER:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, this is directed at QRAA again. Can the minister please explain why the latest QRAA rural debt survey is from 2011?

**Mr BYRNE:** I sort of thank the member for the question. I do not know. Let me ask my deputy director-general, who may well know.

**Dr Woods:** As you would be aware, QRAA conducted a series of rural debt surveys up until 2011. From that time onwards the commercial banks have not all agreed to cooperate in the process and it does require cooperation; it is not a mandated or enforced process. So it has not been able to be conducted at the state level. However, the current Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture is exploring with the rural banks the possibility of being able to recommence a debt survey, which would be on a national basis, where he would seek the cooperation of all the major rural lenders. That is the current state of play.

**Mr KATTER:** I think that is important. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. We will now adjourn until 1 pm. The hearing will resume with the consideration of the proposed expenditure for the Sport and Racing units within the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing, Stadiums Queensland and Racing Queensland.

#### **Proceedings suspended from 12.03 pm to 1.00 pm**



**CHAIR:** The estimates hearing of the Agriculture and Environment Committee is now resumed. For the next hour and a quarter we will focus on estimates for the Sport and Racing units within the department of National Parks, Sport and Racing, Stadiums Queensland and Racing Queensland. Minister, would you care to make a brief opening statement?

**Mr BYRNE:** Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. For this session, I am joined by the director-general of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing, Ms Tamara O'Shea; Mr Ian Hall, the interim Chief Executive of Racing Queensland; Mr Kevin Yearbury, the CEO of Stadiums Queensland; and Mr Elliot Stein, my chief of staff. The government's priorities in Sport and Racing are for all Queenslanders to lead active and healthy lifestyles through participation and physical activity and to restore confidence in the racing industry and ensure that it operates with integrity. On the very day that I was sworn in as minister in February, live baiting in the racing industry was exposed by the ABC on *Four Corners*. Since then, we have been in a period of review and change for the racing industry, building integrity and working to restore confidence in the sector.

Turning to sport and recreation, I am pleased to report that we are injecting a record investment into grassroots organisations to encourage greater active participation by Queenslanders. Support for clubs will continue to be directed through the Get in the Game initiative, with \$45.7 million allocated in 2015-16 across the four key programs. There is \$5 million for the Get Started Vouchers, there is \$3.5 million for the Get Going Clubs, there is \$19.2 million for Get Playing for new and upgraded sport and active recreation facility projects and there is \$18 million for Get Playing Plus for major new or upgraded sport and active recreation places and spaces.

Despite the high-profile success in recent months of the Firebirds and the Matildas, there remains a great disparity between male and female sport. One of my priorities is to increase female participation in sporting activity in Queensland. That is why I am proud that we have committed \$1.5 million over the next three years to provide opportunities for women and girls to participate in sport and active recreation.

I am also pleased to confirm that this budget provides \$15 million this financial year to Stadiums Queensland to support the development of a state netball facility at the Queensland Sports and Athletics Centre in partnership with Netball Queensland. Netball is a leading sport for female participation—in fact, it is the leading sport for female participation—and it is doing a fantastic job of recruiting and retaining youngsters into an active lifestyle. I am happy to take questions.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We will go to the member for Currumbin.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you, again, for allowing me to appear on this committee. My question to the minister refers to SDS, page 15, to do with staffing. Minister, do you have procedures and protocols in place in your department to deal with public servants making either false statements or misleading declarations?

**Mr BYRNE:** I will say this: every department has its processes and procedures. I am more than happy to have my director-general respond.

**Ms O'Shea:** With respect to the honourable member's question, we have a number of fraud mitigation processes in play in the department. Our framework is consistent with the Queensland Audit Office's best practice for prevention approach. Our internal control model complies with international standards in relation to the Queensland Audit Office. We also utilise well-established processes and protocols established by the Public Service Commission in relation to notifications around inappropriate behaviour by staff. Depending on the nature of that behaviour, different protocols kick in, including referral to our integrity unit, referral to the Crime and Corruption Commission and even referral through misconduct to the PSC. So depending on the matter at hand, it would depend as to which process the department would employ.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you. So would that protocol at some stage require the public servant to be stood aside?

**Ms O'Shea:** It would depend on the matter at hand. There are many hypotheticals that I could speculate on but, without knowing the specifics of a particular matter, which I would not be able to be at liberty to comment on if there were specific ones, it would depend on the issue as to which protocol would kick in.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** So it seems then we have different standards for public servants as we do for ministers and here we are in day 4 of the protection racket.

**Mr POWER:** This seems to be a succession of hypothetical questions that I think should be ruled out of order.

**CHAIR:** I would ask the member to ask a question that relates to the appropriations, please.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Minister, in relation to the SDS, page 7, to do with integrity, on 6 March 2015, Racing Queensland issued a statement on its website which states—  
Statutory Declaration required to be completed and submitted to Racing Queensland before you can nominate your greyhounds to trial or race ...

Minister, I ask: what sanction applies if such a statutory declaration were found to be either false or misleading?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. You are asking about matters that exist within the domain of Racing Queensland. So I defer to the interim executive of Racing Queensland to come forward and speak to that matter.

**Mr Hall:** Thank you very much for the question. I guess the penalties would apply as to anybody who swears a declaration that is false. So I think those penalties that will impact would apply to anybody who swears a false declaration.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you very much. So it does seem that there is a set of rules for greyhound trainers and another for ministers in this government.

**Mr POWER:** Is this making an argument?

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I am trying to refer to—

**Mr POWER:** Point of order. Is this making an argument? Have you got a question to put?

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I have a question I am moving on to and it relates to page 7 of the SDS, where it says that the Racing service area objective is to—

Maintain public confidence in, and ensure the integrity of, the Queensland racing industry.

But right now, the industry is in limbo. We have a minister with no plan, a DG was sacked—

**CHAIR:** Member for Currumbin, I would ask you to not make any inferences. Ask a question that relates to the appropriations.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess the truth hurts. I refer to question on notice—

**CHAIR:** Member for Currumbin, I would ask you to withdraw that comment.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I withdraw. I reference question on notice No. 7. In the parliament on 16 July, Minister, you said—

Later today Mr Hall and I will be outlining in detail the current extent of the expected losses in Racing Queensland.

But you did not, did you, Minister. Despite my requests since early June, you did not table any details. Yesterday, I received a response to question on notice No. 7 containing a few figures, but lacking the detail that the minister promised. Minister, will you now table—

**CHAIR:** Member for Currumbin, what is your question?

**Mrs STUCKEY:** My question is: Minister, will you now table the interim assessments you have spoken of from KPMG that support evidence of the cost blowout and the savings as outlined?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question, although I reject entirely the inferences that I, or the government, or anybody else has not acted in this matter entirely appropriately and entirely transparently. After the statement I made in the parliament, in this very chamber we gave an extensive briefing on those issues for which you were most welcome to attend. The interim CEO went through line and verse precisely where the financials of Racing Queensland sat. So there has never been any suggestion that we have not been 100 per cent transparent and visible. In fact, since that time, with the data that we have provided, we have been engaging with industry representatives revealing to them the full nature of what Racing Queensland is confronted with. I am very thankful to the interim CEO for moving that agenda forward.

The facts as I outlined in the parliament are exactly, plus or minus the variations that exist, as they stand today. The racing industry and Racing Queensland are confronting a very, very serious financial problem. There is no way of denying that. All the numbers that we have put on the table in that briefing and subsequent briefings to representatives of the industry, ably undertaken by the interim CEO—as he should—have all been engaging on the facts. So this suggestion that in some way we are obscuring the fact of the matter is absolutely false. In fact, we have gone in the opposite direction. We have engaged. There is nothing that we are not putting on the table here—

**Mrs STUCKEY:** With respect, Madam Chair, the minister is not answering my question.

**Mr BYRNE:** Let me finish.

**CHAIR:** Member for Currumbin.

**Mr BYRNE:** If you ask a question, you get an answer. This problem sheets home to the inaction of the previous government and the comments by the previous minister in the last sittings of parliament were absolutely disgraceful, completely and utterly unable to reconcile the responsibilities of the previous government—

**Mrs STUCKEY:** With respect, Madam Chair, I simply asked for the documents to be tabled and the minister is avoiding deliberately—

**Mr BYRNE:** If anyone is accountable for where Racing Queensland sits today, it is the previous government.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I ask the minister to table—

**Mr BYRNE:** We have come into power and all of a sudden as a result of, admittedly, the investigations and processes associated with the greyhounds—the greyhound commission of inquiry—forcing us to go into Racing Queensland to reveal the lack of substance that exists in Racing Queensland, it has been a revelation and it can only point back to the ineptitude of the previous government. So I refute the claim that we are not transparent. Every single piece of information that we have has been made publicly available. The fact that the opposition did not avail themselves to come in here and get the briefing with everybody else in Queensland, or the fact that they do not seem to want to engage on this matter other than for political point-scoring—

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Point of order, Madam Chair—

**Mr BYRNE:**—says exactly where this opposition sits on this matter.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Point of order.

**CHAIR:** Yes, what is your point of order?

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I object to what the minister is saying about the transparency. We were not invited into the media and we also were not—

**Mr POWER:** Point of order.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** And there were no notes handed out

**Mr POWER:** This is not a point of order.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I ask him to withdraw.

**CHAIR:** Minister, have you answered the question?

**Mr BYRNE:** Well, I will go further, now that the point of order has been determined: a full discussion paper on the industry's finances was released online yesterday. I would encourage the member to go and have a look at that. That is there; it is in the public domain. All the facts are evident and all elements of industry know about where we sit and the very, very severe and hard choices that have to be made going forward. This notion, the Pontius Pilate effect sitting in opposition completely obscured from reality, is a false notion. They have had every opportunity to make sure that they are aware of where we sit and they have deliberately not wanted to engage because of the embarrassment they feel and carry from their previous regime.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Member for Currumbin?

**Mrs STUCKEY:** It seems that the financial documents did go up yesterday. I have been looking religiously every day. I will be very keen to see them and, as I said, on record, please, Madam Chair, I have been asking since June 4.

**CHAIR:** Member for Currumbin, I would just like to point something out. Before you started your questioning you thanked us for allowing you to join us here on the committee. We are very happy to have you here, but you do need to stick to questions that relate to the appropriations, not make inferences or imputations. I would ask you to ask a question that is relevant.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Still on question on notice reply No. 7, the annual report for the Queensland All Codes Racing Industry Board 2013-14 states on page 79 of the independent auditor's report—in this case it was a delegate of the Auditor-General—that the auditor's opinion was that the financial report presents a true and fair view. The total income was reported as \$201.3 million and on 1 July 2015 a new fixed-product fee was payable by Tatts to Racing Queensland of \$15 million.

**CHAIR:** You are making a statement. I have not heard your question yet.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** It is very important. By your projections, Minister, in question on notice No. 7 you state that projected total revenue is \$181.2 million, which is a \$34 million fall in income. I ask: how can that possibly be? Could you please outline where those figures come from?

**Mr BYRNE:** Again, talking about 2013-14 is not within the bounds of the deliberations of this committee. You can talk about 2014-15 in the immediately past period and you can talk about matters that are identified in this Appropriation Bill, but doing this rear vision mirror to 2014-15 is not relevant to the parameters of this debate.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** With respect, Minister, question on notice 7 relates exactly to that and you responded to it.

**Mr BYRNE:** Those numbers are there. They are an accurate reflection of where we sit. I just don't understand why you don't seem to understand the situation that Racing Queensland is in, the situation that is the legacy of the Liberal National Party, the complete and utter failure within the Liberal National Party regime to keep oversight and financial control. That is exactly where we sit. The moment that these matters were brought to our attention the Premier stood in the House and pointed out exactly where we sit. Further to that, when I stood in the House and talked about the briefing that we would be giving, I actually invited people to attend or to that effect. If you look at the *Hansard* you will see that. I was more than welcoming. It was not a closed shop. It was in this chamber for anyone who wanted to see the facts and ask some questions.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** No, you didn't.

**Mr BYRNE:** So, there is no question or doubt about the numbers, where the industry sits and the problems and challenges going forward. And this deliberate suggestion that we are withholding or we are misrepresenting or that we are in some way as a government doing anything that is not completely transparent is absolutely outrageous—an outrageous suggestion—and I take great umbrage at it.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** The \$6 million savings that are mentioned in question on notice No. 7 I am told were not on the previous board's agenda and they have been added since their departure. Where did these figures come from?



**Mr BYRNE:** Before I allow the interim CEO, I am not sure what was on the previous board's agenda, but I can tell you this much: from the moment we went in there, from the moment that we actually got the figures from the chief financial officer from Racing Queensland, it became self-evident where the trajectory of Racing Queensland was. Of course, those numbers are completely accurate and the \$6 million of savings, I will ask the interim CEO to ventilate that further.

**Mr Hall:** When I came into Racing Queensland I was presented with a draft budget by the CFO which showed a loss in the order of \$21 million. A normal process to go through is to go back to the management, go through line by line to understand is that budget—are the items in that budget, are there savings which can be made, are they realistic, what are the assumptions on each of those items. So we went through line by line with each of the key managers and identified areas where they maybe had included additional staff or other items of expenditure which on reflection maybe ought not to have been spent or could be considered to be reduced. So, we went through a process line by line identifying that with the staff and came up with the approximately \$6 million in savings from the original budget.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you very much. Referring again to that question on notice No. 7 reply, on radio on 17 July the minister said that the Queensland Audit Office was raising concerns about a \$5 million increase in salaries, yet the reply to the question on notice No. 7 states a figure of \$2.8 million. Which figure was right, Minister?

**Mr BYRNE:** At the time that was the data that I had present. It is still something that concerns me greatly about how the decisions were made in Racing Queensland prior to our intervention. I will caution the member, though. Some of the things or the suggestions that are being made, admittedly under privilege, go very close to impugning the reputation of the interim CEO and his activities and I think that that is a very, very unfortunate place for the member to venture and I urge caution before any further suggestions of impropriety or lack of thoroughness.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Is that a threat?

**Mr BYRNE:** Well, that is the interpretation I get. I will ask the interim CEO to reflect on that matter about salaries.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** With respect, you are the person who said it, Minister. You went on radio and said \$5 million and the question on notice reply, which I presume your department prepared for you, says \$2.8 million. That is a heck of a lot of staff that would have been employed for that.

**CHAIR:** Member for Currumbin, you have asked the question. The minister has answered it.

**Mr BYRNE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Before I go to this, from day 1, within 24 hours we had a very great set of concerns raised. There has been an enormous amount of work done trying to get to the bottom of exactly where we sit in Racing Queensland. So on the basis of being transparent as we move through that process some of those numbers have moved around. There is no question of that. We started out with \$21 million, we are now at \$28 million despite the efficiency dividends. The further projections are still based on certain assumptions. If you want to drill into the actual numbers here, the best person to take you through that is the interim CEO.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Could I ask that the CEO actually draft that budget that was mentioned?

**CHAIR:** Member for Currumbin, the minister has referred to the CEO.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you and I am asking if he would table what he said about draft budget that he has seen.

**CHAIR:** We will go to the CEO.

**Mr Hall:** In relation to the question relating to the \$2.8 million, what that reflects is that is part of the \$6 million in savings. So, \$2.8 million of that was identified as staff which the original budget had included which, on reflection, we went through and reduced the number. That is what the \$2.8 million relates to. If the member may repeat the second question. I didn't quite get that.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Was whether you would table the draft budget that you said you took that from?

**CHAIR:** Minister, are you prepared to table it?

**Mr BYRNE:** No, I am not prepared—

**Mrs STUCKEY:** When you looked at the draft budget, because I am of the understanding that a draft budget had not been prepared.

**Mr BYRNE:** Look, Racing Queensland has a formal reporting mechanism. When that is concluded you will be able to see—as with everybody—

**Mrs STUCKEY:** So that is a no?

**Mr BYRNE:** You will be able to see when the audited books of Racing Queensland are put on the table and that is what will occur. That is what will occur.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** That is a no.

**CHAIR:** We will move on. Member for Mount Isa?

**Mr KATTER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I refer to page 24 of the National Parks, Sport and Racing SDS dot point 1. The theme repeated often is that the decrease in appropriation revenue predominantly reflects the deferral of funding to future racing infrastructure grants and I ask: can the minister please provide an explanation of this issue and how these changes may impact rural and regional Queensland with particular attention to country racing?

**Mr BYRNE:** I would like to thank the member for the question. As I indicated earlier, consultation has begun to get Racing Queensland back on track. Action must be taken to stem the mounting and unsustainable financial losses at Racing Queensland. This includes discussion about infrastructure investments in the industry. Our focus now is to get on with the future and what can be achieved if the stakeholders work together. That is what our endeavours are focused towards today. It is important that all stakeholders are fully aware of the financial position of Racing Queensland and the key issues that need to be addressed. This will include a plan for infrastructure priorities identified by industry. The Industry Infrastructure Strategy was developed by Racing Queensland to highlight and prioritise the industry's infrastructure needs. Projects identified in the strategy are funded by the government's former Racing Industry Capital Development Scheme and the new Racing Infrastructure Fund. I recently announced that the loan arrangements had been approved for the second phase of the Eagle Farm project, allowing for construction to commence on the tunnels and infield component. This will ensure the upgrade of the state's premier racing facility can proceed as we endeavour to return to racing as soon as possible.

Current approved projects are the \$22 million Eagle Farm redevelopment—\$10 million of that is from the Racing Industry Capital Development Scheme, that is for the track, and \$12 million for a loan from the Racing Infrastructure Fund for the infield tunnel works; and the \$7 million upgrade at the Townsville Turf Club. It is acknowledged that there have been delays with the Eagle Farm project, but this is a situation that the government inherited when it took office.

Unfortunately, at the time when Racing Queensland elected to cease racing at Eagle Farm in August 2014 not all of the required approvals were in place for the funding required for the project as various documents were not submitted for consideration and approval. These issues were not addressed by the former government and former administration of Racing Queensland and the approvals remained outstanding until relatively recently. All other proposed infrastructure projects are currently under review and once consultation has concluded on a reprioritised strategy it will be submitted with an amended infrastructure strategy to myself for approval. I look forward to working with the industry to develop a plan to get the industry back to sustainability and renew Queenslanders' confidence in the racing industry.

As far as country racing is concerned, I know it is very important to rural and regional communities. These regional race meets are a fantastic way for those often in far-flung communities to get together. So the social component cannot be overstated. I have always enjoyed myself at these meets and it is important that they continue. The government has committed \$4 million to country racing over four years. Current funding will continue for the 2015-16 season. This funding has been allocated to support three country race programs: the Showcase Country Series, the Celebrate Country Series and the Sustained Country Series. Twenty race meetings have been allocated in the country series for 2015-16. Funding for these series by the government is in addition to that that has been guaranteed to be funded by Racing Queensland as required under the Racing Act.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, I refer to page 7, dot point 4. The service area highlights that the state is providing \$1 million to fund 20 additional country race meetings to contribute to regional economies. Can you ensure that prize money previously provided to those country race meetings in North-West Queensland, that is, the electorates of Mount Isa and Dalrymple, have not been reduced?

**Mr BYRNE:** The member might have picked up from my previous answer that government support to country racing and prize money is self-evident by the allocations we have made in the budget additional to that being provided by Racing Queensland. Our intention up-front in the budget is to maintain country racing support at a level that it can be. We committed to supporting country racing. As I said in the last answer, that reflects that.

In 2014-15, 279 country race meetings were staged in Queensland. The Racing Act states Racing Queensland must pay 5.32 per cent of the net Unibet product fee for a year as prize money for non-TAB thoroughbred races conducted by non-TAB thoroughbred clubs in a year. Racing Queensland paid a total—and this is separate from the government contributions—\$9,647,750 in prize money at non-TAB meetings in 2014 and additionally \$646,300 worth of QTIS incentive payments and \$551,000 in club administration. As part of Racing Queensland industry consultation, a representative from each of the country racing organisations has been invited to the consultation sessions to be held in Mackay on 24 August and Cairns on 25 August. I hope that gives you some comfort that the government for its role and Racing Queensland under its responsibilities under the act are continuing to support country racing.

**Mr KATTER:** As a follow-up question, as you alluded to before, those once-a-year country race meets do not have a lot of commercial basis. They are a completely different animal; the Mount Isa race meet compared to a Maxwelton. There is a real social benefit, particularly in the context of the rural crisis. There is a real community benefit there, which would suggest there are some obligations outside of this portfolio. Minister, are you open to have that discussion about alternative sources of funding? If in the wash-up from this there is a shortfall and we are looking at cutting country race meets, there is a social factor there as well. Perhaps that means it deserves alternative funding sources, and I am sure you would be happy to hear of that outside of your portfolio, if it was a possibility.

**Mr BYRNE:** Of course we are receptive within the bounds of what our budget allocations are. That said, it is interesting that, because of where the industry sits, there is going to have to be some give and take. We are hoping as part of the consultation process going forward with all elements of industry—clubs, jockeys, all codes—that they recognise that the current settings simply cannot be sustained. It is as simple as that. There is going to have to be some goodwill and some compromise going forward in order to stabilise Racing Queensland. There is no question of that. There are no silver bullets or magic puddings. The deficits here are considerable. We have not landed and nor has Racing Queensland landed on what exactly is going to transpire. It is not our intention to jeopardise racing in country Queensland, but there will have to be some accommodations made going forward. The more that that is shared, the better for all. I do not want to prejudice our support for country racing, but I say this: this is a difficult set of decisions that industry and all codes are going to have to make. We want them to be fully engaged and fully aware of what the implications are and there is going to have to be some give from everybody, otherwise it is a very bad scenario.

**Mr KATTER:** I appreciate that answer, Madam Chair and I do not want any further answer. I would just clarify that I accept what you are saying. I think everyone can see the writing on the wall, that they are going to have to justify themselves. That is why we are suggesting that we explore whether the Department or Communities or something looks at that.

**Mr BYRNE:** There may be something to investigate through Tourism or Events or someone, but it is not something that I have applied myself to at this point. We are open to the idea.

**Mr KATTER:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Minister, I refer you to the SDS at page 2. Can you please advise what the government is doing to support the Queensland thoroughbred breeding industry, with specific reference to the successful breeding incentives?

**Mr BYRNE:** Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question. On 27 June 2015, the state government announced that it would support the delivery of the improved Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme in 2015-16. This is an injection of funding valued up to \$13 million to both thoroughbred and harness race breeding in Queensland. This will result in a huge boost to the Queensland racing industry. As at 30 June 2015, Racing Queensland had provided \$7.605 million in breeding scheme bonuses. The Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme is vital in improving returns to participants in the racing industry and attracting investment in the Queensland thoroughbred industry. As at 30 June 2015, \$6.3 million was spent on the Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme. An additional \$1 million over three years has been committed to the QBRED scheme for harness racing, with an additional \$330,000 budgeted each year for the next three years. As a result of this injection, in the 2015-16 season the QBRED scheme will carry \$1.81 million in stakes. This is made up of QBRED feature races of \$890,000, QBRED bonuses of \$905,000 and QBRED certificates of \$15,000.

As of 1 August 2015, a number of improvements will take effect that consist of inclusion in the Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme program for all two-year-old and three-year-old races in Queensland; the introduction of a fillies and mares bonus, a 50 per cent increase on the standard bonus, will be applicable to two-year-old fillies from August 2015, two-year-olds and three-year-olds in 2016

and two-year-olds, three-year-olds and four-year-olds in 2017; and free racing for all Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme registered two-year-olds in the state for 2015, then for two-year-olds and three-year-olds from 2016. Breeders will receive six per cent of the Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme bonuses for the winner of all Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme races in Queensland and an additional \$150,000 for the Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme race at the Gold Coast. This will coincide with the annual March Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme sale, which will be open to Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme horses of any age and the addition of selected four-year-old races for Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme horses across the state with a particular focus on regional Queensland. This guarantee is proof that this government is committed to restoring confidence and integrity in the Queensland racing industry.

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

**Mr POWER:** My question is to the Minister for Sport and Racing. This year the Brisbane Winter Racing Carnival, the biggest racing event in Queensland, was disrupted by the closure of the Eagle Farm Racecourse and the move to Doomben. When will the Eagle Farm redevelopment be complete, so that racing can recommence there?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. On 9 July 2015, I was pleased to announce that approval had been granted for the \$12 million grant from the racing infrastructure fund to Racing Queensland to provide a loan to the Brisbane Racing Club in order to enable the infield works and tunnels project to be undertaken at the Eagle Farm Racecourse. This was a significant step for the industry to move forward and enable the Eagle Farm track redevelopment to be completed, so that racing can return to the state's flagship racecourse. With the approvals now in place, it is anticipated that works will be completed and racing scheduled to return to Eagle Farm in May 2015.

It is unfortunate that no racing was able to be conducted at Eagle Farm during the 2014 winter carnival due to the track closure and the redevelopment works not being completed. However, all of the group and listed races usually run at Eagle Farm were able to be transferred and conducted at other venues, including Doomben, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast and Toowoomba. It is acknowledged that there have been delays with the Eagle Farm project, but this is a situation that this government inherited when it took office. Unfortunately, at the time when Racing Queensland elected to cease racing at Eagle Farm in August 2014, not all of the required approvals were in place for the funding required for the project, as various documents were not submitted for consideration approval. These issues were not addressed by the former government and the former administration of Racing Queensland, and the approvals remained outstanding until relatively recently.

Since taking office, this government moved to establish what was required for this important project to be completed so that the racing industry could once again return to racing at its most important wagering revenue generating venue. With all relevant matters satisfied, approvals have now been given and the works are progressing. Additionally, the government gave approvals for the Brisbane Racing Club to dispose of portions of land at the Eagle Farm Racecourse that will allow the club to implement its master plan for the facility. This is an exciting project for the Brisbane Racing Club, the racing industry and the local community, which will see a state-of-the-art stabling complex developed on the infield of Eagle Farm Racecourse and a residential apartment precinct developed on the south-eastern corner of the site. The government is proud that it has been able to make the necessary decisions to enable the Eagle Farm racetrack and infield tunnel projects to be completed so that racing can be back on track at Eagle Farm in time for the 2016 winter racing carnival.

**Mr POWER:** I have a further question: can the minister inform the House what have been the changes to the governance of Racing Queensland as a result of the greyhound racing inquiry commissioner's recommendations?

**Mr BYRNE:** This government is committed to restoring confidence and integrity to the Queensland racing industry and building a sustainable future for Racing Queensland. As such, upon the release of the final report from the Greyhound Racing Industry Commission of Inquiry on 1 June 2015, the government took immediate action by appointing Mr Ian Hall as the interim Chief Executive Officer of Racing Queensland on 2 June 2015. Mr Hall was appointed to advise on the implementation of the interim administration arrangements and to ensure effective ongoing management of Racing Queensland. Recommendation 2 of the report was actioned with the removal of all members of the Queensland All Codes Racing Industry Board and the three individual code boards for thoroughbreds, harness and greyhounds. The Hon. Justice John Muir has been appointed as the Chairman of the Queensland All Codes Racing Industry Board, trading as Racing Queensland. The report recommended for the individual code boards be abolished and an all-codes board for the three codes

of racing be established consisting of seven members. That includes four independent members, with the chair being one of the independent members. As a temporary measure, an advisory board will be created to assist with the transition to a new board model until a permanent board can be established. Advertisements for the advisory board have been published in the *Courier-Mail* on 20 August. I am committed to ensuring that an open and transparent recruitment process is used to appoint new members of the interim board. The process for appointments to the advisory board is expected to be completed by October 2015.

Another recommendation was for the creation of a new statutory authority dedicated to ensuring the integrity of the Queensland racing industry. Mr Mark Ainsworth has been appointed to Racing Queensland as the integrity adviser. Mr Ainsworth is leading the Racing Queensland restructure as well as advising me, the board and the acting CEO of Racing Queensland on strategic and operational matters impacting on the delivery of integrity and stewarding services. This government is determined to ensure that racing in this state has the confidence of the public and has integrity in terms of the management and welfare of all animals.

**Mrs GILBERT:** I would like to ask another question relating to the greyhound racing industry. Since the joint Queensland Police Service and RSPCA task force was set-up by Racing Queensland in February 2015 to target animal cruelty in the greyhound racing industry, how many people have now been charged or warned off greyhound tracks in Queensland for offences relating to the live baiting or bleeding of greyhounds?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. I think Queensland has demonstrated its proactivity to its peer states in relation to the live baiting issue. Included as part of Racing Queensland's ongoing investigations in conjunction with the joint Queensland Police Service and RSPCA task force was a review of the extensive video footage and interviews with suspended participants. As a result, 22 trainers to date have been warned off for life by Racing Queensland. Also, a total of 25 people have been charged by the Queensland Police Service with 69 offences between them.

Racing Queensland continues to cooperate and share intelligence with the joint Queensland Police Service and RSPCA task force targeting animal cruelty in the greyhound racing industry. The government remains committed to a racing industry where integrity and animal welfare is restored. In support of recommendation 1 of the Queensland greyhound racing industry commission of inquiry, a new authority will be established and will include a team of officers on secondment from the Queensland Police Service to add strength to the investigative arm of the authority.

**CHAIR:** In a statement to the House on 16 July, you said that Racing Queensland is expected to make a loss of \$28 million in the 2015-16 financial year. This is after \$6 million was identified in savings. Can you break down this unexpected loss?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank madam chair for the question. A breakdown of the expected loss to be incurred by Racing Queensland is as follows. Revenue for the 2015-16 financial year is estimated to total \$181.2 million, which is made up of wagering revenue of \$166.8 million, representing the revenue received from UBET, the other state totes and the corporate wagering service providers; racing fees of \$9.5 million, representing the various starter fees, scratching and feature race acceptance fees as well as fines; revenue from the Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme and QBRED breeding programs of \$1.7 million; and other revenue of \$3.2 million, which primarily includes rental income derived from Albion Park, the annual licence subscription fees from the various industry participants, income from the RTO operated by Racing Queensland and the grant from the state government for country racing. Total revenue for the financial year 2015-16 is slightly down by \$2.2 million from an estimated revenue for financial year 2015-16 of \$183.4 million, which is currently subject to an annual audit.

Despite anticipated growth in wagering activity, Racing Queensland is expecting wagering revenue to remain at 2014-15 levels, primarily due to a shift from parimutuel to fixed odds betting, for which Racing Queensland receives a lower return, growth in the corporate wagering service providers and interstate totes which also provide a lower return to Queensland Racing than UBET. Total estimated revenue for financial year 2015-16 is anticipated to be insufficient to meet the estimated financial year expenditure of \$209.3 million, which is made up of prize money and payments under breeding schemes of \$138.6 million, subsidy payments to clubs and other payments made by Racing Queensland on clubs' behalf of \$16.8 million, Racing Queensland costs, race day costs, stewarding and integrity costs totalling \$33.6 million, the Racing Science Centre costs of \$4.2 million, payments to jockeys of approximately \$13.3 million, harness driver fees of \$931,000 and depreciation expenses of \$1.8 million. This sees expenditure forecast to increase by \$14.6 million from the total expenditure in financial year 2015-16 of \$194.6 million, which is currently subject to an audit.

The main reasons for the increase in expenditure for 2015-16 are: the full annual impact from the increase in prize money made on 1 October 2014—in 2014-15 financial year Racing Queensland paid nine months at an increased prize money level whereas for financial year 2015-16 this will see the full 12 months paid at an increased level; the additional contribution to the Magic Millions race meeting held in early January 2016, which is above the contribution made by Racing Queensland in financial year 2014-15; and additional expenditure under the QTIS and QBRED breeding schemes as a result of the recent changes made to those schemes.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Would you be able to tell the committee how many kennel inspections were carried out by the stewards at Racing Queensland since the animal welfare issues came to light on the ABC *Four Corners* program? How does this number compare to the six months from 1 August 2014 to 31 January 2015?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mackay for the question. As I said earlier, the day that I was sworn in as the Minister for Racing, a program appeared on *Four Corners* uncovering the disturbing practice of live baiting within the Queensland greyhound industry. From that moment it was apparent prompt action needed to be taken to not only determine the extent of the problem but also, most importantly, implement measures to eradicate the practice from the industry.

Once the scandal broke, Racing Queensland stewards were instructed to ramp up inspections and search for any evidence of live baiting as well as inspect and assess the kennel and training facilities on the properties of licensees. Between the day the scandal broke and 19 August this year, Racing Queensland stewards conducted 732 inspections of properties, which equates to approximately 93 per cent of the 790 kennel addresses across the state.

This is in stark contrast to just 21 inspection conducted in the six months between 1 August 2014 and 31 January 2015, prior to the live baiting scandal breaking on the *Four Corners* program and this government coming to power. This is a clear issue of neglect under the former government. Stewards continue to deploy teams weekly to inspect the remaining 190 kennels as efforts continue to eradicate the practice of live baiting from the sport.

Queensland has been by far the most proactive state in its response to the scandal. The most significant improvement in the rate of kennel inspections is just one of the measures implemented by this government and Racing Queensland to drive cultural change within the greyhound industry.

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

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I am continuing to ask about the commission of inquiry into the Queensland greyhound racing industry. I refer to the SDS at page 7—the service area highlights. How long will KPMG be acting as administrators for Racing Queensland? What is the budget for this?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. There is a defined period when we expect to see the stabilisation of Racing Queensland. It is difficult to be absolutely precise about at what point that will occur. As I said earlier, we are in the process of putting in place a board of a transitional nature to provide oversight of our measures going forward.

At the moment, it is intended—and I do not want to be held to this—that March 2016 will see the transition out of administrator control. That depends, however, on a number of measures going forward. If you are looking for a planning figure, March 2016 is most likely. That is what we are working towards. There can be no absolute time, as I have realised, going forward with racing.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I did also ask what the budget would be. Is there an estimate?

**Mr BYRNE:** Mr Hall has been engaged under a standard offer arrangement through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, as per standard policy. The value of his remuneration will be posted on the Department of Housing and Public Works website in due course. This engagement cost is being paid for by the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing.

Mr Hall has been appointed by the Governor in Council for a period, at present, from June to September 2015. The executive council minute is in progress which seeks approval for the Governor in Council to extend that appointment, as I indicated earlier. It will be posted on the appropriate website in due course as all procurements are.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I really had hoped that we would have some idea of the budget. Perhaps you would be able to assist me by saying how much is spent on the security guards at Sovereign Lodge or any other facilities guarding seized or surrendered greyhounds.

**Mr BYRNE:** This is a matter for Racing Queensland so I will defer to the interim CEO.

**Mr Hall:** The decision in relation to maintaining the security guards at that location has stepped down. I cannot remember the exact date, but recently we reduced them to being there at night. From last Saturday, from memory, they are no longer at the premises.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** So there was no budget for that? Were they free?

**Mr Hall:** Sorry—

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I asked how much had been spent on them.

**Mr Hall:** I do not have that information with me.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I would be very happy for you to take that on notice. How much is being spent on the care of greyhounds at these facilities? It is reported to be up to \$50 per dog per day. How long will this continue and what is this costing?

**Mr BYRNE:** Again, I will defer to the CEO.

**Mr Hall:** I will take that question on notice.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I would appreciate that. I would also like to ask why there is such a huge difference in the price of care. I am told that it costs up to \$50 a dog per day, but \$11 a dog per day is considered to be the going rate.

**Mr BYRNE:** So you expect me to be an expert on the going rate for greyhound daily care, is that right?

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I think I am asking a perfectly reasonable question when it is a huge variance from \$11 to \$50.

**Mr BYRNE:** We will go away and do a cost-benefit analysis on the costs and get that figure back to you.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Can I ask what is happening with the Greyhound Adoption Program while all of this is going on? Has there been a delay?

**Mr BYRNE:** There is an ongoing program but it does not sit directly in my ministerial space. The Greyhound Adoption Program is a Racing Queensland initiative which finds homes for greyhounds that are no longer suitable for racing.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** That is correct.

**Mr BYRNE:** It is a key welfare program and funded by Racing Queensland. The Greyhound Adoption Program has moved to a new facility at Churchable which offers greater capacity and first-class facilities. Racing Queensland rehomed 56 greyhounds in 2014-15. Greyhound Adoption Program staff were also responsible for caring for up to 100 seized greyhounds whose trainers have been suspended. Fourteen remain in foster care and 30 are in the care of the Greyhound Adoption Program at Sovereign Lodge, Churchable. Forty-seven seized dogs remain in Greyhound Adoption Program care. Racing Queensland has been working with other rehoming groups through its rehoming incentives scheme. In January 2015, the Greyhound Adoption Program received approval from Racing Queensland to expend an additional \$1.5 million in capital expenditure as Racing Queensland looks to expand its capacity.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** How many Racing Queensland and departmental staff have had their positions terminated since this inquiry began and what were their positions?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. I can first talk about Racing Queensland and ask the acting CEO to reflect on that as he sees appropriate.

**Mr Hall:** Thank you very much for the question. Again, in terms of normal day-to-day business, I do not have the exact numbers of staff that have been terminated. There are two staff that have been terminated. There are obviously movements, and people resign and leave. I do not have those exact numbers with me at the moment. Can I take that on notice?

**Mrs STUCKEY:** You will take that on notice?

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Mount Isa.

**Mr BYRNE:** I can speak to the Office of Racing. There is nobody there.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** So none from the department.

**Mr BYRNE:** So the answer is zero at this point.

**CHAIR:** Member for Mount Isa, do you have a question?

**Mr KATTER:** This is a little bit embarrassing. I am going to ask a question which relates very closely to the one I asked before. I may have in the course of conversation asked a similar question before. I just wanted a comment from the minister with regard to north-west racing. I talked about the pool prize money. I am not sure if you mentioned the number of country race meetings that would still be available in the coming season.

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mount Isa for the question. I think you can sense from my earlier answer that there is no government policy position here that is seeking to undermine country racing. In fact, our sentiment and policy is to do everything we can to encourage, but that is within the total reality of where Racing Queensland is at. In terms of what happens going forward with numbers of meetings, as I indicated before, government support for country racing additional to what Racing Queensland is obliged to deliver under its act is what I indicated earlier. I cannot get into the actual detail of every particular club and what they do. I simply do not know that. That is an operational matter for Racing Queensland. But, if your clubs are concerned, they should be engaging in that discussion paper that is out there now. That is the mechanism that will inform the way in which racing goes forward. The discussion paper that I referred to earlier that was released yesterday is the best tool to use for those issues to be raised.

As I said earlier, I think there are 20 race meetings that have been allocated to the country series in 2015-16. I hope that the aggregation of the things I said earlier and now give you some comfort but that is all within the facts of where racing is financially positioned right now.

**Mr KATTER:** Do I have time for one more?

**CHAIR:** Yes, a quick question.

**Mr KATTER:** We talked about different lines of funding before and how the one-a-year race meetings may not stand up financially. Because they are a different sort of animal and often scratching around for community funds to keep them going, is there an opportunity for the Gambling Community Benefit Fund and those sorts of things to come into that space? We identify that they are a different animal and they may not stand up on their own commercially. Is that open for conversation?

**Mr BYRNE:** I think all of those options are available to clubs. Country racing has never been sustained based on the notion that it was profitable, that it would return a profit. That is why you see the support coming from government. That is why you see the Racing Act directions to Racing Queensland. If the entire industry was going to be supported by only those areas of activity that are profitable, it would see a dramatic decline. It is not really contested that some country race meetings cost more than they deliver. It is a social obligation from successive governments to do everything we can to maintain that fabric in rural and regional Queensland. We are not wavering from that and we are not terribly sympathetic to the pure financial argument about what is profitable and what is not.

You can see by the commitments we have made in the budget to support regional racing and you can see from the responsibilities that exist under the act that we are doing what we can. But I have been advised that there is a specific section in that discussion paper that addresses this. Those prospects that you raised or any other—nothing is off the table here. There have to be other ways that we can support this potentially.

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

**Mr POWER:** I would like to move across to Sport and Recreation and my question is to the minister. As a local member, I am excited by the Get in the Game program. What are the changes in the recently announced Get in the Game program from the program's first announcement?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. All the programs under the initiative were independently reviewed to ensure that the programs are efficient, effective and deliver maximum value. The amount of \$80 million has been committed over the next three years. A forward schedule of program release dates for the next three years has already been announced. This is a first and will now allow eligible organisations to better plan and prioritise projects, particularly infrastructure development projects. There was some habit, I suppose, of people waiting for these announcements about programs and it made it difficult for many clubs and associations to prepare themselves and access the programs. So I think it is a good thing that we now have a forward schedule over three years that everyone who is interested in availing themselves of these programs can identify and prepare for.

Specific program changes include an increase in the annual budget allocation for the Get Started Vouchers program to \$5 million. That is up \$1.5 million. The vouchers program provides vouchers to contribute up to \$150 towards local sport and recreation club membership fees for eligible children and young people. This increase in budget guarantees that the minimum number of vouchers distributed



each year is around 43,000. The eligibility of referral agents for the vouchers program was reviewed. Teachers and local, state and federal members of parliament are no longer eligible to act as referral agents. Focus for referral agents is around those who have regular contact with disenfranchised youth including law enforcement officers, school principals and school guidance counsellors and community health and welfare officers.

The Get Going Clubs program provides funding projects that create and provide access to participation opportunities for Queenslanders. Levels of funding available under the clubs program has been reduced to \$7,500, down from \$10,000, to support more projects within the program budget. This decision is based on the average of approved projects across the last three rounds being less than \$8,000. So it is specifically tailored for what the majority need is. Specific categories have been introduced to simplify application and assessment of the club's program. The categories of participation, education and training, and equipment allow for reporting trends and needs of clients to inform program reviews and revisions. Additionally, organisations can now only apply every second round of the club's program, allowing more organisations to receive support.

The Get Playing Places and Spaces provides funding to develop places and spaces so that Queenslanders are encouraged to participate in sport and active recreation. Under the revised places and spaces program, councils with populations up to 40,000 are eligible to apply. Councils with populations up to 5,000 were eligible to apply in the last round. This allows smaller councils in regional and remote locations to support the development of minor active recreation places and spaces.

The Get Playing Plus program provides funding contributions to develop places and spaces that increase participation opportunities, meet service gaps and address regional needs. Under the revised program, two categories have been introduced—new and an upgrade or improvement category. The lower limit of funding has now been reduced from \$400,000 to \$300,000 following feedback that the gap between the two infrastructure programs was significant. The reduced lower limit allows smaller councils to apply for community infrastructure with a reduced contribution required. A sliding scale of contribution adjusted to better support regional and remote councils is included. The adjusted scale increases support to 14 councils. The branding of this program was mostly kept from the previous rounds because it had good brand recognition within clubs and the broader community. As I have highlighted, these programs have been refined and are now better targeted to those who will derive greatest benefit from those government funds.

**CHAIR:** Over the last five years there has been a 10 per cent increase in signing up for netball in my electorate of Ipswich. Would you please tell us more about what the government is doing in the area of netball and, in particular, to support women and girls' participation in sport?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. Having been to the Firebirds games and being the father of three netball playing daughters, I know full well the significance of the announcements that have been made by the government. On 28 June 2015, this government announced plans to build a new \$30 million state netball facility to provide a long overdue home for netball in Queensland. This is a landmark decision for the sport of netball, which enjoys wonderful support at a grassroots level here in Queensland and has over 50,000 registered players currently participating across the state.

The new home of netball will be located at the Queensland sports and athletics facility at Nathan and, once completed, will feature eight indoor hard courts, player changing facilities and administration offices for Netball Queensland. Thousands of young netballers from clubs, schools and junior development programs, as well as seniors and representative players, stand to benefit from this new facility. It will provide a training base for the Firebirds and for the development of age group players, as well as being a facility for the next generation of elite netballers.

This announcement comes off the back of the Queensland Firebirds showing their true Queensland spirit to come from behind in the dying seconds to take out the 2015 ANZ Championship. Our champion Firebirds are wonderful ambassadors for our state and for the sport of netball. They have passed the ball over to the Queensland government and now, as you see, it is our time to deliver for the next generation of young netballers, and I am pleased to say that we have hit the ground running on this matter.

Planning has already commenced to deliver this significant piece of sporting infrastructure, and early concepts are currently under development by Stadiums Queensland. More detailed designs will follow over the coming months as we work together with Netball Queensland to ensure the design enables the sport to continue to grow. The facility is expected to create around 100 jobs during construction, providing a boost to the local economy and demonstrates our commitment to creating jobs.

A competitive tender process will be undertaken to determine who will build the facility once designs have sufficiently progressed. The Labor government has a proven track record when it comes to delivering major sporting and entertainment infrastructure and we anticipate the facility will be up and running by the end of 2017. This is yet another example of how this government is getting on with the job of delivering infrastructure that Queenslanders want, with real benefits for future generations. Netball Queensland CEO, Catherine Clark, has said—

Our job is to help women and girls realise their sporting potential through the programs, clinics and competitions we will be able to run in this facility, our Home of Netball.

She further said—

We will be able to grow and develop netball at every level, for players, coaches and umpires, across Queensland.

...

Netball has never had a purpose-built facility and this has certainly put us at a disadvantage when competing against other State teams and programs.

...

The Government has demonstrated real leadership in supporting women's sport in Queensland and this facility will provide tangible benefit in improving lifelong participation in sport and active recreation.

She concludes by saying—

A dedicated facility will strengthen our competitiveness allowing us to identify and develop more home grown talent through the Netball Queensland elite pathways.

**CHAIR:** The time allocated for the consideration of the examination of estimates for the Agriculture and Fisheries and Sport and Racing portfolios has expired. Thank you, Minister, directors-general and advisers for your assistance today. The transcript of this session of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's website within two hours. A couple of questions were taken on notice. I remind you that the deadline for your answers to questions on notice and clarifying material is 10 am on Wednesday, 26 August.

**Mr BYRNE:** Madam Chair, I should make a correction. I talked about 190 kennels being left to inspect. I have just been advised, as things have moved on, that the actual number is 58. If that can be adjusted on the record of the committee, that would be appreciated.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. The committee will now adjourn for a break and the hearing will resume at 2.45 pm with the examination of estimates for the Environment and Heritage Protection and National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef portfolios, commencing with the Office of the Great Barrier Reef.

**Proceedings suspended from 2.17 pm to 2.46 pm**

**ESTIMATES—AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE—  
ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE PROTECTION, NATIONAL PARKS AND THE  
GREAT BARRIER REEF**

**In Attendance**

Hon. SJ Miles, Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef

Ms D Cohen, Senior Policy Adviser, Officer of the Minister

**Department of Environment and Heritage Protection**

Mr J Black, Director-General

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


Ms E Nichols, Executive Director, Office of the Great Barrier Reef

**Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing**

Ms T O'Shea, Director-General,

Mr B Klaassen, Deputy Director-General, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

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 **CHAIR:** The meeting of the Agriculture and Environment Committee is resumed. I am Jennifer Howard, the member for Ipswich and chair of the committee. Joining me on the committee are our deputy chair, the member for Burnett, Steven Bennett; Julieanne Gilbert, the member for Mackay; Robbie Katter, the member for Mount Isa, who is not here at the moment, Linus Power, the member for Logan; and Ted Sorensen, the member for Hervey Bay. 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.

The committee has resolved that today's hearing will be broadcast in line with the conditions for filming and broadcasting the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly tabled on 21 May this year. Copies of the conditions are available from the parliamentary attendants. 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. The committee has authorised the release of answers from ministers to the prehearing questions, and these will be available shortly on our website.

The estimates process is an important part of the parliament's scrutiny of the budget and the work of departments. As laid out in the guidelines at schedule 8 at the back of the standing orders, we expect all departmental officers appearing today to provide full and honest answers to our questions. Anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide an answer should be prepared to state their reasons. I also remind members that departmental officers are not here today to give expert opinions on the merits or otherwise of the policies of the government. That is the role of ministers.

Finally, before we begin can everyone switch off their mobile phones or put them on silent. For the remainder of our hearing today which will finish at 7.15 pm, the committee will examine estimates for the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef. Welcome, Minister Miles, and advisers. The committee will begin with estimates for the Office of the Great Barrier Reef. For the benefit of Hansard, if advisers are called to give an answer, please state your name before you speak for the first time.

The committee has granted leave to the leader and deputy leader of the opposition and other opposition members to participate in today's hearing. We have the member for Glass House with us today. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef open for examination. The question for the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you care to make an opening statement?

**Dr MILES:** I would, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to make some introductory remarks at the opening of my portfolio section of today's estimates hearing. I am very proud of the progress made over the past six months to implement the agenda of the Palaszczuk Labor government in the Great Barrier Reef portfolio. First and foremost, we have taken swift action to preserve the Great Barrier Reef's health before irreversible damage is caused. We have created the state's first Office of the Great Barrier Reef to coordinate reef matters across government and to oversee investment to tackle key challenges. We have set ambitious new water quality targets to reduce pollution run-off in key reef catchments and brought together a task force of world-class experts developing the policies and investment strategies to achieve these targets based on the latest science and research. In addition, we are working with on-land producers to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities in terms of pollutant run-off onto the reef and have the support needed to make sustainable farming decisions.

The UNESCO decision not to list the Great Barrier Reef as in danger acknowledges our unprecedented work to secure the reef's future. We are also helping safeguard our coastal communities from the impending impacts of climate change and have acted on our commitment to reinstate world-class coastal planning laws, already restoring predicted sea level rise into coastal hazard and erosion-prone area mapping.

Our 2015-16 budget allocations have provided further opportunities for meaningful work during the next year in my portfolio. We will continue our focused effort to protect our Great Barrier Reef and have been provided an additional \$100 million over five years to help achieve this. Our work will include tracking the health of Gladstone, Mackay, Cairns and Townsville waterways, and investing in scientific research, tools to help business transition to better environmental practices and funding the buyback of net fishing licences in Cairns, Mackay, Yeppoon and Rockhampton.

To assist in today's hearings, I would respectfully request that members of the committee ask their questions relating to the specific parts of my portfolio at the times scheduled for those parts of my portfolio's review, as I will only have departmental experts at the table at the time allocated to those specific parts.

I would like to introduce the members of my staff and departmental representatives who are here for questioning relating to the Great Barrier Reef portfolio. They are the Director-General of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, Jon Black; the Deputy Director-General of Environmental Policy and Planning, Tony Roberts; the Executive Director of the Office of the Great Barrier Reef, Elisa Nichols; and the Associate Director-General of Corporate Services, Peter Griffin. I thank the committee for allowing me to make this opening statement, and I look forward to taking the committee's questions on matters pertaining to the Office of the Great Barrier Reef.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I go to the member for Glass House.

**Mr POWELL:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you for the invitation to join the committee for this afternoon's proceedings. Minister, I refer you to page 3 of your department's SDS, where it states that the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, and therefore the Office of the Great Barrier Reef by association, identifies, monitors and takes action in relation to unlawful activity, and I ask: Minister, do you have procedures and protocols in place in your department to deal with public servants who may be undertaking unlawful activity including making either false statements or misleading declarations?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Glass House for the question. I must say I was excited when I found out that the member for Glass House was joining us for these deliberations. I have not yet had a chance to talk to him about the efforts we have made to protect the Great Barrier Reef since the change of government, and I was really hoping this would be a chance for us to discuss those.

**Mr POWELL:** It certainly will be, Minister.

**Dr MILES:** In a moment I will ask the director-general to address the substance of the question asked, but I note that it is the first of a series of questions that opposition members have been asking in committee deliberations this week. It is the first of a series of questions that will reach a crescendo when the member for Glass House yells 'protection racket'. I invite members to get your bingo table ready and yell 'bingo' when he goes 'protection racket'.

**Mr POWELL:** There is no need to now. You have done it for me so thank you very much, Minister.

**Dr MILES:** On the substance of the question, I am happy for us to deal with it and I will ask the director-general to deal with it.

**Mr Black:** The department has policies and procedures in place in order to ensure that the conduct of public servants is in accordance with the standards of behaviour expected as detailed in the code of conduct, which includes the power to investigate any misconduct that may ensue, the severity of which determining where the investigation would be referred. But I can assure the member that all of the policies and procedures are in place.

**Mr POWELL:** Given that the minister has deferred to the director-general, I will ask this of the director-general. Given that approach that you have just described, would it be common practice for the public servant to be stood down whilst that investigation was underway?

**Mr Black:** It would depend on the circumstances, but certainly that has occurred in one case I am aware of. In another case, without substantial evidence I was not willing to necessarily move to that step until an investigation had been completed.

**Mr POWELL:** To summarise what you have just said, if there is sufficient evidence—and in your case you have used an example where that warranted that the public servant be stood down—

**Mr Black:** Correct.

**Mr POWELL:**—whilst the investigation was underway.

**Mr Black:** That is correct.

**Mr POWELL:** Thank you, Director-General. Madam Chair, I do not need to—

**Dr MILES:** Here it comes.

**Mr BENNETT:** You have already said it for us.

**Mr POWELL:** No, Minister, you pre-empted it so I don't need to. Minister, could you clarify for me that the Office of the Great Barrier Reef has carriage under the administrative arrangements for the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Act 2009?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question and for his interest in the work of the Office of the Great Barrier Reef. As he may be aware, creating the Office of the Great Barrier Reef was a key element of our response to the Auditor-General's report and our attempts to better coordinate reef activities across government departments. The office is not charged with delivering the reef functions of my agency. It is, however, charged with coordinating, and coordinating measurement of progress against our ambitious reef targets. In terms of the office more generally, it is not a statutory body. It is a small, high-powered unit that reports directly to the director-general. In terms of whether it administers the particular act that the member referred to, I am advised that that is not a responsibility of my department. Let me clarify: I am advised that that act is the responsibility of the department but it is not the office's responsibility to administer it.

**Mr POWELL:** Does the office have any role to play in the administration of that act?

**Dr MILES:** No.

**Mr POWELL:** It is administered, instead, by regulatory services; is that correct?

**Dr MILES:** Yes.

**Mr POWELL:** I will then hold, as per your request earlier, that line of questioning over until you have the relevant officers present later. Minister, I refer to the position of Director of Regulatory Performance, which is one of the number of positions funded through this budget appropriation. The Director of Regulatory Performance has publicly stated that the reef is under threat, and I quote him: 'Queensland Labor supports coal. Coal causes climate change. Climate change will kill the reef.' Minister, do you agree with your director?

**Dr MILES:** Let me thank the member for Glass House for that question. I am not aware of those particular comments, but what I can say is I am aware that the single biggest long-term threat to the reef is climate change. Climate change already has had and will continue to have an impact on the health of the Great Barrier Reef. The actions that we are taking in this budget will, by and large, help us address the short and medium term—the direct impacts, the things that Queensland has substantial policy levers to address.

Global warming impacts on the reef in four different ways. Most of the additional heat coming into the earth from global warming is absorbed by the oceans—90 per cent of it—and, when you increase the temperature of the ocean at a rate greater than species can adapt, those species die. So, first and foremost, the warming of the oceans is already having and will have an ongoing impact on the

health of the reef. Secondly, the reef also absorbs the additional CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, and that absorption of CO<sub>2</sub> changes the pH balance of the water—it makes it more acidic—and that acidification has an impact on many species, including bleaching coral.

Thirdly, the increased number of and intensity of storm events that we are already seeing and will continue to see under various global warming scenarios has a physical impact on the reef. Cyclones cut physical swathes through reef structures as well as the substantial turbidity caused by cyclones. Finally, the cycle of droughts and floods and floods following droughts makes our task of sediment reduction and nutrient reduction much harder. So across all of those four fronts it is true that global warming is the big, long-term threat to the Great Barrier Reef.

**Mr POWELL:** So, Minister, to summarise your answer then you do agree—

**Dr MILES:** Sorry, you asked me about a topic I feel strongly about so I would like to finish my answer, if I can.

**Mr POWELL:** You have given me an extensive answer about the fact that you agree climate change is killing the reef.

**Dr MILES:** I have a bit more to say about the impact of climate change on the reef.

**Mr POWELL:** I look forward to hearing it.

**Dr MILES:** We heard today that July was in fact the hottest month ever on record.

**Mr POWELL:** What? Hotter than December or January?

**Dr MILES:** In the world, so there are two hemispheres and the—

**Mr POWELL:** Right, so July was the hottest month in the northern hemisphere?

**Dr MILES:** In the planet.

**Mr POWELL:** In the planet, okay, thank you.

**Dr MILES:** That is right. We are currently seeing higher ocean surface temperatures than we have ever recorded. These increases in ocean temperatures are already having and will have a massive impact on the Great Barrier Reef, as it will on many other ecosystems. The actions we are taking, we hope, will help make the reef more resilient, will help it to adapt, but there is no doubt that global warming is a major threat to the Great Barrier Reef. Thank you for the question.

**Mr POWELL:** Madam Chair, I will take that as he does agree with the comments of his director.

**Dr MILES:** No, don't take that.

**Mr POWELL:** Minister, can you confirm that your election to this parliament and elevation to cabinet is actually based on the preference flow you received from the director—

**CHAIR:** Member for Glass House, can you please explain how that is relevant to the appropriation?

**Mr POWELL:** Quite simply, Madam Chair, the appropriation funds the position of director of—

**CHAIR:** The question is out of order.

**Mr POWELL:** Madam Chair, on what grounds please, may I ask. Which standing order are you using to make that ruling?

**CHAIR:** It is not relevant to the appropriations.

**Mr POWELL:** Are you suggesting that—

**CHAIR:** You are making a personal reflection. You are making an inference.

**Mr POWELL:** Are you suggesting that the police minister is not the only protected species that the Palaszczuk government has?

**Dr MILES:** We got there!

**Mr POWER:** Point of order, Madam Chair. To me the question is clearly not relevant to the appropriations we have here before us. The question should be relevant to the appropriations that we are looking at in the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and in this case the Office of the Great Barrier Reef.

**Mr POWELL:** Again, can I ask under which standing order you are referring, because the position I am referring to—

**CHAIR:** Member for Glass House, it is under standing order 181.

**Mr POWELL:** So a question regarding a position in the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection funded by this appropriation—

**CHAIR:** Perhaps you would like to recast your question.

**Mr POWELL:** I will try it again. Minister, the position of director of regulatory performance is funded through the budget appropriation. Are you aware that the person in that position allocated preferences to you in the seat of Mount Coot-tha and therefore ensured your election to parliament and your elevation to cabinet?

**CHAIR:** Member for Glass House, your question does not relate to any action by the minister. You are referring to an election process. It is not relevant. I will ask you to move on to the next question.

**Dr MILES:** I can address one element of the question, Madam Chair. I do not think it is appropriate to be addressing issues of the election because clearly we are here to talk about the budget. But the member is right that the officer he is referring to is employed by the department and therefore his wages are met by the appropriation of this budget. As I said, I am not aware of those particular comments, but those comments I imagine were made by that individual as private comments as—

**Mr POWELL:** They were tweeted, Minister. They were far from private.

**Dr MILES:** In their private capacity, so they were not tweeted as a public official. I would note that the arrangements in place when the department became aware that that person was a candidate in the election were put in place by the member for Glass House, by my predecessor. He was the minister at the time. I have been advised that he was aware of the situation—

**Mr POWELL:** I was, but I did not need his preferences—

**CHAIR:** Member for Glass House, cease interjecting. You have asked the minister a question. He is answering it.

**Dr MILES:** I would, under other circumstances, have asked the D-G to outline what processes were put in place, but given they relate to prior to my term as minister, and in fact relate to the time that my predecessor was minister, I do not think it would be appropriate to ask the D-G to respond to them.

**Mr POWELL:** Madam Chair, if I may, has the individual in that position received a promotion or a pay rise since you have taken up your tenure as minister?

**Dr MILES:** That is an internal HR matter for the department. Not that I am aware of but I am happy to ask the D-G to respond.

**Mr Black:** Not that I am aware of, but I will get that verified immediately.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Member for Glass House.

**Mr POWELL:** Thank you. I will pause for a moment.

**CHAIR:** Member for Burnett.

**Mr BENNETT:** Minister, page 28 of the SDS makes reference to dredging in Moreton Bay and the royalties received by the department being remitted through Treasury to the Consolidated Fund. We would like to know how much that is and what has been received. But clearly the question is this: dredging of Moreton Bay is capital dredging and is okay, but not in Cairns, Abbot Point or any other critical infrastructure zone. Would you like to comment on that please?

**Dr MILES:** Let me thank the member for Burnett for that question. We will track down the amount of the royalties remitted to Treasury.

**Mr Black:** I might—

**Dr MILES:** The director-general thinks he has that to hand.

**Mr Black:** Approximately between \$24 million and \$26 million was the amount received, but again I will get that figure checked. If the member is happy, it is approximately that figure.

**Mr BENNETT:** Approximate is fine, thank you. The second part of that is the inference that we are allowing capital dredging in Moreton Bay but quite clearly the government is opposed to strategic capital dredging in some other key locations up and down the east coast.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Burnett. As I understand it, it is a bipartisan position that opposes capital dredging in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area. The reason to have a particular approach in the reef area is because of the reef—

**Mr POWELL:** I am sorry, can I just clarify. Are you saying Labor is opposing capital dredging anywhere in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area? Is that including Abbot Point?

**Dr MILES:** Labor is opposing the onshore dumping of capital dredge spoil anywhere in the World Heritage area.

**Mr POWELL:** Sorry, you are opposing the onshore dumping now?

**Dr MILES:** Offshore dumping, sorry. Labor is opposing the offshore dumping of capital dredge spoil in the entire World Heritage area and opposing capital dredging outside of four priority ports.

**Mr POWELL:** So when you were referring to bipartisan support, you were referring to capital dredging outside of those four priority ports; is that what you were referring to?

**Dr MILES:** That is my understanding of the position of the opposition.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We will go to the member for Logan.

**Mr POWER:** My question is also to the minister. I refer to budget paper 4 page 36 and the budget measure 'Saving the Great Barrier Reef'. Can the minister explain the purpose of this funding?

**Dr MILES:** Let me thank the member for Logan for that question. I know he is a passionate supporter of our efforts to save the Great Barrier Reef. In keeping with our election commitment, the government is providing an additional \$100 million over five years—including \$21.8 million in years 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19—as part of our Saving the Great Barrier Reef policy. This funding delivers on the government's commitments to protect the Great Barrier Reef by investing in water quality initiatives and scientific research, as well as helping businesses to transition to better environmental practices in the primary production, mining and fishing industries.

All Great Barrier Reef spending across state government agencies will be reported by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection in an annual investment plan and annual report. The funding profile is based on the expected timing of ministerial task force recommendations. The task force is to advise in year one the best blend of regulations, market approaches and other instruments and investment priorities. The benefits of this measure are: \$10 million provided in year one to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for fishing buyout to create three net-free fishing coastal zones; \$1.683 million provided in year one to support the task force; and \$1 million to eReefs to provide water quality information similar to the way the Bureau of Meteorology provides weather data to the general public. All of these efforts will support our tourism industry. The economic contribution of the reef is \$6 billion a year to Queensland and it supports more than 69,000 jobs as well as maintaining the reef's World Heritage status.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, healthy waterways is an important issue in my area so I would like to refer to budget paper 4, page 38, and the budget measure 'Expansion of Waterway Health Report Cards'. Can you please explain to the committee the purpose of this funding?

**Dr MILES:** Let me thank the member for Mackay for her question. The government is providing \$1.5 million per annum to better integrate water quality monitoring and expand waterway health report cards across the reef regions to support the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. The program aims to build partnerships with industry, community groups and landowners to provide valuable information and engagement on local water quality. As a consequence, government funding will be leveraged by the private sector. Waterways health report cards are currently being produced for South-East Queensland and a number of regions in the Great Barrier Reef, including Gladstone Harbour, Mackay-Whitsunday and Fitzroy River. The measure will fund the ongoing activities of the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership and the Mackay-Whitsunday Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership. The funding will also assist in the development of further report cards proposed for Cairns and Townsville. The report cards will provide important finer scale information to local communities about the health of their waterways and inform local management. Expansion of the report card program is an action listed under the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan.

**CHAIR:** Minister, what do you expect will be achieved through the creation of the Office of the Great Barrier Reef?

**Dr MILES:** Let me thank you, Chair, for that question. The Office of the Great Barrier Reef was established within the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection in May to coordinate the delivery of the government's reef strategies and programs to drive improved accountability for reef outcomes. The establishment of the office reflects the importance this government places on protecting the reef and ensuring that actions are in place to meet our commitments to improving the water quality in the Great Barrier Reef. The primary roles of the office are to implement the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan and to coordinate all of the Great Barrier Reef related actions across the Queensland government.



The Queensland Audit Office performance audit on managing water quality in the Great Barrier Reef highlighted the need for a more coordinated approach to water quality programs and a greater sense of urgency and purpose. The QAO recognised that the Office of the Great Barrier Reef, established by this government, was a positive step towards ensuring true accountability for Queensland's reef management strategies and programs. I want to emphasise that the Office of the Great Barrier Reef is not a costly statutory body. It is a small, high-powered unit reporting directly to my director-general. The 2015-16 budget for the office is \$4.19 million. The budget covers staffing and operating costs for the office, support for the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce, support for the Mackay-Whitsunday Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership and the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership, and the development of report cards for Cairns and Townsville.

Several funding sources support the office including \$683,000 from the Saving the Great Barrier Reef election commitment, just over \$1 million from special purpose funding transferred from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, \$832,000 from within the department and just over \$1.5 million of limited life funding including \$45,000 carried over from last financial year to support the existing and new regional water quality report cards. There are 19 positions in the office; 12 of the positions have been transferred from within EHP, four have been transferred from DPC and three new positions have been created and are under recruitment. The office includes people with project management, policy communications and stakeholder engagement skills and many have a strong science background to ensure practical outcomes are delivered. My director-general chairs the Great Barrier Reef IDC, which includes senior executives from all relevant Queensland government agencies. The office provides secretariat support for this committee and meets regularly with officers from other government departments to coordinate reef related activities.

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

**Mr POWER:** My question is again to the minister. During the last election campaign the Great Barrier Reef was an issue of great importance to the electors of Queensland. Can you please outline for the committee the government's progress in implementing the election commitments taken to that election on the Great Barrier Reef?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you for that question. I am very pleased to be able to report on the progress of implementing the Great Barrier Reef related election commitments that are under my responsibility. The first election commitment I will talk about is convening a high-level task force with representatives from regional communities; conservation organisations; industry groups, including primary producers, tourism operators and local government; and leading scientists to determine the best possible approach to achieve an up to 80 per cent reduction in pollution run-off into the Great Barrier Reef by 2025. The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce has been established, with Dr Geoff Garrett as its chair. The 21 member task force met in June 2015 and will have further meetings in September and November and possibly in early 2016. They were on track to provide me with an interim report in December 2015 and a final report in 2016.

The second election commitment is to provide an additional \$100 million over five years towards water quality initiatives, scientific research and helping businesses transition to better environmental practices. This funding was allocated as part of this government's budget commitment. While just over \$12 million is allocated for this coming financial year, the advice from the water science task force will inform how the remainder of the funding is allocated. This government has committed to targets to reduce nitrogen run-off by up to 80 per cent and total suspended sediment run-off by up to 50 per cent in key catchments such as the Wet Tropics and the Burdekin by 2025. These targets are now included in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, the road map that the Queensland and Australian governments have signed up to that will continue to improve on the Great Barrier Reef's outstanding universal value every decade between now and 2050.

Work has commenced on reinstating the world-class coastal planning laws axed by the Newman government. As you will be aware, my colleague the Hon. Dr Anthony Lynham, Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, introduced the Sustainable Ports Development Bill 2015 into parliament on 3 June. This legislation bans capital dredging within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area for the development of new or expansion of existing port facilities except for the four major ports and bans the disposal of capital dredge spoil from ports within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area. It also mandates master plans for all four priority ports. In fact, the introduction of legislation to implement our policies relating to ports was welcomed by representatives of the World Heritage Committee. As you can see, we have made significant progress within the election commitments that will help save our Great Barrier Reef for future generations.

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

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, I am quite concerned that it has been revealed that \$1.6 million was spent on a Great Barrier Reef advertising campaign. Can you please inform the committee what this money was spent on and why?

**Dr MILES:** I can and I know, member for Mackay, you will be as concerned as I am that this money was spent to attempt to mislead your constituents. I was interested to read on *Brisbane Times* this morning that the previous government had spent millions of dollars trying to convince the people of Queensland that they were in fact acting to protect—

**Mr POWELL:** That is \$1.6 million. That is not millions. It is \$1.6 million.

**CHAIR:** Member for Glass House, I will ask you—

**Mr POWELL:** And compared to what Greenpeace and WWF and the unions have spent—

**CHAIR:** Order!

**Mr POWELL:**—it is a lot less.

**Dr MILES:** Chair—

**CHAIR:** Excuse me a moment, Minister. There is a point of order.

**Mr BENNETT:** Just for clarification, this is about this year's Appropriation Bill. If we are talking about stuff that was in previous budgets I would ask that you rule it out of order, thanks.

**Dr MILES:** It is expenditure from the previous financial year and the appropriation for the coming financial year. So it is appropriate.

**Mr BENNETT:** These appropriations are for estimates, not for the previous government's expenditure.

**CHAIR:** It is covered by the appropriations; I am confident.

**Mr BENNETT:** You are?

**CHAIR:** Yes. Continue.

**Dr MILES:** The estimated actual of this expenditure is reported in the SDS. So it is an appropriate discussion for this committee. Let me go back a few interjections. The first one was about my use of the word plural when it came to millions. The member will well know that he had planned an expenditure of \$2.4 million, which is plural—

**Mr POWELL:** How much was spent?

**Dr MILES:** He spent \$1.6 million because he stopped all of a sudden after the G20. I am not sure why. The expenditure included hundreds of thousands of dollars for polling, for advertising material—

**Mr POWELL:** You would want the investment to be well spent, wouldn't you?

**Dr MILES:**—and millions of dollars was intended to be spent—

**Mr POWELL:**—intended, yes.

**Dr MILES:**—on advertising. It is interesting because the member is keen to defend the research component of that expenditure. I could have helped him out. I could have pre-empted the expenditure. The research found that it was very difficult for him to communicate in an environment where people did not trust him. It was very difficult because they were losing the battle for hearts and minds. The key challenge—

**Mr POWELL:** Point of order.

**CHAIR:** One moment. What is your point of order?

**Mr POWELL:** I will put aside the personal reflections that the minister is trying here, but when the minister himself tries to take an advertising campaign to the government advertising body that makes those decisions, I would like to see the minister try it without also taking the evidence to support the work that he intends to do.

**CHAIR:** There is no point of order. The minister was answering a question from a government member. I would ask the minister to go back to that answer.

**Dr MILES:** I am just outlining for the benefit of the committee what that research said. I was not disputing that he should not have necessarily done that research. The polling also found that Queenslanders believed that the government was not doing enough to protect the reef, that the

government was choosing the economy over the environment and that the reef was not well managed. Most concerning of all is that the communications plan explicitly recognised that they would need to manage the implications for tourism and business investment in and around the reef if, in fact, the reef had been listed as in danger. In a context where they were constantly telling us it would not be, the fact that they were doing this research and communications as to whether it should be listed suggests that they were, in fact, entertaining that as a prospect. Do we have some of the materials here? The committee might be interested to see what all this money went on.

**Mr POWELL:** Point of order.

**CHAIR:** What is your point of order?

**Mr POWELL:** Has the time for government questions expired?

**CHAIR:** I think the minister is still answering the last question.

**Dr MILES:** I can probably finish this one question. I will not go on for too long. Some of these materials are pretty fancy. You did very well; they are very glossy. We also have USB sticks with turtles on them, all to tell the people of Queensland how well the reef was doing, that it was all fine. Keep looking, there is nothing more to see here. If only that money had been spent on protecting the reef instead of trying to hoodwink Queenslanders.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I go to the member for Glass House.

**Mr POWELL:** Before I ask my question, Madam Chair, has there been a chance to respond to that earlier question? Has the director of regulatory performance received a pay rise or a promotion since the beginning of your tenure as minister?

**Dr MILES:** I can answer that question now, Madam Chair, if you are happy for me to come back to it. I am advised that the officer about whom the member for Glass House is asking questions has received no pay rise or no promotion since the change of government and, just to pre-empt another possible question, nor has the other officer who was, I am told, a candidate in that election. Obviously, it is disappointing that the member for Glass House has chosen to question the professionalism of individual department staff—department staff that he, in fact, worked with. I have not had reason to question that professionalism.

**Mr POWELL:** It is not the professionalism of the officers I am concerned about.

**CHAIR:** It is not a forum for argument. Do you have a question of the Minister, member for Glass House?

**Mr POWELL:** Minister's pay-off for preferences—

**CHAIR:** Do you have a question that is relevant to the—

**Mr POWELL:** I do, Madam Chair. Director-General—

**Dr MILES:** Madam Chair, the pay-off for preferences claim from the member for Glass House is clearly offensive. I ask that you ask him to withdraw it.

**CHAIR:** I ask you to withdraw.

**Mr POWELL:** I withdraw. Madam Chair, if I may direct my next question to the director-general. At this point, Director-General—I did not have an opportunity before, but can I congratulate you on your reappointment as the director-general of EHP and wish you all the best in your coming tenure. I just need confirmation of some of the details that the minister raised recently. Again, page 3 of the SDS refers to the fact that the Office of the Great Barrier Reef is there to improve water quality for the Great Barrier Reef through the provision of an additional \$100 million over five years towards water quality initiatives, scientific research and helping businesses transition to better environmental practices in the primary production, mining and fishing industries as part of the Saving the Great Barrier Reef policy. Director-General, is it correct that there are currently 19 staff in the Office of the Great Barrier Reef?

**Mr Black:** That is correct. It is 19 positions. I will just get the clarification on the actual staff attending because we are still in a recruitment process.

**Mr POWELL:** That is fine; 19 identified positions is fine, Director-General.

**Dr MILES:** I answered that earlier. There are 19 positions: 12 transferred from EHP, four from DPC, three new created and are under current increment.

**Mr POWELL:** I am sure the director-general thanks you for your assistance, Minister. Director-General, the three under recruitment, can I ask for some details as to the type of positions that they are?

**Mr Black:** I might ask the Executive Director, Elisa Nichols, to answer that question. She is across the detail.

**Ms Nichols:** We are currently advertising for two two-year temporary positions. One is an AO8 manager, which is a recruitment to the position in the water quality report card team, and the other is an AO6 in the same team—principal policy officer. The third position is a stakeholder management position. We have not yet started recruitment for that position, and it is at an AO6 level.

**Mr POWELL:** Sorry, stakeholder management position?

**Ms Nichols:** Yes.

**Mr POWELL:** I understand the minister mentioned that part of the \$100 million commitment—\$20 million for five years—is being used to fund those staffing positions? I think it was \$683,000. Minister, is that correct?

**Dr MILES:** Yes, \$683,000.

**Mr POWELL:** So \$683,000 out of the annual \$20 million is being allocated to the staffing positions? Okay. Under the previous iterations of the Labor government and under—

**Mr Black:** Madam Chair, that is not precisely correct in terms of the funding for the actual three positions. Is that what you are asking?

**Mr POWELL:** No, within those 19 positions, \$683,000 is being allocated for those?

**Dr MILES:** The funding of the office.

**Mr Black:** The funding of the office for other functions, yes.

**Mr POWELL:** Thank you. Director-General, under the previous iterations of Labor governments with that act that I spoke about before, the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Act, there were a number of regulatory officer type roles employed throughout regional Queensland with a specific task of checking up on farmers. Have you been directed to advertise for such positions again as of yet?

**Mr Black:** No.

**Mr POWELL:** So there has been no addition of regulatory officers to work under the stipulations of that Great Barrier Reef amendment act?

**Mr Black:** No. The question was: have I been directed to recruit? No. In terms of the additional part of your question, the department is currently undertaking a training needs analysis to undertake some compliance activity related not specifically to the act, but to the regulations under the act. That process is underway with the intention of meeting the government's commitment to reinstate that regime in a different format. But no, we have not been given any direct directions to recruit staff.

**Mr POWELL:** My interpretation of that is a training needs analysis and potentially redefining roles within existing staff to be able to 'reinstate that regime', to use your words. Minister, does that mean that you will be releasing the reef police back on cane farmers and graziers throughout Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** There is no intention to return to the reef protection officer structure to which the member refers. They are the 39 people who were charged with monitoring compliance with reef regulations which the previous government got rid of. There is an intention to fund targeted compliance in reef catchments, and you might have missed it, but it is in the budget. There is a \$1 million commitment to that in the budget. We are currently working with stakeholders and consulting with the task force about the best mix of policy measures that will deliver on our runoff targets.

**Mr POWER:** I rise to a point of order. We let it go, but standing order 115 clearly says that we should not have inferences in our questions. If we could use the terminology in the budget or previous budgets when clarifying questions rather than inferences, that would make the process better and clearer.

**CHAIR:** I would ask the member for Glass House to not make inferences.

**Mr POWELL:** Thank you, Madam and Mr Chair. Director-General, the \$20 million per year that the government has spoken about is on the back of the \$35 million a year that I understand they are continuing to fund towards water quality improvement across agencies. Can you please confirm how that \$35 million per year is being allocated in this coming year?

**Mr Black:** Madam Chair, with regard to this question I will just refer to the detail, if I may. This is an extensive list and it will take some time to go through.

**Mr POWELL:** If you want to go through the more significant investments and then, Madam Chair, through you, if you are able to table the document or a form of the document later on with a list of all projects, that would be much appreciated.

**Dr MILES:** We are happy to go through them all.

**CHAIR:** Minister, would you table them as well?

**Dr MILES:** The member may not have been through the questions on notice, but they are listed in non-government question No. 4.

**Mr POWELL:** That negates them reading them out, so I thank them for that. Out of the \$12 million being allocated this year, is any of that money for any new initiative not previously funded or prepared for by the LNP government?

**Mr Black:** Yes, there are some new initiatives. I will just refer to some details in terms of the expenditure breakdown. For instance, the minister referred to the Reef Water Science Task Force, which is a new initiative. That is one example. I will get the information for the other ones where the appropriation has been expended.

**Mr POWELL:** While that is being sought I am happy to defer to the member for Mount Isa.

**Mr KATTER:** In relation to page 2 of the SDS, goal 5, 'work productively with industry, business and community', and especially with regard to the need to provide evidence behind decisions, I ask: can the minister state how the department intends to work with the industries, businesses and communities of Cairns and Mourilyan on the coast of the Great Barrier Reef to ensure that projected growth for the region and its ports can be maintained?

**Dr MILES:** Let me thank the member for Mount Isa for that question. He is always a passionate advocate for economic development in the state, and so I welcome the chance to address his question. I have not had a chance to discuss it with him, but I do acknowledge that the member has made public comments expressing concern that Cairns and Mourilyan ports are not designated as priority ports in the Sustainable Ports Development Bill which was recently tabled in the House by my colleague Minister Lynham. While the issue primarily falls within the jurisdiction of other ministers, and in particular Minister Lynham, I am happy to offer some general comments, having reflected on it since seeing a media commentary.

I want to say firstly that the Queensland government will stand by its election commitment to continue to deliver trade and tourism opportunities for the port of Cairns. The Queensland government is working closely with Ports North to ensure that future development opportunities for the port of Cairns can be accommodated. The fact of the matter is that the former government's proposal for capital dredging at Trinity Inlet never stacked up on any measure and could not proceed. The volume of dredge spoil and costs of over \$360 million were not commercially viable.

We are a government that supports sustainable development opportunities to deliver jobs and underpin Far North Queensland's long-term future. That is why Labor went to the election with the promise not to allow the dumping of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area. To fulfil the Queensland government's election commitment regarding the proposed development at the port of Cairns, the bill includes transitional arrangements to protect projects currently undergoing an EIS, and that includes the Cairns shipping development project.

I am advised that high-level meetings have taken place around reworking the current EIS for the Cairns shipping development project to include a more commercially and environmentally viable option. But inextricably linked to our commitment to create economic opportunities for Far North Queensland is our commitment to protect the Great Barrier Reef and its associated billions of dollars' worth of economic contribution and tens of thousands of jobs. The four priority ports—Townsville, Abbot Point, Gladstone and Hay Point, Mackay—nominated under the Sustainable Ports Development Bill are the same ports the former government selected as priority port development areas in its 2014 ports bill. The port of Cairns was not proposed to be a PPDA.

The federal government has advised that the Sustainable Ports Development Bill, including limiting priority ports to the four ports contained in the bill, did have a material effect on UNESCO's decision not to list the Great Barrier Reef as being in danger. This is a decision which is critical to the ongoing success of the Cairns tourism industry.

**Mr KATTER:** In reference to page 3 of the SDS under 'service area highlights', dot point 2 relates to the expenditure of some \$100 million over five years to improve water quality for the Great Barrier Reef and in particular better environmental practices in primary production. Can the minister detail or anticipate expenditure which may be available for the provision of funding soil conservation work on the eastern fall of the Great Dividing Range which eventually flows into the Great Barrier Reef?

**Dr MILES:** Let me thank the member again for that question and for his interest in our initiatives to restrict sediment runoff. The last thing any of us want is good soil ending up in the Great Barrier Reef. The Water Quality Science Task Force that I was talking about earlier is charged with making recommendations about how that \$100 million is spent beyond this year's allocation. We anticipate that measures dealing with soil conservation and riparian system repair will be part of the thinking of the task force. It is certainly part of the deliberations that they are currently working on. I would be very keen, once we see the outcomes of those discussions, to brief you on their deliberations and to let you know where they are up to.

**Mr KATTER:** I think some of that money goes to good use with levee banks and whatnot. On SDS page 6, dot point 4 with regard to the protection of the Great Barrier Reef, does the minister consider grass plains to be superior at retaining soil runoff than timber environments?

**Dr MILES:** Again let me thank the member for his question. It is an interesting one and it has been a topic of much scientific research and interest recently, so I am keen to have the chance to talk about it. Both modelled data and monitoring based data of treed versus pasture areas has shown a reduction in water runoff from treed areas. Forested areas provide a wide range of benefits and functions to water management, soil conservation, biodiversity and farming production. Within grazing landscapes trees play a vital role by providing shade and shelter, recycling nutrients and helping to guard against salinity issues.

In terms of soil erosion, treed areas provide deep-rooted soil stability, enable water filtration and are particularly important for minimising stream bank erosion. Ground cover can be highly variable over time, as the member would well know, with rainfall and land management. Areas of low cover in dry periods, particularly during drought, are proven to contribute to high sediment losses. Trees provide persistent cover through dry periods, and the litter layer under trees is also effective in minimising soil erosion. The roots provide channels through the soil for increased filtration and can also act like small barriers, slowing water down across the surface.

NRM undertakes modelling at both paddock and catchment scales which incorporates ground cover and treed areas. Both have shown an improvement in runoff under treed areas. The amount of erosion that occurs under these landscapes is heavily influenced by the management of them as well as other factors such as slope, geology and soil type. For example, a scientific study showed that pasture areas can produce 3.8 to 5.4 times as much sediment as forested areas, and this can increase to up to 27 times more loss if pasture areas are overgrazed. Both landscape types can produce soil erosion if not managed well though, and this is the focus of our ground management programs.

I am happy to put together an analysis of that research for you down the track.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The federal government recently cemented its unwillingness to take any serious action against climate change with its announcement of the underwhelming 2030 reduction targets. What does this mean for our government and our investment in protecting the Great Barrier Reef?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you for that question. As you would have noted earlier, the member for Glass House gave me a chance to talk at length about the impact of global warming on the Great Barrier Reef. As someone who is passionate about seeing the Great Barrier Reef survive, I know you were as disappointed as I was when the Commonwealth Government announced their 2030 reduction targets, which are well short of our fair share of addressing global warming and our fair share of the task of limiting global warming to two degrees.

The fact is that global warming is the biggest long-term threat to the reef and if we are going to do what it will take to make sure the reef is around for our kids and our grandkids, we have to address climate change for all of the reasons I spoke of earlier. The conference of the parties this year is clearly the big global opportunity for us to secure what is needed to address global warming, and that is a global treaty with national targets that each nation is required to achieve.

**Mr POWER:** My question is for the minister as well. In the budget there is a significant amount of expenditure and money earmarked for reef water quality improvement, which is the key to improving the reef. Why has a significant amount of money been earmarked for reef water quality improvement

and why focus particularly on water quality? I have some follow-up questions, if you do not mind. I know that you have spoken about targets earlier. Are these targets achievable? Further, is the investment that we have proposed sufficient to achieve the targets? I wonder if you could speak to all of those issues.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you for those questions. Reef water quality really is just so important to our activities to protect the reef. At the end of the day, what we do on the land actually matters a lot more than what we do in the water when it comes to the health of the reef. We are doing more than any previous government to address reef water quality.

A number of new commitments have been made which aim to ensure the reef's long-term survival, including the development of ambitious water quality targets. The impact of broadscale agricultural land use on reef water quality continues to compromise the health and resilience of the reef. This includes nutrient runoff, sediment runoff and pesticide runoff. To put numbers around this, the modelled anthropogenic baseline loads for total suspended sediments from Great Barrier Reef catchments entering the reef is over 5,500 kilotonnes per year. The modelled anthropogenic baseline loads for dissolved inorganic nitrogen from Great Barrier Reef catchments entering the reef is approximately 5,000 tonnes per year.

Our targets are to reduce this sediment run-off by up to 50 per cent and nitrogen run-off by up to 80 per cent in key catchments like the Wet Tropics and Burdekin by 2025. These new reef water quality targets align with recommended reductions in dissolved inorganic nitrogen and sediment run-off from scientific studies in the Wet Tropics and Burdekin regions published by well-respected scientists from the James Cook University and the Australian Institute of Marine Science. You will note that these targets are up to 50 per cent and up to 80 per cent. This recognises that these targets are not necessarily appropriate for every Great Barrier Reef catchment and regionalisation of these targets is to be undertaken in 2016 as part of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan targets midterm review. These ambitious targets have been included in the joint Australian and Queensland government's Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan which will drive the management and protection of the reef in the coming decades. The targets acknowledge that increased levels of pollutants entering the reef lagoon from agricultural land use practices is a major cause of deteriorating water quality and an issue that needs to be addressed to ensure the system's survival. Cleaning up the water in the reef will help us build the resilience of the reef in the face of other threats.

You asked about the achievability of our targets, and I readily accept that our targets are ambitious. A business-as-usual approach will not get us to these targets. We need to do more. That is why our government formed a high-level Great Barrier Reef Water Science Task Force to provide us with the best possible advice on how we can meet our ambitious targets and how we can most efficiently apply the additional funding. The task force will consider options including voluntary initiatives, regulations, extension services and market based instruments in order to achieve the targets. In terms of that question about whether even with this additional investment—even with that extra money—

**Mr POWER:** Especially in the Wet Tropics and the Burdekin, as you mentioned.

**Dr MILES:** Sure. In terms of whether that will be enough, this additional funding is on top of the \$35 million that has historically been committed by governments to reef water quality work and it is expected that this funding will be aligned and leveraged with funding from a variety of other sources, including the Australian government, various science funds and the private and philanthropic sectors. Clearly these funds will run over the next five financial years and these targets are for five years beyond that, so the question of what funding is required in that period of time will have to be deliberated on by future governments in future budgets.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, can you explain for the benefit of the committee the significance of the decision of the World Heritage Committee not to list the Great Barrier Reef as in danger?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Mackay, for that question. Obviously I welcome the decision of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee to not list the Great Barrier Reef as in danger. With the Deputy Premier, I was very proud to attend the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee held in Bonn earlier this year when the decision was announced. An in danger listing, although considered less likely as a result of our comprehensive policies on the reef and the early progress made on implementing these policies, had the potential to cause substantial reputational and economic damage to Queensland and Australia. The World Heritage committee unanimously endorsed the draft decision of not listing the reef as in danger. Each and every delegate spoke in favour of the resolution and

commended us on the actions we have taken to ensure the long-term protection of the reef. The positive outcome is an international acknowledgement of this government's firm and swift actions since taking office and acknowledges the significant achievements and continuing work of the new Queensland government in collaboration with the Commonwealth government to tackle the short- and medium-term risks to reef health. The decision specifically welcomes this government's new ambitious pollution reduction targets and the injection of new funding of \$100 million for the reef, which has been subsequently matched by a further \$100 million commitment from the Commonwealth government. Our work to protect the reef will be checked on regularly. An update on progress of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan will be provided to the World Heritage Committee in December 2016 for consideration at their meeting in 2017. In 2019 the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority will provide a report on the state of conservation of the reef to the World Heritage Committee. At home, annual reporting of progress on the Reef 2050 Plan will be provided to the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Forum.

The Queensland government can attest it has already begun implementing the 2050 plan alongside the Commonwealth. For example, we have updated the Great Barrier Reef intergovernmental agreement to give the Reef 2050 Plan the highest possible level of agreement between the national and state governments and convened the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Task Force to provide advice on the best approach to meet our targets. We have introduced the Sustainable Ports Development Bill and released a joint investment baseline as the first step towards an investment framework for the management and conservation of the reef. The investment baseline illustrates the substantial investment in the reef coming from all tiers of government and the private and philanthropic sectors. In 2014-15 this totalled \$485 million, including \$78 million from the Queensland government. The positive acknowledgement of our actions by the World Heritage Committee sends a strong message to the world that we are standing up to save this international icon.

**Mrs GILBERT:** As a follow-up question, Minister, the World Heritage Committee met in Bonn. Could you tell us whether it was worthwhile for you to personally attend that meeting?

**Dr MILES:** As Minister for the Great Barrier Reef I think my participation in the delegation and advocacy for the Queensland government's commitments that aim to ensure the outstanding universal value of the reef is maintained were identified by Minister Hunt as a valuable contribution to Australia's overall diplomatic effort to avoid an in danger listing. Ahead of the formal consideration of the state of conservation of the Great Barrier Reef by the committee, the Deputy Premier and I met with member state and civil society delegations to promote the work of the new state government and to argue that the reef should not be placed on the list of World Heritage properties in danger. We were able to personally highlight the excellent work this government is doing to ensure that we are working hard to protect the reef.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Glass House.

**Mr POWELL:** Director-General, if I may return to that previous question. Specifics—

**Dr MILES:** Madam Chair—sorry to interrupt, member for Glass House—I just have some more information on the questions you were asking earlier regarding a particular officer of the department.

**Mr POWELL:** Thank you.

**Dr MILES:** The officer you are referring to was promoted from A08 to SO2 during the term of the LNP government in December 2012. He acted up from his AO8 substantive position in a range of higher duties from February 2012 to November 2012.

**Mr POWELL:** The question, Minister, was under your tenure as minister, not under mine.

**Dr MILES:** I thought you would be interested that he was promoted under yours.

**Mr POWELL:** No, I am intrigued to see what has occurred since you have become minister and if there is nothing more you can add I do not need to know anything else.

**Dr MILES:** No, I assume you were not promoting him to—

**Mr POWELL:** I am well aware of what the individual was doing during my tenure, thank you very much.

**Dr MILES:** Very good.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Glass House.

**Mr POWELL:** Director-General, with regard to the \$12 million that has been allocated this year, what are the new initiatives as per se what this government has provided funding for as per continuation of previous projects or programs?



**Mr Black:** I can detail the appropriation was \$12,683,000. Some \$10 million of that has been assigned to the fishing buyback—that is, the fishing net buyout—to create the three net-free fishing coastal zones. Some \$683,000 was to support the task force and the associated work with that for the water quality. Some \$1 million was for the compliance regime that was discussed previously and \$1 million was for the eReefs initiative, so that is the second payment of \$1 million over the three years.

**Mr POWELL:** Just to clarify, of the \$12 million, \$10 million is a further buyback, so that is continuing the programs that were undertaken by DAFF under the LNP government, albeit in new areas, and I acknowledge that, but the buyback program certainly was instigated with \$9 million under the LNP government; and \$1 million for eReefs which, as you rightly pointed out, Director-General, is the second payment given the commitment was made under the LNP government. I will acknowledge that \$683,000—

**CHAIR:** Member for Glass House, do you have a question?

**Mr POWELL:** Yes, I do thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** Could you please get to it?

**Mr POWELL:** Thank you; I will. I will acknowledge that \$683,000 has been allocated for the task force, but basically, Director-General or Minister—I do not mind which one—that is the only new initiative that is going towards the reef this year. Is that correct?

**Dr MILES:** That is not correct, member for Glass House. You do note that the previous government had made additional verbal commitments to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation to fund eReefs but had never made a budget allocation to do so. That was one of your nice little presents—

**Mr POWELL:** The first payment was made, Minister.

**Dr MILES:**—left for me.

**Mr POWELL:** The first payment was made, Minister.

**Dr MILES:** The \$1 million in additional compliance effort is new and additional funding.

**Mr POWELL:** Sorry? So you are bringing back the reef police? Thank you.

**Dr MILES:** The \$10 million that you noted was for fishing buybacks. I think given the member for Burnett is campaigning pretty hard against those, I am not sure you want to claim that is a continuation of your policy.

**Mr BENNETT:** What am I campaigning against, sorry, Minister?

**Dr MILES:** The net fishing buybacks. Are you not campaigning against those?

**Mr BENNETT:** No, do not put words in my mouth. I am campaigning, if you give me an opportunity, against the way it was done and sustainable fishing into the future. That is what I am campaigning against.

**Mr POWELL:** Thank you. So what we agree is that basically \$1.683 million is new money, so that sort of dispels the myth that you are the fairy godmother of the Great Barrier Reef here, that you have come in here—

**CHAIR:** The member for Glass House will refrain from making statements.

**Mr POWELL:**—with the name in your title and sprinkled a bit of fairy dust around—

**CHAIR:** Does the member for Glass House have a question?

**Mr POWELL:**—and all of a sudden UNESCO has taken the reef off the in danger list, hasn't it?

**Dr MILES:** All of that \$12.683 million is new money. It was not in this year's budget. It is allocated by this government—

**Mr POWELL:** \$683,000—

**CHAIR:** The member for Glass House—

**Dr MILES:**—and in subsequent years the contribution increases to more than \$20 million in additional funding each year—additional funding that is over and above anything anyone else was doing. Let me be clear: the reason there is not substantial expenditure in this financial year is because we are consulting with the experts to identify the best way to spend that money. We could run out and do what has been done before, but we know what has been done before is not going to work. So we

have the task force and the task force reports in an interim way late this year and in a final report next year and we will base the expenditure in subsequent years on those recommendations. I am pretty happy to say that I think that is a responsible way to do public policy and expenditure.

**Mr POWELL:** My question is for the director-general. Reference was made earlier, Director-General, to a number of catchment report cards. Two of those—the South-East Queensland and Fitzroy report cards—have been in train for many, many years. Gladstone and Mackay-Whitsunday were initiated under the LNP government. There was reference made to initiating a Cairns and a Townsville report card. Director-General, can you please outline the time frames for the establishment of these report cards?

**Mr Black:** The report card process has already commenced in the sense that the intention is to continue the rollout of the current programs to take the benefit of the economy of scale, if you will, and we have also released a discussion paper which we will get in alignment so we can get the consistent recording of water quality throughout the Great Barrier Reef zone. Indeed, the intention is to align it with the South-East Queensland one so the report card grades would be consistent, if you will, right across the area in question. In terms of the rollout of the report cards, I will just see if I can get a more concise date for the start. In terms of the financial year, Cairns will be this year and Townsville the following financial year in terms of the establishment of those report cards.

**Mr POWELL:** Consistent with the report cards in each of the other catchments, is the intent to have both community and business partners in the funding and in the determination of future project money in both Cairns and Townsville?

**Mr Black:** Absolutely. That is the intention—to build on the success of those previous report cards. The community engagement has proven to be very successful and of course, as you were reflecting upon, the contributions from industry and local businesses can also take part in that and get the better outcome. So that is the intention. We do note, however, that consistent with government objectives is to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are leveraged to the best way possible and that is what we are intending to do to make sure that the lesson is learnt and indeed investment in systems, particularly water quality models, can be lifted and moved and relocated, if you will, to those other areas.

**Mr POWELL:** Is there an intent to complement that baseline data consistent across the state with the eReefs investment that was initiated under the previous government?

**Mr Black:** That is correct. The eReef model, I believe the minister described it as a system like the Bureau of Meteorology. So it is like a weather map, but obviously reflecting water quality and the movement of water through the reef lagoon. The intention is to enable the report card information to be an input into the eReef model so that we can get consistent water-quality modelling and forecasting throughout the reef lagoon to its full extent. That is the long-term intention of that investment.

**Mr POWELL:** So it will marry up the catchment reporting with the lagoon reporting. That is, in essence, what you are saying?

**Mr Black:** That is correct, yes.

**Mr POWELL:** Thank you, director-general.

**CHAIR:** The committee will now adjourn for a short break and we will be back here at 4.15 to examine the estimates of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. Thank you.

#### **Proceedings suspended from 4.00 pm to 4.17 pm**



**CHAIR:** Welcome back, Minister. The committee's examination will now focus on the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. I call the member for Burnett.

**Mr BENNETT:** Good afternoon everyone.

**Dr MILES:** Do I get an opening address?

**CHAIR:** My sincere apologies.

**Dr MILES:** It would disappoint everyone to not hear my opening remarks, I think.

**CHAIR:** I apologise, Minister. Yes, please share your opening remarks.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, Madam Chair. As I say, I would like to make a few opening remarks on our goals to create a healthy and resilient environment for Queensland. One of the matters that we will be focusing on over the next 12 months will be climate change. In this regard, we will be working in partnership with the Local Government Association of Queensland to deliver the coastal councils adaptation program to help councils address coastal hazards, including sea level rise, inundation and erosion in their planning processes.

From October this year, coastal councils will be able to apply for funding to assist with the development of local plans and options to deal with their escalating climate risks. We will also be developing a climate adaptation strategy in collaboration with industry, local government and the community to develop responses to the varying impacts of climate change across Queensland's regions and sectors.

To ensure that our most valuable natural places are protected and strengthened by community commitment to conservation, we will be expanding our NatureAssist program, providing incentives for private landholders to undertake conservation management on their land and creating nature refuges for land of significant conservation value and climate change resilience.

In addition to the natural environment, we have continued the important work of identifying and conserving the state's built heritage places. There are now more than 1,700 places on the Queensland Heritage Register, including Brisbane's own Cultural Centre, which was recently added to the register.

I would like to introduce the members of my staff and departmental representatives who are present for questions relating to the Environment and Heritage Protection portfolio. They are Director-General Jon Black; Deputy Director-General Tony Roberts; Deputy Director-General, Environmental Services and Regulation, Dean Ellwood; Acting Deputy Director-General, Conservation and Sustainability Services, Geoff Clare; Assistant Director-General, Corporate Services, Peter Griffin. Like forward to the committee's questions pertaining to the EHP portfolio.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Burnett.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you very much. Welcome, Minister, and your team. Page 15 of the SDS relates to staffing. As you alluded to in your opening statement in relation to the Great Barrier Reef, there have been some discussions around protocols and procedures for departmental staff. I will not propose to go back there, but allude to the fact that we have had staff stood down for inappropriate behaviour. In terms of section 166 and penalty infringements, would you be able to enlighten the committee on what the individual new penalty units are? This is for obligations for a person to not make misleading statements on administrative activities.

**Dr MILES:** Let me thank the member for Burnett for his question. I am just struggling to follow. You said page 15 of the SDS?

**Mr BENNETT:** That is the broad heading about staffing. It leads into the fact about staffing and infringements.

**Dr MILES:** Page 16, was it?

**Mr BENNETT:** It is on your website, Minister—a summary of changes to penalty infringement notices, if I can reference that to you as a courtesy.

**Mr POWER:** You are drawing a very long bow.

**Mr BENNETT:** I think we have established that there have been cases where staff have been stood down for this in the last session. I am just wondering if we can play that out for the infringement notice component of that, being three penalty units.

**Dr MILES:** I am not sure what you are trying to get at, member. I am happy to try to address your question.

**CHAIR:** Perhaps the member for Burnett could just explain how it is relevant to the appropriations so that the minister can—

**Mr BENNETT:** Clearly, all staff are employed under the appropriations. We have established earlier that if people make a misleading statement or carry out inappropriate behaviours that they have been stood down, as your director-general alluded to. My question is about the infringement notice component. Could you explain the three penalty units to the committee for that infringement?

**Dr MILES:** One hundred and sixty-six of the infringement notices?

**CHAIR:** I understand that these people are not employed under the appropriations.

**Mr BENNETT:** I think their wages are paid from there, though, are they not? That is how the government works. Money goes to employing public servants.

**Dr MILES:** So are you saying a staff member received a PIN; is that what you are saying?

**Mr BENNETT:** Yes, three penalty units. I am asking you as the minister if you know what the penalty units entail—how much they are and what they would be used for.

**Mr Black:** I will have to take that on notice.

**Mr BENNETT:** Are you happy to do that?

**Dr MILES:** Yes, I am happy to come back with those figures—

**Mr BENNETT:** One hundred and sixty-six of the infringement penalty notices for persons who make misleading statements in the administration of the act. Thank you.

**Dr MILES:** Sure.

**Mr BENNETT:** Moving on, Minister, I refer to non-government question No. 5 that you kindly returned to us yesterday. I am just after some clarification. This is for the Queensland Waste Data System. In the response there is a breakdown of the running costs towards the Queensland Waste Data System. The total figure that has been portrayed to the question is \$305,330. When we looked into it—and, of course, kindly provided by your department—there are some 20 staff engaged in that process. I am just wondering if I could get some clarification on 20 staff being engaged for the reported \$305,330. Sorry, it is non-government question No. 5.

**Dr MILES:** Yes. Sorry, we are just pulling out non-government question No. 5. In terms of the specific roles of staff, I will probably have to ask the director-general.

**Mr BENNETT:** The costs, Minister. The specific roles are quite clear there. They are managers, team leaders, policy officers—

**Dr MILES:** Yes.

**Mr BENNETT:** I am just curious about the reference to 20 staff working in the Queensland Waste Data System and the money in the budget of \$305,000 that has been reported. I am just curious for your comments on that, please.

**Dr MILES:** Yes. Let me get the director-general to answer that.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you.

**Mr Black:** I think the figure of the \$305,000 would be the actual hosting in relation to the Data Management System and all the staff on the back are the people who are involved with the whole waste portfolio responsibility. So there are two separate issues being provided there. I can get the detail. I think you can see the waste data hosting costs of \$77,334. That is the system cost. The staff expense associated with the waste tracking system is the \$227,996. That is the total cost there to do with the waste tracking. So there are only a couple staff who are associated with actual waste tracking, the data system. The remainder of the staff are undertaking the other policy and compliance activities associated with waste.

**Mr BENNETT:** So as clarification for me for that \$305,000, that is for the time that they are allocated to that data system tracking?

**Mr Black:** They are the staff working on that system.

**Dr MILES:** Footnote 3—

**Mr Black:** Yes, footnote 3—

Staff expenses are an estimate of time dedicated to QWDS operation and maintenance. Resources were also dedicated to other projects.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you for that clarification, director-general. Minister, in relation to page 19, controlled income statement, grants and subsidies, would you or the director-general, kindly for the benefit of the committee, detail all the grants made to groups where there have been no formal tender application or procurement process since 14 February 2015 to today? Of course, we are after things like consultancies, contracts and grants. I think there are references on page 19. Of course, if you want to consider taking it on notice, we would like to know what the grant was used for, the purpose, the date that the grant was delivered et cetera. Is that something readily available?

**Dr MILES:** Sorry, repeat the question. What specifically are you after?

**Mr BENNETT:** Of course, I am talking about the controlled income statements, grants and subsidies.

**Dr MILES:** Yes, I have that.

**Mr BENNETT:** But we would like to know for the benefit of the committee the detail of all grants that were made to groups where there have been no formal tender application or procurement process essentially since the change of government.

**Dr MILES:** Let us aim to get back to you before the end of the session on that.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you, if you would be kind enough. Minister, on pages 25 and 26 of the SDS there is an explanation on the variances in the financial statements, with numerous references to the additional funding for the investigations of underground coal gasification. I have two questions. What is the amount and the aim of these investigations? Of course, with the issue of Linc Energy, it is usual that the minister would not be able to comment directly on these matters of prosecution, but would you like to make a comment on that?

**Dr MILES:** Sure. Let me thank the member for Burnett for that question. I just note that we addressed some of these matters with government question on notice No. 4.

**Mr BENNETT:** Yes.

**Dr MILES:** You have correctly stated that I will be circumspect about what I can say about an ongoing prosecution.

**Mr BENNETT:** I appreciate that.

**Dr MILES:** I will defer to the director-general in a moment to outline, in what detail that we can, the situation. Essentially, very early in my term as minister the director-general briefed me on a significant pollution event in the Hopeland area near Chinchilla. The investigation into that has been ongoing. I saw my role in that process as ensuring that EHP had all of the appropriate resources that it needed to properly pursue that investigation and properly communicate with the affected community. That is why there is an additional appropriation, additional supplementation from Treasury to allow that investigation, which is the biggest single investigation of its kind ever undertaken by our environment regulator and it would be among the biggest in the country. Let me ask the director-general to outline what he can for the benefit of the committee, because it is a very concerning situation. We will continue to understand that there are limits on what he can say.

**Mr BENNETT:** Yes, I appreciate that.

**Mr Black:** As the minister has indicated, the matter is before a court. There are five charges—serious charges—that have been laid against Linc Energy. That is on the public record. The investigation, as the minister has indicated, has been ongoing. The first and foremost priority has been the health and safety and, indeed, the ongoing prosperity of the community that has been impacted by the alleged pollution event.

It is incumbent upon the department as the environmental regulator to undertake the lead responsibility for the investigation. As the minister indicated, this is significant in so much as it has involved seven departments. We have also had to engage specialists to advise on the investigation and obviously contribute towards the burden of proof that the department has in terms of the prosecution. I think I would like to limit my comments to that, given the circumstances. The matter is before a Magistrates Court. The magistrate at this particular time has ordered a committal hearing that will commence in late October. Within that committal hearing he has ordered some particular occurrences in terms of the prosecution, but I would probably be best to leave it at that if I could, Madam Chair.

**Dr MILES:** I might just add, member for Burnett, that throughout this process I have sought to ensure that the member for Warrego, as the person who represents this area, is well briefed on what we are up to. I am happy to include you in those briefings in an ongoing way if you are interested as the opposition environment spokesperson. This is a matter that needs to be above politics.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you for that. Page 2 refers to 'Goal one: Enhance Queensland's ecosystems.' Can the minister outline actions the government is taking in the waterways in North Queensland particularly around the crocodiles issue?

**Dr MILES:** Sure.

**Mr BENNETT:** It is not a Dorothy Dixier either.

**Dr MILES:** Let me thank the member for that question. I am happy to talk about the ongoing crocodile management strategy in Townsville and Cairns. Obviously public safety continues to be our highest priority, but at the same time we have committed to review the current crocodile management plans in those locations. They were coming up for review anyway under the previous government's program. The member will be aware that there is ongoing concern from the scientific community and

from conservationists about the impact of crocodile removals on the crocodile population. What I would really like to be able to do is to tell you that crocodile removals are not having an impact or they are having an impact and this is what the impact is. Unfortunately, there was no baseline surveying done of crocodile populations before the plans were put into place, which is a shame.

**Mr POWELL:** Madam Chair, point of order. That statement is incorrect. There was baseline surveying done by the department and that surveying and the data was reviewed by Professor Craig Franklin to determine whether it was accurate and could be relied upon. In Professor Franklin's—

**Mr POWER:** This is not a point of order, this is an argument.

**Mr POWELL:** I am just correcting the statement. It was suggested that there was no baseline data. That is not true.

**CHAIR:** Member for Glass House, it is not a point of order, but the minister may wish to explain further.

**Dr MILES:** I am advised that there was not baseline data, that the studies you are referring to are substantially dated and that it is not possible for us to accurately assess the impact of the crocodile removals on the crocodile population, so what I have asked the department to do is to look at what we know and what we need to find out so that we can better assess the impacts we are having with these crocodile management plans and so that is the initial focus of that review work.

Before we move on, member for Burnett, your earlier question about grants without tender, it would make sense to me if you were asking from February 2015, but I thought you might have said February 2014.

**Mr BENNETT:** My apologies if I did. 2015, hence the relevance.

**Dr MILES:** In the term of this government, yes. That makes sense to me.

**Mr BENNETT:** To today if that is possible, if the department officers could do that.

**Dr MILES:** We will be working on that now.

**CHAIR:** We will go to government questions. Minister, how was the Reef 2015 Long-Term Sustainability Plan strengthened by the new Queensland government?

**Dr MILES:** I am very happy to talk more about the long-term sustainability plan, although I had understood the focus of this session would be EHP matters. I am very happy though to take a whole another round of questions. Would you like to me to address that question or would you like to ask me one about EHP?

**CHAIR:** I will ask you another one. With reference to the service area descriptions of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection Service Delivery Statement, can the minister outline the impacts on the department from the previous government's job cuts?

**Dr MILES:** Sure, Madam Chair, I would be pleased to. I can talk both about the impact of the previous government's job cuts and the actions we took in government to avoid further job cuts. Employment in EHP dropped dramatically in the 2012-13 financial year. In June 2012 there were 1,336 employees. Twelve months later there was 1,038 and it stayed roughly at that level for the following two years of the previous government. The key reductions were in the areas of climate change, of reef protection and other areas. The reduction from June 2012 to June 2015 was 340 full-time equivalents overall: 247 employees left the department through the separation program—244 of those were redundancies and three were retrenchments. The high-end impact on services due to redundancies and of funding losses were across the Office of Climate Change, with the cessation of the Sustainable Energy Innovation Fund and the ClimateSmart Home Service, environmental planning, which reduced the capacity to ensure departmental business interests were achieved under the Sustainable Development Act, and reef compliance where 39 protection officers were removed. The department's lowest staffing level was 1000.07 FTE in November 2013.

Since then we have secured funding that has allowed us to slightly increase staff while also defending jobs that would have been lost if it were not that we secured ongoing budget funding. There was a range of programs planned to be declined or ceased by the previous government on 30 June.

**Mr POWELL:** Or considered under a budget.

**Dr MILES:** In coming to office I was faced with the situation of needing to find new budget funds in order to stop further job cuts. The areas affected were the Nature Refuges Program, our wildlife programs, the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership and Waterways Health Report Card programs.

For Nature Refuges a total of 22 permanent positions were funded from a combination of discontinuing limited life funding and declining koala habitat offset revenue; for wildlife management there were 13 positions of which eight were permanent and were not funded beyond 30 June. So the government has now provided a further \$5 million in 2015.

**Mr POWELL:** Point of order.

**CHAIR:** Excuse me, Minister. What is your point of order?

**Mr POWELL:** Again I want to make sure that the minister is not misleading—

**Mr POWER:** Is this a point of order?

**Mr POWELL:** Yes. Can I at least get the first sentence out?

**Mr POWER:** Not from the past experience.

**Mr POWELL:** I want to make sure the minister is not misleading—

**CHAIR:** What is your point of order?

**Mr POWER:** It is not a point of order.

**Mr POWELL:** Yes, it is. The point of order is that the minister is misleading the committee. The minister is well aware that there are things called limited life specials that require consideration by budget committees and the suggestion that these positions were going is false. The only suggestion he can make is that they were going to be considered at the upcoming CBRC in the same way that he has taken these matters to CBRC. His implication that the previous government was going to cut these positions is false.

**CHAIR:** Member for Glass House, you have had sufficient time. It is not a point of order. I will let the minister go back to answering the question.

**Dr MILES:** That's right, Madam Chair. These initiatives were not included in the forward estimates for the previous government. They were scheduled to end on 30 June by the previous government and the fact is that the member should be quite careful because he could well be accusing the previous Treasurer of not including all intended future expenditure in the forward estimates. These programs were not in the forward estimates. The purpose of forward estimates is to account for funding that governments expect.

**Mr Powell** interjected.

**CHAIR:** The member for Glass House will cease interjecting.

**Dr MILES:** The point of the forward estimates is to outline intended expenditure in future years. If they are not included there then either they were misleading the people of Queensland about their budget bottom line in future years or they were intended to cease on 30 June.

**Mr POWELL:** We will see if your budget changes next year.

**CHAIR:** Member for Glass House, it is not a debate.

**Dr MILES:** I hope it does. A further \$1.8 million has now been provided in 2015-16 to continue the wildlife management and conservation activities providing continued funding for 13 existing positions in wildlife management. The government has now, as we heard earlier, allocated \$1.5 million ongoing from 2015-16 for the expansion of the Waterways Health Report Card and we have provided additional funding of \$1.4 million in supplementation to overcome a funding shortfall for EIS assessments. That funding replaces a decline in revenue collections for this business because there is a disparity between when the funds are collected and when the work has to occur.

The government has taken a fiscally responsible approach to my portfolio budget while ensuring that there are no further job losses and no further redundancies as a result of further reductions in the department's budget allocation. Quite frankly, enough funds and enough jobs were cut from this department in the last three years. We could not afford to lose more.

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

**Mr POWER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Isn't it exciting to hear of the good things the LNP would have done but didn't budget for? Can the minister please provide an update on implementing its election commitments, many of which are listed in the 2015-16 service area highlights of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection Service Delivery Statement? An update on the implementation would be fantastic.

**Dr MILES:** Sure. Thank you, member for Logan. My department is managing the delivery of 31 of this government's election commitments. I am happy to advise that my department has already delivered on five of those commitments. One was the pollution reduction targets that we outlined earlier. We have delivered that by including it in the long-term sustainability plan. The second was to provide incentives and mechanisms for leasehold and freehold landowners to manage and secure environmentally significant ecosystems and corridors, and that is delivered in this budget. A matter I am sure the member for Mount Isa continues to take an active interest in: we have supported amendments to the Environmental Protection Act to extend the life of the Mount Isa copper smelter. That was delivered in June 2015. We committed to not support the referral of powers under the EPBC Act. We delivered that in June 2015 when we advised the Commonwealth government we would not be supporting that bilateral agreement. The fifth delivered commitment was to ensure that mining companies properly provision for water treatment to prevent contamination of nearby creeks and rivers.

Of the remaining 26 commitments, 11 will be delivered this financial year, five will be delivered during 2016-17, five during 2017-18 and one during 2018-19. The remaining four commitments are aspirational and will be delivered over the long term. They are things such as secure and conserve representative—it is to hit the IUCN target of 17 per cent of Queensland being a protected area estate. They are aspirational targets that will take longer than this term, although clearly in this term we can make significant progress towards it and put in place the policy settings that will get us there.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Mackay.

**Mrs GILBERT:** With reference to service standards on page 7 of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection service delivery statement, can the minister outline how this government is using climate change resilience mapping to help select new protected areas across Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Mackay for the question. This is a program I have taken some interest in. The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection is working with the James Cook University to map which parts of the state will be most resilient to different levels of global warming. Those properties will then form the basis for our strategically targeted land acquisition program. We will seek to acquire those properties that will be most resilient in the face of global warming and that will provide habitat opportunities and corridor opportunities for wildlife that will be affected by global warming. The strategy build's on the unit's existing landscape resilience program by incorporating the core protected area principles of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness into a climate change adaptation framework. The strategy will guide the acquisition for land for national parks and the provision of incentives for nature refuges. The landscape conservation unit staff are working closely with the JCU to ensure the scientific rigour in the strategy. New mapping is being prepared for target areas incorporating the best available data. Since the adoption of the landscape resilience approach to protected area acquisition, EHP has acquired 19 resilient properties for state owned protected areas.

The Queensland government is leading the world in implementing protected areas for climate change adaptation, according to distinguished Professor Bob Pressey of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies. The landscape resilience approach will be crucial in ensuring that this government's intention to reach the 17 per cent IUCN target is achieved in the most effective manner for the conservation of biodiversity in the long term. The Palaszczuk government has budgeted nearly \$8 million this financial year for protected area acquisitions and \$7.3 million to secure nature refuges on private lands through the nature assist program.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Logan.

**Mr POWER:** I have a follow-up question on that for those of us who come from coastal electorates or electorates that have rivers with tidal affects. How will the three-year climate change adaptation funding, outlined on page 36 of Budget Paper No. 4, assist coastal communities?

**Dr MILES:** In keeping with our election commitment, we are providing an additional \$4 million per annum for three years for the establishment of the Climate Change (Coastal Hazards) Adaptation Program. In addition, there is \$1 million per annum for three years to support the development and implementation of a Queensland Climate Adaptation Strategy, QCAS. The Climate Change (Coastal Hazards) Adaptation Program, CHAP, will assist local governments to develop coastal hazard adaptation strategies and coastal adaptation pilot projects. The QCAS will be developed in collaboration with key stakeholders, including local government. The benefits of this measure are, by resourcing and developing collaborative adaptation pathways, we will be able to position Queensland's regions and sectors to better address climate change impacts as they emerge. Early or appropriately staged adaptation action can deliver significant savings. For example, building cyclone-resistant houses in South-East Queensland could save \$3 for every dollar spent. The Insurance Australia Group expect Australia's natural disaster costs to rise from \$6.3 billion per annum to approximately \$23 billion per



annum by 2050, with population increases and increased severity and frequency of storms, floods, cyclones and bushfires. It is estimated that for every dollar spent in reducing risk, savings of between \$2 and \$10 could be made, avoiding impacts. The government is committed to supporting local councils as they navigate their way through the complexities of climate change. I am pleased to report that we are working in partnership with the LGAQ to roll out these programs.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Hervey Bay.

**Mr SORENSEN:** Minister, I refer to page 3 of the SDS, under 'Service performance'. With reference to the famous Hervey Bay sea scallops, can you explain to the committee why, after six long weeks, I have not had a response to my correspondence?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Hervey Bay for the question. I am indeed concerned about the famous Hervey Bay sea scallops. I am not sure why you have not received a response. You will know that it is unlike my office to have taken that long to respond, so we will look into where that correspondence is.

**Mr SORENSEN:** I wrote to you urgently on 10 July and followed it up on August 15. On 10 August—

**CHAIR:** Member for Hervey Bay, I understand your concern at late correspondence. That is a concern. However, it does not relate to our purposes here today.

**Mr SORENSEN:** It is a service delivery.

**Mr BENNETT:** Performance standards.

**Mr SORENSEN:** It is in here.

**Mr POWELL:** You cannot have a performance standard and then not want to talk about it.

**CHAIR:** The minister has said that he will follow it up.

**Mr BENNETT:** Will you follow up for the member?

**Dr MILES:** Just to be clear, did you correspond with the department or with my office?

**Mr SORENSEN:** I wrote to the Hon. Steve Miles urgently on 10 July and I followed it up on 10 August. This is about the disallowance of the permit to dump scallop shells in an area which is permitted. If we do not get an answer one way or the other, we could lose up to around 30 to 50 jobs. To me it is very important, because I do not want to lose those jobs. This processing will go overseas if we do not get some sort of answer back.

**Dr MILES:** I am advised that a reply is in the system. If you will allow me to chase it up. The service standards relate to responsiveness of the department rather than the minister, but it should not have taken that long for me to respond to correspondence. I will chase it up for you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr SORENSEN:** I have another question, on page 2 goal 3: this is a reference to the iconic Woody Island lighthouse, which I came to meet you about. Are you familiar with the correspondence that has gone back, especially with the use of a helicopter to transport the material to and from the island instead of using a barge?

**Dr MILES:** Member for Hervey Bay, I am very happy to talk about that lighthouse. As you know, I met with you about it. Given it is a National Parks matter, do you mind if we hold it until the subsequent session and deal with it there? Obviously, I am happy to deal with other national parks issues that I know you have.

**Mr SORENSEN:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Mount Isa.

**Mr KATTER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I refer to page 3 of the SDS, which states—

manages and monitors environmental risks proactively through modern and innovative assessment, compliance, investigation and enforcement programs.

I ask: has previous government action to disperse bat populations in urban areas resulted in a reduction of colonies impacting the health, safety and amenity of affected communities?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for the question. I am aware of Katter's Australian Party's long-held interest in flying fox management issues. The Queensland government has committed to review the existing flying fox management framework. It is important to note that the state government

has never dispersed bat colonies ourselves. Its historical role has been to authorise dispersal were appropriate via permit under the Nature Conservation Act. Councils have been, by far, the dominant users of such permits. In recent times, councils have had the right to undertake non-lethal dispersal and roost modification in urban areas subject to a code focussed on animal welfare. Councils continue to exercise this right and a number are also taking proactive planning for roosts within their jurisdictions to strike a balance that best meets local community needs and expectations.

I can appreciate that having a flying fox roost nearby can be a source of all sorts of unpleasantness, with noise, smell and concerns about health risks such as virus risks, which I know that people have. However, we should note and we should remind the community that that risk is quite low. However, flying foxes are also an essential part of the state's biodiversity. They keep native forests healthy. There are seeds and flowering plants that do not get dispersed or pollinated without the contribution of flying foxes and that strengthens the gene pool of those species, but we need to ensure we have a sustainable and humane management approach where flying foxes are causing significant concern.

This does not go specifically to the question, but I am also aware that there are two separate concerns: there is the management of flying fox roosts in urban areas, which I have attempted to address there, but I am aware that you are also concerned about the management of flying foxes in agricultural contexts. I would simply note that the previous government's reintroduction of lethal take of flying foxes would appear to have been not very successful. Of a 10,000 quota for lethal take of flying foxes, I think around 300 were actually taken. I think there are questions to be asked about whether that is effective, too.

**Mr KATTER:** I am sure we could make it effective, Minister. This question runs fairly parallel to the last question. What initiatives does the government have to permanently disperse bat colonies that reaggregate or repopulate after action has been taken by the local or state government to move these animals in order to maintain health and safety standards in North Queensland communities?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Mount Isa for the follow-up question on flying foxes. As I am sure the member would know and as anyone who has tried to deal with a contentious flying fox roost would know, dispersing a colony can be incredibly difficult, not to mention publicly divisive. There have been public concerns raised in relation to conservation and animal welfare considerations on the one hand and the effectiveness of the tools we have to manage flying foxes on the other. In urban environments, the management of flying fox colonies is conducted by local governments under a standing as-of-right authority, provided that the actions of the local government comply with the relevant codes of practice. In areas that do not fall within urban management flying fox areas, residents can apply for a roost management permit. The government has committed to review the existing flying fox management arrangements and I would be very happy to include yourself or your constituents in that review.

**Mr KATTER:** Thank you, Minister. I am sure that the bats will be safe, as they always are. The SDS makes numerous mention of environmental sustainability. On page 2, goal 4, the SDS refers to the mitigation of impacts on the environment. Does the minister recognise the benefits working towards a 10 per cent ethanol mandate would have on the environment and its positive effects on the environment? Has the government done any modelling to verify how the benefits will be superior to that of a two per cent mandate in regards to emission reductions and environmental aspirations?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Mount Isa for that question and for his advocacy for biofuels and the potential environmental benefits that they may provide. As I know you are aware, the government is committed to introducing a biofuel mandate that will see a proportion of our petrol and diesel supplied from renewable sources. This is an important regional development initiative, so it is good for the environment and good for demand for producers. We are now systematically working through the best way to implement that mandate. It is only one plank in our bigger strategy to grow the bio-manufacturing industry in Queensland and to add value to the abundant agricultural resources that we have here in Queensland and that I know you are a very passionate advocate for.

A 10 per cent ethanol mandate could deliver environmental benefits. Factors influencing the extent to which those environmental benefits accrue would include what the ethanol is made from, how it is made and where it is grown. All of those factors can affect what the ultimate environmental benefit is. We are looking at including sustainability criteria to ensure that the biofuels deliver that environmental benefit, which I think will be important in terms of sustaining community support for that initiative.

We are intending to undertake modelling of the life cycle greenhouse gas emissions of various different biofuels compared to convention fuels. BHP is leading this work and stakeholder consultation is progressing.

Increasing the mandate will be independently reviewed by the Queensland Productivity Commission. The only thing I would add is that in recognition of the environmental benefits but also the need to consider environmental policy in this, the Premier specifically added me to the biofuels committee that is looking at this.

**Mr BENNETT:** At page 3 of the SDS, I refer to the section on performance statement and service area where it refers to environment legislation policy. Could the minister explain to the committee the decisions and expected outcomes of the correspondence on 17 March 2015 when he wrote to the Clerk of the Parliament asking not to table the now infamous subordinate legislation?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for the question. At the time I welcomed his interest in that subordinate legislation. I understand that all have now been progressed.

**Mr BENNETT:** I am wondering why we saw the unprecedented occurrence of you writing to the Clerk asking that it not be tabled?

**Dr MILES:** On coming to government we were advised of a range of subordinate legislation that had not yet been tabled. We took the time to assess that subordinate legislation against our policies to determine whether it should be tabled or whether we should take other actions to deliver a result congruent with our policies.

**Mr BENNETT:** With regard to the unfortunate event today of the euthanasia of a cassowary up north, would you describe what has occurred at the cassowary rehabilitation centre at Garners Beach for the benefit of the committee?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Burnett for his interest in cassowary conservation and our efforts to improve our ability to respond to cassowary incidents in the north. It is an issue I have taken substantial interest in in recent weeks.

The Garners Beach cassowary rehabilitation centre was originally generously bequeathed to the state. It has since been made a national park. The facility has historically been maintained and managed by the government, but the rehabilitation services have been delivered by not-for-profit or non-government partners. The previous government signed the most recent agreement with a not-for-profit partner—Rainforest Rescue—in 2014. I am not sure which month.

In the last four or five weeks Rainforest Rescue advised the government that they were unable to continue to deliver those services. Essentially, as I understand it, their fundraising had fallen short of what they need to keep it operating. The department set about trying to find a new partner to continue to deliver those services. As the withdrawal of Rainforest Rescue approached and it became clear we were not going to get a new partner in place in time for that departure, I asked the director-general to provide interim funding of \$50,000 so that Rainforest Rescue could at least continue for the few months that it would take to find a new partner. We have since issued an expression of interest seeking new partners to deliver those services.

At the same time there have been concerns about the response to injured wildlife. I have spoken at length with vet Dr Lauridsen who delivers veterinary care in response to wildlife incidents up there. I am not yet briefed on an event today, but I am aware of an event on Tuesday and Wednesday which lead to the euthanasia of a bird. If another has happened today, that is very sad.

In response to the concerns raised by the vet about the response to that particular incident, I have asked the director-general to conduct an investigation into the events and—I am not sure this would have resulted in a different outcome ultimately—communication management processes and whether the response could have been handled better and not dragged out over that period of time. If you are interested, I am happy to have the director-general speak about where he is up to with that. He has only had 48 hours to work on it.

**Mr BENNETT:** I am happy with that response. We are all concerned about ongoing issues associated with that. I am happy with that response, if you are.

**Dr MILES:** I am happy to keep you up to date on that.

**Mr BENNETT:** Please, it is too important. I turn to the issue of coal seam gas. It is an emotive issue. It is very important to the state's economy as well. Concerns have been raised about compliance issues around CSG being relaxed. We alluded to the fact that staff may have gone over to the office of the Great Barrier Reef when we were looking at that part of the portfolio. CSG companies now appear to be able to engage in a practice called land spraying. This is a cheap means of disposing of regulated waste?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you for that question. I do know there is substantial public interest in the regulation of CSG, but as you say—

**Mr BENNETT:** Not enough public interest, did you say?

**Dr MILES:** There is substantial public interest in how we regulate CSG. In terms of that particular practice, I am aware that CSG processes derive waste products. How companies are to deal with those is regulated by their environmental authority. I might ask the director-general if he can go into more detail about the practice that you are referring to and what we know of it.

**Mr BENNETT:** Director-general, I will help you by framing where I am coming from. It is beneficial use approvals that are obviously regulated under the minister's department.

**Mr Black:** I thank the member for the question. If there were a specific example I might be able to help more precisely in my reply. If it has been issued under a beneficial use agreement—

**Mr BENNETT:** We do not want to name companies, of course. For the benefit of the committee, I point out that it seems that the spraying of this material is an activity that is increasingly more prevalent on companies' land. It could affect the future beneficial use of those properties and surrounding properties, I would have thought?

**Mr Black:** If it is helpful for the member, I can convey that the department, in issuing a beneficial use agreement, takes into account the end state in terms of the environmental outcome to ensure that the risk is acceptable and within the compliance standards required for the continuation of the depositing of that material onto land. For instance, we are very keen to ensure that we can deregulate as much as we effectively can, but at the same time ensure community safety and health not only for humans but also for agriculture.

We are looking at all ways we allow beneficial use, including the end of waste. That is probably the most recent policy move to be able to look at how, for instance, drill muds in the CSG supply chain can be not meeting the required environmental standard when they are extracted from the land but if they are then treated in the appropriate way and then composted we can approve that as beneficial use or an end of waste type of process. I am very happy to take on notice any specific examples that you may have concerns about. Our detailed effort is to ensure that we maintain those environmental standards.

**Mr BENNETT:** The conclusion of that is, could you tell us about the land spraying that has been checked by the department, I suspect, recently? Could you tell us where and when surveillance of land spraying activities has been undertaken for compliance with beneficial use agreements? Is that reasonable?

**Mr Black:** Can I clarify that. Can we provide a compliance record of any compliance activity that has been undertaken regarding that?

**Mr BENNETT:** The amount of surveillance the department has had of this land spraying activity? Is that appropriate?

**Mr Black:** I think I should be able to take that on notice.

**Mr BENNETT:** With regard to the waste management issue that is obviously very prevalent in Queensland, can you outline how the state government is working with councils to crackdown on litter and illegal dumping in Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you for the question, member for Burnett. This is an area we have been doing quite some work on in recent months. At the moment Queensland holds the ignominious title of the waste capital of Australia. We are exploring with industry what actions we can take to minimise waste and reduce waste to landfill.

On the upside, though, there are lots of opportunities for waste and recycling to create jobs and deliver real economic benefits and for us to invest in innovative technologies and practices. We are in the process of investigating several mechanisms to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. The first of these is an investigation into market opportunities for the re-use of used vehicle tyres in road construction projects. This is exciting. A joint trial is underway between EHP and the Department of Transport and Main Roads.

We are also facilitating the development of clean procurement policies and opportunities within government. The work is being undertaken in conjunction with the Department of Housing and Public Works. Landfill bans have been identified as a means to divert waste from landfill and increase re-use and recycling. A preliminary investigation has been completed by EHP which indicates that bans of certain waste types might be feasible.

The waste infrastructure mapping project will bring together information and data relating to waste generation and management infrastructure across Queensland which can be really important in terms of knowing what recycling plants are available in different locations. That mapping will enable waste infrastructure planning decisions to be better informed and locating waste facilities in areas where there is sufficient demand. That work will facilitate job development and market opportunities, particularly in regional areas. There are policy and legislative barriers to realising the full potential of some of those opportunities. We will be working through those in coming months.

**CHAIR:** With reference to the \$5 million in funding in 2015-16 for the NatureAssist program, which is outlined on page 37 of Budget Paper No. 4, can the minister outline how this will deliver conservation outcomes on privately managed land across Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, Madam Chair, for that question.

**Mr Powell** interjected.

**Dr MILES:** Your program was not going to be here this year. The NatureAssist program is a great opportunity for us to augment the national parks that we have and manage to deliver more of the state for conservation. In keeping with our election commitment, we have provided additional funding for the NatureAssist program to secure nature refuges for lands of significant conservation value. This program secures perpetual, legally binding covenants known as nature refuges over areas of significant, current and potential conservation value. The nature refuges are established through voluntary negotiation between landholders and government.

Continuing this program is vital to achieving the government's protected area target of 17 per cent. With this funding the government can meet its obligations under legally binding agreements to conserve some four million hectares of land. As funding to buy lands to increase the national park estate gets tighter, the NatureAssist program is the best way to move towards the government's target. Queensland currently has the lowest area percentage of protected areas of all Australian jurisdictions. That is 7.5 per cent compared to a national average of 16.5 per cent. NatureAssist covenants though contribute about two per cent of that 7.5 per cent in the last 10 years and are highly cost-effective compared to the ongoing costs of managing national parks.

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

**Mr POWER:** In the limited time we have left, my question is to the minister. With reference to the service standards on page 7 of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection Service Delivery Statement, can the minister outline the new protected area declarations that were made during the term of the previous government?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Logan. I acknowledge that the building of the protected area estate necessarily overlaps terms of governments. However, in coming to government I was surprised to learn that during the term of the previous LNP government, apart from some declarations in Cape York as part of ongoing tenure resolution, no significant new land was declared or gazetted as national park. This emphasises the lack of interest taken by the previous government to protect the environment and to acknowledge the important role that national parks play as a safe haven for flora and fauna.

What was more surprising was that I learned that they had a whole bunch of properties acquired under the National Reserve System program by Labor between 2010 and 2012 that, apart from the agreement of the Australian government, were sitting there ready to declare as protected area. It was a bit like a free kick that they refused to take. They had three years to get the Australian government to sign off but they did not get there. In coming to the portfolio, I instructed my department to recommence those discussions with the Australian government to get their support and declare these properties as national parks.

While the successful Labor government's Nature Refuges Program that I spoke of earlier was temporarily retained by the LNP, it was severely reduced, being funded on a limited time basis only. This program, as I said, is important because it complements the government's land acquisition efforts. It is clear that the previous government were too focused on new ways to exploit national parks through commercial development and grazing—

**Mr POWELL:** That is rubbish.

**Dr MILES:**—that they neglected to resolve and fund standard management agreements resulting in delays in national park declarations.

**Mr POWELL:** You are talking about the wrong portfolio, Minister. That is after dinner.

**Dr MILES:** You might recall acquisitions sit with EHP.

**Mr POWELL:** Yes, but you are talking about—

**CHAIR:** Member for Glass House, you have had ample opportunity to speak and ask questions. It is now government questions that we are wanting to have answered. I will ask you to cease interjecting.

**Dr MILES:** This government has acted swiftly on these issues and this budget outlines these national park management funding fixes.

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

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, can you outline how additional funding allocated to the underground coal gasification investigations outlined on page 37 of Budget Paper No. 4 will be spent?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Mackay. This goes to the issue that the member for Burnett was asking about earlier, but it is a good chance to go through the actual figures in terms of the funding allocation.

The government provided additional funding of \$1.966 million in 2014-15 and is providing a further \$2.145 million in this financial year in response to the very concerning soil contamination incident in the Hopeland area near Chinchilla and to support the ongoing investigation of this matter and the prosecution of Linc Energy. The actual cost of the response has been considerably higher than the original estimate due to the extent and complexity of environmental impacts uncovered. The response to this incident has required the allocation of significant resources due to the complex science involved, the costs of qualified expert consultants, the extent of the contamination and the impacts on landholders. This event was unexpected and unfunded. Due to ongoing investigation and the prosecution of Linc Energy, further budget supplementation will be required and a CBRC submission will be progressed.

In February 2015, the department detected the presence of hydrogen, carbon monoxide and hydrogen sulphide gases in the Hopeland area. Concentration of the gases was considered hazardous and the department issued a public warning in regard to excavation works over an area of approximately 340 square kilometres. The area impacted is predominantly agricultural land. Following this public notification, the department has been leading a whole-of-government incident response to determine the cause, extent and impact of the gases. The incident requires ongoing monitoring and possible remediation to ensure the environment and community are protected. In addition, the department is progressing with the prosecution of Linc Energy in regard to the charges laid for allegedly wilfully causing serious environmental harm. This requires the engagement of external legal support, external experts and additional support from the litigation team.

**CHAIR:** Can the minister provide an update on waste reform opportunities as outlined in the 2015-16 service area highlights on page 3 of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection Service Delivery Statement?

**Dr MILES:** I can, Madam Chair. I have already spoken to some of these in response to questions from the member for Burnett. But I am pleased to respond to your interest. I spoke earlier about the work with Main Roads on tyre recycling, the options with banning certain types of waste from landfill and other initiatives that we are exploring. We have set up an advisory committee to look at options for a container deposit scheme. Such a scheme has worked successfully in South Australia for a very long time. The New South Wales government is implementing such a scheme, so it struck me that it was timely and appropriate for us to also look at a scheme and see whether we can collaborate on it.

A similar piece of work involving some of the same stakeholders is exploring the options to reduce the prevalence of single-use plastic bags in our waterways—again, an important piece of work. One option there is banning single-use plastic bags or other initiatives to reduce single-use plastic bags. We are working with industry to ensure that we respond to unregulated waste operators. We are also working with industry to determine where storage of certain kinds of waste should be re-regulated for public safety or for reducing waste and improving recycling. They are all elements that we are looking at in a comprehensive waste strategy.

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

**Mr POWER:** I know the minister took time out at the recent community cabinet to speak to locals from my area about plastic bags and those recycling options, and I hope to have ongoing discussions. My question is to the minister. With reference to Heritage Protection Services service area objective on

page 8 of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection Service Delivery Statement, can the minister outline how the government has acted to address community concerns for Willard's farm in Birkdale?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for that question and for his interest in those waste initiatives. I am looking forward to hopefully coming down your way and running a forum or some kind of—

**Mr POWER:** We are about to organise a time, so we will be in contact.

**Dr MILES:** That would be great.

**Mr BENNETT:** Send a memo.

**Mr POWER:** Do you want to come?

**Dr MILES:** On 16 July 2015, I responded to community concerns by issuing a stop-work order for a property known as Willard's farm, the property the member is asking about. Willard's farm, also known as 'The Pines', is located on Old Cleveland Road East in Birkdale in the Redland City Council area, and contains a house, outbuildings and mature plantings from around 1876.

EHP accepted a nomination made by a local community group, the Birkdale Progress Association, to enter the farm as a state heritage place in the Queensland Heritage Register. There may be potential for the place to satisfy one or more criteria to be entered into the register. Willard's farm may be important—and this will be determined by the Heritage Council—in demonstrating the pattern of rural settlement in Queensland. The stop-work order period will allow EHP to undertake further research and inspections to assess if the place is of state level historic cultural heritage significance.

Once the assessment is finalised, EHP will make a recommendation to the Heritage Council on whether it meets the criteria for entry on the register. The Heritage Council as an independent statutory body will decide whether the farm is or is not entered on the register. In making its decision, the Heritage Council will consider the nomination, written and oral submissions made on the nomination and EHP's recommendation. The Heritage Council will also visit the site to gain firsthand appreciation of the property. The Queensland Heritage Council will make their decision at an extraordinary meeting on 8 September.

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

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, I am really interested to know how the government measured up against the SDS performance measures from 2014-15.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Mackay, for that question about the SDS performance measures. The department monitored and reported against 12 standards during the 2014 financial year. At the conclusion of the 2014-15 financial year the department had met or exceeded the target set for eight or around two-thirds of the standards.

In terms of the four standards where the targets were not met, one was a target of 70 per cent of monitored licensed operators returning to compliance with their environmental obligations. As at 26 June 2015, the estimated outcome was 65.7 per cent, rather than 70 per cent. We had a target of a 12.5 per cent increase in the total amount of land secured that will be rehabilitated as new koala habitat. During 2014-15 the program was discontinued. However, koala nature refuge programs continued until funding was exhausted in the second quarter. During that time, an increase in land amounting to 5.21 per cent occurred. That is against a target of 12.5 per cent. We had a target of 100 per cent of damage mitigation permits, DMPs, issued prior to the statutory deadline. The outcome was 99 per cent. We had a target of 10 per cent annual increase in high-quality conservation land gazetted as nature refuges. The 2014-15 outcome was 2.8 per cent, which was the result of delayed negotiation with landholders which precluded the finalisation of agreements.

As per the Audit Office's report *Monitoring and reporting performance*, which said that service standards should measure the effectiveness or efficiency of service delivery rather than the quality or quantity of program outputs, that is why 10 standards have been discontinued and been replaced with new standards that better measure the effectiveness or efficiency of the department's service delivery.

**CHAIR:** Minister, thank you.

**Dr MILES:** Madam Chair, given we are coming to the end of this session, do you mind if I recap on questions that have been taken on notice or that we needed to report back on? To the member for Hervey Bay, I am advised that my response to you is not yet with me but is not far away. As it relates

to the regulation of a specific commercial operator, rather than reporting back publicly or in this forum, do you mind if we progress that correspondence separately? In relation to the member for Burnett's question re the value of penalty unit infringements, we have not got that data yet. We are working on it. If I can get it to you before the end of the committee's deliberations today, I will.

**Mr BENNETT:** Any time you have for those under the standing orders, Minister, is fine.

**Dr MILES:** I am advised we are unlikely to get that to you today.

**Mr BENNETT:** There is an appropriate time for you to do that. That is fine. Do not stress.

**Dr MILES:** Similarly, I think we will need to seek a compliance record on where we have investigated CSG waste product dispersals. We undertake to take that on notice. We do not yet have the information on your request about uncontested grants. Again, we believe we will have it before the end of the committee's deliberations, if you don't mind me reporting back.

**Mr BENNETT:** There are three still outstanding; that is fine.

**CHAIR:** Minister, we might just ask one more question. With reference to page 38 of Budget Paper No. 4, can the minister outline how the additional \$1.4 million allocated to assessing environmental impact statements will be spent?

**Dr MILES:** The government is providing additional funding of \$1.4 million in 2015-16 to support the delivery of EIS assessments for large-scale resource development projects vital for the economic development of Queensland. EIS assessments ensure important values such as ecological integrity, biodiversity and air and water quality are assessed and properly protected so that a healthy and resilient environment is maintained.

In 2014 fees per EIS were raised by \$70,000 to cover the increased cost of assessing Commonwealth matters. But the projected revenue is down due to the downturn in the resources sector. The timing of EIS fee receipts has also not aligned with the timing of assessment workloads. EHP uses the controlled revenue from EIS fees to offset costs in assessing EISs. EHP was able to absorb shortfalls in the last financial year, but, as it appeared we would be unable to in 2015-16, additional funding was sought and provided of \$1.4 million. This funding supplements the cost of maintaining 15 assessment staff.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The committee will now adjourn for a 30-minute break. We will resume at 6 pm to examine the estimates for the national parks unit within the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing.

#### **Proceedings suspended from 5.31 pm to 6.01 pm**



**CHAIR:** Welcome back, everybody. The committee will now examine estimates for the national parks unit of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing as it relates to the minister's area of responsibility. Minister, would you care to make a brief opening statement?

**Dr MILES:** I would. Queensland's national parks are the foundation of our state's rich biodiversity and unique natural environments. We are fortunate to live in a state that is home to over 1,000 national parks, forests and other protected areas including five World Heritage areas—more than any other state. The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing's Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service manages over 12.5 million hectares of land, which is an area larger than 50 per cent of the world's countries. Recently it gave me great pleasure to announce that we have increased our protected area estate by adding 586 hectares of adjoining land to Lamington National Park, a very special place that forms part of Gondwana Rainforest World Heritage area.

Our 2015-16 budget allocations have provided further opportunities for meaningful work during the next year in my national parks portfolio. To ensure our natural places are managed to best preserve the unique natural and cultural values and enhance sustainable visitor access, we are also investing in greater joint management with traditional owners and Indigenous ranger employment opportunities. This includes North Stradbroke Island, where we invest \$12.4 million to support joint management with the traditional owners, the Quandamooka people, to employ rangers and a joint management coordinator.

I would like to introduce the members of my staff and departmental personnel who are present for questions relating to the national parks portfolio. They are the new Director-General of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing, Tamara O'Shea; the Deputy Director-General of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Ben Klaassen; and Assistant Director-General of Corporate Services, Peter Griffin. I look forward to the committee's questions on matters pertaining to national parks.



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

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Here we are on Friday night. Minister, with reference to page 17, part 3 of the SDS regarding major asset balances, can the minister advise of the number of tenures of national parks and state controlled land that are currently leased to NGOs or not-for-profits on the peppercorn or \$1 leases and whether any leases have been extended recently?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Burnett for the question. It is a specific question, and I am not sure we have that data in a collated form. If you give us a moment, I think we can come back to it.

**Mr BENNETT:** If I tell you where I am trying to get to, it might ease what we are about. We believe some leases have just been renewed. Are you aware of any breaches prior to any of the lease arrangements for state controlled or community assets being renewed, particularly around the Springbrook area of Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** It is easier to respond when I know where you are trying to get to.

**Mr BENNETT:** I appreciate that.

**Dr MILES:** I can confirm that in the term of my government and to our knowledge the not-for-profit that I think you are referring to, the ARCS, has not been and is not currently in breach of its lease over the Koonjearre property. I am advised that they have fulfilled all of their lease obligations.

**Mr BENNETT:** In relation to that particular part of the world and that particular organisation that was mentioned, you would be aware that some time ago under previous governments a lot of money was spent on a buyback in that particular part of the world, and every property in that particular court was bought with the exception of one. Without naming names, are you aware of the result of that buyback? Does the Labor government support particular individuals being granted special access to properties and having sole access to that particular part of the world? I do not want to name names, but you know where I am going.

**Dr MILES:** I think you can, though. I do not think it is a problem for us to name the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, which is whom I believe you are referring to.

**Mr BENNETT:** Sure.

**Dr MILES:** They will be aware of your interest in their affairs so I don't think that will surprise them at all.

**Mr BENNETT:** Queensland is interested in their affairs, Minister.

**Dr MILES:** The member is right; in 2005 the Queensland government commenced a property acquisition program in the Springbrook area known as the buyback strategy or more commonly referred to as the Springbrook rainforest restoration project. A total of 45 properties covering an area of 705 hectares was acquired at a cost of \$40.15 million to enhance the protection of the significant values of this World Heritage listed national park.

In 2008, to facilitate the restoration of some of these properties, the state entered into a restoration agreement—this is the agreement you are referring to—with the ARCS. While we are aware of some criticism of the arrangements, the fundamental value of the agreement with ARCS is that the people of Queensland are the beneficiaries of their volunteer program. Their volunteer program aims to restore, enhance and protect the Springbrook plateau's iconic World Heritage values at zero cost to the state. To date, 92 per cent of the purchased land has been transitioned into protected area estate. Twenty-eight of the 45 parcels have been gazetted as national park; 11 parcels have been gazetted as national park special management areas while they are rehabilitated; and six properties remain freehold. Of these properties, 17 are subject to the restoration agreement that you have referred to including two freehold properties where ARCS hold commercial accommodation leases, the proceeds of which are returned directly to the restoration program. The two freehold leases where ARCS hold commercial accommodation leases are the Lyrebird Retreat and the Koonjearre Accommodation and Activity Centre, which I think I addressed earlier. In response to speculation that they may have been in breach, I can confirm that in the term of this government and in the period of my responsibility to the best of our knowledge they have not been in breach.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you for that. Could you indulge me in checking with your director-general on that breach issue for clarity and we can then move on? Is your director-general aware of any breaches in particular around Koonjearre, just as a point of clarification?

**Ms O'Shea:** No, I am not aware of any breaches either.

**Dr MILES:** If you are aware of anything, you should feel free to provide us with that information and we are happy to investigate, but that is the information we have.

**Mr BENNETT:** Page 6 refers to the introduction of new performance measures for overall satisfaction of recreational areas. This is about the satisfaction of the department's sport and active recreation programs. Can the minister provide an update on the off-road motorcycle facility established under the last government? Were any changes made to the operation of the area for this recreational purpose? It is the Mooloolah motorcycle area I am referencing.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you for the question, member for Burnett. It may well be that I need to ask a departmental officer to address it.

**Ms O'Shea:** With respect to the Mooloolah forest proposition, in recognition of the significant natural values of the Mooloolah logging area in the Beerwah State Forest and the potential impact of a large-scale motorbike facility, the Queensland government has confirmed the area will be protected from future commercial or recreational motorised vehicle use. The previous government had earmarked a site in the Mooloolah logging area for a commercially run trail bike facility. The natural values of the area include two endangered and four of concern regional ecosystems as well as a large and diverse array of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibian species. The government has terminated the previous government's plans and confirmed the development of large-scale motorbike facilities in the Mooloolah logging area will not progress under the government. This is a further demonstration of the government's commitment to strong environmental management.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, I refer to page 2 of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection's SDS, in particular dot point 2 under 'strategic environmental challenges'. Given the dire circumstances needed to manage both land and animals in severely drought affected areas, will the minister consider on a case-by-case basis a need to utilise grazing capacities in national parks? I say that bearing in mind that in some instances in my electorate there are parks with introduced buffel grass that can create hot burns that incinerate native timbers. Anecdotally, in discussions here with people from National Parks they see some benefit to getting rid of some of that buffel grass on that basis. Is there any scope for some consideration there?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Mount Isa for the question. As you know, our general principle is that grazing is not consistent with national parks. There are, however, many other tenures of state land where grazing continues and we support its ongoing use. You are right, though, there are occasions where grazing can be a useful management tool for us, especially in managing buffel grass, which, as you say, can be a catastrophic fire threat.

In those circumstances where the department advises me that grazing is useful for managing the park, I am in principle in support of it and will do what I need to do to facilitate that. There are a couple of circumstances that we are addressing right now that will likely see that occurring. What I have said, though, given that we are probably about to embark on some use of grazing for buffel grass control, is that we should use it as an opportunity to also research how effective it is and what impact we have. It is a chance to put to bed some of the conjecture. On those two that I haven't named because they are under consideration now, I can confirm that we are in the process of consulting with both AgForce and conservation groups with an interest in national parks to get their views, but the firm advice of the department is that in these instances grazing will help us to defend against a buffel grass fire.

**Mr KATTER:** Very good, thank you, Minister. I have another question referring to page 16 of the National Parks, Sport and Racing SDS. Can the minister please confirm that the management of a single new national park is listed at almost \$5 million? Could the minister indicate his intention or otherwise to take on further national park acquisitions?

**Dr MILES:** I might let the director-general speak to the specifics of that reference, and then I am happy to talk to the ongoing approach to acquisitions and management. Is that okay?

**Mr KATTER:** Yes.

**Ms O'Shea:** Sorry, Mr Katter. Would you mind telling me exactly where on page 16 you were referring to the \$5 million that you referenced? I just want to try to find it.

**Mr KATTER:** To be honest, I have not got the document in front of me. I left it up in the office.

**Dr MILES:** Member for Mount Isa, EHP does the acquiring of parks, and I think that is the \$5 million reference. We have the SDS here for national parks; that is the reason we do not have the same reference.

**Mr KATTER:** Okay.

**Dr MILES:** I think your general question is what is our approach to ongoing acquisitions and management funding, isn't it? That is what you are really interested in.

**Mr KATTER:** Yes.

**Dr MILES:** The real challenge with building the national park estate is securing recurrent government funding for management. Often times, we could easily acquire and expand our national parks in terms of the upfront expenditure, but it is the management and managing it well that ends up being expensive in the long term. That is why one of the things we have said is that we will not transfer acquisitions into the parks estate until we have secured management funding, until we have the funding to put rangers in there. That is why you will have noted in the previous session I really focused on that nature refuges process, where private landholders add their land and manage their land for us because it will be very difficult to achieve that target and also put sufficient resources in, and the last thing we want is poorly managed parks.

**Mr KATTER:** Just following on from that, does anywhere in that funding model address a problem that is often brought to me where the councils lose out? It can be a big part of the rate base for the smaller councils if there are any more acquisitions that come out of that. For instance, with the Etheridge shire, if a national park turns from private holdings to national park, they lose \$20,000 to \$30,000 out of their rate base. I just wonder if there is any talk in the funding model to offset there because there is a burden that goes on the councils with that.

**Dr MILES:** That is the first time that issue has been raised with me.

**Mr KATTER:** I am happy for that to go on notice.

**Dr MILES:** I am certainly interested to hear about that. The director-general has just told me that the ongoing acquisition program will have an explicit consultation with local government component to it. I might ask her to address the questions of possible financial impacts.

**Ms O'Shea:** At this point, Mr Katter, there is no specific reference to compensation for local government in respect of loss of revenue arising from loss of rates. Certainly, the acquisition process is a joint one that we have with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. We will be working closely with all key stakeholders in relation to future acquisitions. One of the key advantages of a national park is the benefits that ecotourism could potentially bring from the acquisition of that park. So that is another option—that we would work closely with councils to see what opportunities may also arise beyond just the conservation value that the park would bring to the protected area estate.

**Mr KATTER:** Thank you. I look forward to seeing the Main Roads minister better making those opportunities available.

**Mr BENNETT:** Minister, page 2 of the department overlay addresses the detrimental effects of marine debris on Queensland beaches. What can the department do or what should it be doing to accelerate and manage the increasing marine debris that is washing up on our beaches? The reason this is raised today is that we received a letter about the work you are trying to do with volunteer groups and accessing more community involvement in that important work. Would you be prepared to make a comment about where you see things like marine debris on Queensland beaches going in the future?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Burnett for his question. I know we have a shared interest in waste, and particularly waste that is ending up in waterways and ultimately in Moreton Bay, the Great Barrier Reef or other important marine environments off our coast. When it comes to beaches in particular, there are a wide variety of different organisations that will have different responsibility, depending on the location. There is a role for councils, local government and of course national parks to play in different places. I might ask the director-general to speak specifically about what efforts we have to hand in that regard.

**Ms O'Shea:** I will defer to the deputy director-general of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to give you some specific examples of how the service is dealing with this very important issue.

**Mr Klaassen:** The most recent partnership we have is with an organisation called Eco Barge that works up in the Whitsunday area. We have sponsored them. They do a clean-up program that collects rubbish off the beaches that washes up in the reef catchment there. We also have worked with some local volunteer groups which we from time to time support in Cooloola, where they will go out and collect rubbish and we provide transport to move the rubbish off the beach. We support local level partnerships recognising, as the minister said, it is a multiagency approach with councils, ourselves and other partners to get these activities done.

**Mr BENNETT:** I am happy with that. Thank you.

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

**Mr POWER:** My question is to the minister with reference to Budget Paper 4. Can the minister please go through the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service budget measures and especially to outline what measures were necessary to avoid job losses within the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service?

**Dr MILES:** Let me thank the member for Logan for his question and his ongoing interest in the ability of QPWS to deliver the services people expect from it. The government has provided continuing funding for a number of programs where the original funding by the previous government was due to cease or was declining. Without further funding to these programs, the department would not have been able to continue employing those staff.

The Indigenous national parks ranger initiative provides funding for 15 rangers to work in North Queensland managing national parks in the Cape York Peninsula. This program delivered Indigenous employment opportunities and enhanced conservation and front-line services for growing visitor numbers on the Cape York Peninsula. I was deeply concerned that these jobs were not provided for beyond the 2014-15 financial year. We have secured ongoing funding of almost \$2 million per year, which means we can permanently recruit to these 15 Indigenous national park ranger jobs.

The government has also provided \$1.7 million in 2015-16 and ongoing funding of up to approximately \$2 million per year towards Cape York Peninsula national park management actions and another seven rangers in North Queensland. Together, these initiatives will increase the permanent ranger workforce in the Far North by a total of 22 positions. Similarly, the government has joint management contractual obligations to fund 12 permanent Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service ranger positions on North Stradbroke Island, but there was no funding commitments beyond June 2015. At least six of these positions are intended to provide for the employment of Quandamooka Indigenous rangers. Through this government's commitment to support front-line services and joint management arrangements, I have been able to provide a secure future for these 12 ranger positions plus a Quandamooka joint management coordinator and provide ongoing joint management of these island protected areas through a \$12.4 million commitment over four years. The fact that this government has managed to secure permanent employment for these rangers in the first six months demonstrates my commitment to joint management, to job security and to a positive future for skilled Queensland workers.

In addition to the published budget highlights, another way I have protected Public Service jobs was in the procurement of a new national park camp booking service. Earlier this year, I asked the department to review the scope of the procurement process commenced under the previous government's contestability agenda as it involved outsourcing services for camp bookings to a private company. I support a national parks camp booking solution that is contemporary, user-friendly and cost effective for Queensland, but I will not support procurement options that potentially result in job losses for Queenslanders. A new national park booking service supported by the Queensland government's integrated contact centre will be delivered this financial year.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Mackay.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, I noticed in the 2015-16 service area highlights on page 3 of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing Service Delivery Statement that it outlines that the department is delivering \$12 million in the field of management programs on the Great Barrier Reef. Minister, can you please outline how this program is delivering positive outcomes for the reef?

**Dr MILES:** Sure. Member for Mackay, I know as you are someone who lives on the reef coast that you have a real interest in this Field Management Program. Earlier today, we spent some time discussing efforts underway by the Queensland government to protect the reef through the Office of the Great Barrier Reef, but it is important to recognise that our reef protection efforts extend across many departments and jurisdictions. The Queensland government works closely with the Australian government to secure the health of the reef through the Great Barrier Reef joint Field Management Program. That program is funded to just over \$17 million and is a fifty-fifty Queensland-Commonwealth contribution.

The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing then receives an appropriation of \$12.57 million from that funding pool to support its lead role in the Great Barrier Reef program delivery. It is a collaborative Field Management Program with associated field rangers employed by Queensland, ensuring the most efficient and effective delivery of field services right across the reef. The Field

Management Program performs practical actions that assist in protecting important marine and island ecosystems and maintaining the reef's popular natural tourism destinations, like our island parks. It is this work that ensures the economic and recreational opportunities available in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area are maintained and enhanced, while safeguarding the iconic natural and cultural assets.

Our primary focus is ensuring that key tourism and recreational sites are well maintained and available for use by tourists and local residents. This includes looking after the 163 kilometres of walking tracks, 111 camp grounds and day use areas, 21 boardwalks, 128 public use moorings and 127 reef protection markers. In addition, it is on the Great Barrier Reef islands where some of Queensland's most important conservation work continues, with management particularly focusing on their significance as important nesting and breeding grounds for many threatened species. As part of its surveillance and forward crown of thorns starfish scouting contribution, the Great Barrier Reef marine park rangers have undertaken over 3,060 reef health surveys, conducted more than 13,000 manta tows and assessed the health of over 2,310 kilometres of reef. This equates to being towed the entire length of the Great Barrier Reef under water and is the most comprehensive survey work ever undertaken of the reef.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Page 14 of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing Service Delivery Statement outlines the department's capital program. Can the minister please outline the capital purchases schedule for 2015-16?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, Madam Chair. You will see in the Service Delivery Statement total capital purchases for the entire department of \$38.6 million. Of this, \$28.1 million is allocated to national parks. The \$6.3 million increase from 2014-15 estimated actuals to the 2015-16 budget comprised \$3.5 million in CYPAL projects—Cape York projects—and \$2.7 million in projects associated with new land acquisitions. The 2015-16 capital program directly supports the department's objectives through significant capital works in national parks.

The national parks capital works provides infrastructure critical for management, enjoyment and protection of our special places. In 2015-16 capital purchases include \$4.8 million for development of management bases, ranger accommodation and infrastructure on Cape York Peninsula; \$3.3 million towards start-up activities, including construction of internal roads, fences, signage and fire breaks; establishment of management bases and ranger accommodation; and purchase of plant and equipment for newly acquired properties. There is \$2.3 million for visitor access and park management facilities and equipment on North Stradbroke Island jointly managed with QYAC, the Quandamooka Aboriginal Corporation; \$1.6 million towards refurbishment of the Carnarvon Visitor Information Centre and office; \$1.5 million for improvements and upgrades to high priority, urban interface fire lines; \$1.1 million towards replacement of visitor amenities at Eurong and Dundaburra on Fraser Island—I know that will be of interest to the member for Hervey Bay—\$1.1 million towards development of management infrastructure at the Curtis Island environmental management precinct; \$700,000 for vehicle replacement and plant and equipment jointly funded through the Great Barrier Reef management program; and another almost \$12 million in various capital works plant and equipment purchases for our parks and forests.

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

**Mr POWER:** My question is to the minister. This one is of particular interest because I have a family connection to North Stradbroke. With reference to page 51 of Budget Paper No. 4, can the minister outline how securing ongoing funding for the joint management of the North Stradbroke Island national parks will deliver improved conservation outcomes?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Logan. I did not know you had a family connection to Straddie. You know someone for nearly 20 years and I did not know you were connected to it.

**Mr POWER:** It is not a glamorous one. It is to do with Dunwich asylum and the death was in 1911. So it is a long time ago.

**Dr MILES:** There you go. The Palaszczuk government has delivered on the commitment we made to the Quandamooka people to ensure that ongoing funding is provided for the effective joint management of protected areas on North Stradbroke and Peel islands. Prior to being elected to government, Labor made a number of commitments including rolling back changes made by the previous government to the North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability Act, the provision of \$20 million to assist with economic transition, securing ongoing funding to ensure joint management

arrangements for the Naree Budjong Djara National Park delivered in accordance with the Indigenous management agreement in contribution of the Indigenous joint management coordinator position. I have successfully secured \$12 million over the next four years and ongoing funding thereafter to provide for the continued joint management of the national park and other protected areas in a joint management partnership with QYAC. I have also secured funding for the continuation of the QYAC appointed joint management coordinator and my department has renewed the agreement for this important position for a further five years. Securing continued funding for joint management of these naturally and culturally significant protected areas will strengthen this relationship and ensure that the iconic, natural and cultural values of North Stradbroke Island and surrounding areas are conserved for the benefit of the Queensland people. I visited Straddie over two days early in my term and saw so many of the beautiful locations that I know people want to see preserved.

Fire management has been a key focus, with agreement now reached for the joint development of a fire management strategy and the scoping of a current traditional ecological knowledge fire project. In July 2015 the first of a jointly planned burn of the estate was successfully completed. Joint management continues positively at an operational on-ground level. To further assist in the joint management arrangements, there has been agreement to increase the number of Indigenous ranger positions once management plans and work programs are in place. Securing this funding means that the department has capacity to engage the traditional owners on fee-for-service contracts, further increasing local employment opportunities and building further park management skills within the community. Two currently approved fee-for-service projects include the development of a restricted access area operational trail and the removal of asbestos from Herring Lagoon.

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

**Mr BENNETT:** With reference to point 15 on page 25—it is referencing non-government question No. 8—I am after some more information, if we could please, on examples that are quoted from the 2015-16 SDS on the losses on sales and re-evaluation of assets. If you would be kind enough—or the department officials—to help us with understanding around the bad debts and the asset issue, please, Minister. The second paragraph of the answer is what I am referencing.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Burnett, for that question. I see the reference you are making to the paragraph of the question on notice. It goes to a level of specificity that I will need the department to respond on. If you are happy for us to seek some advice and come back to you before the end of the session—

**Mr BENNETT:** Most definitely. Thank you. That is no problem. I will continue on while the members are doing that. With reference to non-government question No. 7, the variations from the 2014-15 budget to the 2015-16 budget, point 28, can the minister please provide further details of the \$11.1 million of land transfers to the department of national parks that was planned and did not proceed?

**Dr MILES:** Member for Burnett, thank you for your question. In terms of the specific reasoning for each of those acquisitions I will again look to whether the department is able to outline those.

**Ms O'Shea:** If it is all right with you, Sir, I might defer to the deputy director-general.

**Mr Klaassen:** With regard to your first question about non-government question on notice No. 8, that is actually the EHP SDS and not National Parks related. So we will not have the information on that.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you.

**Mr Klaassen:** With regard to non-government question No. 7 and the \$11.1 million, the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection undertakes the acquisition program and went through a process of acquiring a range of properties that had been identified as having values that are appropriate to transfer to other national park or protected area over time. The issue was that there was no ongoing management funding for those properties at that time. The department said we do not want to take the properties just yet. As a result of a bid by this current minister, we have received funding in this current budget which provides some level of funding for those properties. We are now working through a process to identify which of those can progress to protected area at the moment.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you very much. Minister, in relation to the Cape York park management, page 15 of the SDS refers to an increase in the 2015-16 budget to increase staff for the national park estate. Could you describe the acquisition and transfer of the national park estate into Cape York and what additional resources have been directed in the management of that particular area? I think you alluded to some Indigenous rangers. Could you expand on that for me, please?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you member for Burnett. In this budget is a range of initiatives to provide security of funding for our work on Cape York. In terms of a breakdown, it is \$7.4 million over four years to jointly manage parks and create seven new permanent ranger positions. There are 21 protected areas on the cape, equating to about 1.9 million hectares which we hope to see increase to 2.6 million hectares in coming years. For 2015-16 we have up to \$1.7 million for joint management and up to \$2 million per year for jobs and operating costs; up to \$4.8 million per year for Indigenous management agreements. That is \$3.3 million for Aboriginal land trusts or corporations and up to \$1.5 million in labour and operating costs. On top of that we have committed \$4.8 million for capital works in the coming year.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you, Minister. Chair, I will defer to the member for Mount Isa for a question.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, I refer to page 3 of the SDS and the National Parks, Sport and Racing ranger management up in the northern areas of the gulf. I know from recent discussions that there is a shortfall of about \$100,000 to cover CPI for training and wages costs. Is the minister confident that there are adequate resources there to ensure that service standard is met?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Mount Isa, for your question, which is a matter that you and I have discussed. There is a difference between the Indigenous rangers that I have just been referring to and the land and sea rangers, which are grants we provide to Aboriginal corporations to do on-park work. That land and sea ranger program is administered by EHP and I do not have those figures here now.

**Mr KATTER:** I was hoping you would not pick that up, Minister.

**Dr MILES:** To address your question anyway, of course we would love to have more resources to fund more of these programs because the land and sea ranger program is fantastic. The particular implementation of that program that you are referring to is raved about and I know that. We have been in touch with them since you and I met about it, I believe—not these guys, but EHP folk—to look at what options there are in our grants programs and what options might be coming forward. I asked for that to happen. I cannot categorically say it has. I would like to keep that dialogue going with them because I would love to support their work.

**Mr KATTER:** I appreciate you taking my question. Thank you.

**Mr BENNETT:** One more?

**CHAIR:** Certainly.

**Mr BENNETT:** Minister, page 3 refers to the management of forests for conservation and people. Can the minister describe the government's strategy for the grazing leases and special leases on forest areas and what security of tenure can the lessee expect—and I reference a family that I think you have met, the Lohses, and others. That is page 24, point 15 of the SDS.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Burnett, for that question. You are right, I have met with the Lohses. Their situation is, I believe, a matter of ongoing discussions. So I will not refer to them specifically.

**Mr BENNETT:** I appreciate that.

**Dr MILES:** However, it is useful to get the chance to talk about this issue more generally because it is a vexed issue. Most of the grazing leases over forests are over state forests, and nobody is proposing any change to those arrangements. There are, however, a small number of grazing leases on national parks. I am advised it is about 70 leases. So that compares to 750 on state forests. So the vast bulk of these arrangements are on state forests. The last thing I want to do is cause any of those folk who are on state forests to panic. There is no policy intention there.

With regard to national parks, these are historical arrangements that tend to predate the gazetting of state forests into national parks. The intention of leaving those leases in place has been to allow people to have time to adjust their businesses to not having access to those lands over time. What I have said is that as a general principle we do not think that grazing is consistent with national parks being primarily for the conservation of nature, but we will assess leases as they come up and we will have particular regard to whether the property is within a drought declared area. We will have particular regard for those potential hardship circumstances. As I outlined earlier in my response to the question from the member for Mount Isa, where the advice is that grazing can assist us in managing the park, particularly in dealing with that diabolical problem of buffel grass, then we will allow grazing in those circumstances.

When I said earlier there were 70 leases, I should have said there are 70 rolling term leases. There are in fact 84 grazing leases on 31 national parks. I am sorry about that; there are 11 more than I outlined. But still the vast bulk of grazing leases on forests that we manage are state forests, and there is no discussion about changing those.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you for acknowledging how vexed the issue is, because it certainly is for us in rural Queensland. With regard to North Stradbroke Island, how much of North Stradbroke Island is returning to national park following the closure of the Yarraman Mine on the north of the island? There are a few questions arising out of that. What is the transition plan? I think you talked about a \$20 million transition plan. Will you honour the \$20 million pre-election commitment made in writing by Tim Mulherin to the Quandamooka people?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you for your question and your interest in the ongoing economic transition on North Stradbroke Island. The responsibility for parks on Straddie relates to national parks and the management of national parks, and I note that one element of your question went to that.

In response, we have not yet determined what percentage increase in national parks we will see. That will be a matter of ongoing discussion within the government and ongoing discussion with the Quandamooka people. I understand under previous Labor governments that issue was settled, but that is still a matter of discussion for us at this time.

The economic transition strategy is handled by the Department of State Development. I am loath to talk about it in too much detail except to say that there is ongoing consultation with all of the stakeholders you would expect: Redlands City Council, Sibelco, Straddie Chamber of Commerce and others. I am aware that that work is progressing and ongoing. As minister I have responsibility for the act, but that process rests with EHP and not with parks. Given that I do not have EHP people here anymore, I would be loath to talk too much more about it.

**Mr BENNETT:** With regard to transition, does the department have management plans in place for all the national parks? If we do not, when do you think that will happen?

**Dr MILES:** Again let me thank the member for Burnett for his question, which I propose to ask the department to answer given that is operational in nature.

**Ms O'Shea:** My understanding is that we do have management plans for the bulk of our national parks with the exception of a few of the joint management parks.

**Mr BENNETT:** Could you be more specific? What do you mean by 'joint'?

**Ms O'Shea:** Indigenous joint management.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, I would just like to make reference to the service area description in the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing Service Delivery Statement. Can the minister outline the impacts on the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service from the previous government's job cuts?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Mackay. With this budget the government has made important steps to improve the service delivery of national parks, which was substantially reduced under the term of the previous government. From 2012-13 to 2014-15 the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service lost 91 full-time equivalent staff through redundancy processes. It is not easy to compare strict counts due to some transfer of functions between QPWS and other departments, but it is clear that these 91 staff represented a reduction in overall QPWS staffing of 8.2 per cent. This does not include the discontinuation of temporary employees, many of whom had been employed for years. Staff losses included retrenchments in administrative and management staff and technical support staff, who managed fire and pest systems, asset and infrastructure management and planning and policy. This loss was borne by the department while it was required to refocus efforts on the government's policy agenda of winding back environmental protections.

QPWS has a long history of being innovative and doing more with less and has still ensured the delivery of a management instrument for every national park and regional park but, due to these staff reductions, has had to postpone the development or review of important management plans for key national parks including: Daintree, Noosa, Hinchinbrook, Great Sandy, Springbrook, Carnarvon, Rinyirru (Lakefield) and Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) national parks. Visitor management and interpretation services were reduced at the same time as the department was required to accommodate an escalated ecotourism commercial agenda. In response to staff losses the department engaged expert contractors to support some policy planning and consultation work which has delivered some good products, but ultimately means the department has not been able to keep these skills and national park management knowledge in-house. The skills go once the contract ends.



This government understands that rangers on the ground are critical to managing the natural and cultural values of our protected areas and to improving visitor facilities and experiences, but I am advised that the number of rangers who were active and paid was reduced from 797 in March 2012 to 734 by the last 2014 estimates. This is a loss of 63 rangers. This clearly demonstrates reduced front-line service delivery, as the loss of any ranger is going to create problems somewhere in the state in terms of basic estate management such as fire, pest, campground management and maintaining infrastructure for the community such as roads and fences. On top of this, our rangers and customers have had to manage the impacts of over 50 voluntary redundancies and retrenchments in regional operations units, primarily of administrative support staff.

All of this has meant that our skilled front-line rangers are further at risk of drowning in administrative work and struggling to get out into the field and manage the parks themselves. This has also led to most customer service counters being forced to reduce operating hours and closing the national park help desks at Gladstone, Longreach, Manly, Roma and the Brisbane CBD. I am continuing to look closely at adequate resourcing for our national parks, particularly as we seek to increase the protected area of the state. Our natural assets face growing challenges from climate change and growing visitation.

Just before I take another question, the Director-General would like to add something on park management plans.

**Ms O'Shea:** I would just like to clarify my statement with regard to management plans. Actually they are management instruments, which is a combination of management plans and management statements. So between the two of them, most national parks have a combination of those two things.

**CHAIR:** Minister, according to page 52 of Budget Paper No. 4, the government is providing additional funding of \$7.3 million over four years to provide for the continued employment of Indigenous rangers. Can the minister outline how many rangers this applies to and where they are likely to be based? I think this has been touched on already.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, Madam Chair. You are correct in saying that we have committed funding of \$7.3 million to continue 15 Indigenous ranger positions. There was no funding for these positions beyond June 2015, but by securing funding we have been able to recruit permanently for these roles. But they are on Cape York; I am sorry, member for Burnett, they are not coming your way.

**Mr BENNETT:** From one end to the other. There is a middle in this state, Minister.

**Dr MILES:** These 15 Indigenous ranger positions are vital to the continued management of the peninsula and our protected areas there and have allowed traditional owners to manage their traditional lands. In conjunction with the government's commitment to ongoing management funds, which include seven new ranger positions, there is ongoing funding for a total of 22 permanent rangers who are committed to improving the management of national parks in the region.

**Mr POWER:** I hope the minister is not forgetting that the Yugambah people have traditional lands to manage as well. My question is about fantastic Logan City. In the 2015-16 service area highlights on page 3 of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing Service Delivery Statement it outlines that the government is protecting Daisy Hill forest. I have to ask this question or the member for Springwood would be very upset: can the minister outline how this has been achieved?

**Dr MILES:** Indeed, member for Logan. When I heard 'Daisy Hill' I thought 'member for Springwood'. He is very passionate about this park, and it is wonderful to have parks and facilities like this in our urban areas. My own area has a similar park and a similar facility at Walkabout Creek, which is near my electorate, and I know how valuable it is for people to be able to access these areas from the city.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service manage and maintain the Daisy Hill Regional Park and will continue to ensure that the park and facilities are appropriate to meet the needs of its 400,000 visitors every year.

**Mr POWER:** Especially international visitors.

**Dr MILES:** And especially as it is so convenient between Brisbane Airport and the Gold Coast. When those international visitors are here for the Commonwealth Games, they can stop and see a koala.

**Mr POWER:** They will.

**Dr MILES:** I know how passionate our south side members are about the regional park and the dedicated rangers down there. I know they had a celebration for World Ranger Day just recently. We will have public consultation to inform future resource allocations. I again recognise the efforts of our local members down there who are advocating for the Daisy Hill Regional Park. With them there, the community can be assured that this iconic area will continue to be an asset for future generations.

**Mr POWER:** That is good to hear.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, can you outline why the government needs to secure the \$2.4 million in additional funds outlined on page 51 of Budget Paper No. 4 to manage land that had been acquired for its high conservation value?

**Dr MILES:** Member for Mackay, thank you for that question. The Queensland government has committed \$2.4 million for the establishment and management of new protected areas. The government is committed to securing and conserving representative and resilient samples of all biogeographical regions of the state in the national park estate and moving towards the target set through the Convention on Biological Diversity. A substantial amount of land with high environmental and conservation values has already been acquired for inclusion in the estate; however, as I said earlier, acquisition is just the first part and in some ways the easy part of the job. You need ongoing management funds to appropriately manage these areas and the important conservation values they were protected for.

Unfortunately, under the previous government the management dollars fell short of what was required. The funding supplied in this budget is supporting the dedication of new properties as protected areas. It provides for operational management costs and for high priority capital expenditure. The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing is progressing start-up activities to help establish these new parks such as construction of firebreaks, roads, fencing and signs as well as visitor facilities and ranger bases. Ongoing responsibilities also include fire and pest management and maintenance of tracks and other visitor and management related infrastructure. They are all things we can deliver now that we have this management funding.

**CHAIR:** The service standards on page 4 of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing Service Delivery Statements outline two effectiveness measures for prescribed burning to protect life and property. Can the minister outline how QPWS implements its good neighbour policy to work cooperatively with adjoining landholders?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, Madam Chair; it is an important question. Establishing and maintaining open, positive and respectful relationships with neighbours and local communities is a very high priority for the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. The QPWS master plan for Queensland's parks and forests recognises and emphasises the need to build better partnerships and relationships with the wider community, including park neighbours. Land management practices are more effective if they are developed in consultation with neighbours and local communities and implemented cooperatively across the landscape. QPWS has a longstanding good neighbour policy that promotes cooperation and exchange of information between landholders and QPWS; establishes guidelines for positive relationships between QPWS, neighbours and local communities based on mutual respect, understanding and recognition of the rights and responsibilities of all landholders; and outlines QPWS's approach on a range of land management issues needing cooperative management, including fire, pests and boundary fencing arrangements. Issues are generally addressed at a local level by neighbours and communities working together and through open communication with local QPWS staff about management issues.

The department achieved its two Service Delivery Statements measures relating to fire in 2014-15. QPWS conducted 410 planned burns covering almost 619,000 hectares to exceed its annual prescribed burning target to protect life, property and biodiversity which is five per cent of the area of its estate or about 618,000 hectares. QPWS conducted 211 planned burns in protection and wildfire mitigation zones, significantly exceeding its target of 140 planned burns by 150 per cent. This increased performance was due to a particular focus on planned burns on areas of the Sunshine Coast identified as high priority protection of life and property. In 2015-16 QPWS is spending nearly \$17.5 million on land management operations that will both directly and indirectly benefit neighbours and communities. The funding for fire and pest management and boundary fencing includes \$3.12 million for general planned burning operations, \$2.07 million on the enhanced fire management program, \$300,000 for the construction and upgrading of strategic fire lines, \$300,000 for priority fire line maintenance, \$300,000 to reduce fire risks in urban interface areas, \$3.22 million for the nest to ocean program targeting feral

pigs, \$1.02 million on 28 strategic pest management projects, \$1.55 million on routine park pest management activities, \$620,000 for pest management under the Cape York Peninsula Enhanced Land Management Program, and \$320,000 on boundary fence construction and maintenance.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Burnett.

**Mr BENNETT:** Minister, is there a position of the government now to progress the ecotourism provision made to suitable tourism ventures to operate in protected areas made possible under a previous regime? I have put a welcome mat out for you to come and visit some of those in the north of the Burnett electorate. I seek your comment on the government's position now into suitable ventures given that we are significantly boosting our protected estate.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Burnett. Your invitation to visit parks and ecotourism facilities in your neck of the woods is well appreciated and I very much intend to get there. In the break the member for Hervey Bay hit me up for a visit too, so maybe I can tour the whole region.

**Mr BENNETT:** There are your holidays taken care of!

**Dr MILES:** There are great parks in both of your electorates. The member will be aware that Labor was critical of some of the approach to commercial activities on parks, and that is not because we are opposed to ecotourism or commercial activities on park in general. I think we have a slightly more conservation focused approach. What that means is that on coming to government I asked for a review of the projects that were on the books that were being assessed under the previous government. We went through those on the basis that we would assess them against our view of what is appropriate on parks. I guess the good news is that, while some of those initiatives we do not think should proceed, many of them will but, because they are all commercial-in-confidence, I am not able to outline which are which. I and the Minister for Tourism are very interested and focused on this. She was when she held the role I have now and certainly is now as the Minister for Tourism. We have met with a number of these proponents and we are working hard to get them progressed and get them over the line.

The commitment that I have given members of the tourism industry and others which I am happy to restate here is that we might have a slightly more conservative approach in terms of what we will allow on park, but we are going to work really hard to get those ecotourism ventures that we think are appropriate up and running because, at the end of the day, as the Minister for National Parks I want more people in our parks. I want more people out there advocating for our parks. I want the permit fees and licence fees that will help us manage our parks better, so I am broadly in favour of improving facilities in terms of getting better on-park facilities. But there were a few that were being pursued by the previous government that we are not supportive of.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you for your open mind on that very important issue. Minister—

**Dr MILES:** Sorry, member for Burnett. I have just been alerted to an issue in the brief I had on boundary fence construction and maintenance in response to the member for Mackay's question. I think I misspoke. I am told I said \$320,000 when in fact the investment is \$230,000. I am getting dyslexic towards the end of the session, so accept my apologies.

**Mr BENNETT:** That is fine; thank you for the correction. Minister, could you inform the committee of what strategic plan for government protected areas of the state have you considered and the long-term goals and provide the targets of those protected areas of Queensland? I suppose what I am seeking is the consideration of alternate funding, whether it is through collaboration, organisations, nature conservation, trusts for nature and also of course that consideration be given to alternate sources of income to maintain those valued staff that service those parks.

**Dr MILES:** Sure, member for Burnett. That is an important question that goes really to the heart of how we are going to achieve our targets to expand the protected area estate. While traditional national park acquisition will continue to be part of the mix, increasingly we will be working with private landholders and not-for-profit trusts to expand the estate. That is in some ways a fact of life in terms of what options we have to acquire new lands and see it managed well, but I see a lot of opportunities in that approach as well.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you.

**Dr MILES:** Madam Chair, I have a couple of minutes of reporting back and closing, but I am happy to take another question.

**Mr BENNETT:** Indulge me with one more then?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr BENNETT:** I am interested in the government's perspective on that important and iconic island, Raine Island. Would you give the committee an update on that important work that continues in that important part of your portfolio?

**Dr MILES:** Raine Island I think has united many of us across the chamber.

**Mr BENNETT:** Absolutely.

**Dr MILES:** It is a fantastic story that all have a part in. The last I reported to the House was our successful completion of an agreement with a commercial sector sponsor which I was very excited about. I note that that effort of partnership is an EHP thing, so the folk here will not be fully across that but can probably speak to what our rangers are up to on Raine Island. Do you have any insight on that, Ben or Tamara?

**Mr Klaassen:** Yes. We conduct two to three visits per year to Raine Island where rangers will participate in the sand reprofiling activities and monitoring of the turtle nesting. We take scientists with us on those visits. Traditional owners also come on those visits. The recent sponsorship that has been secured from BHP will greatly assist in increasing those efforts and EHP does have the lead on that at the moment, but we are working closely in partnership with EHP to plan the upcoming activities for this year and the rest of the five years of that sponsorship.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you, Deputy Director-General. Thank you, Minister.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Dr MILES:** Madam Chair, are you happy for me to just report back on a few things that I have looked into during the hearing and then make some closing remarks?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Dr MILES:** The member for Burnett asked what a penalty unit was and I am advised that a penalty unit is \$117.50. The member for Burnett also asked in the EHP session about some concerns about beneficial use of waste products from CSG. We will continue to look into what compliance activities have occurred, but I urge him that if he has any particular concerns I am happy to receive them confidentially and look into them. If allegations have been made to you, it would be incumbent on all of us to try to get those investigated.

**Mr BENNETT:** I will be very honest with you: it is just a general issue that has been raised. I do not have specifics. It was just that there are concerns in the community, as you know, and it seems to be an increasing activity and I thought it was appropriate that we raise it and have that discussion. I think if you are going to take that on board, I would appreciate that.

**Dr MILES:** Yes, very much so. The member for Burnett also asked about grants that have been provided since February 2015 without a tender process. As you would appreciate, there are not many because normally tender processes would occur, but I can take you through those now. I am advised that in terms of the non-government conservation funding program part of that program has been contracted. We executed a contract with the Queensland Conservation Council on 24 June for \$150,000 per annum for three years. The first payment for \$75,000 was paid on 29 June 2015. Those payments will occur six monthly for the contracting period. That arrangement has been in place with QCC since 2008-09. Given it is the conservation funding program and they are the conservation council, it would not be feasible to have a tender process for what is funding dedicated there. I outlined earlier that I had directed the director-general of EHP to provide funding support to the Garners Beach cassowary rehab facility, so that occurred without a tender, although the ongoing EOI process, if we are fortunate enough to have competition, would be a competitive process. We have a partnership with the Australian Battery Recycling Initiative to pilot the collection of power tool batteries from retailers in Brisbane. That is a grant of \$60,000, but you will agree that anything we can do to get those high-impact, very damaging recyclable power tool batteries out of the waste stream is very important.

We have a partnership with Lighting Council Australia to pilot the collection and recycling of emergency lighting batteries. So that is a similar objective for \$80,000. We have a partnership with farm waste recovery to pilot the collection of sugar cane fertiliser bags in North Queensland for \$50,000. One hundred thousand dollars of the \$150,000 annual administrative grant has been given to the Board of Trustees of Newstead House. Obviously, we are not going to go to tender for funding for Newstead House when the board of trustees delivers those services. We have a contract with the banana growers for nearly \$600,000 over four years for a BMP initiative. Again, the BMP initiatives tend to be partnered with established agricultural industry groups. The Dalrymple Landcare Committee, there is funding for

a community engagement and extension officer to allow it to promote sustainable farming practices in the Burdekin catchment. That is \$300,000 over three years, which is also part of a BMP program. So that is why it was not tendered.

They are the matters that I was able to report back on. I think we have a couple of pieces of homework to do and I understand that we have until 10 am Tuesday.

**CHAIR:** It is next Wednesday, I believe, but we might conclude—

**Dr MILES:** Can I just confirm with the committee that the loss of sales and re-evaluation of assets—the bad debts and assets issue—is the primary matter that we need to report back on? Are there others?

**Mr BENNETT:** No, I think that is it.

**Dr MILES:** You think that is the one?

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you so much for your trouble.

**CHAIR:** There is more?

**Dr MILES:** Can I just very briefly acknowledge the contribution of the team supporting me in this estimates process from the departments of Environment and Heritage Protection and National Parks, Sport and Racing. The leadership of Jon Black and Tamara O'Shea has been outstanding. I particularly note that Tamara has been in the role of director-general for just a few weeks and faced interrogation not just with me but with Minister Byrne earlier.

I also appreciate the commitment and professionalism of the deputy directors-general and the estimates team in governance and strategy, who have managed the process of preparing for today's estimates. This is a job that takes an extraordinary amount of effort from officers across both departments and not just those who are still in the room now but those who have been allowed to go. With the ongoing support and, of course, the team in my office, who have just done an incredible job—

**Mr BENNETT:** Do not forget them.

**Dr MILES:** No, I did not forget them—well noted. With the ongoing support of so many talented and dedicated people, I am excited about the prospects of achieving real progress in protecting our environment, including saving the Great Barrier Reef, our built heritage and our national parks.

Let me also thank the committee. I am blessed with a fantastic committee—not just the folk from my side of the chamber but the crossbench representatives and opposition representatives. We do not agree on everything, but they are genuine in their interests in my portfolio areas. It is well past beer o'clock so let us call it a day.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. That completes the committee's hearings into the matters referred to it by the parliament. Thank you, Minister, director-generals and officials for your assistance today. I would like to also thank the committee members. They are a great bunch and it has been a great experience today.

The transcript of this session of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's website within two hours. The questions on notice that were taken that the minister referred to earlier, I remind you that the deadline for questions taken on notice and clarifying material is 10 am on Wednesday, 26 August.

Before I conclude, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the ministers, the directors-general, their staff—I know how much work goes into this—and I would also like to thank the Hansard staff and the attendants for everything today.

**Committee adjourned at 7.20 pm**