

FRIDAY, 22 JULY 2016

ESTIMATES—AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE— AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Estimate Committee Members

Mr GJ Butcher (Chair)
Mr AJ Perrett
Mrs J Gilbert
Mr R Katter
Mr JE Madden
Mr EJ Sorensen

Members in Attendance

Mrs JR Miller
Mr DR Last
Dr CA Rowan
Mr S Knuth

In Attendance

Hon. LE Donaldson, Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries
Ms A Tibbitts, Chief of Staff
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Dr E Woods, Director-General
Mr M Letts, Deputy Director-General, Agriculture
Mr S Spencer, Deputy Director-General, Fisheries and Forestry
Mr M Richards, Acting Executive Director, Finance and Asset Management
Dr J Thompson, Chief Biosecurity Officer
QRAA
Mr C Macmillan, Chief Executive Officer
Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges
Mr M Tobin, Principal Executive Officer

Committee met at 8.59 am



CHAIR: I declare this meeting of the Agriculture and Environment Committee open. I will begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which this hearing is taking place today. I am Glenn Butcher, the chair of the committee and member for Gladstone. Joining me on the committee today are: Tony Perrett, the deputy chair and member for Gympie; Julianne Gilbert, the member for Mackay; Robbie Katter, the member for Mount Isa; Jim Madden, the member for Ipswich West; and Ted Sorensen, the member for Hervey Bay.

The committee has granted leave for the following honourable members to participate in today's hearing in accordance with standing order 181(e): the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Callide, the member for Moggill, the member for Burdekin, the member for Bundamba and the member for Dalrymple. I welcome those members today.

We are here today to examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2016 for the portfolios of the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, 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 2015. 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 watching online.

The committee has authorised the release of answers from both ministers to the committee's 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 departments. As laid out in the guidelines at schedule 8 of the standing orders, we expect all departmental officers appearing today to provide full and honest answers to our questions. Anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide an answer should be prepared to state their reasons. I also remind members that departmental officers are not here today to give expert opinions on the merits or otherwise of the policies of the government. That is the role of ministers. Finally, before we begin, can everyone switch their mobile phones off or to silent.

The first item for consideration is the estimates for the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. I welcome Minister Donaldson and her advisers. We will examine estimates for your portfolio until 1.30 pm. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisers, if they are called to give an answer, to please state their name before they speak for the first time. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries 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?

Ms DONALDSON: Thank you, Chair. Good morning everyone. I too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners on the land on which we are gathered today and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Today I will be answering your questions relating to the Agriculture and Fisheries portfolio. I am joined at the table by Dr Elizabeth Woods, the Director-General of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and my chief-of-staff, Alana Tibbitts. Cameron Macmillan, the Chief Executive Officer of the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority; Barbara Wilson, Chief Executive Officer of Safe Food Production Queensland; and Mark Tobin, Chief Executive Officer of the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges are here to answer any questions you may have of them.

As you are all aware, the Premier appointed me as minister in December 2015. Since then I have made it a priority to consult widely with stakeholders and to travel extensively through Queensland to meet food and fibre producers and see their operations firsthand. It has been a busy seven months in which we have introduced legislation and regulations for the betterment of Queensland's agricultural producers and for animal welfare. The new dog breeder registration laws, passed unanimously by parliament in May, will help to eradicate cruel puppy farms. I want to once again thank the committee for its work on this piece of legislation.

In recent weeks we have seen the culmination of years of hard work to modernise, simplify and cut red tape for producers. The new Biosecurity Act 2014, which commenced on 1 July this year, replaces six acts and part of two other acts to provide a modern, risk based approach to biosecurity in Queensland. It coincides with a new cattle tick management protocol and tick line, a simplified fee framework cutting the number of biosecurity fees from 87 to 33, and a new approach to Johne's disease management, which, I might add, was widely praised by industry. We have almost doubled the number of dams and weirs in the Stocked Impoundment Permit scheme, another boon to the hundreds of thousands of recreational fishers in Queensland.

I am proud of the efforts the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is making to protect the Great Barrier Reef, in particular, the well-received best management practice programs and other research and development initiatives underway with the sugar industry. I was also proud to launch the Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network in my own electorate of Bundaberg. The network is another example of the Palaszczuk government listening to industry and working in partnership with stakeholders. It is another element in a package of initiatives that include the Queensland Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance, industry to schools programs and active support for agricultural industries to address labour shortages and skills gaps.

We are delivering for rural Queensland by helping producers and communities across the state affected by debt and drought. Last month we delivered a \$454 million investment in Queensland's agriculture and fisheries sector for 2016-17 and an unprecedented package of financial assistance and practical measures to support primary producers. Our \$42 million drought assistance package includes \$24 million for the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme, a new climate risk and drought resilience program and \$1.5 million for the Rural Flying Doctor Service wellbeing service. In addition, we announced a \$36m rural assistance package which includes the removal of transfer duty on intergenerational family farm transfers.

As minister, my focus is on reducing financial stress and improving financial sustainability. We are also delivering on our promise of a productive and profitable agricultural sector by investing significant funding in the budget to boost our biosecurity capacity and deliver innovative research and development.

The budget provides additional funding of \$10.84 million over four years to begin implementing the recommendations of the biosecurity capability review. It raises to \$30.2 million our commitment to strengthen the incident preparedness and response capability of our biosecurity systems. It is worth reflecting why the review and response were so necessary.

Since the Palaszczuk government took office we have undertaken systematic repair of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries that was hit hard by severe cuts under the LNP Newman-Nicholls administration. The number of full-time-equivalent positions in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries fell from 2,589 to 1,973 under the short but disastrous LNP years. There was a 26 per cent cut to Biosecurity Queensland staff. Since the election we have employed an additional actual active 27.63 full-time-equivalent workers in Biosecurity Queensland, 17.23 in agriculture, including Agri-Science Queensland, and 9.2 in fisheries and forestry.

I place on record my appreciation of the incredible wealth of knowledge in the department. Departmental staff are the backbone of the support the government provides to the sector. Their connections to our primary producers are invaluable. I cherish their knowledge and their advice and I can assure the committee that, as minister, I shall do nothing to undermine their expertise or their capacity. I welcome the committee's questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I now hand over to the opposition for their first question.

Mr LAST: My first question relates to the establishment of the Office of Rural Affairs. It was not until the Premier gave her response this week during estimates that I became aware of the details regarding this initiative because the SDS was anything but clear. In fact, there were just six words to cover \$2 million in funding. To be clear, you are establishing a brand-new Office of Rural Affairs with \$250,000 of new money; is that correct?

Ms DONALDSON: The funding that was announced in the budget for the Office of Rural Affairs in the department is an allocation of \$500,000 per year for four years.

Mr LAST: Can I just clarify, though, that \$250,000 of that \$500,000 you are finding within existing resources; is that correct?

Ms DONALDSON: To get across that detail I will pass that question to the director-general to answer?

Dr Woods: It is true that the funding for the Office of Rural Affairs will be a combination of cash and in-kind support which will be provided by the department. We are estimating at this point it will be roughly \$250,000 cash and \$250,000 in-kind support.

Mr LAST: Minister, I refer you to your answer to non-government question on notice No. 10 where you state that a commissioner will be appointed to run that office. What will be the process for selecting and appointing the new commissioner? How much will it cost? What will be the salary package? It seems to me that the entire amount of new money will be burnt up hiring and paying for this new commissioner.

Ms DONALDSON: As the member pointed out, the recommendation is that a high-profile public person be appointed as the commissioner of rural affairs. This person will work closely with government, with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, with rural industry bodies, with rural communities and with the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority.

The role of this commissioner will be to provide independent advice to the minister and to the director-general based on feedback from industry and regional agribusiness. Support to the commissioner will be provided by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, which will thereby free up the budget of the Office of Rural Affairs to fund priorities identified by the commissioner. Examples of these priorities could include the commissioning of an updated Queensland rural debt survey, undertaking research or other high-priority data collection and engagement with the sector to identify where rural and regional adjustment issues need to be addressed.

The Office of Rural Affairs will be based in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, but the exact location of the office may depend on the commissioner chosen, where that person lives and what their requirements will be. This will be a significant appointment through the cabinet process. It could be full time or less and it could be regional or otherwise. For further detail on that question, I will pass to the director-general.

Dr Woods: The details of the appointment of the position are still being developed, but we do expect that it will be a significant appointment. Given the stature of the position, the details of the appointment will probably depend on the people who make themselves available for the appointment. It is possible this could be a full-time position. It is possible that it might be a part-time position if that is consistent with the sort of stature that is being looked for. Similarly, we are envisaging that we might be supporting either a person who wants to work out of the CBD in Brisbane or a person who may choose to work out of a regional office because that is their most convenient location. All those details are still to be worked through at this point.

Mr LAST: In terms of the salary package, would it be safe to say that it would be within the executive band? Are you able to elaborate on what the salary package would be or where they may sit within the pay structure?

Ms DONALDSON: That has not been determined as yet.

Mr LAST: What will the budget be for the office? Has that figure been determined?

Ms DONALDSON: As I stated in a previous answer, the funding that was announced in the budget for the Office of Rural Affairs is an allocation of \$500,000 per year for four years.

Mr LAST: Do you have any time frames on when you would expect this person to be in place? When do you would expect that office to be up and running? Is it this year before Christmas or next year?

Ms DONALDSON: As I outlined, this is a significant appointment. It is not one we are going to rush into. We will make sure we consult and get the right person for that job because of the high profile of that position, and that appointment will go through the cabinet process.

Mr LAST: You talk about a rural debt survey. Can you elaborate on who will do that survey, what it is likely to cost and what will then happen with that survey?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. Rural debt surveys are not new. They have been done previously. They are things that take a considerable amount of time and effort to undertake. Those decisions about a rural debt survey will be up to the commissioner, not me as the minister.

Mr LAST: Minister, you have just said that they have been done previously. Why are we doing another one?

Ms DONALDSON: These things are not static and circumstances change. For example, times of drought are different from times when there is not drought. The industry, as you would well know, is not static. To rely on data that is out of date or information that is not contemporary is something that would not help the sector at all. That is one example of something that the Office of Rural Affairs and the commissioner could undertake.

Mr LAST: When was the last rural debt survey undertaken?

Ms DONALDSON: I will pass that to the director-general for an answer.

Dr Woods: The last rural debt survey was commissioned by QRAA, the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority. I believe it was four to five years ago. At that point it was undertaken, I believe, by a private contractor.

Mr LAST: Minister, will consultants be engaged to recruit the commissioner?

Ms DONALDSON: As I said, that decision will be made through cabinet. The engagement of the commissioner will be a process that is yet to be undertaken. There will be wide consultation about who the right person is for that job, but this is something that we will continue to look into. Whoever does the survey will be up to the commissioner. It may also be done nationally. Minister Joyce has expressed an interest in doing this.

Mr LAST: In simple terms, when we set this Office of Rural Affairs up—we have talked about looking at rural debt—what else in terms of reference for that initiative will this office be doing? What do you see as its primary role going forward?

Ms DONALDSON: As I said, some examples of the priorities that the Office of Rural Affairs could undertake, as we just discussed, is an updated version of a rural debt survey. The office could undertake research or other high-priority data collection. An important part of that could be engaging with the sector to identify where rural and regional adjustment issues need to be addressed. Those are matters that will be further refined by the commissioner.

Mr LAST: Thank you, Minister. I will move on to the next question relating to QRAA. I refer to the firm and announced plans by the Commonwealth government to establish a financial facility within the federal department of primary industries to be known as the Regional Investment Corporation to administer, assess and allocate concessional loans farms for farmers in drought and other weather related hardships. This Regional Investment Corporation will administer water infrastructure loans and other initiatives such as the current support program for farmers to help them investigate multiperil risk insurance, which Queensland is involved in administering. Minister, given the commitment of the federal government, can you explain where the new Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority will fit?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I, too, was watching during the federal campaign with great interest the announcement made by the Deputy Prime Minister. There have not been any details on what this federal body might do. There is not sufficient detail being provided on whether it is something that will duplicate or will complement. Without that detail, it is difficult to identify what role that body might have, how that might work in with QRAA or how QRAA might continue administering some of the federal government schemes. As I said, it is unknown what the impact will be. Until we get some of that finer detail from the Deputy Prime Minister, I cannot speculate on what it might look like heading forward.

I would like to say that QRAA is an organisation that has a great relationship with the communities. They work very closely with producers and communities around those issues. They have on-the-ground knowledge of the day-to-day issues. They have a proven record in delivering drought assistance and they will still deliver PIPES loans. I would hope that anything that is established at a federal level will still ensure that producers get that one-on-one support on the ground that they need.

Mr LAST: Minister, what steps have been taken to establish that new entity in Queensland, QRIDA, given that it is likely now we will see a duplication in terms of the services that it offers and that announcement from your government to establish that facility? How far down the track are you in terms of establishing that?

Ms DONALDSON: As I said, I do not know that it is likely we will see duplication. I have yet to see any of the detail, and it is difficult for me to speculate on hypotheticals because I do not know what that organisation will look like. I do not know what programs there might be or how that might work. Until I see that, I do not have the information at hand to be able to give you the answer to that question.

Mr LAST: In terms of the work to establish the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority, what work has done or is it simply just a name change? Has there been any work done on establishing that authority?

Ms DONALDSON: I will pass that question to the director-general.

Dr Woods: There will be a range of steps that need to take place to transition QRAA to the new QRIDA. In the budget papers there have been a range of additional roles outlined which include, for example, providing a home for farm debt mediation within the Queensland government. There is also a series of grants that were outlined in the budget papers in addition to changes to various existing schemes and the change of name.

My expectation at this point is that there will be some legislative changes required and some regulatory changes required. There will also be a series of skills to be developed and appointed. Since legislation and regulation changes are required, that will require a significant amount of government

work through the cabinet process and then through the process for regulatory changes which I expect will take place over the next few months. Clearly, there will also be significant work done by the board of QRAA which is expected to transition as the board of QRIDA and have the immediate oversight responsibility for the provision of those changes.

Mr LAST: Dr Woods, have you and the minister personally discussed this expanded role for QRAA, how it addresses that rural debt and task force report and the need or otherwise for parliament to continue to examine legislation to establish a rural industries development bank?

Dr Woods: It would be a normal part of the portfolio business for the minister and I to discuss all parts of the business. Certainly there has been significant discussion in the context of the drought that currently affects rural Queensland and the financial issues that were examined as part of the debt and drought task force which would form part of the discussions that I would have with the minister and her office.

CHAIR: Minister, with reference to page 2 of the SDS, will you outline the government's proposal for reform of fisheries management in Queensland?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. Today, with the chair's permission, I will table the green paper on fisheries management reform for Queensland.

CHAIR: There being no objection, it is so tabled.

Ms DONALDSON: There will be a 10-week period of consultation with industry, recreational fishers and the Queensland community on the key proposals outlined in the green paper. Modernisation of fisheries management is long overdue. It has been 22 years since structural reform of fisheries management, and we went to the 2015 election with a promise to review the framework for sustainable management of our fisheries resource. As the state's population grows, I want to ensure that future generations of Queenslanders have access to fresh fish and recreational fishing opportunities. In order to do that, we must develop a management system around principles that guarantee the long-term sustainability of our fish stocks.

The proposals in the green paper have also been informed by public feedback to the MRAG review. The proposals seek to ensure fair access for all to our fisheries resources, clarity for all on how management decisions are made, and improvements in data gathering. I think that it will be clear to all those with an interest in fishing either as a business or a hobby that reform is not only desirable but also essential.

It is vital that we seize the opportunity to bring fisheries management in line in Queensland with world's best practice. The green paper proposals are important for commercial fishers, recreational anglers and Indigenous fishers. I want to see a thriving and profitable commercial industry and increased tourism based on world-class recreational fishing opportunities. There are 10 areas identified in the green paper. These are managing target stocks, managing impacts on the ecosystem including non-target species, resource sharing between the commercial and recreational sectors, access to resources, decision-making frameworks, harvest strategies, data and information, consultation and engagement, fisheries compliance and contributions to the costs of management.

We all know that fishing is an integral part of life in Queensland. It puts wonderful fresh seafood on our plates and is an important contributor to our economy, and I want all those with an interest to have a say on how the resources are managed. That is why there will be this extensive period of consultation. People will be able to make submissions until 30 September either online or in writing.

Mrs GILBERT: Fishing, both recreational and commercial, is very important to my electorate so I, too, would like to ask a question about fishing. In reference to page 2 of the SDS, will the minister detail how the fisheries green paper meets the government's sustainable fishing policy?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for Mackay for the question. I do know through various conversations with her and from visiting her electorate how important fishing is to the Mackay area. The Queensland government is committed to ensuring, as I said, that Queenslanders have a say in issues that they are affected by and that are important to them. The green paper addresses the policy direction set out in the sustainable fishing policy. We have considered past feedback and are now ready to move forward with a strong stance on the future sustainable and profitable management of Queensland's fisheries. For all sectors to be able to share our fisheries resources in the long term, we need to build our fish stocks with the stocks being a consideration of the green paper.

The Queensland government is committed to the sustainability and profitability of all Queensland fishing sectors, including the recreational and commercial fishing sectors. We are providing balance between all sectors, addressing the need to avoid overfishing and pursuing the goal of maximising the

economic return from fishing to the Queensland economy. We are a consultative government and strongly oppose making hasty decisions without the necessary consultation with stakeholders. I would also like to encourage members of the public, as well as industry, to make a submission to the green paper.

Mr MADDEN: Minister, with reference to page 2 of the SDS, what relevance for Queensland does the minister see in the recommendations from yesterday's release of the Productivity Commission's interim report on red tape in the agricultural sector?

Ms DONALDSON: Thank you to the member for the question. That is a very good question. The Queensland government is committed to red-tape reduction and we will be carefully considering the draft findings and recommendations contained in the Productivity Commission's draft report on the regulation that was released yesterday. In February this year, my department provided a submission to the inquiry in response to an issues paper, and I am pleased to see that the draft report addresses a number of areas which were highlighted in the submission. These include issues such as the Commonwealth's arrangements affecting overseas backpacker workers, consistency in heavy vehicle regulation, foreign investment and sugar marketing.

The commission's draft report recommends returning the screening threshold for agricultural land and agribusiness investment to the pre-2015 threshold because it could deter investment without offsetting benefits. The report also recommends the repeal of the amendments made by the Sugar Industry (Real Choice in Marketing) Amendment Act 2015, which passed with the support of the LNP. Of course some regulation, such as biosecurity and food safety regulation, provides clear benefits to Australian farmers, as the draft report points out. The government is always willing to consider how legislation can be improved. We will look carefully at the draft report's recommendations relevant to the department, such as agvet chemicals and animal welfare.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, the Dinmore meatworks is in my electorate and there have recently been times where the meatworkers have worked only two days per week due to cattle shortages. Minister, do you support Queensland abattoir production and the full employment of meatworkers or the export of their jobs overseas due to live cattle exports?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. The beef-processing sector in Queensland is a major employer and a major source of jobs for people in their local communities. I was out at the processing facility at Cannon Hill only last week and I was very impressed by the facilities they have there.

As I just said, the beef-processing sector employs an estimated 18,000 workers so that makes it Queensland's largest manufacturing sector. I am aware that domestically the beef-processing industry has expressed concern over the large number of cattle being exported, particularly as stock has been hard to source due to drought conditions and local market conditions. A large number of slaughter-weight cattle being exported to Vietnam in the last year in particular has caused the processing sector concerns.

In comparative terms, the \$268 million earned through live cattle exports is a relatively small percentage. It is about 5.5 per cent of the total beef export value of \$4.9 billion achieved in 2014-15. The view of the Queensland government is that an open and competitive beef cattle market benefits all participants in the beef supply chain. In speaking with workers and also with people working in the industry, I am acutely aware of the concern that is held in that sector.

The other thing we know is that value-adding is something that helps support and increase jobs in areas that do need a boost. We know that anything we can do to support value-adding—and the beef sector is no different to any other—can actually increase the number of jobs and increase those activities.

Mrs MILLER: As a supplementary question, can you explain to me so that I can explain to my local meatworkers: what does value-adding, in your view, mean?

Ms DONALDSON: Thank you to the member for the question. Value-adding is anything that is undertaken with cattle production, so when meat is frozen, when meat is packaged or when it is sent for other things that are contributed to it. For example, in relation to the meat-processing facility, some of the offal and other cuts of meat which would not be used for the domestic market are able to be used for export and other markets. That is traditionally not something that we would have a use for here in Australia. As I said, last week I went to the Cannon Hill facility. I saw the cattle go in one end and I saw Coles meat packages go out the other side. That facility was also producing rissoles and a whole range of other products to value-add to that investment that they make at the front end.

CHAIR: Thank you for answering that question. I have a question in reference to page 2 of the SDS. Will you inform the committee why the sugar industry amendment act is bad for Queensland agriculture?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. Late last year, before I became the minister, the Queensland parliament passed the sugar industry amendment act with LNP amendments which the Palaszczuk government opposed. The Australian Sugar Milling Council warned that the changes would kill capital projects. Almost immediately, MSF Sugar's Thai parent company, Mitr Phol, flagged the suspension of \$360 million over three years which was intended for new growth projects in the sugar industry. The LNP's reckless reregulation of the sugar industry is jeopardising 16,000 sugar jobs. I have watched with dismay as the conflict in the industry has been exacerbated rather than healed by this ill-considered intervention.

Earlier this month Wilmar said that the reason for the delay in the proposed 2017 agreements for its Burdekin and Herbert canegrowers was the sugar marketing legislation that was passed in state parliament last year. Wilmar is clear that the legislation has caused considerable uncertainty in the sugar industry. The shadow minister, the member for Burdekin, was quoted in the *Burdekin Advocate* on 6 July as saying, 'The question that needs to be asked is: why is it taking so long to finalise the contracts for the Burdekin?' In its editorial, the newspaper had the answer to that member's question, calling the legislation a sticky mess and a complex web of confusion. It said that the new law served to disempower growers—the opposite of what the LNP set out to achieve.

The Palaszczuk government's position has not changed. We warned that reregulation of the industry would be a retrograde step. The Palaszczuk government raised its concerns with the federal government, asking for the National Competition Council to assess the anticompetitive provisions of the new legislation, but the federal government has done nothing to date in responding to the Queensland government's letter asking for the NCC to assess the legislation.

As was previously mentioned, yesterday the Commonwealth Productivity Commission released their draft report on agriculture, and the amendments to the act that the LNP supported are noted by the Productivity Commission. In their view, the evidence suggests that the preferred choice of marketing arrangements is likely to reduce the productivity and profitability of the industry. It is ironic, I think, that the LNP—the party that thinks it represents private enterprise—does not seem to understand business in this instance.

CHAIR: I will hand over to the opposition and start with the member for Mount Isa.

Mr KATTER: My question to the minister relates to page 2 of the SDS and the statement 'creating the conditions for successful agribusinesses and supply chains which encourage innovation and productivity'. Has the government also taken into account moves to encourage the viability of these producers? This includes addressing the market power imbalance between producers and the processing and retailing sectors.

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. Before I start, could I congratulate the member on his recent engagement.

Mr KATTER: Thank you.

Ms DONALDSON: I know from the many interactions I have had with the member for Mount Isa that this issue is something he is very passionate about. In fact, the trip we took across North Queensland earlier this year really gave me an opportunity to hear from him about those issues. It was a great opportunity for me to meet some of those local councils and get on the ground and hear from them firsthand. It was timely that we were there as the new councils were being sworn in.

We know that in times of drought—and this prolonged drought has been a very strong example of that—it is tougher for businesses to maintain viability through a whole range of things that are outside their control. It is important in these times that the department continues to undertake a range of activities to support those businesses. Historically, the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme that is administered by the department has met animal welfare needs during drought.

I am happy to inform the member that the budgeted Queensland government drought assistance package, labelled as 'Extending existing drought relief arrangements' in the budget papers, provides \$41.9 million for 2016-17, which includes funding for the following major measures. There is \$15.1 million for the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme, as I said, which provides freight subsidies and emergency water infrastructure rebates and drought reform initiatives. This scheme is also administered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. The department has also internally reallocated \$13.1 million for this scheme, for a total of \$28.2 million. Continued funding is a part of

DRAS for the rural financial counselling service and a new \$3.5 million drought preparedness and climate risk management program. There is a further \$4.2 million for land rent rebates and water licence waivers, which are managed by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. There is \$4 million for the community assistance package which is managed by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. There is \$4 million for drought relief from electricity charges, which is managed by the Department of Energy and Water Supply and included estimated forgone revenue from Ergon's community service obligation. There is \$1.5 million for the Royal Flying Doctor Service's drought wellbeing service, which is managed by Queensland Health.

Part of the drought assistance package is \$3.5 million for drought reform measures. This funding has been allocated towards research, development and extension activities that promote drought preparedness and climate risk mitigation, with the centrepiece being the establishment of a Queensland Drought Mitigation Centre, which is in partnership with the University of Southern Queensland. While the DRAS money is provided to primary producers, much of it ends up being spent in local towns and communities which injects much needed economic activity into those communities. The Queensland government also makes donations to charities from time to time that assist local communities. We have also committed to keeping existing drought arrangements in place until 2018. I will pass on to the director-general for some further detail on that also.

Dr Woods: In addition to what the minister has already outlined, it is worth returning to the Rural Assistance Package which was announced in this year's budget papers of \$36 million. That, again, has some significant measures to address the question of business viability. There are grants, as I previously mentioned, to be administered through QRAA or the new QRIDA to support farm financial management, succession planning and undertaking multiperil insurance assessment, all of which are important strategies for farm businesses to improve their business viability. We talked earlier about the establishment of the Office of Rural Affairs, which is intended to have an oversight role in understanding issues affecting farm business viability. The government has also announced the extension of transfer duty concessions for properties where properties are being passed to family members with monetary consideration. Again, that is an area that has been the subject of significant discussion by peak industry bodies because that is seen as a key step to support the business viability of younger generation members of the family taking over the business.

It is also the case that farm debt mediation process has the potential to be able to assist businesses to manage their way through debt problems. Through the Drought Assistance Package and Rural Assistance Package we are obviously continuing to fund pest and weed management programs, which particularly in the extensive grazing areas are a critical part of ensuring ongoing business viability.

Mr KATTER: In an effort to create that drought resilience—and you talked about the water infrastructure—has the department further explored options around the dam desilting, which is currently restricted, and options such as solar pumps combined with desilting as alternatives so that those places that do not have bores and dams can still access that emergency water infrastructure?

Ms DONALDSON: Thank you for the question. The desilting of dams is something that has been raised a number of times. As I have mentioned previously, historically, the DRAS that is administered by my department is a scheme that meets animal welfare needs during drought. Farm maintenance is not something that has been included in this scheme in the past. I am aware that this committee is examining the DRAS scheme. As a number of submissions have raised the issue of dam desilting, it would be appropriate for me to await the outcome of the committee's deliberation of this matter.

CHAIR: I hand over to the opposition now.

Mr LAST: Minister, I will move on to the area of Forestry, SDS page 3. Can you explain the service area objective to lift productivity of food and fibre businesses in relation to what is happening with the Queensland Forest and Timber Industry Plan 2012? What guarantee can you provide that the plan will be progressed and provide genuine time lines to implement this program?

Ms DONALDSON: Thank you to the member for the question. Since becoming minister I have had the opportunity to visit a range of forestry places and activities. I have been out to visit HQPlantations forest. I have been to the Hyne Timber mill. I have been to the department's Salisbury research centre. I have been to Wondai to visit the sawmill there as well. In June I also had the pleasure of opening the inaugural Doing Timber Business in Queensland Conference on the Sunshine Coast. The Queensland Forest and Timber Industry Plan, which you identify, is a joint industry and Queensland government initiative to address the challenges faced by the industry. As you pointed out, the plan was originally developed in 2012 and it is an important platform for assisting the industry to achieve its vision

of innovation and sustained business growth. Funding of \$2.8 million has been allocated to implement actions under the plan including \$1.4 million towards research priorities and a further \$1.4 million towards other actions.

I understand that significant progress has been made in implementing the actions in the plan, which is overseen by an implementation committee comprising industry and government representatives. Actions that have been delivered to date include establishing an industry-led research, development and extension framework and the initiation of eight aligned research programs; introducing new measures to facilitate and manage plantation developments including the recently completed voluntary Timber Plantation Operations Code of Practice for Queensland; supporting industry to achieve environmental certification of their wood products by providing grants to help businesses develop systems and completing auditing needed for certification; and publishing an overview of the industry that includes reliable statistics about the industry's contribution to the Queensland economy. The actions outlined in the plan align with the Queensland government's priorities of job creation, growing existing economic strengths, value-adding, innovation, workplace safety and supporting regional and rural Queensland.

I am currently finalising the Queensland government's response to the plan, which in essence supports the continued delivery of the plan's actions. This includes continuing the supply of state owned native forest timber to the industry under existing sales contracts. This supply provides around 14 per cent of Queensland's domestically produced logged timber and supports employment and investment in many regional and rural areas.

Mr LAST: Minister, when can we expect to see the government's forestry asset management plan relating to the surplus assets that were transferred back to the government prior to the sale of Forestry Plantations Queensland to the private sector?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. Could I ask for the reference in the SDS for that question?

Mr LAST: It comes under the Forestry SDS. More importantly, it relates to the sale of Forestry Plantations Queensland and those surplus assets—

Ms DONALDSON: I just ask what page of the SDS that refers to.

Mr LAST: There will be a financial implication there that I would like an answer to.

Ms DONALDSON: Can I just ask what page of the SDS that refers to?

Mr LAST: I can get that researched for you. I am happy to come back to that while I get that page number of the SDS for you. Minister, I picked up on your point regarding jobs. I want to refer to comments made yesterday by the Attorney-General and Minister for Training and Skills regarding the establishment of a rural job agency in Queensland. When she was asked this question she said that the Minister for Agriculture was best positioned to respond. The Rural Job Agency was a showpiece of the government's Jobs Now, Jobs for the Future plan released as part of last year's budget. Can you advise the committee where that agency is located?

Ms DONALDSON: Yes, thank you to the member for that question. I am very grateful to the committee for giving me the opportunity to set the record straight on the efforts we have made to boost employment in regional Queensland. I noted the comments made after the state budget last month in which a number of opposition members displayed their ignorance of investments we have made to create employment and help agricultural employers in rural areas find the workers that they need. It is disappointing that the former shadow minister clearly failed to notice what was happening in her former portfolio, especially as it happened on her watch.

The Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance and the Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network have been enthusiastically received by industry. The industry peak bodies such as Queensland Farmers Federation, AgForce, Canegrowers and Growcom are peak bodies that have embraced the Rural Job Agency. Those bodies advise that their preferred approach was to support an industry-led Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance that would provide a collaborative approach to identifying and addressing agriculture's workforce issues. The alliance was formed in October 2015 and, as I just outlined, the current membership includes the Queensland Farmers Federation, AgForce, Growcom, Cotton Australia and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. The alliance will ensure that there is a collaborative approach by industry to identify where businesses have difficulty in recruiting appropriately skilled workers and seasonal labour. The alliance has established comprehensive data on Queensland's agriculture workforce and is providing advice to government, industry and service providers to meet the industry's unique needs.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is investing \$3.08 million in industry-led workforce initiatives between 2015 and 2018. One of our key election commitments was to work with industry in rural Queensland to help create job opportunities to assist producers to overcome seasonal labour shortages. We said that we wanted to help job seekers to acquire skills to satisfy potential employers and to get more young people in rural and regional areas into apprenticeships. Unlike those opposite, who when in government failed to consult or consider any expert opinion, we have listened to the wishes of employers and we have tailored our initiatives to suit their needs.

The Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance was established, as I said, in partnership with industry. It supports the work of six experienced officers based within regional agricultural bodies. These officers are available to any primary producer or group of producers experiencing difficulty in accessing skilled or semiskilled labour. The Palaszczuk government has listened to industry on our election commitment. I am proud that our election commitment is being delivered to support rural jobs and employment. This is something that is in my charter letter and I am delivering on it.

Mr LAST: Minister, how many jobs have actually been created since you established this Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance?

Ms DONALDSON: As I said, the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance is an alliance that is not about creating jobs; it provides advice and support in partnership with industry to give them the information they need to employ workers in the private sector. As I said, part of the alliance assists producers to better understand the range of ways that they can access workers and explore alternative approaches when they have labour shortages. It seems that the members of the opposition do not understand this part of the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance, but I am sure Growcom Chief Executive, Pat Hannan, would be happy to talk to them about it. His response to this was—

The network will ensure that there is a multi-faceted, coordinated approach to tackling one of the major challenges facing agriculture—accessing a consistent supply of appropriately skilled workers.

The importance of this industry-led initiative cannot be understated.

As I said, these officers are available to any primary producer or group of producers in Queensland. They do not employ people. What they do is provide information on employment options to producers, advise them on available employment or training subsidies, and work with employers to identify current recruitment processes and link them to alternative sources such as long-term unemployed, seasonal workers, school leavers and persons undertaking higher education and training. They initiate local activities contingent on the needs and available opportunities of the local community. Some of the activities they undertake are: coordinating work experience for school students; arranging forums for industry to meet with recruitment and training providers to identify industry needs and available solutions; working with service providers to better target agricultural employers with the relevant solutions; and enhancing employers' understanding that alternate available sources of employment can deliver on their needs. The extension of this election commitment is delivering something that industry has asked for. I have found it surprising that the members of the opposition are not across what the industry actually does.

CHAIR: We will now turn to government questions.

Mr LAST: Excuse me, Mr Chair, I just have a follow-up to that because I think—

CHAIR: Sorry, you have had two follow-ups from the initial question.

Mr LAST: I will come back to it. That is fine.

CHAIR: You can come back to it.

Mrs GILBERT: Minister, with reference to page 6 of the SDS, cattle ticks are a complex and emotive issue for a lot of cattle producers. Did you listen to the feedback on the cattle tick zone changes and what will these changes mean for producers?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. The government has listened to producers. The final location of the tick line was determined after an extensive public consultation period. Over 1,000 producers attended information and consultation meetings in relation to the new cattle tick zones and the location of the tick line, and almost 1,000 survey responses were received. Officers from Biosecurity Queensland attended 19 industry meetings along the length of the line, from Prairie to Pilton, to consult with producers and to listen to the views of industry. I also attended meetings with delegations of producers about the tick line to listen to their views and concerns directly, both in Brisbane and out in regional areas.

While not everyone agrees with some of the finer details of the location of the tick line, I am confident that the final decision reflects the best decision to support the producers of Queensland and is a vote of confidence in their ability to protect the cattle industry in Queensland. Queensland will benefit from the implementation of the bipartisan supported Biosecurity Act 2014 and regulations which support a modern, risk based regulatory framework for the management of cattle ticks in Queensland and serves to protect and support the integrity of the cattle tick free zone in the state. The new framework is less prescriptive and provides opportunity for more flexibility for managing cattle tick incursions in the free zone. Producers who have cattle tick infested properties in the free zone have an obligation to eradicate the infestation. The manner in which this is achieved is for the producer to implement in a way that best suits their enterprise, rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach which, we have regularly been told, does not work.

The shift to the new framework demonstrates the faith that the Queensland government has in producers to effectively manage biosecurity risks at the property level without burdensome regulatory oversight. I would also like to make it clear that the line will be reviewed in two years, and if producers have demonstrated eradication that can be sustained there is an opportunity for that line to continue to move.

Mr MADDEN: Minister, with reference to page 6 of the SDS, what are the nature of the changes to Queensland's BJD arrangements?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. The industry has been asking and calling for a reduction in the regulatory burdens associated with the management of Johne's disease since 2012, and the Palaszczuk government has listened. The outcomes of an extensive national review of the approach to Johne's disease management provide the framework for the changes to JD management in Queensland to occur. The new national framework shifts focus from government-centric regulatory protection to market driven industry management of JD risk, and this is something that the Productivity Commission draft report supports.

Consultation on this was undertaken with representatives of all JD affected industry sectors, including the dairy and beef cattle industries and the goat, sheep, meat and wool industries, through the Queensland JD review committee. Members of the JD review committee include AgForce, Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation, Cattle Council of Australia, Australian Veterinary Association, Animal Health Australia and the Australian Livestock & Property Agents Association Limited.

The committee should appreciate that these changes lessen the impacts of regulatory control on affected producers and allow them to manage JD in a way that best suits their enterprise. This is an example of where government will get out of the way and let industry get on with business. The new approach has the business interests of producers at its core. It places the assessment and the management of JD risks with them and empowers them to manage them without burdensome and unnecessary government oversight. Producers should always still take appropriate steps to prevent the introduction of JD onto their properties to support ongoing access to all markets, including interstate and international markets. These changes will ultimately benefit Queensland producers.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, I note your rissole led recovery advice to Dinmore meatworkers, and I am sure that at present they are consulting their CWA cookbooks, but what about the workers at Wallangarra meatworks? This is a goat and sheep processor that has been citing livestock shortages and difficult global trading conditions, so I would like to know what the minister is doing to help this company and its workers. Approximately 260 workers were working at the Wallangarra meatworks last year.

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I do not have the detail of that particular meatworks. I have not had anyone from those meatworks talk to me about that, but I am very happy to take that question on notice.

CHAIR: I remind the member to make sure that the question is straight to the point and without rhetoric like that, please.

Mrs MILLER: I was assisting the minister because she had not had that information.

CHAIR: With reference to page 6 of the SDS, following on from the questions on notice, will the minister inform the committee what the government is doing to help keep Australia free of foot-and-mouth disease?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the chair for the question. I am sure all members of the committee will appreciate how devastating an outbreak of FMD would be for our state and for Australia. It has been estimated that a major outbreak would cost our nation more than \$52 billion. The livestock industry

would be hardest hit, with the prospect of the mass destruction of animals and an export ban on all meat products. Australian's reputation as a supplier of safe and high-quality food products would be compromised and it would take a very long time to recover. As Queensland has the largest beef industry in the country, here in Queensland we stand to lose the most.

In May I launched a major foot-and-mouth disease awareness campaign as a key component of a \$2.5 million biosecurity preparedness program. The centrepiece of the program is a free online awareness course. The course is recommended for anyone who owns or works with livestock—cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, deer, camels, llamas and alpacas—and it takes about 40 minutes to complete. It provides all those who take the course with the essential information they need to prevent an outbreak. In addition to this valuable resource, my department is posting out a range of materials to 25,000 addresses. There are guides, brochures and fact sheets designed specifically for livestock producers, retail food outlets and livestock supply chain industries. There are specific materials for piggeries and regional food outlets about the imperative not to feed swill to pigs. These materials have also been translated into Vietnamese and Chinese. In addition, a series of short videos have been produced, and we are encouraging producers and industry groups to use these videos at events and to share them online and through social media to achieve the greatest possible reach.

Strengthening biosecurity prevention and preparedness is a top priority for the Palaszczuk government, and it should be a prime concern to everyone who owns or works with livestock. There is no room for complacency in efforts to keep our state free of FMD. Too many livelihoods are reliant on a livestock industry that is free from disease—free to grow, prosper and provide the food that is rightly in demand all over the world.

It is also important for the committee to note that there are further benefits that arise from the FMD preparedness program. The program has delivered manuals and procedures that can apply to other disease responses which have all been developed from a response to a worst-case scenario. I would like to thank those participants and peak bodies who contributed to biosecurity preparedness programs that oversaw the Queensland government's FMD preparedness program. I am happy to table the associated advertising materials regarding FMD awareness for the committee.

CHAIR: Leave is granted.

Mrs GILBERT: Minister, with reference to page 8 of the SDS, can you outline the Palaszczuk government's support for the forestry and timber industry and update the committee on the state of the industry?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. As I mentioned earlier, I had the pleasure of opening the inaugural Doing Timber Business in Queensland conference on the Sunshine Coast recently. The conference brought together policymakers and a broad cross-section of the forest and timber industry in our state. It attracted growers, harvesters, processors, manufacturers and haulers, timber fabricators and retailers. Presented by Timber Queensland, the conference showcased how Queensland is a great place for conducting timber business. It highlighted the opportunities for capitalising on our innovations and resources, and there is a high level of optimism in the sector.

The Queensland government supports the forestry and timber industry with a significant investment in research through our R and D facility at Salisbury. I had an opportunity to go out and see that firsthand yesterday, and what an impressive facility it is. It is the largest of its kind in Australia. This is in recognition of the fact that the forest and timber industry delivers many important benefits to Queensland, with operations dispersed broadly across the entire state. The most recent statistics indicate that the industry has an estimated annual turnover of around \$3.2 billion and employs at least 10,000 people. This huge contribution to Queensland's economy is most telling in rural and regional communities. Forestry has a long and proud history in our state, and the extensive timber-processing facilities in regional parts of the state are the lifeblood of many rural towns. I understand that the facility in Wondai, which I visited, is the largest employer in town, so it has a significant investment in that town and is a very, very important part of that community.

While the industry is facing strong competition from imported and alternative materials, it continues to evolve and adapt to meet changing market demands, particularly in its core domestic housing building product markets. 2015 was a record-breaking year in new housing activity in Queensland, and I am happy to report that our timber industry is buoyant and feeling optimistic, coming off the back of these high levels of new housing construction. Timber sales and production have been lifted by the housing market. There are also new opportunities that exist in the use of innovative new engineered wood products in multistorey applications. This is particularly exciting, with the recent

changes to the National Construction Code allowing the use of timber in buildings up to eight storeys—or 25 metres—in height. I opened the facility at UQ and saw some really interesting work and research that is being done there, too.

In the seven months since I became minister I have not missed an opportunity to find out more about this valuable sector. As I said, I have visited plantations, nurseries, sawmills, processors and manufacturers, and I have come to appreciate the passion and the spirit of innovation that exists in this industry. Looking ahead, the forecast is for steady demand for timber from a growing population and rising building needs, especially in the south-east of the state.

Mr MADDEN: With reference to page 6 of the SDS, will the minister update the committee on how the Palaszczuk government has modernised and simplified legislation and regulations for zoos, circuses and others who exhibit animals?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. The new regulations and legislation, which commenced on 1 July, streamline and simplify legislation by replacing six licensing schemes and parts of four existing acts with a single scheme under a single piece of legislation. The act modernises the way Queensland regulates the exhibited animals industry and ensures that risks to animal welfare, public safety and biosecurity are adequately addressed. An immense amount of work and extensive consultation with business has been undertaken to get to this point, and I would like to thank everyone who has participated in that.

I know that with any new legislation where there are changes businesses need to adjust, but this is the right approach if we are serious about providing a future for the state's exhibited animals industry and strengthening the state's biosecurity. A central improvement under the act is a risk based framework that encourages exhibitors to identify how they will manage risks such as animal welfare, human safety and biosecurity risks associated with exhibiting and dealing with their animals. Risk based licensing decisions will unlock new opportunities for operators who were previously prevented from exhibiting some exotic species that are allowed in other Australian states and territories. This means that operators in Queensland for the first time are able to offer similar experiences to their competitor attractions in other states. This will be a significant benefit to those exhibitors, enabling them to further build on the unique experience they provide to people every year.

I understand there has been some concern raised about changes to costs under the new regulations, but I can assure you that we have sought the right balance for business. I do remind the committee that the regulatory impact statement with the proposed fees was released under the previous government with the regulated fees as the preferred fee structure. Small businesses made it clear that they felt they should not pay as much for their licenses as large zoos and circuses. In response, we have created a fee structure that takes into account the size of a business and the level of risk associated with its operation. For example, a small wildlife exhibitor with fewer than three employees will pay \$1,584 under the new act, replacing the current higher fee of \$2,288 for the renewal of a three-year licence. There are instances where some costs have increased, such as amending a licence to add new species or changing the way a species is managed. However, this reflects the true cost of assessing and issuing the licence and the cost will depend on the type of amendment, with a lower fee for minor amendments as opposed to major amendments. My department will guide businesses through these changes as we transition and the department has already been doing work with individual exhibitors to talk through these new changes. I am very pleased to introduce this landmark improvement of legislation. It supports businesses in their wish to add new attractions and responsibly manages the welfare of exhibited animals while protecting the environment and community from biosecurity risks while meeting the animal welfare expectations of the community.

Mr LAST: Minister, I go back to that forestry asset management plan on page 10 of the SDS under the heading 'Administered Items' which states—

Forestry Assets: Holds surplus assets that were transferred back to the Government prior to the sale of Forestry Plantations Queensland to the private sector. The department has been developing and implementing an asset management plan for these assets.

I repeat my question: when can we expect to see the government's forestry asset management plan relating to the surplus assets that were transferred back to the government prior to the sale of Forestry Plantations Queensland to the private sector?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I ask the director-general to answer that question and provide that detail.

Dr Woods: Thank you, Minister. I will actually request the Deputy Director-General of Fisheries and Forestry to come forward and provide detail on that question since it is a detailed question of operational management.

Mr Spencer: Mr Last, we already have a plan in place and we are implementing it. It deals with the assets that, as you have said, the department is managing after the sale of HQP. Those assets are fuel storage tanks, and we have 22 of those; the Jimna Fire Tower; two properties at Yarraman; the Beerburrum nursery; the Beerburrum office; and herbicide pits across the state mainly in plantation areas, and there are 55 of those. Last year we spent about \$390,000 dealing with those issues. They are difficult because of their nature, particularly things like herbicide pits. This month we hope to remove another fuel storage tank and we expect to spend around \$60,000 on that. With regard to the Jimna Fire Tower, we are getting expert engineering advice on that because it is of some concern to us from a safety point of view. It is quite an old structure and it has some very serious issues. Hopefully in six days time we will have settlement on the sale of one of the properties at Yarraman. The other one remains on the market. With regard to the Beerburrum nursery, we are negotiating with our friends in the department of transport because it may well be an area that is required for extension of the rail system. The Beerburrum office is currently being leased to HQPlantations.

Mr LAST: Just in terms of—

CHAIR: You have to direct your question back to the minister.

Mr LAST: Sorry, Mr Chair. Minister, through you I ask Mr Spencer: in terms of the ongoing financial liability, do you have any projections?

Mr Spencer: Yes. I would expect that this year we will spend \$328,000 in that area. That will bring our total expenditure on the plan to \$1,138,000.

Mr LAST: Thank you for that. Minister, I take you back to the jobs related question and your response regarding the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance. Given the skyrocketing unemployment in rural and regional Queensland—and it is well documented—would you say that the establishment of that alliance has been a failure?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. The short answer to that question is, no, I would not say it is failing. As I said, this is an industry-led initiative and the feedback from industry is that this is the way to support agricultural enterprises to get the skills and labour for those jobs that they need. There is no simple response to the challenging issue around unemployment, and in those areas unemployment is not just located in one particular sector. It is a very broad and entrenched problem that takes in all levels of government, including federal government policy, state government policy, local governments as well as private enterprise. The general issue around employment across-the-board in regional and rural areas falls within Minister Grace's portfolio as Minister for Employment.

In relation to the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance, as I said, the alliance was formed in consultation with industry, and this is the way that industry as the experts identified we would help their particular specialist needs. Again, we had Queensland Farmers' Federation, AgForce, Growcom, Canegrowers and Cotton Growers. There are a range of programs that are about ensuring ongoing access to employers. Collectively, the rural jobs initiatives will ensure that our agriculture and horticulture sectors will be able to address common workforce issues such as seasonal labour shortages in an informed and uniform way, but it is outside my portfolio to talk about unemployment in other sectors that do not relate to my portfolio. Employment in the sector will be driven by the overall strength of the industry and the capacity of firms to employ. I am very optimistic about the future of the sector and there is a lot of optimism within industry itself about these initiatives.

Mr LAST: Are you satisfied that it is the best use of government funds with regard to this initiative? Do you propose any changes going forward?

Ms DONALDSON: As I said, this is something that we listened to industry as the experts in their fields on the best way forward. Industry identified that the best way to address the skills shortages and seasonal shortages was to develop skilled workers. Rather than having people come in and leave so then they have to continually retrain, by growing the workforce in a sustainable way so that they can have an ongoing workforce was something that they identified. I think it is arrogant to think that government knows better than industry around how they do their business. I am happy to be a minister that listens and consults with industry and follows through on those matters that industry tells us are the things that they need.

Mr LAST: Surely, Minister, government has a lead role to play in this. We are talking about taxpayer funds here.

Mrs GILBERT: Mr Chair, the minister has answered this question about five times now.

Mr LAST: Mr Chair, it is a key initiative and it is a program that the government has given a lot of publicity to. They are hanging their hat on this initiative and there are, as I said, skyrocketing levels of unemployment in rural and regional Queensland and the agricultural sector in particular is struggling. I would like the minister to elaborate on whether she is happy with that program or whether she thinks it needs further changes.

Ms DONALDSON: I am happy to answer that question.

CHAIR: The minister is happy to answer.

Ms DONALDSON: I am pleased to acknowledge that the shadow minister identified how well known it is considering some of his colleagues did not believe it even existed. As I said, this is something in my conversations with industry they are very optimistic about and I am very pleased with this initiative in this sector. I think it will bring long-term benefits and stabilise those jobs for young people who are looking to get in and get the skills. This will be a great opportunity for them to do that and match their skills and match employees with employers.

Mr LAST: Thank you, Minister. I will move on to my next question. Minister, can you explain to the committee your reasons for slashing funding to the Queensland sugar industry's dedicated research and development organisation, Sugar Research Australia? Why have you decided to cut funding to SRA at a time when the industry is battling to identify the cause of the destructive yellow canopy syndrome?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I am happy to sit and have a conversation all day about slashing and cutting to the industry, but the member should remember that through the Queensland government the department will continue to invest \$2.85 million in sugarcane RD&E with Sugar Research Australia in 2016-17. The sugar industry is an important industry to Queensland and it injects significant dollars into rural economies and provides numerous employment opportunities. As we know, Queensland accounts for approximately 95 per cent of the total Australian raw sugar production and the department investment supports SRA to deliver a large number of sugarcane related research projects.

My department will continue to support research into solving yellow canopy syndrome by providing funds to SRA for four existing projects. The department's support of sugarcane RD&E through the grant to SRA has provided significant benefits to both the sugarcane industry and to Queensland. Some of those highlights include assisting farmers to transition to and adopt precision technologies through the development of online support tools and apps; increasing productivity through improved yield monitoring; remote sensing technologies to identify and manage pest infestations and improved breeding programs; analysing mill data to determine producer productivity levels; investigating the high and low achievers and developing customised extension programs to target low achievers, with the overall aim of increasing productivity; and helping to address the yellow canopy syndrome through the department's investment of \$847,851 in 2015-16 across four research projects. So far, as we know, research efforts have ruled out a number of potential causes. However, the cause is still unknown.

As part of the development of the agriculture and food RD&E blueprint, the department will review and consider future funding past 2016-17 for sugar cane RD&E. My department recently commissioned an external agency to review its investment in sugar cane RD&E through SRA. One of the areas investigated was the research related to the use and release of nutrients into the environment. The review found that Six Easy Steps, a region-specific nutrient management guideline for all sugarcane-growing areas, has been developed. It is estimated that 60 per cent of Queensland growers are using Six Easy Steps. Six Easy Steps provides better management of key inputs and has enabled producers in sensitive areas to reduce off-farm impact, which has reduced impact on areas such as the Great Barrier Reef and has increased farm and industry sustainability.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. With reference to page 6 of the SDS, will the Minister outline how the Palaszczuk government is stepping up its efforts to protect producers from wild dogs, which I know is a real issue after being around the country myself?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the chair for the question. Members will be aware that the Palaszczuk government made an election commitment to provide \$5 million over three years to tackle the problem of wild dogs and feral cats. They will also be aware that, through collaboration with the federal government, we were able to announce a \$15 million feral pest initiative and a significant program to build cluster fencing—a greater contribution indeed than has ever been made by a Queensland government. That funding is now rolling out to local councils and natural resource management groups.

For some time we have been discussing with producers the scale of the wild dog problem and, in particular, its impact on the sheep industry. On May Day in Barcaldine, the Premier committed an additional \$5 million to further expand wild dog fencing, with the specific intention of breathing new life into the sheep and wool industry in Western Queensland. Flock numbers have declined dramatically—from 17 million in 1991 to two million today—but we are advised that, with the protection of fencing, graziers of sheep can restock with confidence. Our intention is to stimulate an industry that will significantly boost economic activity in towns in Western Queensland—economic activity that will create new jobs and secure the future of those communities. The funding initiative will be of great benefit to landholders, fencing contractors and agricultural supply companies.

The Premier also announced two new wild dog fencing commissioners to support the existing oversight group and advise on the most appropriate way to spend this additional funding to get the best results for the industry. Those commissioners are former Murweh shire mayor Mark O'Brien and the former member for Gregory, Vaughan Johnson, who started their positions on 1 July. The feral pest initiative oversight group, including the wild dog commissioners, recently met on 14 July to review the progress of the initiative and to start discussions on the rollout of the additional funding.

I would also like to inform the committee of what Mr Johnson told *Queensland Country Life*. I will quote directly here—

I'm very pleased to be a part of this ... Rural Queensland is sick of being second class citizens.

Lawrence Springborg is a good mate, but the former government didn't give us the recognition we deserve.

The former member for Gregory went further. He said that the Newman-Nicholls government that he had been a part of 'had only paid lip service to western areas'. I hope the members of the opposition will recognise that our efforts to protect producers from wild dogs are not only appreciated by those who stand to benefit from them, as it is Labor that is delivering for the bush. I hope that the LNP in Queensland will support our call for this additional \$5 million to be at least matched at the federal level so that we can revitalise the sheep industry. We are delivering where those opposite failed. We are fighting the battle against invasive pest animals and plants on multiple fronts and we are delivering for Queensland producers.

Mrs GILBERT: Minister, with reference to page 6 of the SDS, what impact will the puppy farms legislation have on stopping puppy farms?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. This new scheme aims to end puppy farming in Queensland by removing puppy farm breeders from the market while providing prospective dog owners with greater assurances that their dog was bred by a reputable breeder. To inform potential purchasers of puppies, an extensive public awareness campaign will support the scheme, urging prospective purchasers to buy dogs only from registered breeders. The new scheme aims to end puppy farming in Queensland by removing puppy farm breeders from the market.

I am happy to inform the committee that as part of this year's budget there is an increase in the operational funds for the RSPCA, to bring the total to half a million dollars a year. RSPCA Queensland Chief Executive Mark Townend praised the commitment. He said that this will help enormously, that fuel alone costs them over \$300,000 annually and that this money will also help them increase their resources to help investigate organised crime activities such as dogfighting. This boost will definitely help. This committee, which reviewed the legislation, knows that Labor's election commitment has now been met and that illegal puppy farms have no place to hide in Queensland.

Mr MADDEN: Minister, with reference to page 14 of the SDS, could you outline how the \$3 million allocated to the RSPCA Queensland for refurbishment of their premises in the north of the state will be spent? How will this allocation result in higher standards of animal welfare?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government is providing \$1.5 million per annum over two years, in 2016-17 and 2017-18, as a grant to the RSPCA for facility upgrades in Cairns and Townsville respectively. The RSPCA works with the Queensland government to ensure high animal welfare standards and regulatory compliance by animal owners. The RSPCA does this through its delivery of a range of programs and educational services to the community. The government works in partnership with the RSPCA to deliver a range of compliance and investigative services.

The RSPCA obviously welcomes the additional funds for its facilities in Townsville and Cairns. Mr Townend from the RSPCA said that the funding for the Cairns and Townsville shelters would allow the organisation to carry out vital refurbishments. Having visited both facilities and met the staff there and seen the animals in care, I can say firsthand that this money will make a wonderful difference for

these communities. An amount of \$1.5 million of that funding will be spent to rebuild the Cairns shelter. A further \$1.5 million will provide new veterinary facilities and replace the existing dog isolation holding areas in Townsville's RSPCA shelter.

The vast majority of the work that the RSPCA does to prevent animal cruelty, rehome abandoned or mistreated pets and treat sick animals is funded through donations. The bulk of the money raised goes directly on front-line care of animals. Sadly, despite all the public education and community sentiment, there are always going to be people who mistreat or abandon their pets, or who are cruel to wildlife. That is why it is so important that the government is able to provide infrastructure funding, as the Palaszczuk government has done, to ensure that the facilities are up to the task. As minister, I am pleased with what the Labor government is doing to improve animal welfare.

Mrs MILLER: My question, Minister, is in relation to feral pigs. What is the process for a person, whether they are a farmer or not, who has problem with feral pigs to seek assistance? I ask this because it appears that there is bureaucratic ping-pong going on between local government and local DPI officers and the locals are stranded in the middle.

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. As the member rightly points out, feral pigs are widely spread and particularly have significant environmental and agricultural impacts. Under Queensland legislation, the responsibility for feral pig control rests with the landholder. Feral pig populations in some areas can pose a greater risk and there are varying levels of control expected. For further detail around the department's interface with local government, I will pass that question on to the director-general.

Dr Woods: As with most other pests and diseases that are handled by Biosecurity Queensland, there is a responsibility that is shared between landholders, local government and state government with occasional situations where the Commonwealth government also contributes support. In relation to feral pigs, there are a range of different investments across the state. Obviously, this is most intensely a problem in North Queensland. For detail of how a landholder should approach this problem, I will call on the Chief Biosecurity Officer, Jim Thompson.

Dr Thompson: The issue with feral pigs across the state is a really difficult one. Feral pigs, as you know, are spread right across the state, particularly in the wetter areas, but in dry areas in drought they can cause significant damage as well.

The legislation puts the responsibility for the management of all pests and weeds on the landholder. They have to manage it themselves in the way that suits them the best. The role of the state government is to provide legislation, to provide information to make sure that people have the best options available for them, to work with local governments and to work with landholders to ensure that coordination and control is done in a way that is sustainable. It is very easy to have control programs that do not last for any length of time. We do research—and we have done research for many years—on the best methods of controlling feral pigs and we continue to foster research nationally as well to try to come up with the best systems.

In relation to your issue about dealing with feral pigs at the local level, landholders need to be working with local governments, which should have a pest management plan in place—and feral pigs would almost certainly be part of that. Where there are problems in those areas, the state government is prepared to facilitate and work through those issues and try to make sure that the issues locally are dealt with.

CHAIR: Thank you. With reference to page 6 of the SDS, how are dairy producers meant to meet their general biosecurity obligation under the new management regime that has been introduced?

Ms DONALDSON: Thank you, Chair, for the question. The Biosecurity Act 2014 commenced on 1 July 2016. From that date, a general biosecurity obligation now applies to all people who deal in livestock. It is an offence to breach the general biosecurity obligation. Producers are required under the general biosecurity obligation to do what is reasonable and practicable to prevent or minimise the likelihood of infection with Johne's disease.

For a dairy farmer, reasonable and practical measures they can take to discharge their general biosecurity obligations when introducing new animals on their farm could include obtaining a health declaration or statement prior to introducing the animal that states whether or not the animal originates from a dairy herd with a Johne's disease assurance score and what the score is; determining the conditions they purchased animals under, using tools to assess the health status and risk profile of the animals; and considering the likelihood of the animal being infected with Johne's disease.

The Queensland government will continue to work with industry to develop and promote tools to assist producers to meet their general biosecurity obligations in buying or selling cattle, including risk assessment tools, cattle health statements and regional biosecurity plans. The Queensland government, through Biosecurity Queensland, will be assisting dairy farmers with the JD framework transition.

Mrs GILBERT: In reference to page 3 of the SDS, can you explain the work that is carried out by the department to encourage sustainable farming practices?

Ms DONALDSON: Thank you to the member for the question. I would like to recognise that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is a powerhouse of research and development for the farming sector. Many of our natural resources are under threat from salinity, soil acidity, pollution of waterways by nutrients and loss of native vegetation so we direct a lot of effort into sustainable farming approaches and techniques. Agricultural industries understand the need for environmentally sound protection. Queensland producers actively engage in projects supported by programs such as the Reef Water Quality Protection Program, the Queensland Wetlands Program, Healthy Waterways and Landcare. Our producers also enthusiastically support industry-led whole-of-farming system programs such as the grains, cotton and graziers' best management practice and the previous Labor government's ClimateQ program.

My department works with industry and individual growers to research sustainable farming practices which improve soil, air and water quality, reduce the need for biocides and chemical fertilisers, boosts production, appeals to supply chain buyers and consumers and strengthens profitability. We also work with industry to harmonise these practices into whole-of-farming system programs for coordinated industry rollout. Some of the strategies and techniques we promote include precision farming, use of biodegradable materials, reduced biocide usage assisted by our integrated pest management research, composting, sustainable grazing land management, converting livestock manure into fertilisers, using methane gas from piggery effluent ponds to heat piggeries, auditing and redesigning irrigation systems to save electricity and water use on dairy farms, using sandworms to remove nutrients from wastewater from aquaculture ponds, more efficient irrigation and recycling and crop rotation.

Since 1999, the Queensland Land Use Mapping Program has identified areas moving into progressively more intensive agricultural production. While this change is gradual, it corresponds with an increase of \$2.17 billion in agricultural exports since 2001. Across Queensland, growing numbers of producers are embracing sustainable farming as they can see benefits for their enterprises. One tomato grower has had great success with a compost making system that he developed to overcome the impacts of his activities on soil quality. By using waste products from the sugarcane industry there is less use of inorganic fertiliser and improved soil and plant health, water infiltration rates for watering, productivity and fruit quality. This grower is now supplying compost to other farmers who also want the same benefits. Similarly, the ginger industry has adopted soil health practices to overcome significant losses from fungal diseases. These practices not only suppress the disease but also improve establishment, growth and yield.

We will continue to work hand in glove with farmers to promote sustainable farming. Sustainable farming makes use of science and innovation to produce the food we need while protecting and improving our natural environment. The Palaszczuk government is supporting our growers to advance Queensland agriculture in domestic and overseas markets and build jobs for the future.

Mr MADDEN: In reference to page 3 of the SDS, can you advise the committee of some of the innovations in the agricultural sector?

Ms DONALDSON: Thank you for the question. I know that visitors to the Advance Queensland Innovation and Investment Summit in Brisbane at the end of April were absolutely spellbound by the ingenuity on display across a range of sectors. The summit was an ideal platform to display the technological advances that have the capability to transform agricultural production. Farm robotics, a new farmed fish product and smaller fruit trees were just some of the agricultural breakthroughs showcased by my department. As minister, I am proud to say that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries demonstrated its credentials as a powerhouse of research and development for the agricultural sector.

The innovation summit was an important opportunity to promote home-grown innovation to international investors. My department highlighted the research and development that has gone into a variety of initiatives, such as, in the space of eight years, helping to take cobia from a little known wild fish to an award-winning new seafood dish which is served in high-end restaurants in Australia, Qantas

Business Class and was recently on *MasterChef*. Queensland is now producing 100 tonnes per year of this high-quality farmed fresh fish. I had the opportunity to visit a cobia farm in North Queensland back in March and it was an impressive experience. The research behind this program is a partnership between the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, the university sector and private industry and is just one example of how we work closely with non-government partners to achieve economic gains for agricultural industries.

Another program on show was the Small Tree High Productivity initiative. This involves reducing the size of avocado, mango and macadamia trees through a range of agronomic practices to increase yield per hectare. Of course, we could not pass up the opportunity to further promote the Queen Garnett plum. Developed by our horticultural researchers, the Queen Garnett has become something of a sensation in retail circles. Dubbed the super plum because of its high antioxidant levels and potential health properties, the Queen Garnett is now available in shops and is in very high demand. It represents the culmination of many years of research and development by the department into new varieties of fruit and vegetables, providing products meeting evolving consumer expectations and preferences and tapping into lucrative new markets.

We are also working in the area of farm robotics in a joint project with the Queensland University of Technology which is aimed at making Queensland a global leader in agricultural automation. By putting on display our successes and promising works in progress, we stimulated new business ideas and attracted those groups who want to invest in and support the progression of these ideas. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries display was extremely popular with attendees, with many eager to try the department-bred Kalei apple that this committee was told about last year. For those of the committee who will be attending the Ekka this year, you are in for a very sweet surprise if you sample the fruit at the Queensland government display.

Mr KATTER: With reference to the department's strategic objective to support agribusiness in Queensland—referring to SDS page 2—what efforts are being made by the department to support the longevity of the dairy sector, particularly the smaller suppliers in the domestic market who do not have the opportunity of tapping into the export market? Again I am referring mainly to that market imbalance between the producer, the processor and the retailer?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I have an answer to the question on notice from the member for Bundamba that I can provide now.

CHAIR: Answer the question that has been presented to you first and we will come back to that.

Ms DONALDSON: Yes. The department is working currently with Austrade to explore opportunities for the transfer of dairy technology and services to China. In addition to the department's focus on improving the profitability of the northern dairy industry, Dairy Australia is supporting Queensland's RD&E through a major project focused on improving the efficiency of the feed base. As the feed base is the largest operating cost of a dairy, the developmental trial at the Gatton dairy facility is evaluating and demonstrating more profitable production systems for dairy producers.

The department is also working on other projects supporting improved water use efficiency and industry business benchmarking, including the Dairy and Fodder Water for Profit program which aims to assist dairy farmers and commercial fodder producers to improve water and energy use and nutrient management practices. This program is delivered by the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Support funding is provided through the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

The Queensland Dairy Accounting Scheme service is provided by the department, offering farm management, accounting and analysis of various dairy production systems. This analysis provides physical and financial information to help dairy farmers make better business decisions. In addition to that, I might pass over to the director-general for some further information.

Dr Woods: It is worth just making the link, in addition to what the minister has said, that much of our work with the dairy industry is intended to assist in supporting extra milk supply with the intention of putting the industry in a position where it can seek export markets. The opportunity to be able to export milk in competition to the major purchasers of milk for domestic supply in the retail sector is really what will in the long-term underpin price stability and potentially price growth. Currently, the Queensland dairy industry is pretty much restricted to only being able to sell on domestic markets.

Mr KATTER: I refer to SDS page 2 in relation to promoting equitable access to fishing resources. Prior to 30 June 2016 it cost a family of recreational fishers \$41 a year for a Stocked Impoundment Permit. On 1 July it jumped to \$100 per year. Can the minister explain the reason behind this increase?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. The Stocked Impoundment Permit schemes have been nearly doubled this year and the permit fees will be fixed for five years as at 1 July, but I will pass to the director-general for further detail about those fees.

Dr Woods: Thank you, Minister. In relation to the changes with the SIPs groups, the fee structure has also been revised as the number of scheme impoundments has been significantly increased. The fee structure now is built around every recreational fisher over the age of 18 buying a permit which allows them to fish in a scheme impoundment. This is due to the fact that it was difficult for inspectors to establish arguments about who was a partner of whom and who was eligible for what was previously essentially a family discount. To clarify that situation, and to also provide a situation where the fee structure reflected the fishing pressure that was put on the resource, every recreational fisher over the age of 18 is now required to buy a permit allowing them to fish in the scheme impoundment. Scheme permits though we have made much more easy to access. They are now digital, meaning there is no need to keep a paper permit safe and carry it around with you. When a fisher buys a permit online, over the phone or at an agent, the permit is instantly emailed and text messaged to the fisher and that means that a fisher can simply display the permit on their phone if requested by an inspector. For fishers who prefer to purchase their permit in person, they are now available through 586 Australia Post outlets and in those circumstances they will receive a paper permit at the point of sale. This is an increase of over 430 locations to where fishers previously could buy a permit in person.

Just to clarify the fees, for simplicity we have now fixed the fees for a five-year term so that makes it much easier for fishers to know what they will need to pay from year to year. The prices are \$10 for a weekly permit, \$50 for a yearly permit and \$36 for those who are entitled to a discount yearly permit and those prices will remain the same until 2021.

Mr KATTER: One final question. Page 6 of the SDS states the objective to prevent potential biohazards. I wanted to ask what initiatives there are for prickly acacia prevalent on the Northern Central Downs and also native Navua sedge grass on the Atherton Tablelands?

Ms DONALDSON: The issue of pests and weeds in Queensland is a significant challenge. So that the committee has some context overall of what the department is dealing with when it comes to pests and weeds in Queensland, the Queensland Herbarium has recorded at least 1,260 naturalised weed species in Queensland. You can appreciate that it is a very challenging issue for Biosecurity Queensland.

In relation to your question about prickly acacia, the War on Western Weeds project is occurring. It involves landholders, local governments and NRM groups in Central and North Queensland. To date, the project has undertaken a number of activities. They have undertaken research into some innovative control options developed by landholders, such as misters and scatter guns that more efficiently distribute herbicides, and an improved understanding of seed longevity and seed spread along watercourses and via livestock movement to better inform management decisions. They have completed a pilot project known as the Good Neighbour Study with the Flinders Shire Council, Southern Gulf NRM and others to measure the cost of removing prickly acacia along property boundaries in identified and imported new biological control agents to support on-the-ground management of prickly acacia and bellyache bush. I have been to some of the properties up there and seen firsthand prickly acacia and the impact that it has on those environments.

In 2015, the Palaszczuk government, together with the federal government, announced that \$1 million of the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative funding was going to Desert Channels Queensland to help tackle prickly acacia infestations in Lake Eyre Basin and the adjoining Southern Gulf river catchment. I have met with representatives of Desert Channel Queensland and looked at the work that they have been doing. They have provided me with a progress report indicating that on-ground works have commenced, with field surveys and property assessments undertaken along the Diamantina River, with its project partner, the Flinders Shire Council, having mapped prickly acacia infestations on 25 properties in the area.

The department's researchers will work with the CSIRO and other Queensland government agencies in the delivery of nationwide initiatives valued at over \$13 million over four years to find effective biocontrols to widely established weed species. Queensland will take the national lead on the implementation of the giant rat's-tail grass and prickly acacia components, and will be involved in other research components to find effective biocontrol solutions for some others. This research initiative will run for four years. It is expected that landowners will be invited to participate when the biocontrol research progresses to releasing agents in the field that can be integrated with conventional control methods. The department will continue to work with federal government agencies, industries, local governments and NRM groups to support cost-effective prickly acacia management that is sustainable.

In relation to your question on Navua sedge, Biosecurity Queensland will continue to provide the Tablelands Regional Council with the latest advice and educational material relating to Navua sedge control. Recently I have been to the Tablelands and seen the invasiveness of that particular weed. The department will also assist graziers with battling this issue, doing a range of things including organising a field day with stakeholders that have expertise in pasture management and herbicide control, facilitating some partnerships with industry, government and community to collectively contribute funding to support further research and extension efforts if gaps are identified, and Biosecurity officers will continue to assist all stakeholders to transition to the new pest management arrangements under the Biosecurity Act 2014.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. After the break you will have the opportunity to answer that question on notice, if possible, please. The committee will now adjourn for a short break. The hearing will resume at 11.30 with further consideration of the estimates for the department, as well as Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges and QRAA.

Proceedings suspended from 11.04 am to 11.30 am



CHAIR: The estimates hearing of the Agriculture and Environment Committee is now resumed. For the next two hours we will finish questions on the department and focus on estimates for Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges and QRAA. I now call the minister to answer a question on notice from prior to the break.

Ms DONALDSON: In relation to the question on notice from the member for Bundamba about the Wallangarra processing facility, I am advised that the government has received advice from Thomas Foods International, which is the owner of that facility, that the facility will be closed for an extended stand-down period from 8 July. The closure is due to an unprecedented shortage of livestock post the drought and extremely difficult global trading conditions. Meat and Livestock Australia has acknowledged that a national shortage of sheep has impacted supply. The nation's flock has declined from 75.5 million head in 2012-13 to 70 million in 2014-15. Queensland has exhibited a rapid decline in sheep numbers, decreasing from 3.5 million head in 2011-12 to a low of 2.1 million head in 2014-15. The processor/owner has advised that the closure should not be perceived as a permanent closure. However, the facility will be closed in the short to medium term.

At a regional level, the Department of State Development, in association with the Southern Downs Regional Council, has commenced discussions on what can be done to entice businesses to move to the Southern Downs region. On a broader scale, the investment the Palaszczuk government is making in wild dog fencing to revitalise the sheep industry is further work to try to support and grow the sheep industry in Queensland in the longer term.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you very much. It is very encouraging to note that the department reads the *Border Post*. Minister, I have a question in relation to Brexit and the referendum in the United Kingdom. What have you done so far to assist farmers and farming organisations to seize any initiatives to plan for any increased production should markets be opened up in Europe?

Ms DONALDSON: That is a very important question in this portfolio, because we do know that the demand for Australian and, in this context, especially Queensland agriculture and produce is growing, particularly in the Asian regions. In terms of the detail around some of those opportunities and emerging markets, I will hand over to the director-general.

Dr Woods: The Queensland government, through the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and in partnership with Trade & Investment Queensland, puts significant effort into facilitating the export trade of Queensland agricultural products. Those efforts range from technical assurance through negotiating the technical standards for access of product into particular markets to business support for businesses that are looking to grow exports and then support for, particularly, visiting groups from partner countries where the Commonwealth is engaged in country-to-country negotiations about market access.

In relation to Brexit, we have done a preliminary examination of what the opportunities might be. It is true to say that those are not yet even slightly clear. There are no individual trade agreements at this point negotiated between the UK and any other country. Therefore, we are not in a position to understand either what the nature of a bilateral arrangement with the UK would be or at what time that might become available. We are also conscious that the Commonwealth government had begun a process of negotiating a potential free trade agreement with the European community, which is also a major trade partner for Queensland and, potentially, an increasing trade partner for some parts of the Queensland agriculture sector. We are watching to see whether the exit of the UK from the EU has any impact on the rate at which that free trade agreement progresses.

The entry of the UK into the European community way back in the late sixties had significant impacts on access for Australian product into the UK market. At this point, it really is a market only for a relatively small number of specialised products. We are not in a good position, until we see something from the UK about what their approach is going to be to trade agreements, to provide advice to any individual businesses. As the minister has indicated, our focus at the moment is significantly on the Asia-Pacific region and, in particular, on those countries where recent free trade agreements have provided a clear path, where Australian and Queensland products will be more competitive and, therefore, where there is real immediate opportunity to expand our sales.

CHAIR: Minister, in reference to page 3 of the SDS, what is Queensland's Climate Risk and Drought Resilience Program, when will it be delivered and what will it mean for the farmers of Queensland?

Ms DONALDSON: As I have travelled throughout Queensland, I have seen firsthand the devastating effects of drought on the land. From speaking with producers and seeing their properties, I have seen the effects not just on the land but also on livestock. The Palaszczuk government will deliver a drought preparedness and climate risk mitigation program. This program is a \$3.5 million budget commitment to improve the overall performance of farm businesses and their preparedness for climate risks such as drought. The program is a partnership between the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, DSITI and the University of Southern Queensland. This partnership will establish the Queensland Drought Mitigation Centre. The program will springboard a significant number of projects, including expanding the Grazing Best Management Practice program to Western Queensland, improving seasonal forecasts for Northern Australia, conducting workshops, developing new tools and updating existing tools that help producers build drought and climate risk resilience into their business planning, and updating regional longer term climate forecasts. This government has committed to maintaining, as I said previously, current drought programs through to 2018 and this commitment will be honoured.

For the information of the committee, it is general practice for DRAS drought funding to be budgeted year by year. In the meantime, it is important that this new program is seen to deliver tangible results in the 2016-17 year. I expect that some of the research projects will be able to commence by the end of this month and some of the workshops and extension programs should commence by September this year.

Mrs GILBERT: Minister, I have a question about the use of drones. In reference to page 2 of the SDS, can you inform the committee on Safe Food's use of drones and how they can be used in the agricultural industry?

Ms DONALDSON: Safe Food is a Queensland government statutory body. They recognise that aerial drones can be utilised in agriculture. They can be used under a wide range of conditions, at any time, as a cost-effective solution when the use of home resources is not a viable option. There is remote monitoring of fences, stock and water. Those are just a few examples of where this technology can be deployed. It can also be effective in the areas of pest management, imaging, mapping, irrigation management and animal welfare. From a regulatory perspective, drones have the potential to be used for purposes such as remote surveillance, inspection and mapping. Safe Food is currently exploring these options as alternatives to more traditional and resource intensive approaches, together with collaborative uses with industry. An example of this is that it can be used as an educative tool in an agricultural food production system.

I am happy to inform the committee that I saw a drone in action when I visited Safe Food Queensland. The staff generously allowed me to pilot the drone. It was a very new experience. It took a little while to get used to it, but I had a great time doing that.

For increased productivity, producers can make use of drones from the homestead, instead of having to travel throughout their property. It is a positive step in ensuring that our primary industries will be able to maintain and improve their properties with ease.

Mr MADDEN: Minister, following up from my previous question and in reference to page 2 of the SDS, could you outline Queensland's research and development efforts in relation to robotics and its benefits for Queensland farmers?

Ms DONALDSON: Queensland farmers seek to keep up with global demand while maintaining the delivery of high-quality produce that has long-term sustainability. It is why they are turning to technology, particularly agriculture robots, to help them remain competitive. Robots have the potential to play a vital role in helping farmers manage their daily operations, as well as helping inform management decisions by collecting data.

The department currently invests in a research development and extension robotics project with QUT that is worth \$3 million and is due to finish in January 2017. The project aims to fast-track the commissioning of farm robotic technology, thereby making Queensland a global leader in agriculture automation and innovation. The Queensland University of Technology has designed a revolutionary new agricultural robot called Agbot II to enable new ways to manage weeds and crop nutrients in farms. The robot's cameras, sensors, software and other electronics enable it to navigate through a field, apply fertiliser, detect and classify weeds, and kill weeds either mechanically or chemically. This is vital for Queensland as currently weeds cost Australian farmers around \$1.5 billion per annum in weed control activities and a further \$2.5 billion per annum in lost agricultural production. Agbot II promises to reduce the cost of weeding operations by approximately 90 per cent, which could save the Australian agricultural sector \$1.3 billion per annum.

QUT has found that agricultural robots can also increase the uptake of variable rate technology of fertiliser with a potential average benefit of \$17 per hectare. Continuing with their fantastic work, QUT has developed a new prototype robotic platform, known as Harvey, for harvesting capsicums. Initial results show a fruit detaching success rate of 90 per cent, compared to a previous six per cent in similar testing scenarios. The combination of the state-of-the-art robotic vision software and novel crop manipulation tools enables the successful harvesting of the crop and promises significant benefits for horticulture growers. Having seen this technology firsthand and being very impressed by what is on offer, I can vouch that Queensland farmers have a bright future in utilising robotics on their properties.

CHAIR: I will hand over to the opposition for questioning.

Mr LAST: Minister, I take you back to your response regarding sugar research funding. Was Queensland government funding to SRA last year \$4.05 million and is it \$2.85 million this year? Does that not constitute a cut?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I will pass that question to the director-general to answer.

Dr Woods: The Queensland government has a longstanding core investment in sugarcane research development and extension with Sugar Research Australia which will amount to \$2.85 million in 2016-17. The previous year was the final year of an initiative which was a new initiative of the former government. It was a fixed-term commitment of \$4.6 million over four years. That reached its conclusion on 30 June and, as is the normal situation with fixed life funding under initiatives of governments, it has now been completed. In a sense, it is not a withdrawal of funding; it is a completion of a particular funding tranche that was identified by the former government.

Mr LAST: Minister, can we move on to biosecurity? Doesn't your media statement of 15 June, which I table, announcing the dumping of Queensland's protected zone status for Johne's disease, stand as a statement of failure, a statement of your government's failure to properly protect Queensland's 19,000 beef and dairy producers regarding doing the right thing for Queensland's largest primary industry?

CHAIR: I seek leave from the committee to table that. There being no objection, it is so ordered.

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. Industry has been calling on a reduced regulatory burden associated with the management of Johne's disease since 2012, and we have listened. As I previously mentioned, the new national framework has been agreed and implemented. The new strategy shifts from a framework of regulatory control to one of industry management driven by biosecurity measures at the individual farm level. As you mentioned, regulated zones will no longer be recognised under the new national framework, and the individual property will become the focus of management of JD including for certification for live cattle exports.

The changes lessen the impacts of regulatory control on affected producers and allow them to manage JD in a way that best suits their enterprise. This is an important example of where government will get out of the way of industry and let industry get on with business. The Queensland government is committed to working within the national system to raise awareness and capabilities in JD management to benefit all Queensland livestock producers.

Not everyone agrees with the proposed changes. However, they do align with the nationally agreed framework for the management of JD. This was developed in conjunction with industry, including the national dairy and beef cattle industries and the sheep, meat and wool industries through the Queensland JD review committee. As I mentioned previously, members of that committee include AgForce, the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation, the Cattle Council of Australia, the Australian Veterinary Association, Animal Health Australia and the Australian Livestock and Property Agents Association Ltd.

There is a lot that government and industry can achieve by working together under the new framework. It is well recognised that education and awareness are key elements in any change process and that both government and industry have a critical role to play. As I said, the government is working with packages for industry. I think what the shadow minister fails to appreciate is that this approach has the business interests of producers at its core. It empowers them and removes something that I am surprised he is not championing which is the removal of what those opposite always want to get rid of—red tape and burdensome and unnecessary government oversight.

The government will continue, though, to work with the beef, dairy, sheep and goat industries, as I said previously, and will still be there to support and protect producers. JD will remain a notifiable disease to support ongoing market access obligations. Government will work with industry to develop and promote tools to assist producers in buying or selling cattle including risk assessment tools, cattle health statements and regional biosecurity plans.

Mr LAST: I will come back to the interests of beef producers in a minute. Minister, can you provide clarification on the time line surrounding the release of your media statement announcing the dumping of Queensland's protected zone status for BJD, because your media statement was issued in the heat of budget week before the department had final feedback on draft policy documents from industry representatives on the BJD review committee? To be absolutely clear, can you advise this committee exactly when final feedback from the BJD review committee was received? Was it before the media statement I have tabled was issued or after?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I will have to take that on notice. I will get that information brought forward.

Mr LAST: Minister, you claim in that release that the decision had broad industry support. Why did you make that claim when the Dairyfarmers' Organisation—and I attended their rally out there, as you did—say the exact opposite? Indeed, in a survey of its members, 96 per cent of respondents wanted Queensland's protected zone status maintained.

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. As I previously mentioned, the JD review committee membership includes a broad range of stakeholders. The Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation is one of those organisations. However, that committee also includes AgForce, the Cattle Council of Australia, the Australian Veterinary Association, Animal Health Australia and the Australian Livestock and Property Agents Association. There was broad support for this way forward. If the member could point out how many members 96 per cent of QDO represents? How many actual members is that?

Mr PERRETT: No. I don't think the minister can ask questions.

CHAIR: Continue your answer, Minister.

Ms DONALDSON: In relation to any further detail, I will forward that question to the director-general for some more detail.

Dr Woods: I call the Chief Biosecurity Officer, Jim Thompson, to come forward and run through the details of the current approach to BJD management.

Dr Thompson: The issue with BJD management is complex, as you are aware. I guess it came to a head in 2012 and 2013 when we had massive cases in Queensland. That led to a huge concern nationally around the management of JD, and it did set up the review of national programs.

The overwhelming view of all other states, perhaps with the exception of Western Australia, was that the national system was not working properly and that we needed a national system to run with. The national system was reviewed over the last couple of years and the agreement was that we would deregulate—in effect, move away from the regulated approach in Queensland. There is no doubt that there have been different views in Queensland about that. Generally a lot of people were saying, 'We don't want this heavy-handed approach around quarantining and other things.' The decision was made nationally that those regulated areas would be removed.

It does not mean that we do not take seriously JD and JD introductions into Queensland. The new system is very much around producers having their own control. We have very much tried to work with producers and said we will put guidelines in place under the new legislation, under the general biosecurity obligation, that JD is not something we want in Queensland, and we have worked with them to look at how we might implement that.

It is true that there is still a difference of opinion by different groups. I guess the most obvious ones are the Dairyfarmers' Organisation where JD is obviously far more endemic in the southern states. The recent export of animals to Japan where it was picked up was an issue that was raised there. This

continues to be a difficult issue. In this type of management in a country like Australia where animals can be moved we have to work within a national system. The national system that has been developed is what is now considered to be the most appropriate approach.

Mr LAST: Minister, has the department surveyed the 18½ thousand or 19,000 commercial beef producers in Queensland? You talk about industry support. How many producers have actually been surveyed?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I will pass that question on to Dr Thompson.

Dr Thompson: We have not formally surveyed groups.

Mr LAST: Did you say you have not?

Dr Thompson: Yes. We have not formally surveyed across all beef producers in terms of their views. One of the things that we have been asked to do is do actual surveys of livestock herds to determine the prevalence of BJD, and that is something that we have indicated we will be doing within the new system as well.

Mr LAST: Minister, if you do that survey and the survey shows that the majority do not support your actions, will you accept that the protected zone should remain?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. As I outlined, industry peak bodies were on the JD committee. The way forward was something that was supported broadly by industry.

CHAIR: For the member, that was a hypothetical question. The minister cannot answer a hypothetical question.

Mr LAST: Minister, what guarantee can you provide that the decision the government has taken with BJD will not lead to a spread of this disease to the long-term detriment of our beef industry?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. Nobody can ever guarantee that nothing is ever going to happen. What I can guarantee is that Biosecurity Queensland takes its role very, very seriously in working with industry and with the sector. I am not going to engage in hypotheticals around what may or may not happen in the future.

Mr LAST: Minister, why didn't you follow the lead of Western Australia, which are determined not to lose their status? They have implemented interim border controls. Why not follow their lead?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. As I said, the decision was made by consultation and in line with industry. This is something that was highlighted in the Productivity Commission's draft report that government should get out of the way of industry and industry know better than anyone how to manage their business. They understand the risks. This is something that—

Mr LAST: Surely government has a role here, Minister, to protect—

CHAIR: If you can let the minister finish answering her question.

Ms DONALDSON: We will continue to engage with them and get feedback. The department does not disengage and then not regularly review what is happening. I am happy to pass to the director-general for some further detail about the JD situation.

Dr Woods: As has previously been outlined, the new national approach to the management of JD included as one of the key contributors the Cattle Council of Australia, which represents the beef cattle industry in Australia. Fifty per cent of Australia's beef cattle are in Queensland. That council signed on to the national approach. In terms of the size of both the beef industry and the much smaller dairy industry in Queensland, we are much more central to the national arrangements than is the case in Western Australia, where they are operating with a very small beef industry and a relatively small dairy industry largely focused on their domestic requirements. There is also much less geographical continuity between those industries and the industries in the rest of Australia.

In this particular case, the Queensland department was actively involved in the discussions around the national approach to the management of JD. It is an important disease but not one of the most easily spreadable or most difficult to control diseases. It is an endemic disease. In the case of endemic diseases and pests, as I referred to previously in answer to a question from the member for Bundamba, the normal practice is that this is a responsibility of business to manage. That is what is reflected in the approach that has been outlined by both the minister and the Chief Biosecurity Officer. The department, through Biosecurity Queensland, will continue to work with industry and support industry to ensure that individual businesses can be supported in managing the risk.

Ms DONALDSON: I just finish this by saying that this approach is consistent with the shared responsibility and risk based decision-making implemented under the Biosecurity Act 2014, which received bipartisan support when the now federal member for Groom shepherded that legislation through the parliament. That legislation commenced on 1 July 2016.

Mr LAST: Minister, given your responses today, will you now undertake to conduct a survey of beef producers in Queensland?

Ms DONALDSON: I am quite satisfied that I have answered the question. I also think the chief biosecurity officer answered the question about what consultation was undertaken.

CHAIR: I will move to government questions.

Mrs MILLER: Has there been any tied funding to the RSPCA in relation to the so-called wastage of greyhounds and also the Greyhound Adoption Program of Queensland? I am not talking about an increase in funding; I am talking about tied funding, specifically for greyhounds, as a result of community concerns about the ill-treatment and death of greyhounds in Queensland?

Ms DONALDSON: I think all of us here in this room find absolutely abhorrent the activities of some of those trainers in terms of the treatment of greyhounds. I am very pleased that there has been a spotlight shone on that industry to bring that into sharper focus. I am very pleased that there was an inquiry that looked into those activities. The issues around that particular industry are matters for the racing minister, Minister Grace. However, in relation to the activities of the RSPCA and funding that goes to animal welfare and the investigative activities, I will pass that over to the director-general to answer.

Dr Woods: Clearly the department has a general responsibility for animal welfare. The specific issues of animal welfare in relation to wastage, as you have termed it, in the racing industries are issues that are managed by the racing industry, as the minister has indicated.

Mrs MILLER: Director-General, I understand the governance of racing. I have specifically asked if there is any tied funding that has come from the department to the RSPCA specifically in relation to community concerns as a result of these inquiries? If there has been none, please just say so.

Dr Woods: There is no tied funding provided from this department for that specific purpose, but the \$250,000 that we have provided as an ongoing annual funding to the RSPCA is to assist it in meeting its costs as the agency that actually delivers on-the-ground services around animal welfare which could include any issues of animal cruelty that might occur in the context of the racing industries generally and in particular in relation to the greyhound industry.

Mrs MILLER: So it is all encompassed in the general funding?

Dr Woods: Correct.

Mrs MILLER: So there is no specific funding, even though the community has been up in arms about the greyhound industry.

CHAIR: With reference to page 36 of the SDS, will the minister tell the committee about the Primary Industry Productivity Enhancement Scheme and, in particular, the First Start program and the Sustainability Loan program and how this will benefit Queenslanders?

Ms DONALDSON: Under the Palaszczuk government, QRAA's Primary Industry Productivity Enhancement Scheme is thriving. Through this scheme we have been able to grant first-start and sustainability loans that will enable Queenslanders to acquire or establish their first primary production enterprise and enable producers to improve their farm productivity and sustainability.

First-start and sustainability loans are currently available up to \$650,000 and are available at concessional interest rates. The loans attract no fees or charges, with the option of joint lending with commercial banks available to those interested. Considering that over 80 per cent of Queensland is currently in drought, we have placed priority on increasing awareness and updating the sustainability loan scheme. It is important for Queensland farmers to be prepared and to have the funds to contribute to mitigation activities like predator fencing.

As of June 2016 there had been 180 applications totalling \$59.6 million net that had been approved. This has increased from 2014-15, which saw 162 applications with approvals totalling \$51 million. These figures include 104 sustainability loan approvals totalling \$29.6 million. This represents 58 per cent of all PIPES loan approvals, increasing from 56 per cent for the 2014-15 intake.

Two successful agricultural industries dominate the loan approvals, with 54 per cent of approved applications going to the beef cattle industry and 18 per cent to the sugar industry. Loan recipients in these industries have primarily used the funds to purchase property or infrastructure or do capital works.

Applicants who have received a loan were eligible if they met certain criteria, which included the ability to demonstrate the need for concessional finance, to provide adequate security and to demonstrate sound prospects for commercial viability in the long term.

The average age of applicants to PIPES is under 46 years. That is in contrast to the average age of producers in Queensland which is 60. The first-start loans will continue providing Queenslanders with the opportunity to enter primary production at an earlier age, with the average age of applicants in 2015-16 being 35 years.

I am happy to inform the committee that the government will be supporting the Primary Industry Productivity Enhancement Scheme, with loans being improved to reflect the higher capital requirements in agriculture. This includes doubling the sustainability loans to \$1.3 million and increasing the first-start loans from the current \$650,000 to \$2 million. I am sure that the primary producers of Queensland will welcome this initiative, which I am proud the Palaszczuk government has been able to implement.

Mrs GILBERT: With reference to page 3 of the SDS, can you explain what commercialising DAF's intellectual property actually means? Why is it not already happening?

Ms DONALDSON: This is a very interesting and exciting area. Commercialising intellectual property refers to the processes and activities that the department undertakes to bring it to market and make it available for industry to access. The specific commercialisation activity depends on the particular intellectual property. For example, the department has well-established processes for commercialising new varieties of horticulture and field crops. The department also does a lot of work in the area of extending non-commercial information and technologies to various industries.

The department already commercialises a range of intellectual property and received approximately \$3 million in 2015-16 from royalties and licences. The department has intellectual property that is unique and does not necessarily fit with the established commercialisation process. For this type of intellectual property the Queensland government has provided funding to pilot the technology commercialisation fund, which will attract private investment to take Department of Agriculture and Fisheries owned or co-owned intellectual property from the proof-of-concept stage through scale-up to commercial reality.

For Queensland the benefits of the technology commercialisation fund are more intellectual property will reach the market in a timely manner and be available for industry use and provide additional R and D funding. More royalties will be generated which, in turn, will be reinvested into R and D for the benefit of Queensland. Queensland will benefit from this election commitment from Labor that sees real investment in innovation. This will also see jobs for Queenslanders.

Mr MADDEN: I understand there has been a change in the leadership with regard to Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges. Could you outline if there has been any change in senior leadership and whether they have experience in the education sector?

Ms DONALDSON: This is an important question. I would like the committee to note that Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges does have a new chief executive officer. Under the act I, as minister, may, on recommendation of the board, appoint an executive officer. The board recommended Mr Mark Tobin. That is a recommendation that I endorsed.

Mr Tobin is experiencing his first estimates today and is here if the committee has any operational questions regarding Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges. Mr Tobin commenced his position on 23 May 2016. The committee may be aware that Mr Tobin was previously the college director of the Emerald Agricultural College. Furthermore, Mr Tobin has experience as a cattle producer and has a past history at Central Queensland University.

I am also happy to report that an agreement for the delivery of academic programs at Emerald, Bundaberg and Rockhampton was signed between Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges and Central Queensland University earlier this year. Students from CQU's agriculture degree commenced in semester 1 this year.

When I visited Emerald Agricultural College in June, Mr Tobin highlighted the changes that were being made to boost the student learning experience. Students may now undertake an embedded diploma delivered by QATC as part of the bachelor program, allowing students to transition from vocational training to an academic tertiary degree with CQU. With Mr Tobin in this important role, the close association with QATC and CQU will continue to be explored.

Mrs MILLER: I refer to page 29 of the SDS. I refer to the average cost per competency successfully completed. I was wondering how this cost compares with TAFE colleges or private providers?

Ms DONALDSON: I will ask Mr Mark Tobin from QATC to answer that question for you.

Mr Tobin: Our competencies, particularly at our residential colleges, are more expensive than our TAFE counterparts. However, that is based on the quality we provide with an actual production system. They live in residence with us and experience a holistic program. It is very difficult for us to be able to compete against another product that does not provide that. We go to market and hold our hands on our hearts that we provide a quality program with actual production experience, showing them how to make a profit relevant to the industry. There is an associated cost with it.

Mrs MILLER: How much more expensive is it for you to provide this training than the—

CHAIR: Member for Bundamba, address your question through the minister, if possible.

Mrs MILLER: The minister has already referred the response—

CHAIR: Every question needs to go back to the minister.

Ms DONALDSON: I am happy to refer that question to the CEO.

Mrs MILLER: I thought you would be. In relation to the agricultural colleges—and I am a very strong supporter of the agricultural colleges—can you please give me an estimate or an actual figure, if you have had it worked out, of how much it costs to subsidise this training? I know that it cannot be provided the way you do it within TAFE colleges and the private sector. Would there be a figure that you put on that, or a percentage?

Mr Tobin: If you would like a specific figure, I would have to take that on notice and find that out.

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

Mr Tobin: Okay.

Mr KATTER: I refer to page 10 of the SDS which outlines the department's administrative duties. The uptake of drought concessional loans, or PIPES, was poor in the Mount Isa electorate, arguably the worst affected by things like the drought and the live export ban. Throughout that period for an area with such a large footprint—almost a third of Queensland—we had only one financial consultant based in the area for a small part of that, perhaps in the last 12 to 18 months, with two others servicing from outside. I am interested in what efforts there are to rectify that, given that there has been such a poor uptake of the scheme in that area.

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I would be happy to refer that question to Mr Cameron Macmillan from QRAA to answer.

Mr Macmillan: I thank the member for the question. QRAA has been proactively marketing drought concessional loans right across the state. We deliver these loans on behalf of the federal government. The federal government set the guidelines for the loans. As the member mentioned, there was a slow start to the program. The program in 2015-16 started on 1 October. We have just extended that program through to 31 October this year. It had a slow start. It is now rolling.

We have found right across the state that, first of all, there was not a break in the season. Some of the loans are a little slow to start but now they are gaining momentum. Recent rains have seen a lot of activity. I am pleased to announce that there has been some activity in your area, and we continue to market very hard in that area. We have been doing radio advertising, TV advertising and we have nine CLOs—client liaison officers—across the state. We have been proactively ensuring that those liaison officers are marketing the program.

Mr KATTER: It would appear that in some of those areas like Charleville we had a hub or concentration of financial consultants and there was a better uptake. We are pretty lean on the ground there. Is there movement towards addressing that as part of the solution to improve that uptake?

Ms DONALDSON: I might address that, as that is a departmental question. I refer that to the director-general.

Dr Woods: The department provides support to the Farm Financial Counselling Service, which in Queensland is headquartered in two locations—in Longreach through RAPAD and in south-western southern Queensland in Charleville. We provide an ongoing core funding payment each year in partnership with the Commonwealth government. In addition to that, as part of the DRAS we have provided extra funding for the Farm Financial Counselling Service which has been designed to match the demand. In all parts of Queensland during the recent drought, we have been carefully monitoring through our staff, liaising with the Farm Financial Counselling Service, where the demand is coming

from and what the nature of that demand has been in terms of not just loan applications but also applications to Centrelink for assistance through the farm household support scheme that is provided by the Commonwealth. We have been providing additional funding wherever that has been needed to increase the amount of service available. We have not had a request for additional funding for the north-west specifically, but we have been monitoring it along with the rest of the state looking at the requirements that have been forthcoming in terms of assistance with farm financial counselling type work.

Mr KATTER: If there is a failure in the uptake and that is registering as there is not much need, has that not been seen as a call for more assistance in that area? It might be that people have not been able to deal with all the paperwork. I take it from that answer that because there had not been much uptake—I am not sure if I am interpreting it correctly—that was a signal to not provide any more service.

Dr Woods: There is a whole range of assistance measures that are supplied in the circumstances of drought where we strike this difficult balance between what is requested and what might be needed. We do attempt through marketing programs that have just been outlined from QRAA and similar marketing efforts from the Farm Financial Counselling Service to make sure that people are aware of the services that are provided. Similarly, in relation to the various health and community services that are provided through DRAS, through the Royal Flying Doctor Service in the case of health and mental health services, and through local councils often in relation to community services, we go to a lot of effort to try to make sure that members of the community are aware of the services that are available—

Mr KATTER: Yes, that is true.

Dr Woods:—but it is not a situation where we can require people to seek assistance. I think you are right in saying that, if people are not requesting assistance, we cannot provide it but we do also work at the front end of the problem to try to make sure that people who are in distress, adversely affected by drought and by the general impact that that has on business activity and economic activity are very aware of the services provided. In many cases, the first step is through those community services ensuring that people are remaining connected and active in their community which then leads to the situation where they are more prepared for ask for specialist services.

Mr KATTER: Thank you.

Ms DONALDSON: I think it also goes to the point of the establishment of an Office of Rural Affairs. The commissioner will be able promote and champion those sorts of issues. Mr Chair, the director-general has a correction to an answer she gave to the member for Bundamba that she would like to give.

Dr Woods: In relation to the question that was asked by the honourable member in regard to funding for the RSPCA, I wanted to clarify that the budget this year provides an additional \$250,000. That is over and above the \$250,000 per year to the RSPCA that we have provided previously. In all cases we do not direct the RSPCA about where that money is spent. It is not tied funding, but it is spent in the areas where the priority is seen by the RSPCA for services in relation to animal welfare. I am not sure in the wording of my answer that I clarified it was \$250,000 additional per year over and above the \$250,000 that was already there.

Mrs MILLER: In response to that, can I just say that I am well aware there is an additional \$250,000, but you are still confirming that it is not tied funding?

Dr Woods: That is correct.

Mr LAST: Minister, I refer to page 2 of the SDS. In the departmental overview a stated objective of the government is to create jobs and a diverse economy and a productive and profitable primary industries sector. Minister, can you advise the committee on how many occasions you or your staff have personally met with the Deputy Premier to raise any concerns that you have over Labor's proposed new draconian vegetation management laws that leading stakeholder group AgForce says will smash farm productivity and profitability in Queensland?

CHAIR: I remind the minister not to use imputations during his line of questioning.

Mr LAST: Thank you, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Would you rephrase your question for the minister?

Mr LAST: Minister, can you advise the committee on how many occasions you or your staff have met with the Deputy Premier to raise any concerns the minister has over Labor's proposed new vegetation management laws?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I meet with the Deputy Premier regularly on a whole range of issues, and I have spoken with the Deputy Premier about vegetation management on a number of occasions. As the member knows, vegetation management is something which the government took to the election. This is a matter for debate in the Queensland parliament and the Queensland government's stance on this is clear.

I know from reading the report that the committee was unable to reach unanimous agreement on this bill, but the person responsible for the government's response to that bill is the Minister for State Development and Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. I cannot speak to what discussions he may or may not have had, but I am advised that there have been no departmental staff meetings with the Deputy Premier to my knowledge.

Mr LAST: To carry on from that, we have heard from you today about your plans and your vision to grow agriculture in Queensland. Are you satisfied, as the Minister for Agriculture, that there will be no impact on the growth of the agricultural sector in Queensland as a consequence of these laws?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I think the member is asking me to engage in hypothetical discussion about what may or may not happen in the future. I did not bring my crystal ball with me today so I am unable to answer what may or may not happen in the future.

Mr LAST: You are the Minister for Agriculture in Queensland. Are you happy that these laws will have no impact on agricultural development in Queensland going forward?

CHAIR: I remind the member for Burdekin that this bill is still before the House and hypothetical questions are being asked of the minister. Please keep them relevant. The current legislation is still in place for vegetation management.

Mr LAST: Thank you, Mr Chair; I withdraw. I refer to page 15 of the SDS. Can you advise how many front-line operational fisheries officers are now employed in your department compared with the previous two years?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I will pass that operational question to the director-general to answer.

Dr Woods: I am just getting to hand the staff numbers for the Fisheries Queensland group. Current staff numbers are 184 FTEs comprised of 43.19 FTEs in the north region, 14.1 FTEs in the central region, two in the south region, 69.01 FTEs in the south-east and 55.7 FTEs in Brisbane. Our regional fisheries staff members deliver critical services including compliance, fishery monitoring and development impact assessment as well as providing regional intelligence about what is happening on the ground in relation to both fisheries development and aquaculture matters. With more than 600,000 recreational fishers and 1,400 licensed commercial fishing boats in Queensland, the Boating and Fisheries Patrol is on the front line 24 hours a day seven days a week. The overall compliance rate for their monitoring activities in 2015-16 was 92 per cent. The patrol, as I have already indicated, has 88 authorised officers stationed across the state.

It is worth also noting that in the last year we have further developed the opportunities for sharing patrols with a range of other government agencies. Enforcement and resourcing is further supported, therefore, through those joint operations with the patrol's long-time partner, Maritime Safety Queensland, and with other agencies such as the Queensland Water Police and the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing. We use these joint patrols to deliver both cost-effective and efficient services.

CHAIR: We will move on to government questions now. In reference to page 4 of the SDS, will the minister inform the committee what the Palaszczuk government is doing to assist horticulture exports?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for that very important question. The Palaszczuk government is working with industry and agribusiness to significantly boost the volume and value of horticultural products exported from Queensland. We have a range of programs underway that will help producers and businesses in our fruit, nut and vegetable industries gain increased market access and increased profitability. Strategies include increased information flow on export requirements, additional investment in research to support new market access, and more efficient and profitable supply chain systems. Market access research will provide complete datasets for the development of new or improved market access protocols for apple, avocado, strawberry, citrus, mango, table grape and many vegetable products.

Specific work being done includes a project to establish a monitoring system to accurately predict product quality on arrival and reduce the level of product loss. This means increases in the quality of Queensland products in overseas markets and improved profitability for our exports. The development of new air transport systems for broccoli that do not use ice will reduce package weight and freight costs while maintaining product quality and the confidence of importers in the product's quality.

The department is also working with the avocado industry to assess the viability of establishing a 'ripe and ready to eat' program in Singapore and Malaysia. This is because we know that consumer purchases increase when fruit is at the perfect stage on the day of purchase. Getting the right product to consumers has the potential to improve profitability and volume for our avocado exports.

I recently attended a Department of Agriculture and Fisheries presentation at the horticulture industry forum in Bundaberg in my own electorate where growers were informed about how the department is developing new market access protocols, such as the low-dose methyl bromide protocols for nectarines that were recently accepted by China. This will allow exporters of airfreight produce access to this market without the previous lengthy cold treatment required.

I announced at a trade dinner in Bundaberg that we are also working to encourage Taiwanese investment in the lychee industry for the purpose of increasing local production of varieties suitable for export to Taiwan and neighbouring countries. A memorandum of understanding between Queensland and the Taiwanese government was signed this month which will provide Queensland producers with access to lychee varieties from Taiwan. Queensland's growing season is opposite to that of the Northern Hemisphere, meaning that Queensland and Taiwanese growers could potentially work together to supply product year-round in Australia, Taiwan and other export markets. The first stage, though, is to import specifically developed varieties into Australia for testing by Queensland growers in both the north and south of the state.

They are just a few of the ways we are helping to bolster this \$2.9 million industry. It shows the importance of gaining access to rapidly-growing Asian markets on our doorstep. Our approach is collaborative as we recognise the importance of working with business and industry to secure a stronger future for Queensland horticultural exports.

Mrs GILBERT: In reference to page 3 of the SDS, can you inform the committee what steps are being taken to improve horticulture productivity and profitability through the development of innovative new technologies and systems?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. The department is engaging in a wide range of programs aimed at bringing new and innovative systems to horticultural production. The work that is being done will have a wide range of benefits for everyone, including from producers to consumers, by reducing inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides and labour, while improving the quality and consistency of product that is offered to consumers. Additionally, this will result in improved environmental outcomes while simultaneously boosting the overall profitability of horticultural enterprises.

The department, in partnership with industry, is undertaking work in several areas aimed at delivering these outcomes. This includes: research and development in precision application of fertilisers and other products in several vegetable and tree cropping systems; sensor and data interpretation systems in vegetable cropping; robotic harvesting of capsicums; robotic, mechanical and chemical control of weeds; yield prediction using remote sensing in bananas and fruit tree crops; and protected cropping in strawberries and a range of vegetable crops. Already work in these areas has yielded results, with fertiliser application technology and yield monitoring to improve potato and sweet potato yields by up to 16 per cent and reducing the use of soil and fertiliser amendments by up to 44 per cent.

Results have been even more marked in the production of carrots. Variable rate technology has seen increases in yields of up to 30 per cent. This is yet another way in which this government is working with industry and producers to deliver improved outcomes. Improving profitability for producers while simultaneously delivering a better product to consumers and delivering improved environmental outcomes is a win-win for everyone.

Mr MADDEN: Minister, in reference to page 3 of the SDS, can you inform the committee about the work being done to develop new commercial varieties like the Queen Garnet plum you have already mentioned? What steps are being undertaken to make them commercially viable?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. There is a lot of work being done by the department in this area. The department works with horticultural producers to meet consumer demands, which are always changing, to help increase productivity, to grow regional economies and to boost

exports. The way this is accomplished is through industry supported breeding programs that produce new varieties of fruit, nuts and vegetables that are specially adapted for Queensland. The programs have aims like developing varieties of fruits and vegetables that are productive under Queensland's climate conditions as well as increasing disease resistance.

Currently, programs include departmental scientists working with the mango industry to develop new mango varieties. One of the success stories from this has been the calypso mango variety, which currently makes up about 25 per cent of Australia's mango sales due to its high quality and high productivity compared with industry standard varieties.

The National Strawberry Varietal Improvement Program, which is co-funded by the strawberry industry, has developed new varieties of both subtropical and temperate strawberries allowing year-round production. A particular standout from this work has been the rubygem, which has done well in both Queensland and overseas with around 10 million plants sold annually. The red rhapsody variety is also proving a success, with rapid increases in commercial plantings. On top of this, there are more varieties on the way. The sundrench and Parisian kiss are the newest release for commercial evaluation and are already promising improved berry quality, favourable production characteristics and timing of production to ensure an extended season for improved producer profitability.

Our fresh market pineapple breeding program is assisting the industry to transition from a processing focused market to a predominantly fresh one. A field day was held in April 2016 to promote the department's disease resistant apple varieties and was well attended from around Australia and overseas. The day, which was managed in conjunction with the department's commercial partner, sought to promote the new kalei variety that I mentioned earlier as well as another as-yet-unnamed apple that is also being bred by the department.

The citrus breeding program has also yielded results. Three new easy-peel mandarins are transitioning to on-farm testing, with 2,000 trees to be planted this spring in the central Burnett. These hybrids have excellent flavour with low seed numbers and high yields in Queensland's subtropical environment.

A total of over 70 new tomato hybrids have been developed that give the plants increased resistance to five major diseases and improved flavour to produce a much sought after gourmet flavour. These are currently undergoing rigorous testing and we expect that these elite hybrids will be available for planting in the Bowen and Bundaberg regions.

Last month the member for Sunnybank and I toured the department's facilities at Coopers Plains to see the wonderful work taking place at the health and food science precinct. Many consumers now want more out of their food than just taste. For example, sweet corn high in the nutrient zeaxanthin has been developed. This nutrient is known to slow development of the eye disease macular degeneration, which is the leading cause of blindness in Australia. The department is currently negotiating with a commercial partner to further develop and commercialise the hybrids. I think this offers a very exciting promise.

That is just a snapshot of some of the ways the department is pushing forward horticultural science. These programs increase profitability for growers and industry. They make Queensland crops safer from disease, they heighten the reputation of Queensland produce and they can offer some very delicious and very healthy produce to consumers.

Mrs MILLER: I refer to page 4 of the SDS where it refers to 'Develop a Customer Engagement Strategy'. Doesn't one already exist?

Ms DONALDSON: Can I clarify what specifically that is relating to?

Mrs MILLER: It is on page 4 and it is about five lines down. It says 'Develop a Customer Engagement Strategy that will transform the way the department engages with its customers'. Doesn't a customer engagement strategy already exist? Why do you have to develop one?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I will allow the director-general to answer that question.

Dr Woods: On taking up my position at the beginning of this year, I reviewed the activities of the department and in particular highlighted some areas which had not been refreshed through the process of some significant reductions in staffing numbers in the department over the preceding three years. As the minister outlined earlier, the department had reduced from roughly 2,500 employees down to just under 2,000 employees. A number of key parts of the business functioning had not been refreshed to

reflect how we were going to operate most effectively and most efficiently in a reduced framework. One of those areas of activity is outlined there in terms of the customer engagement strategy. I will call on the deputy director-general of agriculture to outline for the honourable member some of the detail of what is being done in that work.

Mr Letts: As the director-general has said, we have been undertaking some work over the past six months in relation to developing a customer engagement strategy for the department. That work has been based on undertaking some research nationally and internationally in relation to frameworks that are being used for customer engagement in the public service more generally. We have developed a strategy and we are using that strategy to guide, if you like, best practice across the organisation in relation to the way that we engage with stakeholders. One of the elements of that that we are aware we may have lacked in historically is around the promise we make to stakeholders when we engage with them—so, ‘What are we saying to you in relation to what action will be taken as a result of this stakeholder engagement?’

In addition to that we have identified two pilot areas where we will use this new framework. One is around the fisheries review and the green paper, which has just been released. The other is in relation to the R and D blueprint which we will be consulting with industry on over the next few months, and we will use the framework in both of those instances as pilots.

Mrs MILLER: Chair, can I just confirm? Are you talking about databases here? If an officer goes out to a farm, for example, and undertakes to do something, that will then be recorded, so it is like a database?

Mr Letts: I thank the member for the question. I think the member may be referring to a customer relationship management database, which the department has also initiated some work on, which will record those sorts of interactions that you refer to. The stakeholder engagement strategy that is referred to in the SDS is more broadly in relation to engaging with industry around policy decisions that we would be making or program design, so the way that we actually deliver our services.

CHAIR: I will hand over to opposition questions.

Mr SORENSEN: My question is about sustainable fishing policy, SDS page 2. Minister, I refer you to the comments made by your Labor Party federal candidate in Wide Bay about extending the World Heritage area to the west and the south of Fraser Island to include the sandy strait. As you would be aware, this area is vital to the seafood industry in Hervey Bay and Tin Can Bay and supports hundreds of local jobs. Can the minister assure this committee that she has no plans to further restrict commercial fishing operations in this area that would destroy local businesses and jobs?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I am advised that this was a question on notice and a matter for the environment minister. However, should the Fraser Island World Heritage area be expanded, commercial fishing can continue as it currently exists within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area. Staff from the department have met with the review officers and are providing whatever assistance they require from a fisheries perspective such as data and advice on fisheries management. In fact, only in the last month or so I have met with commercial fishers in Hervey Bay about this very issue and assured them of our ongoing support for commercial fishing in the Great Sandy Strait.

Mr SORENSEN: Minister, how can you give any credibility to that when you say in an answer to a question on notice that you really do not have any jurisdiction over a marine park?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. As I said, it is a matter for the environment minister. It might be news to the member, but we ministers do talk to each other about things that impact on each other’s portfolios.

Mr SORENSEN: You cannot go down there at this present time and assure the fishing industry that that is going to happen and they are not going—

Ms DONALDSON: I am not going to engage in hypotheticals, either.

Mr SORENSEN: The fishing industry in Hervey Bay have given me the impression that you have given that assurance.

Ms DONALDSON: I can assure you that is not the impression the fishers in Hervey Bay have fed back to me when I have sat down and met with them.

CHAIR: I remind the member for Hervey Bay about relevance to questions under the minister’s portfolio. Next question, please.

Mr LAST: Minister, I refer to the SDS on fisheries management and your estimates eve announcement yesterday of a green paper for fisheries. There is now to be more consultation with stakeholders—certainly a welcome change from the government's management of fisheries so far. Is fisheries management in Queensland to be based on sustainable principles underpinned by sound science, or is fisheries management going to continue to be run on election eve political stunts?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I think the member answered his own question in the advice. The green paper certainly talks about a path for fisheries management that will maximise economic benefit. It was part of our sustainable fishing policy election commitment and is part of a broader range of activities and net-free zones were progressed as part of the policy. Let us be clear that the green paper is being released because there has been no reform for fisheries for decades. Let us not forget that this process started under the former LNP government with the MRAG review about which you did nothing for three years. It has taken a Labor government getting back into power to—

Mr LAST: Minister, that is not true. Mr Chair—

Ms DONALDSON:—actually put this—

CHAIR: Hold on for one second.

Mr LAST: The minister is making misleading statements. The MRAG review was certainly commissioned and then there was a change of government before those recommendations could be enacted. To say to this committee that we failed to act on it is erroneous and misleading.

CHAIR: This is not a debate. You can continue to answer the question, minister.

Ms DONALDSON: The green paper does build on our election commitments but it also has taken into account the recommendations from the final report of the MRAG review. As I said, that was undertaken by the previous government and was based also on public feedback that we received on the MRAG review after we released it last year. Just yesterday, as the member stated, we published a green paper on fisheries management, and this is a major reform for Queensland. I also announced a 10-week period of consultation with industry with recreational fishers and the Queensland community on the key proposal outlined in the green paper. Modernisation of fisheries management is long overdue. This is the first step in delivering the remaining two commitments, these being the adoption of a resource allocation policy based on maximising economic value and review of the regulatory structure of commercial fishing to ensure the sustainability of Queensland fisheries.

The green paper will engage the community in the development of the strategic direction around delivery of the sustainable fishing election commitments. The green paper provides an opportunity for the government to make a clear statement about the proposed future of fisheries management. It sets out the direction the government proposes to take and, through consultation, determines the level of support for the key concepts. The feedback that we receive in response to the green paper will be used to finetune the strategic direction for the future management of Queensland's fisheries resources. I might pass to the Deputy Director-General, Fisheries for some further discussion about the green papers.

Mr Spencer: The green paper is designed to take the main concepts about managing fishing in a modern way, which was based both on the feedback we got from MRAG plus the feedback we have been receiving from industry and the recreational fishers for many years, and put them in a framework. Then we will have a strong framework and it will be very clear to everyone how the fisheries are managed. It is a similar approach to that taken by the Commonwealth government. It is based on making sure that the fishery is more resilient. One of the issues we have at the moment with the fisheries is that we have made a lot of piecemeal changes over the years and as a result the sustainability of the resource is not always guaranteed.

In this case what we are trying to do is to make sure that they can overcome shocks like climate change, the current problem we have in the gulf with the mangrove dieback and market shocks so that the industry would be far more resilient and can bounce back from that process. It will mean that in some cases we will move to systems of quota, but that will be decided on fishery-by-fishery basis. We will have a harvest strategy approach, which is the best practice process that is used by the Commonwealth. By the way, Australia is recognised as one of the best fisheries managers in the world. Once we move to that process, everyone will be clear about the rules of engagement for the next 10 years that they are normally in place for.

Mr LAST: Minister, has a decision already been made to establish a net-free zone in Moreton Bay?

Ms DONALDSON: Currently there is a consultation out about the establishment of a net-free zone in Moreton Bay. We have not received that feedback as yet, so no, that decision has not been made as yet.

Mr LAST: What date will that decision be made?

Ms DONALDSON: I will consult with industry and I will get all the feedback, but I have not got a particular date in mind for that decision. I will make it when I feel that I have got sufficient information to make that decision. As we have said, any future additions to the current net-free zones would need significant consultation. It is encouraging for me to hear that there is a lot of discussion currently underway. I am really looking forward to getting that feedback from the broader community.

Mr Chair, while I am here I understand that Mr Mark Tobin can also answer the question on notice.

Mr Tobin: We have received some figures. The average cost across the total delivery for the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges on the unit is \$1,500. As compared to TAFE, it is \$525. Both organisations receive subsidies on that. Our cost, as I reiterated, was against increased costs on the basis of our production enterprises and our live experience. The length of the program has been somewhat longer to get a good generalist, holistic education that the industry has impressed upon us including the client base—the students themselves.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Tobin. We will continue on with non-government questions.

Mr LAST: Minister, we will move onto Biosecurity, SDS page 2. At the 2003 estimates hearing, 13 years ago, then primary industries minister, the Premier's father, Henry Palaszczuk, said he was set to slash Biosecurity staff because of the success of the fire ant program in clearing this pest. Mr Palaszczuk said at that time that only half of the 629 staff would be needed after June 2004. The remaining staff would run a two-year surveillance operation to get the all clear for fire ants by June 2006. He stated that 96 per cent of fire ants in the areas first targeted had been destroyed. Minister, 13 years after the Premier's father made those predictions what is your advice on an eradication date, and how much more funding from Queensland taxpayers will be needed?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. Fire ants are certainly a very topical issue. It is an issue that has also been very topical when I have been at the agricultural ministers forum with the other state and territory ministers. There is a range of predictions that people can make into the future. I can make predictions that may or may not come to pass in 30 years from now, but I am not going to speculate on which predictions in the past have been successful—

Mr LAST: Surely, Minister, you are working on an eradication date into the future?

Ms DONALDSON:—or which have not. What I can say is that when it comes to fire ants, this government has been working diligently in this area and that this government remains committed to the eradication of fire ants in Queensland. During 2015 and 2016 an independent panel undertook a comprehensive assessment of the South-East Queensland program to assist our national cost-share partners reach a decision on the long-term future of the program. The panel believes there is a compelling case to continue the eradication of fire ants. On this basis, eradication is still possible and it is in the national interest to rid Australia of these pests. The independent panel found that the cost of dealing with the impacts of this pest if there were no program far outweigh the cost of funding this eradication program. Without an eradication program we would have the same problems as seen in the United States. Not only would our agricultural, building and construction, electrical, infrastructure and tourism sectors face immense costs, the environmental and health impacts would be just as significant.

There have been reports of approximately 100 deaths since fire ants established in the US. The South-East Queensland program has prevented us from experiencing many of those impacts. Our world-leading techniques and technologies have been beneficial for not only the program here in South-East Queensland but also the national and international programs currently being undertaken to eradicate other invasive tramp ant species. The eradication strategies used by the program are working, with three of the six known incursions in Queensland—one at the port of Brisbane and the previous Yarwun response near Gladstone—successfully eradicated. The second incursion at Yarwun is in the process of being finalised and has been successful in the Gladstone electorate.

Despite the obvious benefits of investing in the eradication of fire ants, the national cost-sharing funding arrangements are tenuous, with a national decision on the long-term future of the South-East Queensland program pending. The agriculture ministers' consideration of an independent assessment and long-term plan for the future program is due November 2016. In addition to the South-East Queensland and Yarwun program budgets, our cost-sharing partners recently endorsed a new

response plan, with additional funding of \$914,240 to eradicate the incursion at the Brisbane airport precinct in 2015. I will hand over to the director-general for some further detail about the fire ant program.

Dr Woods: By way of clarification, the South-East Queensland incursion I believe was in 2001, not 30 years ago as suggested in the question. I will call the Chief Biosecurity Officer to comment on the progress to date in that program.

Dr Thompson: The fire ant program has been going in South-East Queensland since 2001. It has been a long-term program of work, as you have alluded to. It is the only program of its type to have the success that it has had anywhere in the world. We are closer to eradicating fire ants than any other country in the world. It is a very difficult issue to make sure that we get all the fire ants and control them. Our effectiveness over the years has meant that this issue has not really been raised as a problem because we have kept the numbers at a very low level, but it is a very difficult pest to get rid of. The program has been reviewed many times over that period of time. In recent years it has had a number of reviews, but over last year and early this year an independent review was commissioned at the request of the national funding groups because this is funded nationally, not just by Queensland.

The review has found that it is still possible to eradicate fire ants and that the work to date has been a great success, but it is going to take a period of some years from now. The expectation is that there needs to be a national commitment for possibly up to a further 10 years, and that would have to be funded at the appropriate level. At this point that decision has been deferred for six months by the agricultural ministers at the ag. min. meeting, and a decision will be made in November on the future of the program. They have committed to funding it for this year again, and that is in recognition of the success of the program to date and the likelihood of developing an agreement around future funding operations.

CHAIR: We will return to government questions now. With regard to page 6 of the SDS, will the minister detail biosecurity incidents that are currently facing Queensland, and is the minister confident that Biosecurity Queensland is equipped to deal with all of these issues?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the chair for the question. Queensland's reputation and ongoing market access are dependent on our ability to respond quickly and effectively to biosecurity risks in order to manage or control them as they emerge. The Palaszczuk Labor government is committed to innovative, high-performance and customer focused front-line resources that deliver better services for clients. The government is confident in Biosecurity Queensland's policies and procedures, as they have been proven effective in responding to biosecurity incidents.

Biosecurity Queensland, with the full support of the Palaszczuk government, is currently managing a number of ongoing biosecurity incidents including: Panama disease tropical race 4 in North Queensland, the National Tropical Weeds Eradication Program, the National Red Witchweed Eradication Program, the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program, the National Electric Ant Eradication Program, cucumber green mottle mosaic virus, exotic fruit fly in the Torres Strait and varroa mite in Townsville. Many of the responses will require ongoing activity in 2016-17 and beyond to ensure these pests and diseases are under control or eradicated in Queensland.

I feel confident that Biosecurity Queensland's capability will continue to grow, with the Palaszczuk Labor government's 2016 budget investing an additional \$10.8 million over the next four years in biosecurity. This investment in biosecurity is in stark contrast to the former LNP government's cuts to biosecurity. This investment is vital because biosecurity risks are increasing due to expansion in the movement of humans, livestock populations, animal and plant products, increased geographic distribution of plant species production and changing patterns of human activity impacting on ecosystems.

Queensland is a front-line state for the entry of exotic pests and diseases, which is why the Labor government has been committed to continually work with stakeholders in order to confirm priorities and maintain our high biosecurity standards. Under the Palaszczuk government, during 2015-16 Biosecurity Queensland has demonstrated its capacity to meet all service requirements by effectively responding to 43 incidents involving invasive species and pests and diseases of animals and plants. I am confident in Biosecurity Queensland and their capability to deal with pests and diseases that affect our great state. As such, the Labor government will continue its support of Biosecurity Queensland so that it can continue to do its work effectively with the resources it needs.

Mrs GILBERT: Minister, with reference to page 8 of the SDS, can you provide details on the government's commitment to support the aquaculture industry in Queensland?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for Mackay for the question. I am sure that, like me, the committee recognises the potential for aquaculture to make a significant contribution to the regional economy in Queensland. The Palaszczuk government will fund the implementation of the Queensland Aquaculture Policy during 2016-17. This funding is geared to aid expansion of the industry.

I recently released a Queensland aquaculture policy statement and the government's response to the Queensland Competition Authority's review of aquaculture. The response highlights initiatives to develop opportunities for new aquaculture projects to create jobs, stimulate investment and provide new sources of quality, healthy and nutritious food. Opportunities include the creation of terrestrial aquaculture development areas and developing assessment codes which contain the regulatory conditions for aquaculture. The assessment codes will provide certainty about the future price and availability of environmental offsets. At the same time, they will allow investigation around the potential for marine aquaculture development areas. We will begin implementing these initiatives to provide a statewide approach to sustainable aquaculture development.

Aquaculture is the fastest growing food industry globally, and its production and value have significantly increased in Queensland. The industry had a gross value of production of over \$120 million in 2014-15. That represents more than 38 per cent of the total value of Queensland's fisheries production. The Palaszczuk government's policy sets the direction for future growth and future development of a sustainable, diverse and innovative aquaculture industry in Queensland. There can be no doubt that high-quality seafood is in demand, both here in Queensland and Australia and around the world. We aim to identify new potential aquaculture sites and opportunities to expand existing sites along the Queensland coast. We know that some businesses are ready to either expand their operations or diversify their existing sites, and this policy will assist them in reducing unnecessary barriers around that expansion.

Our goal is to attract investment and aid commercialisation. The policy statement reaffirms the Queensland government's commitment to ensuring that industry growth maintains a high level of environmental performance. Any future development must take into account the significant environmental values along the Queensland coast as well as the needs of multiple regional stakeholders. I would encourage members of the committee to view the Queensland aquaculture policy statement, which is available on the department's website.

Mr MADDEN: Minister, with reference to page 2 of the SDS, will you outline the concerns that farmers and producers have with regard to the backpacker tax and how this will impact Queensland's primary industry productivity?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. We still have no position from the federal government about that particular issue. As I have travelled around Queensland I have met with producers and business owners, and the one thing that they continue to make clear to me is that they do not want this backpacker tax. Businesspeople have made it clear that backpackers will simply stop coming—predominantly to the regional communities that they like to go to—because of the tax. This means that international backpackers who come to work on farms or spend their money in regional establishments just will not come here. They have already indicated that they will go to countries like Canada and New Zealand, where the tax rate is lower. I am quite dismayed to see that a lot of the federal government's policies are sending work offshore and not supporting the Australian domestic economy.

Regional Queensland, despite having some good rains recently, is still in the grip of drought and we do not need another economic obstacle from the LNP. Queensland's own federal LNP member Michelle Landry said that she would like to see the backpacker tax gone. She sees it as a massive issue. It is interesting that the member's own side seem quite divided on this issue. National Farmers' Federation president Brent Finlay said that there is still real concern out there about agriculture with everyone he speaks to and that resolving this and getting a clear plan is one of the highest priorities for them.

In my own electorate of Bundaberg, the backpacker tax is something that is raised with me all the time and it is a main concern for businesses, as without the backpackers our pubs, shops, tour companies and cafes will all struggle. We have had a range of new businesses pop up to cater for the backpacker market, and I worry about the ongoing viability of those businesses if this is not resolved.

As I said, the impact of this does not stop in Labor electorates. Since I have been out around the state I have spoken to growers in Stanthorpe who are concerned that their businesses will be impacted by the lack of backpackers because of this regressive tax. In fact, the mere discussion about the tax has been enough to deter some backpackers from coming. In the electorate of Nanango—again, not a

Labor electorate—the issue of this tax was raised with me as I travelled the state. Regardless of where I have gone, the issue of the backpacker tax has been raised with me, and it has not been limited to agricultural producers. Be it a producer or a publican, this tax is concerning regional communities.

Mr LAST: The minister seems to be going around the state electorate by electorate, just padding this out.

CHAIR: I think the minister is allowed to answer the question of where she has been in the state and is relevant to the question that was asked. Thank you.

Ms DONALDSON: Thank you. As I said, I am surprised that this is something that is still floating about and I know that in discussions with industry it is an issue that they are continuing to provide feedback on and are hoping that the federal government will do the right thing and get rid of this progressive tax. Perhaps members of the opposition now might have a direct line to their federal colleague who could talk some sense into his federal counterparts.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, just getting back to live cattle exports, how many officers in your department or agencies work full time on live cattle exports and what is the cost to the Queensland taxpayer?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I will pass that to the director-general for an answer.

Dr Woods: To my knowledge we have no officers who work full time on live cattle exports. As indicated by the minister previously, live cattle exports represent about five per cent of the beef industry currently and as a general rule they involve classes of cattle which are of lower value which come from properties that would have difficulty producing finished cattle which would go into high-quality boxed beef. The result is that in most beef production areas in the north and western parts of the state there are some cattle which go for live export. Other cattle will move into the supply chain and move east and south across the state for fattening and will end up in processing works. Most of our staff who work with the industry will therefore be working with producers who supply live cattle exports as well as producers who send beef into the processing supply chain. In many cases, individual beef producers will send cattle in either direction depending on seasonal conditions and on the market price that is offered to them. Both in our regional locations and as you come close to the coast and engage officers who are looking at, for example, biosecurity issues or in the case of, say, Safe Food Production Queensland the food quality issues that affect beef moving into meat in the meat processing chain, I think virtually everybody except perhaps Safe Food Production Queensland will have some engagement with the live cattle chain. For that reason I doubt that we have any particular officer who is 100 per cent allocated. It is not something that we would normally look to measure because it changes as seasonal conditions and market prices change.

Mrs MILLER: Would you be able to take that on notice though just so that I can get a proper answer? If there is none there is none though.

Dr Woods: Minister, if I am able to respond, I do not believe that we could quantify that question.

Mrs MILLER: Okay.

CHAIR: I will now hand over to the opposition.

Mr PERRETT: My question is to the minister and it follows on from that in terms of the beef cattle industry to Queensland, and I refer to the SDS at page 2 where it says 'creating the conditions for successful agribusinesses and supply chains'. Minister, do you unequivocally support the Queensland live cattle export trade?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. What I do support is a very vibrant cattle industry. As the director-general previously mentioned and I previously mentioned, in 2014-15 Australia exported 1.378 million head of live cattle and Queensland directly exported 301,058.

Mr PERRETT: Mr Chair, with your indulgence, I think we may have heard those figures quoted earlier. I am asking either yes or no: do you unequivocally support the live cattle export trade in Queensland, because we heard that answer earlier?

CHAIR: Member, you did not ask a yes or no question. You asked her a question—

Mr PERRETT: I am just asking yes or no now.

CHAIR: If you can let her get on with answering the question, that would be lovely.

Mr PERRETT: I have just asked yes or no. It is very simple: yes or no.

CHAIR: We are nearly there.

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I support a beef industry that produces for the Queensland economy and for individual producers. I think there is room for both live export and for processing here in Australia. As a government we are doing what we can to ensure that we provide the conditions and the policy settings to ensure a profitable beef and cattle industry regardless of whether one is a live exporter or whether the cattle goes to a domestic meat producer.

Mr PERRETT: Thank you, Minister. I have a follow-up question on that. I refer to the free trade agreement that has been negotiated by the federal government prior to the last federal election and the confidence that that is providing to the beef industry, particularly here in Queensland. I just wondered whether you could inform this committee what initiatives, including funding, you have to grow the Queensland beef industry to meet current and future trade opportunities.

Ms DONALDSON: Within the portfolio we have beef industry development and, as I said, it is the highest value agricultural industry. In April 2016 I held a round table with Queensland's largest beef companies to hear the industry's aspirations and their challenges firsthand. Industry was clear that they need effective transport infrastructure, and they welcomed the Queensland government's investment in roads at Rockhampton and rail at Oakey. We discussed the importance of working together to maintain good biosecurity and to negotiate reliable access to export markets. The department provides ongoing support to the beef industry through major programs like biosecurity, drought assistance, and research, development and extension. The department also works directly with industry and other government bodies to develop and implement targeted industry development projects with external contract costs of \$97,000 in 2015-16.

The department is working with industry and other government bodies to ensure that the Queensland beef industry stays at the forefront of the global beef export market. Some of the examples of the collaboration in this regard are working with the CSIRO on livestock modelling tools that can accurately calculate the time and cost of cattle transport on the Queensland road network which will allow us to work together to identify ways to reduce cattle transport costs, and this began in 2014-15 and is being finalised now; working with LiveCorp to review importing country requirements to identify global market access barriers so as to inform future research and development opportunities in BJD at a cost of \$47,000 in 2015-16; and working with Safe Food Production Queensland to promote the integrity of the beef supply chain in six languages and to develop an e-learning program to improve food safety knowledge along the beef supply chain at a cost of \$50,000 during 2015-16.

Mr LAST: Minister, in relation to the tick line changes and notifications—and it comes under the Customer Engagement Strategy on page 2 of the SDS—are you aware of the impact of your changes to the tick line on local property values, particularly for those which are now in the tick zone?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for the question. I have had no evidence provided to me that that is the case. As I mentioned earlier, the tick line is something that will continue to be reviewed and that that line can move into the future.

Mr LAST: Minister, given that you are not offering compensation for any changes, will you undertake to review cases where it can be demonstrated that your decision has devalued properties?

Ms DONALDSON: As I said, I have not had any evidence or information that that is the case and, again, I do not deal in hypothetical situations without facts put in front of me.

Mr LAST: If the evidence is put in front of you?

Ms DONALDSON: If I have evidence put in front of me, I will look at it.

Mr LAST: Okay. With regard to those changes, can you confirm to the committee that all affected farmers and landholders who have been affected by tick line changes have been advised of those changes to their properties?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for that question. I will pass that question on to the director-general for answer.

Dr Woods: Thank you, Minister. I will call the Chief Biosecurity Officer to outline the information and communication that has taken place in relation to the tick line.

Dr Thompson: There has been a comprehensive range of communications to everyone in the tick line. Certainly we sent information out to as many producers as we could. Obviously we have not sent information to every producer but we have tried to put information into all newspapers and all other means of communication and working through industry organisations to try and make sure everyone was aware of the situation.

Mr LAST: Thank you. Minister, I move on to the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges, and I refer to the SDS at page 32. I note the increase in cash assets is due to destocking in response to the drought and increase in market price for cattle. Minister, can you advise what provision is being made to allow for restocking—that is, have funds been set aside to allow for restocking, because it is clear that cash assets are being used for normal operations?

Ms DONALDSON: I thank the member for that question. I will pass that question to Mark Tobin from the QATC to answer.

Mr Tobin: We did indeed undertake a severe drought mitigation strategy, particularly over the last 12 months, moving cattle into markets, selling down and moving cattle from the Longreach Pastoral College over to our holdings at Emerald to hold them. The funds from the excess of stock that we would not normally have sold have been quarantined or set aside and it will be budgeted throughout as we buy back into the industry. We have a pasture up at Longreach first which is going to take probably 12 months or so. We are talking with industry about what that buyback should be. It may be that we go heavier into sheep when we go back into the market rather than beef cattle. We are also looking at our beef cattle enterprise becoming a value added supply chain across all of our production enterprises rather than separate herds. To answer your question, that money is set aside to buy back as necessary.

Mr LAST: Thank you.

Ms DONALDSON: If I may, Chair, just answer a question on notice from the member for Burdekin in relation to BJD. As we all know, the Biosecurity Act 2014 commenced on 1 July 2016 and the focus of my media release on 15 June 2016 was in order to alert producers of the pending changes. The media release was made by Animal Health Australia on 24 June 2016. Thank you.

CHAIR: The time allocated for consideration of the estimates of expenditure for the Agriculture and Fisheries portfolio has now expired. Thank you very much, Minister, Director-General and your advisors for assisting us today. The transcript of this session of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's website within two hours. If any questions were taken on notice, we need that clarifying material by 10 am on Wednesday, 27 July. The committee will now adjourn for a break. The hearing will resume at 2 pm with the examination of estimates for the Environment and Heritage Protection, National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef portfolio, commencing with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Ms DONALDSON: Thank you. Mr Chair, if I may, I would like the opportunity to provide some brief closing remarks.

CHAIR: Sorry, but I have closed the meeting, Minister, unfortunately. Sorry.

Ms DONALDSON: I just clarify that all questions on notice have been dealt with here. Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay. Wonderful. Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 1.29 pm to 2.02 pm

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

In Attendance

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

Ms M Surawski, Senior Adviser

Mr P Spencer, Senior Adviser

Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

Mr J Reeves, Director-General

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

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

Ms M Mohr, Deputy Director-General, Conservation and Sustainability Services


Mr B Lang, Chief Finance Officer

Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing

Mrs T O'Shea, Director General

Mr B Klaassen, Deputy Director-General

Mr D Anson, Chief Finance Officer

 **CHAIR:** The meeting of the Agriculture and Environment Committee is resumed. I am Glenn Butcher, the member for Gladstone, and I am the chair of the committee today. Joining me on the committee is our deputy chair and member for Gympie, Mr Tony Perrett; Mrs Julieanne Gilbert, the member for Mackay; Mr Robbie Katter, the member for Mount Isa; Mr Jim Madden, the member for Ipswich West; and Mr Ted Sorensen, the member for Hervey Bay. Today, the committee has granted leave for the following members to participate under standing order 181(e): the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Dalrymple, the member for Callide, the member for Moggill, the member for Burdekin and the member for Bundamba.

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 the filming and broadcasting of proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, tabled on 21 May 2015. Copies of those conditions are available from the parliamentary attendants in the building today. The hearing is being broadcast live from the Parliamentary Service's website. We extend a warm welcome to everyone who is picking up this broadcast today. The committee has authorised the release of the minister's answers to the prehearing questions. These are available now 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 at schedule 8 at the back of the standing orders, we expect that all departmental officers appearing here today provide their full and honest answers to any questions asked. Anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide an answer should be prepared to state their reasons. I also remind members that the departmental officers are not here today to give expert opinions on the merits or otherwise of the policies of the government. That is the role of the minister.

Finally, before we begin, can everyone switch their mobile phones now to silent or turn them off? For the remainder of our hearing today, which will finish at 6.30 pm tonight, the committee will examine the estimates for the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef. Welcome, Minister Miles, and your advisers here today. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisers, if you are called to give an answer, to please state your name before you speak.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier 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 for us, please?

Dr MILES: I would. Thank you, Mr Chair, for providing me with an opportunity to make some introductory remarks at the opening of today's estimates hearing. I would like to thank the committee for taking some time to look at what we have been achieving in this portfolio over the past 12 months and what our plans are for the next 12 months. I especially thank those members of parliament who are not members of this committee, but who have taken some time out to show some interest in my portfolio: the member for Dalrymple, the member for Moggill and the member for Bundamba. I am looking forward to your questions.

Significant developments have been made in the portfolios of Environment and Heritage Protection, the Great Barrier Reef and National Parks in the past year and we have a lot planned over the coming months. I am pleased to report that the Great Barrier Reef task force has presented its recommendations for meeting the government's ambitious reef water quality targets and the priorities for investing an additional \$90 million over the next four years. Out of the 2016-17 budget, an additional \$21.7 million has been committed for implementing the task force's recommendations.

Today, we have taken the first steps to deliver two major integrated projects that will reduce pollution run-off into the reef. We have committed \$33 million to these projects over four years. An expression of interest has been released today calling for tenders to coordinate the design and delivery of the projects in two pollutant hot spots: the Wet Tropics and the Burdekin regions. This approach is different, because it is about intensively trialling water-quality actions that are designed specifically for those areas. We will also take advantage of local landholder and expert knowledge to ensure that we receive the maximum return from our investment.

Climate change has and will continue to be one of the major areas of focus for the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, which is developing a range of strategies to ensure the long-term viability of Queensland's economy, communities and industries. The Queensland government is playing its role in the global effort to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees, committing a further \$6.8 million over four years in this budget to develop and implement a climate change strategy. Meanwhile the government is also helping local governments get ready for coastal hazards through the QCoast2100 program.

Waste and resource recovery is also high on the agenda. Today, we announced that a container deposit scheme for Queensland will be introduced in 2018. This year, we have introduced laws that prevent major companies from closing their doors without rehabilitating their sites, giving Queensland's environmental regulator the powers it needs to protect the environment and the taxpayer from costly clean-up bills.

When it comes to wildlife management, \$5.8 million has been set aside over three years for a comprehensive program to monitor koala populations and \$12.1 million has been committed over four years with ongoing funding of \$2.6 million per year to address the devastating decline in koala populations in the south-east.

Identifying and conserving the state's built heritage places has also been an ongoing priority, with the department continuing to add to the Queensland Heritage Register. More than 1,700 places are now listed. Heritage applications are being sought from the community in the first round of our \$12 million Community Sustainability Action grants program.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has also had a strong year. We have continued to expand protected areas in Queensland, bringing the total estate to more than 13.5 million hectares, covering almost eight per cent of the state. I was also pleased to announce today that a very exciting new ecotourism venture on the Scenic Rim through the Main Range National Park has been conditionally approved by QPWS. QPWS has been working with the proponents, the Turner family, on the development of the Scenic Rim trail, which will provide a new product to showcase the magnificent landscape of the Scenic Rim area. The Turner family own and operate a number of high-quality ecotourism ventures in the area and have made significant investments in setting aside land for local nature refuges and undertaking wildlife rehabilitation projects. The Scenic Rim trail, a six-day ecotourism walk in the World Heritage listed Main Range National Park, will link up adjacent freehold tourism ventures with ecotourism facilities in the national park.

I would like to introduce Mr Jim Reeves, the Director-General of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. With us are a number of officers of the department who, I am sure, will be able to answer any factual or technical questions that the committee might have.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. I now hand over to non-government members to ask questions.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, chair, and thank you, Minister, and your departmental representatives who are here today. Director-general, with reference to page 1 of the SDS, 'Departmental overview', given that you are leading one of Queensland's key departments, which plays a significant role in every major approval process for the resources, construction and industrial sectors across Queensland, could you provide us with a brief summary of your background qualifications and experience as a senior Labor appointee?

Mr Reeves: Sorry, what was the last sentence?

Dr ROWAN: Your qualifications and experience as a senior Labor government appointee.

Mr Reeves: I have a long—

CHAIR: Just before you answer the question, I am not sure that the question is relevant to the budget. Could you rephrase your question and gear it more towards the budget and the estimates hearing?

Dr ROWAN: Given that this is such a key portfolio area in Queensland, I wanted the director-general to give us a summary of his qualifications and experience with reference to page 1 of the SDS, which is the departmental overview. If you would like to move on—

Dr MILES: SDS page 1?

CHAIR: Once again, it is not relevant to the budget whatsoever. Can I get you to move on to your next question?

Dr ROWAN: I am happy to do so. Director-general, I refer to the 129 new mine approvals since 31 January 2015 under the tenure of the environment minister as outlined in the minister's answer to question on notice No. 636. I will table a copy of that.

CHAIR: Do you seek leave to table the document?

Dr ROWAN: yes.

CHAIR: Carried. Thank you.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to page 2 of the SDS, and the regulation of environmentally relevant activities, director-general, can you name the 16 new coalmine site approvals that were approved, as outlined in the table at the bottom of the page?

Mr Reeves: I would take that on notice. I cannot—

Dr MILES: It is in the document you just tabled. The purpose of asking questions is to—

Dr ROWAN: I am asking a question—

Dr MILES:—ask for information. You have information that you just tabled.

Dr ROWAN: I am asking the question of the director-general about some—

CHAIR: If it is as simple as redistributing the document later on, you can do that.

Dr ROWAN: Is Adani one of those mine sites?

Mr Reeves: Adani is.

Dr ROWAN: Adani is actually 11 mine sites. Again, director-general, with reference to mine approvals referred to at page 2 of the SDS, the regulation of environmentally relevant activities, has the minister at any stage ever advised you if he wished the approval of these 129 new mines, including the 16 new coalmines, to be halted, delayed or vetoed in any way?

Mr Reeves: Of the 129? I do not see the point. I cannot comprehend the question, really.

Dr ROWAN: I will come to the point. Has the minister, in relation to those new mine approvals—which have clearly been approved—indicated that he wanted any of those to be halted, delayed or vetoed in any way?

Mr Reeves: The answer is no.

Dr MILES: If you do not mind me addressing that, chair? As I have consistently said publicly, and in the parliament, those assessments are scientifically performed by technical officers within the department. The decisions are made by the regulator entirely independently of me and I play no role in the process at all. Any accusation being made by the member for Moggill is quite offensive. I would urge him to table any evidence if he is accusing me of interfering in the processes of the regulator.

Dr ROWAN: With respect, chair, I was asking the director-general just whether there had been any discussions between himself and the minister in relation to those mine approvals—whether any of those should be halted, delayed or vetoed in any way. I understand that the answer is no to that question.

CHAIR: Thank you. If you can move on.

Dr ROWAN: We will move on. Again with reference to the mine approvals, the same reference as before, SDS page 2, I refer to the 129 new mine approvals which were never opposed by the minister as we have just heard. Do any of these mines operate in a reef catchment area and if so how many?

Mr Reeves: I could not tell you off hand, but I will take that on notice. I am not sure of the location of every one and have not tried to correlate that with any particular geographic area of Queensland.

Dr MILES: Given the level of detail of that question, I might suggest that Deputy Director-General Mr Elwood would be better placed to answer that question and in doing so he can also address how potential impacts on the reef are considered in the EIS process.

Dr ROWAN: If he can. I think it is very important to understand how many mines were there. It is legitimate information when we are scrutinising these approvals.

Dr MILES: That is why we are arranging for the appropriate officer to answer the question.

CHAIR: If we still need that we will have to ask you to take it on notice after the question is answered.

Mr Ellwood: Thank you, Minister, and committee. I think if I could just clarify what the question was.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you very much, Deputy Director-General. It is good to have someone step up to answer the question.

Mr Ellwood: I will do my best.

Dr ROWAN: Again with reference to mine approvals, reference SDS page 2, regulate environmentally relevant activities, I refer to the 129 new mines which were never opposed by the minister as we have just heard. Do any of these mines operate in a reef water catchment area and, if so, how many?

Mr Ellwood: I do not have the 129 in front of me, but it would be fair to say, given that the Great Barrier Reef runs just north of Fraser Island right through to the Cape, there have certainly been some coal projects that have been approved which, given the Fitzroy Basin is quite large, do eventually or potentially flow into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. Regardless of that, the approvals process, perhaps to clarify in relation to your question to the minister and the DG, is a Public Service decision, whether it is by the Coordinator-General through his EIS process or the state EHP's EIS process or whether they are amendments for smaller projects, they are done by public servants and the decisions are made by public servants. The only difference there would be if there are any matters referred to the Land Court prior to green tape amendments which were in—I would hate to give the wrong information—but somewhere around 2013. Prior to that the recommendations went to the minister. That has since changed and it goes to the chief executive now.

In relation to the assessment though, water quality is one of the key areas that is assessed and the conditions are very, very strict in relation to any releases that basically need to resemble the background, both upstream and downstream, and minimise any impacts, including those to the immediate downstream landholders and ultimately any of those that could make their way right through into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

Dr ROWAN: If there is some specific further information about the specific numbers of how many actually operate in those reef water catchment areas and the locations, could you take that on notice to provide that back to the committee?

Dr MILES: We will do our best to get that information during the session and if not I will come back at the end and say we will take it on notice.

CHAIR: You will take that on notice for us?

Dr MILES: We will see if it is possible to get that information to the committee before the end of the session, that would be my preference, but if that is not possible I will advise the committee at the end of the session.

Dr ROWAN: Again with reference to the approvals, and the reference is SDS page 2, regulate environmentally relevant activities, and the 129 new mines which, we have heard, were never opposed by the minister, does the environment department have any estimate of how many tonnes of raw materials generated by these new mines will be exported via ships through the Great Barrier Reef?

Mr Reeves: Again I would call on the deputy director-general who handles regulation, Dean Ellwood, to come and answer that question.

Mr Ellwood: Whilst each individual project would have an outline about what they would call 'run of mine' or production totals, I am not sure that we would have that. I certainly do not have that ready to hand around the cumulative amount that would then be exported through a number of the ports throughout the state. Again it would be one of those, Minister, if you agree, where we would endeavour to try to collate some of that material.

Dr MILES: I am not even sure it is a feasible question.

CHAIR: I will take this opportunity now to remind the member that these questions are more questions in line with question time in parliament not to the budget estimates. This is a hearing of the budget and these are not question that are lined up with this budget.

Dr MILES: Perhaps if the member was clearer about what he is trying to get to. If it is about shipping safety there is an appropriate minister for that. There is not a single source of information about total tonnage of shipping. That would require significant administrative effort to collate, I imagine, and would certainly not rest in our agency. It would probably rest in the minister for ports, so perhaps it is a question that can be directed to him.

Dr ROWAN: With respect, we have a number of questions that have been asked that are now taken on notice with information to be provided back. It would be good to get an idea of the total amount of raw materials coming through there. If we move on to what I am trying to get to: there have been a number of new mine approvals and there are statements in the budget papers about protecting the Great Barrier Reef and the climate change strategy around that. It is the due diligence of understanding what will be the impacts of those decisions to approve those mines and also the impacts on the Great Barrier Reef, with the minister in his opening statement talking about the importance of protecting the Great Barrier Reef. I am presuming the department has actually done its due diligence when it comes to estimating the additional tonnage of raw materials that will be travelling through the Great Barrier Reef, let alone the impacts of these mining endeavours on the health of the Great Barrier Reef. To this stage, I have not been able to be given the information around that. If it exists that would be great. I would like that information provided.

Dr MILES: I am happy to address one element of that. The Great Barrier Reef is one of the most regulated series of shipping channels in the world. In terms of actual impacts on the reef, shipping rates relatively lowly. Port developments we know do have an impact on the reef and that is why we have moved to greatly limit port developments and greatly limit the disposal of capital dredge spoil on and near the reef. If the member is particularly interested in shipping impacts I am happy to get the executive director of the OGBR to talk about that, but the honest assessment is that the big threats to the reef are climate change and agricultural run-off, sediment and nutrients. Shipping is well down the list. I will let Ms Nichols speak to that.

Ms Nichols: Shipping impacts, as the minister has indicated, are highly regulated in the Great Barrier Reef by Maritime Safety Queensland, which is under the Minister for Transport and Main Roads as well as via the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. There is a pilotage scheme. There is a vessel tracking system which you can go on live and see where vessels are at any time. There have been incidents in the reef, as you know, but they are few and far between and since that time there certainly has been an improvement in the vessel tracking system and that is an action under the Reef 2050 Plan that Queensland and the Commonwealth are jointly administering.

Dr MILES: The member should, next time he is in North Queensland, go and see Reef HQ and see the shipping monitoring. It is genuinely very impressive. I would like to share one further anecdote on that front: one of Rio Tinto's vessel is actually a mobile monitoring station that, as it traverses up and down the coast, is constantly gathering data about the state of the reef. It is not all doom and gloom in that regard. We actually get significant support like that which helps add to the information we have.

Dr ROWAN: Given that there are all of these new coalmine approvals and new mining approvals as well which we know have an impact on waterways and the Great Barrier Reef, is it not a double standard that you have one set of actions on one hand—approving all these—and on the other talking to Greens in your electorate of Mount Coot-tha because, let us be honest about that, you are here because of Greens preferences.

CHAIR: I will pull you up there. That is imputation. You cannot go along that line of questioning. If you continue with it I will pull you up at every stage. Please get back to a direct question.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to SDS pages 1 and 2 and the government's climate change strategy, do you support a carbon tax for Queensland?

Dr MILES: Mr Chair, let me thank the member for his question. What I have consistently supported is a national system to cap and reduce emissions over time. I have never proposed that such a system should be state based or that it should resemble a tax. My support is for a national system for capping and trading emissions reducing emissions over time because pretty much everyone who has any honest knowledge of this topic agrees that that is the most efficient, least-cost method of reducing national emissions. It is a bipartisan commitment at a federal level to reduce emissions between now and 2030. We would argue that the current commitments are not sufficient, but both parties agree on that. Even the consultants that Greg Hunt got to assess his emissions reduction fund said that it would have to become an emissions trading scheme for it to have any chance at all of achieving even the targets that Malcolm Turnbull went to Paris with.

I do not know where the member intends to go with this, but my credentials on this have been consistent and clear: Australia needs to reduce its emissions. The sooner we start on that journey, more of the job opportunities, more of the economic opportunities that come with the transition to a low-carbon future will be in Australia and that is why that work is so important.

CHAIR: We will now move to government questions. Minister, I draw your attention to page 6 of the SDS. What activities will the new community sustainability action grants be used for?

Dr MILES: Thank you, Mr Chair. The recently announced community sustainability action grants will provide a total of \$12 million over three years. Funding from the grants will be provided to individuals and organisations to undertake projects which conserve Queensland's heritage listed sites and natural environment and assist Queensland's native wildlife. Already the call for projects under the first round for heritage activities is open and the next round for conservation activities will open in mid August. We know the best way to make the biggest impact is with innovative new projects, but innovation requires upfront investment. Through these grants we are looking to support the development of new ideas at a local level. The grants will also help community organisations to grow existing programs and activities. Specifically, grants will be provided to recipients to undertake restoration and conservation of Queensland's heritage listed sites. This includes roofing, restumping and other urgent repair work with the aim of improving public access to and understanding of our historic sites. We know that maintaining heritage properties can be costly and community groups often shoulder the bulk of the costs. This will provide some much needed help to people protecting our historic places.

In fact, it was a conversation with the member for Ipswich West that convinced me we needed to find a way to support community organisations struggling to maintain buildings and places important to our state's heritage. Mr Madden and I visited St Brigid's church, we talked with the local parish about the love of their church and the difficulties they faced raising the funds needed for reroofing and painting from their parishioner families. Applications are now open for the heritage component of the grants. I know the member will be making sure St Brigid's puts in an application. Of course, we have a panel of experts who are making these decisions, but after hearing their story and their passion I for one hope St Brigid's is successful.

Grants will also be available to develop or update a conservation management plan for heritage listed sites. Projects which encourage growth in volunteers and which leverage funding or in-kind support from other sources will be encouraged. We will target groups that engage volunteers to undertake environmental conservation activities, such as weeding, re-vegetation, pest animal control and litter and marine debris collection, with the aim of protecting and conserving Queensland's ecosystems and native species.

There will also be grants available to research the threats impacting on koalas and develop innovative processes to mitigate those threats. I am pleased that, in committing new funds to conserving our state's environment and heritage, we have ensured some of those funds go to local community organisations that do so much. I know these dollars will be amplified many times over with the time contributed by wonderful volunteers who work tirelessly in all of our communities.

Mrs GILBERT: Minister, I refer to page 2 of the Service Delivery Statements. Please explain the \$5.17 million in additional funding for investigating alleged serious environmental harm associated with underground coal gasification operations.

Dr MILES: As minister, I have sought to ensure that the department has access to extra resources to obtain additional expert advice and conduct testing over a wide area to ensure a thorough investigation of the allegation of environmental harm in the Hopeland area. The department is committed to ensuring that human health and people's livelihoods are a priority. The investigation of Linc Energy is the largest and most expensive case ever handled by the state's environmental regulator. Since coming to office the Palaszczuk government has provided EHP with \$15.8 million in special funding to deal with this important case. The \$5.17 million allocated to the Linc investigation and prosecution for 2016-17 is critical to ensure that the government is properly resourced to continue the largest, most complex and comprehensive investigation into environmental offending in the state's history.

Funds have been allocated for the purpose of conducting additional drilling and laboratory testing in the Hopeland region and for continuing the investigation, prosecution and other action against Linc. The funding is also being used for an ongoing investigation into potential offending by executive officers. This work is an important part of the department's enforcement approach. The funding will also assist in commencing the work necessary to ensure the rehabilitation of the Linc site. This work is complex because of the novel nature of the technology, because of the underground contamination and a history of protracted and high-profile litigation. This funding gives my department the ability to undertake complex enforcement action, which is ultimately designed to deter environmental offending.

As the minister, it is my expectation that the department will hold all enterprises accountable to the environmental protection laws set by the parliament. In doing so, the department as regulator follows a compliance and enforcement policy that has been in place for some time. This policy calls for significant breaches to be dealt with very seriously. That is what the people of Queensland expect, and certainly the people of Hopeland deserve nothing less.

Mr MADDEN: Minister, with reference to the 2016-17 service area highlights at page 6 of your department's Service Delivery Statements, can you please outline how the government is supporting off-park conservation activities such as nature refuges?

Dr MILES: Queensland is home to an extraordinary diversity of landscapes and native species. From bilbies in Currawinya to turtles streaming down the beaches of Raine Island, we have some of the most incredible natural environments in the world. We want to preserve them for future generations to explore and enjoy. Labor governments in Queensland have always been strong advocates for a robust, resilient and representative protected area estate. It is a record we are very proud of, a record we intend to continue with and a record that contrasts with the LNP's trash-and-burn approach to nature conservation.

It was the Goss Labor government in 1992 that brought in the groundbreaking Nature Conservation Act, which introduced new classes of protected area and the land management principles required for each. National parks preserve the best of our natural heritage, like spectacular landscapes and extraordinary wildlife. They also deliver significant economic, social, cultural and health benefits for Queensland and Australia. It is, after all, our wonderful natural environment, including of course the Great Barrier Reef, that draws people from all over the world. They come here to experience our unique natural places, and while they are here they spend money in our hotels, shops, pubs, cafes and restaurants, literally employing tens of thousands of Queenslanders. That is why we think of them as public assets. They should be used and enjoyed by the public, not treated as an exploitable resource for the government of the day.

Even with our protections, we know that climate change will place increasing pressure on our precious natural environment. That is why the Palaszczuk government is committed to a strong and expansive system of protected areas that represents Queensland's unique flora and fauna and is resilient to the impacts of climate change. The Queensland government has shown continued support for off-park conservation activities, including through its ongoing commitment to the successful NatureAssist program to establish new nature refuges on private land. NatureAssist has been operating since 2005 and is the government's primary mechanism for securing new nature refuges, a class of private protected area that complements our state owned parks. There are now 497 nature refuges across Queensland that protect more than four million hectares of land of high conservation value.

The previous LNP government did not see the ongoing value of this program and the 500-odd nature refuges it supported, with its funding a year-to-year proposition. You can imagine why that was very damaging. The LNP was asking landholders to make a perpetual commitment to conservation

while itself committing to the program only for one more year. We were elected just in time to extend it for a further year last year, but I am pleased to clarify that in the recent state budget the government announced \$11.7 million over four years to support the management of existing nature refuges under the NatureAssist program. This is ongoing funding to provide the program and its voluntary participants with certainty. Furthermore, \$2.5 million in carryover from the 2015-16 budget was approved to fund priority conservation activities on five new nature refuge proposals. The negotiations to establish those nature refuges and NatureAssist funded projects on them are well advanced. The allocation includes \$440,000 towards the conservation of the recently rediscovered night parrot on the proposed Pullen Pullen nature refuge, owned by Bush Heritage Australia.

It is recognised that, if we are to grow Queensland's protected area estate towards the 17 per cent target set by the Convention on Biological Diversity, as we have committed to do, the government must continue to support landholders to protect and manage conservation values on their lands. To progress this commitment, the government has directed the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing to work towards developing a protected area strategy for expanding and effectively managing the protected area estate. These agencies are jointly exploring innovative strategies to move coverage of the protected area estate towards the 17 per cent target and continued effective management of protected areas on both private and public lands.

The establishment of new nature refuges through NatureAssist will continue to be a critical component of an expanded protected area system for Queensland. In addition to NatureAssist, the Queensland government is continuing to work with the Queensland Trust for Nature to achieve conservation gains across Queensland. Eleven new nature refuge proposals are being progressed collaboratively with the trust. These proposals include land containing important koala habitat in the Scenic Rim region and magnificent cassowary habitat and corridor connectivity in the Mission Beach area.

Mrs MILLER: My question to the minister is in relation to Swanbank. Is there still a full-time-equivalent officer at Swanbank to identify and address concerns from the residents of Redbank Plains, Ripley, Raceview and Flinders View in relation to the dreadful smells that emanate from there? If an officer is not still stationed there, I would like to know whether that officer will be replaced.

Dr MILES: I am aware of those odour concerns in that area. In a moment I will ask the appropriate deputy director-general to advise what the specific staffing allocation there is. I do know that the department is conducting a targeted compliance project to investigate and manage ongoing offensive odour being experienced periodically in Swanbank and surrounding suburbs. The source of odour almost certainly is waste industries regulated by the department, but EHP continues to work collaboratively with the council to investigate alleged sources. I understand the challenge is how you pinpoint the source of an odour when you have a number of operations—

Mrs MILLER: That is why an officer was there.

Dr MILES: In terms of the allocation of the officer, if you do not mind, I will ask Mr Ellwood to respond.

Mr Ellwood: The question was in relation to Swanbank. My understanding is that we certainly have—and I have to clarify how many—compliance staff based at Ipswich.

Mrs MILLER: No. We used to have a full-time officer located at Swanbank.

Mr Ellwood: Dedicated?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, a dedicated officer in relation to complaints from thousands of residents in my electorate and also in the electorate of Ipswich, concerning the smells at Swanbank. Therefore, that officer could identify where that smell was coming from very quickly. I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Mr Ellwood: Thank you for clarifying. As the minister alluded to or stated, the odours around the Swanbank area are certainly a primary focus. Just to clarify, our dedicated staff work out of our Ipswich office. We have a range of compliance staff working there. Some of those—and I can try to clarify how many—are dedicated directly towards Swanbank. They undertake a range of duties throughout that area and there has been a significant focus of effort in relation to odours in that area in more recent times. We are certainly working with the local government and their somewhat recently appointed chief operating officer to make sure there is a concerted effort in relation to the sources of those odours. Some of them are regulated by the state and some of them are regulated by the local government

authority. It takes a joint effort, if you like, as to how we manage that. Certainly, if there is a view that there has been a reduction or a staff member is not being there, I am unaware that that is the case. I would suggest that we have probably put more effort into that area than previously.

Mrs MILLER: For the benefit of the minister, previous Labor governments and environment ministers have had a full-time officer located at Swanbank. As a follow-up question, the local government always says that it is an issue for the environment department, which is ping-pong. The residents are, quite frankly, sick of it. I would like, through the minister, a full-time officer located at Swanbank, because we are sick of having a situation whereby we are told that they cannot get out there or whatever because they cannot identify where that smell is coming from. If an officer is there full time, they are able to identify that very fast.

Dr MILES: I am happy to commit to finding out what the arrangement there is at the moment and perhaps organise for Dean to brief you directly on how the response—

Mrs MILLER: No, I do not want a briefing. I have been through this for many, many years. I just want to know when a full-time officer will be located at Swanbank.

CHAIR: Minister, will you take that on notice?

Dr MILES: Certainly. I will ask Dean to investigate the arrangement and see what further support can be provided.

CHAIR: I now hand over to non-government members to ask questions.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, with reference to page 4 of the Service Delivery Statements for the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, can you ensure that small timber-milling businesses remain viable and competitive in Queensland by unburdening the small milling operators from the high cost of environmental authority fee structures, by reducing fees and red tape? What measures are being implemented to ensure these milling companies are charged proportionate fees in relation to the volume of timber being treated?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. It is an excellent one. I particularly acknowledge the contribution that the member for Dalrymple has made on this important issue. More than a year ago, not long after I was elected, the member for Dalrymple raised with me his concerns about the environmental licensing fees charged to a small regional sawmill in his electorate. It did seem to me to be disproportionately large, and that was the argument that he put to me.

The member had done his homework and he showed me enough detail to capture my interest. I asked the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection to look carefully at his concerns. As part of the department's review, EHP examined the businesses that are engaged in what the law refers to as timber treatment activities. In plain English most of us would call them sawmills. As the member and I know, the sawmill industry is very diverse. Some businesses in the sector are large but some regional towns have quite small sawmills which might even only operate on a seasonal basis. They provide local jobs and supply products to local business both in property and in construction but also to agricultural interests. As we looked deeper into this industry, the department found that the sawmillers have been changing and improving their environmental management practices and that the law had not kept up—the law had not given proper recognition to the improvements that they had made over the years.

I am happy to announce today that we have acted. Queensland's laws on these issues were actually changed just a few days ago on 8 July. Under the changes that we have made, we will be able to provide a direct reward for timber treatment operators who are actively adopting improved environmental practices. Under the old law, we treated all sawmillers the same. It was one size fits all. We have now finetuned the laws to recognise the diversity in the industry. The first change that we have made is to recognise that many operators in the timber industry are moving away from using old riskier chemicals. In particular, I am referring to copper chromium arsenic, known as CCA, and creosote. Instead of those chemicals, a number of sawmillers are using newer chemicals which pose much less risk of harm to the environment. Those newer alternative chemicals are identified for convenient reference under the Australian Standard 16041. Those operators present far less risk to the environment, and it was appropriate that we recognise this in the law.

The second change we made was to recognise that, amongst the class of operators who no longer use the more dangerous chemicals, the small operators will actually present even less risk than the big operators because they handle lesser amounts of material. That is something we could not do before because the law assumed that all operators might be using arsenic compounds and creosote. We had to assume that each and every operator presented a risk of those chemicals leaking into the environment. Those chemicals are obviously something we need to regulate tightly. The law did not care whether a business was large or small. The law treated all businesses the same because each

and every business was considered to potentially have these chemicals on site. As I say, through the consultations that EHP has undertaken over the past 12 months with the industry, we have found that many operators have moved away from those old-fashioned chemicals. Once that was recognised then it has also become possible to treat smaller and larger businesses differently.

As a result of this work, the department has been able to substantially reduce annual licence fees for sawmilling businesses like the one in the member's electorate. For larger sawmills, if they do not use the old-fashioned chemicals and are using safer modern chemicals instead, we have cut their annual licence fee by a little over \$2,500 per annum. That is a 24 per cent cut in these government licence fees. For smaller sawmills like the ones we are interested in, such as the one in the member for Dalrymple's electorate, because they do not use these chemicals, we have completely abolished the annual licence fee. It falls to zero—100 per cent saving. In cash terms, that is a saving for a small local business in the member for Dalrymple's electorate of more than \$10,000—\$10,634. That means that we can put that money back into the hands of someone who operates a smaller business. I honestly thank the member for raising this with me. I am very pleased that we have been able to deliver what I think is a great outcome for that business but also for similar businesses right throughout the state.

Mr KNUTH: That is good news, Minister—very good news. With reference to page 9 of the Service Delivery Statement for the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, can the minister provide details on the measures being taken to assist local government authorities to remove flying foxes?

Dr MILES: Again, let me thank the member for his question. Both the member for Dalrymple and the member for Mount Isa have been passionate advocates for better tools to address flying foxes, I know, over a very long period of time and certainly during my period as minister. I do not think a sitting week has gone by without me having the opportunity to discuss flying foxes with representatives of the Katter party.

The Queensland government recognises the need for urban flying fox roosts to be managed in a way that addresses community concerns and expectations and the long-term survival of these species in the wild. We recognise that some flying fox roosts, particularly in built-up areas, need intervention to protect residents from nuisance impacts such as smell and noise. We also recognise that flying foxes play a vital ecological role. They pollinate native plants and they maintain the health of our native forests. The management of urban flying fox roosts has remained problematic for decades in towns like Moranbah, Charters Towers and Mount Isa, despite the application of various management interventions by local government.

The biology and behaviour of flying foxes, and the little red flying foxes in particular, have been poorly understood. Further scientific work is needed to better inform the management of these animals at flying fox roost sites. This budget includes a \$2.7 million investment program over three years to address little red flying fox behaviour and management issues. We acknowledge that, while councils can move roosts on, they have no control over where they go next, so understanding their movements will make sure councils are not just shuffling this problem around their community or to neighbouring councils.

As part of the program, CSIRO scientists will fit little red flying foxes with radio transmitters to track their movements so we can better understand their roosting preferences and the factors that influence their roosting behaviour. The program will commence later this year in Charters Towers, where hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of little red flying foxes spend winter before heading south in the warmer months in search of flowering eucalypts. If you look at the maps of what we know of the flying foxes' flight paths, Charters Towers looks just like Central Station. It is right there in the middle. That is why so many end up stopping there.

It makes sense to start the project in the north of the state so that we can track flying fox movements around that area as they come and go into Cape York Peninsula and as they make their way down to the southern and central parts of the state. The use of GPS transmitters and satellite monitoring will allow flying fox movements to be tracked and interpreted across thousands of kilometres. The funding will also be used to review and report on the effectiveness of flying fox dispersal exercises undertaken by local government over the past five years.

The project is targeted at creating transferable knowledge for use by local governments across the state experiencing similar difficulties with flying foxes, and little red flying foxes in particular, at flying fox roost sites in built-up areas. I understand that the department has met with the Charter Towers council if not this week then we will be meeting next week to discuss how that program rolls out and how it can support their efforts.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, there have been many ministers who have dodged Charters Towers, so we would like to invite you to come out and have a look at this problem as well.

Dr MILES: I am looking forward to the opportunity to see firsthand many of the issues the member has raised with me. I am keen to go and tell the sawmill about the changes in their licensing arrangements, but sitting down with the council and hearing about the challenges they have had in managing the roost I think will be most useful for me.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I would like to come back to question on notice No. 636. In relation to the 30 coalmining approvals including the 16 new ones between the period of 31 January 2015 and 31 March 2016, for clarity purposes, was Adani a single approval or are there multiple approvals in that count which is in the answer to question on notice No. 636?

Dr MILES: As I explained earlier, these approvals are managed by the regulator independent of me and my office, so I will ask the appropriate deputy director-general, Mr Ellwood, to come and speak to that detailed question.

Dr ROWAN: Moving on from question on notice No. 636—

Dr MILES: Let us answer the question.

Dr ROWAN: My apologies. I thought you were taking it on notice.

Dr MILES: No. I was calling forward an officer with the appropriate expertise.

Mr Ellwood: If I could, I will clarify the exact number but there is more than one approval. There is the mine itself obviously and then there is other associated infrastructure in relation to the port activities as well. As to the exact numbers of all of those, I will endeavour to get those exact approvals, if that is okay, Minister?

Dr MILES: We will aim to come back before the end of the session.

CHAIR: Will you take that on notice?

Dr MILES: We will aim to come back before the end of the session, if we can.

Mr Ellwood: I have some figures here but I would prefer to be certain about it for the record. If we can clarify that during the session, I will put that through to the minister.

Dr ROWAN: Just to add to that, Minister, is there also the possibility of providing information on the number of coalmines that have been approved since 31 March 2016 and their locations and reef catchments impacted as well. That is other information I would be interested in as well if that were able to be provided.

Dr MILES: Essentially, the question you asked earlier and the question you are asking now is for a breakdown of the list of approvals highlighted by reef catchments.

Dr ROWAN: There were two periods: question on notice No. 636 relates to the period between 31 January 2015 and 31 March 2016, and I have now asked a question about post 31 March 2016. If there is similar information available as well then that would be of benefit.

Dr MILES: We will endeavour to find that for you.

Dr ROWAN: The 2016-17 service area highlights include a reference to 'Encourage and support community groups, through a new Community Sustainability Action Grants program'—which you outlined in your opening statement, Minister—'(\$4 million per year over three years) to support community-based delivery of environmental, conservation and heritage protection activities and outcomes'. I specifically wanted to ask: within this grants program, will there be any funds that are provided for the purchase of koala habitat or other koala conservation initiatives? I would be interested to know what the actual budget for purchasing at-risk koala habitat areas is for 2016-17.

Dr MILES: I addressed the first part of the member's question in answer to one of the non-government questions on notice. I will endeavour to get the number. Essentially, the answer was that, if koala conservation projects met the conservation criteria or the koala research criteria, there are certainly grants there available for conservation activities. It was non-government question on notice No. 1.

With regard to funding in the budget for koala habitat, there is not currently funding in the budget for koala habitat. I will speak to the reasons for that. The first reason is that, in response to the UniQuest study that was released earlier this year, the government has appointed an expert panel to advise on the best mix of policy measures to better address the decline in koala populations in the south-east. Although there are only two regions where there was sufficient data to properly analyse the decline in koala numbers, that study showed that there had been an 80 per cent decrease on the koala coast and

a 54 per cent decrease in Pine Rivers. That obviously triggered a significant level of concern within government but also within the community. While in this budget we have committed significant new funds to koala conservation efforts, at this stage none of those funds or additional funds have been allocated to habitat purchase until we receive the advice from that expert panel.

There is a second reason why we have not at this stage included additional funding for habitat and that is that there are serious questions about the effectiveness of the koala habitat purchases, particularly those made by the previous government. The previous government, when it was elected in 2012, committed \$22.5 million to purchase koala habitat. I understand there has been some coverage of this in the media today, but it turns out that all of that money was spent purchasing land in LNP electorates. Of some 14 purchases only one was in the South-East Queensland koala habitat protection area where we know that koalas are most under threat. It took the previous government 18 months to purchase its first property under that program which ironically was a \$2.4 million property in the then minister's seat of Glass House.

It was not a requirement of that purchase program that there be any koalas on the property. It turns out the Glass House property currently has one koala. For an investment of \$2.4 million of taxpayers' funds the LNP has provided a home for one single, but very lucky, koala. We are going to give him a special name. I am not sure if Tim or Andrew is the best name. It cost \$2.4 million to provide a home for one koala.

All of the funds went to LNP seats. Before you say that that is because the LNP held most of the seats, even if you look at the electorates against the currently more balanced parliament, only two of the purchases were in seats now held by Labor, that being Pine Rivers and Mirani. People will be aware that Mirani is a very long way from South-East Queensland.

With the spectre of those very significant concerns, I think, although the quantum of dollars is lower, the questions around the allocation of these funds is even worse than the Royalties for Regions report that we all now know about. Given that these properties rarely contained koalas and given that we know that one property was purchased for \$2.4 million and it has only one koala, we would have been better off buying that koala a riverfront property in your electorate, member for Moggill. I think for \$2.4 million, you just about could have—

CHAIR: Please be relevant to the budget.

Dr ROWAN: I come back to the substance of the issue. Koala conservation is a very serious issue, which I am sure the minister would appreciate.

Dr MILES: It is. That is why it is a shame to have seen these funds wasted.

Dr ROWAN: I have just heard some political rhetoric. I think the last thing anyone would want is the politicisation of such an iconic animal. I want to come back to the substance of the issue. There was \$15 million budgeted for koala habitat in 2015-16. If I am correct, from your answer there is zero for the purchase of koala habitat in 2016-17. Is that correct?

Dr MILES: There are no additional funds in this current budget for the purchase of habitat for the two reasons I outlined. One is that we are waiting on the outcome of the policy process. The other is that there are very serious questions to be asked about the previous koala habitat purchase program. They are not political accusations, member for Moggill; they are very serious concerns.

I will table for the committee the list of properties purchased between 1 October 2013 and 12 January 2015. I can list them. They were in the seats of Glass House, Lockyer, Lockyer, Noosa, Beaudesert, Beaudesert, Beaudesert, Callide, Burnett, Callide, Lockyer and Nanango. As I have said, there were two other properties—one in Pine Rivers and one in Mirani. None of them were in the areas highlighted as being of concern by the UniQuest study. It is very concerning. I table that for the committee.

Dr ROWAN: With respect to the budget, in 2015-16 there was \$15 million allocated for the purchase of koala habitat. I understand the reasons that you have outlined in relation to the review. I am asking about the specific budgetary variance between 2015-16 and 2016-17 for the purchase of koala habitat.

Dr MILES: As I have made clear, there is no allocation in this budget specifically for koala habitat for the two reasons that I have outlined. There is funding for a range of koala programs. I am happy to go into the detail of how that will be allocated between survey work and other conservation work, if that is what you are trying to get to, but if the question you are asking is whether we have allocated funds in this budget to purchase koala habitat, as the previous government's policy purported but failed to do, then the answer is that, no, we have not.

CHAIR: Leave is granted to table the document. We will move to government questions.

Mrs GILBERT: I refer to page 2 of the SDS. What steps has the government taken to ensure the financial assurance raised from the largest mines in Queensland is up to date and appropriate?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for her question. The member's electorate of Mackay is home to much of the resources industry and many of the workers supported by that industry.

The Queensland government is committed to ensuring that adequate financial assurance is held by the state as security for rehabilitation obligations of mine sites in Queensland. A robust system of financial assurance is important to ensure that taxpayers are not left picking up multimillion dollar environmental clean-up bills to rehabilitate mine sites. Financial assurance provides the government with financial security to cover costs or expenses incurred in taking action to prevent or minimise environmental harm or rehabilitate or restore the environment should an environmental authority holder fail to meet their environmental obligations.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1994 mining operators are required to submit a plan of operation every five years. However, most operators have operated on a one-year time frame. The operator must propose the amount of financial assurance as part of their submission.

The Department of Environmental and Heritage Protection rigorously reviews and assesses the activities in accordance with the legislative requirements and ultimately decides the amount and form of financial assurance to be held. Financial assurance must be provided by the operator prior to undertaking activities on the site. Should activities being undertaken change or if the plan of operations is not consistent with the requirements of the environmental authority, operators are required to amend or replace the plan of operations. This would require the proponent to propose a revised financial assurance.

One of our key responses to the Auditor-General's report into FA was to develop an FA calculator that accurately assesses the amount of FA required to rehabilitate the environmental disturbance associated with resource activities. Also in response to that report the department has increased the amount of FA the state now holds. We now have more than \$7 billion in financial assurance from mining, gas and oil companies. That compares with \$1.45 billion in 2008.

We have also passed new chain of responsibility laws that aim to ensure mining, petroleum and gas or other industrial companies that have closed shop and moved on, folded or gone into liquidation do not leave the taxpayer with the clean-up. The laws give the government a number of options to pursue related persons of a company, to have them make good on the company's environmental responsibilities. For example, the department can now issue related persons with legally enforceable environmental protection orders if the resource companies they are involved with cease operations without complying with their rehabilitation obligations.

Queensland is a resource rich state. Investment by resource companies contributes enormously to the state's bottom line. The government and the community have an expectation that before a company's activities have ceased rehabilitation will be completed. That is what this government will ensure.

Mr MADDEN: I have a question with regard to page 3 of the Service Delivery Statements under the heading '2016-17 service area highlights'. Could you advise the committee as to what is planned for improving waste management through funding of \$1.9 million in the 2016-17 budget?

Dr MILES: Nowhere is the policy failure of the LNP laid bare more than when it comes to waste management. Thanks to their policy failure, Queensland receives not truck loads but literally train loads of waste from other states destined for our landfills. They made us the nation's dump. It is nothing short of shameful.

The government is determined to improve waste management outcomes in Queensland and is investing an additional \$1.9 million during the next financial year to ensure we get results. These funds will allow us to implement a container deposit scheme and to progress restrictions on single-use plastic shopping bags.

The additional funding will also find solutions for other high-impact product waste, including end-of-life batteries, tyres and food waste. We are working to divert high-volume waste based feedstocks, such as organic waste and tyres, away from landfill and into the production of biofuels and other bioproducts. Clearly, we need to find ways to divert organics from landfill.

To assist in achieving this aim, a partnership was established between the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the City of the Gold Coast to pilot the collection of commercial food waste from hotels. The pilot aims to inform the collection of food waste during the 2018 Commonwealth Games, but it will have much broader application.

At the same time, we will continue working with our partners the Department of Transport and Main Roads and the tyre industry to use recycled tyres in road construction and repairs. Every year in Australia 51 million tyres reach the end of their life and only 16 per cent of these tyres are recycled, with most ending up stockpiled or dumped in landfill.

Last year we saw 16 tonnes of waste tyres transported into Queensland from the Tweed coast region of New South Wales. This is because the previous LNP government deregulated tyre storage, leading to the re-emergence of tyre stockpiling and a reduction in the flow of waste tyres into the Queensland market. The LNP believed that regulating tyre stockpiles was just green tape. They did not give any thought to whether the laws they scrapped actually helped control the risk of toxic tyre fires.

Deregulation has led to situations where operators do not store or manage tyres responsibly. We know of tyre stockpiles abandoned once they have become full. We know of shipping containers of tyres abandoned. This is all because of the LNP's policy failures. Stockpiling raises the risk of severe oil fires, which are incredibly damaging to the environment and to human health.

Work is currently underway to investigate the reintroduction of regulatory requirements for tyre storage through the review of the environmentally relevant activity framework. This would allow conditions to be placed on the storage of tyres to help reduce the risk of tyre fires and inappropriate management. We want to ensure that operators who charge customers to collect tyres for recycling are actually recycling the tyres. This will make sure there is a strong market for used tyres because they have interesting and very beneficial applications.

Right now the Palaszczuk government is partnering with Tyre Stewardship Australia to develop and trial specifications for the use of crumbed rubber in road asphalt applications. In 2015-16 we demonstrated that recycled tyre crumb rubber can be used effectively in spray seals on much of Queensland's road network. In 2016-17 we will be trialling the use of recycled tyres in open-graded asphalt roads. There is great potential there. I am advised that roads containing some rubber are quieter, creating less noise from wheel-on-pavement contact, and are safer as cars are less likely to skid on them. They also last longer as the surface is less likely to crack.

I am sure you can also appreciate the pressing need to reduce the amount of litter impacting on the environment and particularly the Great Barrier Reef, Moreton Bay and other waterways. Plastic pollution is a global problem. Here in Queensland we have every reason to tackle it with a concerted effort. Plastic litter comes from many sources apart from bottles and bags.

In 2016-17 we will be expanding our efforts to find solutions for waste from the agricultural sector, which increasingly relies on plastic products for packaging, irrigation and mulching. I will give an example of how the government can work effectively with industry and local communities to improve management of agricultural plastic waste.

Every year fertiliser is delivered to cane farms in thousands of plastic bags. The department worked with fertiliser manufacturers, local government and plastic recyclers to trial the collection of the bags in North Queensland last financial year. Almost 80,000 bags, or 217 tonnes of plastic, were recovered. As a direct result of this project, the fertiliser manufacturers have committed to a long-term, sustainable arrangement for all their fertiliser bags, not just sugarcane bags.

Plastic that was previously burnt or buried on-farm or in landfill will now be recycled locally. This commitment will reduce the dispersal of harmful plastic fragments into the waters of the Great Barrier Reef while creating regional employment. In 2016-17 the focus will be on other agricultural products, such as trickle irrigation tape and plastic mulch used in horticulture.

At last year's estimates hearings I mentioned that we were working with industry to pilot the collection of power tool batteries from retailers in Brisbane. That pilot has just wrapped up and we will be publishing the results shortly. In 2016-17 we will expand on this work to pilot the collection of all sorts of rechargeable batteries. This time we are working with 14 different collection partners across the Toowoomba region.

All this work is contributing towards the long-term goal of a national product stewardship scheme for these highly hazardous, smaller batteries. These schemes are important environmental protection measures, but of course they are also the catalyst for the creation of waste recovery infrastructure and jobs in waste, transport and recovery.

The government is also working to provide the right regulatory and policy settings to enhance innovation and investment opportunities in the resource recovery industry. For example, in 2016-17 funding will go towards delivering, for the first time in Queensland, state and regional waste infrastructure mapping and plans to provide future security for the location of waste infrastructure. It will

also be used for detailed investigation of landfill disposal vans for specific waste as a means to drive industry investment, recycling market development and jobs. There will be funds for an economic and employment study of the waste and resource recovery sector to determine up-to-date and robust figures for the waste industry's contribution to Queensland's economic development and job creation. This is some of the background work we need to put in place to create jobs and economic growth in the sector.

We also want to undertake new work in remote and Indigenous communities to improve waste management outcomes. These communities face particular challenges including low population density which leads to an increased cost for collecting and recovering waste. We want to identify opportunities to tackle the challenges and put projects on the ground to demonstrate the benefits of reducing waste and litter. Again, the key is to search out innovative solutions that will reduce environmental impacts from waste we create while creating employment by redirecting waste from landfill disposal. That is all money very well spent.

CHAIR: With reference to goal 2 on page 2 of the SDS, the Great Barrier Reef task force has called for the state government to partner on two major projects to reduce pollution run-off into the Great Barrier Reef. What can you tell me about these major integrated projects and what is new about this approach?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for Gladstone for his question. I know he is very interested in the welfare of the Great Barrier Reef, as he represents a beautiful part of the southern part of the reef. The Palaszczuk government will use the recommendations from the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce to allocate \$90 million over four years to deliver cleaner water for a healthy reef. The task force has recommended a greater focus on innovation, education support for farmers and expanded monitoring of water quality, and that is exactly what we plan to do.

As I touched on earlier, today we have taken the first step to deliver two major integrated projects that will reduce pollution run-off into the reef. We have committed \$33 million to these key projects over four years. We are looking for capable and experienced parties to work with us to target these pollutant hot spots. An expression of interest has been released calling for tenderers to coordinate the design and delivery of the two projects which are a direct response to the recommendations of the task force which realised it was critical we integrated and tested innovative tools.

This approach is different because it is about intensively trialling a range of coordinated actions that are designed specifically for that catchment. We will also take advantage of local expert knowledge to ensure we receive a maximum return. It is exciting to be at the forefront of such an approach which has the potential to deliver environmental and economic benefits for the reef and for our farmers. These projects aim to improve reef health by reducing nutrient sediment and pesticide loads.

The project manager must be based in the region where the majority of work will be focused, and I believe this will generate jobs in these areas. The projects will focus on supporting local stakeholders and landholders in key agricultural activities such as grazing and cane through a suite of coordinated services including extension, trial of innovative practices, incentives or stewardship payments. The projects will deliver a practical, accessible and regionally tailored program of work designed and owned by regional stakeholders for those regional stakeholders.

The outcomes from these projects will be continually evaluated and will be flexible in our delivery so we can achieve transformational on-ground change. Most importantly, we will be able to identify pathways to extend successful components to other regions. Through the expression of interest process, which closes next month, the government is looking for capable and experienced potential delivery agents who have the interest, availability and capacity to coordinate the design of works in the targeted regions. Responses to the EOI will then be short-listed and preferred tenderers will be invited to submit detailed proposals about how they would design and coordinate a program of works in either of the major project integrated project areas. Following this process, successful applicants will then be awarded contracts to coordinate the design of the major projects for each region.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I want to come to funding for the Environmental Defenders Office, and that is with reference to page 10 of the SDS. Can you advise how much funding is being provided in this budget and over the forward estimates for the Environmental Defenders Office in Queensland?

Dr MILES: The Environmental Defenders Office is funded by the community justice program—or a similarly worded program—within the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The EDO is not a beneficiary of the funds that EHP provides to community environmental organisations, if that is what the member is asking.

Dr ROWAN: Will this committee be assured that taxpayers' money is not being used to pursue court objections for approvals provided by state ministers and departments including yours? That is the next question I was coming to.

Dr MILES: I cannot speak for the funds that the Department of Justice and Attorney-General provide. They are essentially the funds that go to community legal centres and legal aid services. The conditions of the grants program that EHP provides to community environmental councils, which is the non-government conservation funding program, which is a long-running program that has been in place since the 1990s, have not changed in recent years. They have always required that those funds be used for day-to-day operating expenses which are defined in their specific contracts as being explicitly associated with staffing, rent, utilities, rates, building and equipment maintenance, printing and publications, stationery, audit fees, bank fees, cleaning, insurance, security training and equipment purchase and hire. The specific exclusions in the contract are for catering, entertainment, donations, external service providers, event management and attendance. The department keeps \$10,000 of those funds to cover the minister's environment round table, which is where I meet with all of these groups, and previous governments have had the same practice. Those funds, as I understand it, have not been increased since Minister Powell increased them in his first year in office.

It is \$575,000 per year. The agreement, though, must be over three years because I have here the three-yearly figures. QCC will receive \$495,000 for the agreement period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2018. CAFNEC, the Cairns and far north, will receive \$150,000 or \$50,000 a year; the Capricorn Conservation Council will receive \$150,000 per year; the Darling Downs Environment Council will receive \$75,000 year; the Gladstone Conservation Council will receive \$25,000 per year; Gecko, the Gold Coast and Hinterland Environment Council, will receive \$50,000 per year; the Mackay Conservation Group will receive \$50,000 per year; the North Queensland Conservation Council will receive \$50,000 per year; the Sunshine Coast Environment Council will receive \$50,000 per year; and the Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council will receive \$50,000 per year. As I say, the funding allocation for the program has remained consistent and the conditions have remained consistent since 2011-12 when Minister Powell increased it from \$400,000 per annum.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, I want to come back to you. My previous question was confirmed by the minister regarding those 220 mines that the minister did not oppose before 31 March 2016—a time frame which was confirmed in earlier testimony. For any of those mines approved since then, did the minister at any stage ask that approvals post 31 March 2016 be halted, delayed or vetoed in any way?

CHAIR: Before you answer the question, once again you need to be relevant to the budget. That is not a question relating to the budget.

Dr ROWAN: With respect, I asked that question earlier in relation to the period of time from 31 January 2015 to 31 March 2016 and there was an answer provided. Given that I asked about information from 31 March 2016 until now, I want to clarify that statement given that that has already been discussed this morning.

CHAIR: I want to make sure that you are aware that we are treading a pretty thin line of relevance. Is the minister happy to answer it?

Dr MILES: The question was directed to the director-general, but I have not and would not.

Mr Reeves: I had no direction or discussion with the minister.

Dr ROWAN: That is fine. Director-General, in relation to the cash flow statement, I refer to page 24 of the SDS which refers to forfeited financial assurances for mine rehabilitation. Can you advise of the total amount of forfeited assurances for the past two financial years? Are you able to provide a brief outline of where the funds are currently being spent?

Mr Reeves: I would have to take that on notice or refer it to Mr Ellwood, the deputy director-general.

Dr ROWAN: Would you like to take it on notice or refer it to Mr Ellwood?

Dr MILES: I think we can ask Mr Ellwood to answer that question.

Mr Ellwood: Could you ask the question in relation to the time frames again?

Dr ROWAN: I was asking specifically in relation to the past two financial years for the total amount of forfeited assurances and a brief outline of where the funds are being spent in relation to mine rehabilitation.

Mr Ellwood: I have detail in relation to financial assurances. Whether it is within those time frames I would prefer to clarify, but what I can say is that there has certainly been a number of disclaimed mines in recent times including Texas Silver and Collingwood Tin, of which the money that was the financial assurance that is required for that site, the money that the state government held at the time and the way in which it is held being irrevocable and on demand, has been claimed. That money for at least those two sites and a number of others is being used in relation to ensuring that the sites are at least nonpolluting and stable.

Dr ROWAN: I am interested in the total amount of money for the past two years and a breakdown of where those funds are being spent. I am happy for you to take it on notice if you need to, but I am asking a specific—

Dr MILES: We can certainly get the information for you about the number of relinquishments and the dollar amounts involved. You asked about how that money was expended. The Texas Silver case is particularly telling. In the case of Texas Silver, the anticipated total cost to rehabilitate is something like \$10 million. The state recouped \$2 million in financial assurance and is using that \$2 million to manage the site. I think it would be interesting to hear from Mr Ellwood about how those funds are being used.

Mr Ellwood: I appreciate your frustration. The detail we have in relation to financial assurance is not necessarily written in a way that is aligned to the two financial years. Again, to clarify your question, I would prefer if I can take some more time to line that up. Specifically, though, in relation to the management of Texas Silver, what we see is a site that has been neglected for some time. A range of its storage dams contained quite highly contaminated material. Part of that work and the money that is being spent is to initially get on site and ensure that the place is safe for staff and people to operate.

We are very mindful about adjoining landholders and our New South Wales counterparts, because of the way in which the water flows. The primary focus for the money that is being used is to ensure there is adequate and sufficient storage for wet weather events. In any normal time you ensure that you can use whatever you can in relation to evaporation techniques and managing the storage facilities to ensure that in times of heavy rainfall you have capacity to contain and store that. The last thing we wanted to see was any discharges from the mine. Water management is really the primary focus of the \$2 million that is currently available to the state government for that.

CHAIR: Are you still asking a question on notice for figures?

Dr ROWAN: I would like those figures provided, if they are able to be provided.

CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to provide those figures?

Dr MILES: I think we will have to take that on notice.

Mr Ellwood: It is something I think we can do but, as I said, it was more around doing it within the time frame that the member had asked for to align those two figures.

CHAIR: We just have to get that through the minister. That is all.

Dr MILES: Thank you, Chair.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I would like to come to page 7 of the SDS and the area of protected estates and the percentage of Queensland land area that is protected. You will see that three-year targets appear to be missing in this document. I seek to leave to table that.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, when that comes around, you will see that the three-year targets appear to be missing. I am interested to know what the three-year targets are for protected areas. I will give you a moment to have a look.

Dr MILES: I think what has caused the confusion there is just the formatting of the page. The cell runs over the two pages. If you turn back to page 6, it says that the measures are the target estimated in 2015-16, the estimated actual and the target estimated in 2016-17. They are at the bottom of page 6, even though the cell continues over to page 7. There is a relevant note that says—

This service standard measures the percentage of Queensland land which is dedicated as national park or regional park or declared as a nature refuge. The 2015-16 Target/Estimate was 8.1 per cent; however based on available data, 7.9% is a realistic Target/Estimate for 2016-17. An assessment of probable additions and revocations ... suggests a zero net increase from the current 2015-16 Estimated Actual figure of 7.9 per cent.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, Minister. I will move on to the EHP Connect user fee. I understand you are introducing a voluntary user fee for customers to transact using the department's new online system, which is going to be termed Connect. I refer to Budget Paper No. 4, page 140, and the Connect

voluntary user fees. Although supportive that users of Connect will be able to lodge applications, make payments and manage licences and permits online to streamline processes, it seems extraordinary that the government will charge industry to use a service that will in fact save government resources and be more efficient. How is the fee arrived at? Were there some forward projections on how many operators it is intended will be using the system?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for the question. That fee is, as you say, a voluntary fee. It is optional whether operators choose to avail themselves of the online option. The advice to me was that for many operators the administrative burden realised within their organisations from being able to use the online system would be substantial and would in most cases be greater than the fee being collected. The department has invested significantly in the new online licensing system. The fee is designed to recoup some of those costs in line with the broader policy of cost recovery from industry for the cost of licensing, regulation and compliance. The 2016-17 budget projects \$750,000 to be collected. I would have to check with the CFO if we had a figure in the out years. I will ask Mr Lang to come to the table to address that specific question about future years.

Mr Lang: I believe the question was what would be collected over the forward estimates under that fee.

Dr ROWAN: Just the projections about how many users and what money will be collected.

Mr Lang: I can tell you what the projections are for the amount of money to be collected. It is \$750,000 in 2016-17; \$964,000 in 2017-18; \$1,071,000 in 2018-19; and \$1,104,000 in 2019-20. I do not have the numbers of users. We would have to collect that information and come back to you on that one.

CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to take that on notice?

Dr MILES: Is that something you can readily provide?

Mr Lang: In the calculation of the fee, there were some estimates on what the uptake would be.

Dr MILES: We will endeavour to get the basis of that modelling in terms of the number of users and perhaps the average fee to be applied to those users or something like that.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, you said in your opening comments that climate change was important in your department. In my electorate, new housing is being built on a daily basis. Are there any officers on staff in your department who can provide advice to families on sustainable housing options and design, thus reducing the need for air conditioning or other heating and cooling devices?

Dr MILES: Let me thank the member for her question. It is an incredibly important one. There are equity issues associated with the fact that oftentimes more energy efficient construction techniques and designs have an upfront cost that often will not be incorporated in accommodation design for lower income folk, so we effectively burden them with a lifetime of higher energy costs. It is a matter that I have taken some interest in.

The incorporation of improved sustainability in building standards actually rests with the Department of Housing and Public Works, but EHP is working very closely with them on projects designed to provide that knowledge. It also ensures that our public housing stock—which in recent years has had a pretty minimal interest in sustainability—has incorporated in it things like breezeways, flow of air, capacity for solar panels and batteries even down the track if the technology is not yet suitable. The department is working with EHP on programs around that and that work is ongoing. I am happy to see if we have an officer available to talk more about that engagement with Housing and Public Works, if you would like.

Mrs MILLER: I know Housing and Public Works is important because I have hundreds of housing commission homes in my electorate, but I am talking about private dwellings. If someone bought a block of land and they wanted to do the right thing by climate change, who in your department would they ring?

Dr MILES: I was referring to Housing and Public Works' responsibility both for public housing but also for setting building standards.

Mrs MILLER: So you have no-one in your department?

Dr MILES: There is a role for them in setting building standards. In the office of climate, we have new funds for new roles. At this stage, their focus has been on working with Housing and Public Works for both public housing and addressing building standards because that is the opportunity to get construction sector wide change. I will certainly ask them to look into whether there is a function we can play, even if it is just connecting people with builders and people with that expertise. Obviously, the last

thing we want to do is discourage early adopters. That is the chance to demonstrate that you can build a house that is more sustainable and that you will save money over time. Certainly, that is even more important in places like yours.

Mrs MILLER: At present there is no-one they can go to?

Dr MILES: That is my understanding. I think prior to 2012 there probably was. You might be aware that Queensland was a leader in this space prior to 2012. There were something like 60 staff in the office of climate. It was one of the first offices completely gutted by the LNP on their election. To be honest with you, we are rebuilding from a platform of zero.

CHAIR: Thank you. I think you have answered the question. I refer to page 3 of the SDS. What is the government's progress towards achieving the sediment and nitrogen targets? What will be achieved this year?

Dr MILES: Nothing demonstrates the government's commitment to protecting the Great Barrier Reef more than our ambitious water quality targets. Our targets are to reduce 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, which I was talking about earlier. Those targets are for 2025. By improving water quality, the reef will be more resilient to threats such as climate change. The targets acknowledge the ongoing risk posed to the reef by agricultural run-off and the government's determination to reverse this trend. These targets are included in the joint Australian and Queensland governments' Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, which drives reef management and protection of the reef over coming decades.

The use by the government of the term 'up to' is quite deliberate as it recognises that 50 per cent and 80 per cent reductions are not necessarily required in all catchments. Regionalisation of targets will be undertaken by June 2017 as part of the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan targets midterm review. The Reef Water Quality Protection Plan report card for 2013-14 outlined progress to water quality targets, with a 17 per cent reduction in dissolved inorganic nitrogen and a 12 per cent reduction in sediment. Modelling of catchment loads for the 2014-15 Reef Water Quality Protection Plan report card—which is due to be released in September 2016—unfortunately shows only limited additional progress in reduction in sediment and dissolved inorganic nitrogen run-off. That is why our new initiatives are so crucial. The government has committed an additional \$90 million over the next four years to improve reef water quality and work towards the targets.

The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Task Force released its final report in May 2016 with 10 key recommendations on how to invest the government's \$90 million. The task force's recommendations will guide government investment over the next four years and it will focus predominantly on on-ground management efforts to reduce sediment and nitrogen run-off. A total of \$21.7 million will be allocated in the 2016-17 year.

I have already outlined how we will invest up to \$33.5 million for two major integrated projects. In addition, we will invest: up to \$9 million for innovation, knowledge and science that will support the development, scaling up and rolling out of new technologies and approaches; up to \$20 million for increased and improved extension; and up to \$11 million to ramp up monitoring efforts to provide more comprehensive information to farmers. It is anticipated that this increased targeted investment, together with our ongoing \$25 million a year investment in other reef water quality investments, including the BMP program, will strengthen progress towards the targets.

However, more needs to be done. We are seeking to leverage the government's investment with public and private philanthropic funding. For example, we are providing \$3 million over three years to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation which will be matched by the private sector and philanthropists for projects that will boost the resilience of the reef. Our commitment to innovation is being delivered through an innovation fund that will support the development, scaling up and rollout of new technologies. The focus will be on trialling innovative approaches to land management, monitoring system repair and water treatment. Just to be clear, in case I misspoke, the increased targeted investment is on top of the \$35 million a year ongoing investment in other reef water quality initiatives.

Mrs GILBERT: Minister, I refer to pages 2 and 3 of the SDS. What resources are the government providing for the BMP program? How is the government integrating support for this program into existing regulations that apply to Queensland farmers?

Dr MILES: Let me thank the member for Mackay for her question. She represents many farmers who are currently on or who have completed the BMP journey. Within the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection the Reef Water Quality Protection Program is investing \$17.3 million between 2012 and 2017 in best management practice programs for the cane, banana and cattle grazing

industries. The department continues to work collaboratively with agricultural industries to identify and assist with the adoption of improved land management practices. This will improve the water quality of run-off in reef catchments and improve the profitability of farming businesses.

Since 2012 participation in the voluntary industry-led BMP program has been increasing. As at 7 July there are 1,090 graziers in the Burdekin, Fitzroy and Burnett-Mary catchments engaging in the Grazing BMP program, which covers nearly 10.6 million hectares. Twenty-seven graziers have completed the accreditation process for all five modules. The Grazing BMP program has exceeded its module target and in a real sign of the value placed on the program, a significant number of graziers have completed module reassessment, which is a critical step to continue the improvement of their farming operations.

In the Smartcane BMP program there are now over 1,300 cane farming businesses participating covering over 240,000 hectares, which represents over 50 per cent of the cane growing area in reef catchments. One hundred and nineteen cane growing businesses have also completed the accreditation phase in the three core modules covering over 32,000 hectares.

While the ambitious target set for the cane BMP uptake has not yet been achieved, there has been a significant increase in both participation and accreditations in the program in the 2015-16 year. The sugarcane industry also remains committed to its agreement to update nutrient management standards in the Smartcane BMP by 2017 to more closely reflect the standards required to help achieve reef water quality targets. EHP now has a renewed compliance program in relation to reef protection regulations with a focus on assisting cane farmers in the high priority catchments of the Wet Tropics and the Burdekin to increase the adoption of soil testing practices and ensure they follow the regulated standards for nitrogen and phosphorus fertiliser application.

We recognise the good performance of cane farmers and graziers who have already adopted and are using best practice through the Smartcane and Grazing BMP programs. Those producers already accredited under a BMP or equivalent program who continue to apply those standards will not be the focus of this compliance program. Also those cane farmers who have completed a Smartcane BMP self-assessment and are actively working towards accreditation will not be subject to any farm visits for up to 12 months, providing time for them to achieve accreditation.

In 2015 EHP also committed to three years of funding to support further uptake of the Banana BMP program. The department is supporting the development of a record-keeping application which will assist banana growers to record optimal fertiliser use and chemical application, allowing them to demonstrate their adoption of best practice and facilitating their completion of the Banana BMP program. This also supports control efforts to avoid further outbreaks of the Panama disease. Currently, growers farming over 6,200 hectares—about 55 per cent of land under banana production in the Wet Tropics—are participating in the BMP program.

CHAIR: We will now hand over to non-government members.

Mr KATTER: I refer to page 6 of the SDS detailing the department's role in monitoring of industrial commercial compliance and the impact on the environment, and I ask: what are the actions to ensure the continued monitoring of CSG in Western Queensland, and how does the department assist in collaborating and ensure compliance of environmental standards and agreements between property owners and corporations?

Dr MILES: Let me thank the member for Mount Isa for that important question and one of significant community interest. For the detail of how compliance is enforced and how EHP works with landholders I might ask Mr Ellwood to come forward and address those questions. While he is doing that, I have some information here I can share with the committee. A total of 354 compliance inspections were undertaken for the petroleum and gas industry including CSG in the last financial year. Of those, 62 per cent were proactive. The department has assessed and approved with condition three site-specific and eight new standard environmental authority applications and six major and 52 minor EA amendment applications for petroleum and gas including CSG. In the last financial year the department has approved with conditions eight underground water impact reports and 14 baseline assessment plans. That I think gives you a high level sense of what they are up to. It might be useful to get Mr Ellwood to talk to the compliance activity.

Mr Ellwood: In relation to the efforts which the department puts towards compliance relating to CSG, we have upwards of 170 FTEs dedicated to compliance—not necessarily on any one day. It is all focused on CSG, but that is the typical level of compliance availability of staff throughout Queensland and which can be dedicated towards the CSG sector. In relation to the assessment side and working with applications and helping landowners understand the application types that the petroleum and gas

companies are putting forward, we have just over 20-odd staff available for that assistance as well. The applications that do come in are publicly advertised through a range of formats. Staff are available to help anyone in relation to landowners et cetera who can also make submissions about the activity and what is involved. I think the member would also understand that there is the compliance group that sits within NRM. The function there is that, rather than landowners and other concerned people trying to work out which part of government you need to talk to, there is a single desk that they go through and then the coordination of that occurs behind the scenes within the state government and EHP plays an important part of that.

Mr KATTER: I am conscious of the time, Minister, so I will go to the next question if that is all right. Page 2 of the SDS speaks of the department working collaboratively with stakeholders. In terms of agriculture in the western sector, the two biggest stand-out environmental threats are the prickly acacia, estimated anywhere from 10 to 20 million hectares of infestation of what would otherwise be pristine Mitchell grass plains, and the feral cat population. We are losing the battle with both. I would like your response to that.

Dr MILES: Let me thank the member for his question. It is not the first time he has raised prickly acacia with me and no doubt will not be the last. The responsibility for the prickly acacia response rests with Biosecurity Queensland in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. I have some portfolio responsibility with regard to it on national parks. In the next session where we talk about national parks I can certainly have a more detailed discussion than about how on park we are seeking to manage prickly acacia and feral cats. They are both very serious threats, as you say, both to our agricultural production but also biodiversity to our wildlife. As the member knows, there is no easy solution to either of them. Biosecurity Queensland has that responsibility. Obviously parks work in with them, but the department of environment does not really have any particular function to work in there.

Dr ROWAN: I refer to SDS page 10 and the departmental budget summary of the corporate partnerships. I seek leave to table a newspaper article.

CHAIR: Is leave granted? Leave is granted.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, can you assure Queenslanders that no government money subsidised the alcohol fuelled binge at the recent environmental awards night? I understand you were in attendance.

Dr MILES: I was, although the cartoon accurately represents my level of sobriety on the evening, so I trust the member is not making any accusation in that regard. Historically, Healthy Waterways has received funds from EHP. I will come to their current level of funding in a moment. It would be normal that those conditions had limitations on entertainment type expenditure but, equally, it is probably the case that the awards themselves, many of which were sponsored by GOCs and utility companies—I will ask Tony to address that. Tony was also there. I will ask Tony to address the question of how much funds we have provided them and what the conditions are. Then I will be happy to take another question.

Mr Roberts: Routinely, the department funds the Healthy Waterways limited to half a million dollar a year for core operating costs and does so in association with a number of investment partners from local government, the utility sector and the like. That is exclusively for use for office purposes, not for entertainment purposes.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I have a follow-up question. Have you sought assurances that there was compliance with the guidelines and the processes that are in place in relation to government moneys which may or may not have subsidised this function? Have you individually sought that from departmental officers?

Dr MILES: Healthy Waterways themselves contacted my office subsequent to that news article and did provide some assurances. I am now advised that EHP funding includes a specific contribution for the minister's award, which I presented at the awards. I am happy, though, to seek a specific assurance from Healthy Waterways and communicate with the member what their response is. Obviously, I was pretty concerned about what occurred at the event and was reassured that Healthy Waterways had contacted my office to seek to provide some reassurance.

Dr ROWAN: Given that you have acknowledged that you were concerned at the time, have you not sought additional assurances since the actual night itself as in going back to the department itself or formal correspondence to Healthy Waterways in relation to the event?

Dr MILES: As I say, Healthy Waterways contacted my office and provided a number of assurances including an apology that such a thing had occurred. I am, though, happy and willing to ask the department to further investigate. I believe it would be a breach of our agreement with them if funds were used in that way. We will discuss it with them.

Dr ROWAN: Can I also ask whether departmental staff were in attendance?

Dr MILES: Mr Roberts was in attendance. I am not sure if there were any other departmental—


Mr Roberts: There were several departmental staff in attendance and other departments as well.

Dr ROWAN: There was no breach of code of conduct requirements in relation to departmental staff in any way?

Dr MILES: To my knowledge no departmental staff were involved in the incidents that have been reported.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. That brings to an end the hearing at this stage. The committee will now adjourn for a short break. The hearing will resume at 4.30 pm with the examination of estimates for the National Parks section of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing.

Proceedings suspended from 3.58 pm to 4.30 pm

 **CHAIR:** The committee's examination will now focus on the national parks section of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing. Before we kick off, the member for Gympie will make a statement.

Mr PERRETT: Before we proceed with this session, in accordance with standing order 260 and following advice from the Clerk, I declare an interest in the debate and proceedings as I am a director of a family company which holds grazing leases over state owned land. This interest is declared in my member's register of interests.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Perrett. Minister, I refer to page 77 of Budget Paper No. 4, which refers to increased funding of \$16.2 million over four years to manage land that has been acquired due to its high environmental and conservation value. Please advise me on how this funding supports the government's commitment to securing and preserving protected area estates.

Dr MILES: I thank the member for the question. This new funding of \$16.2 million over four years supports the government's commitment to secure, conserve and manage representative and resilient samples of all biogeographical regions of Queensland and the vision to secure and preserve 17 per cent of the land area in Queensland as protected area estate. The Palaszczuk government has dedicated and declared an additional 617,106 hectares of national and regional parks. This new funding acknowledges the need not just to acquire important ecological landscapes but also to provide resources to manage these properties. The funding will also support continued work with traditional owners and their involvement in collaborative partnerships for managing parks and forests. This new funding of \$16.2 million over four years will allow the adequate management of more than 700,000 hectares of new and future national parks and provide for up to 29 full-time front-line ranger positions by 2021.

The LNP, you will all recall, railed for hours in parliament against legislation to protect national parks because many argued that there were not enough staff to manage these areas. They should know: they sacked so many of them. We are committed to expanding our protected areas and making sure we have the necessary staff to manage them because we see parks as public assets. The funding will support the expanded Currawinya National Park, which doubled in size in June 2015, and 10 significant properties across the state totalling over 370,000 hectares. These properties were acquired under the National Reserve System program between 2010 and 2012 and were gazetted as protected areas in November 2015. The gazettal of these properties created Littleton National Park, Rungulla National Park, Expedition National Park—adjacent to Expedition (Limited Depth) National Park—and extensions to Giringun National Park and Wondal Range National Park. Complementing the \$16.2 million in operating funds to manage these and other areas is an additional capital commitment of \$5.4 million. This brings the total investment in these new and future protected areas to \$21.6 million.

Many of these properties are in geographically dispersed and remote areas of the state. Planned activities include construction and maintenance of fire breaks, new tracks and roads, fencing and signage. Appropriate fire management on these lands includes controlled burns and wildfire response to minimise threats to life, property, species and ecosystems. The management and control of feral animals and weeds is necessary to ensure that pests do not impact on the economic viability of surrounding landholders and the area's natural values. The funding will also support priority ecosystem rehabilitation and ecosystem restoration works, tourism and visitor facilities such as bush camping sites and day-use areas where appropriate, ranger bases and accommodation. This funding commitment will not only create new Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service ranger jobs but also generate economic activity, particularly in remote areas. Well-funded national parks attract tourists and visitors to regional communities. The construction of new fences, roads, campgrounds and ranger facilities also generates economic benefits, helping local communities to grow and prosper.

With this funding this government is ensuring that the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is a good neighbour and appropriately manages any new and future protected areas to benefit visitors, neighbours and future generations.

Mrs GILBERT: Minister, with reference to pages 3 and 4 of the SDS with regard to improving the customer experience for camping and vehicle access permits, can you please provide us with a progress report on the implementation of the new online booking service and its expected benefits?

Dr MILES: I can, and I thank the member for Mackay for her question. One of the most popular activities in Queensland's national parks is camping. Camping and vehicle permits have been available online for over a decade now, but the booking system was old, not responsive to changing customer needs and not available on mobile devices. I am pleased to announce that QPWS released a new Queensland National Parks Booking Service on 9 June 2016, and to date customer feedback has been very positive. Customers said they wanted a simpler, faster and more reliable system, and that is what the new service provides.

In 2015-16 more than 360,000 permits were issued for visitors to more than 460 camping areas in national parks, state forests, regional parks and recreation areas across Queensland. The new service provides more information about parks, camping areas and facilities to help make their camping experience a great one. Vehicle access permits for sand driving within four declared recreation areas—Fraser Island, Cooloola, Bribie Island and Moreton Island—can also be purchased. The new service is available 24 hours a day and is available on mobile devices like smartphones and tablets as well as desktop computers. The new service will also help our QPWS rangers with improved management tools and up-to-date information about visitors.

Visitor information is extremely important not only to gather data to inform management of national parks but also to ensure visitors can be notified immediately about emergencies and park closures due to weather events. Customers can subscribe to receive email newsletters from QPWS, including special camping offers, and opt to participate in customer feedback surveys about their booking experience.

For customers who are unable to book online, the new service supports the continued sale of permits through QPWS offices, self-service kiosks, booking agent outlets and the Queensland Integrated Contact Centre. The functionality of the new booking service will also be improved over time based on that customer feedback. Planned future enhancements to the booking system include the ability to book camping via a map view, additional site information and images. The revenue generated through the sale of permits is used to maintain and improve access to, and facilities within, national parks. The National Parks Booking Service is part of the broader QPWS digital strategy that includes a range of initiatives to provide online, customer focused, streamlined and quality services.

Mr MADDEN: Minister, I draw your attention to page 4 of the Service Delivery Statements where the government has committed to progressing departmental initiatives in the Queensland Ecotourism Plan, including ecotourism proposals for protected areas. Could you outline for the committee what progress the government has made in promoting ecotourism in our national parks?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for Ipswich West for the question. The Queensland government recognises the importance of the tourism industry to the Queensland economy. It is a major export earner and a generator of many jobs for the state. Queensland's world-class national parks, marine parks and World Heritage areas provide a significant competitive advantage for tourism in Queensland. This government supports the growth of high-quality, best practice ecotourism experiences in these national and marine parks.

Conservation and growth in tourism are not opposing objectives; they can, and should, go hand in hand. We have a responsibility to protect the natural and cultural values of these special places and to get the right balance between conservation and tourism. The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing is progressing a raft of initiatives supporting ecotourism, including the Queensland Ecotourism Plan, proposals for ecotourism facilities on protected areas, the Queensland Eco and Sustainable Tourism policy and significant regional infrastructure projects at the Mon Repos Turtle Centre and the Great Barrier Reef.

To provide an overarching framework to this work, the new Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2016-2020 is in final stages and due for release shortly. The draft plan contains a positive vision and five strategic priorities for Queensland to become Australia's foremost ecotourism destination and a world leader in best practice ecotourism. Feedback on the draft plan has been strongly supportive of the proposed priorities and actions. With regard to ecotourism facilities on protected areas, this

government supports low-impact, best practice ecotourism experiences in our national parks and marine parks and is determined to strike the right balance between tourism aspirations and preserving our special natural areas and wildlife.

At the 2015 DestinationQ forum the revised Ecotourism Facilities on National Parks Implementation Framework was released, and it is the governing policy for ecotourism facilities on national parks. The strengthened conservation and public interest principles in the revised framework will ensure that all approved ecotourism proposals on national parks deliver both excellent conservation and tourism outcomes. The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing is the lead agency for nine ecotourism facility proposals on or adjacent to national parks. Two of these proposals are government initiated, including the Green Mountains Campground in Lamington National Park and commercial opportunities at the Walkabout Creek Discovery Centre adjacent to the D'Aguilar National Park. The remaining seven proposals were initiated by industry. The department has worked with proponents to progress eight of these to the detailed proposal stage and continues to work with the remaining proponent to progress their concept proposal.

The government is committed to partnering with the tourism industry to foster best practice ecotourism opportunities in national parks that provide unique, high-quality eco experiences for visitors and achieve the right balance between looking after the economy, jobs and the natural environment. I am pleased to announce today that a very exciting new multiday walk in the Scenic Rim through Main Range National Park has been conditionally approved by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. QPWS has been working closely with the proponents—the Turner family—on the development of the Scenic Rim Trail, which will provide a new product to showcase the magnificent landscape of the Scenic Rim area. The Turner family own and operate a number of high-quality tourism and ecotourism ventures in the area. They are well-credentialed when it comes to conservation activities, having made significant investments in setting aside land for local nature refuges and undertaking wildlife rehab projects.

The Scenic Rim Trail is a six-day ecotourism walk that will link up adjacent freehold tourism ventures. The ecotourism facilities in the national park will include two new eco camps linked by a combination of new and existing low-impact walking tracks and fire trails and new mountain bike tracks, primarily on fire trails. The Turner family has also had initial discussions with the federal government and will refer their proposal to ensure that matters of national environmental significance within the national park are considered under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. QPWS will continue to work with the Turner family through the assessment phase to ensure the proposal meets the policy requirements detailed in the implementation framework and the best practice guidelines prior to the grant of a lease within the national park. Now that QPWS has given its consent as the landholder, the Turner family will also commence engaging with traditional owners and other key stakeholders. Importantly, work has already commenced on how native title will be treated as part of this proposal. As well as providing a return to the state through lease fees, ecotourism can make a genuine contribution back to the conservation and management of the national park in which it is located and also provide community benefits.

The Scenic Rim Trail conservation projects may include invasive weed control and rehabilitation works in the national park and wildlife management projects aimed at research and recovery of endangered species and habitat both on park and on adjacent wildlife refuges. In addition, the proposal will provide improved public access to the northern section of Main Range National Park, with the proponent committing to construct on their private land a new trail head with car park and toilet. The new trails will also be open to the public. Scenic Rim Trail guided tour operators will deliver ongoing employment and economic benefits for the local community.

CHAIR: I will now hand over to non-government members.

Mr KATTER: Minister, I refer to page 4 of the National Parks, Sport and Racing SDS and I ask: can the minister please confirm the decision-making process in the lead-up to the purchase of Springvale Station?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question but am sorry to say that the purchase of Springvale—in fact, the purchase of all national parks—is managed by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, so the opportunity to discuss that was in the earlier session. Given the member's interest, I am happy to organise a briefing or have a discussion with him offline, but I do not have the officers here with me who are responsible for the land acquisition program.

Mr KATTER: Would the ongoing issues with that be through Environment and Heritage Protection?

Dr MILES: Yes, until and unless it was declared a national park.

Mr KATTER: Okay.

CHAIR: We will have to get that question on notice back to the committee, not to the member himself.

Dr MILES: Yes, sure.

CHAIR: You will have to brief the committee, not just the individual member.

Dr MILES: Yes, we can do that.

Mr KATTER: In reference to page 4 of the SDS, can the minister detail how many new rangers and employees, if any, have been hired to mitigate the loss of full-time landowners and their conservation efforts following the implementation of the reforms to the Nature Conservation Act 1992?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. I do note that the budget does include a significant funding increase to deliver new rangers for new and additional national parks. With regard to the numbers of those and where they propose to be located, I might ask the deputy director-general of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to just work through, I think it is, 21 initially working up to 29, but I might let him go through that detail if that is okay.

Mr Klaassen: The budget does provide new funding for up to 21 rangers in the 2016-17 financial year and they are primarily to manage the new parks that have been declared such as Currawinya National Park, Rungulla National Park, Littleton National Park and a range of other properties that have been acquired and those rangers will be working across those properties over the coming 12 months and moving forward.

Mr KATTER: Thank you. Minister, can you provide an explanation of how the department has expanded its capacity to prevent the proliferation of noxious weeds and feral pests within the existing parks now that the associated producers are removed from those areas?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for Mount Isa for his question and again I will ask the deputy director-general to address it, but in doing so I will also ask him to address the questions you raised in the earlier session about prickly acacia and feral cats and how the department plans and manages dealing with those pests and weeds.

Mr Klaassen: With regard to the properties that have been recently acquired in the new funding, in developing the funding bid for those properties we included amounts that would cater for pest management. The officers, once they come on board, will do an assessment of what the key pest issues are on the properties and then they will develop a pest plan that will be specific to the property and we will work through that as part of our overall pest framework. With regard to prickly acacia, I can give you some information on that if you are interested to hear what we are doing. We recognise that prickly acacia is a particular pest in Western Queensland and we are doing various targeted activities to deal with that.

QPWS adopts various strategies to contain and limit the spread of prickly acacia on and from the protected areas under its control. These include adoption of hygiene and quarantine protocols to limit the introduction of the spread of prickly acacia, mapping and monitoring of infestations of prickly acacia on the estate to support targeted control and to measure success of control efforts, targeted control or removal of prickly acacia along key drainage lines and watercourses, the integration of different control techniques including chemical mechanical control and biological control to combat prickly acacia infestations on our estate, and management of feral animals and feral livestock on protected areas to prevent the movement and spread of prickly acacia. We also participate in the State Land Pest Management Committee which also has oversight for dealing with prickly acacia, so we are part of the strategy that is being developed to deal with that. We do have a plan. We work cooperatively with the other local governments and other agencies in Western Queensland to manage it as best we can.

Mr KATTER: Thank you.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I refer to the SDS at page 5 with regard to the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service management of the state's fuel loads being reduced by planned burning lists and a new measure to control burn 630,000 hectares in 2016-17 in what I understand is a new standard following the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommending a five per cent burn. Minister, can you advise what areas are planned for burning this year, and I take it that if the controlled burns have not commenced already they will be very soon?

Dr MILES: Given the operational nature of that question, I will get the deputy director-general to address the question. The member is correct: the 630,000 hectare figure represents five per cent of the estate which was the target proposed by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. We have

outlined it in the note there, but it is important to note that season to season that number is going to vary quite dramatically and so we have characterised it as an average target over a number of years. Climatic conditions in particular will have a great impact on how much QPWS can burn in any given year, but with regard to where the targeted burns are occurring in this year or soon to occur I will ask Mr Klaassen to answer that question.

Mr Klaassen: I do not have the specific locations on me. That is a program that will be developed. We would have done burns already throughout the burning season. There are burns that are being conducted at various locations across the state. There is only a short window that we have to get those burns in place before the fire season starts fairly soon. I do not have the detail to hand, but if the minister is agreeable we can get that on notice.

Dr MILES: Yes. It means getting into the fire management plan for each individual park, so there is an administrative task in trying to pull that together.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Dr ROWAN: As a follow-on general question through the minister perhaps to the deputy director-general, in relation to those areas that have either been burnt or intended to be burnt, do any of those include drought affected areas?

Dr MILES: I am happy for you to take that, Ben.

Mr Klaassen: Yes. We do our assessment across the state and if the ranger deems that there is a burn that needs to be put in place and the conditions are suitable then a burn may occur in a drought affected area, yes.

Dr ROWAN: Are primary producers notified of those processes and engaged? How does that occur?

Dr MILES: Certainly neighbours are consulted and advised, but I will let Mr Klaassen describe how that is done.

Mr Klaassen: Yes. We work cooperatively with neighbours, so with neighbours adjacent to the park the rangers will make contact with them. If it is in a more urban area we will put messages on radio and if it is a significant burn we will do letterbox drops and contact people in the local area.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to the SDS at page 12 with regard to user charges and fees, could you explain the 20.5 per cent increase in user charges and fees which is increasing from \$21.839 million in 2015-16 to \$26.311 million?

Dr MILES: The total, as you say, QPWS controlled user charges and fees revenue is \$26.3 million. There was a \$5.6 million increase between the 2015-16 budget and the estimated actual which comprised a \$4 million compensation from TMR for the Townsville ring-road; \$1 million due to increased RAM area visitation and usage, which is camping and vehicles; and \$0.7 million of camping revenue in other parks due to increased patronage. That is the difference between the estimated and the actual figure for last financial year. The \$4.5 million increase from 2015-16 to 2016-17 primarily comprises CSG revenue paid to the department and estimated increased patronage from camping and visitor centres. I can break that down a bit further if you would like me to.

Dr ROWAN: Sure.

Dr MILES: To be more specific, the \$4.5 million increase year on year is anticipated. Some \$2.1 million of that is anticipated to come from camping and vehicle permits in RAM areas, \$0.7 million relates to other parks camping revenue, \$0.3 million relates to visitor tours and admissions and \$1.4 million relates to that CSG revenue.

Dr ROWAN: Just to clarify that around an indexation rate, what is the indexation rate used?

Dr MILES: The indexation rate is the government CPI rate which, as the member might be aware, is 3.5 per cent.

Dr ROWAN: It is 3.5 per cent and the CPI is used as that. With regard to the split between the increase in indexation and the forecast growth in camping and vehicle permit bookings, what is the split there, if I can clarify that?

Dr MILES: It would be the difference between 3.5 per cent and the total. I am happy to get the CFO up. Mr Anson can well subtract the difference.

Mr Anson: Thank you, Minister. Thank you for the question. The 2015-16 budget for camping permits was \$7.4 million. The estimated actual is \$8.2 million. As the minister pointed out earlier, that is due primarily to increased visitation at both our RAM area national parks and other camping grounds

throughout the state. The camping permits budget in the 2016-17 year is \$8.5 million. Vehicle access permits for the 2015-16 budget is \$5.5 million. That goes up to an estimated actual of \$6.2 million again just due to increased visitation. With the indexation applied in 2016-17, that goes up to \$6.6 million.

Dr ROWAN: Following up on that referring to the SDS at page 12 just about these targets, I note the target for overnight campers in national parks and forests is 1.3 million and that is a new measure. However, your forecasted growth in this number has been included as we have just outlined in the forecast user fees and charges. Are you able to give me what the actual figure of overnight stays for the past two years was and in round terms what is the forecast percentage increase for this financial year? What I am trying to get to is if the figure was one million last year and you have a target of 1.3 million that would be a 30 per cent increase, so I am after the methodology behind that.

Dr MILES: Yes, I understand where you are getting to and I might ask Mr Anson again if he has the figures. Actually, I might ask Mr Klaassen in the first instance in terms of average camper nights but then he might ask Mr Anson to refer to how the modelling was done for the future year revenues.

Mr Klaassen: As the member would appreciate, the 1.3 million was an estimate based at the time we prepared the SDS, which was in April-May. We were anticipating that we would get about 1.3 million for 2015-16. The actual number has come in at 1.5 million. We had a very busy Easter period with lots of people out camping. With the warmer weather, it allowed more people to be out enjoying the parks. The actual is 1.5 million.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you. With reference to page 14 of the SDS, the capital program, can I ask why capital investments are down 19 per cent—from \$28.1 million to \$22.8 million? There is higher spending for new measures, including an additional \$1.1 million for system development. What does 'system development' mean? Is this for management plans for parks?

Dr MILES: I might ask Mr Anson again if we have a detailed breakdown of the differential between particularly the \$34 million estimated actual and the \$28 million budgeted figure, which, as I understand, is what you are asking about.

Mr Anson: I thank the member for the question. For the area of the department of national parks, the original 2015-16 budget was \$28.087 million. The 2015-16 estimated actual is \$23 million. The difference between those two figures is due to the carryover funding into the 2016-17 budget and into future years as well. That primarily relates to three programs. One is the North Stradbroke Island program. The other is the Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land tenure resolution program. The third program, which is the most significant, relates to the acquisition of new national parks and capital infrastructure projects and on those the main reason for the deferral being the uncertainty that existed in 2015-16 surrounding whether ongoing funding would be approved for that program. That now has been approved.

That budget has now been carried over, primarily into 2016-17, but also some of that budget exists in 2017-18. The forecast over those two financial years has just been based on conversations between me and the director-general, Tamara O'Shea, and deputy director-general Ben Klaassen in relation to the expected timing of those programs, but I can confirm that none of that funding that was in the 2015-16 budget has been removed from the budget.

Dr ROWAN: Just to clarify around that \$1.1 million for system development, is that for management plans for parks? Is that some of those areas that you referred to?

Mr Anson: Sorry, I do not have that \$1.1 million in front of me, but when we talk about systems, I can see that there is a \$1.1 million increase in the 2016-17 budget compared to the 2015-16 budget. The primary reason for that is that systems, obviously, reach the end of their useful lives on a cyclical basis. The amount of budget in each year will vary depending on which systems become due for replacement. Due to the timing of the 2016-17 budget, we have the FLAME fire management system that is due for replacement. That makes up the budget, but we also have the permitting system that we are working on. They relate to the department's software systems to support the front-line services of the department.

CHAIR: We will now move to government questions. Minister, on page 12 of Budget Paper No. 3, \$2.4 million is allocated to improving tourism and recreation use of the Great Barrier Reef. Given your commitment to protecting the reef, can you outline how this funding will be spent and how it will improve the protection of this World Heritage environment?

Dr MILES: I can. I thank the member for Gladstone for his question and I look forward to getting out on the water with him off Gladstone and enjoying this new infrastructure. The Palaszczuk government is committed to improving tourism and recreation use of the Great Barrier Reef in an

appropriate and sustainable manner. I am proud to advise that the government will invest \$2.375 million over three years into an expanded mooring and reef protection program in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area. These funds will be used to build upon an existing network of public moorings and reef protection markers by installing 100 new public moorings and 150 reef protection markers.

Public moorings promote and provide safe, convenient and sustainable access at high-use destinations by reducing the need for boat users to drop their anchor. Reef protection markers are used to clearly designate no-anchoring areas, mitigating the risk of anchor damage, particularly on sensitive island-fringing reefs. Together, they achieve ongoing protection and provide for sustainable use of the reef's most popular dive and snorkelling destinations visited by both tourist and recreational boat users.

New public moorings and reef protection markers will be targeted around high-use fringing reef sites in the Cairns, Townsville, Whitsunday and Capricorn Coast regions. Work will commence in 2016 around the Keppel islands and offshore Cairns locations. This will be followed by additions to the existing mooring network in the Whitsundays in 2017.

As well as the environmental benefits, this investment will assist regional economies through contracted mooring construction and installation work and supporting the reef's tourism industry. Further, this project delivers on the Queensland government's commitment within the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan by ensuring the protection and sustainable use of the reef's popular and iconic destinations.

This investment is provided from the \$180 million Significant Regional Infrastructure Projects Program, as part of the Queensland government's State Infrastructure Plan. This project demonstrates the government's commitment to both understanding and strengthening the Great Barrier Reef's tourism industry needs while addressing concerns associated with managing the reef.

Mrs GILBERT: Minister, on page 12 of Budget Paper No. 3, \$2.4 million is allocated to improve the tourism and recreation use of the Great Barrier Reef.

Dr MILES: The moorings will be of benefit in Mackay also. I understand your interest.

Mrs GILBERT: I was quite excited to hear about the ones that are coming to Mackay. I refer to page 4 of the SDS in relation to the Great Barrier Reef field management program. Minister, can you describe how this joint state-Commonwealth funded program and other National Parks portfolio initiatives are helping to safeguard and improve the health of the reef?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for her question. The Queensland government, through its investment in the Great Barrier Reef field management program, continues to deliver practical, on-the-ground actions that are improving the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef. The field management program is a \$16.99 million partnership between the Queensland and Australian governments.

Under the intergovernmental agreement, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service jointly delivers the field management program across the length and breadth of the Great Barrier Reef in an award-winning partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The joint program delivers practical actions and management to protect and maintain the marine and island ecosystems of the Great Barrier Reef, including in the great electorate of Mackay.

There is widespread concern that the Great Barrier Reef field management program is starved of funds and that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is operating as a shell of its former self. The joint field management program funding, which does this critical work and supports around 100 state and Commonwealth officers who are employed on the reef, has not been receiving annual indexation to meet its costs. Funding for the program has not increased since 2008. In the meantime, costs and wages have risen, leaving an unacceptable shortfall. Without indexing inflation and EBA wage increases, the result is an effective funding cut in real terms. That is why the Palaszczuk government has committed a further \$1.66 million over four years and a future ongoing allocation to the FMP to ensure that there is no decline in current service levels that would result in an unacceptable risk to the Great Barrier Reef.

This funding, though, is reliant on the federal government committing to match our contribution, as has long been the arrangement. Importantly, our commitment is to invest new funding into the program and is not a diversion of current allocations from other Great Barrier Reef programs. This is a time when both the Commonwealth and the Queensland governments have called attention to the unprecedented coral-bleaching event and are highlighting the concerted efforts that are required to protect the reef, including the need for enhanced capacity and resourcing. If the Turnbull government really does want to save the Great Barrier Reef, it will invest in new funding, too, and it will ensure that other important Great Barrier Reef programs are not compromised in meeting these essential commitments to the sustainable and secure future management of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Queensland government is committed to ensuring that the reef continues to be the best managed and protected marine ecosystem in the world. In late 2015, the great work of the field management program was recognised. It received the Prime Minister's award for collaboration and excellence in public sector management. This award is a testament to the commitment of the approximately 105 officers and marine park rangers who are dedicated to delivering a number of actions from the Reef 2050 plan.

The field management program is at the front line of reef management, protecting important marine and island ecosystems while at the same time developing and maintaining world-class visitor facilities at the reef's most iconic natural tourism destinations. The work supports the reef's \$6 billion tourism industry and ensures that use remains sustainable. For example, marine park rangers have been responsible for collecting and recording the most up-to-date information on the impacts caused by coral bleaching and the crown-of-thorns starfish, conducting some 1,982 reef health and impact surveys over just the last 12 months. Additionally, the program continues to improve adult turtle survival and nesting and hatching success on Raine Island, the world's largest green turtle rookery, by rolling out adaptive management actions, such as cliff-top fencing and reprofiling sand above watertable levels.

The program is also committed to strengthening community stewardship and has been empowering Indigenous ranger groups and community volunteers in hands-on reef protection. For example, these groups now respond to over 60 per cent of marine animal strandings along the GBR coast, supported through the program's production of marine animal stranding guides and online and face-to-face training programs. In conjunction with all of this, marine park rangers have retained a strong on-water presence, delivering over 1,500 vessel days at sea. This contributes to informing park users of the values of the reef and, most importantly, ensuring user compliance with the reef zoning plan.

With regard to visitor infrastructure, rangers are maintaining a network of 163 kilometres of walking tracks, 111 camping grounds and day-use areas, 21 boardwalks, 128 public-use moorings and 123 reef protection markers. These facilities are aimed at not only protecting the reef but also ensuring enjoyable experiences for all visitors to the reef.

In addition, the Queensland government has also committed a further \$2.375 million to expand the vitally important and popular reef protection program, as I detailed earlier. The important role of the field management program cannot be understated, and I will continue to encourage the Commonwealth government to match this commitment to enable the program to continue its important work and strong on-the-ground presence. I have just been alerted that there are, in fact, 115 officers in the field management program, not 106, as I said earlier. I apologise to the committee for that error.

Mr MADDEN: Minister, with reference to page 14 of the Service Delivery Statements, titled 'Departmental capital program', can you advise the committee how much money is being spent on capital works and infrastructure projects to make sure that Queensland's national parks continue to attract nature lovers and international tourists?

Dr MILES: I can. I thank the member for his question and his pedantry when it comes to SDS page numbers. It is much appreciated and makes it easier to find the references. The Palaszczuk government recognises the importance of the tourism industry to the Queensland economy. It is a major export earner and a generator of jobs for the state. Queensland's world-class national parks, marine parks and World Heritage areas provide Queensland with its competitive advantage. This government supports the growth of high-quality best practice ecotourism in national and marine parks, as I have already outlined.

The department is also supporting Queensland's tourism industry through a total investment of over \$6.3 million in capital and business development across the 2014-15 to 2016-17 financial years at three ecotourism gateway visitor centres: the Walkabout Creek Discovery Centre at The Gap in Brisbane; David Fleay Wildlife Park on the Gold Coast; and Mon Repos just outside of Bundaberg.

The ranger guided turtle experience at Mon Repos Turtle Centre is widely regarded as a signature experience in the southern Great Barrier Reef and Bundaberg region. \$10 million has been allocated to the redevelopment of the Mon Repos Turtle Centre, including integration of the research and monitoring program in the centre. This will provide an impressive new visitor attraction which supports a continued significant economic contribution to the region from tourism. The investment of \$10 million in the turtle centre is in addition to an investment of over \$658,000 across the 2014-15 and 2015-16 years. This has delivered the construction of a new roof over the amphitheatre, a roadside entry feature, improved orientation signage, new ranger office and a new turtle encounters audio visual presentation for visitors, all of which I was able to see when I was visited with the Premier while we were there for community cabinet in October 2015.

The Walkabout Creek Discovery Centre, which is close to my electorate, was allocated a further \$2.1 million in 2015-16 to develop nature play areas, an events lawn, mountain bike skills course, new toilet facilities, new visitor signage, upgrades to wildlife exhibits and information centre. Further funding of over \$1.5 million has been allocated in 2016-17 to continue improvements at the Walkabout Creek Discovery Centre. A new access road, a southern car park and pedestrian access will be constructed from the nearby TransLink park-and-ride car park. This will improve accessibility for visitors travelling via public transport and also provide parking access to the events lawn, mountain bike skills centre and the nature play activity areas.

At David Fleay Wildlife Park a significant investment of over \$619,000 in 2015-16 has been allocated to the construction of a new outdoor amphitheatre, upgraded wildlife exhibits and visitor signage. A new canoe access facility and 80-metre boardwalk has been completed at Tallebudgera Creek adjacent to David Fleay Wildlife Park at a total project cost of \$516,000. This included a contribution of \$295,000 from the Gold Coast Waterways Authority. The new canoe facility opened on 2 February 2016 and is providing improved access to the wildlife park and allowing visitors to experience the scenic beauty of Tallebudgera Creek.

Together these significant investments in the national park gateway visitor centres will provide further opportunities for visitors to be engaged and inspired to keep discovering our national parks. After consultation with the local community and tourism industry, the Dubuji boardwalk in Daintree National Park has had a major facelift with sections of the existing timber boardwalk replaced to meet tourist operator, visitor and park management needs. \$646,000 has already been committed to this project, with \$1 million in additional funding planned over the next three years.

To improve other visitor experiences for nature lovers and ensure fragile environments are protected, QPWS committed \$2.6 million to upgrades of various public amenities and waste treatment systems in some of our most popular parks. These include Dundaburra and Eurong on Fraser Island, Freshwater in Great Sandy National Park at Cooloola, Inskip Point at Rainbow Beach and Bunyaville Regional Park. At Curtis Island \$1.3 million has been invested in roadways to improve access in anticipation of visitor growth to the national and conservation parks on the island. The member for Gladstone announced that just recently. Significant upgrades worth over \$660,000 were undertaken at some of the department's most popular park campground and day use areas at Danbulla State Forest near Tinaroo Dam where redevelopment includes showers, shelters, campsites, barbecues, access and signage at visitor nodes, and at Peach Trees camping area in Jimna State Forest where toilet buildings and waste treatment systems have been replaced, a safe swimming area provided and the site design upgraded. The Northern Spit campground in the Whitsunday islands has also had a toilet and waste management systems upgrade to minimise visitor impacts on the Great Barrier Reef and improve visitor experiences.

For visitors in the Mackay region, \$366,000 of upgrade works were undertaken at The Diggings and Broken River campgrounds. Day use areas were upgraded with \$680,000 committed, including \$156,000 of works at Mapleton Falls National Park where visitor access and the experience of picnickers, walkers, horseriders and trail bike riders have much improved, also at Trezkin Cave in the Chillagoe-Mungana Caves National Park where \$164,000 was invested in replacing approximately 200 metres of rusting elevated walkway and a stainless steel and fibreglass decking boardwalk with strip lighting. In addition, over \$1.8 million has been invested in various tracks and trails across the state, including at Python Rock in Lamington National Park where the track was upgraded for wheelchair assisted access and Smithfield Conservation Park where a system of single and multiuse mountain bike trails have been built to a standard suitable to host major international events. The facilities and track work undertaken in Samford Regional Park are designed to make it a mountain bike hub for the Brisbane region, with improved CarParking, signs and maps. This work complements other mountain bike activity centres in Brisbane at Daisy Hill and the Bunyaville conservation parks.

Visitor projects approved for 2016-17 include over \$1.6 million for tracks and trails at Alligator Falls in Bowling Green Bay National Park near Townsville, Burleigh Heads National Park, Magnetic Island National Park, D'Aguiar National Park, Dubuji in the Daintree National Park, Cathedral Fig in the Danbulla State Forest on the Atherton Tablelands, Royal Arch Cave at Chillagoe and wood in Carnarvon National Park. Mountain Bike tracks will be upgraded at Bunyaville and Daisy Hill near Brisbane. Planning is underway for improvements to the popular walking track at Burleigh Heads National Park in 2016-17 following temporary closures caused by rock falls in previous years.

Mr Chair, clearly I could go on for much longer. I think you can get a pretty clear impression though from that just how much is happening in our national parks, how many improvements we are making and how fantastic that will make so many of these places for visitors to come and enjoy.

CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you very much. I will now move to non-government members' questions.

Dr ROWAN: Before the break we spoke about the function sponsored by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. I will seek leave to table the copy again given this is a new committee. Gold sponsorship has obviously been provided by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection in relation to that event, but is there any gold sponsorship provided by the Department of National Parks to sponsor corporate events similar to those sponsored by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection?

Dr MILES: Just while we check our records to see if there are any similar events, in the break I asked the department to contact Healthy Waterways and they have since provided me written confirmation which I will table. The confirmation says—

I can confirm the following—

1. No EHP core funding provided to Healthy Waterways Limited is used for the Healthy Waterways Awards, the awards are all covered by sponsorship dollars.
2. The \$10,000 Ministers Grand Prize goes in totality to the Ministers Grand Prize winner.
3. There were no Government Officers or Officials involved in the incident (therefore no code of conduct was broken).

They have confirmed the communication I outlined to the committee earlier between Healthy Waterways and my office on the first working day following the incident. I table that for the committee given your interest in it.

CHAIR: Leave is granted.

Dr MILES: With regard to sponsorships from QPWS, I am advised that in 2015-16 there was \$17,500 worth of sponsorships, excluding GST. That was \$10,000 for the Queensland Tourism Awards, \$5,000 for the Savannah Guides and \$2,500 for the Queensland Tourism Industry Council's World Environment Day luncheon and panel discussion. I attended that luncheon and I can assure the member it was much more tame than the Healthy Waterways one.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you for that reassurance. If I can come to reference SDS page 15 in relation to staffing, you have budgeted for an additional 23 staff for national parks. Again this is listed for the Cape York program, a similar increase to last year. I would like to ask, Minister, can you advise the roles and locations of these additional staff? A follow-on question is, is resourcing matching forecast growth?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. This budget does provide resourcing for growth in both new and expanded national parks, including those that are scheduled to be declared as a result of the ongoing Cape York tenure resolution process. In terms of the breakdown of the additional staffing, both across the state and on Cape York, I might actually get Mr Klaassen to speak to that just for fear of getting one of the numbers wrong.

Dr ROWAN: There is no need to be fearful.

Dr MILES: It is better to not get the numbers wrong. Mr Klaassen can speak to that, but there are additional rangers for both the new and expanded parks as well as on Cape York.

Mr Klaassen: As the minister outlined, the ranger positions are for those new protected areas that have been declared. Locations proposed for those appointments are Mackay Highlands, Clermont, Townsville, Princess Hills, Undara, Littleton, Taroom, Currawinya and across South-East Queensland. There will also be some positions to support the Cape York Tenure Resolution Program as well.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to the announced \$2.2 million over three years to progress world heritage nomination for areas including the Cooloola section of the Great Sandy National Park as part of an expanded Fraser Island World Heritage Area, as well as several parks of Cape York—I refer to SDS page 6—can you outline what consultation has already been undertaken, what will be undertaken and how were you specifically involved in any consultation with the commercial fishing industry?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. The process of world heritage consultation and listing is managed by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. In the earlier session I had officers here equipped to address those specifics. Unfortunately, the chance to interrogate that was in the earlier session.

Dr ROWAN: I am specifically asking you what sort of consultation will you be involved in given that this is a decision that is coming from your portfolio area? I want to know what consultation given the significant economic impacts that will be had there.

Dr MILES: First of all, there will not be significant economic impacts on the commercial fishers. The scaremongering that other members of the LNP have been participating in is pretty unfortunate. I had understood the committee had resolved to deal with the EHP budget papers in the first session and the NPSR budget papers in the second session. The world heritage funding was clearly listed as an initiative under EHP rather than NPSR, but I am happy to provide some latitude there.

Just to be clear, with regard to commercial fishing, should the Fraser Island World Heritage Area be expanded and a listing ultimately occur, commercial fishing would and could continue to occur as it does in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and other marine world heritage areas. An investigative world heritage boundary will be released later this year for the purpose of consultation and all interested parties, including the commercial fishing industry, will have an opportunity to comment on the boundary and discuss what implications that might have. It is important though that we keep our eye on the positives of this story. What we know is that once a site is listed for world heritage, visitation increases on average 30 per cent each year for the following five years. Once on the list, the list comes with tourism and global recognition.

In fact, there are many tourists for whom the World Heritage List is a bit like a bucket list. Money just cannot buy the kind of status and visitations that come with a World Heritage listing. The listing gives tourists the knowledge that visiting the site will be a unique experience and, at the same time, provides the tourism industry with an easily promoted and almost fail-proof destination strategy.

Separate to the World Heritage listing process, the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing has had initial conversations to address the concerns of commercial fishers about the review of the Great Sandy Marine Park zoning plan, and further consultation with key stakeholder groups will commence shortly. The review is about the marine park zoning, which was set some time ago, and achieving the intended biodiversity outcomes. Staff from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries have met with the review officers and provide assistance that might be required from a fisheries perspective—things such as data and advice on how fisheries are managed and how that might impact on particular fisheries.

Dr ROWAN: I understand there are multiple competing interests here, but it is reassuring to know that there will not be any negative impacts on commercial fishermen. You have reassured us here today. Did you consult with the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries prior to the announcement of the decision?

Dr MILES: Which decision?

Dr ROWAN: This decision to look at World Heritage listing for the areas that we are talking about.

Dr MILES: This was a commitment made by the then opposition in the lead-up to the 2015 election. Nothing has changed here apart from this budget providing the funds necessary to do that consultation work.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, if I can come to you please. Welcome to the committee. In reference to the expansion of protected estates, both through direct purchase of freehold land and tenure conversion, which is resulting in the removal of primary industries from leasehold land, as Director-General can you outline what new money and staff resources are being allocated to the management of these lands to cover pest, animal and weed control? Is there a specific reference in the SDS?

Mrs O'Shea: With respect to acquisitions of national parks, when the acquisitions occur the department negotiates closely with the EHP to undertake an analysis of what funding would be required when NPSR takes over management of that particular national park. With respect to funding for the new national parks, as the honourable member has mentioned, new funding has been secured for the establishment and ongoing management of over 700,000 hectares of new and future protected areas. With that, the government is investing new funding over the next four years, totalling \$21.6 million, to deliver this program, and that includes 29 full-time front-line ranger positions.

With respect to pest management programs on those particular parks, part of the process will be to undertake management planning. Part of that management planning will be to determine what pest management programs need to occur. At this juncture, we do not have that detail for the new areas. They will need to be worked through on a case-by-case basis.

Dr ROWAN: Is the intent with those management plans that they will be individualised?

Mrs O'Shea: Individualised for each of those parks? That will need to be determined through our adaptive management framework. The framework is designed to look at parks on a risk based process and under that risk based process we would determine whether an individual park needs an individual management plan.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, you would be well aware that there is widespread concern, particularly with adjoining landholders to these areas, that the department could be failing to honour the good neighbour policy. How are you intending to address that through consultation and other means?

Mrs O'Shea: It is a fairly standard practice that we have with any national park, existing or new. We have quite a comprehensive good neighbour policy, which looks to work closely with our abutting neighbours. With respect to that, we have over 12 million hectares that we have to manage. In some parks we have many neighbours; in some not so many, depending on the number. With respect to that, this includes rural and primary producers, tourism operators, guesthouses, industrial, commercial, residential communities depending on whether they are urban parks or more remote parks.

As I said, we have an actual good neighbour policy. It includes cooperative risk management. With respect to fire, we work across boundaries to protect fire property biodiversity and we participate closely with Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. In a general sense, we actually work with local and state authorities and volunteers to determine the location of fire control lines and construction and maintenance; planning, implementation and communication of planned fuel burns; and training.

With respect to pest management, which I understand the member was particularly interested in, we undertake pest management activities on both protected areas and state forests. We take responsibility under the Biosecurity Act. Like most other landholders, we take practical steps to minimise the risks associated with plant and animal pests. In 2015-16 we spent an estimated \$7.5 million on pest management, which included 29 strategic pest management program projects across the state.

CHAIR: We will go to government questions.

Mrs GILBERT: I refer to page 76 of the Budget Paper No. 4. Minister, what is the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing's role in the Cape York Tenure Resolution Program and how will the new funding deliver environmental benefits to the cape?

Dr MILES: The Palaszczuk government has provided QPWS with increased operational funding of \$11.5 million over four years to jointly manage Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land with traditional owners. QPWS works closely with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships in the Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program to deliver positive social, economic and environmental benefits on Cape York Peninsula.

QPWS is responsible for the joint management of national parks on Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land once an existing national park has been transferred or a new national park has been dedicated in the area. These parks are referred as CYPAL national parks. In the creation of a new CYPAL national park, DATSIP consults with QPWS and the traditional custodians of the land throughout the process to ensure that conservation outcomes underpin land transfer negotiations and that future management arrangements and management challenges are well understood. This ensures that the QPWS relationship with traditional owners starts out in a really positive way.

The Cape York Tenure Resolution Program makes a substantial contribution towards this government's commitment to expand the Queensland protected area estate to 17 per cent of its landmass. The Cape York program is a strategic approach to returning ownership and management of lands on Cape York Peninsula to traditional owners, while ensuring that outstanding environmental values are protected in national parks and other classes of protected area.

To date the program has transferred almost 1.4 million hectares of existing national park to CYPAL national park and created six new CYPAL national parks, resulting in an increase of over 590,000 hectares of protected area on the peninsula. The program continues for a further three years to finalise the transfer of existing Cape York national parks and state lands, as well as progressing the conversion of national parks, including the Eastern Kuku Yalangi Indigenous land use agreement. Binerá CYPAL national park, the newest national park created through the program, includes rock art galleries found in striking sandstone formations and conserves these significant cultural places and Indigenous story lines. A key environmental benefit in this transfer is the previously poorly represented sandstone escarpment country, which is now protected forever for future generations to enjoy. The state has recently reached agreement with the traditional owners of the sandstone west land dealing, to create approximately 16,500 hectares of new CYPAL national park on Mount Jack Station near Cooktown.

This \$11.5 million in new funding has been provided to meet the state's obligations under Indigenous management agreements and to provide for effective on-ground joint management. In addition to operational funding, new capital funding of \$2.8 million over four years has been provided for the establishment of visitor and management facilities. Joint management of national parks on Cape

York Peninsula is undertaken by QPWS rangers and traditional owners through natural resource management projects, as well as infrastructure, construction, cultural mapping, visitor management and compliance. The joint management partners share traditional, ecological and contemporary scientific land management knowledge and skills, and make decisions jointly to undertake park operational activities such as planned burning, weed control and the presentation of cultural values to visitors. Indigenous rangers coordinate and implement fencing and weed programs and work cooperatively with park rangers in feral animal and fire management.

The new funding allocation also provides for the establishment and running of the Cape York Peninsula Regional Protected Area Management Committee. The committee will have a role in advising about park planning instruments, Indigenous employment, allocation of resources and a review of existing Indigenous management agreements. Overall, the government partnership with the Cape York Tenure Resolution Program is integral to the success of existing and future joint management arrangements on Cape York Peninsula, in turn increasing and enhancing the delivery of social, economic and environmental benefits to this significant landscape.

Mr MADDEN: Minister, I refer to the Service Delivery Statements where the government commits to progress long-term protected area policy for the acquisition and management of the protected area estate. Could you provide the committee with details as to what action the government is taking to ensure that it continues to effectively manage its national parks, while looking towards the future with its goal of having 17 per cent of Queensland protected for its biodiversity and natural values?

Dr MILES: This government has ensured that major new additions to the estate have been supported by additional appropriations for ongoing management of these lands, including this year's budget measures totalling \$35.9 million over four years for new protected areas and joint management of Cape York parks. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has a strong culture of innovation and will continue to improve its service delivery towards internationally recognised best practice protected area management. As a demonstration of this, 2015-16 represented the first full year that all protected areas managed solely by QPWS were being managed in accordance with an appropriate management instrument, either a management plan or a management statement. These planning tools are critical to the effective management of protected areas.

Also this year, the department initiated a new adaptive park management framework consistent with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, IUCN, best practice management planning and evaluation approaches. The new adaptive park management framework focuses on identifying and managing key park values, for example key conservation, economic, social and cultural values, in a prioritisation framework that identifies the most appropriate levels of service for each park. With all protected areas prioritised within this framework, QPWS will be better placed to make decisions on where it focuses investment across the state and over time.

QPWS is making improvements to how it manages fire, pest and weeds with a new ICT system known as Flame, making fire management planning and prioritisation more effective and accessible to on-ground fire crews. It should be recognised that government is not the only custodian of national and marine parks. These areas are managed increasingly through cooperative partnerships with traditional owners of the land, with park neighbours and with conservation, recreation and volunteer organisations and the business sector.

The department will increasingly manage protected areas with traditional owners under Indigenous land use agreements and Indigenous management agreements, in accordance with the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the native title determination over these areas. This past year alone, the department supported the resolution of four native title claims over protected areas. These covered the traditional countries of the Birriah peoples, the Wulli Wulli peoples, the Darumbal peoples and the Gangalidda and Garawa peoples. Such arrangements are expected to over time generate new and novel management opportunities that will be in keeping with the natural and cultural values of the areas and be beneficial for the traditional owners of the land, for the department and for local communities.

On North Stradbroke Island, for example, camping areas are managed as a partnership between the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation and Indigenous Business Australia. Through its Cultural Capability Action Plan, the department aims to continue building the capacity of its staff to grow stronger working relationships and partnerships with traditional owners caring for their country.

The department will also continue to support and improve its volunteering programs. In 2015-16, more than 1,000 registered volunteers donated an estimated 96,000 hours of park management services, and a new program at Mon Repos Turtle Centre saw 51 volunteers provide a record 4,518

hours of volunteering to support the seasonal turtle watching program. Through the year, up to 100 partners across the state provide practical support for park management. As an example, the Four Wheel Drive Queensland beach clean-up on Fraser Island in May this year attracted 500 volunteers.

The department is also exploring other innovative partnership opportunities. The Raine Island recovery project is a highly successful flagship partnership initiative and is a five-year almost \$8 million collaboration with BHP Billiton, the traditional owners and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. It is improving the survival chances of the endangered green turtle. In the joint state-Commonwealth \$7 million nest to ocean program, turtle hatchling survival rates in the cape and other parts of the Queensland coast have been improved through projects delivered in partnership with traditional owners, natural resource management groups, universities and state agencies.

Recently, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the Save the Bilby Fund have worked in partnership to build predator-proof fences at Currawinya National Park. The department has formalised a 10-year trusteeship with the Wetlands and Grasslands Foundation over Wongaloo Regional Park, a significant wetland and migratory bird habitat south of Townsville. The Queensland government and the Australian government are also currently considering a proposal by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy to work together to protect wild populations of the greater bilby and other threatened species which has the potential to deliver beneficial management outcomes for many years to come. These initiatives demonstrate that the government has strong focus on making continued advances in contemporary, outward focused and innovative protected area management.

CHAIR: Minister, with reference to the service area highlights on page 4 of the SDS, please outline the results of the second round of consultation into the Central Queensland fish habitat area expansions and when the people of Queensland can expect the new areas to be finalised.

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. I know he has had an ongoing interest in the Central Queensland fish habitat area expansion. The Palaszczuk government is contributing to maximising the economic value that Queenslanders receive from sustainable management of their fisheries' resources while improving protection of the Great Barrier Reef. Declared fish habitat areas under the Fisheries Act 1994 provide a management layer over existing land tenures and waters and complement marine parks and other protected areas managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. These areas protect all fish habitats within them, such as mangroves, salt marsh and seagrass, from development pressures while allowing limited appropriate infrastructure and legal commercial, recreational and Indigenous fishing.

In February this year, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service released the Declared Fish Habitat Area Network Strategy 2015-2020, with the objectives to consolidate, reinforce and strengthen management of the network. This includes currently 70 declared fish habitat areas covering over one million hectares of critical fish habitats. Through the Central Queensland Declared Fish Habitat Area Investigations Program, the department has investigated and undertaken consultation related to the possible declaration and expansion of fish habitat areas in the Calliope River in Gladstone, Leekes Creek on Great Keppel Island, the Cawarral Creek declared fish habitat area in Rockhampton and the Fitzroy River declared fish habitat area also in Rockhampton. There has been overwhelming public support for the proposed declaration of the two new fish habitat areas and the expansion of an existing fish habitat area in Central Queensland.

Feedback from the first round of consultation was incorporated into the revised proposed fish habitat areas released for the second round of consultation in February and March this year. I think we might have done that when we were in Gladstone in February. The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing received 494 submissions in the second round of public consultation, with almost all of those in support of the proposals.

Expansion of the Fitzroy River declared fish habitat area will deliver on the Queensland government's commitment under the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan to protect the Fitzroy delta. Declaration of new fish habitat areas at Leekes Creek on Great Keppel Island and the Calliope River near Gladstone will protect important local fish habitats from the impacts of coastal development. With this considerable public support, NPSR is progressing the new and expanded fish habitat areas, with declarations anticipated by the end of this calendar year.

CHAIR: I will now hand over to non-government members.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, with reference to page 4 of the SDS where it refers to reforms to the Nature Conservation Act 1992, in relation to the additional staff that have been budgeted for in implementing this reform, how many are there and how many will be at the SES type level?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. At the outset I take the opportunity to note that the SDS was signed off before that bill had passed the parliament. That is why it is listed as an objective, although by the time the budget was released the parliament had endorsed those amendments. I will ask Mr Klaassen to speak to the classification of those officers, but the additional rangers are all rangers so they are all in the operational stream. I presume there are some rangers and some senior rangers, but there are no SES or executive level roles. I might ask Mr Klaassen to clarify that in more detail.

Mr Klaassen: In terms of your specific question about whether there are any staff to implement the reforms under the Nature Conservation Act, the answer to that is no. There are no new staff for that. The additional staff are for managing the protected areas that have been acquired. They are principally rangers, operational staff, who will be based in the field. There are no senior staff, SES or SO level staff to be employed through that.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I refer to page 4 of the SDS of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing. I want you to outline or explain how a policy setting of a fixed target percentage of Queensland managed as protected area achieves ecological benefits, because surely such areas should have ecological value or be endangered habitat to warrant that protection. Is your fixed target percentage really a process metric as opposed to an outcome metric?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. We addressed this in part in an answer to a question on notice from non-government members where you asked how the target was arrived at. We explained in that QON that the 17 per cent target is set by the Convention on Biological Diversity, which Australia is a signatory to. It is Labor's view—and it was the position Labor took to the election—that the 17 per cent target as listed in that convention was appropriate and should be the long-term aspiration for expansion of the protected areas.

As we noted earlier, the acquisition program itself is a program of EHP, but obviously there is significant crossover in responsibility because, when they transfer to NPSR, NPSR has to take over that management. Queensland has a lower proportion of land covered by national park than I think any other state—well lower than the other more populated states like Victoria and New South Wales. We can quibble over 17 per cent or 15 per cent or whatever, but it is certainly the aspiration of this government to continue to expand the protected area estate not just through new national parks. In fact, it is my view that that will be an important component of that growth but only a component of that growth. The Nature Refuges Program, which sees us work with private landholders—it is delivered in partnership with AgForce—is a really important opportunity to put conservation protections in place over private land. I think increasingly that will be an increasing proportion of the protected area estate as we seek to get closer to that 17 per cent.

All of that land, as I outlined earlier—nearly 500 nature refuges—gets included in our assessment for the protected area estate. The 17 per cent target is not 17 per cent of the state as national park; it is 17 per cent of the state protected for conservation purposes, whether that is by a landholder voluntarily agreeing to a perpetual conservation agreement like a nature refuge or, indeed, a trust like Bush Heritage Australia or Queensland Trust for Nature managing a nature refuge or even nature refuges like the Steve Irwin reserve in Cape York. All of that gets counted towards that 17 per cent target.

Dr ROWAN: Just to follow on from that, how are you proposing to measure the outcome? Given that this goes across, as you have outlined, two departments, there will be a percentage that is in place given that you are pursuing the policy. How is the outcome benefit of that policy going to be measured? What is the process?

Dr MILES: Again, I think this goes largely to the acquisition process which is measured by EHP, but I am happy to address it here. The way we make sure that that target is geographically biodiverse is at the acquisition end. The work we do at that end to map ecosystems to determine the most important, the most valuable properties to add to the estate is how you make sure you are not just adding land that does not come with a biodiversity value.

Importantly, EHP uses world-leading climate change modelling technology to also inform the acquisition strategy. It is not just looking at ensuring there are representative samples of different bioregions but also taking into account climate change resilience, which is really about saying that there are parts of the state which will become refuges for a species as the planet warms up. That tends to point towards land with variable altitudes so that as the summer gets hotter there is the opportunity for species to move to higher altitudes to maintain a similar climate to what they are accustomed to. All of that work, I think, is really crucial in making sure that the properties that we add to the national park estate, and indeed to the entire protected area estate, is valuable for all of the outcomes that we are trying to achieve.

I accept your point that the proportion of the state that is protected is one measure. The value of the land that it protects is another measure. That is the job of our acquisitions program and, indeed, I suppose the Nature Refuges Program, making sure that they are seeking to partner with landholders who have properties that have those kinds of conservation values that we are trying to protect.

Dr ROWAN: Given that it will be undertaken by the acquisition program, once that is measured, will it be reported in the public domain as to what the outcome is?

Dr MILES: Certainly. In the case of each acquisition, we can report on the values that are being sought to protect with that acquisition. We can report separately on things like how much of a certain kind of habitat has been protected—for example, how much cassowary habitat has been protected—obviously seeking to provide over time measurable increases in the kinds of habitat for particularly endangered species that we are trying to protect. It is not the kind of thing that can necessarily be measured in a performance measure. That goal is useful in one sense, but I accept the value in being able to measure other outcomes of what is protected by the protected area estate.

Later this year we are also due to release the next state of the environment report, which will also go some way towards outlining what the state of the Queensland environment is generally and therefore the kind of biodiversity that has been protected by the protected area estate. The DG has just alerted me to the fact that the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is also in the process of establishing health checks to monitor the condition of key park values across a representative sample of parks and will regularly review its performance in managing parks across Queensland. It is our hope over time to release those as report cards for each individual national park and to describe the key park values, which will vary from park to park, but also outline what steps have been taken and what steps are planned to enhance those particular values.

Dr ROWAN: That is really what I was trying to get to with those report cards. I guess they will be publicly available and publicly reported and there will be measurable differences over time. Is that your intent?

Dr MILES: Our hope is to be much more open and transparent not just about the good news but also to say that there are parks that have particular challenges. Most of them are challenged by the change in climate but then there are many other threats and challenges that vary based on the location of the park. There is a piece of work that is underway, which we cannot fully outline yet, which will provide, park by park, much greater detail like that. We will hopefully engage with the local community that uses that park on what steps can be taken to improve on the values.

Dr ROWAN: I take your point about if there is bad news—in other words, if there are pests and weeds or a growth in a park. That will be as a result of legislative changes that that comes to pass in particular areas and that will all be transparent and in the public domain?

Dr MILES: It will. From the perspective of a government there are risks in that. My view is that being open and transparent and providing that information allows for an honest and sincere debate about how we manage not just each individual park but our parks in aggregate. While that might mean occasional uncomfortable questions for me about the state of a particular park, I think the overall outcome from the perspective of better managing our parks is going to be valuable.

I know that these kinds of conversations tend to go to the problems, but our park rangers really do an incredible job right across the state. I know they love their work. The work they do is amazing. I put that on the record so they do not think that we are always talking about the problems.

The fact is that we manage an enormous amount of land. We manage it for fire, pests and weeds and also visitors. The role they play in welcoming visitors to our parks and translating parks for visitors and filling young people with the inspiration that comes from someone who has decided to spend their life caring for the land is pretty special.

Dr ROWAN: I agree. Our park rangers do an exceptional job on behalf of all Queenslanders. Certainly the LNP opposition recognises that. Director-General, with reference to pages 3 and 4 of the SDS, I understand you are restructuring the national parks regions. I wanted to confirm that that is correct?

Mrs O'Shea: Yes.

Dr ROWAN: What efficiencies are to be gained? What was the evidence base for the decision?

Mrs O'Shea: With respect to the member's question, in late 2012 the department decided to undertake a review of its executive management structure in particular with a view to looking at how it would manage across three portfolios in a much more coordinated way. As part of that process, the department commissioned an independent review that was done by Deloitte. They were contracted to carry out the review under a standing offer arrangement.

The key finding of the review related to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness across the department and better alignment with some of the strategic functions. As the department's title would indicate, we have national parks, sport and racing. It was designed to look at efficiencies for the department to ensure it would deliver its remit across three portfolio areas.

With regard to the boundary realignments for the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the new structure delineates between operational and support responsibilities but retains a split of service. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service continues to be the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Sport and Recreation continues to be Sport and Recreation.

We have actually gone from two regional areas, which was a contraction under the previous government, to three regional areas. We had northern and central and south-west. We have now added a third dimension, which is marine and island parks. We have gone from two to three regions to provide greater senior executive support in very intense and front-line areas. That is with no additional senior executive positions but a repurposing of the existing senior structure we have.

CHAIR: We will move onto government questions. Minister, I draw your attention in the SDS specifically to visitor and tourism infrastructure. Given the Inskip Peninsula nearshore landslide event in late 2015, can you please outline how much funding will be allocated to capital works to restore and maintain this popular camping site to ensure that visitation and enjoyment of this area is not diminished?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. I note the collaborative effort the member for Gympie provided in responding to this incident. It was good to work with him on it. I was pleased with the work undertaken by staff from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in responding to both the immediate and the long-term impacts of the nearshore landslide that occurred at Inskip Peninsula Recreation Area on 26 September 2015. At the risk of overstepping the mark, I convey to National Parks the appreciation of the member for Gympie to the parks staff and rangers who kept him informed and responded to the incident. It was appreciated by both of us.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has shown professionalism in achieving a balance in ensuring visitor safety while minimising the impacts on overall camping capacity, supporting the local tourism and business community. After the initial event QPWS engaged a geotechnical firm, EDG Consulting, to undertake studies of the underlying causes of the instability affecting this section of coast and provide guidance on how to manage risks at this site into the future.

Hydrographic and side sonar surveys of the seabed and laser surveys of the beach area were undertaken on behalf of the geotechnical consultant by Port of Brisbane Hydrographic Solutions between 15 and 17 October 2015. The geotechnical report provided QPWS with recommendations on how to manage the area to minimise risks into the future. As a result, QPWS has installed a permanent buffer zone to camping along the shoreline in the areas assessed as being highly susceptible to possible future nearshore landslides. This buffer has been established to maximise visitor safety while minimising the impacts on the number of campers who can be accommodated at the site to as low a level as reasonably possible to ensure risks to visitors are minimised.

QPWS has also implemented a no-vehicle zone over the beach areas adjacent to the camping buffer zone and installed additional interpretative signage warning people and explaining the nature of these events. As I said, the member for Gympie was briefed on site by QPWS staff the day after the landslip and also met with senior QPWS staff in Brisbane for another briefing on 11 November.

QPWS spent approximately \$125,000 in response to the nearshore landslide, including commissioning an expert report, installation of a no-camping buffer zone and vehicle restriction areas and interpretative signage. These actions were implemented prior to the peak visitation period of Christmas 2015 and received overwhelming public support. Campers flocked back to Inskip Peninsula over the Christmas, New Year and Easter periods.

While there were earlier concerns of a loss of some camping capacity, the Christmas, New Year and Easter peak camping periods demonstrated that the number of available camping spots was sufficient, with capacity reached on two nights over the period—New Year's Eve and 26 March. Camping spots remained available for all other nights.

Moving forward, QPWS has allocated \$50,000 in the 2016-17 financial year to plan development works for future upgrades to the Inskip Peninsula camping area, including replacement of toilet facilities and consolidation and definition of camping zones. This work will be undertaken over several years. The funding complements \$414,000 previously allocated in 2014-15 to replace three toilet blocks. I am happy to ensure that the member for Gympie gets briefed as that work is planned and progresses.

Mr MADDEN: I refer to page 4 of the Service Delivery Statements which references facilitating recreational experiences within parks and forests. Could you outline for the committee how these different experiences are managed and why some activities such as quad bike use are restricted?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. The Palaszczuk government is committed to ensuring parks and forests are protected, accessible and valued by all Queenslanders and visitors. Outdoor recreation is recognised for improving physical and mental health, reducing the cost of Queenslanders accessing our health systems and supporting tourism and contributing to regional economies.

The vast majority of visitors to QPWS parks are visiting to take part in non-motorised activities—for example, bushwalking, swimming and diving, fishing, sightseeing and camping. While it is acknowledged that some quad bike owners want to ride their vehicles recreationally in QPWS managed land, quad bikes fall within a class of vehicles that cannot be freely operated on public roads because they fail to meet road safety standards. Therefore, their use is highly regulated and they may only be used on Queensland roads with conditional registration where there is a genuine need to do so.

In 2015 QPWS reviewed the findings of the Queensland Deputy State Coroner following his inquest into the quad bike related deaths of nine Queenslanders. In part, that further reinforced existing requirements which regulate the use of such vehicles on public roads.

More broadly, the Queensland government launched the *Statewide plan for improving quad bike safety in Queensland 2016-2019* in March this year in recognition of the prevalence of serious injuries and fatalities caused from recreational and work related quad bike use. The plan quotes the concerning statistic that over the past 15 years 69 people have been killed in quad bike incidents in Queensland and many more have been seriously injured. The existing prohibition on the recreational use of quad bikes on QPWS managed lands is therefore considered appropriate and will be continued.

Mrs GILBERT: Given that you have outlined a lot of progressive programs of the QPWS today, could you please outline to the committee what the QPWS is doing to harness the Pokémon Go craze to increase visitation to our national parks?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for her question. It is important that we ensure that our experiences in our national parks are contemporary and appeal to new generations of potential park lovers. We have been discussing how to make sure young people and not-so-young people hunting for Pokémon can do so in our national parks.

One of the things we discovered in that process was that, while there are a couple of Pokéstops in our national parks—there is one in Lamington National Park and one in the Bunya Mountains National Park—because our walking tracks are not currently mapped in the mapping software used by the Pokémon Go app to guide players around their environment, currently there is a disturbing lack of Pokémon within our national parks. We also know that the New South Wales government worked with Google to map their walking tracks into Google Maps. New South Wales now has more Pokémon in its national parks than Queensland does. There is work to be done to increase the number of Pokémon in our national parks.

We also need to ensure that there is an availability of incense and Pokéballs—the currency and trade of Pokémon hunters within national parks—because the last thing you want to do is identify a very highly valued Pokémon deep within a national park and run out of Pokéballs and not be able to catch it. We intend to work with the game developers to increase the number of Pokéstops in our national parks, and I hope that means that more young people—and not-so-young people—will find a new way to get out into nature and enjoy our national parks.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I refer to page 2 of the SDS which talks about protecting the environment by managing parks and ensuring healthy species. Would you be able to advise the estimated koala population residing in national park areas? What population would be living in protected areas? What is the estimated population outside of those areas?

Dr MILES: That is an excellent question from the member but it is not one we can answer, unfortunately. While different surveys will provide some guidance as to koala populations, it is not possible for us to approximate koala populations in our parks or even not in our parks. Apart from the decline that was recorded in that UniQuest study, the study also highlighted many weaknesses in the historic survey and modelling of koala populations. That is why they were only able to make those assessments about those two discrete regions because they were the two regions where there was sufficient data. With regard to how our rangers record wildlife sightings and collate that information, I might ask the director-general or the deputy director-general to speak to it.

Mr Klaassen: QPWS does not have a formal system of tracking wildlife because, as you would imagine, in our national parks there is a broad variety of wildlife that rangers would encounter. There is no formal system for monitoring koalas in QPWS.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, given that in your own words it was an excellent question, is there any capacity for your expert advisory council to look at that given that there are distinct populations in the areas that we talk about? Given that the government has not allocated funding in this year's budget for the purchase of koala habitat, are you concerned that national parks might become the last bastions of land areas in Queensland where you can find koalas?

Dr MILES: I think the most important interaction we can ensure occurs between not just the expert panel but also the wider koala research community in making our parks as accessible as possible to them for their koala research. There are existing arrangements in place for researchers to access our national parks and collect data that can then feed into the wider knowledge of koala populations and koala conservation efforts. A project of that kind would be eligible for the koala research funding that we have allocated from within the community sustainable action grants.

With regard to your second question, as I outlined earlier, the more I look at the impacts of climate change and land clearing on our wildlife populations, I am concerned for all of our endangered species. There is reason—and we should all be concerned—for ongoing declines in the whole range of endangered species that we as Queenslanders are charged with protecting and being the custodians of. That is not limited to koalas, but clearly it includes koalas. For all of the other endangered species that live in our national parks, under some scenarios those properties that allow for climate resilience could be very, very small. The efforts that we put in place to ensure that we are protecting them now is really important.

Dr ROWAN: To follow on from that, given that we do not know what the numbers are in national parks or protected estates at this stage, rather than putting money into Pokémon Go, which might be a noble endeavour for some reasons, would it be better putting that money into mapping and recording what is happening to our iconic species of koala in our national parks and our protected estates?

Dr MILES: I think you are talking an entirely different scale of investment, comparing it to the Pokémon Go activity which is really designed to create another reason to get people into our parks. I make no apologies for putting effort into new and interesting reasons to get people into our parks. I think that is quite separate to koala surveying work, which historically has been performed by universities. The EHP budget allocation for this year includes substantial funds for koala survey work, and I am happy to go back to the team implementing that survey work to explore with them if more of that should be done in national parks. I have no doubt that National Parks would be happy to partner with us on that work.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to page 4 of the SDS, have any staff from your department been seconded to the Deputy Premier's office to assist with the proposed changes to the vegetation management legislation?

Dr MILES: Not to my knowledge, but I will ask the director-general to speak to it.

Mrs O'Shea: There have been no staff seconded to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet or any other department on vegetation management issues.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I refer to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines' comments to estimates. I seek leave to table his comments, a copy of which I have here.

CHAIR: There being no objection, it is so tabled.

Dr ROWAN: Dr Lynham's comments to estimates were that the overwhelming majority of Queensland landholders do the right thing when it comes to vegetation management and only a minute percentage—something in the order of 0.4 per cent of land holdings—get picked by satellite imaging for further investigation. Given that there is such a high level of compliance, why have vegetation management laws been taken out of the hands of Minister Lynham and given to Deputy Premier Jackie Trad. Who do you have confidence in—Minister Lynham or Deputy Premier Trad?

Dr MILES: The member's question certainly does not relate to my portfolio responsibilities for Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services. It does not really relate to my portfolio responsibilities at all. The responsible minister for vegetation management is Minister Lynham and continues to be Minister Lynham. The opportunity to interrogate Minister Lynham was earlier in the week. The member refers to the role that the Deputy Premier has taken in introducing changes to that act. She is playing that role because of the number of agencies that have an interest and the need for it to be centrally coordinated by a central figure in the government such as the Deputy Premier, but the member's question really does not go to my budget papers at all and I would ask that any further question be ruled out of order.

Dr ROWAN: Do you have confidence in either Minister Lynham or Deputy Premier Trad?

CHAIR: I rule that question out of order. You cannot go back to it. Please move onto your next question.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, with reference to pages 2 and 3 of the SDS, has there been any discussion between your environment department or the department of national parks and the Department of Housing and Public Works about the potential cost impacts of proposed changes to vegetation management laws on property developments and housing markets?

Dr MILES: On pages 2 and 3? Page 2 is the name of the Queensland Racing Integrity Commissioner. Where are you referring to?

CHAIR: That question is not related to the member's portfolio. I would ask you to ask questions that relate to the minister's portfolio.

Dr MILES: Given the time, Mr Chair, I have some follow-up on the questions the member asked in the first session. Would it be okay to go to those now? If we have a few minutes I am happy to take another question after that.

CHAIR: Most definitely. Are these your questions on notice?

Dr MILES: I want to be clear about what I have taken on notice and I have some responses which might address the member's questions. The first question, as I understood it, was for the 129 new mine site approvals discussed in QON 636 and to give a breakdown of how many of these approvals were for sites in the Great Barrier Reef catchments; is that correct?

Dr ROWAN: That is correct.

Dr MILES: We will take that on notice and have a response to the committee within the time frame that the committee has advised us. The reason for that is that I am advised the department needs time to compile this information as it is not on hand in a readily accessible format.

The second was to give a breakdown of the number of new mine sites approved since 31 March 2016 and the number of these that were for sites located in the Great Barrier Reef catchments. For the same reason, we will take that on notice.

The third was from the member for Bundamba and related to what arrangements for staffing were in place in the Swanbank area. The department has since researched payroll records back to 2001 and cannot locate any employee located at Swanbank. I have been advised that there may have been a council officer stationed there which might be what the member was thinking of. The department has 10 people operating from the Ipswich office who respond swiftly to any complaints. Travel time from Ipswich to Swanbank is 15 minutes. Nine of those staff are authorised and one of them is an admin officer.

The fifth question, returning to the member for Moggill, was the amount of financial assurance that was forfeited and accessed by the state in the past two financial years. I am advised that the total value of financial assurance that was forfeited during the last two financial years was \$3,372,465. Suffice to say that that is far from adequate to meet the total value of rehabilitation expenses across the relevant sites.

The next question was the number of users expected to use the Connect system over the forward estimates broken down by financial year. I am advised that for financial forecasting purposes the department has estimated that 16,000 users will convert to become users in year 1. The system is expected to be popular with users as it saves business administrative time and cost. The department has assumed the use will steadily increase in the remaining outyears, with close to all permit holders being users by 2018-19. I am advised that full uptake is therefore forecast to be 23,000 users.

With regard to the decision-making process behind the purchase of Springvale as that relates to work from EHP, I will take that on notice and report in the committee time frames. With regard to the specific locations for planned burns this year and in the near future, we will have to take that on notice too. By my count, that is four questions on notice. Is that your understanding?

Dr ROWAN: It is. In relation to the mine questions, we were specifically looking for the names and the projects related to those as part of the response.

Dr MILES: In reef catchments or all of them?

Dr ROWAN: All.

Dr MILES: It is all public record so we can certainly do that. I have one clarification for the record. In response to the question on Inskip, I am told I said that we had spent \$414,000 on the toilet block. I am told it was actually \$400,000 so I was out by \$14,000. I apologise to the committee.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister.

Dr MILES: Can I say some thankyou? We have one more minute.

CHAIR: Yes.

Dr MILES: I sincerely thank the committee for its interest in my portfolios. I have enjoyed the chance to discuss the very many matters. I know that all of you have passionate interests that relate to the portfolios that I am fortunate enough to work in. I look forward to continuing all of those discussions with you over time. Thank you, Mr Chair, in particular, for your management of the process. I thank the committee staff and the Hansard reporters. I especially thank the departmental and ministerial staff who really have slogged their guts out to have all of this information available and at hand for the committee. It is no small feat and they have done an excellent job.

CHAIR: That completes the committee's hearings into the matters referred to it by the parliament. Thank you, Minister, Director-General and officials for your assistance in our hearings today. I thank the committee members who are here today and those who sat as part of the committee. A transcript of this session will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's website within two hours of the finish of this meeting.

I remind the minister that the deadline for those questions that have been taken on notice and clarifying material is 10 am on Wednesday, 27 July. Before I conclude, on behalf of this committee I would like to thank Hansard, the secretariat and attendants for their assistance and help during this hearing. I declare this public hearing officially closed.

Committee adjourned at 6.30 pm