

Tuesday 4 June 2013 - Estimates Committee B (Wightman) - Part 2

DIVISION 10

(Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment)

Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage

Output group 3

Resource Management and Conservation

3.1 Land Management services -

Mr WIGHTMAN - The Environment, Parks and Heritage portfolio does a range of important works to manage the sustainable use and protection of Tasmania's natural resources, ensuring a healthy environment for all Tasmanians and we manage and protect our natural and cultural heritage, including our iconic heritage assets parks reserves and crown land.

New initiatives started in 2013 include new funding of \$3 million to the Port Arthur Site Management Authority to undertake stabilisation work in the Penitentiary precinct building. The major structural work to be undertaken is an important part of a large-scale project to conserve the iconic structures inside. New funding of \$175 000 per annum to the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens for ongoing sustainability of recurrent operations supporting the operation of the Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre. New funding of \$100 000 for the Mine Remediation and Innovation Centre of Excellence study. The funding will be used to evaluate a proposed centre at Queenstown focussed on trialling development technologies in mine site rehabilitation. New funding of \$50 000 to undertake a cost benefit study of a state-based container deposit system for Tasmania. The study will build on existing work already undertaken on container deposit systems and provide information on public and private investment requirements for a model scheme. Significant progress is also made on a range of ongoing initiatives. The amalgamation over the last year of Crown Land Service and Parks and Wildlife means that the management and administration of public lands in Tasmania is now better integrated. The new invasive species branch had a successful year. The branch brings together existing fox eradication, weed management and invasive animal staff and resources with a focus on building improved monitoring, incursion responses systems and reducing the damage and cost cause by these species.

I note the department has received significant Australian government funding for key programs in 2012-13 including the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program, which received \$2.06 million this year; the Fox Eradication Program, \$2.76 million; Parks Management Program, \$410 000; and Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage area, \$2.4 million.

Commonwealth funding beyond 30 June for the devil, fox and carp programs through the Caring for our Country program is yet to be confirmed. The government has been working hard to secure ongoing funding arrangements for these programs. I have emphasised to the Federal Environment Minister the importance of ongoing Commonwealth support and I am optimistic that future funding can be secured.

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The Three Capes Track, when completed, will provide a world-class walking experience. Stage 1 is practically complete and stage 2 is now under construction, and \$6.7 million of the \$25.3 million project is funded in 2013-14.

I am pleased that the Plastic Shopping Bags Ban Bill has now passed both Houses. Some \$780 000 in total is committed to implementing this initiative, with \$440 000 allocated in 2013-14 and \$40 000 for 2014-15.

The portfolio continues to support the critical work of developing contemporary Aboriginal heritage legislation for Tasmania with funding of \$600 000 per year being provided for ongoing management and implementation of new legislation. The funding has been reallocated from other resources within the department.

The 2013-14 consolidated fund budget allocation for the portfolio is \$72.07 million, including \$64.63 million for recurrent appropriation, \$6.28 million for administered payments and \$1.16 million of works and services appropriation.

I am pleased to confirm that the department has met its budget targets and tasks for 2012-13. The department faces no new targets as a result of this year's budget. Ongoing strategies are being developed to ensure that the department is in a position to meet the existing \$5.4 million savings target in 2013-14. What I am saying is we have not had any additional efficiency placed on top of that \$5.4 million. However, I acknowledge that it will continue to be a challenging task to deliver and I look forward to another productive year progressing a balanced agenda in this portfolio.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Can you outline to the committee what savings have been made and where they are?

Mr WIGHTMAN - As part of the 2012-13 state budget, the department has been allocated an additional savings target of \$2.7 million for 2012-13, \$5.4 million for 2013-14 and \$6.9 million in 2014-15. The department has completed strategies to meet the 2012-13 savings targets and manage within the 2013-14 allocation. As I said in my opening remarks, it will be a challenging task.

Two one-off strategies have been successfully implemented to meet the \$2.7 million saving targets for 2012-13, namely:

(1) A reduction of \$2 million to the additional initiative funding of \$2.5 million for the Office of the Valuer-General in relation to valuation and rating reform. The funding reduction recognises that the government at the time was awaiting the outcomes of the rating and valuation review.

(2) A reduction of \$7 000 for the Save the Tasmanian Devil program. This has been achieved by deferring \$400 000 in infrastructure and maintenance with a balance achieved through restructuring the management of the program.

I make the important point that these decisions have not impacted on the overall effectiveness of this important program.

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The budget management strategies for 2012-13, although temporary, have provided time for the department to develop ongoing strategies to ensure that the department is in a position to meet the \$5.4 million savings target in 2013-14. I can go into those.

CHAIR - Staff numbers, last financial year number and then the current.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I will go through output. As at 30 April 2013, DPIPWE employed 1 289.24 FTEs, plus 75 FTEs on leave-without-pay or secondment, or transfer to another agency. Of the 1 289.24 FTEs employed, 846.85 FTEs are funded from the consolidated fund with the remaining balance of 442.39 FTEs funded from the commonwealth and industry funds, and retained user charges. DPIPWE also employs 22.70 FTEs in the Inland Fisheries Service.

[2.30 p.m.]

Output group 1, Information and Land Services: to April 2012 - 244.74 FTE; April 2013 - 247.01 FTE. That is an increase of 2.27 FTE. Output group 2, Primary Industries, which is Minister Green: 51.37 FTE in April 2012, 49.55 FTE in April 2013, which is a reduction of 1.82 FTE. Resource Management Conservation, which is mine: 172.91 FTE in April 2012, 170.06 FTE in April 2013, a reduction of 2.85 FTE. EPA, Environment Protection and Analytical Services: 1.1931 FTE in April 2012 and 1.2027 FTE in April 2013, an increase of 0.96 FTE. Parks and Wildlife management: 326.71 FTE in April 2012, 299.62 FTE in April 2013, a reduction of 27.09 FTE, which includes Macquarie Island staff. Output group 9, Heritage: 50.97 FTE in 2012, 60.72 FTE in 2013, an increase of 9.75 FTE. DPIPWE total: 1 417.71 FTEs last year, this year 1 386.94 FTE, which is a decrease of 30.77 FTE.

CHAIR - There are 75 either on secondment or leave without pay. Those jobs are effectively still there waiting when they decide to come back; is that right?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

Mr EVANS - Sometimes people go on secondment without a promise that they will come back to exactly the same position and the same can be true for leave without pay. In these times where we have a difficult budget situation and we can reorganise and let someone go on leave without pay, it is a really useful way to try to save some money. We haven't discouraged people from taking leave without pay provided that we can manage it without any service level impacts in terms of critical service.

CHAIR - That is the key, minister, still being able to carry out the roles.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We know we have a large role. We have a large reserve system right across Tasmania, but we also do a lot of other things such as the EPA and RMC, conservation of flora and fauna in Tasmania. We have a job to do, but we also have a budget saving to meet.

CHAIR - Which is becoming more difficult.

Mr WIGHTMAN - It is challenging, but we are just fortunate it is a Labor budget and not a Liberal one.

CHAIR - Minister, we are not going to get into that. We are not going to go there. We tried this yesterday and it didn't work. It won't work today, tomorrow or Thursday.

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Mr DEAN - You start it every time, minister.

Dr GOODWIN - He manages to get one in.

Mr DEAN - If you can afford to lose 70-plus people from this area, from the organisation, how can it be justified that those positions are needed in the future? I don't know how long those 70 people are gone for. I guess they are coming back spasmodically, but what areas would suffer as a result of that? What areas would not be given the same level of -

Mr WIGHTMAN - The point I would make to you, Mr Dean, is that a number of those people own permanent positions within the department. They are just not all fixed-term temporary appointments. You might say 70 are away but you cannot just cut them out of the organisation.

Mr DEAN - No.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Do you understand what I mean?

Mr DEAN - I understand and accept that.

Mr WIGHTMAN - It is an industrial -

Mr DEAN - The work that those people were doing in the organisation - what actually happens to it? Is it now not done? And if it not being done now, how do you justify it into the future? That is the position I am putting.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I will have a go at it and then I will throw to you, Kim. Obviously, we have to manage our budget savings and we are able to do that. We have \$5.4 million to save this year. When you look at the different roles that each of the output groups performs, you see the ways you can do them most efficiently and you cover as much as you possibly can with those sort of issues. But it needs people working particularly hard in those areas. There is a lot of work on; we have a large reserve portfolio to manage. I am not saying that this is not challenging or that we could not do with additional staff resources. The simple fact is we cannot afford them.

Mr DEAN - I understand that and I accept that they are hardworking; I am not questioning that at all.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I understand that too.

Mr DEAN - Is that reflected in any way in health issues, stress leave, sick leave? Is it shown anywhere else in the organisation?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Kim?

MR EVANS - This is a big organisation. We have 1 400 staff, and the numbers that the minister gave you were at a date - April 2012 to April 2013. If you were to look at any year and at any time we would have a number of staff - it may be higher or it may be fewer than 75 - who are off on leave without pay or seconded or are transferred to another agency. We do not discourage that, provided that we can make arrangements to continue to deliver the services.

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Mr DEAN - On top of that, there would be those who were on annual leave, and so on.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, that is right.

MR EVANS - Yes, and some of these staff would be backfilled. It is not a case of, 'We have got 75 people out of their jobs at this one point in time, therefore we can do without 75 people'. Those positions will change across the organisation, depending on the timing and the year. So I don't think you can assume that just because on April 2013 we have 75 staff off on various arrangements that we can do without 75 staff.

Mr WIGHTMAN - If I can pick up from Kim there and take you to the profile of the leave and also sickness, 97 per cent of staff have a recreation leave balance of less than 40 days. This is consistent with the same time last year. The average long service leave entitlement per employee was 24.92 days. This compares to 24.44 days at the same time last year, so it is very similar.

Mr DEAN - Very good.

Mr WIGHTMAN - The average personal sick leave taken per employee for 2012-13 was 5.28 days. This compares to 4.94 days at the same time last year. For 2012-13, 45 staff have taken or were on parental leave, including maternity leave. This compares to 65 staff at the same time last year, and 213 staff had taken up the new option of the purchased leave scheme.

Mr DEAN - Stress leave, minister?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Is it included as sick leave?

MR EVANS - No.

Mr WIGHTMAN - So at 31 March 2013, there were five people on stress leave. I would prefer to have nobody on stress leave but that is small out of a large organisation.

CHAIR - That is pretty good out of 1 400 - especially when you are cutting the budget as you are, minister.

Mr DEAN - Don't go down that path.

Laughter.

Dr GOODWIN - Minister, you just mentioned something about a new option of purchased leave.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I will get Kim to explain the purchased leave scheme.

MR SALTER - You basically take a reduction in your pay to accrue up to an extra 10 days leave. That was under the last State Service agreement.

CHAIR - How well has that been taken up, minister?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Two hundred and thirteen people have taken it up.

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Dr GOODWIN - Contracts and consultancies - can we go through that same exercise as this morning?

Mr WIGHTMAN - These are awarded contracts for greater than \$50 000 between 1 July 2012 and 20 April 2013. The department entered into 14 contractual agreements in excess of \$50 000. In 2011-12 the department entered into 13 contractor agreements in excess of \$50 000. The combined value of the 2012-13 contract as at 20 April 2013 was approximately \$6.6 million. Thirteen of the contracts have been awarded to Tasmanian suppliers with a combined value of approximately \$6.3 million. So \$6.3 million out of the \$6.6 million are Tasmanian contractors.

CHAIR - Impressive.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Awarded consultancy less than \$50 000. Between 1 July 2012 and 20 April 2013 the department entered into three consultant agreements in excess of \$50 000. The combined value of the 2012-13 consultant contracts as at 20 April 2013 is approximately \$697 000. One Tasmanian consultancy agreement was awarded the contract value of approximately \$241 000.

CHAIR - For?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Geometry Pty Ltd, Battery Point: business unit of ILS professional services, a development of mapping and common operating picture web interface - \$241 000.

CHAIR - Please explain.

Mr EVANS - In Minister Green's side of the portfolio there is large project called the Spatial Information Foundations Project, which is a rejig of the entire LIST system. That was one of the consultancies that was let as part of that program. We are happy to table the consultancies and they go down to payments to consultants of less than \$10 000, so they are all on that document. We will ensure you have that.

Dr GOODWIN - Minister, have there been any voluntary redundancies in the department this financial year?

Mr EVANS - Twenty-five.

Mr WIGHTMAN - As at 30 April 2013 the department approved six targeted voluntary redundancy arrangements in the 2012-13 financial year. The cost of these separation payments was \$429 954 and this included an incentive component of \$110 884.

Dr GOODWIN - Are you able to indicate which area they were from?

Mr EVANS - I do not have all of the details here with me.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We can get for you where those six employees are from.

CHAIR - Your mine rehabilitation pilot project, \$100 000.

Mr WIGHTMAN - It is a study.

CHAIR - A study. My understanding was that before a mine application is approved they have to have -

Mr WIGHTMAN - No, it is not that. This is about rehabilitation of old mines, in particular.

[2.45 p.m.]

CHAIR - That no longer have an owner.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, we have an issue with mines in Tasmania with acid drainage, particularly getting into the waterways. This is looking at remediation of mine sites. When you have got so many mines right across the country the one thing Tassie does well is research and development so it is seen as an opportunity to have that development and research make sure that you deal with those acid drainage issues right across the state and they are skills we could certainly export if they were required.

CHAIR - Thank you. I was just thinking each company would have an obligation to deal with those but they are obviously people who have long since passed.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Our legacy issues are most often with older mines that are no longer used in Tasmania. If you look at the mining practices on the west coast, for example Grange, which we had the great pleasure of visiting, are extremely environmentally conscious. They are extremely conscious of their employees and looking after them and they are a very good operation. The newer mines in operation have sound environmental practices in my view. It is some of the legacy issues from the older mines, where we tipped tailings down off cliff faces or hills and the like and hence the drainage issues.

CHAIR - That \$100 000 is only likely to get you an assessment of what is required, that would be fair to say?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

3.1 Land management services -

CHAIR - It tells me in the notes that this output group delivers co-operative weed management programs. I am yet to see that as I drive around the countryside so can you please let me know how we are dealing with that.

Mr WIGHTMAN - If you could stop and pick up the ragwort every time you see it, which I am sure you do, Madam Chair.

CHAIR - I see it everywhere. I need to understand with less money how we are going to fulfil that obligation.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Weed management remains a priority for the government. This is reflected in the Tasmanian Weed Management Strategy Weed Plan and compliance activities under the Weed Management Act 1999.

CHAIR - But you have cut the budget, minister.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

CHAIR - So it is not a priority.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I think all areas of the budget could be considered priority, Madam Chair, but you need to find the savings. It is still a priority but we do not have as much money to commit to that at this stage. We have extended the roles within the Invasive Species Branch, which undertakes weed management. The reason for a budget cut, and I do remember thinking about this plant when I was going through my notes, is mainly due to a commonwealth funding agreement that is finished and that was the serrated tussock 2013 project, and that is the reason why there has been -

CHAIR - So we have no more serrated tussocks.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Our eradication efforts have been sound, Alistair, with the serrated tussocks.

Mr SCOTT - I think so, yes. We do not claim total success but we have made some good progress at a number of properties. They are particularly down in the south-east around the South Arm area and also other parts of the state as well.

Mr WIGHTMAN - The \$300 000 came in as part of Caring for our Country funding and then that project has concluded.

CHAIR - It also talks about regulatory activities. What sort of compliance?

Mr WIGHTMAN - On weed management?

CHAIR - Yes. It says to ensure compliance. Are there any ongoing programs around that as we speak?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

Mr SCOTT - We have a number of weed inspectors, not only in our own department, and with Quarantine Tasmania, Forestry Tasmania and local government there are 53 weed inspectors. They do a lot of that work as well as the work that we do. Obviously as issues come up we are looking at issuing instructions or directions to landholders and that is done quite regularly.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Within the department we have 11 invasive species staff involved with weed management. We also have weed inspectors located in Quarantine Tas, in Forestry Tasmania, in our department, and 53 across 19 councils in the local government areas across Tasmania.

Mr DEAN - Gorse is one of these noxious weeds. There is a lot of activity currently in the Quercus Park and Hadspen areas. Is the department involved in that, or is that private work?

Mr SCOTT - I would imagine that we were offering advice on that, but I am not aware that we are involved on the ground.

Mr DEAN - There was a lot of work there and it was good to see.

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Dr GOODWIN - There are a lot of Coastcare and Landcare-type groups involved in weed management on a volunteer basis. Does the department have any formal interaction with them?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I will let Alistair give the more specific detail but we provide support and work with the NRM boards to ensure that there are links between NRM and also Landcare, Coastcare and the like.

Mr SCOTT - I do not have much more to add. We have 11 invasive species staff who are involved in weed management activities. That includes providing advice, working with councils and also working with Coastcare and Landcare groups. As the minister said, we work with the NRMs for the three regions.

Mr WIGHTMAN - They do a terrific job. I have tried to encourage NRM to work with other groups so that we have a co-ordinated response to those land management and natural resource management issues in Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thanks, minister. Can I take you to output group 3, table 11.5? I just want to get some clarification around the performance measures in relation to land. My question is that the target of 2012-13 for an increase in the amount of land protected by legislation is 47.1 per cent from 45.4 per cent. That is less than 2 per cent; but it also tells me in the notes that it includes the hectares protected under the Tasmanian Forests Agreement. Is that 'less than 2 per cent' correct? Is that absolutely rock solid? My understanding is that 504 000 hectares was going to increase the land reserve by more.

Mr WIGHTMAN - But it is 100 000 to start with - a tranche. It is only tranche 1 in that time period, so it would be 100 000.

CHAIR - You have not included the whole.

Mr WIGHTMAN - That would be my understanding, unless I am corrected.

CHAIR - That is what I am clarifying.

Mr WIGHTMAN - To me, it would be the first tranche.

CHAIR - The first tranche of 176 000 hectares, I think, was the first tranche all up; that is if the World Heritage listing goes ahead.

Mr WIGHTMAN - What we will do is take that on notice and get an answer for your question. We should be able to get that.

CHAIR - I do not think that those figures reflect the notes, but I am happy to take further clarification on that.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We will just need to take further advice on that.

CHAIR - That is fine. I have talked about the reduction of \$188 000 to that area, but you assure me that you will still be able to undertake the required services through that department.

Mrs TAYLOR - I was thinking that that would come into output group 8: Parks and Wildlife.

CHAIR - But it talks about it in the notes to one, that is why I picked it up there. So I know it almost cross-references but I made sure that -

Mr WIGHTMAN - And we will get some confirmation around that, Madam Chair.

Mr DEAN - Capeweed concerns local government to some degree. It is concerning a lot of people, brought to my attention; out around the Dilston area.

Mr SCOTT - I don't have any specific information on that, I am sorry.

Mr DEAN - Right.

Mr SCOTT - But we could provide some if there is -

Mr DEAN - If you could, particularly in the Dilston area. I know the Launceston area used to get huge numbers of complaints in relation to capeweed in the nature strips and lawns, so I wondered whether the department was doing any work on it.

3.2 Conservation of Tasmania's flora and fauna -

Mr DEAN - You have mentioned a \$7 million decrease in the fox eradication program, and devils. I know you are pursuing further funding from the commonwealth, but what does it mean to those programs at this time and without that extra funding? I daresay you have a strategy in place?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, with the devils we are deferring an isolation project but we hope to pick that up through Caring for our Country. Caring for our Country is differently organised now into two streams; one is agricultural and one is conservation. They are looking at supporting projects like some of those landscape isolation projects, rather than just an issue like saving the Tasmanian devil. Under Caring for our Country, we have an opportunity to be able to apply for additional funds for fox eradication. The important part to note is that we, over a longer period of time, have looked about at this fox issue in Tasmania. Last year we brought in an invasive species unit just to broaden the role it and that seemed to be particularly well received right across the state. We are attempting to broaden the role of the fox eradication taskforce to make it into the invasive species so that they are dealing with a number of issues, not just fox related; it could be cats, weeds and the like.

Mr DEAN - What changes has that brought to the department in the way that you are doing your work?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I have a rather long answer, Mr Dean, which might just clarify a lot of your follow-up questions, so if we perhaps do that and it can canvas a number of issues about foxes and might answer a lot of them.

Members will recall last year that I announced the formation of the Invasive Species branch within the Resource Management and Conservation division to improve our response to a broad range of invasive animals and plants. The new branch brought together staff from across the

RMC Division and from Biosecurity and Product Integrity division to maximise the effectiveness of our work in this area. We have three core objectives in this area: to support land managers dealing with established invasive species like feral cats, rabbits and weeds; to prepare for and respond rapidly to new and emerging threats like foxes and the various needle grasses and to develop community awareness and knowledge of invasive species.

[3.00 p.m.]

The Invasive Species Branch has now been in operation for over 12 months and has made significant progress in better coordinating our invasive activities. Achievements include the development of a cat management strategy, an on ground action to remove feral cats from important natural areas, new and better coordinated programs to control invasive birds, including emerging threats like Indian mynas and rainbow lorikeets and the commencement of an agile wallaby eradication program on the east coast. Rather than being confined to a particular work area, branch staff is working across a range of programs bringing a wider skill set to the branch's activities and continuing to build response capacity.

While the Invasive Species Branch has enabled us to work more effectively across a range of invasive species issues, I want to emphasise that fox eradication remains a core activity as part of the branch's broad portfolio. I am aware of the level of community interest in our fox eradication effort and the debate about the need for the program, which has become an easy target for some people. Put bluntly, we cannot afford to allow foxes to establish in Tasmania and I have always said that prevention is better than the cure. Let there be no doubt about the cost to our state if foxes established here and the government is committed to preventing what would be an ecological and economic disaster. We have worked hard to not only prevent potential decline, or even extinction, of an estimated 78 native species but also to avoid a massive impost on our agricultural sector that would cost tens of millions of dollars annually in losses and control programs. Rather than wait until foxes were widely seen and eradication not possible we have responded to the pool of evidence indicating fox activity in the state and created the opportunity to prevent their establishment.

This is now one of the largest conservation programs ever undertaken anywhere in the world. So far, as part of stage 2 of the program starting in 2010, precautionary baiting is being undertaken across over 430 000 hectares on over 2 700 properties. At any one time this program is working across hundreds of parcels of land and is one of the most visible government programs due to this level of contact. The support we have received from the community deserves recognition. Likewise the great commitment of the program's staff, who have worked in often difficult circumstances and copped ongoing flack for simply doing their jobs, deserve recognition and our thanks.

We are now at a very important stage with this major eradication program providing us with a level of confidence that we are moving towards ensuring that one of the world's most devastating pests does not gain a foothold in Tasmania. From a pool of evidence, that has included four carcasses and 61 confirmed fox scats, we now have no hard evidence of foxes since July 2011. This is what we need to see and why we, and the community, can be encouraged that this eradication will be achieved.

Monitoring behind the baiting fronts, using dog detector teams across some 285 000 hectares, has found no evidence of foxes. Despite these encouraging results we must remain committed to preventing the establishment of foxes in Tasmania. The fox eradication program has, in the past, made some critical strategic changes, particularly following the parliamentary accounts committee

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and Landcare research review reports, after which we adopted a precautionary baiting strategy supported by enhanced landscape monitoring and it continues to review and adjust its approach. For programs such as this, periodic program review and strategic redirection will warrant a consensual.

The greater focus on landscape monitoring, supported by incursion response capability where a potential fox presence is detected, is now being considered. The proposed strategic redirection has been supported by a review panel, convened recently, and is now being considered by the department and the program's steering committee in collaboration with the Invasive Animal CRC. A strategic shift to a greater focus on landscape monitoring would see increased resources devoted to a landscape-monitoring program that is progressively working across the state to confirm the absence of foxes.

The government stands firmly behind the fox eradication effort and state funding is being maintained at current levels. The Australian government has strongly supported the program's field operation and further commonwealth funding is being sought to extend our fieldwork and I am hopeful of a positive outcome in this area. At the same time the Invasive Species Branch is continuing to break new ground in fox eradication and ensuring that it uses best practice and adopts new technology as it becomes available.

A joint research program with the Invasive Animal CRC to maintain this cutting edge approach is continuing. The CRC is working with us on a research program that includes monitoring populations of at-risk native species, identifying alternative toxins and delivery mechanisms to replace or supplement the buried 1080 baits, and enhancing DNA analysis to identify prey items within fox scats to improve the ability to quantify detection probabilities for foxes of low densities.

The Invasive Species Branch is also focusing on staff training on biosecurity and emergency procedures to enhance response procedures to fox and other invasive species incursions, as well as other biosecurity emergencies. The work of the invasive species branch is achieving important results and deserves the support of Tasmanians. I look forward to further positive results as the branch moves forward.

Mr DEAN - How many are employed in the fox eradication program and can you give a breakdown of administrative staff and those out in the field?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I have invasive species in front of me here, so that includes all of the things that I have talked about: fox eradication, weed management. Currently, the invasive species branch has 58.28 FTEs - 33.68 permanent employees and 23.7 contract employees. A lot of those contract employees would be working on the fox eradication program. Based on known funding allocations, the Invasive Species Branch will now consist of 33.6 FTEs, with an additional 8 FTEs subject to additional funding. Those positions that are currently employed on fox eradication efforts - up to 30 FTEs, on fixed-term contracts - are going. They are going on 30 June.

We have achieved our eradication targets. That precautionary baiting program has been reduced and we are looking toward a land management program. That will mean that there is a reduction in 30 FTEs, which were fixed-term contracts on 30 June this year.

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Mr DEAN - I note that in the invasive species 'worst threat' list, the Indian myna birds are number one; rainbow lorikeets are number two; foxes are number three; I am not quite sure what number four is; and feral cats are number five. What is happening about these? What programs do you have in place for the Indian myna and the rainbow lorikeet?

Mr WIGHTMAN - The invasive species branch is now a broad approach to invasive species in Tasmania and there will be a reduction of 30 FTEs come 30 June, which is part of the fox eradication program - the precautionary baiting has gone.

Mr DEAN - I understand that. I am wondering what is now happening on the concentration in relation to the Indian myna and the rainbow lorikeet.

Mr SCOTT - Those two birds are among our priorities. As the minister has said, the fox eradication effort remains a priority, but we are also extending across the branch into other areas, so they include those two birds. With Indian mynas, particularly, we have the opportunity to prevent their establishment. We have had some individuals that have been identified around Devonport. I think there have also been reports down here in Hobart, but we are trying to get on top of them.

Mr DEAN - Can I ask the question what is happening to 'get on top of them'? What is the eradication program?

Mr SCOTT - It entails the monitoring of the areas where they have been reported and then eradication activities where we can locate them. With Indian mynas we have had staff in the Devonport area and they have destroyed some of those birds - small numbers. That is the sort of work that we are doing. We work with councils and NRMs as well, where they are able to provide people. The whole aim of the invasive species branch is very much to have staff who can operate across all of the invasive species. It is not only weeds, but also into invasive birds and other animals as well.

Mr DEAN - What is happening with feral cats, which is a known problem to farmers and to all? I understand it is causing havoc in relation to the brown quail; so what is happening there, minister?

CHAIR - Even in suburbia.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Feral cats really are an issue in Tasmania; there is no doubt about that. I have been asked a number of times if I could estimate how many feral cats there are in Tasmania, and we could not do that. We have seen in areas like Bellingham that with a concentrated effort, you can reduce them.

Mr DEAN - They removed 50 to 60 there in a very short time, didn't they, a couple of years ago?

Mr WIGHTMAN - You can trap them and get rid of them that way. Obviously there have been some changes to the Cat Management Act and also the regulations that came in place, commencing 1 July 2012. This will assist landowners or land managers to be able to deal with feral cats on their property. It also assists land managers such as Parks and Wildlife Service to be able to deal with those.

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One of the key things that we have been able to do and need to continue to do is work with the RSPCA. That is why we have provided \$155 000 in grants to the RSPCA and to some councils as well about desexing and microchipping, and having those programs in place so that cats do not become feral. It is a real challenge. Some of the registration and licensing, particularly around those who are breeders and the like is important as well.

Mr DEAN - What is happening out there in the wild in relation to feral cats. Are there any poison or shooting programs in place? Any eradication programs?

Mr WIGHTMAN - We are not poisoning moggies in urban areas. Let us put it that way.

Mr DEAN - Are there any eradication programs in situ in the wild for feral cats?

Mr WIGHTMAN - First of all we want to empower landowners to be able to deal with these issues so that it provides an opportunity for farmers to be able to euthanase feral cats. The second part of that is an education role in actually trying to reduce the number of cats that turn feral. That is why we have worked with RSPCA and with local government to have some trapping programs in place, and also some cost-effective desexing and microchipping as well. It will be the role of the invasive species branch to co-ordinate responses to that. Alistair, do you have more on that?

Mr SCOTT - Yes, in two parts or three, perhaps. We have done a lot of work on a couple of islands over the last couple of years, Wedge and Tasman islands, to eradicate cats. That is where we can be successful - on offshore islands, and that has been where the Parks and Wildlife have assisted. We are also looking at what other islands we can do that on. Secondly, where we can work with councils and local communities, we do trapping operations. The most recent ones have been at Low Head and also at the Lillico Beach area. There we have high value biodiversity; so that sort of area is where we go into it.

At the same time we are developing a cat management strategy, which is in draft form at the moment. That aims to not only increase our knowledge of the population, but also look at where we can best use the resources that are available to us to reduce the impact of feral cats. It is an ongoing process. We try to involve the community and other levels of government where we can.

Mr DEAN - It is good to hear that. Has the department commissioned a review of the Tasmanian fox program this year, 2012-13? I understand there is, and you talked about that review. Who conducted the review, what were the main findings or recommendations and will that review be made public?

[3.15 p.m.]

Mr WIGHTMAN - The review panel was Max Kitchell; Mike Braysher from the University of Canberra; Andrew Woolnough, who is the Victorian head of department for invasive species; and Professor Elissa Cameron. It was a different style from earlier reports we received but it provides strong endorsement of the need for the program, sees retaining a fox-free Tasmania of vital importance, notes a huge and complex task on a scale not attempted anywhere else, no evidence of either hoaxing or faulty science, recognises the efforts of the fox eradication program staff - and I make the note that 30 people will be finishing up on 30 June.

Mr DEAN - It is not as though I want to see people on unemployment.

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Mr WIGHTMAN - No, and we do not; that is the point I make. While we are broadening the work we are doing, there are 30 people on fixed-term contracts who will not be there anymore and so do not have a job.

It continues - analyse the design of the program based on the 2009 Landcare report; notes that the average baiting density target of 10 baits per square kilometre was not being met - average 6.2 in recent times. Importantly, it acknowledges it is not known whether that target is appropriate. It notes 200 000 hectares baiting per year, with advice that 820 000 hectares be baited. It recommends a shift to broad-scale strategic monitoring using detector dogs with immediate reaction and response where signs of foxes are detected. That is the shift from precautionary baiting to this. It noted monitoring exceeding the target of 75 per cent of the area. We have the report and have responded.

CHAIR - Will it be made available?

Mr SCOTT - Yes, it will be. The report is being considered by the steering committee and also the program's checking advisory panel, so it is being distributed for comment from those. We are looking at analysing the recommendations, particularly the effectiveness of moving to that monitoring stage. We are doing that work with the Invasive Animal CRC. That work is ongoing; it is an ongoing review process and, yes, the report will be released publicly.

Mr GAFFNEY - How many councils are you aware of that took up the offer of putting in for a submission for the recent cat management program, because I am aware of one very progressive council that was matching funding for a study at Point Sorell. They are actually doing a caging freezing program and have already taken on board two authorised officers, 12 cages, two microchip feeders and three organisations that have already caught 27 feral cats, so I think the program is going really well. How many others might be -

CHAIR - How many more progressive councils are there?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I am happy to name them. The way we deal with feral cats has also got to be through an education process, dealing with families that adopt a kitten or -

Mr GAFFNEY - The Invasive Species Unit have been exceptionally helpful.

Mr WIGHTMAN - That is really nice to hear. Dorset Council, \$930 for equipment purchasing - that will be purchasing traps; Glenorchy City Council, \$1 000, also for equipment purchasing; the Hobart Cat Centre, \$50 000 and they will run a subsidised microchipping and desexing program; Flinders Island Council, \$6 780 for a desexing program; Latrobe Council, \$3 600 for equipment purchasing which I hear has been matched by the council; Kingborough Council, Bruny Island microchipping and desexing program, \$12 000. The Kingborough Council is also involved in a responsible cat ownership community survey for \$14 800, and community education and resource for \$9 390. RSPCA Tasmania get \$30 000 for subsidised cat desexing and microchipping program, and \$2 500 to get some resources together to organise a trap hire service. Hobart cat isolation facility, \$10 000; the Launceston cat isolation facility, \$5 000; and the Launceston cat quarantine facility, \$9 000. That totalled \$155 000, which I talked about earlier.

Mr FINCH - Minister, in this output group you have lost \$2 million of federal money.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

Mr FINCH - How does that impact on conservation?

Mr WIGHTMAN - It impacts enough that I flew to Canberra to have a conversation with Minister Burke about the importance of our efforts to save the Tasmanian devil, and to manage the carp eradication program and fox eradication in Tasmania. I would say that at the conclusion of the meeting he was well aware of my views about the importance of maintaining a level of funding. I also make the point that Caring for our Country has changed into those two streams, agricultural and conservation, so you are actually applying for projects. We hope to be able to get the money to facilitate some of the projects to save the Tasmanian devil in particular. In the carp eradication program - which is not mine; it is actually Minister Green's - we have nearly achieved desired results when it comes to eradication, so it is very important that we continue that work. I have stressed to the federal Environment minister that we need their support to continue to help us with these programs. If we do not have that then it reduces the level of service and what we can provide. We will look at it. Our projects are going well in the devil program. We are getting some outstanding results and we want to continue.

Mr FINCH - I am interested in how much is expended on the Save the Tasmanian Devil program. You mentioned \$2.06 million in federal dollars that comes to that program.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

Mr FINCH - Is that the entirety of the allocation for the Save the Tasmanian Devil program?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes; it also \$3 million in state funding.

Mr FINCH - So \$3 million from the state -

Mr WIGHTMAN - And \$2.06 million.

Mr FINCH - So \$5.06 million that actually goes into Save the Devil -

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, and that has been in since -

Mr SCOTT - This is the fifth year this financial year.

Mr WIGHTMAN - So this is the fifth year of this round. That has helped us with lots of different projects, along with Devil Island projects, in bringing together those two programs aimed at saving the Tasmanian devil.

Mr FINCH - I am just wondering how much the state government pays to administer the Save the Tasmanian Devil appeal?

Mr WIGHTMAN - With the university?

Mr FINCH - Yes.

Mr WIGHTMAN - In 2012-13, \$105 000 was provided from the Save the Tasmanian Devil program to the University of Tasmania Foundation to provide for the Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal, so for them to run it.

Mr FINCH - That is used for their salaries and their office?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Marketing, trying to raise money, as you would well know, Mr Finch.

Mr FINCH - It is a tough gig out there. They also do education and publicity activities?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

Mr FINCH - As part of the appeal program?

Mr WIGHTMAN - That is right. It is growing awareness of the program. One of our greatest opportunities is to grow awareness of the Save the Tasmanian Devil program. You do a fantastic job, along with Bruce Englefield, about growing awareness of it. I see that as one of the key jobs they do because it helps them attract money to the cause.

Mr FINCH - Can you give us an outline as to what is occurring with the devils, where they are being allocated, Maria Island, interstate -

Mr WIGHTMAN - We are in the last month of a five-year funding agreement with the Australian Government and we have made significant progress for the recovery of the species. We have exceeded several of the major performance indicators. The Save Tasmania Devil program has established an insurance population for the species of more than 500 disease-free Tasmanian devils which are being maintained with assistance from institutions on mainland Australia and in Tasmania. Four free-range enclosures have been built by Devil Island Projects and are now integral to supporting the insurance population. I thank them for their support and ongoing commitment. We have commenced the establishment of a trans-located population on Maria Island and recent monitoring has shown this to be a success, with pouch young detected. Maria Island is one of my favourite places in the world.

The way that program is working is just fantastic. We were criticised by some quarters at the start about the trans-location project, but when I was there last time there were 18 or 20 female devils with pouched young. They lose about 60 per cent in the first year - a high mortality rate for the imps. It was outstanding and achieving the results that it set out to achieve.

The program has three projects in readiness that will isolate three major peninsulas from the disease. You remove the diseased population - you go in, take them out and then repopulate that area with disease-free devils. The areas are the Forestier, Tasman and Freycinet peninsulas. When I talked about Caring for our Country, they will hopefully assist with those projects.

The program is also working with the Van Diemen's Land Company, the owners of Woolnorth, and with Devil Island Projects Group to facilitate the construction of a fence. You have taken a lead role in that, Mr Finch, to secure a large disease-free population. There are three free-range enclosures which we are building and those four have been built. We have also exported populations to the mainland to some of our partner zoos and parks to make sure that, if required, we have devils that could come back. They all remain under the ownership of Tasmania as part of our insurance population.

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When we were on Maria Island, there was an ITV crew who were doing a documentary for the BBC and for Northern Europe, as I understand. So the actual message and the interest in this program is going worldwide.

CHAIR - Thank you. We will move now to Macquarie Island.

Mr DEAN - I had a question on rabbits. I think there were one or two of them still on the island. How long is the eradication program expected to go?

Mr WIGHTMAN - With regard to conservation projects, this is one of the largest ever undertaken - not just in Australia, but throughout the world. It has had significant success. If you look at the way the landscape looked when the rabbits had taken hold compared to now, it is a remarkable success, particularly with the petrels returning there to breed. If anyone saw the *7.30 Report* about it with dogs being trained and taken down there to perform the work, it was certainly outstanding. I can just make a couple of brief comments. The project is funded by the Tasmanian and Australian Governments. It is the largest conservation project in the world. Aerial baiting completed in July 2011 confirmed no rodent sightings since June 2011 and no rabbits since December 2011.

[3.30 p.m.]

We had 16 hunters and 11 dogs down there in 2011. They just followed up the aerial baiting to make sure that there were no surviving rabbits or rats. Thirteen rabbits have been destroyed as at mid-April 2013 after that baiting. Two further rodent dog-handlers and their three rodent detection dogs were sent to the island in March 2013 to intensively search for rats and mice. It is critically important that we continue that work to make sure that we finish it off properly.

Mr DEAN - If you leave even two or three, you will be in trouble - with rabbits in particular.

Mr WIGHTMAN - That is right. The change in the landscape down there is stunning. I think there are things we have learned from this project that are of value not only to Tasmania or Australia but to the world.

CHAIR - Minister, I am not sure if I am able to ask this question in this area. Outstanding compensation payments to private landowners around land conservation issues - have they all been resolved? I know there are some still outstanding and I do not want to go into specifics -

Mr WIGHTMAN - And I cannot go into specifics about some of them.

CHAIR - I am just wondering how much longer I have to receive phone calls from constituents in relation to this matter. That is pretty much what I am wanting to know.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, I understand that.

CHAIR - Are we close?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes. During 2012-13, \$3.8 million has been obtained as part of the supplementary appropriation bill by government to settle some of the outstanding compensation claims. I just make the point that when you are dealing with \$3.8 million, it is a large sum of money.

CHAIR - I understand.

Mr WIGHTMAN - They are complex; they involve legal issues and all of that has to be addressed before we finalise and sign off on the matter.

CHAIR - We expect private landowners to comply so, as a state, we have to compensate them.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I have had that message promoted by the member for Lyons as well.

CHAIR - Well, the member for Apsley has the same view.

Output group 7
Environment Protection and Analytical Services

7.1 Environmental management and pollution control -

Mrs TAYLOR - It is a big budget. What are your major initiatives?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Obviously, the major initiatives remain working with developers or those people with legacy issues in Tasmania and having the staff deal with them so that when they put forward a proposal for a development -whether it be a mine or whatever - we actually have people there to support those developers or people wishing to invest in Tasmania to make sure that no adverse environmental harm is caused by those developments. That is really the core business of the EPA along with compliance measures.

Mrs TAYLOR - I was going to say I thought you would spend more money on compliance than on dealing with complaints.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I put that at the top because the EPA, in my view, is there to assist people and to assist projects coming to fruition in Tasmania. It is not there to block projects. It is there to support them and make sure that the environmental condition of our state, or environmental biosecurity, whatever it might be, is maintained. An additional part of that is compliance where they ensure that companies or individuals are doing the right thing when it comes to the environment in Tasmania.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am very pleased to hear you say that the proactive stuff is high on your list.

Mr WIGHTMAN - The reason I say it is that I want to get that message across, that the EPA is not there to stop development; it is there to support development.

Mrs TAYLOR - Thank you.

Mr SCHAAP - Certainly we do have more of our resources tied up in the operational regulatory role than in the assessment role. The staff we use in that function really just depends on how many proposals we have coming forward to us at any one time. Because we have quite a mixture of skills within the division, we can move people around to accommodate development proposals as they come forward. It is not unusual for us to move staff from one area to another to ensure that we meet our time frames.

We also have a scientific and technical group, which supports both the operational regulatory group and the assessable group. We have air specialists and water specialists and a sound specialist who advise on the conditions that need to be applied to new developments and help the regulators figure out whether those conditions are being complied with. It is a fairly mixed group and a fairly flexible one that we can allocate according to circumstance.

Mrs TAYLOR - I would like to get some idea of - I don't like to use the word clean-up, although it was used on the news this morning.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Legacy issues?

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes, I suppose that is a better way to say it. I know that there are, for instance, a number of companies, some in my own electorate, like Nyrstar but plenty of others, who in the past have been doing the wrong thing environmentally and are progressively being proactive. I am not sure that it is because they have to as much as because it is now part of their brief to do so.

Mr WIGHTMAN - One is obviously compliance. The threat of compliance creates a deterrent. My view, and this is my personal view, is also that larger companies in particular realise that they need to have a conscience. The reason I say that is because I have been particularly interested in this area of economics -

CHAIR - They have to have a social licence now, minister.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I am not going to use the words 'social licence.' It is about the fact that if a company does the wrong thing, social media can create such a fuss around that very quickly. Very quickly we see multiple hits on sites or on Facebook pages about people perceiving companies to do the wrong thing. I think there is a real understanding that companies need to be really good corporate citizens, but also good citizens within their communities and I think that is coming more and more to the fore. I don't think it is just because we come along with the stick. I also think it is because it is good, it makes commonsense and it is good for their business as well.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am assuming that some of this money is spent on assisting them in trying to find solutions to some of those problems?

Mr SCHAAP - Again that varies according to the business. You mentioned Nyrstar as an example. Nyrstar is a large public company that values its reputation in the market place. Shareholders I think assign some value to that as well. They take the environmental performance business very seriously. Our capacity to assist Nyrstar in figuring out how to solve their problems is really quite limited. They are the experts in their field and the challenge for us is satisfying ourselves that what they are doing is best practice environmental management.

On the other side of the coin you might have a small family quarry operation that has issues with sediment management where it is fairly straightforward for us to give them some advice about how to fix their problems and get themselves out of trouble with their neighbours. Again, it is horses for courses and we do try to deal with those different businesses in the way that best meets their needs. Lecturing Nyrstar technical managers about the right way to go about making zinc is probably not terribly productive.

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Mrs TAYLOR - I am not talking about zinc; I am talking about things like the polluted groundwater that they are tackling and the stuff that used to come out of their smoke stacks and now does not, cleaning up those.

Mr SCHAAP - Nyrstar is an excellent example in that respect too because we have a regular quarterly meeting with the general manager of Nyrstar about their environmental programs and about their production programs. We discuss prioritisation, we discuss what they believe they will be able to invest in and when. We give the company an indication about how we see the priorities for clean-up. There is quite a bit of work to do there at the Nyrstar site - there are solid-waste issues, groundwater issues and operational effluent issues. Those sorts of discussions will help us head off problems. As you say, they are more about proactive engagement than trying to fix problems after they have occurred.

Mrs TAYLOR - Minister Green said yesterday there are 40 waterways and rivers that still need cleaning up. Is the government actually doing that, because some of it would be from mine sites that are long gone. Who is doing that? Is this department doing that clean-up, or funding it anyway?

Mr SCHAAP - There are a couple of different categories. There is one site in particular where the EPA board is responsible for administering quite a large fund for the clean-up of historic legacy issues at the Savage River site. That is all about the mining activity that occurred before, as it was then, AVM took over the site. That is the only example we currently have of a large scale remediation program, and it would want to be because it is a fairly large scale problem.

Everybody is aware of Mount Lyell and the history of trying to address that problem, but apart from those two headline ones that are in the public domain there are a vast number of small sites around the state that require remediation works. That can be relatively simple earthworks right through to management of actual drainage issues and water quality management.

MRT, Mineral Resources Tasmania, administers a mine rehabilitation fund. We have a relationship with MRT that sees us go through the list of priorities from time to time and work out which issues can be addressed cost-effectively with the resources we have. MRT is gradually working through that list, but as Minister Green has observed there is quite a lot of work still to do after a couple of hundred years of mining.

Mrs TAYLOR - Can I ask you also, minister, about wastewater. Is Derwent Estuary a program in your bailiwick?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I certainly go there and support the NRM and launch things.

Mrs TAYLOR - We have seen a fantastic clean-up of the Derwent over the last 20 to 30 years.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We have.

Mrs TAYLOR - But the reason you still cannot swim in the Derwent, apart from the sediment under the mud, is the fact that every time there is heavy rain, water from the streets pollutes the river and the E. coli count goes up dramatically. There is also, of course, the occasional spill from wastewater works because we still have quite a number of wastewater treatment plants around the edges of the river. There has been talk for years about taking

wastewater treatment to a third stage or to pipe it across to farmland for irrigation or whatever. Is there any progress on this?

[3.45 p.m.]

Mr WIGHTMAN - The key Derwent Estuary program activities in 2013 have included delivery of coordinated monitoring programs, ecosystem and public health, the 2012 Derwent report card, scientific collaborations with IMAP and CSIRO, on-ground actions to manage stormwater, heavy metal pollution, weeds and protected species and the promotion of regional walking tracks, which I was involved in recently.

Mrs TAYLOR - I have had a great interest in the Derwent Estuary program and I think it is fantastic. I am not taking here about the program; I am talking about the stuff that goes into the Derwent before the program.

Mr WIGHTMAN - So how do we manage that?

Mrs TAYLOR - Are you being proactive in looking at what the next steps might be to stop that happening?

Mr SCHAAP - Like all the water corporations, Southern Water has an arrangement with the EPA whereby the corporation and myself agree a prioritised investment plan for fixing the legacy issues they have. The Derwent certainly has a number of wastewater treatment plants that are well below par.

Mrs TAYLOR - I would think it is not just the Derwent, though.

Mr SCHAAP - It is not just the Derwent but -

Mrs TAYLOR - Around the state.

Mr SCHAAP - This principle applies around the state. There are a number of those wastewater treatment plants prioritised for investment in the Derwent for that program. For example, the Macquarie Point Wastewater Treatment Plant is quite a large plant that often does not perform very well and as you mentioned we had had a quite significant spill this financial year, so there is still a lot of work to be done in that area. The extent to which we can achieve the targets for each of those plans depends, a little, on the circumstances of the plant. In some cases, for a relatively modest expenditure, you can make some pretty serious gains. In other cases there is a serious infrastructure deficiency that requires a lot of investment and often those sorts of plants don't get dealt with in the first tranche. We try to get the best value for investment as we go through the process. Perhaps the minister can discuss the broader game plan with the wastewater management.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I was having a look here at water and sewerage compliance, so the EPA division collated information relevant to the environmental compliance of wastewater treatment plants for inclusion in the Tasmanian Water and Sewerage State of the Industry Report 2011-12, which was released in March this year. No corporation achieved full compliance with the specified discharge limits for all wastewater treatment plants during that reporting period.

Mrs TAYLOR - But that is not the real problem. Nothing is failsafe.

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Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, we know it is an infrastructure issue.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am looking more at future plans and whether the government has any or whether you are working with the state water authority to prioritise where they might go.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

Mrs TAYLOR - For instance the Clarence Council, some time ago, started piping its wastewater to Coal River Valley.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I am well aware of that project.

Mrs TAYLOR - At the time there was talk of why don't Hobart and Glenorchy, for instance, also pipe their water. Clarence would be happy to receive it. You are looking at relatively not so high cost infrastructure and then you get rid of the problem entirely. I just wonder how those initiatives might be developed.

Mr WIGHTMAN - The Coal River Valley project is an excellent project. I was heavily involved in that project because of Aboriginal heritage permits. Obviously that was an initiative of the local council.

Mrs TAYLOR - They probably got some funding from somewhere.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, I have to check the funding of that one out.

Mr SCHAAP - They got commonwealth funding for that.

Mrs TAYLOR - Federal funding, I would think, yes.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We know that as a government there are issues with wastewater in Tasmania, that is why we have had the water corporations brought in, why we have wastewater management plans that are agreed with by the director. We are really strategic about ways in which we deal with these issues and we are not going to fix them overnight. We have significant problems, some with infrastructure. Working with the three water corporations is important. The councils own them and we encourage them to have some influence as well.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is as good an answer as I am going to get. I guess I am just looking for strategic future, not necessarily state government funding but cooperation and some guidance for water corporations or priorities set.

Mr SCHAAP - In each case, the option for reuse is the first level on the hierarchy. If reuse is possible then that is the preferred outcome for each of these wastewater treatment plants.

Mrs TAYLOR - I suppose that is where I am heading. You see how good it is when it is done.

Mr SCHAAP - In many cases reuse does not turn out to be the most cost effective option because of land capability issues and because of the costs of maintaining ongoing pumping. You need to consider not just the capital costs, but the recurrent costs and pumping costs can often represent a very large fraction of the total treatment cost. Any pumping costs need to be defrayed

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as far as possible. Typically, that means the long distance movement of water does not turn out to be practical and you are better off investing in better treatment technology and discharging to waterways.

Mr DEAN - My question is about noise pollution and this relates to Dodges Ferry, which has still not been resolved. There are tests to be done, it is one decibel above the maximum limit and one decibel in noise, I am told, is quite high. The question from people who live in that house, and they have peace at the present time because their neighbours are away and it is switched off, is the placement and use of Boral pumping equipment, heat pumps and air conditioners is a real issue, causing conflict between neighbours. When the EPA clearly states that noise is unacceptable when it affects quality of life if it can be heard in any habitable room of a neighbouring property. What is the government doing and what is being done in relation to the placement of heat pumps, pool pumps and those other areas that are causing consistent noise levels? Going back 12 to 18 months ago, there was a position put in place where EPA was going to trial a program, a mediation service, to resolve complaints. Was that ever used, was it ever put into place, were any complaints ever resolved in relation to that agreement?

Mr SCHAAP - There are three points to make with respect to that. First, there are noise regulations in place and council officers are empowered to employ those regulations. When it comes to level 2 premises, the premises that the EPA regulates, it would be a matter for EPA officers to administer those laws. In this case, as with a lot of these issues where you have residential conflicts essentially between neighbours, we have had some success with mediation, both from local government and an EPA perspective. That is one reason why we embarked upon that mediation project whereby the EPA board funded, from its environment protection fund, a trial mediation program with local government. Last time we spoke about that, it was to be a trial for 12 months. We extended that because we had very few takers and that meant we had not spent much of the money. It was a fairly easy to extend the program. We have had a few participants in that program, but it has not been as fruitful as we would have expected. Generally speaking, if talking a problem through is going to fix it and the people involved are prepared to do that, then it happens without the need for a formal program, I suspect. That has not resolved this particular problem and when we last talked we thought it might.

We have made a little progress with the whole issue of product standards. At the national level there has been a lot of discussion about the best way to introduce product standards for things like portable garden equipment like leaf blowers, air conditioners, heat pumps and the sorts of things that generate noise in an urban environment at a level that can readily be a nuisance to a large number of people.

We have been working through mechanisms by which those standards could be introduced. There are now at least some reasonable prospects for being able to do that and one is a potential amendment to the legislation currently used to establish national and environmental protection amendments. That legislation could be expanded to include product standards, which would mean that over time we would have much greater consistency in noise emissions, in particular, from these sorts of products that can cause a problem.

It is a bit disturbing, for example to find that in Australia we have much noisier chainsaws than there are in Europe. You can build a quieter chainsaw; it is just cheaper to build a noisy one. Those sorts of issues about product quality and standard really do need to be addressed at a national level.

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Mr DEAN - I need to address this to your office again to see if there can be some remediation. These people have tried to sell their house but they cannot because of the noise next door. They are spending a lot of their time away because they cannot tolerate the noise. It is a sad situation.

Mr WIGHTMAN - If you choose, contact me Mr Dean and I will refer it.

Mr DEAN - Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - In your overview you indicated that there was \$50 000 for a CDL investigation. That is music to a fair few members of the Legislative Councils ears but have we done enough investigating, why are we not getting on with it?

Mr WIGHTMAN - At standing councils of environment ministers, right across the country, there has been ongoing discussion about this matter. There has been a belief that there should be a national scheme so you do not have to have exemptions like the Northern Territory have faced in recent times to be able to continue their scheme. That is what we had hoped for and I would not be the first environment minister to say that. I am now realising that it is not something we are going to find common ground on. The regulatory impact statement was due to be out at the last standing council meeting and it was not available at that time.

We have always encouraged the federal government to make a decision about this or have a decision in front of us that we can make. I admitted freely in the House of Assembly that it did not look like, in any way, that we had reached a decision about that so we have gone for a cost benefit study of a container deposit scheme in Tasmania. That is not to say that we have not done some work about this before. When it came to container deposits some work had also been undertaken by the department in 2008 and one of the issues raised was to start up a scheme to have the deposit site might cost a considerable amount of money. You could recoup that money over time but the initial outlay would cost some money. There are different organisations that disagree with that, but that was what we found out as per a statement in the House of Assembly and all three parties supported a motion for a cost benefit analysis should a federal scheme not come into place. We have just said it doesn't look like a federal scheme is going to happen so let us do a cost benefit analysis to look at how much it should cost.

[4.00 p.m.]

We have good kerbside recycling systems in Tasmania. I can say that in Launceston, the Launceston City Council, I pay my rates and the kerbside recycling is very good. If you then go down to Veolia, down on the coast, you will see that a lot of that recyclable material is spoilt. It might be by a closed plastic bag, there are dirty nappies, there are wallaby carcasses and you have all seen it. We all need to play a role with education and that we do have a good opportunity to reuse and recycle in Tasmania through kerbside recycling. We could do much better than we are doing at the moment. A lot of that glass is then used in road base. You have recycling of the different plastics and the like. I look forward to the cost benefit analysis.

CHAIR - When are you likely to receive that in your hot hands?

Mr WIGHTMAN - We will need to engage someone and start the process.

CHAIR - We are still a way off?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Further than we were before and further down the track than we were before the budget.

CHAIR - The last test for today is how are you going with the Litter Hotline number?

Mr WIGHTMAN - 135513.

CHAIR - Well done, minister.

7.2 Analytical services -

Mr GAFFNEY - This is to provide scientific and analytical services in order to manage environmental incidents. Alex mentioned the Macquarie Harbour spill this year and last year it was the Longford tyre fire?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - What were the other big three in the last 12 months?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Where we have provided support?

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, engaged your services?

Mr WIGHTMAN - We provided support to the Derwent Estuary program, the Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers program, the Department of Health and Human Services -

Mr GAFFNEY - No, no. What are the big three incidents, not the programs, what are the three incidents that you have had a look at this year. You mentioned the Macquarie Harbour spill.

Mr WIGHTMAN - The Longford tyre fire?

Mr GAFFNEY - No, the Longford tyre fire was the 12 months before that.

Mr SCHAAP - We had quite a large spill. It was Macquarie Point in the Derwent, off the wharf. In terms of environmental events that have relied most heavily on the laboratory services, two come to mind. One is the DHHS investigation of some rainwater collection tanks that had been inappropriately soldered and we had an awful lot of work in the laboratory looking at lead levels in water.

The other one that took an even larger volume of work was the response to some new algal blooms that we had not seen previously in Tasmania. It required the identification of algae through many more samples than we would normally deal with in a year. DHHS in conduct of that program provided some additional revenue to support that work, but nevertheless the laboratory still gets nearly a third of its funding through the consolidated fund, so it is quite a significant contributor to the total output from the laboratory.

Mr GAFFNEY - When you first look you think what is this line item and when you look at the diversity and range it covers it is really very important. It says the decrease of \$587 000 was the withdrawal of some Australian government funding. Was it the total \$587 000 that was finished, or what percentage of that was Australian Government funding?

Mr SCHAAP - That is a rather odd one. It was a \$600 000 Australian Government project. It was the Derwent Estuary project, which ought to have been costed against 7.1 rather than 7.2. It ceased this year in any event, but it shows against 7.2 and it is a bit of a misnomer. There have been a few other changes in funding there but all you see here in terms of that is the consolidated fund amount. That two-thirds of the revenue is retained revenue from proceeds of fees on -

Mr GAFFNEY - In last year's budget estimates I was told there have been two extra staff recruited to the analytical services, with a possibility for further recruitments. Have there been any further recruitments?

MR SCHAAP - Yes, we have had to add a couple more technical staff over the last two years. We have had some issues with maintaining our service at a low enough error frequency to be regarded as a high standard laboratory. Also, our percentage of jobs-on-time has not been very good. So we have been looking at trying to adjust the resources with the laboratory to try and get the error rate down and the jobs-on-time rate up to acceptable levels. Obviously the market place is limited in terms of what it will pay for these services because it is a very small laboratory. Larger commercial labs can usually run at a much lower per unit cost than the Tasmanian laboratory can. So it is not simply a matter of putting fees up to match costs. We charge market rates and on this occasion, we found that has not been sufficient to fully recover the cost of the service. One example of that is that we have needed to put on an extra part-time phycologist to help with the identification of algae with the increased workload that we are getting through algal bloom.

Mr GAFFNEY - As you said, a lot of the labour is funded primarily through works and you spent a lot of last year's budget on equipment to get that up to speed. Given that the projection for 2012-13 was 255 000 assessments, and then the following projection is 250 000, is that just a ballpark figure, because it depends on what sort of incidents happen?

MR SCHAAP - It does and it also depends a little on where some of our larger clients go as well. That is always a bit variable and one reason why we try and maintain a reasonable level of service so we do not lose those clients. We expect to see those sorts of figures in terms of through-put in the laboratory to be maintained. We have perhaps been a little conservative with that estimation in the past. We tend to find that we have more work than we expect. At least part of that is due to the fact that we have these incidents that you really cannot forecast that generate additional workload.

Mr GAFFNEY - Does the bushfire situation in Tasmania impact on your services? In the last few weeks there have been fuel reduction burns and so you have obviously had enquiries. How does that impact on what you asked to do?

MR SCHAAP - The bushfires did not have a very substantial impact but there were circumstances where we needed to run more analyses through the lab than we would have done otherwise. That is particularly relevant where you have evidence of potential for contaminated soils - where power poles have burnt down and potentially contaminated nearby soil with copper chrome arsenate. In terms of fuel reduction burns, that does generate some work for us because we handle smoke complaints. The most common source of those complaints would be from forestry regeneration burns and hazard reduction burns, and we do deal with those. The procedure for those is that every time we get a report, we try and identify what the source of the smoke was, and determine whether the burn was undertaken in accordance with what we regard as best

practice. At the moment, we are fortunate in Tassie that we have what is called the 'coordinated smoke management system' whereby Forestry Tasmania and the major forestry companies, together with the Parks and Wildlife Service, cooperate in maintaining this system to manage smoke outputs. They try to ensure the amount of smoke being generated in any particular air catchment does not exceed the capacity of that catchment to disperse the smoke. This ensures that burns are not undertaken in a way which is going to expose population centres to more smoke than is absolutely necessary. It has been fairly successful this year, though it is a bit difficult when you undertake a burn around the suburbs of Hobart. You have a lot of people very close by.

CHAIR - Hopefully, they will understand why that is happening, given what we have been through in January this year.

Mr SCHAAP - People are generally more sympathetic to the irritation from smoke from a hazard-reduction burn.

Mr GAFFNEY - One of the things of interest was the amount of emphasis placed on the water and sewerage corporations regarding environmental controls and flows of water quality. Ten years ago the state government dropped the ball on following through with its environment procedures. It did not know who to go to. That was one of the main reasons it went to the water and sewerage corporations to lift their game. Do you believe that in doing that there has been a greater onus placed on water and sewerage corporations to get to the lines you guys are now enforcing with the EPAs? .

Mr SCHAAP - The minister mentioned earlier that the waste water management plan of each of the corporations agrees with the director. That agreement essentially says that if you invest in accordance with this plan and make the improvements that you described in it, then the regulator can reasonably continue to entertain the fact you are not achieving contemporary standards at the moment. For the first time then, you have a very explicit statement about what is expected of the water corporations in order to maintain a circumstance where they are not spending all the community's revenue in fines to the EPA. As long as that progress is maintained, that is a productive relationship. The difficulty is that you make these plans at an instance in time and the very next day you learn something new and so plans evolve. We have to work out how to sensibly involve those plans so we get the best use of the community's finances in developing and operating this infrastructure. I believe we are doing that. I cannot imagine a better model for dealing with that sort of quite intractable problem. I believe it has a reasonable prognosis for coming up with a good result, but it will take a while.

The committee suspended from 4.14 p.m. to 4.29 p.m.

**Output group 8
Parks and Wildlife management**

8.1 Parks and Wildlife management -

[4.30 p.m.]

Mrs TAYLOR - You started this conversation a little while ago, Chair, by talking about table 11.5 and the increases. Note 1 says that the 2012-13 target is attributable to increases in the hectares protected under the Tasmanian Forest Agreement, as we expected. However, there is no

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increase in funding and in fact there is a decrease, so how does that work? If you are expecting more hectares, how can you do that with less money and what is going to go?

Mr WIGHTMAN - There is obviously consolidated revenue that comes through to Parks and Wildlife but for additional reserves that will come under the TFA there will be additional commonwealth money, so there is \$7 million plus CPI and progressing to \$9 million.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is what I figured but you expect extra hectares and commonwealth funding so why didn't you put that in?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Why didn't we put the extra commonwealth funding in there? I don't think you would put commonwealth funding in there at this point.

Mrs TAYLOR - They have promised that.

Mr WIGHTMAN - They have promised that but we haven't finally proclaimed that 100 000 hectares in the first tranche.

Mrs TAYLOR - I think the two should go together - the hectares and the money.

Mr EVANS - Firstly, on the question of the hectares, we have already undertaken to go away and have a look at that footnote because I would like to clarify exactly what is involved in those increases in hectareage. On the funding, the funding from the commonwealth will flow from the signing of the national partnership agreement between the state and federal governments which, if it has not already, is very close to being signed. The funding will come to Treasury and then go to the land manager and we need to work out with Treasury the flow of funds to Parks and potentially also Forestry Tasmania.

CHAIR - The national partnership agreement is different to the Tasmanian Forest Agreement?

Mr EVANS - Yes, to give effect to the Forest Agreement there is an intergovernmental agreement between the federal and state governments and then sitting under the intergovernmental agreement is what we call a national partnership agreement which is about the funding.

Mr WIGHTMAN - The national partnership agreement is to be able to get access to that funding.

Mr EVANS - This is an agreement about the money.

CHAIR - Has that money had to be renegotiated in any way, shape or form?

Mr WIGHTMAN - No.

CHAIR - The \$9 million is there waiting to be allocated?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, \$7 million plus CPI in the first year and then \$9 million the year after that.

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Mrs TAYLOR - So it is never going to appear in your bundle?

Mr EVANS - It will appear in future years.

CHAIR - It is not in your forecast, though.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, I know, but you could not preempt that money.

Mrs TAYLOR - You preempt all sorts of things, come on.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We could not preempt that money being paid and then for that to appear in the budget papers this year.

Mrs TAYLOR - I don't understand why you couldn't; if you can preempt the hectares I don't see why you can't preempt the money seeing that you have a pretty cast-iron agreement, I would have thought. However, I hear your answer. So what will be cut from Parks and Wildlife if that money is not there because there is a significant cut of \$2 million or thereabouts?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I can certainly talk about that. There are cuts in Parks. I will go to the savings targets and how we are going to meet those. We would like to retain our funds but we have to make those savings.

Mrs TAYLOR - I think the community needs to know where those cuts are going to be made because there are significant issues.

Mr WIGHTMAN - The main cash-flow movements are a decrease in payroll tax of \$1.47 million and a notional budget management strategy reduction of \$660 000 for Parks, and that is offset by an increase in the Macquarie Island pest eradication state allocation of \$112 000. As I said, the output group 8 apportionment of those savings for a baseline of 2011-12 is \$660 000 in 2012-13; \$1.4 million in 2013-14; and \$1.7 million from 2014-15 onwards. They are substantial savings. I do not step away from that in any way but we need to make them, and the savings in Parks now will look at staffing in particular. What we have done over time is look at programs, natural attrition and vacancy control and look at ways we can still maintain and not cut the programs within Parks and Wildlife, but there is a saving that has to be made and that will most likely be a staffing component.

Mrs TAYLOR - Will that mean there will be reserves you are currently looking after, say smaller reserves, that you will now not look after, or will it mean you are not going to do as much work or maintenance within the bigger national parks? What are we talking about?

Mr WIGHTMAN - We know that our national parks are very important to Tasmania, not just for biosecurity or ecological reasons but also because it is the main reason why people come to Tasmania. People forget that Parks is the main tourism operator in Tasmania, with a million people visiting our parks throughout the year, so it is a very important role that they play. The Parks and Wildlife staff are an absolutely dedicated group who will continue to maintain parks for people who wish to come to them but, in saying that, there will be less numbers.

Mrs TAYLOR - Are you thinking maybe just not developing more things in Parks? You're right, people notice when a walkway in a park is not maintained or when a road is not maintained.

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Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, and when we get any of that information or feedback provided we act upon it really quickly because we know how important it is to our brand, but I cannot shy away from the fact that the cuts are required to be made. We have looked everywhere, across the last three years in particular, to make sure that we are not reducing any programs that would have an impact upon the ecology or whatever it may be, but we still need to find those savings and it is most likely it will be through staff.

Mrs TAYLOR - You're talking not administrative staff obviously, you're talking on-the-ground maintenance-type staff?

Mr WIGHTMAN - We will look at those issues very closely and if we can find a way that does not impact upon programs or the care and protection of Tasmania's national parks or reserved areas then that is certainly what we will attempt to do.

Mrs TAYLOR - Okay. What about bushfire management?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, sure.

Mrs TAYLOR - Strategic fire management.

CHAIR - It is table 11.10.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Very interestingly it has been talked about a lot this year as being bushfire suppression or fuel reduction burning. Today we have already touched on the fact that at times there will be complaints about smoke. Sometimes that is from forestry regeneration burns, other times that might be from fuel reduction burns that are completed by Parks, Tasmania Fire Service and also Forestry Tasmania.

I noticed with the Mount Direction fire we saw recently that there is less of a discussion about smoke and more of a discussion about protecting communities. That is a subtle change that I have noticed already. That is not to say that those people with asthma in particular will not complain about the smoke from planned burns but I think there is a far greater understanding of the fact that we need to do fuel reduction burns in Tasmania. You only have to cast your eye across - and I lived around the Trevallyn and the nature recreation area, the gorge - to see that people live amongst rather large gum trees, for example, and there is a lot of bush that surrounds many of our urban areas. It is very important that we do all we can to reduce the fuel loads in those areas. Some of the burns we have done in recent times have been around my home area but also at places such as the Trevallyn recreation area and Kate Reed, which is another recreation area. The reason you burn those areas is because you are attempting to protect communities. They are small but highly intensive fires because houses border on these small recreation areas. You need to put a lot of resources into managing those burns to make sure that they don't get out of control.

A lot has been talked about a 5 per cent fuel reduction load on public land in Tasmania. I make the point that that was the target out of the Victorian Royal Commission. We could burn 5 per cent of public land in Tasmania, but a lot of that may be button grass plains, for example, which wouldn't reduce or contribute to the fuel reduction burning because it would not protect a community. The key thing that we focus on is protecting communities. The Giblin River fire, which is the south-west fire and was the largest over the summer, was managed in a completely different way because it wasn't impacting on infrastructure or communities.

The target and the focus on fuel reduction burning is about protecting communities and that is resource intensive. You can see some of the targets about fuel reduction burning and hopefully to achieve that 10 000 hectares over 2012-13. When we wanted to start burning at the beginning of March it was 30 degrees in some places around Tasmania, making it absolutely impossible. When it comes to fuel reduction burns you need to get the temperature right. As Mike Brown often says it is not what you burn it is where you burn.

Mr FINCH - Has any thought been given to a register of people who are dramatically affected by burn-offs and smoke? In Grindelwald, Clive Stott is dramatically affected. I am wondering whether some sort of register might be developed for people.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We advertise and make it very clear when burns are about to happen and then we encourage people to implement a fire management plan for themselves, which may be particularly about those who suffer with asthma. I believe public health has had a role in that as well. It is a difficult one because we do know that people are affected by smoke, particularly those who are asthmatics, but we also know when you look at the recent Mount Direction burn-off of 500 hectares that it needed to be done. That cast a plume across the city, but I still think there is a subtle change in people's view about that.

Mrs TAYLOR - This happens every time that there is a major fire because we get a bit complacent and we start talking about not wanting to burn and then we have a fire that either destroys property or is a significant risk to health. Suddenly people say, my goodness, of course we need to be controlling this. You are right. At the moment that is so and for the next two or three years people will do that and that is fantastic, because it does need to be done. It is interesting you say that the concentration will be on the urban fringe, because whilst that is important in terms of protecting communities with fuel reduction burns, the forest science also tells us that if we don't manage fuel on the ground in forests generally in Tasmania then we are going to have megafires. They happen every 60 or 70 years or thereabouts. We haven't had one in our lifetime. I think 1910 was probably about the last, so we are probably due for one and when that happens everybody gets hit by smoke. It is not something that is controllable. The fire that you talked about in the south-west this year -

Mr WIGHTMAN - The GIBLIN River.

Mrs TAYLOR - was relatively minor compared to a megafire, they tell me. The big problem is that fuel builds up and builds up and then it is natural occurrence almost in the end.

[4.45 p.m.]

Mr WIGHTMAN - That is not to say in any way, Mrs Taylor, that it is not important to burn and we certainly have had burns around Bicheno that protected that community. It is not to say we would not look at larger-scale burns where fuel reduction load is important. When you consider the conditions, we seem to have a shortening window of opportunity to burn off. When we did Mount Direction the other day, it is almost a bit late. Half of Mount Direction is in shadow and remains dampish until 12 o'clock. That is why you would ideally wish to burn in the March period, particularly the start of March, because that is the ideal burning conditions. The problem was it was 30° in large parts of the state and it would be madness to start a fire in those conditions. We waited for a time and conducted that burn, which I understand has been successful.

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I thank everybody who was involved in supporting our communities through January. That was a remarkable period of time in our history and we saw the way forestry people, the Tasmanian Fire Service, Parks and Wildlife Service - Peter Mooney was right in the thick of it, as you would expect, sleeves rolled up - and the Tasmanian community came out in support of everybody in that situation. A huge thank you to all those people.

Mrs TAYLOR - I suppose that is one of the other slight areas of concern that I have with regard to the TFA. FT will shrink, our forestry industry shrinks, Parks and Wildlife is hopefully not shrinking too much, but forest reduction burns, fire management and response to fires has been done traditionally with the cooperation of all three of those agencies. As there becomes less of those, that is going to be more of a concern, would you not agree?

Mr WIGHTMAN - In my view we will still maintain the numbers we have had of trained firefighters within Parks and Wildlife.

Mrs TAYLOR - You might, but I am talking about FT, for instance.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We know there are some skills within FT, particularly in fire management suppression, that are very much needed and we will be having conversations about that.

Mrs TAYLOR - And private contractors. It is an area that we need to be aware of because if you start losing resources, even if it is private contractors who have had machinery

CHAIR - Who have had their bulldozers, excavators and heavy machinery available at the snap of a finger.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We also have wonderful volunteer fire brigades around Tasmania that do an absolutely outstanding job.

Mrs TAYLOR - Your level of volunteer support is way up. Level of volunteer support, registered volunteer partner organisations - table 11.10 - is interesting. The target is up.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, it is up but are they aspirational?

Mrs TAYLOR - I do want you to be aspirational, I think it is fantastic.

Mr WIGHTMAN - There is a real opportunity around voluntourism. We are finding around the world that people come into areas like parks areas when on holiday and they are prepared to volunteer. Even with the Save the Tasmanian Devil program, we have young students joining that program who may be on exchange from a university or college in America. They are coming out here to learn and work in those areas and it is an opportunity for us. We rely heavily on the commitment of volunteers in Tasmania because they significantly add value to whatever government funding can be provided. We have a lot of wonderful volunteer groups in Tasmania - Landcare, Wildcare and Coastcare.

CHAIR - The numbers are static.

Mrs TAYLOR - They are going to grow this year, though.

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Mr WIGHTMAN - We are hoping to grow them.

CHAIR - The last two years they have been static.

Mr WIGHTMAN - They have - 5 000 is good, but we would like 10 000.

CHAIR - You would be happy with 6 000.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We would be very happy with 6 000. In recent times on the Overland Track we have had people assisting with duckboarding. Those people walking the track are prepared to volunteer. I have seen that in New Zealand and it is a very good opportunity for Tasmania if people want to come and be active and add a little bit to the community, even when they are on holiday.

CHAIR - Can I talk to you about the reduced visitation for national parks and your concerns around that, considering that there are some who are pinning their hopes on tourism being the saviour for the economy of our state. I do not personally see it. What is your opinion, minister?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I will make a couple of broad points about that. My political opponents would say that everything is simply locked up in Tasmania and I do not think that is true. We protect areas of Tasmania, whether it be rainforest, or parts of the wilderness World Heritage area, because of their natural values. But a large proportion of the Tasmania reserve system is in recreational areas, regional reserves and conservation areas which permit a lot of activities within them. I think there is a misunderstanding that these sorts of places are locked up and you cannot use them for particular purposes. That is just not true. I think that our natural environment is one of the major drawcards to Tasmania.

CHAIR - Then why are our numbers down?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I will get to that. We have a million visitors coming to our parks and reserves in Tasmania each year. During the 2011-12 period, I think they have been hit by a downturn in the tourism industry right. They have also been hit by the high Australian dollar which means that families have gone overseas - an opportunity they previously have not had because the dollar has been too high.

I went to the US on 64 cents in the dollar. It was a wonderful experience but rather expensive. When it gets to a \$1 or more, I think people have been taking those opportunities to go overseas instead of coming to our parks. I think we will see an improvement in that over time and that is why it is important that we have these iconic places across Tasmania available for opportunities.

CHAIR - I know you are not the Minister for Tourism but I suppose you put his hat on occasionally.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I usually have an opinion on most things.

CHAIR - What is your department doing to encourage people to visit the parks?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I am incredibly fortunate to be the Parks minister in Tasmania. While it may be challenging at times, the reserve system we have in Tassie is world class. I might not be

the Tourism minister but we run the largest tourism operation in the state. Whether it be camping grounds or Cradle Mountain, the Overland Track, the Three Capes Track, or the Cape Hauy track, we are actually one of the largest tourism operators in the state, so we play a key role in that. I think Parks and Wildlife have a really strong brand in Tasmania. It is one of the most recognisable of any Tasmanian brand across the state. I think that gives us an advantage.

Mr MOONEY - A good example is somewhere like Maria Island. Each winter that suffers dramatically from very low visitation and we have got two ferry operators who try to make a living there. What we did last winter, and we are doing again this winter, is to have basically heavily subsidised camping rates there and very subsidised ferry rates. You can go on the ferry to Maria Island and it does not cost you one cent to go over and back.

CHAIR - How is this being advised and promoted into the community? I did not know about that and I should have known.

Mr DEAN - It is your area.

CHAIR - That is right; it is what I am saying.

Mr MOONEY - There are regular ads in the *Mercury*, for example.

CHAIR - Say no more - seriously.

Mr WIGHTMAN - They would be in *The Examiner* as well.

Mr MOONEY - I am sure they would be in *The Examiner* - the most important paper in the state.

CHAIR - I have not seen it in *The Examiner*. In this day and age, a lot of people don't get the paper anymore.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Can I say the Tasmanian Parks Facebook page has a lot of 'likes' and I continually share that. Social media is a way to capture young people these days. There are very good brochures out about the parks system in Tasmania. There is a very good website about it. I think the Parks social media campaign has certainly ramped up and that is the way to target people.

Mr MOONEY - We have regular ads on Southern Cross television that is northern Tasmania-based, especially for the Mole Creek caves. We have really good evidence that that advertising has increased visitation at Mole Creek. Not all our sites are going down. In fact, Maria Island, Hastings Caves and Mole Creek Caves have increased. It is not all a sad story, but the general visitation from Melbourne and Sydney has gone down in Tasmania, which affects our major national parks because that is where the great visitation percentage is. Cradle Mountain, Freycinet and the big parks are the Melbourne-Sydney market through summer.

Mr WIGHTMAN - One of the most visited places is the Cataract Gorge in Launceston. Other areas that are heavily used, in my view, are Kate Reed Nature Recreation Area and the Trevallyn Nature Recreation Area where we have built tracks - mountain bike tracks in particular - and now they have really strong visitation. I think the numbers will increase over time. When people say tourism is the next great thing for Tasmania, you have to remember that

tourism is already a great thing and employs a lot of people. We can grow that further and share the message that a lot of these areas are used. They are not just protected for their wilderness values. They are actually protected so that they can be used; whether it be recreation or conservation areas, they are actually in place.

Great Lake and hydro-industrialisation is one of Tasmania's greatest stories and it is wrapped up in parts of the wilderness World Heritage area. It is also a magnificent inland fishery where we have turned a lake system into probably the best inland fishery in the world. These are lakes that are used. They are not just locked up. You can go to Arthurs Lake to the pump over there and see workers working and being part of the system that we are all so proud of. That is also now creating opportunities for guides at \$700 a day to take mainlanders and people from overseas to participate in fly-fishing, in particular.

When we think about tourism, don't just think about lattes, cappuccinos and the hospitality industry; I think we need to think far broader than that.

Mr GAFFNEY - You can get those up at the lakes.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Usually mine is served in a 10-ounce glass at the Great Lake Hotel. I was in New Zealand recently and I think a lot of what we have in Tasmania is far better when it comes to recreation areas and opportunities, if I may be so bold as to say so. What I try to do is get that balanced, commonsense view out there, that a lot of these areas are reserved but they are highly accessible.

CHAIR - Let us hope they remain highly accessible, given the budgetary constraints.

Mr WIGHTMAN - The land tenure on lots of those is not going to change. A tranche of land, for example, under the TFA is not all going to become national - a 100 000 hectares is not going to become a national park. I guess that is the point.

[5 p.m.]

CHAIR - I have a bit doughnut theory on that but we won't go into that now.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Because we look at the values of it and then we look at the most effective classification for it.

Mr DEAN - We currently have Dr Pullinger and Mr Brown and a few others saying that the tourism in our reserves is the way they are progressing and moving now. Have they had discussions with you in relation to this, minister?

Mr WIGHTMAN - No, they have not had discussions with me. I will allow Pete to answer himself. I know they have had discussions with Luke Martin and that is what I read from the media, but not with me personally.

Mr MOONEY - We have had several discussions.

Mr DEAN - What is their position on how to open them up and what to do?

Mr MOONEY - I think they're pretty genuine people in applying answers for employment and the new parcels of land, and it's fair to say it will not be at a level to replace the forest industry

but it is certainly on a way forward in an industry that has not perhaps been at the level they would like. I have promoted that they talk to the tourism industry just as importantly as us because it is industry that drives commercial development. We are like a service provider; we provide the platform and the environment but it is industry that has to drive it. Luke Martin and Phil Pullinger have had a lot of discussions in the last three weeks, especially to do with grant funding from the commonwealth.

Mr DEAN - If I can get a little bit more about that concept, is it simply about providing more access into these reserve areas that will be reserved? Is it opening up more tracks in there? Are you aware of the level of the opening up to tourism?

Mr MOONEY - It is on several fronts. It is looking at new opportunities and new types of experiences. A good example is the canyoning business that started up at Cradle Mountain two years previous. That is looking at expanding now, even in some of the newer areas, because there are river systems that are good for canyoning. Mountain biking is another activity and it is about just extending the levels of experiences you can get. It is similar to the New Zealand concept but probably not as dramatic as some of the New Zealand stuff.

Mr WIGHTMAN - There is also a study being undertaken where the state contributed \$10 000 from Parks, the federals contributed and I think also the Tourism Council. I don't have the exact detail but that is looking at tourism opportunities within the wilderness World Heritage Areas.

CHAIR - That is \$10 000.

Mr WIGHTMAN - It's a \$100 000 study of which Parks put in \$10 000.

CHAIR - Minister, are you aware that there was a meeting in the Deloraine area over the weekend looking at ecotourism opportunities? Do you have any information to share with the committee in relation to that?

Mr WIGHTMAN - No, I'm sorry, I don't.

CHAIR - That's all right, I have the information. I just wondered if you had it.

Mr WIGHTMAN - No, but I am happy for you to share it with me.

Mr FINCH - I have a question that might fall between Parks and Crown Land Services. Last year in the Legislative Council we revoked a small piece of land at Badger Head, which is in my electorate, under the Nature Conservation Act.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, it hasn't sold.

Mr FINCH - It is only 0.216 hectares of land but important to the local community. As far as I know, the reserve status of the land was revoked from the reserve system.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Correct.

Mr FINCH - So that piece of land is up for sale. When that is sold, what happens to that money? Does that go into Parks, Crown Land Services or consolidated revenue?

Mr EVANS - It will now go back to Parks because we were selling some assets to cover our budget management strategies.

Mr FINCH - Then that helps the work of Parks and is not earmarked for anything in particular, just into the fund?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Through the CLAC process we identified a number of parcels of land that could either go to local council or be sold or added to reserve areas. We had a few different parcels that could be sold and that helped contribute to our savings but it is a challenging market to try to sell in at the moment.

Mr FINCH - The decrease in Crown Land Services reflects the transfer of the coastal protection framework initiative to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, so it was transferred. Why was this transfer made?

Mr WIGHTMAN - That money has been transferred from DPIPWE to sit it in DPAC as a whole-of-government response.

Mr FINCH - A coastal protection framework initiative?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, which is a combination of myself, the Minister for Climate Change and the Minister for Planning.

Mr EVANS - Last year there was a new budget allocation specifically for that purpose and it was put into our budget but when we looked more closely at how best to operate that program, which was always going to be a whole-of-government program, it was decided it fitted better with DPAC through their climate change office rather than in our department.

Mr FINCH - I wanted to get an understanding of why that occurred. On page 11.27 it says that structural asset upgrades under Crown Land Services speak to the removal or remediation of physical structures and lands that present public liability risks. Am I right in assuming that the physical structures and land have not changed but the public liability is being viewed differently in recent years?

Mr WIGHTMAN - As far as I understand it is a general budget way to deal with those types of issues. You want a little bit more information, don't you?

Mr FINCH - I'm trying to make some sense of it, minister.

Mr WIGHTMAN - No worries. The government allocated \$556 000 in the capital investment program during the 2012-13 financial year for maintenance of crown-owned properties administered by Crown Land Services. Capital investment funding is an annual government allocation to address high-priority maintenance and refurbishment items required in the management of the state's more significant public assets and infrastructure. A recurrent annual allocation of \$100 000 also continued for the statutory essential maintenance of the Theatre Royal and \$50 000 on the Salamanca Arts Centre, so it is a government allocation to deal with maintenance and refurbishment.

Mr FINCH - And that comes into Crown Land Services area as well?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes, and then we prioritise.

Mr FINCH - They are the physical structures that are referred to -

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

Mr FINCH - Okay. I made a note that the public liability risks are not expected to show any improvement in the future because it said stabilised \$556 000 over the forward estimates to 2016-17 so that allocation is going to be there.

Mr WIGHTMAN - It is and it is for high-priority maintenance of those crown land assets we have. It is good to have there should it be needed and I have no doubt it will be expended.

Mr FINCH - Okay, thanks. As you know, we have had an issue in respect of having use of some crown land and it seemed to me that Crown Land Services were looking to opportunities as much as possible to divest itself of crown land so it could become the responsibility of somebody else. Is that an ongoing program, minister?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Absolutely, and someone will give me the number in a minute of the CLAC transfers. The Crown Land Assessment and Classification project has been in place for a number of years and has been about looking at unallocated crown land right across Tasmania. That was a significant undertaking. We have been able to move in tranches - so 10-15 parcels of land - either to the local council, add them to the reserve system in Tasmania with some boundary adjustments, and in some of those have been sold. The Launceston City Council, in particular, and other councils around the state have taken on responsibility for some of that area. We spent a significant amount of time on the CLAC project, a bit over 600 crown land parcels going to local government.

Mr FINCH - Is it mainly local government? I remember I had an issue with a private landowner who had a crown land strip and needed -

Mr WIGHTMAN - Mainly local government. Some have been sold. Where we see a parcel of land that might be landlocked or disjointed because there is a road through the land so it is better some of those parcels are sold. That has gone on for a significant period. They come through in batches of 10-15. It has been a large project and we find the best home for them. Council maintains it. One was the Zig Zag Track at the Cataract Gorge. Launceston City Council has management of all of Cataract Gorge and there was a parcel, which was the Zig Zag Track, so it made sense for it to be with the Launceston City Council as part of that whole parcel of land.

Mr FINCH - It is probably good to alert people to the fact that that opportunity is available through Crown Land Services. It is a matter of contacting them through your office and seeing how that can be better managed outside of Crown Land Services if people want to acquire that land.

Mr WIGHTMAN - The case you talk about, Mr Finch, is that there is a pragmatic and practical approach with crown land. That is one of the reasons we have brought it in under Parks and Wildlife and had that restructure.

CHAIR - I thought it was to do with the manager.

Mr WIGHTMAN - When I first became Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage we needed a far more practical way to manage crown land in Tasmania. That is why Crown Land came back in under Parks and then it provides you the resources to manage some of the crown land parcels in Tasmania. It is no good just having a compliance officer or someone at a desk when you need to manage a fire risk, for example, on a crown land property. We needed a far more pragmatic and practical view of crown land. Andrew, who is here today, has led that and we have been able to achieve some very good outcomes, such as the parcel of land at Deviot.

CHAIR - Minister, I am going to ask you with much trepidation about the shack sites program.

Mr EVANS - We do not have a briefing today on shack sites.

CHAIR - I might avail myself of a briefing because there are still some outstanding issues.

Mr WIGHTMAN - There are still some outstanding issues with shack sites. Some of them have been particularly difficult to deal with. I do not try to hide that in any way, it has been very challenging. While we have resolved a number of those issues, there are a few outstanding ones that some families have with that project. We are trying to slowly work our way through them.

CHAIR - I will make contact with the appropriate persons.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We will happily give you a briefing on that.

CHAIR - We have one question in relation to illegal activity, and by that I mean motorbikes in reserves.

[5.15 p.m.]

Mr DEAN - There has been a bit of publicity in relation to wood-hooking in reserves and forestry areas. Illegal four-wheel driving and trail bike riding has gone on for a long time in these areas. Is that an issue, minister?

Mr WIGHTMAN - The first one would be around wood-hooking, the taking of wood from the reserve system in Tasmania and selling it sometimes on the side of the road. You would be surprised to see how significant and how sophisticated the operation is in Tasmania. We have been installing remote cameras to assist with the identification of those wood-hookers and trying to catch them in the act. Yes, there are times when we have illegal four-wheel driving and trail -

Mr DEAN - Sorry, is the wood-hooking in particular areas?

CHAIR - No, because that is where the cameras are.

Mr DEAN - I don't mean location.

Mr WIGHTMAN - There are some prosecutions underway as well. I have to be cautious about that because there are some prosecutions underway. The point I make is that it is a sophisticated operation in Tasmania.

Mr DEAN - The number of prosecutions?

Mr MOONEY - Yes, we have achieved a number of prosecutions to date by using the surveillance cameras, so it can be admissible evidence in the process. What we tend to find is that has been a really good wake up call for that part of the community that wood hooks. In the locations where we have had the prosecutions the amount of wood hooking has dropped significantly.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We are not after families who need a bit of wood to keep the fire burning. I am not talking about targeting families in any way, I am talking about significant operations that exist in Tasmania and the people are making money.

Trail bikes are an issue that we have at an electorate level in and around Launceston. Some of those areas are managed by the city council and a lot of those areas where the illegal trail bike activity occurs in and around Launceston is on Launceston City Council grounds. We report matters to the police, go and see constituents and talk to people about ways that we can assist them.

CHAIR - They are fairly quick, though.

Mr WIGHTMAN - You will have the Braaaps; it is not the Braaaps, it is the ones bought off eBay from China and the like, the imitations. People call the police and by that time they are gone. It is an issue.

Output Group 9 Heritage

9.1 Historic heritage services -

Dr GOODWIN - I am interested in the number of properties currently on the Tasmanian Heritage Register and whether any have been removed in this current financial year, and if so, why?

Mr SMITH - As of 30 June 2012 there were 5 529 places on the register. During the course of any given year in recent times there have been a number of removals for a couple of reasons. One is that if a place is destroyed to the point that it has no historic heritage values, such as by fire, we can undertake an assessment and propose to the Heritage Council the place be removed. There are instances where we have done replacement entries or consolidated entries. For instance, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery occupies a whole city block with Dunn Place car park and a couple of years ago there were a couple of individual buildings listed, but we replaced those listings with one individual list and so we have a consolidated entry. There are those sorts of processes we use as a standard rule, but we have not had any wholesale removals from the register at this point in time. It is something that may be contemplated in the future depending on the progression of future legislative reforms that have been talked about previously.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I have some statistics. In 2011-12 the Tasmanian Heritage Council made 30 new permanent and five provisional entries to the Tasmanian heritage register. As at 30 June 2012, there were 5 549 historic heritage places permanently in a Tasmanian Heritage Register.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Dr GOODWIN - Excellent. I have a vague recollection of mention of maybe an audit or something of places on the register from a debate on a bill. This is a bit vague, but is that right?

Mr SMITH - One of the things you might recall is the Property Council of Australia in your briefings to the Legislative Council; members were looking to highlight the value of undertaking such an exercise. What I would say to you is that we have started some initial work, firstly in terms of reviewing the heritage register, in terms of ensuring the cadastral information we have is accurate and current because what we are trying to do at the moment to create a historic heritage overlay in Land Information System Tasmania, and then to make sure we have the cadastral information current and accurate, either on the basis of title or a CPR, a central plan register record, so that we can create that overlay. We have done some initial work in that space.

We have also, with the minister's support, done some initial reviews of the register to try to establish levels of significance because the register was originally created based on the sealed plans of Hobart and Launceston, National Trust lists, and those places that were registered or entered in the register of national estate. One of the things we are trying to understand over the next twelve months is where places would fall in terms of levels of significance so that can inform future discussions and policy decisions of government.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I might say this is a matter Pete and I have talked about, and the department at length. We do have a lot of wonderful heritage properties or a number of wonderful heritage properties right across Tasmania, but there are certainly some entries in there that needed to have a second look and we have dealt with some of those issues. There is still some more work to do but we are dealing with those issues.

Dr GOODWIN - In terms of that section of the act that is problematic, as identified through the Parliament Square process -

Mr WIGHTMAN - Proving it feasible?

Dr GOODWIN - Yes, how is that progressing?

Mr WIGHTMAN - We are currently working through that at the moment with the support of Crown Law to try to find a way through that. We are confident we will be able to find a way through it.

Mr DEAN - While you are on statistics, what is the number of properties listed for assessment and yet to be assessed? Also the properties that have an interim listing, how many are on those lists and how long is it likely to be, minister, to get through them because I know at one stage I think there was a thousand or something on my list. There was quite a backlog at one stage so that is what I am looking at now. What is the backlog?

Mr SMITH - What I would suggest to you is that this time last year we had just over 2 000 nominations on hand and that was a figure that we previously reported. In the last 12 months we have had the National Trust review - all the nominations that they have made - and their considered opinion was that all of those nominations could be withdrawn because those places were well and truly represented by the existing register, or they did not warrant entry in a state register. We have engaged a consultant to do some further work on the balance of nominations, which is just over a thousand places, and I am meeting tomorrow with the consultant and my senior staff member who is managing that project to give us a heads-up on where they have got to.

That process of engaging consultants to review those nominations has highlighted the fact that a lot of those nominations are for residential dwellings that are over-represented in the heritage register and not necessarily of state significance, and whilst they are important to the overall heritage stock in Tasmania, you would not expect the onus of heritage listing at a state level to be imposed on those places and that has been the considered opinion of those involved in the process.

Mr DEAN - The consultant group there, minister, and those that have been interim listed, do you still have that list or not?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Of an interim listing?

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Do you have some numbers on that, Pete?

Mr SMITH - In the figures I have at the moment, for the last full financial year there were five places that were provisionally entered, as of the end of the financial year, and 30 that were permanent entries. So, just to outline the process in our legislation, once a place is assessed as meeting at least one if not more of the seven criteria in our act, a place is provisionally entered and that is the start of the statutory process. People then have the opportunity to respond to a request for submissions or representations in relation to that, and then after the statutory period a decision is made on whether to permanently enter or not. I do not have a figure on the number of places provisionally entered at this point in time but I believe it would be in the vicinity of 10-15.

Mr DEAN - Is that a Tasmanian consultancy involved?

MR SMITH - The National Trust has been used; I am working with Chris Tassell - and he would be familiar to many of you - to assist us and that has also been very useful for the Trust as well, so it is good to involve him in that exercise.

CHAIR - It is good that Tasmanians are recognised for their expertise; it does not always happen.

Dr GOODWIN - I was going to ask another question on the prudent and feasible, in terms on whether you had an expectation of when you might be in a position to introduce legislation around that.

Mr WIGHTMAN - At this stage our understanding is that it is not before August, but it will be moved as an amendment in the Legislative Council.

Dr GOODWIN - Okay, but not before August?

Mr WIGHTMAN - No, but before the end of the year. So as I said, we are currently working on that now, we need some specific advice, we need to look at precedent and then make sure we have it right, but our plan is to introduce it to the Legislative Council. One we have that to a point there will obviously need to be a little bit more consultation and a discussion with the community about that, but our intention is to have it-

CHAIR - Minister, there is a relatively small decrease in the funding for this business unit, so is it made up of payroll tax and budget management strategies, or purely all payroll tax? Is there a little component of budget management strategy?

Mr WIGHTMAN - The reduction in payroll tax is \$99 000 and then there is also a new budget saving, so it is \$103 000 in 2013-14 and \$133 000 from 2014-15 onwards. So once again, I have no doubt that people would prefer that that was not there; however, we need to find the savings.

CHAIR - In this area there is \$3 million allocated to the Port Arthur Historic Site management. I know we usually look at that in dividually but it has come out of your funds.

Mr WIGHTMAN - For those that know, the penitentiary precinct building needs some significant work on structural stabilisation so that is going towards that project. We know how important Port Arthur is and I think that is from state view, I really get a negative north versus south comment about some of our extremely important historic heritage, particularly Port Arthur - it is a place that is treasured and loved as much in the north as it is in the south. To bring us all together.

CHAIR - I know we have talked about Port Arthur in a different forum so we will probably do that again at another time.

Mr DEAN - In relation to the Boland Street cottages, that is now, I understand, being sorted. Is there some actions being taken?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I cannot really speak about that. It has been taken off the Heritage list but further than that, I cannot speak about that.

Mr DEAN - It is ongoing.

9.2 Aboriginal Heritage -

[5.30 p.m.]

Mr FINCH - With this we see a fairly constant expenditure here of about \$1.5 million a year. I am curious as to what that money is actually going on?

Mr WIGHTMAN - We have staff who are able to assist people who may have a proposal for a development dealing with Aboriginal heritage issues. In fact Steve talks a lot to developers about further work that might have to be done, and whether that be testing work or a broad-scale look at the property it is Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania that does the work to assist those people wishing to develop in those cases.

Mr GALL - Over the last couple of years we have brought up the technical expertise within the area so we provide some high-level advice to major developments mainly for what types of assessments they require and what sort of mitigation actions are available to them to get through the projects. They can be multimillion or billion-dollar projects, so to increase our capacity to do that we have brought in some extra archaeologists and other technical experts and we have now developed a new database which will assist with looking at sensitivity zones and parts of the state that are probably best left alone or avoided and will require some sort of legal assessment. That is also a direct response to the new legislation reform process as well to start up the new database.

Mr FINCH - Are those people you mentioned consultants or FTEs?

Mr GALL - They are FTEs.

Mr FINCH - How many do you have working in the department?

Mr WIGHTMAN - We have 13.64 FTEs. Those people are there, as Steve has said, to assist with people who have development proposals in particular and they can assist them with what may need to be done, if anything. Sometimes a desktop survey can make a decision if there is no further requirement for work there. If further work is required they will then advise developers about the work required so they are there to assist developers and developments.

Mr FINCH - All located in Hobart?

Mr GALL - Yes.

Mr FINCH - So this is the base for AHT.

Mrs TAYLOR - Did you help Risdon Prison last year with Aboriginal heritage and has that been resolved?

Mr GALL - Yes.

Mrs TAYLOR - They now have permission to build?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes. I must say one of the key roles that AHT and Steve play is to look at mitigation and ways you can avoid places in what we call the Tasmanian Aboriginal Site Index, which is a database of all our sites of significance. If you cannot avoid them, how best you can continue the development but protect that Aboriginal heritage.

I also think Steve probably underestimates the educative role AHT plays in Tasmania about the Aboriginal community and our wealth of Aboriginal heritage material right across the state. While it is not a primary function of the role of AHT, I believe they get that message out there as well through their interaction with developers. Steve probably has some statistics around that but a lot of issues are dealt with at a desktop level that don't have to proceed further.

Mr FINCH - There is an allocation, minister, of \$600 000 a year for the development and introduction of legislation to improve protection and management of our Aboriginal heritage, including the establishment of a new Aboriginal heritage register. How is that going to be compiled and who will have an input?

Mr WIGHTMAN - That is what Steve was just talking about so I will ask him to talk a little more about that.

Mr GALL - The \$600 000 that has been allocated is spread over a couple of areas. It is to do with the legislation reform process itself so there is a project team doing the legislation reform. The remaining amount is for upskilling in the area dealing with the processes and getting ready for implementation. The register itself is a new project that has been undertaken since last year and we have engaged a project manager and an information technology team who are developing

this architecture. It is a database which will have what we have already but the Tasmanian Aboriginal Site Index will be part of it. The other will be the actual processes. It will work out our work processes because the new legislation links in with the land use planning legislation and therefore it is something we have not had to deal with in the past with the tight turnaround timeframes. The system is going to be developed so that it is a one-stop shop for us to be able to get projects in and out the door within those time frames.

CHAIR - How far away is that legislation?

Mr WIGHTMAN - For the first time since governments have talked about having new legislation in place we put a draft out for public consultation and received some feedback about that. Some was about Aboriginal heritage protection measures and some about uncertainty, particularly for developers like the Property Council. We have a divergence of opinions about that but in saying that, we are further down the track than ever about having new Aboriginal protection legislation in Tasmania. It is long overdue and there have been significant attempts to do this. I ask people not to underestimate the difficulty of this in trying to find common ground with it. In the end we will have a piece of legislation that not everybody will be happy with but has been based upon consultation and the fact that we are trying to protect Aboriginal heritage in Tasmania and give certainty for those wishing to develop.

Mr FINCH - Along with the establishment of this statutory Aboriginal heritage register, there is a plan to streamline development approvals between state and local governments. How is this to be achieved when you would expect that a heritage register is likely to slow up the process?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I don't think a heritage register slows up the process. I think a heritage register makes sure we do not destroy important Aboriginal cultural material.

Mr FINCH - Do you feel confident and relaxed about the negotiations between -

Mr WIGHTMAN - I do not feel relaxed about this issue at all, Mr Finch, I must say. It is a really difficult issue and one I have spent nearly three years trying to find a way through. Obviously the protection of Aboriginal heritage is extremely important but I do not think we should be saying that a heritage register is there to get in the way of development. The heritage register is there to ensure we protect areas of Aboriginal significance and we have significant Aboriginal heritage in Tasmania. We are slowly getting a better understanding of that over time and it is a challenging position, but we need to protect Aboriginal heritage in Tasmania. We also need to give certainty to developers, and that is the difficulty of this legislation.

Mr FINCH - Would you have dealt with LGAT about this?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes. We took the show on the road, so to speak, and consulted as widely as we could and we also offered briefings and community-type forums for those people who wished to come along. Alan Haig, who is here today, has done an absolute power of work, as has Brooke, behind me here, who now works in my office. We have consulted as widely as we can. We have then taken that information, that feedback and we will put it into the new legislation, as much as we possibly can, into the new legislation. It is a really challenging task.

Mr FINCH - As you are probably aware Michael Mansell is highly critical of the annual spend of \$600 000 a year on these various -

Mr WIGHTMAN - I have a very good relationship with Michael Mansell. Michael and I, and Clyde I must say, had a difficult start to getting to know each other as many people would be aware in this place. We have been able to rebuild and repair that relationship in many ways. That is not to say that he won't criticise me tomorrow in the paper for some particular matter, but we have developed a good working relationship. He is unhappy with elements of the legislation, but so is the Property Council. In saying that the protection of Aboriginal heritage is incredibly important.

Mr FINCH - He says this year's allocation is flogging a dead horse.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I disagree with Mr Mansell about that, particularly when I know that we are further down the path of having new legislation than we have been since the mid-seventies. Also, we have an interim Aboriginal heritage council in place, which is providing me with information and advice not only on the legislation, but also on other matters to do with Aboriginal heritage in Tasmania. I have certainly talked to the TAC about having representation on that council.

Mr FINCH - Michael Mansell has suggested spending the money on developing Aboriginal sites on the west coast. I don't know if you are aware of that?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I am absolutely aware of that.

Mr FINCH - He says employing six Aborigines rebuilding the villages at Nungu and Temma, and developing some west coast tracks would attract visitors to the west coast.

Mr WIGHTMAN - We are more than keen to have a discussion about that. We employ Aboriginal trainee rangers right across Tasmania and I met one recently on Flinders Island, and he is doing an outstanding job over there. It presents a far broader cultural understanding than we have had. One way to do that is through the trainee ranger programs. I had a conversation with Clyde Mansell in recent days and I am happy to talk to him about opportunities on the west coast and ways that we can engage trainee Aboriginal rangers in our park system.

Mr FINCH - It is good to hear your sense of involvement in this part of your portfolio.

Mr WIGHTMAN - This has been really tough. It was a decision at that time, which I absolutely believed needed to be made, and from that point on I have had an open door policy. I have had some extremely difficult conversations along the way, but I have been trying to rebuild a relationship. We have Aboriginal heritage legislation as far down the track as we ever had. We have an interim heritage council. Both Michael and Clyde will sit down and have a chat with me, although they certainly won't agree with me on everything that I say, or very little that I say, perhaps that has been the improvement in the relationship efforts. I don't need to go into that but we still have a long way to go.

Mr FINCH - Do you think in hindsight you should have shifted this over to the Aboriginal Affairs minister?

Mr WIGHTMAN - No.

CHAIR - She has her own line item now. Things have changed from last year.

Mr FINCH - Some of this confusion of where money is allocated to different departments, and we have an Aboriginal Affairs minister, and I would have thought this would sit under that portfolio.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I disagree because a lot of this work is about permits and about protection. Just like you might have an environmental permit, this is a permit to do with the protection of Aboriginal heritage. You are also dealing with the Property Council and developers, so you are dealing with two groups and trying to find a way through the middle. I think the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is there to champion the rights of the Aboriginal community. My role as minister is about a legislative and permit response to difficult circumstances in which you are trying to make a balanced decision. I do not think that the signing of Aboriginal permits should be sitting with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. That is just my explanation of where I think it should be.

Dr GOODWIN - The minister has done three years work on it now, you cannot take it away from him after all that effort.

[5.45 p.m.]

Mr WIGHTMAN - Since December 2011; it wasn't 2010, sorry.

CHAIR - Can I take you back to your conversations - and they have mostly centred around Michael and Clyde Mansell, who I absolutely agree are key figures for the Aboriginal community, but they are not the only members of the Aboriginal community. Have you engaged with those other Aboriginal communities?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Absolutely. If you go back to when Ray Groom was involved, one of the key components of the consultation was we would talk to all the Aboriginal groups around Tasmania. You will find that the Interim Heritage Council is not made up of the TAC, although they have been invited to be on board. It is made up of representatives from a variety of groups right around the state. I commend them for having the courage to stand up and provide me, as minister, advice not only on the legislation but other matters impacting on the protection of cultural material in Tasmania.

Dr GOODWIN - Minister, how many people are on that interim council?

Mr WIGHTMAN - There are seven and Rocky Sainty is the Chair.

9.3 Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens -

Mr DEAN - Minister, has the carousel been sorted out?

Mr WIGHTMAN - As much as some people might not like to hear this, the carousel needs to go. It cost \$15 000 initially to move and set up in the botanical gardens and costs us \$4 000 per year in power and other charges and that is not an expense we can bear at the moment. In my view, and Mark may think different, it needs to be removed.

Mr DEAN - I thought it was privately run.

Mr WIGHTMAN - Someone has to pay the power and it costs us \$4 000 a year.

Mr DEAN - There has been no negotiation with the current operator to cover the running costs?

Mr FOUNTAIN - There is no capacity. They do not earn anywhere near enough to do that.

Mr DEAN - It is seen as an attraction. I asked a number of families what they thought of it and they said their reason for going to the botanical gardens was so their children could ride on the carousel.

Mr WIGHTMAN - There has been a lot of consultation. It has been there for three years and when you have an operation such as the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens where finances are tight every year \$4 000 is not something we can afford at this stage. There have been ongoing discussions with the owner and operator and we are very sensitive to that.

Dr GOODWIN - It does not have a home yet then?

Mr WIGHTMAN - It sounds as though Mr Dean will be speaking to Mayor Van Zetten in the very near future.

Laughter.

Mrs TAYLOR - On the carousel, \$4 000 a year does not sound that much, minister.

Mr WIGHTMAN - It is in a budgetary sense when you struggle to break even and it had to have support from the department to get through.

Mrs TAYLOR - You could nearly fund that out of a sundry grants budget.

Mr WIGHTMAN - That is not a recurrent funding mechanism.

Mr DEAN - Can I go to major initiatives? I notice there are a number of major initiatives and the one I am interested in, and which I raised last year, was the donation box and the ability of the gardens to generate revenue with donations and so on. Minister, how is that being done?

Mr WIGHTMAN - With regard to gate donations in 2012-13 donations totalled \$59 925; in 2011-12 donations totalled \$39 494; in 2010-11 donations totalled \$12, 365 so that is an increase of \$20 431 or 51.73 per cent compared to 2011-12. It is an increase of \$47 560 or 384.63 per cent compared to 2010-11.

Mr DEAN - That is good but what strategies are you using to increase those donations. That is what I am interested in and that is what the initiative is here that you are putting strategies into place for the purposes of increasing donations and self-generated revenue.

Mr FOUNTAIN - As far as gate entry donations go, the strategy essentially is to have some of our volunteers manning a specially built hut at the gate. They are not necessarily putting their hand out; just that presence alone is enough to increase donations at our donation boxes. That is one aspect of it. The other aspect in regard to larger-scale donations is work we are doing at the moment, looking at the possibility of increasing our capacity to gain bequest funding and further philanthropic funding. We are just commencing that work.

Mr DEAN - So somebody is at the gate at different intervals, but not employed there permanently.

Mr FOUNTAIN - It is not permanent but we have enough volunteers to guarantee a fair presence.

Mr DEAN - It would be a voluntary position.

Mr FOUNTAIN - Yes, they are volunteers. They are Friends of the Garden, a specially formed group that basically functions as ambassadors.

Mr DEAN - It is a wonderful garden, there is no doubt about that.

Mr FOUNTAIN - Thank you.

Mr DEAN - Your last major initiative on the documents we have is developing and constructing the Tasmanian Community Food Garden, part-funded by a Tasmanian community fund grant, and development and construction of the associated skills centre, par-funded by a Skills Tasmania grant. Can you give us a bit more information on that, minister?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I certainly can. The Botanical Gardens are exempt from a proposed efficiency cut. Also there is 175 in there which is recurrent funding for the seed bank, which is a very important initiative and that will help them out when it comes to budget matters.

I will let Mark talk about the education program. I have been able to go down there and present certificates. As a registered training organisation - RTO - it is a wonderful opportunity because you attract a clientele who are very keen to work in the botanical gardens and take it on. Horticulture might be the unit they are studying and because it is based in the botanical gardens it gives them that authentic experience. Many I talked to when they were presented their certificates said they would not be in the training if it was not run by the botanical gardens as an RTO and based within the gardens. It was actually the attraction of the gardens that brought people to education and training and from my point of view that is a really good thing.

Mr FOUNTAIN - To answer your question in regard to the Tasmanian Community Food Garden and the Living Learning Centre, it is a project that has been generated out of our strategic master plan. The aim of the project is to homogenise the site so that it functions as a site for education specifically about food plants and useful plants. Currently the work we are doing funded by the Tasmanian community fund is the redevelopment of the Pete's Patch area. We are well underway with that project and we are hoping to have that open by early October. The Living Learning Centre is a building that will house our education programs. That has been funded to the tune of \$389 000 by Skills Tasmania. We are topping that up with \$100 000 from a bequest fund that we are draining dry to give us enough to work with. We hope to have that finished within the next two years.

Mr DEAN - Minister, do you have the numbers going through those programs?

Mr FOUNTAIN - We currently have about 75 students running through our certificated horticulture program and we think within the next few months we will have over 100 students running through those programs. The minister mentioned the work we are doing in relation to the

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work at the Botanical Gardens but we are also working in the north of the state running a program where the National Trust will be the supporting organisation and the horticulture will be at National Trust sites. We believe that is probably a first in Australia and that is going to be an extremely interesting program. Those programs are expanding. We are also looking at the possibility of developing a course in Smithton and even on the west coast at the moment.

Mr DEAN - Last year we touched on the number of weddings and other activities that are occurring within the gardens -

CHAIR - Weddings, parties, anything.

Mr DEAN - Is there a charge at all by the garden for those activities?

Mr WIGHTMAN - I was going to say, I hope so.

Mr DEAN - I don't mean in the function centre, I mean the use of the grounds where you often see weddings occurring and so on.

Mr FOUNTAIN - We have different charges for different sites. It is on a level with the charges you might see in a commercial facility.

Mr DEAN - Is that generating reasonable income for the gardens?

Mr FOUNTAIN - It adds to our income.

CHAIR - What does the \$175 000 that is allocated for the Seed Conservation Centre actually buy?

Mr FOUNTAIN - It will buy the position of the seed bank manager for whom that position is being funded from within the garden's funds for the last two-and-a-bit years since the funding from Kew was finished. We have been supporting that position and there is a position we have run during the collecting season. We run a part-time collector during the summer months, a specialist field botanist.

CHAIR - Who knows what they are looking for?

Mr FOUNTAIN - Yes and who can organise the fieldwork we undertake. It will support some of the operations of the seed bank. Possibly, if we are really right with the money, we will be able to use some of it because back in the gardens we operate seed orchards, which are part of the seed collecting program, to source and collect plant materials.

CHAIR - Is there any opportunity to generate that seed bank operation to be able to generate any its own funds? Can you sell the seedlings for a price?

Mr FOUNTAIN - Our role is as a conservation seed bank at the moment and our primary role is to get Tasmania's flora stored against future change. We also have a primary focus at the moment on getting Tasmania's rare and threatened flora stored. That work alone will take us 10 to 15 years. This is very long-term thinking, to get that material collected and sourced and into the bank. There is some commercial potential but I do not think we are in a position to exploit that at the moment. It would not be a lot.

[6.00 p.m.]

Mr DEAN - Minister, total visitors decreased in 2011-12, and the target has been set at 400 000 for this financial year which is about to end. How are we tracking on that?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Visitation rates have increased -

Mr FOUNTAIN - We will reach 400 000 by the end of this financial year.

Mr DEAN - That is good because in most other areas the visitations are less.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I think we will see an increase right across Tasmania, particularly through national parks and the like. There will be some recovery. How significant that recovery is, I cannot even hazard a guess, but I think we will see some improvement.

Mr DEAN - Is there a board?

Mr WIGHTMAN - There is a board.

Mr DEAN - How many on that board?

Mr FOUNTAIN - Currently seven.

Mr DEAN - What is the cost of the board to the organisation?

Mr FOUNTAIN - Three or four of our board members don't take their fees.

Mr WIGHTMAN - They can attract sitting fees, Mr Dean, but a number of the board decided not to take those sitting fees, as a community contribution.

Mr DEAN - But some do?

CHAIR - I guess it all depends where they travel from and what else they do.

Mrs TAYLOR - Minister, I am a great fan and friend of the gardens. The initiatives are fantastic, the education and the seed bank and all the other things you are doing are really good. I do have one area of concern, though. I note when I look at your mission and even your initiatives we seem to have lost an area that is a community space for people just to come to. There are lots of families with kids who just come to the gardens every season because they come to see the flowers. In here it is all fairly practical and academic and fund-raising, but there is nothing to say it is just a fun place for families, or we want it to be a place where families can come and just see flowers and trees, as people have done for a very long time. Last spring you did not have, as I recall, the annual plantings of tulips that you have had for a long time. When I took friends to the gardens because I knew the tulips were going to be fantastic at that time, there was no display.

CHAIR - It was not as colourful?

Mrs TAYLOR - There were none there or very few. It is not just tulips. It is the annual and the seasonal plantings. The gardens have always looked fantastic in seasons. Is this a budget measure?

Mr FOUNTAIN - To a certain extent it is a budget measure. Tulips specifically are very expensive and they were -

Mrs TAYLOR - Don't you keep them year to year?

Mr FOUNTAIN - No. They come in and they get thrown out so from that point of view -

Mrs TAYLOR - That sounds expensive.

Mr FOUNTAIN - It was probably about a \$5 000 cost to put on a spring display, most of which was tossed on the tip.

CHAIR - Don't you put them in brown paper bags?

Mrs TAYLOR - Or give them away?

Mr FOUNTAIN - No because there is potential for disease and disease transfer.

Mrs TAYLOR - This goes to the heart of what I am saying. A number of years ago, long before your time, there was talk within the government of charging people to go into the gardens. I was very much against that because everybody can go to the gardens. There are plenty of people from lower socioeconomic areas who would not go with their children if they had to pay, but who can regularly go to the gardens and the kids run around and it is fantastic. I am not against donations at all, but a forced cost -

Mr FOUNTAIN - Donations are not foisted on anyone; people volunteer.

Mrs TAYLOR - I know, and I applaud the fact that we don't do that because I think it is something that we should take out of -

Mr WIGHTMAN - I take your point, Mrs Taylor. You have made that well that it is a community space and the fact that families can go there, or kids can go there and enjoy their time, or you take visitors, is really important. In saying that, too, we obviously have to keep the garden at a standard where people do want to visit and that costs money. Trying to get that balance right between being a profitable organisation - three points really: profitable organisations, making sure that we are preserving flora such as the seed bank, and also providing that community space, are three really important reasons.

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes. It is just that I cannot see that in the current mission.

Mr WIGHTMAN - It has been tight financially as well for the gardens, no doubt about that, and the board has worked particularly hard to try to rectify that, but it has been a challenge.

Mr FINCH - Peter Cundall has been a good advocate, hasn't he?

Mr WIGHTMAN - No doubt.

Mrs TAYLOR - The whole vegetable garden thing has developed beautifully and people come to see that.

CHAIR - It is being redeveloped as we speak - Pete's Patch.

Mr FOUNTAIN - I think you will see improved floral displays. We have been working on floral displays that aren't reliant on quick-turnover annuals and looking at building – really, the last three or four years have been about experimenting on much more sustainable ways of getting colour into those kinds of plantings. They are probably not quite like tulips, but they still perform that function.

Mrs TAYLOR - I thought that the whole tulip - do you remember, once upon a time - the tulip festival was there with no charge. When you made it a commercial venture, I thought that would pay, I suppose, for some of those plantings, but it hasn't worked? You had the tulip festival then, but you are not going to have it any more, obviously?

Mr FOUNTAIN - We don't have it called that. It is now called the Spring Community Festival, so it focuses around spring plants but not the tulips necessarily.

CHAIR - They do the tulips up in the north west, aren't they?

Mr DEAN - In the Forth area.

CHAIR - Table Cape.

Dr GOODWIN - Just in support of the spring festival, minister, I spent a bit of time there with my Rotary club handing out hamburgers, sausages and things, and it was a really lovely festive atmosphere. In support of the spring festival, I think that works. It is just a different format, I suppose, to the tulips.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am not saying you shouldn't do that - I am saying we should - but we did have a bit of a reputation for that tulip festival, I suppose, whether you call it a spring flower or what and displays were just fantastic.

Mr FOUNTAIN - We still get plenty of community engagement, but they are not necessarily coming for that particular event.

Capital investment program -

CHAIR - The Three Capes Track: my question is are you on track to complete? Do we only have one peak at the moment?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Cape Haug.

CHAIR - And when is number two cape or peak ready?

Mr WIGHTMAN - As you would well be aware, the Tasmania and Australian governments have allocated \$25.3 million, that being \$12.8 million and \$12.5 million respectively. As we have talked about it, it is planned to be constructed in three stages. The Cape Haug track upgrade was stage 1 and is practically complete and I would encourage you to go down and have a look - it is absolutely sensational. It is a beautiful view and wonderful work that has been done by the trackies - track workers - but also stonemasons in that area.

Mrs TAYLOR - Can you walk it in one day?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes. Stage 2 is the eastern sections from Denmans Cove to Fortescue Bay and construction has commenced. Stage 3 will be the sections west of Port Arthur commencing near White Beach and ending at Safety Cove. When stage 2 is completed it will deliver a four-day/three-night walk and is expected to be opened in November 2015. The total annual spend, excluding construction stages, is Tasmania and the Tasman Peninsula contributed to the Three Capes Track, stages 1 to 3, \$19 million and \$1.6 million respectively. In recent times, for stage 2 I was able to go down to a gravel quarry with the project manager, Colin Shepherd, which is a family organisation down there. Basically, the investment of the Three Capes Track and the investment working with the family to provide the gravel for the tracks, was a real boost that they needed, particularly after the fires ravaged the area down there. It was really nice to be able to use locals, particularly in the Tasman Peninsula, and have them contribute the gravel to what will be an outstanding product.

CHAIR - That is great. Maybe they might be able to develop their quarry after they have finished getting their gravel out because the Butchard Gardens in Vancouver originated out of a quarry and they are magnificent.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I do encourage people to go and have a look. We are working on that second stage, but the first stage, the Cape Hauy Track, is absolutely fantastic. The way I describe it is that instead of looking down at where you are walking to make sure that you are treading in the right place like you did with the older track, the new track really allows you - it is also a bit of a challenge, but to enjoy the views as well. The stonemasonry there is absolutely outstanding.

CHAIR - The December or November 2015 expected date for the next stage is that - excuse the pun - on track?

Mr WIGHTMAN - Yes.

CHAIR - Minister, on behalf of the committee I thank you and your team today.

Mr WIGHTMAN - I have answers to a couple of questions. One is on the status of capeweed, its extent and management, and also additional information on the voluntary redundancies in the department for 2012-13.

The committee adjourned at 6.13 p.m.