

## FRIDAY, 21 JULY 2017

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### ESTIMATES—AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE— AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

#### Estimate Committee Members

Mr JP Kelly (Chair)  
Mr PT Weir  
Mrs J Gilbert  
Mr R Katter  
Mr JE Madden  
Mr LL Millar

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#### Members in Attendance

Mr DR Last  
Mrs JR Miller  
Dr CAC Rowan

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#### In Attendance

Hon. WS Byrne, Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Economic  
Development

Mr D McIntyre, Chief of Staff

#### Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

Dr E Woods, Director-General

Mr M Letts, Deputy Director-General, Agriculture

Mr M Richards, Acting Executive Director, Finance and Asset Manager

#### Biosecurity Queensland

Dr J Thompson, Chief Biosecurity Officer,

#### Queensland Rural and Industry Development

Mr C MacMillan, Chief Executive Officer

#### Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges

Mr M Tobin, Chief Executive Officer

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#### Committee met at 9.00 am



**CHAIR:** Good morning everyone. I declare the hearings of estimates for the Agriculture and Environment Committee open. I acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet today. I am Joe Kelly, the member for Greenslopes and chair of the committee. Pat Weir, the member for Condamine, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are: Mrs Julieanne Gilbert, member for Mackay; Mr Robbie Katter, member for Mount Isa; Mr Jim Madden, member for Ipswich West; and Mr Lachlan Millar, member for Gregory. The committee has resolved that non-committee members may be given leave to attend and ask questions during the hearing, so

other members may be present over the course of the proceedings. The committee has resolved that the whole of the proceedings of the committee may be broadcast in line with the conditions for broadcasters and guidelines for camera operators, which are available from one of the parliamentary attendants in this room. I ask that mobile phones and pagers be either switched off or to silent. I also remind you that food and drink are not permitted in the chamber.

The committee will examine the portfolio areas in the following order: Agriculture and Fisheries and Rural Economic Development between 9.00 am and 1.30 pm; and Environment and Heritage Protection, National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef from 2.00 pm to 6.30 pm. The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2017 for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Economic Development. The committee will examine the minister's portfolio until 1.30 pm. The committee will suspend proceedings during this time at 11.00 am for a half-hour break.

We have two visiting members with us today: Mr Dale Last, member for Burdekin, and Mrs Jo-Ann Miller, member for Bundamba. I remind those present today that these proceedings are similar to parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to, or excluded from, the hearing at the discretion of the committee. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The same rules for questions that apply in parliament apply here. I refer to standing orders 112 and 115 in this regard. Questions should be brief and relate to one issue and should not contain lengthy or subjective preambles or argument or opinion.

I intend to guide proceedings today so that the relevant issues can be explored without imposing artificial time limits and to ensure there is adequate opportunity to address questions from government and non-government members of the committee. On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome the minister, the director-general, officials and members of the public to the hearing. For the benefit of Hansard, I would ask that officials identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or the director-general. The committee will examine Agriculture and Fisheries from 9.00 am to 11.00 am with a 30-minute break from 11.00 am to 11.30 am, and then another break from 1.30 pm after which it will continue with the remaining parts of the portfolio, including the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges and the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Economic Development open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish, you may make an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

**Mr BYRNE:** Yes, I will be making an opening statement. Good morning, everyone. Today I will be answering your questions relating to the Agriculture and Fisheries budget and Agriculture and Fisheries and Rural Economic Development portfolios. I am joined at the table by Dr Elizabeth Woods, the Director-General of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. To assist the committee Cameron MacMillan, the CEO of QRIDA; Barbara Wilson, the CEO of Safe Food Production Queensland; and Mark Tobin, the CEO of Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges are here to answer any questions you may have for them.

When the Palaszczuk government succeeded the Newman government in 2015 we set a clear path to rebuild what had been damaged by cuts and reform that had become outdated. When the current Leader of the Opposition was Treasurer he presided over a period of chaotic and ill-considered cuts. Biosecurity Queensland, our front-line defence against diseases and invasive pests and weeds which threatened our agricultural producers, was savaged. Twenty-six per cent of the Biosecurity Queensland workforce was removed. The Fisheries Queensland workforce suffered even more, with 28 per cent of the department's staff being culled by the then treasurer, who had no understanding of the damage that was actually taking place.

The 2017-18 budget, which the committee will examine today, is a confirmatory budget that underscores the progress we have made so far in stabilising the department that had been savaged by the razor of the Newman era, in restoring Queensland's biosecurity capability, in tackling significant biosecurity threats such as Panama TR4 and white spot disease, in reviving the sheep industry through a collaborative and systematic approach to wild dog fencing, in establishing net-free zones, in scrapping stamp duty for intergenerational farm transfers within the families, in helping producers tackle the challenges of climate change and the ravages of drought, in protecting dogs and unethical and cruel exploitation of puppy farms, in helping our producers forge new markets overseas, in ensuring that lenders cannot seize farm properties over unpaid debts without independent mediation, in tackling the

thorny issues such as BJD and the tick line, and in reforming Fisheries management to rebuild capacity in the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol. When it comes to delivering on election commitments for our food and fibre producers, we have a proud and enviable record. In opposition, we outlined our priorities and we have delivered on our promises.

I am proud to say that in the same week that the Treasurer delivered the 2017-18 budget I released our sustainable fisheries strategy. This is a signature document when it comes to reform. We are doing what is necessary to cast off the moribund and makeshift fisheries management system and replace it with a world-class management framework based on science, reliable data collection and stakeholder consultation with expert advice. It will maximise the economic benefit of our fisheries while guaranteeing that future generations have access to plentiful fish stocks. There is more than \$20 million of additional funding in the 2017-18 budget to boost fisheries compliance, education and data collection with recruitment of an additional 20 frontline Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers. Today I have announced the appointment of an independent expert panel led by Queensland's Chief Scientist, Professor Suzanne Miller.

I suspect that based on previous estimates some members of the committee may have trouble with the SDS. I want to tackle the issue of cuts head on. There are no cuts to the budget, no cuts to programs and no cuts to staff. Since the election and in part in the 2017-18 budget we have provided additional funding to increase full-time equivalent staff numbers by 31 in Fisheries and Forestry, 23 in Biosecurity Queensland and five in Agriculture. This is a total of 59 additional funded positions in DAF. Priority areas for these additional staff are implementing the government's commitment to fisheries reform and the Biosecurity Capability Review and the drought capability and adaptability program.

I want to remind those from the opposition sitting opposite that their record in government is nothing to be particularly proud of. Staff and funding cuts ripped the heart out of communities in regional Queensland. I contrast this with the Palaszczuk government's record, and it could not be a greater contrast. The budget before you provides specific funding for Rural Economic Development for the first time. I am Queensland's first Minister for Rural Economic Development. It is a role that I am honoured to be given. The \$5.2 million for the Rural Economic Development package is at the centre of a renewed drive to maximise investment, stimulate jobs and support rural communities that were treated quite shabbily by the previous government. I welcome the committee's questions.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, I refer you to SDS page 13, the departmental summary. Your performance statement talks about productivity growth and sustainability, but what is sustainable about your budget cut of 3.2 per cent from \$438.954 million last year to \$424.742 million this year—down \$14.212 million? Is this not confirmation that the Agriculture portfolio under the Palaszczuk Labor government is the poor cousin when compared to other departments?

**Mr BYRNE:** I did not see that question coming. As I tried to say in my opening statement there are no cuts to the budget, there are no cuts to staff and there are no cuts in terms of a government policy heading whatsoever. I have made that clear. I have made it clear in my budget reply speech and I have made it clear repeatedly about where we sit on these matters.

These are key points compared to the previous budget. There are a number of notes in the budget papers that explain the numbers that have been referred to by the member for Burdekin—a number of measures. These have to do with the programs that are ceasing or running out or have not been funded going forward. I speak particularly of the national fire ants program, which is a matter that is going to be resolved at AGMIN next week; some of the committee may be aware that these matters are going to be taken to the national gathering of ministers, and the budget issues and appropriations going forward are subject to those outcomes. I am sure there will be further questions about that later.

I want to say unequivocally that there are no cuts whatsoever. The budget reductions that are referred to by the member are adequately and completely explained in the notes to the SDS. They are not about cutting FTE; they are not about cutting programs. There is certainly not a government policy setting that is demanding cuts. These are programs that have either expired or are subject to further funding going forward. I have made that explanation previously. I talked about it in the budget replies and in the public domain. I simply refute the notion that there are any cuts, so the entire basis of the question is false.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, given that cut of \$14 million—and it is very clearly shown in the budget papers—cost increases and the Public Service wage increase of 2½ per cent, which I see for the department is going to add \$5 million this year, is it not true that the department will have around \$20 million less in real terms to deliver services and programs?

**Mr BYRNE:** I would say, as I said earlier, there are no cuts to staff and no cuts to programs. Let's just run through this. The decrease between the 2017-18 budget and the 2018-19 budget of \$33.2 million relates largely to—and I will just run you through them so you are well informed. There is an \$8.6 million reduction in funding received under biosecurity national cost-sharing arrangements including fire ants, \$7.5 million reduction relating to various limited life funding initiatives and deferrals including the technology commercial fund, \$3.9 million reduction in funding of biosecurity regional response, \$3.4 million reduction in funding of the Biosecurity Capability Review—as I say, these programs have come to their point—\$3 million reduction in Australian funded pest and weeds initiatives, \$2.8 million reduction in funding for the TR4 program, \$2 million reduction in funding for the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme—this is offset by the \$3.3 million in the funding of enterprise bargaining.

Here are the offsets: a \$6.9 million increase in funding for fisheries reforms; \$5.2 million increase in funding for enterprise bargaining; various limited life funding initiatives and deferrals including technology commercial fund, which I have already said; \$3.9 million increase in funding for the Biosecurity Capability Review; \$2.6 million increase in funding for biosecurity regional response; and \$1.9 million increase in funding for Rural Economic Development. Those numbers have already been publicly available. That explains where the numbers are in the tables. The key point here is that the argument that there is a reduction that is the heavy hand of government through policy from the likes of myself is simply not true.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, you are a senior minister in the Palaszczuk Labor government. Did you argue for an increase in the agricultural budget this year?

**Mr BYRNE:** Everybody has their wish lists. Everybody has proposals they take forward. I am sure you are familiar with how budgets are developed. There is a whole lot of proposals that are put forward in the preparation of any budget and, as with any budget preparation, there is a certain amount and a certain level of priorities.

I am very, very pleased—and I know that members of the department are also—with the outcomes from the budget preparation and what was finally delivered in the Queensland budget this year. I always argue strongly for those areas that are of interest to me in my budget area. In the scheme of how budgets develop I am very, very, very pleased with the outcomes.

I have reflected on some of those key areas. Remember that significant items in the 2017-18 budget include a continuation of existing drought relief arrangements with the provision of up to \$20 million for 2017-18. That is held centrally by Treasury. I know that the opposition had some problem with that, but I have no problem whatsoever. That is simply a procedural matter and it has no effect whatsoever on the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme.

Other significant items include further investment in the Queensland Climate Risk and Drought Resilience Program, with an additional \$16.3 million investment to the program over the next five years, which builds on \$3.5 million in initial funding in the 2016-17 period, and additional funding of \$5.2 million over three years for rural economic development packages, including \$1.3 million for the Growing Queensland's Food Exports program.

I could go on, but I think the explanation is about where we sit with the budget and the proposal that we took into budget deliberations. I would unreservedly state that I am very pleased with the budget for the department. I know that departmental officials are similarly very, very pleased with the investments and commitments given by the Queensland government to issues associated with the department.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, your budget has been described by AgForce and the Queensland Farmers' Federation as a 'non-event' for agriculture and 'underwhelming'. I seek leave to table those releases.

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

**Mr LAST:** As stated in the QFF media release—

For all the talk about the importance of agriculture to the Queensland economy, the 2017-18 State Budget disappointingly falls short of delivering upon the hype.

The Queensland agricultural sector is unanimously underwhelmed with a Budget that lacks vision and overlooks the importance and crucial role agriculture plays in Queensland's rural and regional communities.

They are 'unanimously underwhelmed' with the budget. Those are not my words, Minister; they are straight from the Queensland Farmers' Federation budget press release.

**CHAIR:** Is there a question?

**Mr LAST:** Yes, there is, Mr Chair. AgForce president Grant Maudsley said that the state government had 'outlined no clear vision to help the industry grow and prosper into the future.' Are AgForce and QFF wrong?

**Mr BYRNE:** You would appreciate, Mr Chair, that I do not necessarily share the sentiments of those peak bodies. I can assure the committee that I have a very honest relationship with those bodies. They are entitled to make observations. In this case I do not agree with those observations. In fact, from the evidence and private conversations I have had with senior figures in the industry, they are incredibly supportive of the things that this Labor government has done. Intergenerational farm transfers have been talked about for decades and we delivered on that issue. We have also delivered on resolving the tick line.

I think it is more poignant to note that their criticisms are not specific. When you look at what we have delivered in the period of this government, it has been an incredibly rewarding and successful period for the agricultural sector. AgTrends data is on the upswing in a fantastic way. I have endeavoured to deliver on the major things that have been discussed with me as the agriculture minister by peak bodies and influential people in various agricultural sectors. There is a plethora of examples of where the Palaszczuk government—in many ways, and in most cases, in a superior fashion to anything undertaken by the previous government—has delivered.

People are entitled to their opinions. A cold analysis of the efforts of the Palaszczuk government withstands scrutiny by anyone. Whether it is drought assistance, support for producers who are under the pump from biosecurity threats or intergenerational transfers of assets et cetera, every single step of the way we have made progress and we have received very positive support from industry groups about that. Unfortunately, the level of excitement from those opposite is perhaps not what I would have hoped for, but I am very confident that the relationship we have with those peak bodies remains transparent and productive. We continue to engage with them and we continue to pursue those areas where we have common interests.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, are you saying here today that the comments and statements made in those media releases are lies? Is that what you are saying?

**Mr BYRNE:** I am saying that I do not share their sentiments. I am absolutely thrilled about this budget. It delivers on everything that we said we would do. When we were in opposition we mapped out a food and fibre policy. We have spent 2½ years and three budgets giving effect to that food and fibre policy, and the runs are on the board. As I said in my opening statement, this is a confirmatory budget which confirms the commitments we made during the election. Have a look at some of the fantastic successes we have had. I did not hear AgForce make any comment about our wild dog fencing program. If you want to talk about changing the entire nature and construct of Western Queensland then you get back into sheep and wool. We have given dramatic effect to our commitments, and we have more than delivered on what we said we would do when we came to government.

We have invested an enormous amount of additional resources because of the obvious and clear performance merits that have come from that investment. Look at what we have done and forget the hyperbole and the politics. Forget the unfounded criticisms. The fact is that in delivery terms the Palaszczuk government has done more than we promised, and we will deliver entirely by the time this term of government is concluded.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, I refer to page 4 of the DAF Service Delivery Statements. In 2016-17 the government made available up to \$1 million in grants for a range of activities, including multi-peril insurance assessments. Can you please advise how many grants were issued for providing multi-peril insurance assessments and whether these grants will continue to be offered?

**Mr BYRNE:** While in opposition we gave a commitment that we would investigate and interrogate the issue of multi-peril crop insurance. We gave an election commitment; there are no two ways about that. The Palaszczuk government gave the election commitment that we would support moves in the grain industry to establish a national crop insurance system. Proponents of risk management options such as multi-peril crop insurance argued that it would be one means of reducing production risks which can result in reducing dependency on government financial support such as drought business assistance. With drought conditions a normal feature of agriculture, crop production is a risky activity with significant capital outlays required for input costs such as chemicals, fertilisers, fuel, seed et cetera and no guarantee that that outlay will produce a return. Numerous variations exist to the crop insurance model. In general terms, farmers pay an insurance premium and receive a payment should the named peril, such as drought, occur.

The Queensland government has consulted with the agriculture and insurance industries on the development of a market based multi-peril crop insurance and other market based risk management options. This consultation indicated that a lack of available production data is considered an impediment to the development of insurance products for agriculture. Production data collated at both the enterprise level and the industry level over a number of years is considered necessary for insurers to assess risk for certain products. To improve the availability of industry production data, the Queensland government is offering a crop insurance research grants program. This program provides grant funding of up to \$100,000 for successful proposals to collate and interpret industry production data. To date, \$150,000 has been provided under the scheme to a consortium made up of QFF, AgForce and Growcom to collect data for summer grains and the stone fruit and pineapple industries.

Through the Drought and Climate Adaptation Program, the DCAP, the Queensland government is investing in research, development and extension activities that will promote drought preparedness. One of these activities is applying research to improve seasonal forecast reliability. Improved climate data will also be supportive of the development of agricultural insurance options. The Queensland government has funded a multi-peril crop insurance research project involving Willis Towers Watson, an internationally recognised specialist in providing insurance risk advice to the agricultural sector. The company has assisted in assessing three products for use in the cotton and sugar industries. The outcomes of the research relating to both the MPCl and index based insurance products highlight their relative strengths and weaknesses. The federal government also has a grants program tailored to individual producers and provides a rebate on obtaining farm insurance advice. The director-general informs me that we also have \$1 million per year over three years for the Farm Management Grants scheme, which was launched in March. It was launched to run over a three-year period.

I suppose a summary of all of this is that when we were in opposition we accepted that this issue was going forward. The variables and risks to farming are considerable. While in opposition and subsequently we have done everything that we can to investigate and put in place an insurance option that provides some foundation to ongoing agricultural practice. Each sector is very different, and the truth is that the premiums as currently set up are prohibitive to normal agricultural enterprises undertaking insurance. We are trying to work through that with industry, as I said in that lengthy brief. Production data and the certainty about production data are major risks for insurers. From my reading of the situation they are hesitant.

We are committed to it and we are working through it in a productive way. I do know there are many out there in industry who have a view that the seed and structure of multi-peril crop insurance should be led foremost by government—that being an investment that in some way is balanced out by the risks of government support should there be drought, flood or other natural event. I have heard that argument before. All I can say is that it is the government's preference—and I think the preference of most informed parts of the industry—to have an insurance system that gives that option to producers should they want to embrace it and to make it as affordable as possible. There is a lot of work to be done to land something that is usable. One would think that broadacre grains is probably the area that is most amenable to multi-peril crop insurance, but each sector and each industry has its own unique problems in terms of insurance profiles. We are working with industry to try and develop a package that works and that will be attractive to producers.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, recently the banana industry has been in the media again. Can you update the committee on the latest testing with regard to tropical race 4 in bananas?

**Mr BYRNE:** It is important for the committee to note that a suspect case has recently been identified on a second property in the Tully valley. The suspect case was identified on 11 July 2017 by an initial molecular diagnostic test, otherwise known as the PCR test. This test returned a positive result to Panama tropical race 4. Further testing needs to occur before a positive result is confirmed, and this requires a fungal sample to be grown in a laboratory environment. This process can take up to six weeks.

It is important to note that, although this is being treated as a suspect property, there are further tests that must be completed before a positive result can be confirmed. Biosecurity Queensland is working with the suspect property and to assist that business in continuing to trade while managing biosecurity risks and disease spread. The suspect property is a large, experienced business and one of the largest producers of bananas in the country. I am advised that prior to the suspected detection the property already had one of the strongest on-farm biosecurity measures in place and as such there would be limited destruction to ongoing trade.

This year the Palaszczuk government has committed \$2.8 million to fund the Panama tropical race 4 program. It should be noted that this funding was committed when there was a single affected property. To date, the Queensland government has committed over \$23 million to the response to TR4. It is important that the committee appreciates that Panama tropical race 4 is considered to be not technically feasible for eradication and, as such, there are no national cost-sharing arrangements under any deeds. I would also like to assure the committee that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has a large portfolio of research, development and extension projects supporting the \$600 million banana industry. The major focus of research is on the management of Panama disease tropical race 4, which is the industry's biggest threat, with the aim of ensuring a long-term future for the banana industry. The research is funded by contributions from the governments of Queensland, the Northern Territory and South Australia, Horticulture Innovation Australia—the federal government industry levy sources that—and research partners. Research partners include the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, the University of Queensland, James Cook University, the Queensland University of Technology, the University of New England and overseas researchers in South Africa, Taiwan, China and the Philippines.

On 12 May 2017 the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries's South Johnstone research facility held a field day which attracted over 100 participants keen to learn about the latest research in preventing and managing Panama disease. There are now new banana varieties produced from tissue culture variations generated by eradication that are now being planted in the Northern Territory for assessment for possible disease resistance. A range of other research projects are exploring solutions for the industry to support Panama disease tropical race 4's containment and management. In terms of management, Queensland's management of the Panama tropical race 4 outbreak in Tully has so far slowed the spread of the disease much more effectively than any other country or region where Panama tropical race 4 has been detected. In China an initial infected area of 14 hectares grew to 14,000 hectares in four years, with a devastating impact on production. I am happy to update members of the committee when our testing is finalised.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, in your answer to the member for Burdekin this morning you referred to some of the programs that your department runs. Can you update the committee on the Rural Economies Centre of Excellence?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mackay for the question. I am pleased to have already announced that an expression of interest for the Rural Economies Centre of Excellence has been released and is available on the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries's website. I encourage all interested organisations to consider the opportunities that this new centre provides and submit their proposal to the department by 25 August 2017. The Rural Economies Centre of Excellence is a new initiative announced in the 2017-18 Queensland budget providing \$3 million of seed funding over three years for its establishment. This new centre of excellence is intended to be innovative and collaborative, with a focus on providing on-ground solutions that will help create vibrant rural economies and rural communities. The two-stage expression of interest process is being used to help identify the most innovative options and potential partners and collaborators. The centre is expected to be established as soon as practicable. The centre will be a joint initiative with a long-term focus and interested partners will be expected to provide financial and administrative support to ensure the centre is a long-term initiative beyond the initial \$3 million over three years.

The centre will focus on identifying policies, strategies and outreach programs that will significantly enhance the capability of public, private and community sectors to optimise economic prosperity in rural Queensland. An advisory committee will be formed and include government and industry representatives that will provide strategic advice on the implementation of and development of the centre. The centre will support and complement other Palaszczuk government initiatives including Advance Queensland, the Queensland food and fibre policy and the agriculture and food research, development and extension 10-year road map. This is further support provided by the Palaszczuk Labor government to assist rural Queensland. I encourage interested organisations to visit the website and submit their expressions of interest.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Just as a follow-up to that, Minister, will you inform the committee on projects that have already assisted rural Queensland?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mackay for the question. When the Premier reappointed me to the Agriculture and Fisheries portfolio she also entrusted me with the responsibility for Rural Economic Development. This year's budget includes a targeted \$5.2 million rural economic development package to maximise investment growth and support rural communities. The Rural Economic Development portfolio has formed a very productive working relationship with the

Department of Transport and Main Roads's freight unit as well as with AgForce. Rural Economic Development has built a shared goal to identify and support vital agricultural transport infrastructure and policy changes that will optimise agriculture supply chains. Rural Economic Development provides input to and advocates for key infrastructure that improves agricultural supply chains. This ongoing work has resulted in a range of positive outcomes which has seen the Queensland government fund key agricultural freight infrastructure, providing tangible benefits for the agricultural industry and many rural communities.

One project that has benefited rural communities is the Queensland government's support to ensure Oakey Beef Exports progress their \$60 million plant expansion and double output from the Oakey abattoir. This support involved the Queensland government's allocation of \$2.5 million to help fund vital rail sidings and to reopen a section of the old Cecil Plains branch line to connect Oakey abattoir to the western rail line. These infrastructure upgrades allow cattle services to operate from Quilpie in south-west Queensland to Oakey and in the future may eventually see cattle being loaded from other towns including Morven and Mitchell. Oakey Beef Exports slaughters around 6,000 head of cattle each week which are sourced and transported from across Western Queensland and as far away as South Australia. The upgrades enable live cattle to arrive via rail freight which will lower freight costs and significantly reduce the number of cattle trucks on the Warrego Highway.

This is the first stage in the business's longer term plans for expansion, which include exploring opportunities to export refrigerated containerised beef via rail from the Oakey facility direct to the port of Brisbane. As I said at the time, the south-west already has a great reputation as one of Queensland's leading regions for finishing beef cattle and can now reach national and international markets quickly and more effectively. One livestock train can carry the equivalent of up to 44 decks of cattle which would normally be delivered by around 15 B-double trucks which saves up to 30 B-double trips. The trains save haulage costs for producers and pressure on the Warrego Highway. Rail remains an important link to boosting our rural economy. Such an investment makes a real difference in rural economies and assists producers throughout Queensland.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, can you outline what work has been done in the biosecurity capability reform?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mackay for the question. On 1 July 2016 a four-year, \$30.2 million program commenced in Queensland to restore the state's biosecurity response capability to world's best practice. The commitment was in response to an ever-increasing biosecurity pressure and a serious erosion in Biosecurity Queensland's capability to respond to disease and pest outbreaks following the former government's Public Service cuts. In 2015 the Queensland government commissioned an independent review into the biosecurity system in Queensland. The final report of the independent panel concluded that there is a prevailing need to fix Queensland's biosecurity system by building its capacity and capability. The Queensland government allocated an additional \$10.8 million over four years towards the implementation of the review recommendations, demonstrating the government's commitment to a better biosecurity system for all Queenslanders. A further \$19.4 million over four years from within DAF will also contribute towards achieving the goals set out in the review.

One of the priority projects is the co-development of the new biosecurity strategy with key stakeholders. Under that strategy six themes were proposed for action, with action for each of those. One of the themes is around every Queenslanders playing their part in biosecurity. This theme is already well supported with the commencement of the Biosecurity Act 2014 on 1 July 2016. The act enshrines the concept of shared responsibility by enabling stakeholders to partner with government in managing the diverse biosecurity risks that threaten our state. This inclusive approach to biosecurity management is fundamental to our biosecurity capability into the future. The strategy was released for public comment on 13 June 2017 and closed on 14 July 2017. All comments received will be considered in the final biosecurity strategy. Another key strategic project is the development of an investment allocation model that identifies the return on investment for each dollar spent in reducing biosecurity risks. A new decision-making process will be established for allocating biosecurity funds based in part on the model outputs. This will provide greater consistency and transparency to all stakeholders that the use of public funds is being optimised commensurate to the biosecurity risk identified. A prototype of the model is now completed and this will be tested and approved in 2017-18.

Other projects have also commenced to improve biosecurity capability in Queensland, including establishing an emergency response unit within DAF and a broader network of emergency support, increasing plant diagnostic capability, improving marine pest preparedness, increasing capacity and capability of Biosecurity Queensland, and piloting the two collaboratively developed regional biosecurity plans to use as models for the rest of the state. The biosecurity capability implementation program is



overseen by a program board and includes representatives from DAF, the Department of Environment and Heritage, the Queensland Police Service, Animal Health Australia and Plant Health Australia. The key vision for the program is recognising that biosecurity is everybody's responsibility and a joint effort is needed if Queensland is to fully achieve a long-term improvement in the state's biosecurity capacity and capability.

**Mrs MILLER:** My question is to the director-general and it relates to fire ants. Would you be able to tell me how many full-time equivalent staff are working on the fire ant program and what they are actually doing? I can remember when it first started years ago they used to come and visit house to house and they had equipment that they used to bait fire ants and all of that. I am just wondering what is going on with the program because we have not seen them around suburbia much this year or in previous years.

**Dr Woods:** I thank the member for Bundamba for her question. In relation to the fire ant program, the actual number of FTEs in 2016-17 was 97. Our budget position for 2017-18 is an expectation that we will have 132 people in the program subsequent to the funding decision that the minister referred to earlier which relates to the national cost-sharing program. The activity over the last year and over previous years has in fact continued to be very strong on the ground. The focus has included eradicating three of six fire ant incursions in Queensland, so during the last 12 months we have actually completed the second eradication of a small infestation at Yarwun. Infestations were also previously eradicated previously from Yarwun—a different infestation, and we can separate these things genetically—and also from the port of Brisbane in 2012. We have been working on eradication of an incursion from Brisbane Airport and we expect that also to be declared eradicated in late 2017, assuming that no new nests are found. By far the biggest part of the work program is continuing to work on the infestation in the broader South-East Queensland area, including, as you have indicated, your electorate.

We have completed over 90,000 hectares of planned treatment in 2016-17, when the program's total budget was \$18.602 million and the Queensland government's contribution amounted to \$4.082 million. The \$4.082 million includes an additional \$2.575 million over and above Queensland's national cost-sharing commitment.

In terms of the activities over the past 12 months, we have clearly been heavily involved in treatment and surveillance, focusing principally on the western perimeter of the operational area. Once we get the additional funding, which I am very hopeful of, we will look to increase that amount of treatment and surveillance and progressively move the western boundary of the infestation back to the east.

It is true to say that in the past few years, with limited funding, our focus has been on working on the boundary, trying to stop the spread, and we have not been able to be as active as we had planned to be on treatment within the infected area. As we get the extra funding, that will allow us to bring additional people to bear to treat within the centre of the infestation.

The other comment that I would like to make in relation to the visibility of staff on the ground is that we have been increasingly looking to use new technologies to add to the effectiveness of the program. You would probably remember in your electorate that early on it was very much on-the-ground—two legs walking everywhere looking for nests. We have greatly increased the use of remote sensing and other means of bigger area surveillance to try to increase the efficiency, firstly, of identifying areas where infestations are likely, and that is disturbed ground. New areas of urban development in particular are very attractive to fire ants but so are the areas where freight is moving. That really indicates why you find fire ants in places like Brisbane Airport and Yarwun. They are places where there is a lot of movement and the surface of the soil is disturbed. That is a magnet for fire ants in terms of their nesting. We have been able to use technology to try to identify the places where we are most likely to see fire ants and then follow those up with more intensive inspection.

We also have fantastic support from people in the community. At this time of the year, the cooler weather means that nests are more visible and the grass is not growing so quickly. We get a lot of reports from members of the community, including in your own electorate. That is absolutely vital if we are going to be successful in our fight against this pest.

**Mr LAST:** I am concerned that the minister may have misled the committee with his initial comments of staff members being maintained. He stated that there had been no staff cuts. However, the budget SDS shows otherwise. I seek leave to table that document.

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

**Mr LAST:** I ask the director-general to confirm if there are now 79 fewer staff in DAF than there were in 2014-15.

**Dr Woods:** I do not know that I have the 2014-15 figures available to me. I am not sure whether the tabled document covers those.

**CHAIR:** Minister, did you want to respond to that question?

**Mr BYRNE:** The normal process is that you have the budget papers in front of you. They are not going back into the 2014-15 period. We are talking about the 2017-18 budget papers. The actual is delivered in the previous budget. I do not know how we can start talking about budget papers and budget issues from 2014-15. That estimates process has completed.

**Mr LAST:** Point of order. The question is very clear. The minister in his initial statement said that his staff numbers had been maintained. I have tabled documents that show otherwise. I have asked the director-general to confirm whether that is the case.

**CHAIR:** Sorry, your figures do not relate to 2014-15, member for Burdekin.

**Mr BYRNE:** The director-general is happy to keep going.

**Dr Woods:** In relation to the current budget—and I will go to those and then go back to the 2014-15 year—you will see that the figure for this year, the maximum, was 2,057. That FTE total is a maximum for the department. We work within that total. We need to at any time have some space within that total to be able to respond to things like, for example, a white spot event. We had up to 100 people working on that within the space of three or four weeks. We do not expect at any given time throughout the year that we will have the same figure as we might have in a month's time after that, or a month's time after that.

I go back to some of the differences. If you look at the 2016-17 year versus the 2017-18 year, you can see the growth in the cap. The minister has already covered that in his opening address. That refers to the increased staff space that we have in the system to put on additional staff to support the fisheries sustainable management program. I go back to the 2014-15 year, which shows an FTE number of 2,168. In that year we had a number that had come forward from the end of the previous government. The number of FTEs we had there was not matched to the dollars we had in the budget. As a result, we have looked at finding ways to produce the same effort with fewer FTEs and more staff and more use of services that provide seasonal services and also more partnering with outside organisations, in particular the universities in the RD&E space.

In the time between we have not had any significant number of people departing on any sort of VER or that sort of process. It simply has not existed. We have had one or two people who for some reason have come to us and negotiated a departure under those parts of the industrial provisions. We certainly have had no departures of that sort. We have had no cuts in staffing. We have had an adjustment because, if you look back in that period, you discover that we would not have had the funds available to have that number of staff on board, except under circumstances where we had nationally cost-share arrangements and we have not had those.

We have a more responsive situation where we add additional numbers to the FTE total if there is an emerging need for that. We did it to expand the biosecurity capability. In this financial year we have done it with the fisheries group, but we are also keeping in our numbers that gap that we always require to be able to respond to emergencies.

**Mr LAST:** Director-General, is the minister in denial regarding these cuts, given that he has maintained that the staff numbers have been maintained?

**Dr Woods:** I am not in a position, obviously, member for Burdekin, to comment on policy questions, but I repeat that there have been no cuts. There has been no loss of staff. There has been and there will always be a rebalancing of the staff and labour requirements to meet our needs in terms of delivering programs and to find the most effective and efficient ways to do that, as is our requirement as a department under the act.

**Mr BYRNE:** I would like to add a couple of pieces to this. I was the minister in 2015 and I recall the reconciliation between employee expenses and FTE holdings that occurred then and those same points, from my recollection of the estimates hearing, were made then—that there were cuts and reductions. My recollection—and I will have to go back to check exactly what was put on the record—is that the opposition made the same point. We were reconciling the variations that exist between an FTE cap and your employee expenses numbers.

The point I made then and make now is that nobody from the Palaszczuk government came to the department and said, 'I want to harvest 14,000 positions to make cuts.' When I am talking about these things, there are always movements in any HR system. There is always some give in the top percentage of FTE numbers. For anyone who has ever been in an HR system to even try to run their system to perhaps two per cent to five per cent of your FTE, it is always a problem. It is always an issue in any HR system to manage people within caps and within budget.

The point I delineate is that there is no heavy hand of government policy coming into Agriculture saying, 'We are harvesting positions and knocking people over in job lots.' We have certainly never had that conversation at any time with the department or with the director-general. In fact, where we have targeted growth it is for good effect. I stand by my opening statement. The philosophy of the Palaszczuk government has been to invest wisely where it is most needed and our budget papers reflect that.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, you clearly said 'no cuts' but, clearly, there have been. Are you saying that the figures in the SDS are wrong?

**Mr BYRNE:** I do not even know what to say to that. I have pretty much mapped it out. You can say the sky is red for as long as you like, but it is not fact.

**Mr LAST:** Can we look at an area that is apparently getting more resources? The question is 'how much more?', because it is a bit confusing. Page 3 of SDS page states—

We will invest an additional \$20.9 million over three years to deliver a modern, responsive and consultative approach to fisheries management as outlined in the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy.

However, on page 16 of Budget Paper No. 1, the Treasurer's speech, it states—

The Government will invest \$30 million over three years from 2017-18 towards the implementation of Queensland's Fisheries management reforms.

How much has been allocated? You say '\$20 million'. The Treasurer says '\$30 million'. Who is correct? Am I right to ask: is the extra \$10 million being squirrelled away for a rainy day?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. The opposition has already run this one up the flagpole. We are talking about the \$20.9 million. That is new money. Treasury's position is one of probably aggregated. We have been absolutely equivocal and correct at every point along this equation.

**Mr LAST:** It is there in black and white.

**Mr BYRNE:** It is new money. We have said it is new and additional money. There is no disconnect, because the numbers have been an aggregate. Both positions are relevant from their perspective. I am saying that what is in our papers is \$20.9 million of new dollars—exactly there.

**Mr Millar** interjected.

**CHAIR:** I ask the member to cease interjecting.

**Mr BYRNE:** You have had your chance to have a crack at the Treasurer. You are having a crack at me about what is in my budget paper. My budget papers are exactly right. The FTE issues are mapped. We have additional fisheries officers. There is additional money going in to support the science and the collaboration. How all of that money is going to be spent is clearly mapped out. The additional funding that we have talked about in our budget papers is exactly right. There is no 'gotcha' moment here.

**Mr MILLAR:** Point of order. There is a clear question. Who is right? The Treasurer's papers or your papers as agriculture minister? That is the question.

**CHAIR:** That is not a point of order. Can we continue with your answer?

**Mr MILLAR:** It is relevant, Mr Chair.

**Mr BYRNE:** Let us go back to Budget Paper No. 4. At the bottom it states—

The Government is providing additional funding of \$20.9 million over three years from 2017-18 to implement reforms to the management of Queensland's fisheries. Funding of \$9.2 million has also been reprioritised by the department internally to fund this measure.

There is the explanation. It is in the budget papers. Like I said in my introduction, you have a history of not being able to read the budget papers. Look at the notes and it is all there for you to see.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, I refer to page 7 of the SDS and the objective 'to mitigate the risks and impacts of animal and plant pests and diseases and weeds to the economy'. Has the department estimated the cost to the economy of prickly acacia? Has there been a budget allocation for the management of the weed commensurate with this cost?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. I know how particularly interested he is in the issue of prickly acacia. I know that it has been a matter of considerable concern, particularly in the north and the Channel Country, and I know that our government has been allocating considerable resources to deal with that issue. I do not know about the actual dollar value, but I will see if we can find that for you. I am happy to take that on notice. I cannot ever recall an actual dollar figure for the impact and about the measure of response to that, but I am in no way in any doubt what prickly acacia is in terms of threat and what is being done and how far we can go with it. If we can find that number we will get it for you. If not, I will take it on notice and try to get an estimate if we have not done that work previously.

For the committee's benefit, and I suppose for those who may be watching, prickly acacia causes a significant and negative impact on the grazing industry in Western Queensland, particularly in the Mitchell Grass Downs area of the Southern Gulf and the Lake Eyre Basin. Primary responsibility for managing the impact of prickly acacia lies with the participants in the grazing industry with assistance from various natural resource management groups such as the Southern Gulf NRM and Desert Channels Queensland, from local community groups and from local government. DAF'S role is to help reduce the impact of prickly acacia through research and development of improved management tools and the administration of a model legislative framework through the Biosecurity Act 2014. DAF will be undertaking continued research into biological control of prickly acacia focused on four potential agents.

Before I get into this section about the four agents, which I am actually quite enthusiastic about, I am advised that in relation to the dollar impacts there is currently national work underway to work out the dollar figure so I would say we do not have that dollar figure right now but at some time in the future that will materialise through a national program.

Biological control is clearly the best thing that we can do rather than mechanical sprays and all of the other options that are being used presently. There are four that I am aware of. Field host range studies of a scale insect are in progress in India. Gall thrips from Ethiopia are in the quarantine facilities at the Ecosciences Precinct and testing is in progress. A gall mite from Ethiopia is in quarantine in South Africa and host specificity testing will commence in September 2017. Biosecurity Queensland has also applied for permits to import gall fly from Senegal into quarantine in Australia to commence testing. Funding for these studies is from the Queensland government's War on Weeds initiative, the Australian government's Rural R&D for Profit Program administered by Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation and Queensland local governments.

Researchers from DAF are also continuing activities under the War on Northern Invasive Weeds prickly acacia project funded by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources into refinement of the use of three new chemical delivery systems and completion of a good neighbour program. These are case studies. Funding of the Desert Channels Queensland prickly acacia project will continue with \$1 million allocated through the Feral Pest Initiative round 2 subject to final contract negotiations.

I hope from that that you can see that the government is fully aware of this particular problem. There are programs and case studies out there being run, but I am hopeful—and this is from a non-scientist—that a biological system can be introduced that meets all the appropriate protocols, does not spill into secondary areas and that would dramatically do something about this problem which we are tuned into.

**Mr KATTER:** I refer to page 4 of the SDS which talks about the government's strategic blueprint for the North West Minerals Province. One of those is irrigation and agriculture. My question is will you speak with your cabinet counterparts to address the prohibitive pricing of water out of the Flinders and Etheridge systems which have proven to be an inhibitor to development because nothing has been developed since these releases have come?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. As the member would appreciate, I am not the minister responsible for the portfolio on water, but clearly through my role of rural economic development and agriculture it is a foundational issue for me and I am, as you would expect, always attuned to the issues of water. The foundational issues are supply chains, logistics, energy costs and water supply. I am well attuned to how that affects the production prospects of new developments or existing developments. All I can say to you is that I have very honest conversations with the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and we are on the same sheet of music. As with all of these allocations, the price point is always the issue—what is the price of water—and the availability of it. I cannot speak to every single catchment and allocation that is out there. I do know that some of the recent allocations announced by my colleague have been warmly received. I am fully attuned to the implications of water and the availability of water and its prospects to support growth in agriculture and I always advocate in favour of those sustainable options going forward—always. I am fully tuned into it.

I do not know without getting into the specifics of individual catchments, but I am aware there are issues. I am aware of issues around any potential in the Fitzroy Basin, for example. The price point there has not been established. If you are going to start a new agricultural enterprise in high-value agriculture and you are relying on irrigation water, obviously that price point is a determining factor in any business decision you make. Am I aware? Yes. Am I aware of the specifics in this particular catchment? Not to the degree you might expect right at this moment. All I can say is that it is one of my drivers.

I am advised by the director-general that DAF is among a suite of government departments that will be contributing to the development of the strategy for implementation of the North West Minerals Province blueprint under the broader economic diversification strategy to be led by the Department of State Development. DAF has been allocated funding of \$350,000 to develop an integrated agricultural strategy for North-West Queensland. I would imagine some of what you are talking about would be incorporated into that strategy.

**Mr KATTER:** Just a short supplementary, Mr Chair?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr KATTER:** The question is, and it does not need a big answer, is the minister aware that after two releases not one piece of development has been done which would span probably five or six years now under that pricing?

**Mr BYRNE:** When you say two releases? You are saying there has been two—

**Mr KATTER:** Water tenures.

**CHAIR:** I think that is outside the portfolio area.

**Mr BYRNE:** I am not intimately familiar with that area other than a broad interest simply because of agriculture's dependency on it. I think Dr Lynham would be the one to ask.

**Mr MILLAR:** I want to pick up on the member for Mount Isa's question on prickly acacia. It is a big issue in the seat of Gregory as well, as you probably understand. It is at the headwaters of the Channel Country above the Lake Eyre Basin. History tells us droughts break with major floods, certainly looking at the western rivers of the Thomson, Diamantina and Barcoo. There are some big issues with prickly acacia in Gregory. My question is, and I am happy for you to direct this to your chief biosecurity officer, does your department still hold the view that prickly acacia needs to be managed and not eradicated? My concern with that is I believe we need to say eradication not manage given the threat to the Channel Country.

**Mr BYRNE:** It is a technical question, but I have read the briefs on it. It is a reasonable question to ask, but I might throw that one to my head of biosecurity given the strong encouragement from my director-general to do so.

**Dr Thompson:** We recognise that prickly acacia is possibly the biggest weed threat that we have in this state. We have 1,300 or so naturalised species and probably 100 or more of those are weeds. Prickly acacia would undoubtedly be in the top five of those in terms of impacts and the effort by this department. There is a state strategy around prickly acacia. There is a national strategy around prickly acacia. That national strategy does say control and containment and management, it does not say eradication. The cost of eradication for prickly acacia is considered too high and probably not feasible in the scheme of things. The control and the containment area means that you can eradicate within certain areas and we are trying to work with groups, both in your area and other parts of the state, to identify those areas where we think local eradication makes sense and is achievable.

**Mr MILLAR:** I respect what you are saying there, Dr Thompson, but you do understand the threat to the Channel Country. This drought will break, likely with floods. It is at the headwaters of the Channel Country flowing into Lake Eyre. If prickly acacia gets into the Channel Country do you see it as a major threat to beef production out of that Channel Country area, in fact Queensland?

**Dr Thompson:** I recognise the threat there for the further spread of prickly acacia is high, particularly if we do get good rains at various times. Yes, there is certainly a major threat for prickly acacia to continue to expand in the future. I still believe that eradication cannot be achieved on the scale that we are talking about, but we understand that the groups in particular in your area that are working on prickly acacia are identifying areas where they think they can achieve local eradication and we support that.

**Mr MILLAR:** I will continue to bang on about it.

**Mr MADDEN:** Minister, my question concerns the catastrophic outbreak of white spot disease in South-East Queensland. I would ask that you update the committee on the impact of white spot disease in prawns and what biosecurity measures are in place?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Ipswich West for the question. The committee would be well aware that on 1 December 2016 the Queensland government became aware of the presence of white spot disease on a prawn farm on the Logan River. To date the Queensland government has been wearing the costs responding to what appears to be a failure of border security. It is clear that the Commonwealth failed in its responsibilities and compounded this failure by failing to inform the Queensland government or industry that they had concerns about white spot coming in on imported green prawns. The Commonwealth should acknowledge that it did not live up to the expectation that intelligence regarding biosecurity threats are shared with all relevant stakeholders and, in this particular case, ourselves as a stakeholder jurisdiction.

The government has made a substantial commitment to combatting this virus and is continuing to assist through biosecurity assistance, testing and also provision of low-interest loans. What is most concerning, and what should concern the committee, is that the Commonwealth knew of the threat posed by white spot disease on imported green prawns and failed to inform the Queensland government. I have previously stated that I was appalled to find the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources was in possession of enough evidence more than 12 months ago to approve a compliance program on the importation of imported green prawns, Operation Cattai, but not concerned enough to let state authorities know what might be happening. Perhaps the litany of cover-ups and secrecy continued unabated when in June 2016 positive samples of white spot were found in retail prawns. By August 2016 the Commonwealth had identified that 25 out of 40 importers were under suspicion, and yet again they still kept that all secret. At no point was the Queensland government told of these concerns, even though we raised concerns of this nature back more than a decade ago.

It is a pillar of good biosecurity that there is open communication with governments, producers and industry when there are biosecurity threats. In this case it did not happen. It is still not happening. As a senate committee has yet to report and the Inspector-General of Biosecurity is still investigating, one would expect the Commonwealth would take a precautionary-principle approach to such matters, particularly around this issue, yet without consultation the Commonwealth has allowed the importation of green prawns to recommence.

The decision was taken with no consultation with industry. The Queensland Seafood Industry Association said regarding the biosecurity risk—

The blame for this biosecurity meltdown lays squarely at the feet of the Federal Government.

We have been warning the Federal Government for over a decade that allowing imports of uncooked prawns from countries with white spot would inevitably see it infect prawn stocks in Australia.

I wrote to Barnaby Joyce to express my concerns. I am happy to table the letter for the benefit of the committee.

**CHAIR:** Are you seeking leave to table that letter?

**Mr BYRNE:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Leave is granted.

**Mr BYRNE:** In his reply, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture said that he could 'understand that prawn farmers and commercial fishers would be naturally concerned about the lapsing of the suspension'. I can inform the committee that not only are they concerned but so is the state government.

Although the debate regarding the impact of white spot quickly descended into talk about deeds and payments, the main focus should be on how this disease came into Australia in the first place. White spot is not native to Australia. It came via a failure of border security—or it appears to be most likely to have come via a failure of border security. There must be a rethink on how Australia deals with biosecurity threats, rather than an expectation that states and producers can continue to wear the costs of systematic border failures. The first step is that the Commonwealth must be open and honest with state governments and industry over biosecurity threats and what intelligence the Commonwealth has, which must be shared. Next week I will be attending AGMIN. I can assure the committee that I will be raising these biosecurity failings at a discussion point at that meeting.

**Mr MADDEN:** Minister, my next question relates to tomato potato psyllid, an incredibly serious pest in solanaceous crops. Would you outline for the committee whether Queensland is participating in the tomato potato psyllid national cost-share arrangement?

**Mr BYRNE:** TPP was detected in Perth on 3 February 2017 and a national response to the detection was commenced. This is a significant incident, as it is the first time that the pest has been detected in Australia. TPP is the primary vector of a bacterium referred to as CLso, which causes a serious zebra chip disease in potatoes. To date, most of the detections have occurred in the Perth metropolitan area, with a number of detections also in regional areas of south-west Western Australia. The detection has prompted Queensland and other states and territories to impose restrictions on the entry of plants and plant products that could potentially carry the pest. These measures are designed to facilitate trade while minimising the risk of TPP being introduced from Western Australia.

The National Management Group that oversees responses to nationally significant emergency plant pests has determined that it is not technically feasible to eradicate this particular problem from Western Australia. The response plan has been developed by Western Australia in consultation with other jurisdictions and industry, which will guide the transition from an initial eradication focus to a longer term national management program for the problem.

Queensland is participating in the national cost-sharing arrangements under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed to support the implementation of the response plan. In 2016-17 Queensland has committed \$210,056 to a nationally cost-shared tomato potato psyllid response, and it is expected that further funding will be allocated by Queensland in 2017-18 to support the transition to management activities over the next 12 months. It is important that the committee is aware that under existing arrangements, although there have been no detections in Queensland and Queensland was in no way involved in the possibility of the pest making its way to Australia, we share in the cost-sharing agreement, like other states have assisted Queensland both in the past and currently.

**Mr MADDEN:** My next question relates to the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy. Minister, who is on the Sustainable Fisheries Expert Panel and what is its role?

**Mr BYRNE:** One of the key planks of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy is an improvement in engagement and to support evidence based fisheries management through the Sustainable Fisheries Expert Panel. The purpose of the fisheries expert panel is to provide independent expert advice to the minister for fisheries and Fisheries Queensland on best practice fisheries management and the implementation of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy.

I am pleased to advise that Professor Suzanne Miller, Queensland's Chief Scientist, has been appointed as the independent chair of the panel. Her recognised position as Queensland's Chief Scientist and academic standing make her an ideal person to chair the expert panel. She will be joined by Dr Cathy Dichmont, who has expertise in fisheries stock assessments; Associate Professor Ian Tibbetts, who has expertise in fish biology; Professor Ian Cartwright, who has expertise in fishery management; Associate Professor Daryl McPhee, who has expertise in fishery management; Dr Michelle Heupel, who has expertise in threatened species; Dr Nadine Marshall, who has expertise in social science; and Dr Sean Pascoe, who has expertise in fishery economics. With the exception of the chair, all candidates are independent of the Queensland government. This is important to ensure the independent nature of the advice provided to government.

The Sustainable Fisheries Strategy prioritises reform and development of harvest strategies for trawl, crab and east-coast inshore fisheries. The expert panel will review the work of the three new fishery working groups on those priority actions. The first meeting of the Sustainable Fisheries Expert Panel is scheduled for late next month. All stakeholders will be able to see what advice the expert panel provides, as a communique will be published on the Fisheries Queensland website after each meeting. I look forward to working with the expert panel to create a world-class and modern fisheries management system in Queensland.

**Mrs MILLER:** My question to the minister is in relation to the wild dog issue. I know that you have appointed Wild Dog Commissioner Vaughan Johnson. Some people refer to him as the 'wild Vaughan commissioner'. Could you give us an update on what is happening on the issue of wild dogs? Vaughan is a good friend of this parliament. How is he going in his role?

**Mr BYRNE:** Vaughan Johnson is one of the commissioners, along with Mark O'Brien, who is also well known to many on the committee and many who have been in this parliament previously. Vaughan has been very active in this area and has been quite vocal, as Vaughan has always been,

about representing what he believes to be the way forward. The good news is that both of those commissioners have been very influential in advising government and stakeholders about how we should move forward and the practical way of addressing solutions to wild dogs.

I have not heard from Vaughan in the past couple of months, but I had regular dealings with him particularly leading up to the last round of allocations. Vaughan's advice is always freely given and warmly received. I think he is in pretty good fettle these days. I saw him not so long ago when I was in Longreach. He seemed to be in typical fettle.

More importantly, on the Wild Dog Strategy that we have rolled out—I go back to before my time in politics when I would go out to Tambo, where I heard from producers out there about the debilitating effect of wild dogs on sheep and wool production in Western Queensland. I filed that away in the back of my mind. Therefore, when we started talking about these measures and issues that we might like to put forward in opposition, I was able to speak with some local knowledge about the implications for the industry going forward.

There is no doubt of the merits of putting sheep and wool production back into Western and South-West Queensland in terms of employment opportunities. It is a much more intensive industry than perhaps cattle. It creates a lot more job opportunity for the likes of shearing gangs and everyone else in Western Queensland, which has been sadly declining, reflecting problems within the sheep and wool industries as a result of the change by many producers to beef.

We said that government might like to do something to encourage fencing programs going forward. That is what we took to the election and we have put more money into that going forward. Premier Palaszczuk has been incredibly enthusiastic about supporting Western Queensland and supporting the wool and sheep sectors. We think there is real merit and opportunity going forward, not only in the traditional wool area but also in protein production. Given the sort of country that it is and the effects of climate change, sheep is a much better product on a lot of that country than perhaps beef.

We decided to put in place a program that would encourage industry to invest and give some confidence back to Western Queensland. Admittedly, work was done and supported by the previous government in the south-west NRM. I cannot say that this was completely and utterly something that we grabbed hold of, but certainly the level of investment is all ours. The amount of investment is ours and the opportunities. The lambing rates have been incredible. The first batch of data that we have seen come out of properties with exclusion fencing has been extraordinary. We have gone from lambing rates in the low 20s to the high 80s. Those numbers vary from property to property. No matter how hostile they are to our government or whatever, no-one could argue that this is not a good program. It is putting a spring in the step of western and south-western graziers who have had it pretty tough in the last umpteen years with drought cycles and the problems in the sheep industry. We are seeing people reinvest. The productivity dividends are obvious. We are going to continue to support that to a degree.

I have to put on the record that this was always to get over the hump, to break the malaise and get ahead of the problem with wild dogs. That was always the concept. It was about what we could do in a window of time, in a practical way, to make a difference. It changes the entire nature of the conversation in Western Queensland about wool and sheep. There are many, many other dividends that come from what I think is a relatively modest set of investments from government to change the entire nature of the industry out there.

When you look at the map of Western and South-West Queensland right now and the areas that are going to be enclosed or covered by this program, it is incredible. We are simply trying to provide the policy setting and some resources, but at arm's length, with the advice of the wild dog commissioners and through the local mechanisms that we have set up to evaluate the proposal going forward, to deliver what I think is an outstanding example of limited government support to generate a massively positive and proportional response that I think should give many wool and sheep producers in Western and South-West Queensland much confidence going forward.

This is a program that I am particularly proud of. The results speak for themselves. The irony is that we are not hunting for marginal seats here. This is a good policy and will deliver for Western Queensland. We need every animal protein producer to be on their feet in Queensland and this program is designed to do that for that area.

**Mrs MILLER:** Director-General, could you advise us of the cost of the wild dog program? The minister has just said that it is not a lot of money but the benefits are huge.

**Dr Woods:** I will put it in context, because there are a number of sets of funding. In 2015-16 the Queensland government committed \$25 million over three years to support new initiatives aimed at controlling wild dog and cat populations. That was part of the election commitments of the incoming



government. Of that, \$1 million was allocated for feral cat research to support future programs in national parks and key private conservation reserves that are heavily impacted by feral cat predation. I will put the cat funding to the side.

The remaining \$4 million has been allocated to support wild dog projects in drought affected areas, including \$3.75 million to support four regional cluster fences. This funding is complimented by a \$10 million allocation from the Australian government's *Agricultural competitiveness white paper* which, as the minister just indicated, we brought into the pool and has been managed by a group that the government has facilitated bringing together local landholders, the local council and industry to make decisions about where the investment needed to be.

To build on community and organisational efforts, as I just said, we are directly involving the key peak body organisations to be involved in the oversight of funding the initiative. The Queensland Feral Pest Initiative Oversight Group has allocated \$3.5 million of funding to South West Natural Resource Management, Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board, RAPAD, Southern Downs Regional Council, Quilpie Shire Council, Goondiwindi Regional Council, Maranoa Regional Council and Desert Channels Queensland.

The state and federal funding is aiding 288 properties to construct over 4,000 kilometres of fencing in priority sheep growing areas, and approximately 35 per cent of the fencing has been completed. Queensland funding is also assisting landholders in the Southern Downs and Quilpie regions to carry out feral animal control, including baiting, aerial shooting and the use of an unmanned aerial system to detect and count feral animals prior to control. Poison baiting offers broad scale control of feral cats and is being assessed in Queensland national parks. GPS telemetry is also being used in relation to feral cats along with networks of remote cameras and robotics for unmanned aerial system flights.

In addition to that expenditure, the Queensland government, through the department, supports the maintenance of the wild dog barrier fence, at around \$2 million per year, with the contributing local governments providing over \$1 million of that. The wild dog barrier fence is 2,500 kilometres long and protects 26.5 million hectares of grazing country in southern inland Queensland. That project employs 20 full-time staff who live in regional towns, including Wallumbilla, Roma, Mitchell, Morven, Charleville, Tambo and Quilpie.

**CHAIR:** I now call the member for Burdekin for his question.

**Mr LAST:** Which section of your Service Delivery Statement is dedicated to your portfolio area of Rural Economic Development? I know it is in your title, but where is the dedicated section in the SDS?

**Mr BYRNE:** I think the allocation is there.

**Mr LAST:** I know that.

**Mr BYRNE:** According to the 2017-18 service area highlights there is \$5.2 million over three years for a rural economic development package to work with rural communities to identify regional economic opportunities, improve the competitiveness of rural businesses and increase the number of rural jobs. The package includes funding for the following: growing Queensland's food exports, which will support fruit and vegetable producers to grow exports to Asia; the Rural Economies Centre of Excellence; and the one-stop shop to facilitate private sector initiatives for developing appropriate water and land resources in North Queensland on a sustainable basis through various approval and development processes of government. That is on pages 4 and 5.

**Mr LAST:** In terms of the \$5.2 million funding that you are talking about, is that the only reference? Can you confirm that?

**Mr BYRNE:** I cannot confirm that that is the only reference. It is mapped out there what we are doing. That is the allocation.

**Mr LAST:** The government's budget over the next three years for rural economic development represents just 0.003 per cent of the state budget. Does this not prove that the new title of rural economic development is just a consolation prize from when you were dumped as police minister?

**Mr BYRNE:** Mr Chair, you do not mind if I respond in kind given the nature of the inference in the question? I might lower the level of civility a bit. I think it is rather ironic that the member would raise such a matter when we have at least identified the issue. We have identified it through portfolio

responsibility. There was no such identification through the previous government. In fact, all you have to do is go out to Longreach and mention the name Campbell Newman and see how that is responded to in terms of rural economic development. The effect of the last government was to absolutely destroy most of our rural areas by ripping out huge numbers of public servants who worked out there.

What have we done? We have recognised in a portfolio way that this area is important to us as Queenslanders and as the Queensland government. We have provided seed money in areas where we think it will have best effect to start the focus and to start actually engaging on the issue. We have identified it, we have acknowledged it and we have put it forward straight up. It complements all the other work that we did out of the task force and all the recommendations that came forward. It complements the QRIDA reshaping—

**Mr LAST:** I have a point of order, Mr Chair.

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

**Mr LAST:** The minister is just rambling and he is not addressing the question.

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

**Mr LAST:** It relates to relevance.

**CHAIR:** The minister is answering the question in a relevant way.

**Mr BYRNE:** When you look at the entire package in terms of what the Palaszczuk government has done for rural Queensland—whether it is wild dog fencing, whether it is sorting out road trains into Rockhampton for the beef industry, whether it is structuring QRIDA, whether it is helping with intergenerational debt—you find that we have a whole plethora of actual physical outcomes that are making a massive difference. What we have done is restructure the department so we have a particular focus on this issue with a broad remit for the department to consider a whole lot of issues around rural economic development.

We have a massively more committed element of government looking specifically at this and able to champion and advise on these issues. We have provided seed money up-front out of the \$5.4 million. There are any number of other actions, outcomes, policy settings that demonstrate, without the slightest reservation, the commitment that this government has to rural Queensland. As I ran through in my introductory comments, there are ticks followed by ticks, followed by ticks, followed by ticks in terms of outcomes that we committed to in our food and fibre policy from opposition. I have remained diligent, in the time that I have been agriculture minister, in delivering on these things.

It is a great credit to the Premier of this state that she demonstrates such incredible empathy for rural Queensland and that she has empowered one of her ministers to particularly go forward on that issue. That remit allows me to engage in areas that do not traditionally sit in agriculture, such as all those issues I mentioned to member for the Mount Isa previously.

We have a pretty comprehensive approach to this. We are providing seed money up-front. We have restructured the department. We have a portfolio that recognises the issue. None of this was done by our predecessor. This is something that I am very proud of. If you do not get the impression that I am passionate about moving this agenda forward then you are missing the point.

**Mr LAST:** You state that the funding under the rural economic development package will provide for growing Queensland's food exports, a rural economies centre for excellence and a continuation of the department's one-stop shop. Can you explain then how the amount of \$1.2 million, which is what you have allocated this year, will be broken up across these three initiatives, given that you sat here earlier on and said that you were spending \$3 million over three years on the centre for excellence alone?

**Mr BYRNE:** Are you talking about the 5.2?

**Mr LAST:** The 5.2 is over three years. The 1.2 allocated for those three initiatives this year, I want to know how you are going to break that up.

**CHAIR:** Member for Burdekin you have asked the question. We will let the minister answer.

**Mr LAST:** The minister asked me a clarifying question.

**Mr BYRNE:** At least you have acknowledged the three areas that we are investing the 5.2 in. The 1.3 has been allocated to growing Queensland's food exports pilot program. This competitive, discretionary grants program will focus on food value chains which have strong export potential, building capability through market development support, supply chain facilitation and post-harvest quality and market research. I will be establishing the new Rural Economies Centre of Excellence and creating the

rural economies professorship with a Queensland university to undertake integrated research and provision of specialised programs to deliver sustainable growth of Queensland's rural communities and deliver rural jobs. Finally, the one-stop service will help the private sector speed up development proposals for agricultural projects and complements existing systems and processes, including the State Assessment and Referral Agency.

That package, when combined with the five-year rural assistance package announced in last year's budget, is a substantial program aimed at helping rural economies. Further, my role in rural economic development is about maximising existing investment and programs for the benefit of rural economies and investigating and supporting new opportunities that help generate economic activity and employment in rural communities.

As I said before, my first step as the Minister for Rural Economic Development was to deliver the new Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority and legislative farm business debt mediation provisions for farmers. That commenced on 1 July 2017. The Farm Debt Restructure Office will also have important roles to play in engagement processes between the agricultural sector and rural lenders, particularly when communication between the two parties starts to fail.

I am advised that the breakdown of the \$1.2 million in 2017-18 is not something we have immediately to hand. I will take that component on notice. There is nothing to be hidden in any of that.

**Mr LAST:** Can you confirm that the amount allocated this year is \$1.2 million?

**Mr BYRNE:** That is the advice I have received.

**Mr LAST:** Can you explain why in your response to question on notice No. 2 asked on 28 June this year you have nominated an amount of \$2 million? What is the correct figure? I am happy to table the response.

**Mr BYRNE:** I am sure we have a copy of the response to the question on notice.

**Mr LAST:** It is down the bottom of that response.

**Mr BYRNE:** I am advised that \$2 million has the remainder of the jobs initiative. There is \$2 million additional state government funding to support the rural economic development package to deliver rural economic growth and more jobs. The package includes funding for the centre of excellence, the one-stop shop and the program for growing Queensland's food exports.

**Mr LAST:** So are you saying that there is \$800,000 for more jobs?

**Mr BYRNE:** As I said previously, we do not have the earlier number at hand. We will take on notice explaining those figures. I am sure they are both accurate in their own way.

**Mr LAST:** How much does the government's one-stop service cost to operate annually?

**Mr BYRNE:** The estimate for this financial year, 2017-18, is \$300,000.

**Mr LAST:** In your departmental overview on page 3 of the SDS it says that \$1.3 million will be allocated over two years for growing Queensland's food exports program. Given your total budget for this current financial year is \$1.2 million, how much will be left—and you have just \$300,000 is for the one-stop service, so the remainder is for your rural economies centre for excellence, is that correct?

**Mr BYRNE:** I will take that on notice. I have already said I will take on notice the break-up of the spend. We did not have that available. I will take it on notice.

**Mr LAST:** Director-General, can you outline what new measures were introduced in this budget to help farmers in the agricultural sector tackle record high electricity prices?

**CHAIR:** I am not sure that fits within the portfolio being examined here, member for Burdekin.

**Mr LAST:** Mr Chair, I would disagree. I think that power prices for our farmers are probably the biggest issue in the state.

**CHAIR:** You are welcome to disagree, but I am ruling it out of order. I move on to the member for Mount Isa.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, I refer to page 7 of the SDS and the objective to mitigate the risks and impacts of weeds to the economy. You may already be aware of the federal government's proposal to allow the importation of fresh Tahitian lime from five new Pacific nations. What is the Queensland government going to do to protect our local lime producers from further biosecurity threats and economic disaster?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mount Isa for the question. Importation and trade over the borders is not my responsibility in my portfolio, but I am happy to put what I know on the table.

Australia has existing biosecurity risk mitigation measures for fresh limes being imported into Australia for human consumption from Egypt, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Spain and the United States of America. I am aware that the federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has initiated a review of biosecurity import requirements for Tahitian limes in response to requests from the likes of the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.

The federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has prepared a draft report for stakeholder consultation to assess the biosecurity risks associated with the import of fresh Tahitian limes into Australia from these locations. DAF is committed to representing the interests of Queensland agriculture and fisheries. DAF has reviewed the draft report and is preparing a response to the federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

You can appreciate that I have some varying lack of confidence about border issues and about disease prospects in agricultural areas. Most primary production areas represent those concerns to me when they arise. All I can say is that we are tuned into this. It is not a Queensland government area of responsibility about trade arrangements or agreements for importation of fresh produce of any nature. Given recent experience and recent concerns, naturally we will be making sure that the concerns of our producers and the concerns of the broader community in terms of biosecurity risks are well represented.

**Mr KATTER:** I refer to page 5 of the SDS. In 2015-16 and 2016-17, only a handful of loans had been provided by QRIDA's predecessor QRAA to producers in the Mount Isa electorate. Could the minister please provide an update of the number of loans that have been provided to producers in the electorate and how many new QRIDA loans are expected to be provided this financial year?

**Mr BYRNE:** You are asking particularly about the Mount Isa region?

**Mr KATTER:** Yes.

**Mr BYRNE:** I do not have the capacity to discriminate to that level on the advice that I have received about loans and loan applications that have been processed or received. I am not sure that the CEO would either.

**Mr KATTER:** There usually was that information.

**Mr BYRNE:** There is some confidence coming from behind me. I will call the officer forward.

**Mr MacMillan:** I thank the member for the question. Over the past two years since July 2015 QRIDA, previously QRAA, has approved 29 applications for a range of government financial assistance across north-west and the gulf region. They totalled \$18.5 million. This includes nine first start and sustainability productivity loans worth \$6.5 million. Changes to the productivity loans scheme in late 2016—which lifts the first start loan from \$650,000 to \$2 million and the sustainability loan from \$650,000 to \$1.3 million—we believe will bring a lot more business to your part of the world. As a result, QRAA, now QRIDA, made a decision to establish its ninth regional office at Cloncurry and recruited a new regional area manager for that area. She is actually a local—Janessa Bidgood—who commenced in that role in early March 2017. We took the QRAA board to Cloncurry in late May to open that office. I was talking to Janessa. She is actually on the ground. She has been in Brisbane this week. She believes that she is developing a very good pipeline of business.

**Mr LAST:** I refer to my previous question that was ruled out of order, and I ask: will you confirm that you are doing nothing in your budget to help farmers with power prices?

**CHAIR:** Again, that does not relate to this portfolio.

**Mr MILLAR:** I raise a point of order. It does relate. If you go to 'Service performance' on page 4 of the SDS—

**Mr BYRNE:** I am happy to take the question,

**Mr MILLAR:**—it states that the service area 'undertakes industry analysis to ensure the policy and regulatory frameworks underpin the long term productivity growth, export potential and sustainability of Queensland's food and fibre sector'. I think electricity is very much a part of that.

**CHAIR:** The minister has indicated he is happy to take the question.

**Mr BYRNE:** I am happy to take it. As you know, energy is not my portfolio area but I am happy to take it because it is part of it, as is transport, as are information systems and IT systems. I am happy to have a discussion and put on the table what I know. The Department of Energy and Water Supply is the responsible agency.

I am aware of the impact of electricity prices on all Queenslanders, particularly and including agricultural producers. The Queensland government will continue to do all it can to prevent electricity prices from rising more than necessary to ensure a safe, reliable and efficient electricity supply to all. It is for that reason that the Queensland government has taken the major step of removing the cost of the Solar Bonus Scheme from customer bills through to 2020. This will help restrict electricity price increases to approximately half of what they would have been in the wake of the closure of the Hazelwood Power Station in Victoria and South Australia's electricity crisis. In addition to this, we will recommission the gas-fired Swanbank E Power Station. This will also put downward pressure on Australia's wholesale electricity market and will assist with the reliability of Queensland's electricity supply.

In line with our election commitment, the Queensland Productivity Commission has conducted a public inquiry into electricity pricing. In responding to the inquiry's final report, the Queensland government has allocated \$170 million to supporting customers. The agricultural sector can be expected to benefit from a \$10 million regional business and customer support package. The package includes a tariff trial for small agricultural customers to better understand how the price signals of standard tariffs affect small-customer bills and an awareness campaign to better explain the bill impacts of different tariff options and to promote energy audit services and case studies to help customers understand how to lower their electricity bills.

In addition to this, up to \$6 million will be invested in a large-customer adjustment trial. The trial will test the case for the government co-contributions to help fund changes to customer operations and equipment to lower bills. These initiatives build on the government's Energy Savers program, which has been funded by DAF and DEWS and which was rolled out by Ergon with the assistance of the Queensland Farmers' Federation. The program uses case studies based on farm audits to inform and educate farmers on the benefits of adopting new and more efficient technologies. There are currently over 40 case studies available on the QFF website showing potential savings on a wide variety of farms, with average potential energy savings across all case studies of over 30 per cent. These measures provide options to allow primary producers to take control of their energy use and realise ongoing savings regardless of what happens with energy prices.

I note recent undertakings by the opposition to reintroduce the Queensland Agriculture Energy and Water Council that the former Queensland government established in late 2014, although I ironically note that it never actually met. I do not know how you re-establish something that never met. The current Queensland government has elected not to continue with that council as it was considered that its key objectives would be largely achieved through our election commitments on the independent inquiry into electricity prices.

**CHAIR:** I will go to the member for Ipswich West.

**Mr MADDEN:** Minister, can you point to any positive results from the Queensland government's investment in agricultural research?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. It is one of the areas with the most fantastic outcomes. Our strawberry lovers will be delighted to learn that there is a new variety of strawberry available in the shops for the first time this season. The Red Rhapsody was developed by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in a special breeding program at the Maroochy Research Facility at Nambour. Consumers are likely to be enthusiastic about its deep red colour, size, taste, sweetness and antioxidants. Strawberry growers will be thrilled by the characteristics that have been developed specifically for their benefit by researchers. The Red Rhapsody is easier to grow, more resistant to disease and easier and cheaper to harvest. I am also advised that it offers consistently higher yields, helping producers to be more profitable—and here are the Red Rhapsody strawberries!

A producer could have hundreds of thousands of plants and each plant could have up to 50 strawberries. Each of the individual fruit is picked by hand. The Red Rhapsody has the advantage over other varieties of having longer stems that enable the fruit to grow away from the bush and therefore easier to locate for a strawberry picker. It also has a high resistance to bruising which aids in the process of getting it to the consumer in good condition despite the rough and tumble of harvesting, packing and transport. As the strawberries themselves are larger than the other varieties, punnets are filled more quickly. DAF worked closely with Hort Innovation Australia on the project, which is part of a national variety improvement program backed by strawberry growers. The department has answered a specific brief from the growers and delivered in spades. I am advised that Red Rhapsody strawberries are available now in fruit shops and supermarkets. Keep an eye out for the likes of these strawberries and you will be much rewarded.

Demand for the plants is exceeding supply and there is interest not just from Australian growers but also from overseas. Producers in Turkey are showing interest after a previous DAF bred strawberry, the Rubygem, was a big hit with Turkish consumers. The industry has no doubt that the Red Rhapsody will be another Queensland success story. I am pleased to advise the committee that the development program which led to Red Rhapsody was funded by Hort Innovation using the research and development strawberry industry levy and funds from the Australian government. It was also co-funded by the Queensland government and is just one of the examples of a successful outcome from a body of scientific excellence present within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. I table these strawberries for the benefit of the committee.

**CHAIR:** Minister, I have just been advised that we cannot table strawberries, but you can take a photo of them, if you like, and table the photo.

**Mr BYRNE:** We will get them distributed unofficially shortly.

**CHAIR:** We have time for one last question. I call the member for Mackay.

**Mrs GILBERT:** I would like to go back to fishing. Minister, what are the priority areas of reform identified in the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy?

**CHAIR:** Minister, you have three minutes.

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mackay for the question. I know how much she worked with us on many issues associated with fisheries. I am convinced that the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy will fundamentally change the way we manage fisheries in Queensland. Priority actions include the following: completing a monitoring and research plan to inform our needs and priorities for investments in additional monitoring and research; commencing new biological monitoring—initial priorities include saucer scallops, other reef species category fish in the Coral Reef Fin Fish Fishery and blue threadfin salmon; and partnerships for novel monitoring technologies, through the Advance Queensland Small Business Innovation Research program. Fisheries Queensland will be releasing an innovation challenge to automate fisheries data, including tracking location, effort—for example, sensors on gear like crab pots and nets—and catch/protected species interactions—for example, cameras on vessels.


There will be a system for collecting social and economic data through partnerships with a range of research and commercial enterprises to develop a system for the routine collection of economic and social data relevant to fisheries management. There will be regular stock assessments. Fisheries Queensland is bolstering its program of regular stock assessments to roll out more regular assessments. Due for completion in 2017 are pink snapper, yellowfin bream, summer whiting, dusky flathead, Spanish mackerel and barramundi.

Ecological risk assessments guidelines will be developed and priority assessments will commence for species at risk across all fisheries including in the Marine Aquarium Fish Fishery, the East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Fishery, the East Coast Crab Fishery and other priority fisheries. There will be the rollout of vessel-monitoring systems. Fisheries Queensland is working with GBRMPA to pool funding to help subsidise the costs of installation. Fisheries Queensland will be working with innovators over the coming months to ensure smaller and more robust vessel-monitoring units are available for smaller inshore boats.

There will be the establishment of an expert panel, with the first meeting proposed for later this month, as I have already said, to discuss the harvest strategy guidelines, the draft monitoring and research plan, the ecological risk assessment guidelines and the resource allocation policy. There will be further working groups established as we go forward—for example, for crab, trawl and net fisheries. There will be fishery-specific working groups for the three priority fisheries, being crab, trawl and east coast inshore.

**CHAIR:** The committee will now adjourn for a break. The hearing will resume at 11.30 am with continued examination of the estimates for the portfolio including the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges and the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.02 am to 11.30 am**

 **CHAIR:** I welcome back the minister and other officials. The committee will now continue its examination of the estimates for your portfolio including the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges and the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority.

**Mr BYRNE:** Mr Chair, can I offer a couple of things quickly before we commence?

**CHAIR:** Sure.

**Mr BYRNE:** There are a couple of corrections or points of clarification. It appears that when I was speaking on the issue of rural economic development and \$5.2 million over three years I may have talked about \$5.4 million at one point. The real number is \$5.2 million. In the response to Panama disease, I am advised that we have committed \$2.8 million. I think I may have talked about \$28 million at some point, so that clarification is necessary. Additionally, the director-general can now answer the questions that we have taken on notice for the benefit of the committee.

**Dr Woods:** In relation to rural economic development funding, I remind members of the committee that it is a \$5.2 million rural economic development package which includes the following initiatives: \$1.3 million for the growing Queensland's food exports pilot program over two years; \$3 million over three years to establish a new Rural Economics Centre of Excellence; and \$900,000 allocated to the one-stop service to help private sector initiatives speed development proposals for agricultural projects over three years. In 2017-18 the additional \$1.95 million includes \$650,000 focused on the growing Queensland's food exports pilot program, \$1 million towards the establishment of the Rural Economics Centre of Excellence and \$300,000 for the one-stop service. In the answer that was referred to in regard to non-government question on notice No. 2, the \$1.95 million was reflected as \$2 million as all figures were rounded to one decimal place in that answer.

Secondly, we were asked earlier in the session about the estimated impact of prickly acacia. Departmental experts have provided the following advice. In 2003 a departmental report estimated the impact of medium and heavy infestations of prickly acacia on the Mitchell Grass Downs based on four aspects—lost grass production, increased mustering costs, herbicide and mechanical control costs, and increased tyre damage—to be of the order of \$4.3 million per annum. Allowing for the spread of prickly acacia in the years since 2003 and for inflation, the current estimate would be \$28 million per annum. If you allowed for other impacts including reduced property values, impact on other management practices, increased erosion, harbourage for feral animals, capital expenditure, impact on the environment, impact on social amenity and public health, then clearly the estimate would be significantly higher but of course many of those values are difficult to put an actual figure on.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, before the break you outlined the priority areas of reform identified in the sustainable fishing strategy. Can you let us know what the stakeholders' reaction has been to the release of the sustainable fishing strategy?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mackay for her question. In general, the reaction has been very positive. I have directly spoken to a number of stakeholders over the last month including commercial, recreational and charter fishers and conservation groups, and I have been very pleased with people's responses. All stakeholders have strongly welcomed the boost to compliance and the monitoring aspects of the plan going forward. Commercial fishers have acknowledged that this will give them the opportunity to consider what their fisheries will look like in the long term and provide greater certainty so that they can invest in their businesses. That seemed to be an overwhelming sentiment from those people who are in for the long haul in commercial fishing.

Recreational fishers are pleased that there will be regionally specific fishing rules and the opportunity to feed into the fisheries management process. Conservation groups have welcomed the clear sustainability targets, vessel tracking and a better process around looking at environmental risks. While there are some concerns about elements of the strategy such as the rollout of the vessel tracking component, we have clearly indicated that the government will be working closely with all stakeholders in implementing these new arrangements and that we commit to working through the details together through a better engagement process.

Given the positive response across industry groups, I would hope that at least core elements of this strategy will receive bipartisan support. However, I have not seen any criticism certainly in the Queensland parliament. The opposition spokesman is yet to make a public statement about that even though it was released six weeks ago, and I am looking forward to the contributions in coming months.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, will you inform the committee what work is being done to improve the future sustainability of Queensland's scallop stock?

**Mr BYRNE:** Again, I thank the member for the question. Most of the committee would be well aware of recent events in the scallop industry. The committee is aware that in late 2016, shortly after my return to the portfolio, I took urgent action to protect the sustainability of scallops. Scallop replenishment areas which had been closed were due to reopen on 3 January 2017. They were permanently closed and a winter spawning closure was implemented from 1 May to 31 October each year. I did not take the decision lightly, but I was forced to act due to the latest scientific advice that the stocks had plummeted to crisis levels.

Catch rates from January 2015 to April 2016 were the lowest recorded in 39 years and I was advised that stock assessments indicated a fall to just six per cent of original biomass. The scallop preservation areas cover about 11 per cent of the grounds traditionally fished for scallops. Today I can advise the committee that the Palaszczuk government is investing \$2.58 million into a three-year research and monitoring program to track the recovery of scallop stocks. This is an investment that will significantly improve future sustainability assessments and benefit the commercial fishing sector by ensuring long-term sustainability of that fishery.

The program will provide information to build a more comprehensive picture of the Queensland scallop stock and effectively track its recovery. Independent surveys will commence in October. They will provide biological data to be considered together with rainfall, water temperature and other important variables that impact scallop production.

It is vitally important that we have rigorous data so that we can be confident that the stock is recovering. We need to know the point at which commercial fishing can be increased and current closures lifted without impacting on long-term sustainability. The \$2.58 million comprises \$600,000 over three years for monitoring surveys from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, \$1.28 million of in kind support from DAF, James Cook University and the University of Queensland for scallop research, and almost \$700,000 from the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation for scallop research.

As part of the surveys, additional information will be collected on other important trawl species including Moreton Bay bugs and blue swimmer crabs. Research has already started to trial novel tagging methods for scallops that will be used to estimate natural mortality rates. This is an important factor in stock assessments and the management of the scallop fishery.

The first trawl survey will be undertaken in October this year, and I am very pleased to advise the committee that following offers from industry late last year to assist with future monitoring commercial fishers will be invited to participate in the survey when tenders are called in the very near future.

**Mrs MILLER:** I would like to direct my questions to the director-general. Director-General, could you advise how many sexual harassment complaints have been made this year across the portfolio? Could you also advise us whether or not any complainant should be expected to continue working with the perpetrator of the complaint, especially if the perpetrator has admitted the folly in their ways?

**CHAIR:** Member for Bundamba, I am struggling to find the relevance in that one. It is an important question.

**Mrs MILLER:** It is an important question because it costs money to investigate complaints by HRM or people within the department.

**CHAIR:** I will accept that.

**Dr Woods:** I thank the member for Bundamba for that question. I do not have available all that detail for all the portfolio bodies, so we will attempt to pull that together.

**CHAIR:** Are you taking that question on notice?

**Dr Woods:** I will take it on notice.

**Mrs MILLER:** My next question is in relation to meatworks, Minister. I understand that you have a meatworks in your electorate. I have a huge one in mine—the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere—at Dinmore. I am concerned about live cattle exports and the view that Queensland might be losing abattoirs in the future. Could you tell us whether there has been any work in the department in relation to the future of meat processing in Queensland and the risk of those meat processors going to the wall if live cattle exports get a real move on?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Bundamba for her question. It is a matter that has been highly politicised. There are still ramifications for various positions about live industry and meat processing. You look at the issue from a basis of fact. Meat processing and protein processing is the biggest manufacturing employer in Queensland and maybe Australia more broadly. It is a critically important employer in many parts of Queensland. Given the exposure Queensland has particularly to beef, with a huge proportion of the national herd here, it is an important employer in Townsville, certainly in my area and, as you say, in Dinmore. I have two works—both Teys and JBS—immediately adjacent to my electorate. You would not be surprised to hear that I have always wanted to maintain a very, very healthy onshore, value-adding meat-processing sector. Live exports I think generically have been in



the order of about six per cent of the export component. The vast majority of our export beef, in particular, is processed beef in one form or another going overseas. That processing sector is an incredibly important component not only to our regional communities but also to the supply chain more broadly.

I have had various criticisms put to me about my views on live cattle. I am completely supportive of niche elements of live cattle export and I particularly refer to Indonesian markets. Some may recall one of my earliest trade visits was to go to Indonesia with my Northern Territory counterpart. We were the first ministerial level delegation into Indonesia for many years. We had very useful and fruitful discussions with Indonesian political officials as well as commercial entities about the prospects of live cattle export into Indonesia. It is a critically important market for our northern cattle herd, and particularly for the type of beast that is produced across the north.

I am completely supportive of that niche market and that type of market developing for the particular product that we produce, and I always have been but I do have reservations. Anyone close to the industry understands that we are well short of our optimal supply numbers in cattle in Queensland and Australia more broadly. The best estimates I see is that we are some years away to getting back to where we were three to four years ago, and that is a combined impact of drought most principally.

It would be entirely foolish to suggest that ramping up and increasing live-cattle exports, particularly in the slaughter cattle area, is not going to have an implication for onshore value-add processing and jobs in Australia. I have a serious problem with the idea that, because the processing cost here is at this value amount, I can put cattle onto a ship, send them overseas and have them basically killed there and exported as theoretically Australian quality export animals. We are essentially exporting our dollars. We are not talking about an Indonesian type beast, even though they have moved their conditions around a fair bit and changed the metrics on the sorts of animals they are seeking—all a function of the shortage in supply for the Indonesian market anyway.

Yes, I do have a problem with anything that potentially threatens jobs in particularly the likes of Rockhampton and adjacent to that. There are many, many thousands of direct and indirect jobs associated with meat processing in Rockhampton, the beef capital. Anything that pulls considerable amounts of supply out of the system is something that people in regional and rural Queensland should be concerned about.

Too often we have seen the debate about live cattle being a farm gate price and it is them and us. It appeals to the various components of industry. I have always tried to represent, and this government has represented, the entire supply chain and the merits to everybody. I think that live has its very, very important role—there is no question about that; it does provide competition in the market at a point—but there is also a point where live reaches a percentage of export where there simply are not the numbers to validate an ongoing meatworks.

I have had all the processors raise this issue with me at a various scale. It is unfortunate that it has meant that some producers think the processors are working against them. What I try to say is that it is a symbiotic relationship. Everybody needs to be in this and everyone needs to make their way. I simply will not tolerate this idea that it is them versus us in the meat-processing sector. Everybody needs to play their role and understand and respect other parties' roles in this process.

Increasingly, you are seeing aggregation, you are seeing bigger entities, you are seeing vertical integration in order to guarantee supply and you are seeing a lot more investment in finishing of cattle to make sure they are at quality to go into the system. All of that is happening naturally and market forces are driving that, but the fundamental issue is that there is a threat to onshore processing and there is a point at which, let us say, fat cattle exports would pull sufficient numbers out of existing meat-processing plants to make their continued operation problematic. I am highly attuned to that, and I am not the only person; many people commenting in agribusiness sectors are making those points. It is certainly being presented to me as the minister by processors. I am attuned to it. I am concerned about it.

I cannot give you the numbers exactly, but there are around 20 or more various meat-processing projects that are on the table across Queensland. There are many that have more prospects than others. It would be hard to imagine, unless there is a very specific business model, that some of these projects would mature. Some have far more legs than others. Many communities in Queensland think the way forward for economic development is going to be in meat processing. In some cases that may be the case, but the truth is that every one of those supply chains—and it does not matter whether it is cattle, sheep or goats—is under duress. You need a certain amount of supply to retain a permanent workforce. You need a certain kill rate on a daily basis to make the shifts happen. These are real

stresses and strains that exist, and it fundamentally goes back to the availability of cattle. The best numbers that I have seen over the next number of years are that we will not get back to where we were three or four years ago for another three to five years.

It is a problem. It is an issue. I am highly sensitised to onshore value-adding jobs. We give it a lot of consideration and thought as a government. However, live-cattle export is not my domain. It is a federal issue. The approvals are federally driven. Of course market forces will drive whatever is approved or is not, but there is a risk to onshore processing.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, do you agree with the comments of former Labor energy minister Mark Bailey, encapsulated in the *Queensland Country Life* article of 29 June 2017 headlined 'Electricity: Why farmers are to blame'? I seek leave to table that document.

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

**Mr BYRNE:** Mr Chair, there is one thing I can be certain of. Whatever comments Mark Bailey made, I can guarantee you that he did not put a headline on it 'Farmers are to blame'. I will guarantee that that is not from any comment. That might be the editorial interpretation of that particular publication—

**Mr LAST:** Point of order, Mr Chair. I have tabled that document. Here is the article and that is exactly what it is entitled.

**CHAIR:** There is no point of order. Minister, continue your answer.

**Mr BYRNE:** Let me tell you how this works. A minister of the crown or someone from opposition can make any number of statements. It is not up to us how it is editorialised or what the headline looks like. What I can tell you is that Minister Bailey has been an absolutely outstanding minister. He is a close friend of mine and someone I support entirely. His comments would have been informed by fact and evidence. Without going through and reading that particular article, I can guarantee that that would not be the way that Mark Bailey would paraphrase his comments about energy or energy in any sector or any part of his responsibilities. He does not use language like that and he would certainly not be so obtuse.

**Mr LAST:** Do you agree or not agree?

**Mr BYRNE:** It is the opinion of the editorial staff of *Queensland Country Life* to editorialise it and headline it in that fashion. I agree with what Mark Bailey would have said—of course I do—because I know him well enough and I know how much across his brief he is and how passionate he is about these issues going forward. I completely support anything he would have said in policy terms without going through and reading this article because I can guarantee it would have been accurate and true. I can guarantee that he is not accountable for the headline.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, I refer to page 3 of the SDS which says 'create the conditions for successful agribusinesses and supply chains'. I refer to the LNP's success in this parliament in delivering genuine marketing choice for Queensland's canefarmers. Can you confirm that, should the Palaszczuk Labor government be returned to government at the next election, the legislation guaranteeing marketing choice will be dismantled?

**Mr BYRNE:** We had a full debate in the Queensland parliament about this legislation. We put on the record exactly our sentiments about the Liberal National Party proposals that were completely parochial and ill-informed about a free market economy. The implications of the Liberal National Party's interference in this area have been well marked out.

**Mr MILLAR:** Mr Chair, I raise a point of order on relevance. It was a clear question: will you dismantle the legislation if you win the next election?

**CHAIR:** Thanks for the point of order. There is no point of order. The minister has latitude in how he answers the question.

**Mr BYRNE:** Here we have a hypothetical being proposed. I would like to have a parliamentary debate sometime about the federal Productivity Commission's recommendations. Every single informed entity commenting on the actions of the Liberal National Party on this bill indicates what the position should be.

**Mr MILLAR:** Point of order, Mr Chair: I go to relevance. It was a clear question. Yes or no?

**CHAIR:** There is no point of order. Please continue.

**Mr BYRNE:** He is asking me a hypothetical so I am giving a hypothetical answer based on the history of the event.

**CHAIR:** Can I say that I think I am giving some latitude there because I could rule the question out of order under the nature that it is hypothetical.

**Mr BYRNE:** That is up to you, Mr Chair.

**CHAIR:** You seem like you are keen to answer this one, so keep going.

**Mr BYRNE:** We have only had this blue for 2½ years. I am happy to keep going.

**CHAIR:** Please continue, Minister.

**Mr BYRNE:** I will continue by saying that our position on this bill was clearly represented in the debate. We could not have put our position more directly in terms of where the Queensland government sits on this ridiculous set of debates.

**Mr MILLAR:** Will you maintain choice for sugar growers?

**CHAIR:** Can we cease interjecting, please.

**Mr BYRNE:** I am not going to run hypotheticals. I do not think you would have to be Einstein to interpret the views of the Queensland government on the ill-considered intervention in the Queensland sugar industry by the Liberal National Party. The Queensland government's position was backed in by every single informed commentator on this issue. I draw your attention to the federal Productivity Commission's report into this matter, which I might add was hidden by the ministers behind closed doors for a long, long time. That commission's report clearly maps out what should be done in this space. I fully supported the Productivity Commission's report. It is a matter that may well be discussed next week; in fact, I am sure it will be on the agenda.

I refer those members from the opposition to that Commonwealth Productivity Commission report and explain to the people of Queensland why the only solution available to the Liberal National Party is to reregulate industry because that is what they seek to do and they seek to do it over and over. This question is irrational, except for the fact that they are backing in their own branches in those cane-growing areas.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, I refer to page 3 of the SDS. How much funding is allocated to the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance? I cannot find the line item relating to that initiative in the budget documents. Secondly, how many jobs did the government create in the agricultural sector last financial year?

**Mr BYRNE:** I had the pleasure when I was in North Queensland of sitting down and discussing the success of the rural jobs initiative with one of the officers directly engaged in it, and saying what a fantastic performance they were delivering in North Queensland. As recently as a couple of weeks ago, I sat down with one of the officers directly delivering this program and reflected on the local substantial positive components that have come out of it.

The initiative was designed to support rural agribusinesses in their efforts to attract and retain skilled workers and seasonal labour. The initiative is a \$3.572 million investment in industry led workforce programs between 2015 and 2018. I am providing for the operation of Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance, which is led by the Queensland Farmers' Federation in conjunction with peak bodies including AgForce, Canegrowers and Growcom, until September 2018. The alliance has developed strong links with state and federal employment and training agencies and has established itself as a key source of labour market and training intelligence and advice to government.

I have ensured that the successful Queensland Agricultural Workforce Network will continue to support agribusiness and farming communities with tailored support until June 2018. The network involves six officers based with agribusiness bodies throughout the state. Areas include Far North Queensland, North Queensland, Central Queensland, Wide Bay-Burnett, South Queensland and South-East Queensland. These officers are at hand to assist any primary producer or group of producers who are experiencing difficulty in accessing suitably skilled labour. Officers from the network recently organised and conducted the works on connecting Whitsunday's job forums in Proserpine and Bowen to assist employers and jobseekers in the aftermath of Cyclone Debbie. I have also ensured the continuation of the popular School to Industry Partnership Program under the leadership of AgForce until June 2018.

**Mr LAST:** Mr Chair, point of order. My point of order goes to relevance. We are hearing a lot about programs that the minister is talking about rolling out and delivering. My question was: how many jobs were created last year?

**CHAIR:** The minister has some latitude. I will let him continue.

**Mr BYRNE:** We came to government with a set of ideas. When we formed government, we took that election commitment and sat down with the peak bodies. The peak bodies provided us with very clear and succinct advice about how they would like to see this program rolled out—and guess what? We did exactly what they requested. We changed the original concepts from what we had imagined while we were in opposition and we developed this program, which was fully supported and commended by peak bodies, to deliver exactly what the peak bodies were after.

What did I do? I made sure the funding was made available to peak bodies to address the very direct concerns that they had. I can tell you what I do not do. I do not lean over their shoulder and drive over the top of them. They have requested this system be put in place. It is very much the Queensland government supporting and delegating that responsibility to those peak bodies based on what they asked us to prepare and deliver. That is exactly what we have done. As recently as a couple of weeks ago when governing from North Queensland I sat down with one of those officers who talked me through the very, very positive and successful outcomes of the program—

**Mr MILLAR:** A point of order, Mr Chair. Just going back to the member for Burdekin's point of relevance, he was asking how many jobs have been created. I know you are giving the minister latitude, and that is fine. However, the minister has gone on now for about six or seven minutes without actually giving a figure of how many jobs have been created.

**Mr BYRNE:** How long is a piece of string?

**Mr MILLAR:** Say yes or no. I do not know.

**Mr BYRNE:** What a bloody ridiculous question to ask.

**Mr MILLAR:** How many jobs have you created?

**Mr LAST:** Are you saying, Minister, that the creation of jobs—

**CHAIR:** The minister is answering the question. He will be heard in silence.

**Mr LAST:** It is not relevant.

**Mr BYRNE:** It is doing exactly what it is expected to do. How long is a piece of string? Each area has been working very progressively and proactively with industry in those areas. I certainly do not seek briefs and aggregation of their efforts, and why would I? What I receive is feedback about the success or otherwise of the intent of the program. The intent of the program, as reported back to me from those engaged, is that it is doing exactly what the peak bodies asked it to do. As far as I am concerned about government expenditure, that is exactly what I want; it is exactly what the government wants. It empowers the peak bodies to tailor these things to what they need on the ground. I could not be happier with the program or the outcomes. I am not going to get down into how many jobs, in which month or where they are. It is doing exactly what we expect it to do and I am very pleased about it.

**Mr WEIR:** You will note on SDS page 25 spending is down because, among other things, the delayed purchase of a property for critical grains research is not happening this year. It has been put off again. It looks very much like there is a go-slow with research and development for Queensland grain growers after the previous government fought hard to keep grains research for Queensland. Why is the acquisition of this important grains research facility being put off again? When will a suitable property be bought?

**Mr BYRNE:** You would appreciate that the acquisition and disposal of various properties for various persons is very much informed by the advice from the department. I, as the minister, certainly do not say, 'we're going to buy this or sell that.' That advice is provided to me. Invariably, I support the recommendations of the department, who are fully aware of what their obligations are and where they need to head. In the case of this particular procurement, I might defer to the director-general to see what she can offer.

**Dr Woods:** I thank the member for Condamine for the question. In relation to the purchase of the property by the GRDC, our role is in fact not to control the purchase process. It is quite a specific property that is being sought. The history of acquisition of these sorts of properties by government is that government entering the market often impacts on the price of the property. The industry chose, therefore, to take control of the purchase process. They have been actively involved through an industry chaired committee, and the department has agreed to roll the funding forward in full to allow them flexibility to seek the best value-for-money outcome.

However, I would like to point out that given that million dollars was not taken up this year, the department used the opportunity to purchase a property adjoining our Hermitage Research Station, which is similarly used for grains R and D. We had, in fact, been using that cultivation area for some

years leased from our neighbour. Our neighbour decided to sell. The fact that the GRDC had not yet found a suitable property allowed us to move quickly and to acquire the additional area next to the Hermitage Research Station, which ensures that we have adequate space to be able to continue the programs there.

I can reassure the member that, firstly, we are not intervening in the industry-led process of acquiring the GRDC-led research property. Secondly, we have been very active in ensuring that our capital budget is used in a flexible and adaptive way to make sure that we have the facilities we need to continue our research program.

**Mr KATTER:** I refer to pages 10 and 42 of the SDS. A number of Public Service jobs have been returned under this government. Our research showed that there was a large disparity between those positions that came back to the outback areas compared to the coastal metropolitan areas. My question is: can you confirm that there has been a disparity between those jobs, many of which are very valued, that have been returned to these outback areas compared to coastal and metropolitan areas?

**Mr BYRNE:** I will preface what I am about to say with the fact that the minister does not direct the location of staffing. It is not my imprimatur to dig down to the chief executive's responsibilities. I make the arguments for staffing for a purpose and go to the budget process to argue for whatever that effort may be. It is very much about the physical positioning of people. Unless there is a particular government policy setting, that is the discretion and charge of the departmental lead essentially.

DAF staff are employed in 91 locations across Queensland including the Brisbane CBD, working in science and extension, biosecurity, fisheries and forestry management, industry development and corporate positions. The DAF budget showed a full-time equivalent budgeted staff threshold of 2,057. This figure includes DAF corporate staff that provide services to other departments of the business and corporate partnership. Figures from the 2017-18 Service Delivery Statements estimated an increase in the budgeted staff threshold to 2,089. The additional FTEs relate to implementation of the Biosecurity Capability Review and the government commitment to fisheries management reform. DAF is focused on providing effective front-line services to customers. Sixty-nine per cent of DAF staff work in 89 locations outside of the Brisbane CBD. Seven per cent of staff are employed across 13 locations in the central region including Rockhampton, Emerald and Longreach. Fourteen per cent of staff work in the north region in 24 locations including Cairns, Townsville and Mareeba. Thirteen per cent of staff are located in 17 locations in the south region including Roma, Dalby and Toowoomba, and 34 per cent of staff are located in the south-east region across 35 locations including the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and Gatton.

That is the level of granularity that I can provide. I can inform you that a decision has been made to appoint a manager for Western Queensland in Longreach, which is something we have been talking about for a considerable period within the government. It is something that will hopefully add a bit better interaction and transparency in Western Queensland, which I think is needed.

**Mr MILLAR:** Is that position to replace Lew Markey?

**CHAIR:** Are you seeking leave to ask—sorry, member for Gregory. You do not have the call. Member for Mount Isa, do you have a follow-up question?

**Mr BYRNE:** I will tell you later. It is no state secret.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, I refer you to page 4 of the SDS and intergenerational farm transfers. Can you confirm how many of those have been transacted—and there might be a quantum associated with that?

**Mr BYRNE:** I have seen a number on a number of actions. I do not know whether it is immediately to hand. I do know that I have read a brief on some of those numbers. From 1 July 2016 to 15 June 2017, 592 transactions were received from family primary production businesses—transfer duty concession. It is 592. There are four transactions where transfer duty forgone can be calculated. The estimated total value of the concessions provided is \$22.4 million. In addition the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority provides grants of up to \$2½ thousand to support farm succession planning. The funding for the Primary Industry Productivity Enhancement Scheme's First Start loans was also increased from \$650,000 to \$2 million to reflect higher capital requirements in agriculture. They are the numbers you are probably looking for. There have been 592 transactions in the financial year essentially—or close to it—and the concessions are valued at \$22.4 million. That is giving real effect to what we said we would do.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, in my area of Mackay there is a lot of interest around charter fishing and developing that industry. With reference to page 9 of the SDS can you elaborate on the work that the government is doing to help grow a world-class charter fishing industry?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mackay for her question. I know how much charter fishing can benefit her electorate. It is a fantastic spot to launch a charter fishing enterprise from.

On 27 June at Yorkeys Knob, just north of Cairns, along with local member Craig Crawford and Labor candidate Michael Healy, I was pleased to launch the *Charter fishing action plan 2017 to 2020* and the discussion paper that goes with it. This discussion paper is now open for public consultation and the feedback will help set the future direction for charter fishing in Queensland. The action plan will help recognise charter fishing as a distinct fishing activity that provides economic benefit for Queensland.

Charter fishing is a popular activity for Queenslanders and tourists alike so it is important we have plans in place to support that industry. The discussion paper includes proposed goals and actions to help support and grow a world-class charter fishing industry in Queensland. Seven main topics are presented for feedback in the discussion paper. They are: a voice for the charter fishing industry, access to the charter fishery including the licensing and compliance issues, maritime safety and infrastructure, declining resources and increasing fishing pressure, promotion of charter fishing, fisheries enhancements and red-tape reduction.

We want to make it easier for people to enter and operate in the charter industry and we will be looking for ways to support the growth of this important industry. This plan, when it is finalised, will bring industry players together, support the industry and grow tourism benefits for Queensland. Part of the approach includes considering ways to allow charter fishing to operate on a sustainable basis without excessive regulation. The discussion paper also considers some of the challenges facing the industry, not just from Fisheries' rules and regulations but also from other legislation.

Feedback on the discussion paper is open until 4 August. To have your say on future arrangements for charter fishing in Queensland visit the Queensland government website, which is flagged on most publications. The government will then take that feedback and develop a critical action plan that will be considered by government later in the year.

**CHAIR:** With reference to the government question on notice No. 5, what is the importance of the proposed increase in Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers in 2017-18 to the Sustainable Fishing Strategy?

**Mr BYRNE:** The Queensland government invests some \$15.6 million into the state's fisheries and maritime safety compliance programs including the Shark Control Program. Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol monitors boating and fisheries activity and investigates alleged illegal activity along the 7,000-kilometre coastline and hundreds of freshwater rivers and impoundments. The Queensland government is boosting its fisheries compliance resources as part of the recently released Sustainable Fisheries Strategy. This will include employing 20 additional compliance officers across the state which will deliver a 20 per cent increase in the number of front-line Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers in Queensland who work every day to help protect our fish stocks.

This boost in compliance has a strong emphasis on regional employment and front-line government services. Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers play a critical role in ensuring fisheries resources and habitats are managed sustainably for the future. Officers are involved in compliance activities, gathering intelligence to support prosecutions and educating the community about responsible fishing. I recently announced that four new positions are being established in Gladstone—which will also allow the reopening of the Gladstone offices which had been closed previously—while the additional officer in Warwick will provide Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol with better capacity to service south-western Queensland. The additional officers in central and northern Queensland will also help boost enforcement of the net-free zones established in 2015 at Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton. Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers operate from 19 bases across Queensland including Gladstone base, which, as I said, is now being reopened.

It is the role of the Boating and Fisheries Patrol to ensure the compliance of more than 642,000 recreational fishers and 1,705 commercial fishing licence holders. The recruitment for new patrol officers is underway, and more than 330 applications have been received for the positions. It will now go to a rigorous selection process and the new officers will commence in around October. The new positions will be based across Queensland: Far North Queensland with three officers, two at Port

Douglas and one at Cairns; North Queensland with six officers, three at Townsville, two at Airlie Beach and one at Mackay; Central Queensland with five officers, four at Gladstone and one at Yeppoon; and South-East Queensland with six officers, three at Brisbane and Sunshine Coast, one at Warwick, one at Redlands and one at the Gold Coast.

**CHAIR:** With regard to the patrol officers, what tasks do they undertake?

**Mr BYRNE:** The Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol plays a critical role in protecting those fish stocks from illegal activities. That is their first and foremost responsibility. Officers monitor boating and fishing activities and investigate alleged illegal activities along that 7,000 kilometres of coastline. Fisheries compliance activities include monitoring and inspecting fishing activities, investigations into cases of alleged infringement and enforcement in the form of cautions, infringement notices or prosecutions where necessary. Fines can range from \$60 to \$1,219.

Education is also a key component of achieving compliance. Queensland is increasingly moving to intelligence based compliance, which focuses on targeting noncompliant operators based on gathered intelligence rather than randomly catching people who are breaking the rules. It also means that the highest risk areas of compliance are the focus rather than mum-and-dad recreational fishers. This is still balanced with maintaining a regular presence on the water. Resources are allocated through a formal assessment of compliance risks to ensure services deliver real results in addressing noncompliance.

The Boating and Fisheries Patrol also undertakes a range of cross-decking activities with other organisations to improve the efficiency of sea patrols. Officers are also authorised to deliver compliance services on behalf of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing, the Department of Transport and Main Roads, Maritime Safety Queensland, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

**CHAIR:** How many patrols were carried out by Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers last year and how many infringement notices were issued?

**Mr BYRNE:** That is an excellent question. The Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol plays a critical role in protecting fish stocks from illegal activities which can lead to exploitation. Last financial year these officers conducted 3,828 patrols and conducted 25,423 fisheries related inspections, resulting in 2,244 fisheries infringement notices being issued. Last year over 52,000 patrol hours were recorded. In 2016-17, patrols and inspections resulted in 49 court prosecutions finalised for offences against the Fisheries Act 1994, resulting in total fines in excess of \$250,000. Prosecutions are generally only undertaken for more serious fisheries offences. Minor offences are dealt with by infringement notices, formal cautions or education. However, if an individual is found to be a repeat offender or the offence is significant and deliberate, more serious enforcement action such as prosecution may be undertaken. Maximum penalties of up to \$378,450 are prescribed in the fisheries legislation and act as a guide for the court when considering the appropriate penalty.

This year we saw some excellent outcomes from prosecutions. In April 2017 a recreational fisher was found guilty of 16 offences relating to possession of 24 female mud crabs, 33 undersized mud crabs, 5.1 kilograms of crabmeat, using excess crab apparatus and possessing a commercial sized net. The fisher was fined \$18,000 and ordered to pay court costs. In August 2016 a commercial fisher was found guilty of possessing undersized scallops being in excess of 20 per cent of the total commercial catch for a fishing trip completed in January 2016. The fisher was fined \$12,000 and the proceeds of the sale of the scallops—\$38,430—was forfeited. In April 2017 a recreational fisher was found guilty of four offences relating to the possession of 51 female mud crabs, 46 undersized mud crabs, using two crab apparatus in excess of the number permitted and failing to mark a crab apparatus as required. The fisher was fined \$17,000 and ordered to pay court costs. In July 2016 a recreational fisher was found guilty of four offences relating to possession of 15 female mud crabs, 18 undersized mud crabs, one undersized gold spotted rock cod and using 15 crab apparatus in excess of the number permitted. The fisher was fined \$17,000 with a conviction recorded and ordered to pay court costs. As you can see, maintaining the highest levels of compliance with fisheries laws helps ensure the sustainability of our fishery stocks.

**Mrs MILLER:** I notice that on page 16 there is an amount of \$1.3 million provided to the RSPCA to upgrade their facilities in Cairns and Townsville. Minister, the RSPCA facilities here at Wacol are really first class and it would be great if they could upgrade their facilities up north, so do you have any details in relation to those upgrades in Cairns and Townsville?

**Mr BYRNE:** Yes, I do. I will preface my answer by saying that Queensland governments have had a long and successful relationship with the RSPCA and there have been many collaborations to support facilities development for the RSPCA across Queensland. There is a long history of governments of all persuasions, I suspect, working in that space.

In Queensland, enforcement of the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 is jointly conducted by Biosecurity Queensland and the RSPCA. The activities are bound by an agreement signed by both parties which outlines enforcement policies and procedures and areas of responsibility, including media management. RSPCA inspectors have enforcement responsibility in relation to animals within urban, semirural and rural areas. Within those areas the RSPCA investigates animal welfare complaints involving companion animals, wildlife, zoos, riding schools, pet shops and rodeos. Within RSPCAs, DAF inspectors have primary enforcement responsibility in relation to animals used for commercial livestock production and feral livestock animals. In areas where the RSPCA is not represented, DAF and/or the Queensland Police Service are responsible for enforcement.

As part of the agreement, an annual grant of \$500,000 is provided by the Queensland government to support the RSPCA in its enforcement activities. On 18 May 2016 the Queensland government approved an increase in annual grant funding to support the RSPCA inspectorate for inspectorate salaries and motor vehicle expenses. In addition, a one-off capital works grant of \$3 million over three years was approved to assist with the upgrading of the RSPCA animal shelters in Townsville and Cairns. I think that goes to the question that the member asked. The capital works grant has provided the RSPCA with access to a significant funding pool not otherwise available to them. It is a collaborative approach. The planned upgrades also contribute to the state's capability to house large numbers of companion animals in built-for-purpose shelters in the event of a disaster management response. The additional funding almost doubles the previous annual grant of \$500,000 and demonstrates this government's commitment to animal welfare and increasing the welfare of all animals in Queensland.

**Mrs MILLER:** Director-General, there have been quite a number of businesses set up in relation to doggy day care centres. Normally it is dog lovers, including myself, who tend to send their loved ones to those particular centres. Whose responsibility is it to oversight the running of these doggy day care centres? Is it your department, or would it be another department or a council?

**Dr Woods:** I will call on the Chief Biosecurity Officer to clarify this further, but my understanding is that our department's interest in this particular sort of business is in relation to animal welfare issues. We would clearly have an interest to ensure that these businesses provide adequate shelter and handling for the animals involved. One would assume that that would be exactly in line with the customers of those businesses and should not in most instances be a problem. Of course there will be a range of other ways in which these businesses will interact with government regulatory processes, and I would think that the key one would in fact be local government planning approvals in relation to the setting up of businesses in urban areas or close to urban areas. That is not an area where we have responsibility. It is principally a local government responsibility. Let me ask the Chief Biosecurity Officer whether he has any further insights I may have missed.

**Dr Thompson:** That has probably covered most of it. Clearly our remit is about animal welfare. We will continue to work with local governments about dog and cat management in a range of areas, as we do with the RSPCA. We do not license or do any work in relation to licensing those types of facilities that you are talking about, but we will interact with them around animal welfare issues. The puppy farm legislation that came in recently also puts rules in place for how you can sell or move dogs that are born from this point in time. That is not necessarily around doggy day care, but I guess anyone dealing with dogs may come across that legislation and need to address the issues that are covered by that.

**Mrs MILLER:** I think you will find that puppy farms and doggy day care centres are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Some of the doggy day care providers also have excursions such as going to the beach et cetera, so I think we are at different ends of the spectrum.

**Dr Thompson:** I am trying to outline a range of areas where we would interact in terms of the care of animals such as dogs. Certainly we do not have any direct intervention with doggy day care centres.

**Mr BYRNE:** For the benefit of the committee, you have to understand that the member for Bundamba has the most fantastic corgis, and I think her concerns probably reflect her own personal experience.



**CHAIR:** As someone who grew up in a family with corgis, I have spoken about those. I was just wondering whether that question should have been directed to the education minister, but we will move on!

**Mr LAST:** Minister, page 40 of the SDS states—

The Authority's core responsibility is to administer the Queensland Government's Primary Industry Productivity Enhancement Scheme (PIPES) ...

Given that PIPES' loan cap has increased to \$2 million and loans can also be interest-only, can you give the committee some idea of the number of interest-only loans and exposure protection against any interest rate rises? Given that QRIDA is increasingly moving into the realms of commercial banking, is there a need for coverage/protection for both borrowers and QRIDA with this increased level of interest-only lending?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. The basis of that is actually quite reasonable and it is a question that I have in the back of my mind, but there is one part of the question that I would contest. While the processes and systems may be a commercial bank and there are obviously banking considerations involved in all of that, it is not moving into the space of a commercial bank, so that is just not accurate. There are a very specific set of rules around how QRIDA loans are engaged and it is usually an incredibly collaborative sort of arrangement, one that involves normally not only the person seeking the loan but also existing financial arrangements that they may have in place. It is not like it is going in to compete in the banking sector; it is really there with a very specific remit for the terms and conditions under which those loan arrangements are applied. I am sure that I can call to the table the CEO of QRIDA to talk to you about those things, but I can make some initial commentary about the PIPES scheme. As you pointed out, up to \$2 million and \$1.3 million retrospectively are available at the concessional interest rates for loan terms of up to 20 years and that is an increase, as you have pointed out, from the \$650,000 that was in place previously. Up to five years of interest only payments are also available throughout the term of the loan—that is, up to five years, not infinitum. The loans attract no fees or charges and non-competitive joint lending with commercial banks is encouraged. A cap of \$60 million applied to new lending under PIPES in 2015-16. That was increased to \$120 million for 2016-17 to align with the increased loan limits, as you have rightly pointed out.

The widespread impact of drought continued to be felt across Queensland during much of 2016-17. The former QRAA was focused on increasing producer awareness of the concessional interest rate sustainability loan scheme to assist with drought preparation and mitigation activities. Focus was also placed on funding predator exclusion fencing to improve the viability of grazing enterprises, with over 1,400 kilometres of fencing funded through these loans. At 30 June 2017, 257 applications totalling \$116.4 million net had been approved under the scheme. That compares with 2015-16 net approvals of 186 applications totalling \$61.6 million net. The 2016-17 figures represent 151 sustainability loan approvals totalling \$53.3 million. This comprises 45.8 per cent of total approvals under the scheme, a decrease from 49 per cent in 2015-16. The scheme benefits were primarily taken up by the beef cattle industry with 58.9 per cent of total net approvals followed by sugar growers with 13.7 per cent of net approvals. Loan funds were primarily directed to first or additional property purchases and for capital improvements to improve enterprise sustainability. The highest number of net approvals were made to the Maranoa shire primarily to assist with predator exclusion fencing followed by Bundaberg shire for property improvements and expansion. The total PIPES loan portfolio at 30 June 2017 was \$413 million.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, if I could just interrupt there, what happens with those loans should there be a series of interest rate rises?

**Mr BYRNE:** As you can appreciate, the QRIDA board et cetera are the experts in this field. That is why they are there. I might defer to the CEO, but that is a reasonable question to ask.

**Mr LAST:** As part of your response, could you also—

**CHAIR:** Sorry, member for Burdekin, but are you asking an additional question? I think we are still dealing with the first question.

**Mr LAST:** No, that is fine. What happens to those loans if there is a series of interest rate rises and what precautions are being taken at QRIDA to limit any potential defaults? I think that is a fair enough question.

**Mr MacMillan:** I thank the member for the question. QRIDA is not an interest only lender by any stretch. We have 20-year loans which are P&I loans. Depending on the needs of the client—they might be planting trees where they will not see any production for seven years—we try to accommodate that

potentially in the first five years of the loan. It is really about the client's needs and also that gives us the flexibility that the banks potentially cannot. If there is a drought in year 15 or something, we can actually work with them and bring them back down to interest only and then when the drought disperses they are able to go back to P&I. Our aim over 20 years is for them to pay back the principal and the interest. In terms of our Treasury risk management, we work with QTC. We have borrowed \$41 million from QTC. We talk with them daily. We have a thing called a portfolio loan facility which enables us to monitor the amount of money that we have actually borrowed. Currently farming families are able to fix for one, three or five years. The current average is actually 3.25 years and the current interest rate that we pay QTC is 2.25 per cent. We have strict Treasury management built into our organisation and then on the other side of it we work very closely with our clients so that they can perform the challenges of being a family farm.

**Mr MILLAR:** Just before I ask my question, I want to welcome students, parents and teachers from the Emerald Christian College who are down here for an event at City Hall. I thank them for coming along and am very proud to represent them. Minister, my question is to you but it could also be to the DG and refers to the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges. I looked at the balance sheet and it shows a substantial write-down in assets—around \$8.6 million. Can the minister or the DG provide fuller details of what is actually going on? We have a substantial write-down of property values across the college. Was this write-down made before or after the sale of the Longreach Pastoral College's Manningham property for \$76 an acre—a sale that sent shock waves through the district and a price around about 25 per cent less than expectation? I am trying to get an understanding of what has happened here. What were the procedures on the sale of Manningham to have Manningham go for \$76 an acre when people in Western Queensland were looking at around \$100 an acre for a property given that it could have an impact on potential property prices in the future?

**Mr BYRNE:** Again, that is a fairly reasonable question and one that I am happy to engage on, although on that critical issue you would appreciate that as the minister I do not get down into what a disposal program looks like. It is done at arm's length and I cannot provide any illumination as to what the price may be, but perhaps subsequently when I hand over to the director-general she may be able to and if we do not know we will take it on notice. If there is any inference—and I doubt that there would be—that there is some sort of preferential freebie or whatever else at taxpayers' expense—

**Mr MILLAR:** No, not at all, Minister.

**Mr BYRNE:**—that would not be the case. It would simply be what the process revealed at the time. If it was such a meritorious purchase, whoever purchased that did very well.

**Mr MILLAR:** Yes, and they are good people.

**Mr BYRNE:** You cannot expect me to know about what the disposal process generates other than it is done in a competitive way and that the outcomes are published.

**Mr MILLAR:** Minister, I agree with what you are saying, but what was the process when the hammer was falling? At \$76 an acre, I think it was under the reserve price. What procedures are in place to say, 'We're right to let that property go at \$76 an acre,' when I think the expectation was worth 25 per cent more than that?

**Mr BYRNE:** The director-general is quite keen to answer this—as keen as she can be anyway—so I will defer to her.

**Dr Woods:** I thank the member for Gregory for the question. In relation to our capital disposal program, you would be aware that the SDS papers each year foreshadow the properties that will be made available. There are costs of holding properties if they are surplus to requirements, and that is taken into account in trying to not prolong holding properties prior to sale if they are no longer being used in the operation, in this case, of QATC. In relation to Manningham, the normal process was followed which is that we engage a commercial agent on our behalf. They run a marketing program the same as any other property owner would run. We have a reserve price set which is not known to the public, so if you are aware of the reserve price I am not quite sure how that would be. The normal process is that we set a reserve price. We have a tolerance around the reserve price and, as a general rule, if the sale is being made to a local business for consolidation of their business and the price offered is at the reserve price or within the tolerance—

**Mr MILLAR:** So what is the tolerance? Is it 10 per cent?

**Dr Woods:** It depends on the property involved and the amount, but that would be a common figure.

**Mr MILLAR:** With all due respect, you said before in a question to—

**CHAIR:** Member for Gregory, just let the DG answer the question you originally put. I have allowed some latitude there, but we cannot have a debate. We just need to get the answer and then you can put a supplementary if you so desire.

**Dr Woods:** The process in the sale of any of our properties is that that tolerance is allowed and on the day the department is represented at the sale. I am actually the accountable officer responsible. A phone call is made to me on the basis of the best and final offer bid and that is compared to both the valuation and the agreed figure that we have in mind for the sale and approval is given for accepting or not accepting the particular offer. We would not normally, as any vendor would not, disclose whether or not the price we received on any particular property was above or below the valuation, but I am advised in this particular case that the independent valuation figure that we received for the property was in fact lower than the sale price.

**CHAIR:** Member for Gregory, do you have one supplementary question?

**Mr MILLAR:** I go back to a question that the member for Condamine asked and you made the statement that the department is very careful not to influence property prices. The fact that it went for \$76 an acre did send shock waves through the property industry in Western Queensland. Was there any consideration to saying, 'We might need to hold on to this and see if we can get a better price'? Does that come into calculations?

**Dr Woods:** There is no doubt at all that we take that into account, but we also take into account, as any property owner would, the cost of owning a property that you are not actually using in an active sense.

**Mr MILLAR:** I understand that.

**Dr Woods:** That is taken into consideration.

**Mr MILLAR:** Did you have a cost on what that was costing you?

**CHAIR:** Member for Gregory, one question at a time, otherwise it becomes a debate.

**Dr Woods:** I make a second comment that in this particular case the department was handling the sale on behalf of the agricultural college. You would, I suspect, as the local member be aware that the QATC has had significant financial challenges in operating through the drought, so there was also consideration given to the fact that while that property was not actually moved in a market sense those funds were not available to be reinvested in the capital improvement program that has been an ongoing focus at QATC to ensure that their facilities meet the safety and operational requirements that that business has.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, I refer to page 3 of the SDS which refers to people in agri and rural businesses being assisted by DAF to respond to challenges and protect environmental values. Does the minister see an issue with the continued decline in the number of dairy producers in Queensland which since 2000 has gone from approximately 1,500 down to 125 today and, if so, what measures are in place in this budget to fix the problem?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mount Isa for the question. Before I get into the detail of my response about the dairy industry, he would be well aware of the script that the deregulation of the dairy industry laid out for dairy production. With the adjustment schemes that came with the deregulation—well before my time and your time in this place—the trajectory in many ways was inevitable. It was something that was highly contentious at the time, but the industry came to a position and there was a very substantial adjustment scheme—at least planned for and, from what I can read, partially implemented—to adjust the east coast dairy industry. There was no doubt even at that point that the decline in numbers of producers was expected, particularly in Queensland. That was pretty much understood. That is why there were the adjustment schemes that complemented it.

It does concern me. I have recently had meetings with QDO, talking very much about where we are now and what can be done in the future. I am encouraged by their innovation and productivity. I can tell you without any doubt that we are keen to see them prosper within a particular type of market that they appeal to. I am particularly keen to see what we can do with their export in niche areas. We are not going to pull on the bulk milk production that you see in some of the bigger production areas. There are opportunities going forward.

I have indicated to them quite clearly that we are willing to work hand in glove with them as much as we possibly can, because it is certainly not my ambition to see the dairy industry disappear from Queensland. This idea that there is any such proposal on the table is not true. We are trying to assist

them. I have talked to them about how we might sit down and specifically target more investment and more export orientation without diminishing necessarily the fresh milk production that is a focal point of many producers in Queensland.

The estimated gross value of the industry, as you may be aware, is \$233 million presently. We invested \$850,000 into dairy research and development and extension. This was bolstered by an additional \$650,000 in external funding. DAF R&D is focused on improving the profitability of the dairy industry by lowering feed costs particularly. Trials at the DAF University of Queensland research dairy at Gatton have shown that significantly improved margins can be achieved by using alternative forages produced on-farm rather than more expensive supplements and grains. The extension activities to encourage producers to adopt on-farm high-forage feed systems have included a series of workshops held in nine dairy regions, with supporting online videos summarising the feed system trials. There have been four field days conducted on early-adopting farms to provide regional dairy farmers with real-life demonstrations of production benefits. A recently completed independent impact assessment of the C4 milk project found that it had an estimated net present value of \$24.1 million, with a benefit-cost ratio of 5.2 to one.

**Mr KATTER:** Can I interrupt you there?

**CHAIR:** Is that a supplementary question?

**Mr KATTER:** Yes. Along that same line, has there been any work or studies to your knowledge of the effectiveness of cooperatives and the role they can play, particularly in the wake of some of those price shocks that have been experienced, and how they might be able to disseminate the value of the industry back to all parts of the industry and not just some?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. It is a reasonable question. I will defer to the director-general, who may be able to enlighten you, but I have been involved in discussions about prospects like cooperatives. I am into collective representation and collective bargaining. That is why I am on this side of the table. I have no problem whatever in cooperative arrangements for groups of producers negotiating as a group. In fact, my view of the world is that that is the best way to do things, rather than one-on-one relationships, but no-one would be surprised to hear me say that. I have had discussions with producers about that and the role and possibilities of cooperatives going forward.

I cannot attest to whether there is any contemporary work being done in our space about cooperatives in the dairy industry, but I am amenable to the idea that collective representation and the prosecution of arrangements is a much more equalising process than any individual negotiation in an unbalanced set of arrangements. I encourage cooperative arrangements, even if it is a loose cooperative of common purpose rather than a more formal industry piece, because I think it is a better way to get an outcome. I cannot tell you, unless the director-general can advise me otherwise. I will refer to the director-general and she can enlighten us further.

**Dr Woods:** I refer to the deputy director-general of agriculture to respond.

**Mr Letts:** The member would be aware of Norco. There are many farmers in Queensland who operate in a cooperative arrangement. In addition, under the ACCC arrangements there are provisions for dairy farmers to collectively bargain with processors. The federal government has some funding available at the moment to support cooperatives in agriculture. My understanding is that there are several groups of producers in Queensland who are looking at accessing that funding.

We are also in discussions at the moment with QDO in relation to a range of different ways that we might be able to support them, including smaller processors than others that might work in a cooperative arrangement at a local level.

**Mr MADDEN:** My question relates to the controversial decision by the Commonwealth government to move the headquarters of the Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority from Canberra in the ACT to the New England district in New South Wales. Regarding your department's oversight of the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Queensland) Act 1994, what consultation did the Commonwealth government have with you, or DAF, prior to the announcement that the APVMA was moving from the ACT to the New England district?

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

**Mr MILLAR:** Point of order. Where is this in the SDS and how does this relate to the budget?

**CHAIR:** The matter does not have to be referred to in the SDS, but I will ask the question of relevance. It is page 3. Continue.

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. It is not surprising that members of the opposition are a little bit sensitive on this one. I am aware that DAF officers were advised of the Australian government's intention to relocate the APVMA outside of Canberra, but at no stage was DAF formally requested to provide its views. It may not be a surprise to the committee that Barnaby Joyce did not consult with me before he announced that the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority would be moving to New England. I must admit that the lack of consultation did not surprise me, as Barnaby does not often ring me for chats about moving sections of his department without a business case, but I was surprised to see that the APVMA, as part of its Armidale relocation strategy, listed among its partners the federal, state and territory governments. This state was not consulted about the move. What is more surprising about the move of the APVMA is that Townsville and my home town of Rockhampton were both identified in the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee report as being eligible for the relocation. Apparently, we did not get a look-in. Queensland misses out on this alleged decentralisation.

There is no business case that even justifies this, with the loss of staff, except the employment of an executive director for relocation operations and the establishment of a transition team, because of the way in which this move has been mishandled. The director and his team's priorities appear to be to review the business models to inform APVMA's digital strategy to enhance the online delivery of their services, improve customer services and enable parts of the workforce to work remotely. It sounds like they are not confident of the relocation of the office without staff being left behind. It seems that the coalition has failed to realise that there should be business cases when making multimillion dollar decisions, or you get this policy-on-the-run situation.

What this poorly-thought-out policy means for Queensland is still unknown, but many staff have indicated that they will not be moving and some have already left the organisation. DAF is aware that APVMA is facing significant resourcing challenges, particularly to retain the highly specialist regulatory scientists. Scientists who have traditionally been involved in residue risk assessments are highly technical. Their expertise cannot be easily replaced for a variety of reasons, including there being a lack of trained professionals in the field.

Limitations on available resources may contribute to APVMA processing delays in product registration application proposals. These delays will negatively impact on Queensland producers. I can say from my recent trips throughout Queensland that those delays are now evident. I have received a number of comments to that effect, most recently during one of my visits to our own research station about the capacity of APVMA to deliver outcomes in a timely way. Various producers across Queensland are increasingly concerned about what appears to be increased delays in the approval process for chemicals that are desperately needed for application in their industry.

This is a pretty poor example of 'crash or crash through' from the Deputy Prime Minister who, surprisingly to some, has made the APVMA happily parachute into his own electorate. I think it is a matter of grave concern to certainly this government and of grave concern to many of our producers who rely on those services being maintained.

**Mr MADDEN:** I previously asked you a question about the impact of white spot disease on the prawn industry in Queensland. Could you outline to the committee what is being done to assist prawn farmers affected by white spot disease?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. I have already reflected on some of the issues around white spot. Members of the committee would be aware that, so far, the Queensland government has outlaid more than \$17 million on the biosecurity response to white spot disease. Prawn farmers on the Logan and Albert river catchments have suffered the closure of their businesses as a result of the disease and face a considerable period of uncertainty.

Today I can announce that those prawn farmers can apply for up to \$3 million in low-interest finance to aid their recovery. These loans are tailored specifically to enable prawn farmers to improve biosecurity controls, diversify their farming to include other marine species, and improve the productivity and viability of their enterprises. Since the disease was detected, it has been my priority to ensure that those business owners who wish to remain in the industry get the help they need to invest in improved biosecurity infrastructure, new technology and practices to improve their long-term sustainability and a return to a disease-free production status.

The low-interest loans are administered by the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority, have no fees or charges and have concessional rates that are fixed for one year, three years or five years. The loan periods are up to 20 years. Prawn farmers can contact QRIDA free on 1800623946 and receive the full details of the assistance available. QRIDA staff will also attend an

Australian Prawn Farmers Association symposium on the Gold Coast on 1 August and 2 August to discuss finance operations for farmers. Those staff will be available to speak directly to prawn farmers about white spot disease concessional loans. They will also be able to outline the low-interest sustainability and first-start loans that can be accessed by those in the aquaculture industry.

I add that, up until the point of the decision being made to run fallow, there was some reservation or uncertainty from those producers. Now that that piece is in place, I am confident that there will be more interest from those farmers who wish to continue with this loan arrangement that has been put in place by the Queensland government.

**CHAIR:** Thank, Minister.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, will you outline the latest projects that tackle wild dogs?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Mackay. I am pleased to advise the committee that an additional five feral pest projects are being funded under the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative. As a direct result of those five projects, seven additional wild dog officers will be employed with the specific task of reducing the threat posed by wild dogs in regional communities. There will be three wild dog coordinators to cover Western Queensland who will be assisting landholders with their wild dog control. There will also be an additional local government officer for Barcoo Shire Council, Winton Shire Council, Maranoa Regional Council and Barcaldine Regional Council. These new employees will work directly with local government and landholders to increase their feral animal management and planning skills. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is also working with Bulloo and Southern Downs shire councils to finalise similar projects. The five projects will see \$1.9 million invested over three years and will bring a total state investment into the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative to \$9.7 million with \$2 million from the federal government. They bring the total number of projects rolling out in Queensland to 23, all set for completion over the next two to three years.

The Queensland Feral Pest Initiative is a major regional initiative bringing the promise of an end to the damage and destruction caused by wild dogs in the central west, south-west, Goondiwindi and Maranoa areas. The Palaszczuk government's clear focus is on projects that are providing jobs and boosting local economies as well as delivering an integrated approach to pest management. I want to make it clear that these projects and the funding that I have just described is separate to the \$1 million announced in this year's state budget for exclusion fencing. The oversight group which oversees the projects is currently reviewing the options for that \$1 million to be rolled out. By its actions and commitment the Palaszczuk government is maintaining a coordinated and determined fight against feral and exotic pests.

**Mr MADDEN:** Minister, with reference to question on notice No. 9, can you outline for the committee how do stocking groups apply for the SIPS funding for either projects or new inclusions?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question. Queensland's successful Stock Impoundment Permit Scheme for recreational freshwater fishing was expanded in July 2016. There are now 63 stock impoundments in the state where a SIP is required to fish. Almost \$800,000, which is made up of 75 per cent of the money anglers have paid for their stock impoundment permits, is going back to local stocking groups to purchase native fish fingerlings and also covers scheme administration costs. This restocking improves the fishing experience and provides a big attraction for those who like to wet a line. A new guideline is being developed to outline the process for stocking groups to apply to Fisheries Queensland to use their grant for activities other than stocking. Stocking groups are issued their funding in June each year and it is anticipated that stocking groups will be able to submit an application in September each year to have alternative uses considered and approved ahead of the main stocking period in November. This will enable each stocking group to consider the best use of their funding each year and plan accordingly.

Fish stocking groups can apply to use some of the funds from permit sales for projects to enhance recreational fishing in the SIPS impoundment. This could include anything from research or improved facilities to make the location even more desirable to anglers. Anglers will tell you that when they go fishing they also go spending. They spend big on tackle shops, cafes, restaurants and accommodation. Through the expanded program, fishery stocks will grow and prosper, generating additional revenue and driving tourism opportunities.

A separate guideline has also been developed for adding and removing impoundments to SIPS. This process will require amendments to the Fisheries Regulation of 2008 with standard legislative processes to be applied to such.

**Mrs MILLER:** I have a question in relation to Beef Week 2018 and also 2017. I understand that the department supports the event and also property tours and seminars and I am wondering if you could give us some indication of what may be planned for next year, as well as what happened this year, please?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for Bundamba for the question. It is an area that is particularly close to me obviously because it all occurs in the beef capital of Rockhampton. I would imagine most of the committee is well aware that the beef industry is the biggest game in town in Queensland agriculture, with farm gate value of the cattle industry reaching \$5.86 billion in 2015-16, a record high for the industry. The beef processing sector, which, it has already been pointed out, has two major plants adjacent to Rockhampton, is the largest manufacturing industry. So beef is important to Queensland and Beef Week is the showcase event for industry and consumers.

The Beef Australia exposition, known locally as Beef Week, is held every three years and has proven to be a successful platform for business engagement and investment in the beef and cattle industry. Beef Week 2018 is now only nine months and 15 days away. The expositions have delivered substantial economic benefits to the Rockhampton region with national and international interest and visitor numbers having grown substantially since the event's conception.

It is not only the Rockhampton region that benefits greatly from Beef Week, the value to producers will benefit pastoral knowledge in the member for Gregory's own area, as he would well know, and the member for Mount Isa's area, with producers coming from all over the state and, in fact, all over Australia. The Queensland government has committed \$1 million to the 2018 exposition, made up of \$500,000 in cash and \$500,000 of in-kind support. That is a doubling of our cash support. That representation was on the back of the committee coming to me as a local member principally to advocate for that some time ago. It is something I am very proud to have supported. That doubling of assistance, greatly appreciated by the committee, will help Beef Week 2018 be better than ever.

Blair Angus, the chairman of Beef Australia, was very appreciative when the announcement was made. I quote—

This is a great commitment from the Palaszczuk government and I would like to thank Minister Byrne for his continuing support. We are delighted that the government has doubled its financial contribution to what will be our 11th expo in our 30th year. It is especially welcome 18 months or so ahead of the event as it gives us some certainty as we make preparations for what is certainly the most important event of its kind in Australia.

My department is leading and coordinating the whole-of-government interaction with Beef Australia and is drawing on regionally based staff with previous event experience to ensure that the planning runs smoothly and successfully. Queensland government agencies delivering key services around trade and investment, business development, natural resource management, workplace safety, transport and road infrastructure, environmental protection and animal biosecurity will all have hands-on presence for Beef Week 2018. Those on the committee would be well aware that an event such as Beef Week is unlike any other conference or event as biosecurity and animal welfare matters need to be properly planned and executed during the week as there are visitors not only from around Australia, but from all over the world. The international component is an incredibly important element of the event. DAF staff will be working on site prior to the event to ensure that adequate biosecurity preparations are in place.

I would like to go on record now to express my thanks to all of the DAF staff who are going to be involved in this event. In 2015 Beef Week generated \$74 million in local expenditure resulting in an estimated .4 per cent increase in gross regional domestic product. My department and myself have a very, very close working relationship with the committee and we are working very, very hard to make sure this becomes even better than what it has been in the past, which has been an outstanding event for the beef industry in Australia and internationally.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, if I could refer you to budget measures page 31, improving beef supply chains, I note there is no funding allocated in this financial year. Has the beef supply chain study been finalised and, if it has, when will that report be released?

**Mr BYRNE:** I do not accept the premise. The beef supply chain funding, from recollection, was \$700,000 I think last year. That \$700,000 was for new supply chain studies to assess the location of future abattoir investment. My understanding is that that program is ongoing. The money has been put up. It is continuing to roll forward. The Queensland government, as I said, allocated \$700,000 to commission a program of studies on improving beef supply chains to support and inform investment in the beef industry and grow jobs across Queensland driven by high-level interest and development of new abattoirs across Queensland, which I reflected on before. There are 22 new projects ranging from concepts only through to proposals that are much more well developed, as I reflected on earlier.

**Mr LAST:** When will that study be released?

**CHAIR:** Let the minister finish answering the question before we start debating.

**Mr BYRNE:** The budget papers that I have access to say that there is \$50,000 estimated actual going forward in 2016-17 and \$650,000 in 2017-18. Am I reading off a different sheet of music? I might pass to the director-general to clarify that.

**Dr Woods:** In relation to this item, this is an error in the budget papers. This project has been re-lifted in terms of the timing. There was \$50,000 expended in the first part of the project in 2016-17. The remaining \$650,000 has been rolled forward by Treasury into 2017-18 and, as the minister has just outlined, will cover a range of activities, in particular a supply chain and abattoir study which is an analysis of the beef cattle supply chain and evaluation of the commercial viability of a range of new locations that are currently being proposed and considered for processing and new supply chains which have value adding opportunities for beef products. Our intention is that that part of the study will be finished by September 2017. As is often the way with outsourced projects, the majority of the payment will be at the end of the project.

There is also an investment outlook study which is a future investment outlook for the Queensland beef supply chain which is planned to be completed by December 2017. The initial \$50,000 was used for a consultancy undertaken by AgForce to look at the supply chain implications of defence land acquisitions that were planned in both Central Queensland and in the Townsville hinterland.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, if I could refer you to the Auditor-General's report into Biosecurity Queensland's management of agricultural pests and diseases, in particular pages 30, 32 and 47 of that report. Page 32 of the audit states that Biosecurity Queensland has drafted a new 1080 policy. When will the new 1080 policy be released?

**Mr BYRNE:** You have covered a fair bit of ground there. There is a 1080 brief which is very clear. I read quite intently the Auditor-General's report into biosecurity and I thought it was a very, very comprehensive analysis of where we are at. I was very appreciative of that report because it certainly gave third-party effect to the sorts of things that were in my mind. I recommend that all members of the committee make sure that they read that report, because it is a good statement and a good snapshot of where we are at. It maps out the sorts of things that we need to be doing into the future.

As for the 1080 piece that goes with that, the changes by the Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority as to how the poison sodium fluoroacetate, or 1080 as it is commonly known, is regulated in Queensland will ensure the use of 1080 in Queensland is nationally consistent. DAF is working to ensure the smooth transition, as the regulation change will limit some of the current baiting options, particularly for feral pigs. DAF has commenced additional research to support an application to the APVMA to enable practical methods for feral pig baiting to continue.

Queensland Health is the responsible agency for the state regulation of some vertebrate poisons and DAF officers are working with them to ensure landholders have access to vertebrate toxins for the control of feral animals. Landowners can now apply to Queensland Health to receive an approval to purchase and use commercially available 1080 baits and the recently released 1080 capsules for use in canid pest ejectors, as well as baits containing a new toxin. Landholders will continue to be able to source fresh meat baits and commercial baits from local government offices without the need for Queensland Health approval.

**Mr LAST:** Taking that one step further, can you advise the number of rural supply stores and their locations that are currently selling pre-prepared wild dog baits?

**Mr BYRNE:** I will ask my head of biosecurity to come forward. He can probably illuminate us on that.

**Mr Thompson:** I do not have the figure of the number of stores that currently have 1080 manufactured baits available. Obviously, there is availability of manufactured baits in Queensland as distributed through both the state government in the past and local government. A lot of local governments are suppliers. There has been a move to make baits more commonly available through commercial suppliers. Some of the changes that are happening nationally are also impacting, as the minister outlined, on the supply of 1080. We have had a strong approach to supporting 1080 baiting in this state and will continue to represent Queensland on that. Some of the research that we are doing to maintain access to 1080, because it is such a critical issue for us, will continue. I do not have that figure, but I will try to access it.

**Mr LAST:** If you would not mind—particularly at stores such as DJ's Produce in Charleville, for example. Is it available from there and at what other locations? That would be much appreciated.



**CHAIR:** The minister has to decide if it is to be taken on notice.

**Mr BYRNE:** We will take that on notice.

**Mr MILLAR:** Minister, I refer to the decision to dump Queensland's protected zone status for bovine Johne's disease after the previous LNP government went to extensive lengths to successfully deal with a large outbreak of the disease on a property at Bajool near Rockhampton in 2012, which the minister is well aware of. Minister, what are you and the government doing to assist cattle producers who are now very confused about where they stand as far as their herd status is concerned? What are you doing to assist producers who are worried about how to deal with the decisions, the processes and the paperwork they now face?

**Mr BYRNE:** I thank the member for the question, but I will contest parts of the preamble to the question. Firstly, I do not know how you can describe the effort of the previous government as 'successful'. When in opposition, Tim Mulherin and I made a deliberate choice not to politicise bovine Johne's disease, as you well know.

**Mr MILLAR:** Absolutely.

**Mr BYRNE:** You were privy to that. When I came to government, those initial meetings on bovine Johne's involved a levy—equal payments from the state and from industry. Two-and-a-half years later or thereabouts, we came to government and found that there had been absolutely no movement on the industry side of it, not enabled or facilitated by government. I felt a moral obligation to make up the difference from the available funds that we had, in order to help those producers who had been given an impression or an indication that that level of support would be forthcoming from their industry colleagues and government. When I first came to office I filled that gap as one of the first decisions we made. We at least gave moral support to those producers who had been so badly served by the process over 2½ years.

The national review into bovine Johne's disease is a matter of record. The Australian government's leadership in how we deal with bovine Johne's disease was always something that the Queensland government would be sympathetic to. There is absolutely no reason why we would not be sympathetic to the national review's recommendation. We have simply gone forward, as any sensible government would, with that national alignment.

We have also invested heavily through many of our stakeholder agencies, particularly AgForce. The national Livestock Biosecurity Network has been used to promote the new arrangements and tools within industry. There has been a considerable effort to educate on the implications of the change in management arrangements with industry. There have been a considerable number of engagement sessions and tools available for producers to engage on. It has been going on for a considerable period, because the government's intention to move to, essentially, an onsite on-farm management arrangement has been well flagged.

I would simply say that, for those producers who are having particular issues, there has been an extensive period to prepare for these changes. Extensive efforts have been made by government and peak bodies to engage in these changes. It is disappointing that that level of feedback is being represented by the member. However, I can only assure him that all measures that could be taken to manage this transition over an extended period have been attempted by government and by industry. We will get there. I have no problem saying with some confidence that the management arrangements and on-site biosecurity responses will be delivered.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, I note in the SDS at page 19 that there have been substantial cuts to grants and subsidies. In fact, there is a reduction from \$32.4 million last year to \$8.5 million this year. Can you outline what initiatives have been cut from that program?

**Mr BYRNE:** Again, given the level of detail and comparison that you are presenting, I will take that on notice and get back to you in the required period.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, I refer to the SDS at page 32 and the performance statement. How many students are enrolled in the residential programs at Emerald and Longreach? How does that compare with the past three years? Does the department still provide scholarships to the colleges?

**Mr BYRNE:** We do have the numbers of students and eventually they will materialise in front of me. I can assure you that those numbers are well known to us. The numbers of interactions with students are well known to us, of course. The fundamental problem that confronts the colleges is increasing those numbers. There are no two ways about that. We see that the future of those colleges depends on many things. You are talking about total student numbers. Is this specifically about residential students, rather than student interactions?

**Mr LAST:** How many students are enrolled in the residential programs at Emerald and Longreach? How does it compare with the past three years? Do you still provide scholarships, as occurred under the previous government?

**Mr BYRNE:** The annual average full-time student number semester commencements, which is about the closest that I can get to that, is: 2014, 77; 2015, 71; 2016, 113; and 2017, semester 1, 132. That is the annual average full-time student number semester commencements. That is the best number I can give you at this point. That is the two combined.

**Mr LAST:** Are you still providing scholarships?

**Mr BYRNE:** I might go to the CEO of the colleges.

**Mr Tobin:** In short, yes, there are a number of scholarships through a number of different schemes that we provide across the residential colleges. I do not have the figures at my fingertips now, but a number of private scholarships are given and there are a number of government scholarships. We provide scholarships within the organisation ourselves. As a classic example, the cotton grower associations provide a very significant scholarship, as do some of the mining firms. I could take the numbers on notice.

**Mr LAST:** If you would not mind, I would appreciate that, through the minister.

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

**Mr BYRNE:** I am happy to take that on notice.

**Mr MILLAR:** Minister, I refer to page 28 of the SDS under 'Budget Measures'. Can you advise exactly how much new money is being provided for cluster fencing in 2017-18? A couple of questions ago you mentioned it was about \$1 million. Minister, can you confirm that it is \$1 million? I think you have, but is that new money or is it money carried over from the last financial year?

**Mr BYRNE:** I am advised that that is new money. Further, you would be aware that some of the previous money is still washing through.

**Mr MILLAR:** That is what I was trying to clarify.

**Mr BYRNE:** These things take time. There is still money washing through the system from the previous allocations, but that is new money. Mr Chair, there is a number of clarifications that we would like to get on the record.

**CHAIR:** This would be an appropriate time, thank you.

**Dr Woods:** There are three things that I need to clarify. Firstly, in answer to the first question I was asked today in relation to page 13 of the SDS, which was in relation to what was identified as a \$14.2 million income difference, I stated that I was explaining the difference between 2017-18 and 2018-19. In fact, the difference that I was commenting on was between 2016-17 and 2017-18. I record that correction.

Secondly, in relation to a question from the member for Gregory about the proposed position of a manager to be located in Longreach, I would like to advise that the position that is now being proposed is not a direct replacement of the position formerly held by Mr Lew Markey from our department in Longreach. It is in fact a position at a higher level and with higher and wider management responsibilities.

Thirdly, I would like to quickly comment on the question asked by the member for Bundamba in relation to statistics on sexual harassment. I should have stated previously that that is clearly a matter that is not tolerated in any of the bodies within the portfolio. It is too complicated for us to be able to pull together that data today. As a result of privacy laws and, obviously, the sensitivity of these matters, to be sure that we are adding together like for like or comparing like for like from the different bodies, that will take a little time to step through, while being sure that we do not breach any privacy requirements. We will continue to take that one on notice so that we are sure we can provide comparability.

In relation to the question about the \$700,000 figure for 2016-17 in Budget Paper No. 4, I commented that the \$650,000 had been deferred from 2016-17 to 2017-18. What I did not explain was that Budget Paper No. 4 does not actually include the impact of deferrals or retiming as per Treasury advice on how the financials are presented. That is simply a presentation issue in the sense that, for the money was allocated in 2016-17, the activities were started in 2016-17 and the finalisation of paying for some of them will roll forward into 2017-18, but they have been presented as per the longstanding norm for the Treasury presentation of budget figures, because the \$700,000 allocation was actually made in 2016-17.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Minister, did you want to say anything before we wrap up?

**Mr BYRNE:** Firstly, it has come to my attention that during the course of the committee's deliberations the shadow minister has issued a media statement that accuses me of misleading the committee in my opening remarks and in answers to questions about the department's staffing. I would like to answer those allegations and place the facts on the record. I am more than happy to repeat my assertion that there have been no cuts to departmental staff. Given that the department needs to be ready to respond quickly to any emergent biosecurity situation and other issues, the department needs to maintain flexibility within the FTEs available to the department.

The estimated FTEs for the department in 2014-15 referred to by the member for Burdekin were nominal thresholds for the department's budget management purposes. The actual number of occupied positions during that year or for any year fluctuates. The difference of 79 FTEs does not reflect a reduction in actual staff. Instead, it is the difference between the nominal threshold in 2015-16 and the more realistic representation of actual staffing numbers, which enables DAF to facilitate a flexible, agile and modern core workforce.

DAF is also supported by a network of staff from state and local government, as well as partnerships with universities in delivering relevant services to our customers at a location where they are most needed and only for the period they are needed. The opposition has been in denial about the cuts they made to the department for years and continues to circulate spurious and unsubstantiated claims that need to be contested.

**Mr MILLAR:** We had more staff when we left.

**Mr BYRNE:** I conclude by thanking the director-general and all of the staff who are present today. I particularly thank those officers of the department of agriculture who played the roles of the committee in our full-blown rehearsals, which I might add were much more challenging and demanding than this committee has been today. The notion of 'train hard, fight easy' has been well proven by today's events.

I am thankful and grateful to the staff of the department of agriculture who keep the welfare and interests of agriculture in this state well protected and advocated for. It is a privilege for me to be their minister. Their professionalism and dedication are beyond reproach. I strive to live up to their expectations.

**CHAIR:** I remind all members of the committee that there are standing orders dealing with issues relating to misleading the House. I suggest that the appropriate way to deal with those concerns is to follow the standing orders.

The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the agriculture, fisheries and rural economic development portfolios has expired. On behalf of the committee I thank the minister, the director-general and all of the officials for their attendance. The transcript of this session of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's website within two hours. I remind you that the deadline for questions taken on notice and clarifying material is 5 pm on Tuesday, 25 July 2017.

The committee will now adjourn for a break. The hearings will resume at 2 pm for the examination of the estimates for the portfolios of the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef.

**Proceedings suspended from 1.32 pm to 2.00 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 D Cohen, Chief of Staff

Ms E Fentiman, Senior Policy 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 Service and Regulation

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

Ms T O'Shea, Director-General

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

Mr W Oestreich, Deputy Director-General, Strategy Policy and Racing Industry Governance



**CHAIR:** The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2017 for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef. The committee will examine the minister's portfolio until 6.30 pm. We will suspend proceedings at 4 pm for a half hour break. We have a number of visiting members. Jo-Ann Miller, the member for Bundamba, and Dr Christian Rowan, the member for Moggill, are joining us.

I remind those present today that these proceedings are similar to parliament and subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The same rules for questions that apply in parliament apply here. I refer to standing orders 112 and 115. Therefore, questions should be brief and relate to one issue and should not contain lengthy or subjective preambles or arguments or opinion.

I intend to guide the proceedings today so the relevant issues can be explored without imposing artificial time limits and to ensure that there is adequate opportunity to address questions from government and non-government members of the committee. On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, the director-general, officials and members of the public to the hearing. For the benefit of Hansard, I would ask officials to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or director-general.

The committee will examine the estimates for the Environment and Heritage Protection parts of the portfolio from 2 pm to 4 pm. We will then have a 30-minute break and then continue with the National Parks and Great Barrier Reef parts of the portfolio from 4.30 to 6.30 pm. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Environment and Heritage Protection parts of the portfolio open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you would like to make a five minute opening statement that would be greatly appreciated.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to make some introductory remarks. I would like to thank the committee for taking some time to look at what we have achieved in this portfolio in the last 12 months.

Significant milestones have been achieved in the portfolios of Environment and Heritage Protection, the Great Barrier Reef, and National Parks in the last year and we will be just as busy in coming months. We have increased the operating budget for the Department of Environment and

Heritage Protection by \$23.5 million to \$231.1 million to bolster the work of the environmental regulator and to rebuild front-line services. We have made a \$9.3 million investment in 2017-18 for more officers on the ground and to identify environmental risks and enhance mine rehabilitation. This includes the creation of 60 new front-line and front-line support jobs, many of which are in regional Queensland.

This move to restore and rebuild the front line follows a program of savage cuts inflicted by the former Newman-Nicholls LNP government which led to a staffing reduction of over 20 per cent in the environment department alone. Thanks to those cuts, compliance monitoring and action was heavily reduced, contact and support for landholders was discontinued and most institutional partnerships lapsed.

We are working on things Queenslanders care about like healthy koala populations in the south-east. Earlier today I announced grants for cutting edge technology that will help find and protect our koalas. We have come a long way from the Newman-Nicholls government version of koala management, wasting money buying habitat in LNP held seats that had as little as one koala in residence, refusing to accept scientific recommendations to list the koala as vulnerable and axing the jobs of koala specialists in the environment department.

Possibly the most damaging act was scrapping laws that saw tree-clearing rates skyrocket in Queensland. Just today we have seen more evidence of the impact of that reckless decision. In the latest species technical committee report released today we saw that land clearing has been directly responsible for two plant species becoming extinct in the wild and has further threatened many of the 739 threatened flora species and 210 threatened fauna species in Queensland.

We know Queenslanders do not want to see our native wildlife become extinct. That is why we are taking sensible tree-clearing laws to the next election. We also know they want to see our greatest natural asset the Great Barrier Reef, protected. The Palaszczuk government has kept the Great Barrier Reef off the World Heritage in danger list. In their most recent decision on the World Heritage status of the reef, the World Heritage Committee praised our efforts. They said—

There has undoubtedly been an unprecedented level of increased effort and this effort is a marked departure from past practices and deserves full recognition.

We will continue with our efforts. That is why our latest budget delivered record funding for reef protection—\$246.5 million over the next five years. This financial year alone the Palaszczuk government will invest more than \$63 million protecting the reef. Again, this is in sharp contrast to the previous Newman-Nicholls LNP government. They chose not to enforce the legislated minimum standards that exist to help protect the reef from damaging pollution and they sacked the 39 reef protection officers along the way. That is the difference between the LNP and the Palaszczuk Labor government. Our budgets are about building things, providing services and protecting our environment not cutting and selling and destroying.

In fact, thanks to a \$40 million commitment in our latest budget we are going to create a new ecotourism industry to rival Tasmania's. The Newman-Nicholls government talked a lot about ecotourism, but they did not deliver one project. Our funding is already going towards job creating capital works and infrastructure. This funding also supported the recovery of national parks affected by Tropical Cyclone Debbie, with priority funding for parks in the Whitsunday islands and Mackay.

I would now 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 the committee might have.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Moggill for his questions.

**Dr ROWAN:** With the reference to the SDS pages 1 and 2, what is going on with the management of your department? The Working for Queensland survey with respect to your department shows a worrying slump in staff confidence—the performance is assessed against clear criteria—and learning and development as being negative and so too performance feedback. I table a document from the Working for Queensland survey 2016.

**CHAIR:** Leave is granted to table that document.

**Dr ROWAN:** What is going on? Are you spending too much time on the road to Murrumba now that you have abandoned the people of Mount Coot-tha?

**Mr MADDEN:** I have a point of order, Mr Chair. That is a statement rather than a question.

**CHAIR:** That is an imputation. I ask that it be withdrawn and you recast your question.

**Dr ROWAN:** I withdraw, however I would like the minister to answer my question about the decline in the Working for Queensland survey and what that means for leadership and culture in his department.

**CHAIR:** Before you answer, Minister, we will get you a copy of the tabled document.

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Moggill for his question and his concern for my time spent on the road. The Working for Queensland survey is obviously a very important tool in assessing how our public servants are doing their jobs and how satisfied they are at work. What was clear to me from the day that I walked into 400 George Street, the headquarters for the environment department, was how shell-shocked people were after the cruel, mean cuts that had been inflicted upon them by the Newman-Nicholls government. What we now know is that those cuts were assessed according to a pain threshold ranking. The LNP assessed their cuts to environmental programs according to which would cause the most—

**Dr ROWAN:** I have a point of order, Mr Chair. The question was about the Working for Queensland survey 2016 and why there has been a decline in the satisfaction of staff. The question was specifically about the Working for Queensland survey 2016.

**Dr MILES:** As I understand it the question is about—

**CHAIR:** The minister's answer is relevant to the question.

**Dr MILES:** The 2016 annual opinion survey compares how satisfied our employees were in the second year of our government to the first year of our government. In the first year people were very happy because it was the first year they did not have to put up with the cruel, painful cuts of the Newman-Nicholls government. From those peaks we still see that there are things that can be done to make it better. The results speak more to the impact the previous government had on morale and the relief that was felt when we took over rather than any other trend.

I might take the opportunity to say a bit more about the results. This year's survey focused on two areas—workload and health and reducing bureaucracy. Agency engagement in the survey increased overall by one per cent. All three key drivers of agency engagement improved by two per cent each. That is positive news. The most significant change was a 27 per cent improvement at the Wet Tropics Management Authority. The other divisions remained relatively stable.

In response to the survey results, I am advised that the agency is investigating ways to increase the take-up of flexible work practices. They have invited employees to provide feedback and innovative solutions to reduce red tape. They have delivered a series of workshops and health and wellbeing initiatives, designed and developed EHP's diversity and inclusion strategy and increased access to training and development opportunities for staff. I think they are all sensible responses to the feedback we received.

**Dr ROWAN:** I refer to the SDS pages 1 and 2 and objective 5 where it refers to maintaining contemporary governance and accountability frameworks. Do you operate a personal gmail email account and have you used it in connection with your ministerial duties?

**CHAIR:** I question the relevance of that question.

**Dr ROWAN:** Point of order, Mr Chair. It refers to the SDS and objective 5—maintaining contemporary governance and accountability frameworks. This goes to the heart of the operation of government and the portfolio area here. Asking the minister whether he operates a gmail email account and whether he uses it in connection with his ministerial duties goes to the fundamental of transparency, accountability and integrity in government.

**CHAIR:** I take your point of order. Minister, you are welcome to answer as you see fit.

**Dr MILES:** I do note that this question is not particularly relevant to our interrogation of the SDS. My use of private email has been well discussed publicly. I do not have anything to add to what has been detailed in the media, except to make the comment that we are two questions into estimates and the LNP has already run out of questions about the budget. They got one question in about the agency and one question in about environmental protection.

**Dr ROWAN:** I have a point of order, Mr Chair. This goes to the fundamentals of integrity, accountability and transparency in government and the operation of the parliament.

**CHAIR:** Have you finished your answer, Minister?

**Dr MILES:** Hence I am answering it even though it is clearly out of order. This week the LNP have done nothing relevant to the budget, nothing relevant to the administration of this state. They have

used the final estimates of this term to talk about nothing but the use of personal email, which in my case involved emailing a document to myself to print to take to a meeting, emailing myself the word 'test' to see if my email was working, emailing myself the text of a letter that I was working on for the LNP member for Gympie to assist him with one of his constituents. That has been very clearly dealt with publicly. Here we are one question into my estimates and that is all the LNP has left to talk about. That does not surprise me too much. Their record on environment and heritage protection is not worth defending. They do not have much to talk about and certainly not much to criticise in this budget, which is a very good budget.

**Dr ROWAN:** I raise a point of order. We need to be getting to the fundamentals of communication openness and transparency. The minister is now debating this.

**CHAIR:** That is not a point of order. Minister, have you finished your response?

**Dr MILES:** I have a bit more to add. Given the question was out of order, I think some latitude in answering it is not inappropriate.

**CHAIR:** Absolutely.

**Dr MILES:** I do not blame the member for Moggill for having to ask these questions. He did not write these questions. He was given the same questions all the shadow ministers were given by the opposition leader's office. Sometimes I feel sorry for the member for Moggill. The record he has to defend is a pretty woeful one. The task he has in trying to get decent environmental policy through the LNP caucus is not one I envy, having to go and beg the member for Hinchinbrook to support sensible environment policy.

**Dr ROWAN:** I raise a point of order. We are going to the debate again. The minister is not substantially answering the question. Did he operate a personal Gmail email account and has he used it in connection with his ministerial duties? It is a yes or no answer, Mr Chair.

**Dr MILES:** I think I have answered it pretty clearly.

**CHAIR:** I think you have answered the question.

**Dr MILES:** I think it is also not inappropriate to question the tactics that the LNP are using in asking questions clearly out of order with the process. It goes to their inability to talk about environment policy because their record is so bad and their policies are so bad.

**CHAIR:** We might move on, Minister.

**Dr ROWAN:** Director-General, have either you or departmental officers ever been requested to forward an email to either the minister's private email account or that of a ministerial staffer?

**Mr Reeves:** From my point of view, never. I would have to take the question on notice because it is broader than me.

**Dr ROWAN:** Could you take that on notice?

**CHAIR:** The minister will have to determine whether he takes a question on notice.

**Dr MILES:** I seek your guidance, Chair, as to whether that question is relevant to the budget. If you deem it relevant, we will take it on notice. If you deem it out of order then it should be deemed out of order.

**CHAIR:** That question is out of order. We will move on.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, is it appropriate for a cabinet minister to use a private email account for official government and/or cabinet business?

**Dr MILES:** I have never used an email account to do ministerial business. This matter has been dealt with substantially and it is on the public record. The opposition knows the substance of this. It was the response to an RTI from their office. After five questions, you have asked one about the agency and four about my use of Gmail. It is a pretty damning indictment on your ability to debate environmental issues.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, I get to ask the questions here. That is the purpose of the opposition.

**CHAIR:** Do you have a question, member for Moggill?

**Dr ROWAN:** I have a further question in relation to emails.

**CHAIR:** Can you please put your next question?

**Dr MILES:** Is it one of yours or off the list from the opposition office?

**Mr MILLAR:** I raise a point of order. Chair, it is the member for Moggill as shadow environment minister asking the questions. I do not think we need to have questions coming back from the minister.

**CHAIR:** With all due respect, member for Gregory, I am the chair of the committee and I will determine who asks questions. Member for Moggill, you have the call.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, did you send material which a right-to-information officer in your department decided was confidential cabinet material from your ministerial account to your personal Gmail email account?

**Dr MILES:** The content of that email has been fully released publicly. The RTI officer, I think, erred excessively in redacting that one line. Since it has been released, the public now know that that one line essentially said that what I was trying to do to assist the LNP member for Gympie and assist his constituent may require going to cabinet because it was potentially contrary to a previous cabinet decision. The content was not cabinet-in-confidence. That cabinet decision had been released publicly.

The line in question related to whether I had the flexibility with an existing cabinet decision to assist the member for Gympie's constituent, who was seeking to extend grazing on her property, which was a lease on a national park—a matter I know the member for Gregory has discussed with me on a number of occasions. To be attacked here by the LNP for doing that is pretty galling.

Let me say something else, though. Even they do not think that should have been redacted for cabinet material because the LNP opposition office have filed an appeal on the decision that redacted that component. They have filed an appeal saying it was not cabinet material. I agree: it was not cabinet material and I have released it for that reason.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, have you ever emailed Mark Bailey's mangocube6 @ yahoo.co.uk email address or received an email address from that address to your private gmail account?

**Dr MILES:** I have no—

**CHAIR:** I want to take some advice on that question. Member for Moggill, I am struggling to see the relevance of this question to the Appropriation Bill. You are now asking questions about the use of a private email to another private email which presumably these individuals have operated for many years. I do not see that there is any relevance to this question.

**Dr ROWAN:** Mr Chair, what I will explain to you is that we are trying to understand the flow of information here. Under the SDS pages 1 and 2 and under objective No. 5 of maintaining contemporary governance and accountability frameworks, I was asking the question as to what information has flowed from the minister's government account to his private Gmail account, then potentially to the mangocube6 address of Minister Bailey and beyond there. I am asking the simple question: has the—

**CHAIR:** Member for Moggill, those are issues that can be dealt with in the parliament. We are here to deal with the Appropriation Bill for the department. I ask you to bring your questions back to the Appropriation Bill.

**Dr ROWAN:** Director-General, in February this year the ABC reported that they had been provided with 'a raft of cabinet briefing notes'. The documents posted on their website appear to be confidential cabinet CBRC submissions from 2012. Director-General, can you confirm whether these documents were provided to the minister or his office?

**Mr Reeves:** I would have to take that question on notice.

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

**Dr MILES:** Does that question relate to the SDS in your view, Mr Chair?

**CHAIR:** Can you clarify the relevance of that question?

**Dr ROWAN:** Again, it goes to the relevance of the functioning of the department and the communication of information. Again, I reference SDS pages 1 and 2.

**Dr MILES:** I can answer the question. The department never provided those documents to me or my office.

**CHAIR:** I ask the member for Moggill to come back to the subject of the bill we are considering.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, in view of your Queensland Climate Adaptation Strategy, with reference to the SDS page 2, are you committed to coalmining here in Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. I know that he himself questions whether climate change is happening here. We saw at the LNP convention on the weekend that the LNP is just one line of climate deniers after climate deniers. They must have sold out of tinfoil hats over at South Bank on the weekend!



What we have said is in line with the Paris treaty that was signed by the LNP Prime Minister, Mr Malcolm Turnbull. That Paris treaty requires developed countries to phase out to achieve net zero emissions as close to 2050 as possible. Queensland's climate transition strategy, which we released last year, commits Queensland to the very same targets that the LNP federal government have committed to.

**Dr ROWAN:** I raise a point of order. It is a very simple yes-or-no question. Is the minister committed to coalmining here in Queensland?

**CHAIR:** That is not a point of order.

**Dr MILES:** It is very clear that coalmining will continue here in Queensland for decades to come. It is also clear from global projections that by the second half of the century developed countries will need to achieve net zero emissions. That means that their energy production will need to be, as far as possible, delivered by renewable energy. Given that something like two-thirds of Queensland's coal exports are coking coal for steel making, not thermal coal for energy production, it is very clear that there will continue to be coalmining in Queensland for decades to come.

**Dr ROWAN:** Again, with reference to the SDS page 2, do you offer your 100 per cent support for the Adani coalmine?

**CHAIR:** How is this relevant to the appropriations?

**Dr ROWAN:** It relates to the Queensland Climate Adaptation Strategy, and that is mentioned in the SDS on page 2. There is a public discussion about coalmining here in Queensland and other places. I am asking the minister if he supports the Adani Carmichael project 100 per cent.

**Dr MILES:** I am happy to take the question, Mr Chair. What I am happy to support is the stringent environmental impact assessment process we have here in Queensland. That is important not just for the sake of our environment but also for community support for ongoing resource projects. That particular project has been through that process. It is heavily conditioned. I had nothing to do with that process, as is appropriate. The scientists in the environment department did that assessment work. The emissions from that project will be accounted for in India.

What I have consistently and always said is that the way to address climate change is not by considering project by project on the supply side of the market but instead by dealing with it on the demand side of the market, country by country, implementing the targets they made in the Paris treaty. I have long advocated that the most efficient way to do that is with an economy-wide mechanism implemented by the national government. That is what we have consistently supported. That particular project is not relevant to the emissions accounted for here in Queensland or nationally.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, with reference to the SDS page 11, how much funding is being provided in this budget to the Environmental Defenders Office in Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. The Environmental Defenders Office provides services to the Queensland community on a range of legal matters relevant to the environment. There are two branches of the Environmental Defenders Office in Queensland. There is a statewide branch as well as the EDO North Queensland. They receive funding under the Attorney-General's program for community legal services as well as a contribution from the environment department of \$133,000 per year over three years. That meets an election commitment that was made by the Labor Party while in opposition to deliver those funds. The remaining \$600,000 over three years is funded by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General through their legal services assistance program. Of that, EDO Queensland will receive \$300,000 and EDO North Queensland will receive \$300,000.

The EDO, like other conservation groups, is important in providing specialist and dedicated conservation efforts across the state. There are strict rules governing how that government funding is used and can be used. It is scrutinised and audited. The EDO must provide the department of justice with a quarterly report on financial expenditure, an annual audited financial statement, a client survey and the organisation's annual report. Given that all of those funds are administered through that community legal service fund, any further questions regarding the funding or how it is administered should be directed to the Attorney-General.

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

**Mrs GILBERT:** I note that today in the *Townsville Bulletin* there is a story titled 'Feds to look at Tully hydro'. I refer to page 7 of the Service Delivery Statements and ask: what impact would this project have on the Wet Tropics World Heritage area?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Mackay. That is a very good and timely question and it goes to the point I was making earlier about just what a tough job the member for Moggill has—on the day of his estimates his mate the member for Hinchinbrook is out there calling for the flooding of thousands of hectares of World Heritage area.

The Wet Tropics World Heritage area has been assessed as the second most irreplaceable World Heritage area in the world. It is home to the world's most ancient tropical rainforests and habitat for significant biodiversity. In an area that is only 0.26 per cent of Australia's land mass we find 50 per cent of our bird species, 65 per cent of Australia's fern species, 60 per cent of Australia's butterflies and 45 per cent of Australia's vertebrate animals.

The crazy pipedream of the Tully-Millstream hydro-electricity scheme has been proposed on a number of occasions—1986, 1989, 1996—but today, in a repeat of the Franklin Dam madness, the member for Hinchinbrook seems to want to bring it back. Most people thought that that project was dead, but he and Northern Territory minister Matt Canavan have been out talking about it today. The proposed scheme will flood some 4,300 hectares of land, 1,290 hectares of which are within the World Heritage area boundary. As if the LNP's record of putting the reef—our other great World Heritage property—in the sights of the World Heritage Committee was not bad enough, now they want to flood the Wet Tropics.

The habitat that would be inundated includes rainforest and significant stands of wet tall eucalypt forest. Those forests are important as a transition community between the rainforest and savannah ecosystems. As well as being home to a unique suite of plant species, they are also home to a number of state and Commonwealth listed threatened species, including the endangered northern bettong and the northern population of two other species of mammals restricted to this forest type, the yellow-bellied glider and the swamp rat.

Significantly, the area also has national heritage listing for its Indigenous cultural values, and any impact on these values would also have to be properly and thoroughly assessed. It begs the question: what is the point of saving the best parts of our country for World Heritage listing if the land and its values are just going to be destroyed? The member for Hinchinbrook is talking about destroying areas of outstanding value when there are already so many renewable energy projects committed and proposed for Northern Queensland thanks to the Palaszczuk government. There are 11 currently committed renewable energy projects in North Queensland that will generate 720 megawatts without flooding the habitat of a single species.

**CHAIR:** I refer to the budget measure called 'Future of Queensland's environmental regulator', and I ask: how will the \$23.3 million of additional funding over four years and the \$5 million ongoing allocated in the budget be used to ensure strong environmental standards in Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, Chair, for that question. I know, because we have had discussions in your electorate office with your constituents, how many of your constituents in Greenslopes are concerned about environmental protection in this state. The funding you have referred to represents a significant investment in boosting our capacity to protect the environment on behalf of Queenslanders. Environmental risk in Queensland has escalated significantly in the last five years with the rates of noncompliance and required regulatory intervention increasing across all regulated industries. With this increased funding the Palaszczuk government will create 60 new front-line and front-line support jobs to bolster the work of Queensland's environmental regulator in the regions.

The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection suffered enormous staff losses under the Newman-Nicholls government which compromised its ability to oversee and ensure compliance with Queensland's environmental laws and regulations. As we said before, they even ranked the cuts they made to my department on a pain ranking. These new jobs continue the process of repairing that damage and ensure we can protect the environment for future generations and provide the resources necessary to take the right action against those that choose to disregard environmental laws and regulations. This additional funding and budget allocation will also be used to enhance the department's environmental services regulation, improving our ability to manage and protect the environment for the benefit of Queenslanders. We are listening to Queenslanders and we will focus our improvements to the environmental regulator on meeting the needs and expectations of the Queensland community.

The funding will enable the public release of more information about EHP's activities as well as those of the industries we regulate. Environmental education for the community will also be boosted. A more informed community means greater community participation in environmental issues. I want the Queensland community to be our eyes and ears, and I want to have a clear view of how the community thinks the department is performing. This will allow us to continually improve and put the community at the centre of our service delivery.

To ensure we understand the needs of communities across Queensland, we will be commissioning independent market research across community groups and the broader Queensland community. I want to know the vision of Queenslanders for the future of environmental protection and regulation in this state, and this work is part of a broader consultation process that will help us to continue to improve and modernise our regulation.

In line with the Palaszczuk government's commitment to improving customer service, the department will also ensure it is at the forefront of technology for data collection and innovative service delivery. This will help to better understand potential issues and risks and lead to better ways to solve environmental issues. The focus will be across four areas: one, expanding business intelligence and functions to identify new and emerging risks; two, improve compliance frameworks by incorporating state-of-the-art technology; three, enhance front-line services for the resolution of community concerns; and, four, improve the capacity to respond to serious environmental issues and crime.

**CHAIR:** With reference to page 3 of the SDS, what is the government doing to tackle the significant environmental and fire risk posed by significant waste tyre stockpiles in Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** Again I thank the member for his question. Nothing illustrates the misguided nature of the LNP's vendetta against Queensland's environment than the decision the Newman-Nicholls government took to deregulate tyre storage in Queensland in 2014. The waste and recycling industry and the tyre sector have regularly raised with me their concerns about how this move has undercut the business of legitimate operators and created an enormous fire and environmental risk.

The lack of regulation in Queensland has led to an increase in the long-term stockpiling of end-of-life tyres with little or no environmental controls. Despite the deregulation of tyre storage, operators undertaking legitimate tyre-recycling activities are still required to hold an environmentally relevant activity approval. This has created an environment where a person can stockpile tyres and significantly undercut legitimate recycling activities as they are not subject to the same regulatory requirements, performance standards and costs.

The lack of regulation also restricts the ability of the government to undertake compliance and enforcement activities to prevent or restrict excessive tyre stockpiling. Clean-up and removal of tyre stockpiles can also incur considerable cost to landholders and presents a significant environmental and human health risk in the event of a fire. This government will reintroduce tyre storage regulations by the end of 2017. New regulations have been developed as part of a comprehensive review of the licensing framework for all waste related activities.

The proposed tyre storage regulations have been reviewed by waste and tyre recycling industry stakeholders and have received generally positive feedback. Broadly, the regulations will require that any sites storing greater than four tonnes, or 500 equivalent passenger tyres, obtain an approval for tyre storage. This is similar to the previous Queensland regulations and consistent with requirements in other Australian states.

A consultation regulatory impact statement addressing the proposed regulatory framework including tyre storage regulations has been released with comments closing on 25 August 2017. Consultation is scheduled to run for a period of eight weeks from release. Upon completion, the process of implementing tyre storage regulations could commence immediately and be in place by the end of the year. Once in place, this will significantly increase the ability of EHP as the regulator to deal with illegal or poorly managed tyre stockpiles.

It is also relevant to note that under Queensland regulations waste tyres are classified as both regulated and trackable waste. Operators transporting tyres must hold an approval and may only deliver the tyres to facilities that are approved to accept them. To ensure tyres are being lawfully managed, tracking information that contains details of the waste generator, transporter and receiving facility must be submitted to the department.

Despite these requirements, industry sources allege that significant volumes of waste tyres are being transported by unlicensed waste transporters and are being stored in volumes that have the potential to cause environmental harm. In response to these allegations, a targeted compliance program that focuses on investigating suspected unlicensed waste tyre transporters, disposal, storage and recycling facilities is currently being undertaken by EHP and is scheduled for completion on 15 September 2017. That program has already identified up to 24 generators, transporters and disposal locations of interest that may be operating without holding a suitable environmental authority.

**CHAIR:** What is the government doing to encourage and incentivise community conservation efforts?

**Dr MILES:** Again, I thank the member for his question. I know there are many local conservation groups in his electorate who are looking closely at these efforts. Last year I had the pleasure of announcing the Queensland government's community sustainability action grants program. This program is allocating \$12 million over three years to eligible recipients for projects which seek to conserve Queensland's natural and built heritage, and undertake research into protecting Queensland's threatened species.

Many of the projects funded under the grant program are encouraging community engagement in environmental conservation activities. For example, a total of \$150,000 was recently allocated to Reef Check Australia to enable the organisation to expand both their citizen science program and their ambassador program. Over three years this project will increase community participation in reef monitoring activities in Moreton Bay and improve the community's understanding of reef conservation. As another example, a total of \$24,470 was recently allocated to the Tangaroa Blue Foundation for removing marine debris from a number of Cape York beaches as well as Yeppoon. Those who are familiar with their work will know that the organisation is very successful in engaging community volunteers in their marine debris clean-up activities.

Gold Coast Catchments Association, another example, was recently successful in applying for a \$24,770 grant for a revegetation project on the Gold Coast. This recipient aims to engage up to a thousand volunteers to plant 10,000 native plants in Robina. Other projects funded under the grant program which do not have a direct community engagement aspect are assessed on their broader community benefit. For instance, recipients receiving funding to conserve Queensland's heritage listed places must demonstrate that the place is accessible by the general community. Similarly, recipients receiving funding to improve the sustainability of their community facilities, such as sports clubs and community halls, must demonstrate that the facility is well used by the community.

Earlier this week I opened the second round of grants for projects that address conservation and climate change impacts or improve ecoefficiency of buildings. Eligible community groups and individuals can apply for up to \$50,000 for environmental conservation projects in this grant round. A total of \$2 million in grant funding will be made available. \$50,000 goes a long way for local projects to improve habitat and biodiversity and boost the climate resilience of Queensland's natural landscapes. I encourage all organisations and all MPs to encourage organisations in their electorates that want to reduce the impacts of climate change or protect and conserve the environment to get their application for funding in by 15 August.

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, I refer to page 2 of the SDS, objective 1: 'Conserve nature at both the species and landscape levels'. One of the parts within that objective states 'minimise negative interactions between wildlife and communities'. I presume that is talking about protecting landscape and flora and fauna. In my community we have seen hundreds and hundreds of hectares of land become scorched earth. I know that there is an issue with the council—supposedly a Labor council—but what can your department do about this? We have tried everything to have this stopped and no-one is listening.

**Dr MILES:** Which parts of Ipswich are you referring to?

**Mrs MILLER:** I am talking suburb after suburb after suburb. I will name them. We are looking at Ripley, Blackstone, Collingwood Park, Bellbird Park, Goodna, Springfield Lakes and Augustine Heights. Hundreds of hectares of land are just scorched earth. Over the years we have been trying to get governments to help us to have this stopped, and all we are being told is that it is up to the council. Quite frankly, my people have had a gutful of that. To us it is not up to the council. We need a government to step in and say 'enough is enough'. Can you help us please?

**Dr MILES:** Thank you, member for Bundamba, for that question. I understand the level of your concern and it is one that is raised with me not just in Ipswich but elsewhere. It is the primary role of councils to implement planning schemes and protect local environmental values, but I am aware of a range of places across Queensland where people are concerned that their councils are not adequately doing that.

The environment department does not have a significant role there. Planning and Natural Resources have different roles. The Nature Conservation Act does have some capacity to address where particular species might be threatened and that kind of thing.

**Mrs MILLER:** Through you, Chair, can I say that we have species that we believe are being wiped out. For example, we have had kangaroos jumping down the roads of Springfield Lakes because there is nowhere for them to go anymore. I am imploring you to please take our issues on board because the council is ignoring the locals and so is everyone else.

**Dr MILES:** Thank you for raising that with me. I am happy to take it on board. I am happy to talk to the agency if there is any role. I am also happy to talk to the planning minister and the natural resources minister. Most of this rests with their portfolios.

**Mrs GILBERT:** I am interested in employment in your department. Can you inform the committee about programs in your portfolio that are providing economic and employment opportunities in Indigenous communities?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Mackay for that question. In this portfolio we have a great program called the Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger program. It is highly successful and it is providing full-time employment opportunities in regional Indigenous communities right across Queensland. I am very proud that, as a result of new funding announced in the 2017 state budget, these effective and highly valuable positions will increase from 76 to 100 full-time positions. The Palaszczuk government recognises the multiple benefits that Indigenous ranger programs deliver by investing an additional \$8.1 million over four years. This is in addition to almost \$9.8 million per annum already invested in Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger positions.

Numerous reports have confirmed that investment in ranger positions delivers multiple economic and social benefits in addition to protecting the environment. Ranger positions are skills focused, and the program has a strong emphasis on training and professional development. Rangers achieve qualifications in conservation and land management, providing them with opportunities for a career pathway.

In this term of government the Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger program has grown from 65 to 76, and now it will grow to 100. This growth has seen the harnessing of additional investment, including from the private sector. Since September 2016 a sponsorship agreement with ConocoPhillips on behalf of Australia Pacific LNG has delivered three Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger positions in Gladstone. In 2017, matching investment of \$1.75 million over five years from the North Stradbroke Island Economic Transition Strategy has delivered five land and sea ranger jobs on Minjerribah. In 2017, new Palaszczuk government investment has increased ranger positions to six and provided three trainee positions in Aurukun, a community much in need of career pathways.

Indigenous land and sea rangers are currently based in 17 communities stretching from Straddie in the south, out west to Longreach and north to Injinoo. Other communities that are already benefiting from the employment opportunities generated by the program include Pormpuraaw, Mapoon, Georgetown, Home Hill, Normanton, Burketown, Cardwell, Laura, Archer Point, Mount Isa, Wujal Wujal and Melsonby. The additional positions secured through the 2017 state budget will be placed in Indigenous communities responsible for conserving some of our most iconic environmental and cultural heritage assets. I am proud of our support for this program, which not only protects areas of high environmental and cultural heritage value but also is delivering real employment opportunities for Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, I refer to page 3 of the Service Delivery Statements and in particular the department's service obligation to take action against unlawful activity. With regard to environmental authorities issued at QGC for CSG activities in the Surat Basin, and particularly on the property called Brentleigh, is the minister aware of any breaches from environmental authorities or other by QGC? Secondly, has the minister received any advice indicating the government should issue environmental protection orders to QGC which has not been acted upon?

**Dr MILES:** If it is okay with the member for Mount Isa, could we return to that later in the session? We will find some information for you.

*An incident having occurred in the public gallery—*

**CHAIR:** Order! There will be no calling out.

**Dr MILES:** I am keen to answer it.

**CHAIR:** Sit down and resume your seat in the gallery. Stop calling out or you will be removed from the gallery. Minister, you can take that question on notice, if you would like, and you can report back before the end of the day.

**Dr MILES:** I would prefer to do it in the session so that if the member for Mount Isa wants to ask further questions we have that opportunity. I am keen to answer it. I just want to make sure we have the right information.

**CHAIR:** Member for Mount Isa, do you have additional questions?

**Mr KATTER:** Yes. Minister, I refer to page 18 of the Service Delivery Statements on employee expenses. How many current DEHP employees have previously been employed by gas companies and how many former DEHP employees have gone on to work for gas companies?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Mount Isa for that question. That is a level of detail we will have to take on notice.

**CHAIR:** Will you take that on notice?

**Dr MILES:** Yes.

**Dr ROWAN:** I refer again to SDS pages 1 and 2, and objective 5, to 'maintain contemporary governance and accountability frameworks'. Director-General, the minister has earlier referred a number of times to a leaked confidential cabinet CBRC submission from January of this year. Is the department complying with the investigation which the director-general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet confirmed on Tuesday is being conducted by the Queensland Police Service into how these documents were leaked?

**Mr Reeves:** I have had no visibility of that and no invitation or advice that I need to be involved. I am unaware of what you are referring to.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, did you leak the cabinet confidential CBRC documents which are being investigated by the Queensland Police Service?

**Dr MILES:** The member for Moggill should ask his colleague the member for Glass House where that document came from. As I understand it, they were his CBRC documents.

**Dr ROWAN:** So you are confirming that, no, you did not leak them?

**Dr MILES:** I have not been provided with those documents. I did not leak them.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, I would like to take you back to the earlier questioning around the Environmental Defenders Office and again with reference to SDS page 11. Earlier you mentioned there were a number of sources of funding from your department. I think you mentioned \$133,000 over three years as one of those figures. Will any of your budgeted allocation be specifically used to pursue objections to the Adani Carmichael mine?

**Dr MILES:** As I explained earlier, those funds are being administered through the community legal services support fund in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. That fund is clear about how those funds can be used. It is the same rules that would apply to Legal Aid Queensland, Caxton Legal and all of those other legal services. If the member wants to ask questions about how those rules are applied and enforced, the Attorney-General is the person to be asked those questions.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, with respect to your response to non-government question on notice No. 2, do you anticipate the Environmental Defenders Office will undermine any of your significant environmental approvals that have been granted?

**CHAIR:** I will just take some advice on that question. Member for Moggill, I rule that is a hypothetical question. Can you try to recast that question, please?

**Dr ROWAN:** With respect to your response to non-government question on notice No. 2, can you guarantee that there will be no guerrilla tactic attempts by the Environmental Defenders Office to undermine your already granted environmental approvals?

**CHAIR:** Member for Moggill, that is an imputation. I also think you are asking the minister to make commitments in relation to a third-party organisation, so I do not think the question is valid. You can recast the question or move on.

**Dr ROWAN:** I will move on. I refer to SDS page 16 where it lists \$4.9 million to establish the Queensland CarbonPlus Fund. You referred earlier to climate change and climate resilience. I want to understand whether the stated carbon credits generated from the fund could be used to offset the emissions from the Queensland government car fleet? Is this correct?

**Dr MILES:** That is correct. The intention here is to do a range of things. It is to support carbon farming, particularly carbon farming delivered by traditional owners, because the opportunities there into the future are very significant. There are industries that will not be able to reduce their carbon footprint to zero and therefore to achieve net zero will need to offset it. The economies that move to create these markets and have them certified early will be beneficiaries of that big offsets market into the future.

We committed \$8.4 million in funding to support Queensland's carbon-farming industry, and \$3 million of that is specifically allocated to building capacity and supporting Indigenous economic development. Up to \$5 million is allocated towards purchasing Queensland land sector carbon credits, which will allow us to effectively offset the vehicle emissions of the Queensland government fleet. It is an important opportunity for the government to lead by example, help create a new industry, support landholders and particularly support traditional owners.

The Aboriginal carbon fund portion of the program has established an office in Cairns, is undertaking capacity-building workshops, is developing a new method for attributing and valuing the social benefits to Indigenous communities from participating in carbon farming, and is providing new employment opportunities. The work is already attracting international attention, such as from the Canadian government, which is investigating how to support Indigenous community participation in the growing global and domestic carbon market.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, I note that in your response you said it is important for the government to lead by example. I seek leave to table a copy of a photo for the minister.

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

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, is this a photo of your ministerial car? Is it a V6 or a V8?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. This is a picture of my last ministerial car. Those who know me know that I spent two years complaining about the fact that MSB made me drive a six- or eight-cylinder Caprice. I recently won my campaign to no longer have to drive one. I now drive a white Camry Hybrid. I am happy to provide photos of that to the member for Moggill. It is a great car.

**CHAIR:** Are you taking that on notice to provide those photos?

**Dr MILES:** Sure. I will take on notice that I will provide the member with the full details. I will even include a brochure from Toyota explaining the environmental benefits of the Hybrid. We are using a lot less fuel. My driver tells me that we used to fill up every second day; we are now only filling up once a week. Our fuel usage has dropped two-thirds, which is saving taxpayers' money. The Camry is not strictly listed as a suitable vehicle for a minister, and that is the reason it took so long but I am very pleased to have one now.

**Dr ROWAN:** I want to return to the CarbonPlus Fund. The benefits of the fund, as you indicated before, would include carbon abatement projects, Indigenous economic development, employment and environmental management of the fund will stimulate regional communities and create jobs in rural and regional Queensland. Is this correct?

**Dr MILES:** Broadly, yes.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, will there be an office created for CarbonPlus? If so, where and how many staff will be engaged in its operation? What I am really asking about is whether there will be jobs created and whether they will be in George Street in Brisbane or in the regions.

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. If he had listened to my answer to the previous question he would know that I indicated that the Aboriginal Carbon Fund had already opened an office. That office is in Cairns. They were successful in a tender process for activities to create carbon-farming jobs in Queensland's Indigenous communities. I think Cairns is a—

**Dr ROWAN:** There are no jobs in Brisbane, no jobs in George Street?

**Dr MILES:** The Aboriginal Carbon Fund will be based in Cairns, as I said.

**Dr ROWAN:** What benchmarking and objective measurements will be used to ensure that the program delivers genuine results?

**Dr MILES:** A key component of this is developing to international standards a carbon farming methodology; that is exactly what we are trying to do. There are internationally recognised standards and programs. We will be seeking to create a program that can meet those because ultimately we want our traditional owners selling these carbon credits to international airlines, shipping companies, those kinds of organisations that have committed—the airline industry has committed to achieve net zero emissions. The way they will do that is, in part, by using biofuels in which, as you know, our government is investing significant effort, time and money, and also through offsets. I would love to see the day when we get on a plane and the plane is partly fuelled by Queensland biofuels and the other carbon emissions are offset by Aboriginal Carbon Fund offsets on Cape York. I think that would be a pretty exciting thing.

Mr Chair, Mr Ellwood, the deputy director-general, has confirmed for me some information related to the question asked by the member for Mount Isa.

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

**Dr MILES:** I was aware of this matter. I just wanted to check that we were talking about the same matter and Mr Ellwood has confirmed that for me now. I am briefed on this matter but, rather than have me talk about the details, I might ask Mr Ellwood to do so. I am also happy to commit that either he or I would be willing to meet with the member for Mount Isa and the person in the gallery at some point after this session if people want to discuss it in more detail. In the meantime I might ask the deputy director-general to speak to it.

**Mr Ellwood:** I apologise for that. I associate the matter that you have raised with the surname of the owner of the property, but I subsequently found the information, which is a matter that I am personally engaged with. Not dissimilar to the minister's offer—I have yet to meet the property owner personally—I am more than happy to make the offer of a meeting with the minister and/or myself.

With respect to the issues around the disturbance on the Brentleigh property by QGC, that is not in dispute; that is a matter about which the department agrees with the property owner. To be honest, QGC also acknowledge that they have done disturbance on that property that does need rectification. The challenge as I understand is the ability for QGC to enter that property and undertake those works. That has been a matter where the department has been trying to help facilitate mediation between the two parties for the access of that. As I said, there is no dispute that there has been disturbance—there may be other areas of disturbance as well—caused by QGC; they and the department agree it has been done and it needs to be rectified.

**Mr KATTER:** I am aware of that, and thanks for that response. I think the important part—not to be focused on Brentleigh, but as a case in point, the order is going to set a benchmark that is out in front of the public so that Queenslanders can be assured that this money that we spend on enforcing these environmental orders is money well spent. It sets a benchmark by the government not then going ahead onto the site, remediating it and saying, 'There you go; we've fixed it.' I think that is the assurance that the Queensland public deserves: that there would be a detailed order set by the government of what has to be done. To frame that as a question: will there be some benchmarks set and orders given as to what the disturbance has been, because I believe that is absent at this point?

**Dr MILES:** I am happy to have Mr Ellwood talk to how we achieve the objective that you have outlined there. From a policy perspective, the purpose of those orders is to have a legally enforceable instrument when a company or a person fails to do something they are told to do. The view of the department has been that it is not an appropriate tool if the company concerned is saying they want to do it but are otherwise impeded from doing it. I accept the point you are trying to make that he would potentially grant that access if he had confidence that it would be done to a standard.

**Mr KATTER:** Absolutely.

**Dr MILES:** As to the point of how we can make that happen, I will ask the deputy director-general to respond.

**Mr Ellwood:** I appreciate the comment there. In terms of the instrument that we have talked about using, an environmental protection order, I am happy to be part of the conversation with the owner about that and the bigger picture around setting any standard—we know the outcome that needs to be achieved. Do we need to issue a notice like that at this moment? Not necessarily if the company undertakes that as long as it is done to an agreed standard that is required and there will be follow-up to ensure that the works that we asked to be done are done to that standard. If the standard is short or they have failed to do that, the department has the ability to then consider further compliance and enforcement action such as additional notices like environmental protection orders. As part of our follow-up audit programs, if people are short in relation to what they are meant to do, the department has a very strong track record in relation to making sure that people do what they are required to do.

**Dr ROWAN:** I come back to SDS, page 16. Do you support a carbon tax for Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** No, I do not support a state based carbon tax. I do support and have consistently said—and I think I said this the last time the member for Moggill asked me this question—that I support countries meeting their Paris treaty obligations through the most efficient mechanism possible, a nationwide market based system for pricing carbon. That has been Labor's consistent position federally for a very long time. It has been the LNP's position sometimes and not their position at other times. Labor has consistently supported that federally. State based schemes would not be very effective at meeting their objectives. That is why what we have sought to do with our climate transition strategy is to fill the vacuum while we wait for a national government willing to act and do the things that make sense for state governments to do the things that will be complementary to positive national action.



However, it remains the case that the responsibility for meeting those Paris treaty targets rests with the Commonwealth government. Every sensible contributor to the discussion knows how you can achieve that. The clean energy target is one example that the feds are trying to work out—whether they can convince the Queensland Nationals to let them do it—but that is the level where you need to implement a market based mechanism. It is the level where the targets apply.

**Mrs GILBERT:** I have a follow-up from my last question where you outlined the additional employment opportunities in Indigenous communities. Can you also inform the committee of any details in this budget that will fund any programs that will also provide youth training and employment opportunities?

**Dr MILES:** I know that the member for Mackay knows how enthusiastic I am about our various land and sea programs, and this gives me a chance to talk a bit more about them. In an earlier question I had the chance to talk about the ranger program. This government is boosting employment opportunities in Aurukun and establishing a career pathway for young people in land and sea management. The 2017 state budget included \$2.9 million over five years for this new initiative which builds on the successful track record of Indigenous land and sea rangers in engaging with young people to build professional pathways. The new initiative provides funding to engage children at the Aurukun school in caring for country activities to spark their interest in studying for a ranger career. The initiative also supports three ranger traineeship positions and three new full-time land and sea ranger jobs for this remote Indigenous community. The initiative is being delivered through the environment department's partnership with Aak Puul Ngantam, who have been employing the land and sea rangers in Aurukun since 2011. APN is an organisation that aims to help families return to their traditional land in a meaningful way. This program is all about getting the young people back out to country and motivated to learn and take up future jobs in looking after it.

Land and sea rangers employed by APN are working with the community to engage Aurukun schoolchildren in junior ranger activities at an annual on-country camp to strengthen traditional knowledge of country. At the same time three ranger trainees aged between 15 and 20 are gaining experience in conservation projects and will study towards conservation and land management certificate qualifications. The trainees are gaining skills with the potential for employment in a number of conservation and land management fields such as with council, national parks or pastoralists.

The Indigenous land and sea ranger team members at Aurukun have been boosted by three to a total of six full-time positions to support this mentoring work and provide more opportunities for occasional job vacancies. All Indigenous land and sea ranger programs deliver junior ranger activities, engaging young people in caring for country. The rangers provide an important role model for young people in communities serving as reminders of the importance of study to future work possibilities.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, non-government question on notice No. 1 details how many crocodiles have been removed from the wild by EHP. Could you inform us about what kind of community education is being done by the government to reduce the risk of dangerous interactions between people and crocodiles in the first place?

**Dr MILES:** The Palaszczuk government remains committed to protecting all Queenslanders who live in crocodile country. The government's crocwise messaging and education programs are critical in keeping residents and visitors safe. Our crocwise messages include, 'Obey croc warning signs; don't swim or let domestic pets swim in waters where crocs may live; be aware that crocodiles also swim in the ocean; stand back from the water when fishing or cast netting; never provoke, harass or feed crocs; never leave food, fish scraps or bait near the water, a camp site or boat ramp; never interfere with or fish or boat near crocodile traps; always supervise children; remember you are responsible for your own safety in croc country.' Last year our rangers delivered these crocwise safety messages to 3,000 students in 31 schools across croc country.

We have developed a range of educational tools that help to deliver the Palaszczuk government's crocwise messaging, particularly to school students. One of the latest tools to be developed is a new crocwise mat which has a life-size outline of a crocodile—this is five metres—to give young children the sense of just how big these crocs can be. Lying next to it at that end is a human size symbol. This shape here is the shape of a dingy so people can see what a five-metre croc actually looks like. I say often what a great job our wildlife officers do in dangerous circumstances. Just imagine being out at night trying to trap one of these. In addition to the crocwise program, the Palaszczuk government is getting on with the job of removing problem crocodiles in Queensland. The government had a target of removing—

**Dr ROWAN:** Point of order. We need to—

**CHAIR:** Can we remove the prop please?

**Ms Cohen:** Can we table it?

**CHAIR:** I have taken advice. You can table a picture of it, but we will not take the actual five-metre map.

**Dr MILES:** The government had a target of removing 75 per cent of declared crocodiles of concern within three months of declaration. The percentage of declared crocodiles of concern removed by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection within three months of declaration during 2016-17 was 98 per cent—well above the 75 per cent target. The only crocodile not removed within the three-month target was an animal reported in a popular swimming spot on the Ross and Locke Reserve on the Mulgrave River south of Cairns. The trap set to catch that animal by EHP's contractors was interfered with. It had to be removed for repairs and replaced with a second trap. This is precisely why earlier this month I announced that tough new penalties will be introduced for people who interfere with crocodile traps. The impressive result of 98 per cent of declared crocodiles of concern being removed within three months was achieved through our proactive approach to crocodile management, increased investment and improved targeting of animals.

The Palaszczuk government's \$5.8 million crocodile management program is leading to enhanced crocodile management in Queensland and includes a three-year population survey and monitoring program—which is currently underway—and the purchase of new field equipment and funding for 12 permanent wildlife staff dedicated to crocodile management.

During my recent trip to Cairns I was pleased to launch a custom-built croc survey boat that has been specially designed to meet the challenges of surveying crocodiles in the small and sometimes shallow streams of Far North Queensland. With targeted crocodile operations having more than doubled under this government, I am pleased that we have delivered a stronger and more effective crocodile removal policy than any previous government has had.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, when you were in Mackay recently you viewed the historic Commonwealth Bank building in the CBD. Can you give the committee an update on the processes that are being taken to ensure the necessary restoration work goes ahead there?

**Dr MILES:** Rest assured that I have not forgotten what you told me and what we saw when we visited that building not far from your electorate office in Mackay. It was April when we were there. I note again your keen interest in ensuring that the heritage values of that particular building are properly respected.

For the benefit of the rest of the committee who might not be as familiar with it as the member for Mackay and I are, the former Commonwealth Bank building was built in 1880 and is the oldest commercial building in Mackay. It is a valuable reminder of the prosperity of the city as an important sugarcane centre in the late 19th century. It was designed by one of Queensland's most influential architects, Francis Drummond Greville Stanley, and has been on the Queensland Heritage Register ever since the Heritage Act came into effect in 1929.

In June 2014 EHP found on inspection that works were being undertaken by the owner without approval from the department. The assessable development requiring approval includes repairs to the facade columns, repairs to lintels over arches on the colonnade, including the entablature above the columns, and classical triglyphs and removal of the first-floor veranda. EHP has repeatedly engaged with the owner since 2014 and provided advice on how to obtain the required approvals so that the work can be completed and the cultural heritage values maintained. This has included providing assistance and resources on applying for an exemption certificate. An exemption certificate was initially submitted by the owner in August 2014, but this application was refused as the proposed works would have had a detrimental effect on the cultural heritage significance of the building. EHP made further attempts to contact the owner after a meeting in late 2016 but they have not been successful. To date no application has been lodged with EHP and no further works to the building have been undertaken.

I appreciate that this is not a satisfactory state of affairs for the Mackay community. On 1 June 2017 EHP issued a show-cause notice under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 which has provided the owner of the building the opportunity to make representations as to why EHP should not issue an enforcement notice. No representations were made in response to that notice, so EHP is now considering what available enforcement options it has against the owner.

**Mr MADDEN:** I refer to pages 3 and 7 of the SDS. Minister, can you outline for the committee how the government is working with researchers, tourism operators and the general community to respond to the significant impact of two years of unprecedented coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef?

**Dr MILES:** The member is quite right in describing the coral bleaching we have seen on the Great Barrier Reef these last two years as unprecedented. Mass coral bleaching is a global phenomenon; it is not just our reef. All around the world, nations that are custodians of these magnificent and important marine ecosystems are grappling with how best to help coral reefs recover and withstand future assaults from warming oceans.

The 2016 bleaching event caused severe impacts to reefs in the far north, with the worst impacts being felt north of Cooktown. This section of the reef had until then demonstrated the healthiest coral environments, which is what made it so sad. The impacts of the second event in 2017 were felt further south, with the worst impacts between Cooktown and Townsville—some of the most popular sites for tourism to the reef. Some bleaching was also recorded in other sites such as the Whitsundays. The full extent of bleaching and coral mortality from the event in 2017 is still being quantified.

The Palaszczuk government is taking a leadership role on both reef protection and climate change to ensure we are doing all we can to reduce the threat coral bleaching poses to the Great Barrier Reef. While the Great Barrier Reef was heavily impacted by bleaching, it is a large and dynamic system. The best available science indicates that the reef still has the capacity to recover if given sufficient time between bleaching events and if the other pressures on it are reduced. The advice of scientific experts is clear: action needs to be taken urgently to address climate change, and we need to accelerate our efforts to reduce other pressures. The Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan is the right framework to deliver this. The Palaszczuk government is also investing more than ever before to improve reef water quality, with an additional \$246.5 million being invested over the next five years. We have also banned the dumping of capital dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef, and we have limited port expansions on the reef coastline to the four major ports.

This is in stark contrast to the LNP's record in government, where they wasted money on glossy PR campaigns instead of investing in protecting this international icon. The Newman-Nicholls LNP government chose not to enforce the legislated minimum standards that were in place to help protect the reef from damaging pollution. They also cut the jobs of 39 reef protection officers—a whole unit of hardworking Queenslanders—dedicated to reducing pollution affecting the reef. They also took an axe to Labor's sensible tree-clearing laws which stop sediment flowing into the reef and suffocating coral. It sometimes feels like Tim Nicholls and the LNP have never met an environment program they did not want to cut.

Even the UNESCO World Heritage committee noted the clear improvement in approach since the election of the Palaszczuk government. They said that there has 'undoubtedly been an unprecedented level of increased effort' and that this effort is a marked departure from past practices and deserves full praise. I agree, Mr Chair.

**Mr MADDEN:** To follow on from my previous question, Minister, can you outline for the committee the results of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee's recent assessment of the government's progress to protect the Great Barrier Reef?

**Dr MILES:** I can, member for Ipswich West; thank you for your consistent interest in this. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee met this year in Poland between 2 and 12 July. The Palaszczuk government welcomes its decision, acknowledging the strong progress we have made to implement the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. The decision by the World Heritage Committee clearly acknowledges our efforts to protect the Great Barrier Reef. As I pointed out in my previous answer, it shows that even the global community understands that what the Newman-Nicholls government did by axing sensible tree clearing, gutting any program that contributed to tackling climate change and refusing to enforce minimum standards for run-off was a close call for the reef.

The report clearly states that we still have more work to do and notes that progress towards achieving water quality targets has been slow and needs to be accelerated. This is why the Palaszczuk government is doing more than ever to address water quality problems facing the reef. Major integrated projects are underway in the priority Wet Tropics and Burdekin regions. The levels of local engagement and enthusiasm that these projects are generating in regional communities are building a solid foundation for success.

The Queensland government has committed \$246.5 million over five years from 2017-18 for reef protection. In this budget we have increased total funding to reef programs by almost \$85.725 million over that allocated in previous budgets. With most of the catchment areas for the Great Barrier Reef under agriculture, farmers have a key role to play in protecting the reef. I am pleased that many have been making great strides in reducing sediment and nutrient run-off. For those who unfortunately continue to use outdated, high-polluting practices, the Palaszczuk government is delivering on our

election commitment to use enhanced regulation as part of a mix of tools to ensure that everyone—whether in farming or in urban and industrial developments—achieves at least a minimum standard to reduce water quality risk. The World Heritage Committee's report highlighted the issue of vegetation clearing. It stated—

... important legislation regulating land clearing has not been passed yet, and that increased efforts are needed to ensure that all important legislation ... is put in place.

It was the Newman-Nicholls government that inherited sound, effective vegetation management laws and trashed them, and it was the LNP that voted against the government's new laws in this parliament. Under the LNP, statistics show that tree-clearing rates soared to disturbing levels. This is just another example of the LNP's reckless approach which puts our beloved Great Barrier Reef at risk. The World Heritage Committee also expressed its utmost concern regarding the serious impact that climate change is having on World Heritage properties and that the majority of World Heritage coral reefs are already being significantly impacted by coral bleaching.

We have all seen the significant damage that coral bleaching has caused to our iconic Great Barrier Reef over the past two summers. This is a stark reminder of the urgent need to take strong and effective action to address climate change while we have the chance. This is why I was so pleased to stand with the Deputy Premier in Cairns recently and release Queensland's climate transition strategy. This lays out our plans for reducing carbon pollution and meeting a target of zero net emissions by 2050. This strategy demonstrates that Queensland is committed to doing our fair share to meet our commitments under the Paris agreement and sends a clear message that we are taking strong action to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

Queensland will be a leader in the low-carbon economy, delivering new investment and jobs to our state. As the Palaszczuk government acts strongly to tackle climate change and improve water quality entering the reef lagoon, we will also continue to address the other pressures facing the reef to support resilience and capacity to recover from the unprecedented threat of climate change.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, I refer to page 11 of the SDS and the departmental budget summary. I note the remarkable 22 per cent increase in funding for your department compared with reductions across other departments including Agriculture and particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, which had a 25 per cent reduction. This budget allocates an additional \$175 million over five years in relation to water quality, but what are you doing as far as measuring the outcomes of your programs? What outcome delivery and cost-benefit analysis will ensure that this funding is delivering value for money and that it is independently validated to ensure we are not simply throwing money at the problem but we are getting a translational benefit out of it?

**Dr MILES:** That is a good question; it is an important question. I will respond to it in some detail. Before I do, I have a little piece of further information on your earlier question regarding my ministerial vehicle. I erred in not outlining to the committee the fact that, at my own expense, I have each year as minister paid to offset the emissions from that vehicle using Greenfleet, a certified offset provider. I can provide the certificates for those offsets. I am continuing to do that with the Camry, although it is costing me a lot less because it is using a lot less fuel.

The various reef protection programs and certainly where we are heading from here are the result of the Water Science Taskforce, so our additional investments of \$100 million are being directed according to what that scientific task force told us would be the most effective way to invest them. The additional funds outlined in this year's budget represent the implementation of the Queensland Audit Office's review of reef water quality programs. That review was particularly critical of how the previous government had claimed reef protection spending—claimed programs were reef protection—when they were not and that those programs were not well coordinated across government. The first response the Palaszczuk government made to that report was to create the Office of the Great Barrier Reef with overarching responsibility for outcomes across government. In this budget we deliver the full base funding that has previously been claimed for reef programs. Members may recall that the previous government claimed they were spending \$35 million a year on reef programs and then Labor committed to spend \$20 million on top of that which would have brought the total to \$55 million. The Auditor-General essentially highlighted that much of that \$35 million was not going to reef programs, so we have effectively delivered that base \$35 million and the full \$20 million in this budget. It is difficult to herald because previous governments have claimed there was already \$35 million worth of spending when there was not, so in this budget we have delivered both. That is why spending on reef programs this coming financial year will be more than \$60 million.

I turn now to outcomes and important tools for measuring outcomes. I agree: there has been a lot spent on—I have said this publicly—reef programs with not enough outcomes and not enough progress towards the target and there has been a lot spent on BMP programs which are only now starting to get the level of uptake that we need them to have. The way we measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of those investments is with the reef report card program. We have a reef-wide report card as well as a range of catchment report cards. The two levels of granularity relate to each other, so it allows community members and contributors in all of those important reef catchments to each year get a report on their progress on how effective they have been. Let me also add that the major integrated projects—those two projects in the Wet Tropics and the Burdekin—really are an attempt to demonstrate that with a significant, targeted investment in a catchment you actually can deliver the kind of step shift, because we just have not seen that before. I agree: it gets increasingly difficult to seek more and more funding without having demonstrated that the things you are doing can deliver the kinds of targets that you have set for yourself, so that is why they are so crucial, because I am confident that if we can demonstrate in the Wet Tropics and Burdekin with a big, targeted investment we can achieve our targets then I think it will be easier to justify doing that elsewhere.

**Dr ROWAN:** As a supplementary question, in relation to the projects that you have talked about which are currently underway and the report cards and in relation to the money that is allocated in this budget, are there additional tools or additional mechanisms which are tied to that funding to further enhance what already exists in relation to report cards and/or those other projects which are already in place?

**Dr MILES:** The report cards are the primary public reporting tool on progress, as I say, catchment by catchment and reef-wide. The coordinating role played by the Office of the Great Barrier Reef is really crucial internal to government to ensure that agencies are collaborating, there is not overlap, everybody knows what everyone else's role is and all of the agencies' delivery against those programs is properly recorded and reported to government. The creation of that office within EHP but with that coordinating role allows us to address those other components of the Auditor-General's concerns that he raised in his report.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, you confirm that there will not be any sort of duplication or inefficiency in relation to the overall governance mechanisms and processes that are taking place?

**Dr MILES:** That is certainly very much the objective and the work that all of the agencies did together between the Auditor-General's report and this year's budget bid was very significant and I think demonstrated a level of collaboration between agencies on reef programs that probably has not been there before. That is a credit, frankly, to the former chief scientist who chaired the task force and delivered us a road map for improving how those programs are administered in government and the governance arrangements for them.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, we will move on. I refer to page 4 of the SDS and the average cost per formal investigation into serious noncompliance. I note the average cost was some 41 per cent higher than what was anticipated, being \$4,940 rather than the \$3,500 which was initially projected, and the notes provided attributed this increase to the time required to address complex issues. Minister, can you advise the committee as to what these complex matters were which arose over the 2016-17 financial year which caused this blowout in costs?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. I will ask the Deputy Director-General, Mr Ellwood, to address it in a moment. The member correctly highlights that the note says that in each year there will be variation in the complexity of cases that EHP is working on. I think everyone has seen that with matters like the Linc Energy matter, which obviously has taken very substantial resources. We do not have a lot of control over the complexity of matters coming in, but those measures are important to ensure that we are properly tracking our expenditure on these things. I might ask the deputy director-general to speak to the kinds of matters that created that lumpiness in last year's outcomes.

**Mr Ellwood:** Thank you, Minister. Member, could I just clarify: we have a range of SDS measures and I missed the one you referred to. I have so many here in front of me. It was the investigation into serious—

**Dr ROWAN:** Into serious noncompliance and the average cost was some 41 per cent higher than what was anticipated.

**Mr Ellwood:** I understand. Just as background, the methodology or the formula that we use is total hours spent on finalised investigations times the average staff hour rate—which we base on, in a Public Service term, an AO6 pay point 4, which I think is about \$57 an hour—divided by the number of investigations finalised. That is the formula and, therefore, for our outcome for 2016-17 it was \$3,420.

With regard to matters such as Queensland Nickel and Linc Energy, whilst they are only a couple, the time taken in relation to those I guess skews, for want of a better word, the other 29 prosecutions that we have finalised throughout the year. I do not have necessarily further detail into the change for that amount, but I know that notionally those two matters alone are quite significant in costs and that would certainly affect the figure of our SDS measure.

**Dr MILES:** I want to add a further point to what the deputy director-general said because there are two components of this. That target measure measures what it costs us to run an investigation, but of course we also recover some of those costs with penalty infringement notices and with court costs. I just wanted to point out that there might be times where it costs us more to investigate a matter but we recover more of those costs. For example, EHP last financial year issued 615 warnings, 4,044 penalty infringement notices, three statutory environmental programs, 103 statutory orders, and 33 formal investigations were undertaken leading to the finalisation of 21 prosecutions from which fines totalling \$1,220,385—so about \$1¼ million—were handed down. In the case of those, legal and investigative costs were \$141,698. In the case of those that went to prosecution, the amount received to government in fines was substantially more than the amount spent investigating and prosecuting. I just think it is useful to have that other side, but I am happy to take your supplementary question.

**Dr ROWAN:** I ask a supplementary question to the deputy director-general. Just to clarify, what you were saying there in relation to those two complex matters was that factoring in not only the number of hours but the level of officer really accounts for the higher costs?

**Mr Ellwood:** Indicatively that would be my assessment of what would change or affect some of these. We have internal performance measures, and some are reflected in the SDS. Whilst for many matters you have a 12-month statute of limitations, internally we have our own time frames to ensure that we continue to make sure that investigations on compliance matters are dealt with in a really timely way. Having said that, we do not keep our staff to a time on a complex matter and therefore just finalise something because we are over time. Therefore, it is those types of more complex matters that go on for more than one financial year that would impact on some of those costs.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, I refer to page 3 of the SDS in relation to the use of hail cannons in Queensland. Can the minister please advise if there is any intended regulation governing the growing use of hail cannons and whether the department has investigated the effectiveness of hail cannons in protecting crops and the impact of reduced rainfall in areas where they are frequently used?

**CHAIR:** The term is 'hail cannon'.

**Dr MILES:** Yes, just a second, Mr Chair.

**Mr KATTER:** They are used around Mundubbera and Monto on the stone fruits.

**Dr MILES:** We are not sure we have a role in regulating that, but we will find out before the end of the session. We will certainly identify by then who you should direct the question to.

**CHAIR:** Will you take that on notice, Minister?

**Dr MILES:** We will aim to answer it before the end of this session.

**Mr KATTER:** Referring to pages 2 and 11 of the SDS, how much does the department spend on monitoring and enforcing vegetation management laws, Minister?

**Dr MILES:** Enforcement of the vegetation management laws rests with the department of natural resources. EHP has a small and occasional role to play where there is an impact on a particular threatened species through the Nature Conservation Act, but enforcement of vegetation management rests with Natural Resources.

**Mr MILLAR:** Minister, I refer to the SDS at page 2. Underpinning the long-term productivity, growth and export potential and sustainability of our food and fibre industry, especially our beef industry, prickly acacia is now at the headwaters of the Channel Country above Lake Eyre Basin. As you would know, history says that this drought will break, and it is probably going to break by major flood rains down the western rivers—the Thomson, Diamantina and Barcoo.

I am very concerned that the region will face an environmental disaster from the invasion of prickly acacia that will sweep through the Channel Country, some of the nation's best cattle-fattening country. Is your department aware of the potential disaster, given that prickly acacia is on the headwaters of the Channel Country? What plans are in place and what resources will be made available to deal with the situation?

**Dr MILES:** I share your concerns, member for Gregory. I heard you raise this matter with the agriculture minister earlier today. The responsibility for invasive pests rests with DAF. EHP does not have a substantial role. Of course, we would happily provide advice and collaborate with DAF if we could.

**Mr MILLAR:** I understand, but once prickly acacia hits that Channel Country—you have seen that Channel Country; the water rises up and goes across—it will destroy it. We talk about the Great Barrier Reef being iconic. I can tell you that to the people out in Western Queensland the Channel Country is just as iconic. Surely, there has to be some plan with the environment department and the department of agriculture to come together with a plan, because once it gets there we are going to—

**CHAIR:** Member, I ask you to put a question.

**Mr MILLAR:** There has to be a plan in place now. The department must be aware that there is the potential danger of ruining probably the best cattle country in Queensland.

**Dr MILES:** All I can do is repeat what I said, member for Gregory. I share your concern. The responsibility for responding to these kinds of things rests with DAF. If DAF ever asked us for any assistance we would provide it. It is just where the responsibility rests. I can say that I have met with a lot of biofuels producers. I do not know if they have come to see you, but there is a view that they might be able to turn prickly acacia into a biofuel.

**Mr MILLAR:** There are dreamers and dreamers, unfortunately.

**Dr MILES:** I think it is at least worth having a look at. If we could put a value on it, maybe we could change the economics of getting rid of it. It is worth having a look at it.

**Dr ROWAN:** I refer to the notes on pages 15 and 16 of the SDS about the increase in the FTE numbers. What is the additional number of FTEs required to deliver the yellow crazy ant management project?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. Subsequent to my previous answer, this the one invasive species where we have a responsibility for an eradication program because of our oversight of the Wet Tropics Management Authority. We continue to have a to-and-fro with the Commonwealth about its contribution to that program. In my view, they are not carrying their fair share. The Wet Tropics Management Authority has employed, as a result of these funds, 17 temporary staff to the yellow crazy ant eradication program. That staff has been able to ramp up the monitoring activities and move to a fortnightly monitoring program measuring ant activity across 36 sites inside the infestation. They have been able to better define the area of infestation with additional resources. Nine hundred and twenty hectares, which is 85 per cent of the known infestation area, has been surveyed and mapped. The results so far have been positive, showing a slower rate of increase in ant activity this year compared to last year, with numbers expected to drop significantly as a result of the treatments they have administered during May.

One of the great successes of the program to date is the engagement with the community and stakeholders. If the member has been subjected to the enthusiastic support of those stakeholders, as I have, I am sure he would be well aware of how popular that program is up there.

**Dr ROWAN:** Are we winning the war on yellow crazy ants?

**Dr MILES:** As I said, I think the information from this year is positive. I have always thought it was winnable. I know there are people around who do not. When you have heard the stories about just how damaging this infestation is—and we talked earlier about the value of the Wet Tropics—the stakes are just too high for us not to try.

**Dr ROWAN:** I refer to pages 4 and 6 of the SDS and the average cost per permit licence that is assessed. I note that the department failed to meet the target by around \$4,800, or 54 per cent. I further note in the SDS that the department's response is to review the current management options and move resources in line with shifts in the workload. How many staff are currently employed within the business centre assessment teams? Once you have reviewed them, how many staff do you expect to employ in business centre assessment teams at the end of the 2017-18 financial year?

**Dr MILES:** I thank member for his question. I am happy to talk to the general context of the question. The specifics of it are hypothetical and hard to answer. I will ask the deputy director-general to speak to that. Clearly, as an agency that has a role to play in providing these approvals we need to make sure that we are doing it as efficiently as we can, not only for good governance but also for the sake of the people who are waiting on those approvals. I will ask the deputy director-general to talk more about that reform program.

**Mr Ellwood:** For the member's benefit and for the committee's benefit, the formula that we use for average cost per permit licence assessed is the total salary cost for the licence assessment divided by the number of permits or licence assessments decided during the period. That is the formula.

The question was in relation to our existing assessment centres. With an overall establishment as at June this year, the division was just over 524 FTEs, the breakdown of which is 217 FTEs associated with business centre functions and 252 in compliance functions. The challenge is around the cost management of that because of the variability around permit applications coming in in any given month or week, which can vary that formula.

As a management team we are very active in ensuring that we try to stay somewhere within those costs—the SDS measures. The ability of our assessment and compliance staff, who in their role descriptions have both functions and ability, is to move our staff around to focus on activities. When there are fewer applications coming in—and we have certainly seen in the last couple of years, as a general trend, particularly in the resources sector, the numbers of applications drop off—we continue to assess and move our assessment staff back into the compliance centres and we will continue to do that. With respect to where we would be in 2017-18, that is somewhat hypothetical, but it is a matter that we continue to work on all the time within our establishment.

**Dr MILES:** I will add to what Mr Ellwood has said. We do not control the number of applications coming in. We are subject to market conditions, particularly in the resources sector. Our workload does not mirror necessarily what is happening in that sector. There is a bit of a lag between the downturn and dealing with approvals drop-offs. That is why we have seen that effect subsequent to the commodity price downturn and reductions in economic activity in the resources sector. There is a lag but an eventual drop in applications.

It is not necessarily possible to match your staffing level to the number of applications coming in the door when at the same time you want to maintain the ability to, for example, deal with an influx of approvals that might happen when things turn around or sustain the level of expertise that you might need when dealing with particularly large and complex applications. That is what you see mostly happening in that measure. It is effectively taking your wages cost and dividing it by the number of applications. If you get fewer applications, the cost per approval goes up.

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, I refer to the media statement about the Swanbank and other dumps and the sudden realisation by you as the minister that there is a major problem with the foul smells day and night, especially in the heat of summer. Why on earth have you announced a community survey to be undertaken with the council when there is enormous distrust in this council, where over the years I understand that these dump operators have financially supported the campaigns of the mayors and councillors, where there have been few prosecutions by the council, even insofar as development approvals and they have decided not to prosecute? The people in my electorate are absolutely and utterly outraged by this approach. They are saying to me that they will not participate in this survey in its present form.

**CHAIR:** Member, we need to move to the question.

**Mrs MILLER:** I am getting to the question, thank you, Chair. They have asked me to ask you: will you have this survey done completely independently?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for her question. I, too, have been frustrated with the lack of progress on this. It is not true to say that this is a new-found interest of mine; it has been a consistent interest of mine.

**Mrs MILLER:** It has been of mine for over 12 years, but with this survey—

**Dr MILES:** I appreciate that. Part of the reason I know about it is that you have raised it with me.

**Mrs MILLER:** Yes, but I want this survey done independently and the council to have nothing to do with it. I am asking you to consider that.

**CHAIR:** Will you let the minister answer.

**Dr MILES:** I see the point you are making. I would ask you to see this announcement as a significant escalation of resources and involvement in addressing the issues. EHP has issued \$30,000 worth of fines, but I know that there are operators—or I suspect there are operators—

**Mrs MILLER:** They laugh at it.

**Dr MILES:** Compared to what it would cost to rectify their operations, those fines are small. That is why we need to have a new approach. The existing approach has not been working. With the regulation of industrial odours, there is an overlap in responsibility between the state and the council. We could not effectively address it without working with the council.



To the question, though, of the independence of that survey and the reliability of that survey, I do not have an objection in principle to doing it in a way that can be transparent and independent of the council. Let us look at whether we could contract that to a respected organisation or whether we can come up with a way to address your concern.

**Mrs MILLER:** Will you take that on notice, because I can guarantee that people in my electorate will not be involved in it if it includes the council, where councillors have been supported by dump operators.

**Dr MILES:** On the program itself we will need to continue to collaborate with the council, but on the survey I am happy to commit to you that we will find a way to do that independent of the council.

**Mrs MILLER:** Okay.

**Dr MILES:** I will let Mr Ellwood add something to that response.

**Mr Ellwood:** Community involvement is going to be absolutely essential in this. They are the eyes and the ears of people. I appreciate your frustration and that of the minister. As part of this announcement, the department is very pleased that the minister has asked us to undertake and direct some of the funding that we have for this year. We see that the engagement of the community is essential. We are working on a way in which we will do that. I appreciate your comments in relation to the involvement or otherwise of the council.

**Mrs MILLER:** Will you involve the people in my electorate with that, because Redbank Plains was specifically excluded from the media statement? I have 10,000 people living there.


**Mr Ellwood:** When we talk about Swanbank, I accept that there are places that the member for Ipswich West may also have and other surrounding councils. I am open-minded about dealing with the issues. It is not difficult to understand where those locations or some of those operators are and the communities that are affected by that.

**Mrs MILLER:** The operators are in my electorate.

**Mr Ellwood:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. The committee will now adjourn for a break. The hearing will resume at 4.30 pm with the examination of the estimates for the National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef parts of the portfolio.

#### **Proceedings suspended from 4.00 pm to 4.30 pm**

 **CHAIR:** The committee will now begin its examination of the estimates for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

I welcome back the minister and I welcome back the officials.

**Dr MILES:** Can I introduce Tamara O'Shea, the director-general of National Parks, Sport and Racing.

**CHAIR:** Welcome, Ms O'Shea. I call the member for Mackay for the first question.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, can you detail the work undertaken by QPWS in response to Cyclone Debbie, which had a huge impact in my area.

**Dr MILES:** It did, member for Mackay, and I acknowledge that you and I have discussed how fantastic the work of our rangers was. Obviously our first responders get all of the appropriate praise when these things happen, but our rangers were out there doing a great job. Like so many volunteers and organisations right across the state, the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing responded rapidly after Tropical Cyclone Debbie struck as a category 4 storm near Airlie Beach earlier this year. The department is also continuing to assist recovery of the tourism industry with access to key sites in terrestrial and marine parks and forests. Immediately following the cyclone the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing activated and deployed approximately 40 rangers, as well as equipment and vessels from across the state to assist with recovery efforts. Within a day of the cyclone passing, rangers were on the ground assessing the extent of damage and commencing clean-up operations.

In the hardest hit area, the Whitsundays, marine and national parks play a vital role in the region's tourism industry. The rangers worked tirelessly, and at times in day and night shifts, to reopen and make safe the region's premier visitor destinations such as Whitehaven Beach and Tongue Point. This effort made it possible for tourism operators to be back on the water and operating again within days. As an example of this effort, at Whitehaven Beach, one of the worst affected sites, heavy machines and mulchers were barged in to remove vegetation debris and reclaim and reprofile the beach's famous

white sand. Within a week and before the busy Easter period rangers had created over 700 cubic metres of mulch and shifted over 10,000 cubic metres of sand to recreate an accessible beach and a safe visitor experience. In addition, the 80 public moorings and 50 reef protection markers designed to minimise anchor damage to corals were engineer checked and, where necessary, repaired to continue their important role in protecting remaining fringe reef and providing safe anchorage for tourism operators.

On-ground work continues today. More recently heavy machinery was used to return washed up coral bommies into the water to provide hard substrate for corals to recolonise and to provide important fish habitat and structure. While park infrastructure across the Great Barrier Reef and national park islands are now largely operational, the Queensland government's efforts to support the region will continue. The region has taken a dramatic hit and lost some of its best snorkelling and diving destinations. This is why we will invest \$3.9 million over the next two years to create new and alternative on-island visitor opportunities for marine tourism operators while fringing reefs recover. The Queensland government will be upgrading the facilities at Whitehaven Beach and building a number of new walking tracks and lookouts across Whitsunday Island. These lookouts will provide amazing views and tourism marketing opportunities previously not available. In addition, 40 new public moorings will begin to be installed in August 2017 as part of the \$2.375 million expanded reef protection program funded through the Significant Regional Infrastructure Projects Program. The Queensland government believes these projects will provide significant long-term benefits to the region and its tourism industry.

As Cyclone Debbie showed us, tourism to many of our iconic national parks is critical to local economies. Hence one of our goals is to diversify the tourism opportunities available in the Whitsundays to increase the future resilience of the local economy. While the damage was severe and rangers are still clearing tracks and repairing damage to park infrastructure, the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing is pleased that of the 223 impacted parks and forests, 214 are open and the other nine are partially open.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank and congratulate the rangers and officers of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service who worked so hard under trying conditions and in some instances foregoing repairs to their own damaged properties to assist with these clean-up operations. It is a privilege to work with such dedicated individuals.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, as you were saying, a lot of work has already happened in the Whitsundays. They certainly rely on tourism for a lot of their income. With reference to the additional capital funding for national parks in this year's budget, can you provide more information about how this funding will be used to revitalise the Whitsundays, which badly needs a boost?

**Dr MILES:** It does, member for Mackay, and that is why this initiative is one of the things I am most excited about in this budget. The 2017-18 state budget funding is a significant investment by this government to revitalise key national park visitor and tourism destinations and advance new iconic experiences to enhance Queensland's ecotourism opportunities. This will be achieved by providing a \$40 million funding boost for our national parks, with \$35 million of this funding to go toward job-creating capital works and infrastructure. The Whitsunday Islands National Park, one of our most iconic national parks, will benefit from this budget investment. People from all over the world come to Queensland to camp, climb and hike Whitsunday Island. Many others come to relax and enjoy the pristine white sands of Whitehaven Beach which, as I said, reopened in record time after a massive post cyclone clean-up operation. Places such as the Whitsundays, Bowling Green Bay and Hinchinbrook Island national parks are significant tourism attractions generating income and jobs for those regions. Funding in this budget will be used to expand and diversify the visitor experiences in the Whitsunday area and by doing so increase the resilience of the tourism industry to national disasters like tropical cyclones and fires.

I am pleased to advise that a new iconic multiday walk will be developed on Whitsunday Islands National Park with \$2.78 million to fund a 20-kilometre walking track which will connect Whitehaven Beach to Tongue Point. It will include a walk to the peak of Whitsunday Craig and incorporate new spectacular views over Hill Inlet and Whitehaven Beach. Also, \$1.12 million will be invested on the island to upgrade and expand the day-use and camping areas at Whitehaven Beach. This will provide new interpretive areas, visitor facilities and short walks with viewing platforms and lookouts overlooking Whitehaven Beach and Hazelwood Island.

The Palaszczuk government's commitment to boosting the Whitsunday economy post Tropical Cyclone Debbie recovery efforts is clear. What is not clear is the federal government's commitment to the region. I recently wrote to the member for Dawson, Mr Christensen, regarding the federal government's commitment to the proposed new southern Whitehaven Beach lookout and walking trail. I table a copy of that letter for the benefit of the committee.

**CHAIR:** Leave is granted

**Dr MILES:** Preliminary estimates of total project costs are around \$900,000, which would equate to a \$450,000 matching contribution required from each party. In my letter I have sought an assurance from Mr Christensen that the federal government will adequately fund its share of the new project. The Palaszczuk government is acutely aware that Queensland is an important destination where domestic and international tourists visit to experience incredible nature based adventures and we hope the federal government acknowledge this by contributing its fair share to projects in the region.

Let me just correct the record. I mentioned earlier that 214 parks were now fully open. I am told that two further parks are now fully open so it is 216.

**Dr ROWAN:** National Parks, Sport and Racing 2017-18 SDS page 3 talks about improving customer experience in the online booking service. What specific upgrades and when will the new enhanced online service be available and will the upgrades include better links to maps for users?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. The upgrade of the booking service has been an ongoing project. The new online booking service is currently operational, but it is our hope to continue to improve and refine it. The booking service is designed to deliver a customer focused, reliable and cost effective solution. We launched it on 8 June last year. Several enhancements have been delivered as a result of customer feedback since then. Enhancements thus far include improved calendar functionality, a range of refund options, the ability to modify a camping booking and the capacity to easily re-book favourite and past camping experiences. I will in a moment ask the deputy director-general to speak to the specific point about park maps. Customers can purchase camping permits, vehicle access permits and gift cards online making it even easier to organise precious recreation and family time or provide a unique gift for family and friends on special occasions.

Customers are also able to opt in to participating customer surveys which, as I said, have already helped inform further refinements. To date the survey results highlight that customers who visited a park or forest over the past few months have been very positive about their experience: 94 per cent responding to the survey rated their online experience as satisfied or very satisfied, 95 per cent of customers were satisfied with the general condition of the park or forest they visited. For some customers who are unable to book online, we continue to have other options: sale of permits through regional offices, self-serve kiosks, booking agent outlets and the Queensland government integrated contact centre.

To answer your specific question, member for Moggill, about whether when you are booking a camping permit you can then download the map for that site, I will ask Deputy Director-General Oestreich to respond.

**Mr Oestreich:** Spatial mapping is a feature that has been often requested by our clients. One of the things that people often want to do when they are looking for a campsite to book is to be able to see where camp sites are in relation to other camp sites, all those kinds of things, more easily than you can through text descriptions or flat maps. As part of delivering on that, the department is currently exploring opportunities to link together the online booking service with the website and the information that we have about camping sites to better integrate those things so that they can provide, as a package, a more meaningful user experience.

**Dr ROWAN:** The linkage of the online booking and the website, just to understand, is this being done internally within the department or is there an external vendor solution that is being explored?

**Dr MILES:** The booking service itself is an external vendor solution and the contract with them provides for ongoing enhancements essentially. That third-party vendor would be expected to deliver on that. Did you want to add anything?

**Mr Oestreich:** No, just to reiterate the minister's point that it is true that the online booking service is an externally provided service. We are working with our internal staff and our communications staff to look at opportunities for these linkages between the information that is available on the website and the information that is available on the online booking service and how that interconnection can be made more meaningful.

**Dr ROWAN:** Who is the vendor and what are the timelines for the delivery of that?

**Dr MILES:** It is a work in progress, I think it is fair to say. I am happy for the deputy director-general to add to that.

**Mr Oestreich:** We are in the exploratory stage at the moment. We are looking at the technical solutions. It is quite a minefield once you start to move into the area of spatial linkages and all of those kinds of things. We are in the exploratory phase at the moment. To reiterate the minister's point, it is a work in progress.

**Dr ROWAN:** However, there is a contract in place with a third-party vendor and there are established timelines within that?

**Dr MILES:** That is correct. When we came to office we inherited a tender process that the previous government had commenced. We made some changes to the service requirements but continued with the substance of the tender that the previous minister had implemented. That provider was subsequently issued the contract. The contract has a process, essentially, for agreeing over time what enhancements they will implement. What the deputy director-general has outlined is just some of the priorities we want to see. There are others as well.

**Dr ROWAN:** I want to ask about the metrics and evaluating the success of the whole process. I heard before about the customer surveys that are taking place. What additional metrics are there as far as data evaluation is concerned? Are there feedback mechanisms through the parks and rangers themselves? Are the customer surveys emailed out to people who have completed the online booking process?

**Dr MILES:** I will ask the deputy director-general to respond.

**Mr Oestreich:** We use a number of measures, if the member's question is relating to how we field this feedback from our consumers. We have just been through a structured process of polling our users. As the minister mentioned before, we have very high satisfaction rates with the product. As part of our normal business, we consult with the rangers on the ground and the staff who are interfacing with our visitors. We draw our information from a range of places. We do have an email survey process to pulse-check. It is from those that we have delivered and from that process of seeking feedback from our customers that we have been able to identify and deliver those enhancements that the minister mentioned before.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, we will move on. I refer to the SDS at page 3, where the service area description refers to conserving natural and cultural values of parks and forests. Can you advise what consultation process was undertaken in the decision to effectively give over large areas of the Samford and Bunyaville conservation areas to mountain bike riding at the expense of walkers? When was the decision taken to turn the Lomandra picnic area into a mountain-bike-only area, effectively changing the tracks to accommodate only mountain bike riding?

**Dr MILES:** Increasingly, mountain biking is a popular activity in the parks that we manage. It brings a different audience of national park visitors. The member is correct in that it also creates some complexity in how we manage competing demands for different parts of the park. Often, walkers do not want people on mountain bikes racing past them. How you manage those things is an emerging interest for us. I will ask the deputy director-general to speak to the specifics of the Samford and Bunyaville parks and the picnic area you speak of.

**Mr Klaassen:** The Lomandra day-use area project that you refer to was an internal project that QPWS identified for that particular site. It was becoming quite old and tired and we needed to look at options to revitalise it. As part of that, there was some discussion with the local mountain bikers. I would have to seek further advice as to what broader consultation there was in regard to that. The reports I have heard are that the project has been well received locally and that we have done what we can. Conservation parks do provide for conservation and recreation opportunities, and mountain biking fits within that. That is what I can advise.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, can you take on notice the question around consultation, through standing order 183?

**Dr MILES:** Yes, I am happy to do that.

**Dr ROWAN:** In relation to the fact that those tracks have been converted to mountain bike tracks, Minister, what is being done to ensure that erosion along the tracks related to such activities is being properly managed in those two conservation areas? What additional consideration and actions are taken to manage that risk?

**Dr MILES:** I understand the question. It is one that comes up every now and then. I will ask the deputy director-general, Mr Klaassen, to speak to how we manage not just erosion impacts but also other environmental impacts that might be caused by mountain bikers using, in particular, tracks that were first designed for walking.

**Mr Klaassen:** Our standard approach when we design mountain bike tracks is to look at the best and most appropriate design to minimise erosion. We work collaboratively with local mountain-biking clubs to ensure that they are used appropriately and that we have a maintenance program in place where possible. We encourage the local clubs to ensure that they are not used during wet weather, which can further degrade the tracks. We work collaboratively with the local clubs. The rangers will do what they can when they have the ability to go and inspect and look at what is possible. It is a collaborative arrangement with the local mountain-biking clubs to minimise any erosion.

**Mr WEIR:** Minister, can you confirm that the funding for pest and weed management in the national parks last year was \$8.5 million, which across 13.5 million hectares of protected estate amounts to just 65 cents per hectare? Do you consider 65 cents per hectare to be a sufficient investment to control pests and weeds and for QPWS to be considered a good neighbour? Minister, what will the allocation be this financial year across what will be an increased area of protected estate? Is there going to be more money per hectare or less?

**Dr MILES:** It is correct to say that the actual expenditure in 2016-17 was \$8.4 million. The budget for 2017-18 is \$5.9 million. That reduction is the result of the scheduled decrease of the funding for the Nest to Ocean project and the completion of the pest management system project. You are right to say that National Parks manages a very wide and diverse estate with more than 1,000 of the state's forests, timber reserves and national parks. Included in the figure for 2016-17, QPWS invested over \$400,000 to deliver the first stage of a spatially enabled web based IT system to support the department's pest management planning and reporting which it is hoped will deliver more effective pest management with the funds that we have available. I make the point that the difference between the 2016-17 expenditure and the 2017-18 budget is entirely the completion of the Nest to Ocean pest management program.

**Mr WEIR:** Across the national parks in the coming year, will there be an increase in pest and weed management overall?

**Dr MILES:** The expenditure will be the same, other than the areas where the Nest to Ocean program was addressing pests that target turtle nests. The rest of the pest management program will have the same level of funding. The Nest to Ocean program is a joint Commonwealth-state funded program that ceased effectively in the 2016-17 year.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, to clarify, with \$8.4 million for 2016-17 and \$5.9 million for 2017-18, do you consider that amount sufficient for the task at hand?

**Dr MILES:** Like anything in budgets, you could do more if you had more, but that is the level of expenditure. It is staying at that level. I think our park rangers do a great job with the resources that we have.

**Dr ROWAN:** I ask that with reference to a media statement from the Deputy Premier and Minister for Main Roads, spruiking \$30 million for 1.8 hectares of parkland and open space in Minister Bailey's electorate. I can table a copy of that release and seek leave to do so.

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

**Dr ROWAN:** Compared to \$30 million for a 1.8-hectare park in Minister Bailey's electorate, it seems that our national parks are not receiving the required funding to manage some of the pest and weed risks compared to what is currently funded, which is approximately 60 cents per hectare for pest and weed control in Queensland national parks.

**Dr MILES:** I am just reading this very quickly, but it looks like the \$30 million is not for pest management. It is for park management and infrastructure more generally. Our total budget is obviously higher than that amount, but that amount relates to the pest management programs where they are specifically delivered.

Before I go any further, I need to correct the record. Earlier I said that nest to ocean had ceased funding. I should have said that the Commonwealth grant component has reduced, because it was provided up-front. I will ask the deputy director-general to explain that difference.

**Mr Klaassen:** The Nest to Ocean funding is a joint program funded between the state and the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth provided their contribution in the earlier stages and that funding was utilised at the start. The projects are starting to tail down. We still do have an allocation in this year's budget for the Nest to Ocean program but it is not as high as the 2016-17 amount, which was when the projects were at a higher stage.

**Dr ROWAN:** Coming back to before that clarification, the point I was trying to make was related to value propositions—the value proposition of the amount of money allocated to manage pests and weeds in our national parks compared to the value proposition of allocation of money in other areas. Is there a sufficient amount of money being allocated to manage the risks in our national parks of pests and weeds, given what that means for primary producers and agricultural landholders?

**Dr MILES:** I certainly get the point the member is trying to make. I think our rangers do a very good job with the resources they have. Of course, there are fewer of them now than before the LNP was in government and that makes their work a bit harder. I think there were 60 fewer rangers as a result of the member for Clayfield's first budget.

If we are going to compare the particular investment in this media release, a better comparison would be with the entire budget of the agency rather than just the pest management budget. I would imagine only a small proportion of this \$30 million would be going to pest management in Yeerongpilly. We have been very clear that this is a record budget for national parks, with a \$40 million injection in capital works. That will allow us to do some really great things that I am excited about.

**CHAIR:** Minister, what extra funding is being provided in the budget for the Great Barrier Reef Field Management Program?

**Dr MILES:** The Queensland government recognises that the Great Barrier Reef Field Management Program and its dedicated team of marine park rangers and officers play a vital role in protecting and safeguarding the Great Barrier Reef. An adequately resourced field management program is absolutely essential if we are to combat the threats to the Great Barrier Reef and deliver upon Queensland's obligations under the Reef 2050 Plan.

The field management program is accountable for leading or supporting 47, which is about a third, of the Reef 2050 Plan's 139 actions. This is why the Queensland government has allocated \$8.372 million towards field management activities in 2017-18. This includes an additional \$1.3 million over three years commencing in 2018-19 to employ four additional marine park rangers and pay for the operation of a second large vessel. This large, 24-metre ship is currently under construction and due to commence service in mid-2018.

Our funding also includes an additional \$407,000 allocated in 2017-18, which represents the second year allocation of a four-year \$1.65 million and ongoing funding boost to the field management program by the Queensland government. This injection of additional funding addresses a backlog of operating cost pressures caused by a funding flat line since 2008.

Recently the Great Barrier Reef has been subjected to unprecedented impacts, including two severe and successive coral bleaching events, an ongoing crown-of-thorns starfish outbreak and then a severe tropical cyclone. Therefore, an appropriately resourced field management program is needed now more than ever before to aid the reef's recovery.

While the Queensland government is committed to fulfilling its obligations, the opposition's LNP friends in the federal government have failed to date to honour their commitment to matching this funding boost as an equal partner in the field management program. The Queensland government cannot be expected to meet the needs of this essential front-line service alone. The Australian government must acknowledge the program's importance and funding needs if we are to avoid significant negative consequences for the program and, more importantly, the promises made to the World Heritage Committee that Australia will prioritise investment to protect the reef.

I have recently written to Minister Josh Frydenberg. I seek leave to table a copy of that letter.

**CHAIR:** Leave is granted to table the letter.

**Dr MILES:** I wrote to Minister Frydenberg to call him out for renegeing on the funding agreement we struck at our last Great Barrier Reef ministerial forum meeting in November 2016. His failure to match Queensland's indexation funding contribution in full will severely compromise the capacity of the program going forward.

Fewer rangers available to the program means fewer rangers undertaking critical compliance and monitoring activities on the water and managing weeds and pests on island national parks. It means less ability to enforce reef zoning compliance, exposing the reef to illegal fishing activity. Marine animal strandings, such as vulnerable turtles, will go unattended. The ability to undertake joint patrols and build capacity with the reef's Indigenous ranger groups will be constrained. Park visitor facilities essential to the tourism industry will be serviced less frequently and some will potentially need to be closed seasonally. There will also be a reduced capacity to resource responses to critical incidents, such as crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks, future coral bleaching events and the continuing recovery activities following ex-Tropical Cyclone Debbie.

I am meeting Minister Frydenberg next Friday. I hope he comes prepared to reconsider his position. This is not the time to back away from commitments to the Great Barrier Reef. Minister Frydenberg needs to do more to uphold his government's side of the ledger.

**CHAIR:** What work will the new vessel be used for in the field management program?

**Dr MILES:** This new vessel will further strengthen the capacity of the field management program and ensure rangers can reach all corners of the Great Barrier Reef and attend to the highest priority activities. Our funding commitment will make it one of the Queensland government's hardest working vessels and will replicate the successes achieved through the field management program's existing large vessel, the *Reef Ranger*.

With four additional rangers, whose primary responsibility will be to crew this vessel, we will build upon the existing 115 officers and marine park rangers who service the Great Barrier Reef and operate a fleet of 21 vessels. These rangers patrol the Great Barrier Reef and deliver practical on-ground actions, aimed at protecting and maintaining well-functioning marine and island ecosystems and supporting some of the world's best ecotourism opportunities.

The role of marine park rangers requires the ability to travel out to sea in all weather conditions for long periods of time. In the past this was constrained due to an inadequate vessel fleet. That all changed when *Reef Ranger* entered service three years ago. The *Reef Ranger* is a 24-metre, purpose-built catamaran. This vessel, with its large crewing capacity, exceptional sea keeping and long range, has revolutionised the Queensland and Australian government's ability to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

I had the privilege of travelling on *Reef Ranger* to Raine Island and more recently from Green Island to Cairns during the government's Governing from the Regions program. While both times I ended up a little seasick, it was still a great opportunity to see this impressive vessel in full flight. The *Reef Ranger* is effectively a floating ranger base that allows rangers to be where they are needed, monitoring and maintaining this iconic World Heritage area. The rangers now have the ability to perform tasks on water, in water and on islands simultaneously for extended periods of time and regardless of weather conditions.

The success of *Reef Ranger* has been outstanding. It is working hard, averaging over 230 days at sea. Unfortunately, she cannot be in all places at once, though. To complement the revolutionary capacity of *Reef Ranger* and replicate its successes in the southern half of the Great Barrier Reef, the Queensland and Australian governments are building a sister ship to *Reef Ranger*. The new vessel will enter operations in late 2018.

The vessel will cover reef-wide operations, with its deployment governed by the highest priority needs and designed to complement the northern activities of *Reef Ranger*. It is likely the vessel will spend a large proportion of its time between the Whitsundays and Lady Elliot Island and in the east out to Swain Reefs—the very edge and the most distant boundary of the Great Barrier Reef.

The vessel will play a vital role in upholding park user compliance in line with the marine park zoning plan. It will be an essential platform in assisting with the crown-of-thorns starfish response and coral bleaching assessments. As was evident from Tropical Cyclone Debbie, it will be a critical asset in providing a rapid response following severe weather events.

Being self-sufficient, the vessel can carry a large number of rangers into these damaged areas to immediately attend to clean-up operations. The vessel will provide much needed backup support when *Reef Ranger* is inoperative, undergoing repairs or undertaking work at the extreme other end of the marine park, places like Raine Island. It will also provide on-board accommodation capacity when rangers are undertaking pest and fire programs on the over 400 national park islands which are scattered throughout the reef.

The Queensland government is leading the construction of this new 24-metre long-range vessel. I am pleased to say the vessel's design is well advanced and sea simulator testing is showing encouraging results, with fuel efficiency and sea-keeping performance likely to exceed even that of the state-of-the-art *Reef Ranger*. We cannot afford to have an asset of this nature tied up at a wharf, it must be at sea to achieve results. With the Queensland government funding of \$1.3 million over three years and ongoing, the vessel can deliver at least 230 days at sea and match the achievements of *Reef Ranger*. This is an essential and exciting project in our endeavours to protect the reef.

**CHAIR:** Can you outline how the reef protection program expansion project is improving tourism and recreation use of the Great Barrier Reef in an appropriate and sustainable manner?

**Dr MILES:** I can. I thank the member for Greenslopes for his interest. Installing public moorings at popular dive and snorkel sites protects coral from unnecessary anchor damage and makes access to the Great Barrier Reef far safer and more convenient for visitors. The Queensland government is investing \$2.4 million over three years to expand upon the existing and highly popular network of public moorings and reef protection markers.

Specifically this projected is being funded via the \$180 million Significant Regional Infrastructure Projects Program as part of this government's State Infrastructure Plan. This will build upon an existing network of 129 public moorings and 144 reef protection markers in places along the Great Barrier Reef supporting recreational users and tourism operators. This new investment is providing an additional 100 moorings from Cairns in the north down to the Keppel islands near Rockhampton in the south.

I am pleased to announce that, in addition to 25 new protection markers which designate no anchoring areas, 20 new public moorings have been installed and are now operational around the Keppel islands and offshore Cairns. Building upon this and in coming months, 40 more moorings and 32 reef protection markers will be installed around the Whitsundays. I am sure this will be welcomed by the member for Mackay. These moorings have never been more essential to the region, especially as it recovers from the effects of Tropical Cyclone Debbie. Everything possible needs to be done to minimise damage to the region's remaining fringing coral and reefs and to support a tourism industry which showcases the country's greatest natural asset to the world.

After these works have been completed in the Whitsundays, locations for moorings around Townsville and Mackay will be scoped on Magnetic and Orpheus islands, along with a second round of moorings in the Whitsundays. The moorings installed to date have been extremely well received. They are proving to be a valuable asset to regional marine park tourism operators along the Great Barrier Reef coast.

Coupled with the moorings, reef protection markers are being installed and used to clearly mark no anchoring, reducing the risk of anchor damage particularly on sensitive island fringing reefs. The ecological benefits of not dropping anchors on coral are self-evident. Investing in installing and expanding the network of public moorings is a key commitment of the Queensland government within the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. I am pleased that we are delivering upon this direct and very tangible reef protection so quickly.

**Mr MADDEN:** I fully support your kind words about our hardworking QPWS rangers. They often do work under very difficult circumstances. I am pleased to say that many of them studied at my old university, UQ Gatton. Can you detail how the many rangers were employed last financial year and detail the kind of work they do in our national parks?

**Dr MILES:** I will ask the director-general to pass that feedback on to our rangers. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service rangers are front-line workers who manage our national parks to provide for the permanent preservation and ecological sustainability of our natural and cultural resources.

The work of our rangers is quite varied. A ranger might work on pest, weed and fire management, conserving wildlife habitat, providing tourism and recreational opportunities, allowing for controlled scientific study and monitoring of our natural resources or ensuring the conservation of nature by the education and cooperative involvement of the community and landholders. Rangers work in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders to contribute to the land management, recreational and conservation outcomes across Queensland's protected area estate.

There were 795 rangers employed by the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing as at 23 June 2017. This ranger cohort is located across the state, including in regional and remote areas. They do an incredible job, as you say. In my experience they are passionate about the work they do conserving our special places for our kids and their kids to enjoy.

Let us not forget that under Tim Nicholls's slash-and-burn budget of 2012 the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service lost around \$10 million from their salaries budget. That meant QPWS had around 60 fewer active and paid rangers in 2014 compared to when the LNP took over in 2012. On top of this, under the Nicholls-Newman government when permanent rangers left their positions were kept vacant.

These two issues combined significantly reduced the ranger workforce under the LNP. Then on top of that, the non-ranger workforce in QPWS was reduced by 25 per cent under the LNP, which shifted an enormous amount of work back onto the rangers. That is the legacy the member for Clayfield and the LNP left for Queensland. Every one of the 795 rangers employed in this department does a valuable job. It is always an honour to go out on park and see what they do firsthand.



**Mr MADDEN:** Could you advise the committee if there is any work currently being done overseas by QPWS rangers in international partnership agreements?

**Dr MILES:** This is a really great story. I am pleased to inform the committee that earlier this year the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service was invited by the Papua New Guinea government to continue the working relationship that was established in 2015. This relationship allowed for nine Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service officers to assist the Kokoda Track Authority in implementing the recommendations previously made by officers from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

Those recommendations followed a management trek in 2015 in the lead-up to the 75th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign of World War II. The Kokoda initiative brings together Papua New Guinea and Australian interests in preserving the Kokoda Track region. Among other things, it is a joint development program to assist the Papua New Guinea government with the longer term management, sustainable development and protection of the Kokoda Track and the greater area's important natural, cultural and military heritage values. The Kokoda Track Authority is a key partner in the initiative as the body responsible for keeping the track open and safe and managing the track on a day-to-day basis. The Queensland government entered into a memorandum of understanding between the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the Kokoda Track Authority to provide Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service assistance on projects including track upgrade, slope stabilisation and regeneration work.

The success of previous support services is now heavily reflected within the Kokoda Track Authority work program leading up to the 75th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign. The work program identified five projects to undertake accelerated track repair and conservation work under a service agreement between the Australian government's Department of the Environment and Energy and the Queensland government's Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing to ensure that all expenses, excluding labour costs, were paid for by the Australian government. This initiative attracted positive media attention both here and in Papua New Guinea.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service ran a statewide expression of interest seeking staff to assist with the work program. Nine staff were selected and attended Kokoda on two rotations of deployment. The last rotation of four Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff were lucky enough to attend the Anzac Day celebrations at the Bomana War Cemetery before they headed out to work on the Kokoda Track. I am sure that the memory of this will stay with them for a very long time.

**Mr MADDEN:** Minister, with reference to page 3 of the SDS, can you update the committee on the Raine Island Recovery Project?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for Ipswich West for his question. I am pleased to advise that the Raine Island Recovery Project is delivering very tangible, immediate and positive results in improving the viability of the world's largest green turtle rookery. Cliff-top fencing has been installed to stop nesting females becoming upturned onto their backs and the beach has been reprofiled to ensure turtle nests escape tidal inundation and sea level rises.

The project has dramatically increased green turtle hatchling numbers and reduced female adult mortality. These are encouraging results for a species listed as vulnerable and an icon to the Great Barrier Reef. For example, the 1,100 metres of cliff-top fencing has so far saved over 400 adult female turtles which has enabled them to go on and breed and nest again. This number will only continue to grow each year. Improving hatchling numbers are also being achieved in the reprofiled beach section. There is more nesting occurring and hatching success is approximately 15 per cent higher in this area compared to the unaltered sections of the beach.

Courtesy of the project's sponsors, BHP and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, rangers and traditional owners now have a far more regular presence on this very remote island. Rangers and traditional owners were on site to rescue 161 adult turtles during the last nesting season. These turtles would have otherwise died from either heat exhaustion or entrapment under cliff edges. I had the privilege of seeing firsthand and even participating in a number of these rescues when I visited the island with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and BHP in February this year. It was a very rewarding and humbling experience.

Every rescued turtle is an injection of life back into an ecosystem under extreme pressure. Building upon the successes to date, I am pleased to announce that rangers and traditional owners will travel back to the island in August to undertake further beach reprofiling work, install more cliff-top fencing and remove dangerous cliff entrapment areas. This reprofiling will bring the percentage of the nesting beach that has been reprofiled to over 20 per cent, and an additional 200 metres of fencing will have been installed. This work will save even more green turtles each year and maintain Raine Island as the largest and most valuable green turtle recruitment ground in the world.

Beyond saving turtles, this project is also delivering other groundbreaking successes. The project is adopting new technologies and leading innovation in passive seabird and turtle monitoring techniques through the use of high-resolution video drones, acoustic recorders, satellite tags and differential GPS. This year for the first time a satellite broadband connection has been installed to enable real-time data capturing and monitoring on the island. These techniques are proving far more accurate, less disruptive to the wildlife and more efficient. The work on Raine Island will pave the way for their adoption in similar research work across the Great Barrier Reef. Twenty-four acoustic monitoring stations have been installed around Raine Island to record bird sounds, and sound recognition software will be used to determine the number and species of seabirds. Continuing this type of work in such a remote and sensitive environment is a hugely expensive and logistical undertaking which draws upon the collective expertise of scientists, traditional owners, rangers and engineers. This vital project can only be made possible through the strong partnership between the Queensland government, the island's traditional owners and the project's sponsors BHP and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

In particular, I acknowledge the island's traditional owners, the Wuthathi people of Cape York, and the Meriam people of east Torres Strait, who have been willing to explore new ideas and trial such innovation on their country. Their vision and courage have been central to the project's success. As the Great Barrier Reef comes under increasing threat from climate change, it is these types of partnerships, coupled with on-ground adaptive management actions, which will become increasingly important to the reef's survival.

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

**Mr KATTER:** I refer to page 8 of the SDS and the department's objective to increase the state's protected areas. In relation to the Nature Conservation Bill, has any provision been made for incentives to be provided to private landholders to convert their land to a special wildlife reserve or any other costs related to the scheme's implementation?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. I seek the guidance of the chair.

**CHAIR:** We did not hear the question. Could we hear it again?

**Mr KATTER:** I refer to the SDS and the department's objective to increase the state's protected areas. In relation to the Nature Conservation Bill, has any provision been made for incentives to be provided to private landholders to convert their land to a special wildlife reserve or any other costs related to the scheme's implementation?

**CHAIR:** I think that is anticipating a bill that is before the House. Can you ask another question?

**Mr KATTER:** I refer to that same objective on page 8 of the SDS. In relation to national park roads, shires like the Burke shire in my electorate have had diminished capacity with rates over the years with the conversion of land to national parks. The Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park is in that shire. There is increased tourist traffic on the council road, but they have reduced capacity with rates. It is terrific that we are showcasing national parks and it is a good thing that people see them, but councils have less and less ability to maintain the roads. Are there any plans in relation to that sort of low-level infrastructure associated with these parks to address that shortfall that is growing for those smaller councils in those remote areas?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. I think it is something we have discussed before. I know that councils like Burke have raised it with me before. It is a longstanding practice that when land is converted to national park it is no longer rateable land. It is our intention, though, that in doing so we would increase economic activity in the area such that the total contribution would be greater than those forgone rates. Clearly, the roads used by the tourists to visit those places are an important component of being able to attract tourists and deliver those dollars into those local economies and create jobs. Obviously there are other roads within the parks that are managed by National Parks, and we have more capacity to support and contribute in those places.

**Mr KATTER:** I refer to page 8 of the SDS and the allocation of \$5.8 million for crocodile management. How much of that \$5.8 million is expected to be spent on activity directly related to removing crocodiles?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. I think you might be looking at the EHP SDS, member for Mount Isa, rather than the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service SDS. The crocodile management program is under EHP.

**Mr KATTER:** Correct. You have caught me out again, Minister.

**CHAIR:** Are you happy to answer, Minister?

**Dr MILES:** Perhaps we can catch up offline and I can provide you a breakdown of those funds.

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

**Dr ROWAN:** It is great, Minister, to hear you talk about the Raine Island turtle conservation program, because that was initiated under the LNP. It is great for you to give credit to the LNP for some great conservation and environmental outcomes that have been delivered there.

You have been in government for 2½ years. I have heard other members talk about supporting our rangers and our Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff, and it is very important to do that. That is why I am going to take you back to page 3 of the SDS. Minister, what you are spending on physical pest and weed management, in essence, is going to be the same. If you forget about the nest to ocean, what about the rest of the area? You will have an increase in protected areas, according to your own government's policy—that aim of 17 per cent—plus you have your current area. You are down from \$8.4 million last year to \$5.8 million this year. Doesn't this mean that there could be a real and present danger for your department in its management obligation for pests and weeds in national parks in Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. I have consistently acknowledged that the Raine Island project commenced under the previous government, although it was substantially expanded under us when we were able to secure BHP's funding. I am not sure that you still get to claim it given that the minister who delivered it is now the leader of One Nation.

It is correct to say that, as we discussed earlier, the pest management budget, exclusive of Nest to Ocean funding, is stable in the coming year. However, it has been our approach and continues to be the approach that where the national park estate is increased we will seek and secure additional funding for those increases. For example, in 2016 we provided \$21.6 million of new funding to properly resource the establishment and management of more than 700,000 hectares of new and future national park estates. To what I think your second point was, as we expand the estate we will also expand park management funding to be able to deliver that.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, I refer to page 3 of the SDS which outlines \$40 million over two years to revitalise national parks. Will this include providing public toilet facilities at the Mount Coolool National Park? If not, why not? This is a popular tourist destination visited by nearly 150,000 people a year.

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. I am aware of the interest, particularly from the member for Maroochydore, in having those toilet facilities located there. I have corresponded extensively with her about it. The decision Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service makes about how it allocates its capital budget in part considers the nature of the usage of the site and what other facilities are nearby. It is the view of QPWS that, because Mount Coolool is promoted as a short-walk destination, taking on average less than an hour to walk—and, while it is very popular, there is a Sunshine Coast Regional Council public toilet facility located in reasonable proximity to the walk. The department is therefore working with the Sunshine Coast Regional Council which manages the car park at the foot of the summit trail to address other issues, such as car-parking options and the provision of appropriate facilities. That may be a more appropriate location for a toilet facility there.

**Dr ROWAN:** The reason I am interested in this is that I have visited the site there and I have been to Mount Coolool National Park. As a doctor, I have seen the human waste that is there in the park itself. I hear what you are saying that there are related facilities, but the practical behavioural reality is that there are significant public health risks in relation to what is occurring there. I would reflect back to you and say that that is an issue that needs to be managed and dealt with because there is a clear and present public health risk around those areas. Could I ask you to consider that further, given that information?

**Dr MILES:** I am certainly happy to take on board that additional feedback and ask QPWS to consider it as they consider their capital works priorities. It is simply a matter that we do not have the money to build toilets everywhere.

**Dr ROWAN:** I refer to SDS page 9, heritage protection services and protecting Queensland's heritage to ensure that it is conserved. I refer to the Queensland Heritage Register listing No. 602169, the Woody Island Lighthouses and Ancillary Building Site, which were listed on 30 March 2001. Given the significance of both structures—the Middle Bluff and North Bluff lighthouses—as cited on the Queensland Heritage Register and meeting criteria A through to G, including their importance to Queensland history, their rarity as twin lighthouses and their contribution to understanding Queensland's history, importance in design and style of construction, do you agree with the listing and

the description of the register? If so, why are you not abiding by the statutory obligation of the listing which requires both lighthouses at Middle Bluff and North Bluff to be preserved? I seek leave to table some images of the lighthouses.

**CHAIR:** Is leave granted? There being no objection, leave is granted.

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. I visited one of the lighthouses concerned here with the member for Hervey Bay last year I think at the time I announced funding for the upgrade of it. I will ask Deputy Director-General Klassen to respond to the wider issue.

**Mr Klaassen:** I thank you for the question. As the member points out, there are two lighthouses on Woody Island. Our assessment of both of those structures was that we were able to do some works to restore the Middle Bluff Lighthouse, but the other lighthouse has deteriorated to such an extent that we currently do not have the available funding to restore it. It is a rather significant project that would require a large amount of funding so we have not been able to do that at this time. There is a local community representative who we continue to liaise with in regard to the project, but we do not have the funding at this time to progress restoration of that other lighthouse.

**Dr ROWAN:** Can I further ask then, with continued deterioration in the absence of funds, is the intent that it will come off the Heritage Register or will there be funds committed at some particular point? If so, what is the time line of that?

**Dr MILES:** There is no intention for it to come off the Heritage Register. With regard to whether there is anticipation that restoration might be able to happen in the future, I will ask the deputy director-general.

**Mr Klaassen:** I cannot give you a specific time frame around when that will occur. We continue to look at the prioritisation of our capital program across the state. Having seen the state which that lighthouse is in, it does require a significant amount of work. I am unable to give you a specific time frame other than we will continue to look at it.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, your department has received large increases in funding over the past two budgets. Given your approximate 30 per cent more financial allocation—a huge increase compared with many other departments—and given the significance of these lighthouses and that they are on the Heritage Register, why won't you allocate the \$225,000 to \$250,000 needed to restore North Bluff?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. It is correct that we have seen significant increases in the budget, although I would note again that that is off the back of pretty savage cuts by the previous government. The intention with the additional capital funding is to use it to provide, largely in response to feedback from the tourism industry, a series of upgrades to very iconic tourism attractions that will bring with it economic activity and jobs in the tourism industry. The specific allocation of all of those funds is still under consideration, and no doubt projects like this one are amongst those that might be considered.

**Mr MILLAR:** Minister, I refer to SDS page 8, efficiency measures and wildlife permits. What is the average time to process kangaroo mitigation permits in your department? I ask this because I have become aware of frustrating delays of two months or more from graziers and landholders in receiving their permits. Applications that were previously turned around in seven days are now taking two months. As you are fully aware, Western Queensland is in the middle of drought, five consecutive years. Graziers desperately need to manage whatever pasture they have to reduce overall grazing pressure. Minister, can you advise the committee why there is such a lengthy hold-up of approvals? Does the government expect rural landholders to engage in responsible land management, which includes management of overall grazing pressures, particularly in times of severe drought? Minister, is there a deliberate policy instigated to hold up approvals? It cannot be a resourcing issue, given the 40 per cent increase in the department over the past two years. What is happening here? We have gone from seven days to two months to get these permits through.

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. The committee is currently considering the National Parks, Sport and Racing Service Delivery Statement. The damage mitigation permits that you are referring to and the SDS you are referring to is the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection budget paper. This is not the time in our deliberations to consider that, but I have seen your correspondence on this matter. I think I wrote back this week and hopefully you have that response. Obviously, if you have further issues you want to raise, you should write to me again.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, I refer to SDS page 3 and it again concerns natural and cultural values and our parks and forests. I want to talk about fires and burning off. What is your target for prescribed burning off of the fuel load in Queensland national parks and state forests to guard against bushfires?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. The target is listed in the SDS area of the QPWS estate with fuel loads reduced.

**Dr ROWAN:** Is that five per cent? What is the percentage?

**Dr MILES:** The note against there is that the percentage is based on the royal commission into the Victorian bushfires.

**Dr ROWAN:** I will come to the director-general. Could you please outline the planned burn program for fuel reduction in Queensland's national parks in 2016-17? Specifically, which parks will see planned burns? Of those, what is the projected fuel load to be reduced? Does this include any areas under drought?

**Ms O'Shea:** Our park management program includes our fire management program. We do have a planned program but it is often dependent on the weather conditions. A burning exercise will be contingent on the weather of the day so we do not necessarily complete the entire program as scheduled. Our planned program is primarily to reduce fuel loads in order to decrease risk of fire, property and assets and to maintain biodiversity by burning areas of varying size at appropriate intervals to ensure habitat for the widest possible range of species.

On average, 400 planned burns were conducted each year in the five years between 2011 and 2016. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service uses a multiyear planned burn program which increases the flexibility of regional staff. With respect to the specific parks and whether any of those were in drought at the time of any burning, I would need to check that level of detail and endeavour to come back to you during the course of the hearing, through you, Minister.

**Dr ROWAN:** Will you take that on notice under the standing orders?

**Dr MILES:** Sure. I would just note that they are not necessarily all planned out in advance for the year so it may not be possible to answer all of that question, but we can get what information we can.

**Dr ROWAN:** That would be great because it leads into my next question. Leading up to summertime and November, December and January this year, is there a percentage of that five per cent that will be done in the first six months of this financial year compared to the next six months? Is there a historical target that will occur within that time frame? Is there a particular prescribed amount in this next six months?

**Ms O'Shea:** That is a technical operational matter and I will refer that to the deputy director-general of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

**Mr Klaassen:** There is no specific target as such. How we operate the burning program is that each park will have a priority program that they will look to get done. It is heavily dependent on the weather conditions and the fuel load that exists in the park at the time. If the conditions are right and the window is there, then burns will occur and be done based on the priority order that they exist and based on the availability of resources.

We coordinate closely with neighbours and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services on our planned burning program so there are a range of activities that we need to go through in order to get a burn done. We do not set a specific target at that time. We manage it across the year and we try to meet our target at the end of the year by getting those burns done when conditions are right. As the member would appreciate, fire management is a risky activity and we only want to do that when we are certain there are risks that can be controlled and managed and they are not going to impact adversely on neighbours or other property holders.

**Dr ROWAN:** Can I also note that the director-general took on notice under 183 to come back with that information?

**CHAIR:** Yes, that is noted.

**Mrs GILBERT:** In the sea diving community, there is a lot of interest in HMAS *Tobruk*. Can you give the committee an update on that ship?

**Dr MILES:** I can. It is an exciting project. The Department of Defence awarded the ex HMAS *Tobruk* to the Queensland government on 2 December 2016 to be used as a diving tourism site in the waters off Hervey Bay. It will be a terrific addition to the tourism experiences on offer in the Fraser Coast-Wide Bay region. Ex HMAS *Tobruk* is currently berthed at the port of Bundaberg since arriving under tow from Sydney on 14 December last year. Port approvals and all the necessary preparations have been undertaken, and tender processes are progressing on time for a head contractor who will

dismantle the ship, remove all contaminants and prepare her as a dive site. It is anticipated that the ship will be scuttled in late 2018 at a location within the Great Sandy Marine Park between Hervey Bay and Bundaberg and be open to the public as a premier dive site and tourist attraction for the Fraser Coast and Wide Bay area in early 2019.

On completion, this project will offer a year-round diving experience, supplementing existing seasonal location attractions, including whale watching and the Mon Repos turtle experience, bringing tourism and economic benefits to the Fraser Coast and Wide Bay areas. The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing is working closely with the regional councils and the Regional Dive Wreck Advisory Group on assessing site feasibility to allow for equitable permitted access from both regional centres. Assessing the feasibility of sites also involves considering access factors, such as diver safety, suitable currents, visibility, depths and winds.

This dive site will provide regional employment opportunities with a significant boost in both the Fraser Coast and Bundaberg regions. It will provide direct financial benefits to the commercial tourism dive industry, accommodation, retail, hospitality, ecotourism and transport sectors and is expected to draw local, interstate and international tourists.

Key port stakeholders have been consulted to ensure normal port operations are not adversely affected by the long-term berthing of the ship during preparation works. I would like to take this opportunity to formally acknowledge and thank the stakeholders who have shown tremendous support for the project. This includes my colleague the Hon. Kate Jones, Minister for Tourism, for her department's excellent work in securing the vessel from the Commonwealth through the EOI process in recognition of the substantial benefits it will bring to regional Queensland. I also acknowledge and thank the Gladstone Port Authority for assistance with finding a suitable berth for the vessel while it undergoes its transition and the team of Maritime Safety Queensland for their work in keeping maritime stakeholders engaged.

The Bundaberg and Fraser Coast regional councils have combined forces to contribute \$2.25 million to the project, with a further \$8 million contribution from the Queensland government. The regional councils will also contribute to ongoing maintenance and monitoring costs. We are planning a community open day on the ship prior to the commencement of the heavy works. Members should keep an eye out for these and not miss the opportunity to get on board the *Tobruk* before it is scuttled.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, Queensland has a lot of natural beauty. Can you outline what the government is doing to reduce red tape for ecotourism developments?

**Dr MILES:** The Palaszczuk government supports the growth of high-quality best practice ecotourism experiences on our national parks, marine parks and other protected areas. We have progressed a number of initiatives to foster the growth of this very important part of the government's tourism agenda. Importantly, we are taking a new approach to ecotourism that recognises that conservation and tourism are not opposing objectives; they can and must go hand in hand. The conservation values of our landscapes and wildlife are the very things that visitors want to experience, and this government wants to ensure these values are maintained not only for Queenslanders but for all visitors. The world's premier conservation organisation, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, has also said that visitation and ecotourism on protected areas is not only a good thing; it is a necessary thing for the long-term survival of protected area systems all over the world.

The Queensland Ecotourism Plan was released in September 2016, with actions underway to deliver on the vision of Queensland being an internationally celebrated ecotourism destination delivering world-class interpretation and experiences that support the conservation of special, natural places and unique Indigenous and cultural heritage. We are confident that this plan provides the framework to fulfil our vision of Queensland being an internationally celebrated ecotourism destination.

A number of reforms have been completed to streamline processes and reduce red tape. These include the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing providing a case management and support role for each developer-led ecotourism project. The application process has also been simplified, with consistent templates and assessment criteria from start to finish.

At the same time I announced the Queensland Ecotourism Plan in 2016 the government also released an ecotourism development toolkit for tourism proponents. The toolkit has been specifically designed to provide developers and investors with the knowledge and guidelines to make informed decisions regarding the development of ecotourism products on different land tenures. These initiatives are making it easier for clients to do business with the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing

and for more people to visit our parks. NPSR is currently leading several ecotourism proposals that have been submitted by tourism development proponents. Some of these are still commercial-in-confidence, and I am sure the committee will understand that I cannot detail them all here.

Other exciting projects are now in the public domain. One of these is the revitalisation of the Green Mountain Campground in Lamington National Park in partnership with O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat. There is also the Scenic Rim Trail through the Gondwana rainforest in Main Range National Park and Walkabout Creek adventures at The Gap, with activities including bike hire, segway hire, kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding.

We will continue to work with tourism proponents to develop unique ecotourism experiences across Queensland. This government is committed to leading the development of new ecotourism projects that will deliver our vision of Queensland being an internationally celebrated ecotourism destination.

Hinchinbrook Island and its Thorsborne Trail is one of our jewels in the crown and there is clearly an opportunity to investigate other low-impact visitor experiences that we can create on the island including commercially guided walks. In addition to some planned projects upgrading the visitor experience and infrastructure on Whitsunday Island and Whitehaven Beach, there is also the opportunity to establish premium ecotourism sites, making Whitehaven Beach the premier ecotourism location in the Whitsundays. I am pleased to announce that funds have been allocated to undertake the important feasibility work for these two exciting new ecotourism projects. This will ensure any future ecotourism development is designed to deliver commercial viability in an environmentally sensitive and responsible way.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, can you provide details to the committee of the funding for the Mon Repos development?

**Dr MILES:** The Mon Repos Turtle Centre supports the largest concentration of nesting marine turtles on the eastern Australian mainland and has the most significant loggerhead turtle nesting population in the South Pacific region. The success of nesting and hatching turtles at Mon Repos is critical for the survival of the endangered loggerhead turtle. The marine turtle nesting spectacle at Mon Repos Conservation Park is one of Queensland's most popular wildlife experiences. It provides a major tourism drawcard for the Bundaberg area.

To further enhance visitor experiences at Mon Repos and help create a year-round tourism destination, the Queensland government has provided funding of \$10 million to carry out a redevelopment of the Mon Repos Turtle Centre. The centrepiece of this development will be a new visitor centre themed around marine turtles. Funding for this initiative is from the Significant Regional Infrastructure Projects Program. The project will provide a boost to local businesses during construction, with small Queensland companies already awarded key contracts. The project is expected to significantly enhance ecotourism and other commercial opportunities in the Bundaberg area, with local businesses expressing early interest in a new cafe and new tour products around the area. The new turtle centre will provide exciting educational opportunities for Queensland schoolchildren and adults to learn about marine turtles and encourage conservation efforts.

**CHAIR:** Many people in my electorate certainly make use of the Daisy Hill area. You recently released the Daisy Hill directions paper. Can you provide detail on how the funding in this year's budget will help to achieve the aims in this directions statement?

**Dr MILES:** The Daisy Hill bushland is set for a facelift in time for the 2018 Commonwealth Games. Along with the Minister for Housing and Public Works and Minister for Sport, I had the pleasure of releasing the final Daisy Hill bushland directions paper and action plan on 5 June that the member refers to. This directions paper will guide the area's management, use and enjoyment over the next 10 years. It was developed after an extensive consultation process, a review of the site, analysis of relevant policy and planning frameworks and an assessment of recreation and tourism market opportunities.

The Daisy Hill bushland is located 25 kilometres south-east of Brisbane and is one of the most popular recreation parks in South-East Queensland. It attracts more than 400,000 visitors annually and caters for multi-recreational use including mountain bike riding, walking and horse riding. Following community feedback, the Queensland government has allocated \$3.3 million including \$2.8 million in 2017-18 to kick-start investment in the priorities identified in the directions paper to ensure the koala bushland is ready for locals and visitors to enjoy during the Commonwealth Games in 2018 and beyond.

These funded projects will deliver some important improvements in the lead-up to the games while also balancing the important planning and design works to guide future investment in the koala bushland. Key projects funded with the \$3.3 million are detailed in stage 1 of the action plan. The projects will be managed by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff with the assistance of the Department of Housing and Public Works project officers.

To date, work has been completed on upgrading and resurfacing 1.8 kilometres of the ring-road servicing the Daisy Hill Conservation Park day-use areas. Further work to be completed includes upgrading and constructing visitor facilities to serve the day-use area in the Daisy Hill Conservation Park, which includes replacing toilets and renewing barbecue and picnic facilities, pathways, bollards, signage and nature play areas; revitalising the koala centre to improve the visitor experience, focusing on interpretation and visitor orientation; undertaking a range of community conservation projects including flora and fauna surveys, weed management and revegetation; carrying out sustainable trail planning and work including a full trail audit and upgrades to trail signs; upgrading the existing upper trail head at Daisy Hill Road with new tables, gathering area and warm-up track; and undertaking road planning and a redesign study to address safety issues associated with shared use including pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

To assist with delivery of stage 1, a park user reference group will be established and will include representatives from the tourism, recreation and conservation sectors, local residents and traditional owners. These works will ensure that the Daisy Hill bushland continues to be an excellent outdoor hub for locals and visitors alike in the rapidly growing area of Logan.

**CHAIR:** Along a similar vein—another area that is frequented by many people from my electorate—can you provide details of the funding for Walkabout Creek?

**Dr MILES:** Walkabout Creek is a terrific asset for Brisbane families. I am proud of the work that QPWS has done to make it even more welcoming and accessible. In 2016-17 and 2017-18 over \$3 million was allocated for projects at the Walkabout Creek Discovery Centre to improve access and visitor experiences. The projects include \$1.539 million for the tower removal and visitor centre refurbishment, \$1,025,000 for additional car parking, \$242,000 for the finalisation of the activity trail and \$242,000 for the fire hydrant system upgrade. In 2016-17 the removal of the tower was completed and planning is well underway for the Walkabout Creek visitor centre refurbishment, additional car parking, finalisation of the activity trail and fire hydrant system upgrade.

The visitor centre refurbishment includes improved disabled compliant access to the visitor centre and wildlife display, enhanced interpretive spaces and displays, a new educational resource area, improved public amenities, expanded cafe and function spaces, and options for the future expansion of the wildlife display. While much of the current work at the Walkabout Creek Discovery Centre has focused on the outdoor activity areas, the visitor centre refurbishment project focuses on a well-overdue upgrade of the public facilities at Walkabout Creek and is expected to be completed by 30 June 2018.

In addition, to support the increasing popularity of the Walkabout Creek Discovery Centre an additional 30 car-parking bays will be provided as well as disabled access to the event's lawn and beach and a pedestrian activity trail from the TransLink park-and-ride at the southern end of the Walkabout Creek Discovery Centre to allow visitors using public transport to directly access the existing activity trails and areas. This project is due to be completed in early 2018. These important gateway visitor centre projects will see a significant improvement in the presentation of the Walkabout Creek visitor centre and access to its facilities.

**CHAIR:** Along a similar vein—another area that many people in my electorate not only visit but can see if they know where to stand—can the minister please provide details of the funding arrangements and operational arrangements for the management of North Stradbroke Island?

**Dr MILES:** You will have to take me to that spot where you can see Minjerribah.

**CHAIR:** It is a hell of a spot to letterbox, I can tell you!

**Dr MILES:** I am sure it is. The Palaszczuk government continues to be committed to the joint management of protected areas on Minjerribah and Teerk Roo Ra, the traditional owner name for Peel Island. In 2015 the Palaszczuk government delivered on its election commitment to provide new funding of \$12.1 million over four years and ongoing funding to support Indigenous joint management protected areas. The Indigenous joint management areas are jointly managed with the Quandamooka people under an Indigenous land use agreement and Indigenous management agreement in accordance with



the Nature Conservation Act. Joint management recognises the native title rights and interests of the Quandamooka people, their connection to the land and their desire to see it protected in a way that respects and preserves its natural and cultural values.

In 2017-18 the operational budget for the joint management of Minjerribah's protected areas is \$5.876 million, of which \$1.533 million was carried forward from 2016-17. The operational budget supports 12 ranger positions and a joint management coordinator in accordance with the Indigenous management agreement, with eight of these rangers employed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the other four employed directly by the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation, or QYAC, through a grant from the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing which commenced at the end of 2015. The four QYAC positions work collaboratively with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service rangers to manage protected areas through agreed work programs and assist in developing and implementing operating and capital projects. Joint management continues to provide the Quandamooka people with employment, training and financial opportunities that will assist in their long-term economic aspirations for the island and will also ensure that its natural and cultural values are conserved for the benefit of all Queenslanders. Joint management also plays an important role in the future of Minjerribah. A strategy for the expansion of national parks and other protected areas post mining is being developed as one of the initiatives outlined in the Economic Transition Strategy for the island.

**Mr MADDEN:** Minister, could you provide details as to the funding and operational arrangements for the management of national parks in Cape York and Far North Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** The Palaszczuk government is committed to the joint management of national parks on Cape York as well. The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing, through the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, jointly manages 28 national parks (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) with Aboriginal traditional owners who own the underlying Aboriginal freehold tenure. These parks protect over 2 million hectares of land with outstanding natural and cultural values. The parks are jointly managed with 14 Aboriginal corporations or land trusts.

In December 2016 I was very pleased to attend the handback ceremony for the Wuthathi (Shelbourne Bay) National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land). The ceremony showcased the pride, joy and opportunity that traditional owners experience when their country is returned to Aboriginal ownership. The joint management of national parks in Cape York and the establishment of Aboriginal freehold land provides excellent economic opportunities for traditional owners while also achieving significant conservation outcomes. In 2017-18 the Queensland government has specifically allocated \$10,788,000 for the joint management of National Parks (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) or National Parks CYPAL. This includes funding for Aboriginal corporations and land trusts to carry out jointly agreed park management works and services. Many Aboriginal traditional owners are employed in park management, either through these contracts or as rangers in the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Queensland government also provides specific funding for Indigenous ranger employment within the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in Far North Queensland. In 2017-18, this government allocated \$2.1 million for this Indigenous ranger program. The Indigenous ranger program funding provides for the ongoing full-time employment of 15 Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service front-line Indigenous rangers to deliver services on protected areas in Far North Queensland and across Cape York Peninsula. Additionally, 16 officers will be employed under the National Parks (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land) program to deliver enhanced land management of the protected area estate including coordination of joint management, pest and fire management projects and infrastructure development. Cape York national parks have also received \$1.3 million specific capital funding. This funding is directed towards infrastructure projects to support the delivery of the Cape York Joint Management Program. This government is committed to boosting ecotourism in Far North Queensland, investing in a new viewing platform at Nifold Plain in the North Rinyirru National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land), which is Queensland's second-largest national park.

**Mr KATTER:** Minister, referring to page 2 of the SDS, how much of your budget have you allocated to wild dog baiting and trapping in national parks?

**Dr MILES:** I will direct the question to the Deputy Director-General, Mr Klaassen, who might have that level of detail in the budget.

**Mr Klaassen:** What I can tell you is that in our Strategic Pest Management Program we did have \$67,000 allocated to wild dog project activity, which included a range of projects across several national parks including Western Queensland. Some of that project also included feral cat control as well.

**Mr KATTER:** Is that an increase on last year?

**Mr Klaassen:** I would not be able to tell you if that is an increase. I would have to check the figures and come back on that.

**CHAIR:** Would you like to take that on notice?

**Dr MILES:** Yes, we can do that. Before we go on—because I think the member for Mount Isa will be interested in this—the wild dog eradication program includes partnership with the Sporting Shooters' Association, whose members participate in that program and help us remove pests from various protected areas. I had a hunch you might be supportive of a program like that.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, I want to come back to prescribed burning at page 4 of the SDS. Can you confirm that the department has previously met, and will meet, the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission target of five per cent for prescribed burning of the state this year?

**Dr MILES:** I will ask the Deputy Director-General to speak to that in just a moment. I would note that the ability to meet those targets can be greatly impacted by the weather in a particular year, and that can lead to some variability in the ability to meet those targets. I will ask Mr Klaassen to respond to the question.

**Mr Klaassen:** The data I have as at 30 June indicates that for last year we did 694,958 hectares, which is in excess of our target of 630,000 hectares. Yes, we did meet the target in 2016-17.

**Dr ROWAN:** Do you believe you will be able to meet it this year subject to the comments from the minister?

**Mr Klaassen:** That anticipates a range of factors such as weather, so I would not be able to give you a guaranteed commitment. I can tell you that we will be working to our best endeavours, noting the conditions that are there, to deliver our planned burn program, which is a target of 632,000 hectares for 2017-18.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, with reference to page 3 of the SDS, is there any specific allocated funding this year for the D'Aguilar National Park with respect to car parking, walking trails or other specific upgrades?

**Dr MILES:** It is a level of detail regarding intended capital expenditure at D'Aguilar National Park, and we will see if we have any information to hand.

**Dr ROWAN:** I am happy for you to take it on notice.

**Dr MILES:** When you say D'Aguilar National Park, do you mean at Walkabout Creek?

**Dr ROWAN:** Just generally.

**Dr MILES:** I can answer that. I outlined earlier some of the work at Walkabout Creek, but there is planning underway to increase car parking at the visitor centre there—I think by an additional 30 car parks—as well as extending the walking trail to the park-and-ride facility. We are spending about \$1 million on the car park upgrade. Linking with the park-and-ride facility makes a lot of sense. The car park requirements at Walkabout Creek are primarily at the weekend. When you cannot get a car park obviously the park-and-ride is not really used at the weekend, so connecting those two things together will give us increased park-and-ride capacity. I am sorry I did not connect the two when you asked.

**Dr ROWAN:** I refer to page 2 of the SDS, which states—

Delivering quality frontline services by providing customer-focused visitor experiences on parks and forests.

How many national parks in Queensland currently have wi-fi infrastructure for visitors to book their campsites online?

**Dr MILES:** We might have to check on the exact number. There are 13 wi-fi sites. Clearly there are a lot of national parks without wi-fi access.

**Dr ROWAN:** Can you take that on notice under the standing orders and provide that information?

**Dr MILES:** Yes. What further information do you want? Do you want to know which 13?

**Dr ROWAN:** Yes, currently which national parks have wi-fi access and which do not, and if there is a plan for the additional rollout, over what prescribed time frame?

**Dr MILES:** Yes, we can take that on notice.

**Dr ROWAN:** I refer to page 3 of the SDS concerning natural and cultural values on parks and forests and I want to come to the Currawinya National Park. Does the Strategic Pest Management Program include conducting surveys of pest populations in national parks? Are there surveys to quantify pest populations in national parks?

**Dr MILES:** In specific locations?

**Dr ROWAN:** Specifically I am going to come back to Currawinya because of some of the specific biodiversity and other conservation issues that exist there. Is there population surveying and mapping that takes place in relation to that?

**Dr MILES:** That is a level of detail in the program that I will need to ask the Deputy Director-General to respond to.

**Mr Klaassen:** Specifically with regard to Currawinya National Park, on acquisition of the park we had what was referred to as a muster and got ranger volunteers and other people from across Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to go out onto the park for a week or two. They went around and did a detailed analysis of what was on the park which is being fed into a pest management strategy which is being progressed.

**Dr ROWAN:** In relation to that muster and the volunteers and the survey that they did, what were the results of that?

**Mr Klaassen:** I do not have the specific detail of those results in front of me. I have been out to Currawinya myself, and I can report back that there are a range of pest management challenges, particularly with goats, out at Currawinya. There are thousands and thousands of goats, so we have a goat control program that has been put in place to deal with that. There are a range of legacy infrastructure assets that are on the park as former grazing properties. There are bores and dams that need to be looked at and capped. There are pig control issues around the artesian springs that exist on the park. We put in place fencing around certain artesian springs to stop feral pigs getting in, because the water points that they get into are quite valuable ecosystems that we wish to protect. They are the types of high-level results that I am aware of that came back from the muster and from my experience of going out and having a look at the park as well.

**Dr ROWAN:** This is based on the biodiversity and the conservation that we are talking about in relation to a specific national park, but is there any data around the goats, pigs and horses that have been culled in the Currawinya National Park in the 2015-16 and 2016-17 years?

**Mr Klaassen:** Yes, there is, Minister, but I would suggest that level of detail is something that we would have to take on notice.

**CHAIR:** Will you take it on notice, Minister?

**Dr MILES:** Sure.

**Dr ROWAN:** Does the department consult with Queensland police's stock squad before culling horses in national parks?

**Dr MILES:** Again I will ask Mr Klaassen to answer.

**Mr Klaassen:** With regard to feral horses on national parks, they are declared a pest. As a responsible landholder it is our responsibility to manage pests, so there is no need to consult the stock squad with regard to feral horses. However, if there are horses we will consult locally with the neighbouring properties to make sure they are not owned by any neighbours. If a neighbour says, 'Yes, they're my horses,' we say, 'Can you please come and remove the horses?' If they decided not to then we would say, 'Okay, we have to look at this as a pest problem,' and we would take action appropriately in terms of managing it as a pest species.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, when was the last annual aerial shoot of feral pigs in the Currawinya National Park, given that they are a specific problem there? Is there any idea of how many animals were removed through that process and when it last occurred?

**Dr MILES:** Again I will ask Mr Klaassen if he has that level of detail.

**Mr Klaassen:** No, I do not have that level of detail, Minister, so that is another one we will have to take on notice.

**Dr MILES:** Yes, we will take it on notice.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, I refer to the SDS at page 3 again relating to managing parks and forests and permissions and that sort of thing. Is there a current memorandum of understanding between the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Four Wheel Drive Queensland?

**Dr MILES:** I am advised that there is an MOU which is not current.

**Dr ROWAN:** I want to further clarify the process around that. Is there going to be a revision of that and the time lines? What is the intent around that and four-wheel drives in national parks?

**Dr MILES:** I will ask Mr Klaassen to respond.

**Mr Klaassen:** With regard to the issue around the MOU, we work cooperatively with a range of organisations. To my knowledge, Four Wheel Drive Queensland have not come back to us at this point in time to seek to renew the MOU, but we can check that. With regard to the issue of four-wheel drives, four-wheel drives are a road registered vehicle so they do have access to a range of national parks. We try to manage where they go so that they stay on approved roads and do not go on tracks that are not appropriate for four-wheel drives. That is about the level of information I can provide at this point in time.

**Dr ROWAN:** I refer to the SDS at page 3, again relating to conserving natural and cultural values of parks and forests. What is the kind of pest management that requires a national park to be closed in order for it to be carried out?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question, which again I will refer to Mr Klaassen, but I am aware of some pest management operations that for safety reasons do require the park to be closed. I am aware that aerial shooting of feral horses has required us to close parks, but I will ask Mr Klaassen to take us through those kinds of safety considerations.

**Mr Klaassen:** We will assess the nature of the pest activity that we are doing. Anything that involves shooting will automatically result in a closure of, as a minimum, a defined area or perhaps the whole park. When we are undertaking baiting activities we will restrict access to certain areas so that people are aware that we are doing baiting. It is mainly shooting and baiting which will necessitate closing off a park or a section of a park, primarily for the safety of park users, to ensure that no-one is in the vicinity when these activities are being undertaken.

**Dr ROWAN:** In relation to QPWS employed staff versus contractors, is there an idea of how much is actually carried out by the department versus how much is outsourced, Minister?

**Dr MILES:** Again, I will ask Mr Klaassen to respond to the extent he can.

**Mr Klaassen:** The majority of our pest management activities are undertaken by our staff because it is a high-risk activity that we want to supervise. We have a partnership arrangement with the Sporting Shooters Association, so they will be contracted as volunteers to go in to certain parks and undertake pest management activity. That is how the bulk of our pest management work is done—either by ourselves or through our partnership with the Sporting Shooters.

**Dr ROWAN:** What I am really wanting to get to, Minister, is: what is the total amount paid by taxpayers for contracts to cull feral animals in Queensland last year and what is the forecast for 2017-18? How much is paid by taxpayers to external contractors to augment what is already done by the department?

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

**Dr ROWAN:** Again just around the data of QPWS staff who are employed such as our rangers and then the shooters who are contracted to do that, presumably the data that is captured and reported on is kept by the department and then there is a cost value return on what that is in terms of a cost per animal. I am trying to get to that cost in the last 12 months and then the forward projections for 2017-18 and whether there has been an increase or a decrease. It would be great to be matching that against what is being spent on overall management of our parks in relation to pest management.

**Dr MILES:** Again, let us take that on notice and we will provide in our response the level of detail we can. There will be operations where we certainly have that level of data; there will be others where we do not. We will provide that to the level of detail we are able to, yes.

**Dr ROWAN:** Minister, has the department or the government given any consideration to further engaging rural landholders and other primary producers in that contractual way to be part of the solution in relation to managing pests in specific national parks across Queensland where there are real and present issues affecting not only those national parks but also the viability of agriculture?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for his question. As was mentioned earlier, we have that partnership with Sporting Shooters and certainly if landholders wanted to assist with pest removal they could operate under the auspices of that particular agreement.

**Dr ROWAN:** Do you want to take some of that on notice as well just to provide additional information?

**Dr MILES:** Sure, yes. Mr Klaassen is in a position now to answer your earlier question, member for Moggill, about consultation regarding the Lomandra and Samford conservation parks.

**CHAIR:** Minister, quite soon we will get to any of the questions taken on notice that you might be able to deal with today. We will deal with that in about two minutes, but before that we will have a question from the member for Mackay.

**Dr MILES:** Great.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Minister, could you please inform the committee what impacts the federal government's draft marine management plans will have on the government's ability to manage the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park?

**Dr MILES:** I thank the member for her question. Today the federal government released the results of its marine reserves review and this is actually very concerning, member for Mackay. The result is cuts to protections for our marine environments, particularly in the Coral Sea. The Coral Sea is a very important buffer for the Great Barrier Reef and a very important natural asset for Queensland. It provides a safe haven for much of the marine life found in the Great Barrier Reef. Protecting the Coral Sea makes sense. It is better to get management right now than let it suffer the same fate as many other areas.

Given coral bleaching, now is not the time to cut back protections in the Coral Sea. The Coral Sea is a big and important marine reserve that Queenslanders are very proud of and would not want to see diminished. It is utterly extraordinary that the federal government would even entertain an idea like this. Marine protection is not only good for the environment; it is also good for the Queensland tourism industry, for jobs and for our economy. The Coral Sea is the jewel in the crown of Labor's marine reserve network. These changes are another example of the Turnbull government walking away from reef protection. Diminishing the level of protection for our marine parks will diminish our capacity to deliver the important reef protection measures I have spoken about at length today.

**CHAIR:** Minister, are you or the department in a position to provide any answers to some of the questions on notice that have been taken today?

**Dr MILES:** We are, Mr Chair. On the first one I will ask Mr Klaassen to speak to the consultation that occurred at those two Brisbane parks.

**Mr Klaassen:** With regard to the Lomandra Day Use Area project, I can advise the member that formal consultation was not undertaken on that project as a smaller project. There were some unique circumstances in this case and the Lomandra upgrade was carried out in response to liaison with the Queensland Police Service as the area was being used for illegal activities, so we were requested to have a look at what we could do there. It was a park and a toilet block. We were requested to have a look at how we could improve the aspect of that to reduce the illegal activities that were occurring, so it was decided to make that into a mountain-biking area.

With regard to the Samford Conservation Park, the Samford Conservation Park management statement is due for development and formal consultation will be undertaken regarding the future use of the park in this process.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Dr MILES:** I have a little bit of further information on the memorandum of understanding with Four Wheel Drive Queensland. I understand that discussions on a new MOU are well advanced and we would expect to have a new agreement in place sometime soon. I am told it is in Deputy Director-General Oestreich's office at the moment.

On other matters, in the earlier session the member for Mount Isa asked a question about how many EHP employees now work for gas companies. I am afraid that, other than transfers within the Public Service, the department does not capture data on the specific industry of new employees or vice versa and there is no policy restraint of trade or limitation in where a person moves from or to, so we are not in a position to provide any of that level of detail.

With the member for Mount Isa's question regarding hail cannons, research or investigation with respect to the effectiveness of hail cannons for protecting crops is a matter for DAF. We are aware that DSITI did some work some time ago to determine their effectiveness. I am also aware that there are issues of conflict and competition that have been raised with me, but there is not an environmental approval process required.

In terms of questions taken on notice, that leaves planned burns for the coming year categorised by drought status, sites with wi-fi and plans for wi-fi expansion and the Currawinya National Park culling program outcomes. In terms of other questions we have taken on notice, we will get as much data as we can for you about the proportion of QPWS staff versus contracted staff engaged in pest removal

and cost per annum. We will review *Hansard* and make sure we have every component of that one. The last question on notice relates to the details of the last aerial horse shoot at Currawinya, the number of removals and that kind of thing.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Did you have anything you wanted to say before we close?

**Dr MILES:** If you would not mind letting me, just briefly, Mr Chair, thank you, the committee and all committee members for the interest you have shown in my portfolio. Member for Moggill, thank you for your questioning. *Hansard* and the committee secretariat are the unsung heroes who do an incredible job turning around the *Hansard* of these things.

I want to thank everyone from my departments. From the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection I want to thank in particular Director-General Jim Reeves as well as Dean Ellwood, Tony Roberts, Nick Weinert, Rob Lawrence and their key support staff. I also want to thank the Director-General of the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing, Tamara O'Shea, and deputy directors-general Wade Oestreich and Ben Klaassen and all of their key support staff as well and the team within both agencies who worked to put together briefing materials and helped us prepare.

I particularly want to acknowledge my very dedicated hardworking chief of staff, Danielle Cohen, who not only wrote this statement but also did a fantastic job, as did all of my ministerial staff who have put in an enormous effort to make sure that I was prepared for today. I am sure they are as excited as I am to get to do it again next week!

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The time allocated for these hearings has expired. That completes the committee's consideration of the estimates of expenditure for the committee's portfolios today. The transcript of this session of the hearings will be available on the *Hansard* page of the parliament's website within two hours. I remind you that the deadline for questions on notice and clarifying material is 5 pm on 25 July, which is next Tuesday. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the *Hansard* staff, the secretariat and the attendants for their assistance today. I thank the minister, director-general and all departmental officers for your attendance. I want to thank my fellow committee members and visiting members as well. I declare this public hearing closed.

**Committee adjourned at 6.30 pm**