

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Thursday 1 July 2010 - Estimates Committee B (D. O'Byrne) - Part 1

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Thursday 1 July 2010

MEMBERS

Mr Dean
Mr Finch
Mr Gaffney
Mr Wing
Mrs Taylor
Ms Rattray (Chair)

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Ms Forrest

IN ATTENDANCE

Hon. David O'Byrne MP, Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage, Minister for Workplace Relations, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Hospitality

Ministerial Office

Josh Bradshaw, Head of Office
Brad Arkell, Adviser
Ben McKay, Adviser
Astrid Wootton, Adviser
Simon Monk, Adviser

Department of Justice

Lisa Hutton, Secretary
Michael Stevens, Deputy Secretary (Corporate)
Robert Williams, Deputy Secretary
Chris Jacoora, Departmental Liaison Officer
Kerry Worsley, Manager, Crown Law

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Elizabeth Knight, Registrar, Supreme Court
Jim Connolly, Administrator, Magistrates Court
Norman Reaburn, Director, Legal Aid
Bruce Taylor, Electoral Commissioner
Mark Cocker, Acting Director, Monetary Penalties Enforcement Service
Chris Batt, Registrar, Births, Deaths & Marriages
Len Armsby, Director, Legislation Development and Review
Roy Ormerod, General Manager, Workplace Standards Tasmania

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Michele Moseley, Acting Secretary
Robert Cockerell, General Manager, Corporate Services
Kane Salter, Manager, Finance
John Whittington, Deputy Secretary
Kate Kent, General Manager, Information and Land Services
Penny Wells, General Manager, Resource Management and Conservation
Brett Noble, Director, Policy and Projects Group
Warren Jones, Director, EPA Division
Peter Mooney, Deputy Secretary, Parks and Heritage
Pete Smith, Director, Heritage Tasmania
Steve Gall, Manager, Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania
Lesley Kirby, Director, Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens
Alan Haig, Specialist Policy Analyst

Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Arts

Mark Kelleher, Secretary, Office of CEO
Elizabeth Jack, Deputy Secretary Culture, Recreation and Sport
Craig Watson, Executive Director, Corporate Support

Katherine Hough, Director, Arts Tasmania
Bill Bleathman, Executive Director, Sport & Recreation Tasmania

Craig Martin, Executive Director, Sport & Recreation Tasmania
Lynne Fitzgerald, Cultural Development Director, Culture, Recreation and Sport

The committee met at 9.30 a.m.

CHAIR (Ms Rattray) - Welcome, Minister, and can we welcome you to your first Legislative Council Estimates process.

Mr O'BYRNE - Thank you very much; it is a pleasure to be here -at this stage.

Laughter.

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CHAIR - We have had quite a few new ones come before us this week and we have appreciated the information we have been able to gather.

There is a little bit of housekeeping before we start. Obviously, everyone wants to finish today so we need to keep our questions short and sharp and you will need to keep the answers short and sharp as well. Minister, regarding any information that the committee is seeking during the day, we would respectfully request that we try to have it by the end of the day but there may be some things that do take longer than just the day and we will write and request that.

Mr O'BYRNE - There were a couple of incidences yesterday where we were able to get it by the end of the session and we will endeavour to do that.

CHAIR - Thank you. It does help with our turnaround times when we are preparing our report. Also, Minister, if we need to work beyond 5 p.m. then before 3 p.m. we need to inform Madam President, so we will have a look at the time and see how we are going.

I am interested to know whether you are looking to provide a short overview, given that it is a new portfolio with a new minister and new aspirations.

Mr O'BYRNE - Absolutely. What I would also like to do is introduce to the Legislative Council the people who are with me today.

CHAIR - We would appreciate that.

Mr O'BYRNE - We have Michele Moseley who is the Acting Secretary of the department and Robert Cockerell who is the General Manager, Corporate Services.

CHAIR - We have a few people who are a bit short on hearing ability, so if we could keep the volume up.

Mr O'BYRNE - And the quality is stretched as well.

Laughter.

Mr O'BYRNE - My kids would say, 'Dad, that's a dad joke'.

Mr DEAN - Genuine war injuries in some cases.

Mr O'BYRNE - Well, I have never been accused of being softly spoken, so I will do my best.

CHAIR - Right, thank you.

Mr O'BYRNE - Also with me is Josh Bradshaw who is my head of office.

DIVISION 10

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

Mr O'BYRNE - Before we get to questioning and reports, I want to put on the record how proud I am to have been given the incredible responsibility of the environmental portfolio. The

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management and protection of our magnificent environment, parks and reserves and our historic and Aboriginal heritage is something that can really make a difference to the lives of all Tasmanians. This has to be one of the most interesting and amazing times for the environment and the State. Not only is the Government charting and leading a new and exciting era of collaborative and cooperative government but also this year we have one of the biggest investments in our parks and reserves for many years.

This year's Budget will see around 40 new front-line positions being created in the Parks and Wildlife Service and a total investment that is just shy of \$50 million over the next four years. I will provide further details later on this huge boost but before I continue I should point out that this investment in the environment did not just start with the recent Budget. The Labor Party has always been a strong advocate for the environment. For example, early last year the Premier announced the Government's intention to create a new national park at the Bay of Fires which continues a proud Labor legacy in Tasmania. When the proclamation of the new park is complete, we will be able to say that of our 20 national parks Labor has created 17, and I will talk about our funding for the new park later.

The Government established the independent Environment Protection Authority and continues to provide it with substantial funding. We are also partnering with the Australian Government in the Macquarie Island Pest Eradication Project. The eradication team arrived at Macquarie Island recently and has begun what is the largest project of this type ever attempted in the world.

We have two other massive conservation projects under way: the Fox Eradication Project and the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program. We have shown strong leadership in both of these vital projects which aim to protect our iconic species and ecosystems and to avoid potential impacts on large parts of our agricultural industry. All of these large projects and indeed any project cannot succeed without positive collaboration. Without cooperation and support from all levels of government - public servants, scientists, farmers, foresters, industry, business and the broader community - we would never have outcomes that stick. I believe that the Tasmanian Government has already started to show the benefits that come from collaborative government.

Labor and the Tasmanian Greens are working closely together to demonstrate a cooperative politics that is providing strong stable government and protecting our precious environment. We have worked with the Greens to provide an extra \$16 million over four years for the Parks and Wildlife Service. I think that is an impressive amount in anyone's books.

This is an investment that benefits the environment and provides a substantial boost to our local and regional economies. It will help to protect our values and the values of our natural places. It will allow us to manage recreational activity in our reserves in a sustainable way. It will enable the community and visitors to access our reserves, catering for a range of ages and abilities. It will help to sustain the basis of our Tasmanian brand and our unique Tasmanian way of life.

Today, as we look at the detail of the areas I am responsible for in DPIPWE, I think we should consider the strong identity and integrated practices that have already been developed throughout the department. I think we have already started to see the strong synergies that have arisen with the department across the areas that both Minister Green and I are responsible for.

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The 2010-11 Budget has great news for the environment which is build on previous commitments and I do look forward to presiding over similar good news in the future -if I can get my way with the Treasurer. He often comments about the assistance he receives from me.

Laughter.

CHAIR - Can I take you to the table 11.3 and could you provide a further explanation of the movement of the Crown Land Administration Fund to the Consolidated Fund as noted in footnote to table 11.3? I just want to better understand what that movement is about.

Mr O'BYRNE - I will hand over to Robert to illustrate with the details. It is timing and accounting and it occurs within a whole-of-government response but I will get Robert to explain that.

CHAIR - The transfer from the Crown Land Administration Fund to the Consolidated Fund.

Mr COCKERELL - The department has responsibility for this account which gathers the proceeds of sales, rentals and leases in relation to the Government's properties and lands. The receipts are in relation to the sales that the department looks after, sales the Treasury looks after, and also property developments that Economic Development Tourism and the Arts -

CHAIR - We are talking about \$10 million here, so that is significant properties.

Mr COCKERELL - If I may, I will go through and explain the accounting and what happens with it. The department has responsibility for administering the account and so proceeds from the sales and expenses involved in selling the properties are met from that account. The department has responsibility for administering the account and for all the ingoings and outgoings. Then, the determination of what is taken from the account is determined by the Treasurer each year. So the department has responsibility for the incomings and the outgoings and then the determination of the budget that is taken each year from that particular account is made by the Treasurer on the advice of Treasury.

CHAIR - Minister, are there any plans to sell any sizeable quantities of crown land in this financial year?

Mr O'BYRNE - Under the CLAC process, there is a whole range of properties that have been identified over a number of years and progressively there have been sales or transfers of land to local councils or to within State reserves or to private ownership or to sale to the public. They range from very small bits of land which abut either council land or coastal reserves or there are some other areas of land.

At this stage I do not have any details in front of me which allocate individual parcels of land but when we get to the outputs and if I can take that on notice we can get someone from Crown Lands to talk through what is the stage.

There is no particular plan. There is a priority list that has been established under CLAC over a number of years and we are progressively working through them. I do not have a list of what we are going to now but it is a part of the process that has been in train for a number of years and predominantly it is really working with local councils to establish ownerships of land to ensure that they are managed better, and I signed off recently on a couple of transfers to Kingborough

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Council and to the Circular Head Council. Stanley Wharf, for example, was crown land and we transferred that to the council. It is purely for management purposes. We are probably at the tail end of that CLAC process. I think that most of the crown land assessment process has virtually been completed; all the categorisations have been completed and we are going through the final stages of transfer and sale of lands.

CHAIR - Can you provide to the committee at a later time a list of the properties that have been sold, and also the quantum? It does not matter right now.

Mr O'BYRNE - How far back?

CHAIR - Just for the last financial year.

Mr O'BYRNE - All lands that have been under the CLAC process?

CHAIR - Just whatever the sales have been for crown land.

Ms MOSELEY - If I could just add to what the minister has said, a lot of the sales would be revenue that is gained from large properties that has gone through the Major Sales Oversight Committee that Treasury is responsible for. So we should be able to get that information from the Treasurer's office.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms FORREST - Minister, this output line item talked about ensuring sustainable use and development of crown land and crown property. You are well aware of the situation at Hellyer Beach, where we have lost a lot of crown land. I would like to inform the committee of the terms of reference given to Dr Ellison to undertake an assessment of that site at Detention River, what the costings of her work is intended to be, and in light of the urgency of the matter, what was the time frame given to her to prepare a report?

Mr O'BYRNE - I know this particular issue and I appreciated the assistance that you gave me personally in the time that we were up there meeting with the residents and having a look. The process of seeking information from Dr Ellison was commenced prior to me becoming the minister responsible. I would like to welcome to the table Kate Kent from Information and Land Services. If I can talk broadly about the issue of Hellyer Beach, it is a significant issue for the local community and the power of that river coming down and how it hooks around that river is significant. As I said to the community there, I am not interested in a short-term, bandaid solution that does not work. When working with public funds we have to make sure that we invest it appropriately. The issue of coastal erosion is a significant one and it is not just affecting people at Detention River. We are hoping to receive a report soon; it has taken longer than we would have hoped. I will get Kate to answer your specific question, but in terms of how we approach coastal erosion it is important that it be a consistent response and one based on science. In some respects Mother Nature is a powerful thing, and if we try to come up with an idea that sounds plausible but is not based on science or it is not based -

Ms FORREST - I think that we all understand the issue, but I would like you to answer some questions I have asked - the terms of reference, the timing and the cost.

Mr O'BYRNE - I will refer you to Kate Kent for those answers.

Ms KENT - The terms of reference were very informal discussions with her to ask for short-term and long-term solutions to the Hellyer Beach problems.

Ms FORREST - Was that the entirety of it, to look at the solutions?

Ms KENT - Yes. There is no cost at all for her; she is doing this as an expert in her field and through the arrangements we have with the university where other people provide this sort of expert knowledge. As you know, she was a witness at a hearing here over a year ago on coastal erosion. She and Chris Sharpe are considered the two most expert in this fields as geomorphologists. So she was contracted on that basis as an expert adviser rather than as a consultant.

Ms FORREST - Was she given a time frame for the work, in view of the urgency of the matter?

Ms KENT - Her latest advice is that she would be able to get something to us in mid-July.

Ms FORREST - Was she given a time frame when she was tasked with the job?

Ms KENT - No, not a specific one. She was doing it amongst her other work and she recognises the importance and the urgency of it.

[9.45 a.m.]

Mr O'BYRNE - We stress with Dr Ellison the importance of getting this report as soon as possible. Sometimes when you deal with scientists they work on the basis that they have been given a task to do and they work as hard as they can to complete the task within a reasonable time.

Ms FORREST - They were not given a time frame at the start?

Mr O'BYRNE - This is a doctor who is one of the pre-eminent experts in this area. We have asked her to do a task; she is undertaking that. We can rush her report but it then may be a report that is fundamentally flawed and does not assist the people in the area. What we are focusing on is trying to make sure that we can come up with a solution that resolves the issue for the people at Hellyer Beach and Detention River.

Ms FORREST - On that point, before you were minister, there was a meeting in March and there was an agreement with Crown Land to -

Mr O'BYRNE - What meeting was this?

Ms FORREST - With Crown Land on the site at Hellyer Beach. A commitment was made to put signage up to stop people walking on the remaining land that is now no longer there and also to put barriers up to prevent access to that area. That has not happened. Subsequently we have lost another degree of land, and photos have been provided to your office to demonstrate that. I assume you received those.

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes.

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Ms FORREST - Can you indicate why that emergency, immediate action was not taken and what action will now be taken in view of that?

Mr O'BYRNE - In relation to that commitment, I was of the understanding that that would have taken place and as it has not, I am talking to Crown Land about that. After the visit that we made four weeks ago, my focus was very much on how we could focus scientifically on what remedial action could be taken to protect the area, if possible. As minister, I have been trying to get a long-term solution and suggestions have been put forward of either dredging the other side of the river or placing a rock wall down on the side of the river where it hits in. On the day the weather there showed the river in all its powerful glory.

Ms FORREST - You did hit the worst day.

Mr O'BYRNE - It was a shocking day. I acknowledge that, based on your report to me, some of the action Crown Land had undertaken to do had not been done within a reasonable time.

Ms FORREST - It has not been undertaken at all.

Mr O'BYRNE - So it has not been undertaken. As minister I have focused on how we can get that scientific report in and if it suggests that the dredging and/or a rock wall is appropriate, we will act on that report as soon as we receive it. The most important thing is that we have allocated funds in terms of Dr Ellison. There was a commitment in the election of \$100 000 to this area and that is not an insignificant amount of money. We think it has been prudent for the Government to take advantage of a situation where we have an expert in the field who is able to do that work for us at no cost, so that the maintenance for the \$100 000 is focused on the solution, not necessarily being redirected to the scientific report. The \$100 000 is still there. We are really pushing to get the scientific report.

Ms FORREST - Minister, I accept that and it appears that \$100 000 may not be enough but that will remain to be seen, I guess.

Will you consider engaging another professional organisation that undertakes this sort of work if we cannot get a timely report? I have been informed it is still at least a week or two away. Comments have been made, as you have made yourself, that erosion is the nature of living on an island and this land that these houses are situated on were sold by Crown Land, as I understand, erroneously. That land should not have been sold for housing because of this potential. They were sold by Crown Land and subsequently used for housing.

Mr O'BYRNE - I would not say necessarily that erroneously there was a sale. We acknowledge the sale took place a number of years ago but to say 'erroneously' is a bit -

Ms FORREST - Yes. If the erosion is deemed to be out of control and unable to be stopped, will consideration be given to purchasing back or acquiring those properties as an alternative to letting them fall into the river, which I understand happens in some places around the world?

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, we have all seen footage on the news of houses falling with mud slides et cetera. You have asked two questions there. First of all, on the scientific report, I think if we now engage another organisation or another scientist to do it, you are just going to add another six to eight weeks. This is not something where you can just send someone on site, they go for a quick wander around, they say it is okay and they can do x, y and z for that to be a sustainable

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outcome. We are hopeful that in the next week or two we can get the report - I think mid-July - from the site. If we get an indicator in the next couple of days that it is going to be significantly longer, of course we will consider getting some other advice in a speedy way but now that we have invested some time in Dr Ellison, a pre-eminent expert in this area, we are very keen to see that go through because we know with absolute confidence that the report that we get from her will be a very well considered report and it will be a report that will hopefully make some suggestions on how best we protect those houses.

In relation to the second question, again coastal erosion is a whole-of-government issue. We are very concerned about the implications that will possibly impact on a range of properties around the State and we will be looking at it in the context of the State coastal erosion policy, which is a matter for the Premier. This is a whole-of-government approach so whilst I will take on notice your request on behalf of the residents if we get to that point, it has to be -

Ms FORREST - It was not a request from the residents, it was just a possibility that nothing can be done.

Mr O'BYRNE - It will be considered in the broader policy framework but, as you have identified and as everyone acknowledges around the State, there are a whole range of properties that from time to time come under threat from king tides and extreme weather events. I congratulate the Clarence City Council for making a significant contribution to their municipality in relation to assessing potential impacts from climate change and sea level rise. They have made a pretty comprehensive report of the potential implications and the State Government needs to respond on the whole-of-government and whole-of-State approach to the issues of properties that come under threat from coastal erosion either due to weather events or due to the impacts of climate change.

CHAIR - Minister, it appears to me that staffing may be an issue so can you give me the staff numbers for this department?

Mr O'BYRNE - In Crown Land?

CHAIR - Yes, and what regions - we have the north-west, north and south.

Mr O'BYRNE - I will get the acting secretary to answer that but I can say that within a matter of days Crown Land will be appointing someone on the north-west coast to take up the role that has been vacant in that position for quite a time.

Ms FORREST - How is that budgeted for?

Mr O'BYRNE - It is budgeted for within the forward Estimates on staffing and we have quite a good-news story there in terms of staffing, I'm pleased to report. The north-west coast will have a representative for the Crown Land's position, but I will refer to the acting secretary.

Ms MOSELEY - Crown Land Services had 32.35 FTEs in May 2009. In May this year there were 26 but we have recently gone through a recruitment process and an additional six staff joined Crown Land Services this week to work on priority issues and I think next Monday or the next Monday a Crown Land officer will be starting on the north-west coast based at Devonport.

CHAIR - Those 26 and going to be 32, where are they based?

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Ms MOSELEY - The majority are based in Hobart. There are two in the north, two in Launceston and now one on the north-west coast.

CHAIR - The two in Launceston cover all the northern part of Crown Land Services to date?

Mr O'BYRNE - I think there are some functions and duties that really do not necessarily need to be performed in the regions. I think the officers in the north are more the field workers. There are some things within Crown Land that you can do anywhere in the world really as it is information based and processes. In relation to that, the benefit of bringing the department together in the way that we have is that we have a number of people within the Parks area that are now working much more closely with Crown Land and that will continue to build. The Parks profile is more statewide. In the north, the north-west, the north-east, the east and west coasts and the far south we have a whole range of people in the field within the single department who can play a role to assist. I think the relationship now between Crown Land and Parks is one that is going to improve. The consultation, the local representation and the local voice within a large department which is permanently based in Hobart means that we can do some good things.

CHAIR - Was the reduction in staffing numbers related to the budget management strategy requirements of the Treasurer?

Ms MOSELEY - The reduction in numbers was primarily related to the conclusion of major projects. The virtual completion of the Shack Sites Project occurred during the year, although there is still a bit of ongoing work, obviously.

CHAIR - I think that might be very -

Ms MOSELEY - A virtual conclusion.

Mr O'BYRNE - I do not think we are done there.

CHAIR - I was going to say, Minister, I do not believe that Shacks Sites is resolved. That is not a question; it is a statement.

Mr O'BYRNE - I understand. I take it as a statement.

Ms MOSELEY - There was also a project looking at marine structures which concluded during the course of the year. I think there may even be others but those particular projects were funded for short-term funding and they finished during the course of the year. That largely accounts for the drop in numbers but it has been recognised, as the minister said, that these are really important issues so that is why even in the budget circumstances we have moved to get an additional six staff plus another person for the north-west coast.

CHAIR - Minister, how did the department meet their budget management strategy requirements then, if it was only a reduction in projects?

Mr O'BYRNE - In terms of the overall department?

CHAIR - Yes, and I do not necessarily need to know about 'no cream biscuits in the tea room'.

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Mr O'BYRNE - Given the Legislative Council committee has reached, I think, great heights with their lollies on the table - though we did not get that in the lower House -

CHAIR - There are a lot of things you do not get in the lower House.

Mr O'BYRNE - There is a whole range of strategies that we put in place. We obviously had to deal with the amalgamation efficiency as well - we achieved for this particular department \$1.8 million as a part of the amalgamation efficiency.

In terms of the broader budget management strategy, we look at a whole range of things. There were targets: a 30 per cent reduction in targets on phones, mobiles, on cars, on domestic travel, on international travel et cetera and all of those targets were reached across all of those areas. In terms of the employment management strategy, there were three strategies imposed as a part of the 2009-10 State Budget which directly related to salary savings and unfortunately that is where you do get the majority of your savings.

We had a Senior Executive Service reduction; we had a middle level management reduction and agency cost reduction requirement. The financial impact of these strategies in 2009-10 was \$2.86 million with a further \$1.87 million in savings in the coming year.

The employment management strategy was set for the department in relation to the reduction of SES positions which was four, so there was a reduction of four as at April 2010 and their total was achieved with an actual reduction of six positions in the SES. I can go on to give you some more details.

CHAIR - That is all right. Obviously there has been a -

Mr O'BYRNE - Pretty forensic, yes. A lot of the front-line positions were protected. Obviously in Parks there was an increase in staffing by virtue of the \$2.4 million injection into front-line staff of last year and again there will be another increase in Parks staffing with the increase in this Budget of \$4 million recurrent for the next four years.

In most of the positions where savings were made, there were no forced redundancies; they were made through natural attrition or redeployment or voluntary separation packages. Most of them were in the corporate area where it would be most appropriate, so the front-line staffing was not impacted on. Again, the fact that we were able to make those decisions and get through that global financial crisis and the potential impacts on GST revenue from the Federal Government has enabled us to reinvest in a whole range of areas.

The good news is, especially with Crown Land, that we have more of a statewide representation now which we did not have prior to this Budget.

[10.00 a.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY - Climate change and crown land is a sensitive issue and there are lots of people involved in local government and industry development. There have been some significant studies regarding sea level rise and planning documentation and I know that Dr Ellison mentioned Clarence's good work. I think from what I can recall that they had some Federal funding assistance of \$50 000 to undertake that study. They committed to it but there was some funding there, seed funding, I think.

Mr O'BYRNE - There was no reflection on the council; I am just saying 'as an example'.

CHAIR - We have to be careful here - reflecting on councils.

Mr GAFFNEY - What I am saying is that it is a good example because they had some funding set aside to undertake that work. It is great that Dr Ellison has been time-generous but in light of what happened and because there is no time frame in time-generous work, it is really hard to get the material and the information where you can do something proactive

Ms FORREST - Before the rains come.

Mr GAFFNEY - I know that there is \$100 000 in the Budget but that is probably, as you said, for the solution. Is there going to be any money in the Budget for future years so that this does not happen again - where you can say, 'We want the report done by this date and here is your money' because we cannot afford to wait? Other areas are going to be in the same situation. I am wondering how you are going to handle that.

Mr O'BYRNE - Since becoming minister, clearly there are a whole range of issues which are bubbling up where you think that if we have a piecemeal response to this, it will get a patchwork-quilt response across the State. People will feel disenfranchised by it because they will compare their response to other people's response and say, 'Hang on; you treated that community differently to how you are treating this community' and they may not get into the nuances.

We had already had a discussion in relation to this specific issue that it would be an expectation under my ministry to make sure that if we seek a report of this nature we would have a proper contractual basis in place; we would pay for it out of the existing budget and we would have much more strict time lines attached to it. I think we were hoping, as I said in this initial response, to put the majority of money towards a solution. There has been discussion at cabinet level about the State Coastal Policy. More broadly, I have had some informal discussions with the Minister for Climate Change, Mr McKim, and I have had informal discussions with the Premier outside of Cabinet about how we deal with this issue.

It is a significant issue and we need a policy framework to give the Tasmanian people some confidence that there will be a consistent approach, and that means that we will be discussing issues with local councils in a more formalised way. Regarding the reference she makes to the Federal Government funding for the Clarence City Council to allow them to undertake that report, we think that is a very good model so we will be talking to Minister Garrett to see if we can achieve some Federal support to provide a whole range of local councils the resources to reply.

Mr GAFFNEY - I think there were five pilot projects across the nation, five or 10. It was three or four years ago.

Mr O'BYRNE - Maybe someone from my office could sit down and we could get some more details from you if you are across that and we can work on that. I think it is a great idea. Councils need the capacity to undertake these reports and we will assist then in doing it because we are very keen to get a whole-of-government response.

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Mrs TAYLOR - I think that it is interesting that you are not the first minister who has sat at this table this week and said, 'Now that I am the new minister'. It is beginning to sound as though it is a good thing that we have had significant change.

Mr O'BYRNE - Elections are very cathartic.

Mrs TAYLOR - New brooms and all sorts of promises - I accept fully that you are keen to do work. ,

Chair, you were talking about crown land and the sale of crown land and I am aware of the process has been ongoing for some years. It seems to me that most of the straightforward ones would probably have been done. Would it be a fair assumption that the easy transfers and sales have already been done?

Mr O'BYRNE - It is never easy, but the ones that seem more easy than others, yes.

Mrs TAYLOR - I am aware of a number, certainly within Elwick, that are a little more complicated because there is no clarity of title or ownership in some cases and maybe others where there is a future maintenance of infrastructure involved. You have undertaken to give a list to the Chair of those properties that have been sold in the last year. Can you give us an indication of how many properties there still are to be dealt with and, if it is not too difficult, a list of those?

Mr O'BYRNE - I might refer that to Michele Moseley.

Ms MOSELEY - Do you mean through the CLAC process - the Crown Land Assessment and Classification project - in Elwick?

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes. There might be other members who would like to hear it, from other areas in the State, but I am certainly involved in the Elwick ones.

Ms MOSELEY - I do not know the number.

Ms KENT - There are about 7 000 properties assessed under CLAC and I think the majority have been done.

Mrs TAYLOR - Exactly.

Ms KENT - And the majority of the council ones that were being transferred back to councils have been completed, the ones that we could get -

Mrs TAYLOR - We are talking about the difficult ones now that have not been so easy to solve.

Ms KENT - Yes, and also the other part of that was the 78 000 hectares going to back reserves as well, so that process is under way. I do not have those particular ones in front of me but the I could give you the outstanding ones by the end of the day.

Mrs TAYLOR - Thank you.

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CHAIR - Minister, do you have a performance measure for turnaround time for requests to Crown Land Services? I would expect there would be a time frame within which you would look to see that an issue was resolved.

Mr O'BYRNE - Since I have been minister there has been no direction from my office on performance management. I have regular discussions and my office has regular discussions with Crown Land Services about the work that is afoot and the priorities, and we acknowledge that Crown Land Services have been punching above their way in terms of the resources they have been allocated and the outcomes they have received. We acknowledge that in some cases, some issues are taking a bit longer to resolve and hence, the good news that we have referred to earlier is that there are some more resources going into that area. Once those positions have settled and once we understand the work that they will be pushing out over the coming months, we will sit down with Crown Land Services to assess how their workload is going to ensure that the delays are not unreasonable and that people, when they do pick up the phone to Crown Land Services we have instituted a hotline. That is a relatively new thing to make sure that at least people can talk to someone and give some basic level of information and we can start to work on their requests. Once the new positions are in place, we then get an idea of the engine room that we have and then we can make some assessments on how we are working through those priorities.

It is a constant issue for Crown Land Services; they have had an enormous workload. In my incoming ministerial briefs I was made aware that their workload has been massive through the CLAC process and that is on top of all the other issues that Crown Land Services people deal with. We have been mindful of that and the extra resources are there and we will continue to push forward.

CHAIR - Thank you, you have been given some information, Minister.

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, we have just been flicked. The number of complaints to Crown Land services are very low in terms of performance. People understand that in terms of dealing with crown lands, it is not a matter that can be dealt with very quickly.

CHAIR - I think elected members of parliament, Minister, must get the complaints, from my experience. Anyway, I will be interested to see if there is any figure at this point in time. That that might be something that you, as minister, will look at in the future so that we can get an understanding of whether the time has-

Mr O'BYRNE - Are we achieving and what is the turnaround times -

CHAIR - What is the average time?

Mr O'BYRNE - It is a reasonable proposition.

CHAIR - Then we get some idea whether those additional six staff are actually making a difference.

Mr O'BYRNE - I can tell you they will. That is a significant injection into the resources of that area.

CHAIR - My last question is: has there been any noticeable increase or decrease in the request for licences to use crown land?

Ms KENT - I do not think the numbers change dramatically up or down each year. The leases and licences and sales make up the bulk of the work that the Crown Land Services branch does, but it depends on what sort of leases or licences you are talking about. We get a constant number of leases for things such as marine structures and ??10.09.31 roads - there is not any peak or trough in those, without knowing what sort of requirements you are talking about.

CHAIR - Crown land on islands I would expect is one that has been sitting on a desk for a while as well.

Mr O'BYRNE - With the Chairman in caretaker mode, the election and a couple of weeks of uncertainty about who was going to be on this side of the table, as an incoming minister there is a whole range of issues that had been piling up over that time because obviously under caretaker mode there are certain decisions that need to be taken by staff. It is not only in Crown Land Services, there were some covenants and some issues in Heritage as well where the authority of the minister of the day, exercising the power of the Crown, had to play that role. So I know that, in fact, within seconds of getting back from Government House and being assigned a ministry, there were a whole lot of requests on my table, like, 'Can you get that out in the next half an hour, Minister?' Of course my answer was no, but I had to fully consider them. Fortunately we have a democratic process but unfortunately, that with the timing and January being, as we know, always a quietish month where people have to take some annual leave - which I am sure we do not begrudge people. But there was a bit of a backload, as minister, and we have been working pretty powerfully through those and I have signed off on a lot of covenants, for example, for conserving land and dealing with a whole range of issues within Crown Land Services.

CHAIR - I am looking forward to our meeting next week, Minister. I hope you are too.

Mr O'BYRNE - Always.

Mr FINCH - Minister, I want to ask you a specific question about a location in my electorate, the Riviera Hotel at Beauty Point, where we have some issues there with coastal degradation and it has been an issue for some time. I am wondering if somebody from the department can apprise me of the latest developments there?

Ms MOSELEY - The Riviera Hotel?

CHAIR - A very salubrious place.

Mr O'BYRNE - I had a dinner there one night. It is a lovely place.

Ms MOSELEY - We can look into it. I understand the situation. I can remember the ministerial coming in about the collapsing of some stone walls that had been done previously, and some unauthorised works, I suspect. So I think there would have been a briefing prepared at some stage. I do not know, off the top of my head, exactly what has happened with that.

Mr O'BYRNE - We can annotate to get that to you.

Mr FINCH - On notice, yes, please.

Mr O'BYRNE - Absolutely.

Mrs TAYLOR - This area of government is probably the most closely involved in policy for GIS, from the information I have.

Ms MOSELEY - Yes.

Mrs TAYLOR - There are a number of collectors of that information within Tasmania, local government, State Government and all kinds of agencies, and there is currently no interconnectivity between them. I did ask this question of the Premier a couple of days ago and he assured us that there is a project going this year which will involve that.

Mr O'BYRNE - It is within this department but it is Mr Green's responsibility. I really like answering all the questions I get asked, but unfortunately, on that one, it is the responsibility of Minister Green and we can give a quick response and update but, ultimately, it is Minister Green's responsibility. I am sorry I cannot answer that directly, because it is just not within my area of responsibility.

Mrs TAYLOR - I would like that on notice, thank you.

Ms KENT - I will take it on notice and get some information.

Mrs TAYLOR - I would like you to be really aware of that because - I am presuming that the Premier is correct - the State Government is going to take a lead in making sure that that information is gathered but, hopefully, that there will be serious interconnectivity between all the collectors so that we do not double up on work that has already been done and that we get the best possible system that everybody can access.

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, I think that is important too, because I have had a couple of discussions with people from the NRM network across the State and they talk not only about the lie of the land but also about species.

Mrs TAYLOR - All sorts of layers that can be put on.

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, exactly. So I think you are right, you made very good point. There is a whole lot of good work in the space but if you silo it -

Mrs TAYLOR - It is no use to anybody.

Mr O'BYRNE - Exactly right. So an integrated approach would make a lot of sense. But, again, it is Minister Green's portfolio.

CHAIR - Thank you, Minister. I believe that is where we will leave Crown Land Services and move on to output group 3.

Output group 3
Resource management and conservation

3.1 Land management services -

Mr O'BYRNE - Welcome to the table Ms Penny Wells.

Mr DEAN - Minister, I noticed in this area that funding remains pretty static right through, so there is nothing exciting that is going to occur in the next 12 months or so other than what is already happening. So it is more or less work as normal.

Mr O'BYRNE - All the different programs that we have outlined will continue to be funded.

(10.15 a.m.)

Mr DEAN - What is the amount of funding from your area into NRM? What support do you give them? Also, do you give any support to Tamar NRM?

Mr O'BYRNE - The answer to the latter question is that we absolutely give support to the NRM in the Tamar area. I can give you some specific details on that. We recognise the NRMs as a really important part of the framework of management of the natural resources in the three regions across Tasmania. It is crucial. We have committed \$480 000 per year to each of the individual regional NRM organisations up until 2013. That funding ensures that those organisations have administrative capacity to implement the regional NRM strategies and are able to use their Caring for Country funds to achieve significant outcomes.

In relation to the Tamar River, I assume that you are talking about TEER?

Mr DEAN - No, I am talking about the organisation Tamar NRM, which is a separate organisation currently being supported by local government in the north. I am wondering what your support is for this group who are carrying out some good work.

Mr O'BYRNE - We fund the NRM network across the State. That is the one that is recognised by the Government. It will work, no doubt, with a whole range of stakeholders in the different regions - councils, environmental groups, a whole range of things. But in terms of that particular organisation there is no direct funding from the State Government. It is very important that with government spending we do not create a whole range of different bits of silo work, as Mrs Taylor referred to. It is all good work but it lacks a bit of connection.

The NRM framework that is out most appropriate spend. We provided \$150 000 to the ongoing support to the TEER program which is about the Tamar River area. We have provided \$100 000 to the Launceston City Council to assist in the upper Tamar sediment study and around \$70 000 of support was provided in the form of analytical services and technical support from the EPA. There has been some money going into the Tamar River area but not necessarily to the organisation that you refer to.

Mr DEAN - Minister, I know it was covered in another committee but in relation to the siltation situation in the Tamar River and your involvement with that as the minister, \$6.5 million was promised and we have not seen where that is or what is going to happen with it. Local government, as you would now know, withdrew from the dredging and the siltation program as of today, 1 July. What is your position in relation to the siltation of that river? How do you propose to manage it from this point on now that local government has stepped aside?

Mr O'BYRNE - You quite rightly acknowledge that it was covered at another committee hearing. The issue of dredging is a matter for Minister Green but I will talk to you about the Government's response.

Mr DEAN - It is confusing as to where these things lie.

CHAIR - It is always worth a try, I think.

Mr O'BYRNE - We are committed to working with the council. We understand that the council has made a decision but what we are really focusing on is trying to find a sustainable solution to the management of silt for the Tamar estuary. We stand by the election commitment to support a significant dredging program in the estuary but I am sure you will agree that we need to be very sure the program that we embark on is both environmentally and financially sustainable before we commence.

There is little point in pouring a million dollars into short-term programs if it actually does not resolve it in the longer term. The GHD report into the various options of silt management makes that point and that is why we made the initial commitment in this budget of \$500 000 over two years to the Tamar River Catchment Management Strategy and I expect the strategy will provide a clear pathway for government investment at all levels - Commonwealth, State and local government - and it will enable the State Government to maximise the benefit of its \$6.6 million election commitment.

So whilst the \$6.6 million is not necessarily reflected in this year's budget, it is an election commitment that we will honour but we want to make sure that we do it on a sustainable basis and that we have the information. There was the recent select committee report on the Tamar and the Launceston City Council Upper Tamar River Sediment Evaluation report. There were a whole lot of recent reports that hit the deck that made some pretty significant recommendations and observations. We stand by that commitment but we do not just want to go rushing ahead to implement that funding unless it is part of an overall strategy to ease the pressure on what seems to be predominantly a naturally occurring situation.

Mr DEAN - You are not going to call for another report, are you? I think we are reported out, Minister.

Mr O'BYRNE - I understand that but it is important that we reflect on the reports that have been put forward. There are a number of recommendations about a catchment strategy and what is the appropriate framework for management - we think through the NRM process.

They already have good relationships with industry, they have good relationships with councils. There are a lot of councils that have a direct and indirect impact on the South Esk and the North Esk and the Tamar River estuary and we believe that the NRM could play a really constructive role to pull the threads together to come up with a coherent, long-term, sustainable response.

Mr DEAN - Minister, do you support a single statutory authority taking charge of the position regarding the Tamar and its estuaries in the catchment area; one single statutory authority, as was suggested before by that committee?

Mr O'BYRNE - The thrust of a management group is supported and that is why I am referring to the NRM. I do not agree with establishing a separate catchment authority. What that will mean is that we will have one for the Tamar River and then one for the rest of Tasmania and there is the potential to undermine the existing good work that has been done by the NRM.

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There is a model that is set up in other States and that is costing significant dollars. I think there is one in Victoria that cost \$14 million. I do not want to spend \$14 million setting up a separate authority to do work that could automatically be done - for example, the Derwent Estuary Program. That is not a statutory authority -

Mr DEAN - Well, that is a separate one.

Mr O'BYRNE - But it is not a statutory authority. It is a group that has built relationships with councils and governments and it provides a coherent response to the issues of that estuary. I agree with your thrust - we need to get a group that is responsible for bringing together the threads and I think under the NRM process that is the most appropriate place.

Mr DEAN - But the Tamar River and estuaries is a unique situation in Tasmania and it is probably the greatest issue confronting Tasmania. It is a Tasmanian issue, not a Launceston issue so it ought to be dealt with in that context and therefore there ought to be more support given to that at the present time.

Mr O'BYRNE - If the suggestion is that we are not interested and do not care, that is not exactly right. This is a very complex issue.

For many years the Tamar River area was a working port. There was dredging, there were large vessels coming through kicking up the silt and it was a natural flow out of the Tamar River area. It was in a different condition. We do value it and that is why we think having a framework built around the NRM which builds relationships and comes up with a coherent plan that brings together all of the salient recommendations on the many reports that have been done and that is the most appropriate way to do it.

Mr FINCH - I will continue to probably disagree.

Mr O'BYRNE - Okay, I understand that there were strong views.

Mr FINCH - Minister, have you seen the state of the Tamar River at Launceston in recent times at low tide?

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes. I drove to Grindelwald for a meeting a couple of weeks ago and it was clearly low tide.

Mr FINCH - You must have been shocked. You could have driven across the river or walked across.

Mr O'BYRNE - Well, you would not have walked across it; you would have gone about a metre. Again, the Government acknowledge that it is an issue and we want to work with the local community to try to resolve it. Ultimately, this is a matter for Minister Green but you have childhood memories of the river, jumping off Kings Bridge - on the top side, not the bottom side -

Mr WING - You would not want to do it now.

Mr O'BYRNE - No, you would not want to do it now but I do have memories of the river. There has always been silt in the river. We acknowledge that and I am not being flippant about it but we think that in terms of the whole-of-government response it is Minister Green's

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responsibility. In terms of the NRM framework we think they are doing some powerful work as they have in the Derwent Estuary Program that we think we can work through but that is the most appropriate way.

Mr FINCH - But without the legislative grunt that is needed to make strong decisions that are appropriate for the area.

Mr O'BYRNE - I think you always get better results by building consensus and as a model the Derwent Estuary Program does build consensus around a whole range of catchment issues. We acknowledge that there are some pretty hot issues in Launceston and we think instead of spending \$14 million on a separate authority -

Mr FINCH - There is no mention of \$14 million, that -

Mr O'BYRNE - How much would it cost then? How much would a separate authority cost?

Mr FINCH - Whatever it takes to set up a regulatory authority. I have never set one up but -

Mr O'BYRNE - But would you not want to spend that money on actually trying to fix it?

Mr FINCH - Yes, but that \$14 million - I do not know where that figure has come from, Minister, but that was a furphy.

Mr DEAN - It is a furphy and -

Mr FINCH - You have been fed a wrong number.

Mr O'BYRNE - Okay.

Mr FINCH - Have you read the report of the select committee inquiry?

Mr O'BYRNE - I have not at this stage read the full report. I have been briefed broadly on the impacts on my portfolio area within the NRM framework so we have worked through it but at this stage I have not read the full report.

Mr FINCH - I would recommend it to you, Minister.

Mr O'BYRNE - I understand that \$14 million. I have just been advised that it actually comes from the select committee report on what a separate statutory authority would cost.

Mr FINCH - We were the three members and we have never heard of a figure of \$14 million.

Mr O'BYRNE - As I have said, it is based on similar authorities in Victoria. But anyway, it is a point that we did know of but the principle of what I am saying is that if we are going to spend money on dealing with the area, I would rather have it in outputs as opposed to setting up what we think is an unnecessary bureaucratic process.

Mr WING - It seems that you have no idea of the urgency of this matter. Do you appreciate that there could be loss of life unless something is done to remove the silt as a matter of urgency?

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If anybody is thrown into the river by a boat capsizing, they would have no hope of getting out of that silt and there would be no hope of any boat getting in there to retrieve them. It is as serious as that and it is disturbing to hear that you have not even read the report.

Mr O'BYRNE - I am sorry, Mr Wing. I am not sure if you were in the room when this question was first asked.

Mr WING - I was not, I was substituting for another member in another committee.

Mr O'BYRNE - Clearly the broader responsibility sits with Minister Green. I have answered the question. The inference that we do not care about the local community and that we are endangering lives I think is pretty inflammatory and I do take offence to that. Of course we care about our community, Mr Wing, but we actually want to get a solution that has a long-term fix. We are working with the council, working through the inner framework and investing money. We have a commitment to significant dollars and if there is any concern about tiers of responsibility, if the Launceston City Council wants to walk away from the responsibility, that is a matter for them. We want to work on a solution.

Mr DEAN - They have done that. They have walked away.

Mr O'BYRNE - That is disappointing that they have walked away from trying to work on a solution.

Mr WING - I did not suggest that you or the Government did not care about the risk of death but I was asking you if you were aware of that risk.

[10.30 a.m.]

Mr O'BYRNE - It is a risk in any estuary. There are degrees of risk in any boating and recreation activity. I think that I have answered the question.

Mr WING - When you read the report, because of its impact on the environment, I hope that you will take the opportunity to do that.

Mr O'BYRNE - I have already received a briefing from the northern NRM people about the TEER program and about some of the steps being taken to manage that.

Mr WING - When you have the opportunity to read the report you will see that there is almost the unanimous view that the only way to deal with this problem is to have an independent statutory authority appointed with adequate powers and adequate funding. As we have said before, the only exception to that - almost unanimous support for that - came from your predecessor who favoured what you are suggesting: an NRM Moreton Bay Clean Water Authority - type approach where there was no power or authority for the body to enforce any pressures. As you may have already been told, the authorities in Victoria have that power but they have never had to exercise it because they have been able to work with cooperation and that is what is desired here. The river is a disgrace. The city council, I suggest, has accepted much more financial responsibility for this situation than it ever should have. It is not the responsibility of the ratepayers of Launceston. Just about all the silt comes in from other areas and all the floodwaters come in from other areas. Council should not have had any more responsibility than any other council. So I hope you will accept that.

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Mr O'BYRNE - We do acknowledge that there is a whole range of groups in the community such as councils - not just Launceston councils but others - that have responsibility to play a role in the resolution of the Tamar River area. That is why we believe that the most appropriate way is to get them together under a single framework and to do that through a cooperative approach through the NRM, as opposed to a statutory authority. I do not know how many more ways I can answer that question.

CHAIR - I appreciate that there will be an opportunity very soon for the minister to read the report.

Mrs TAYLOR - This is a broader question. This relates to the increase in difficulty there seems to be of local councils and the community to balance economic and environmental issues. In one sense that has been brought into focus in such projects as the Brighton bypass. Are there better tools emerging to balance the economic and environmental and social impacts that need to be considered when development is being contemplated? I understand that this is not just your portfolio.

Mr O'BYRNE - Broadly, the major exposure for me is in the area of the environment and more broadly in another output area within heritage. First of all as it relates to the environment, I think the establishment of the EPA as an independent statutory authority across Tasmania as a single authority playing a monitoring role and an inspectorate role is very important. I think that is a good decision that was made and I think that group is playing an important role. In terms of approvals, we have flora and fauna experts and we are constantly working in the environmental space in assisting proponents and assisting local councils to ensure that we can get appropriate reports to them and appropriate advice. In relation to heritage, especially with Aboriginal heritage, that is an issue that is very close to my heart. There have been some difficulties in relation to the Brighton bypass and I have picked up the phone a number of times and sat down with people from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation and the Tasmanian Land and Sea Council. We sat down and had a conversation about how we build a dialogue around how we can do this better. We are contemplating Aboriginal heritage legislation which will assist not only the proponents in preparation and early stage planning but also in dealing with ongoing management of areas of significant heritage values. I am working very hard as a new minister in building relationships. We have also allocated to TALSC, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, \$130 000 per year to assist them with building up their own expertise and level of independence in assessing the heritage of various areas. We are really investing in these communities so that they can take more ownership and control and have more power over their land and heritage. That is an ongoing process. I might get Penny to talk more broadly about the department's environmental and conservation land management and how we respond broadly to the leases.

Mrs TAYLOR - I suppose my question is more in terms of the overall picture and the relationship between different State responsibilities and management because I think that is possibly where the issue has come about, the same with the Brighton bypass, that there were things that probably should have been ticked off on that were not before the development was planned - so it seems like maybe Infrastructure planned the development before -it is the trigger stuff I suppose.

Mr O'BYRNE - With regard to areas of responsibility, DIER is clearly the Deputy Premier; planning is very clearly within the purview of Minister Green and local council. In terms of the

role that the Environment department plays I can refer this to Penny and she can talk broadly about how we respond.

CHAIR - What sort of interrelationship between departments is there?

Mrs TAYLOR - That is what I am trying to get to, yes.

CHAIR - That is the simple question.

Mrs TAYLOR - Can that be better? What are you doing to improve that?

Mr O'BYRNE - There is a subcommittee of Cabinet that talks about key developments. Key issues like the Brighton bypass and other such things get elevated to a subcommittee of Cabinet so there is that coordination.

Certain departments are given lead roles and within that they are given responsibilities to work with other departments - for example, DIER has obviously a lead role in roads and they have a responsibility to consult with the Department of Environment and other departments that have a stake in the result. That subcommittee of Cabinet has only just been established as it is a new government. It will play a key role in dealing with key issues. For example, Three Capes has been elevated to that level so that there can be a greater coordination of work.

CHAIR - Minister, what is the process for private landowners to allocate conservation areas on their land - and I am talking large areas - and is there any financial support to those landowners to put a covenant, if you like, on their land?

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, I have signed off on a number of covenants. In fact we have just recently signed 500. I might seek some support from Penny to talk through broadly our approach in that area.

Ms WELLS - There are a number of mechanisms that private landowners can work through if they are interested in further conservation works on their property. We have a private land conservation program within the agency, which does have a variety of tools in the toolkit for assisting landowners. We have a monitoring and stewardship program as part of that which offers information and ongoing monitoring services to landowners. Should they wish to actually reserve a portion of their property under a more formal arrangement or agreement we have a number of mechanisms such as a conservation covenant that is under the Nature Conservation Act. That can be a perpetual covenant so it can run with the title even if the property changes hands or it can be a fixed-term arrangement of 10 or 15 years at which point it can be reviewed. We have management agreements that are simply between the minister and the landowner so that they do not necessarily apply to a future landowner. Landowners can certainly consult with our program.

In terms of financial incentives available at this point in time, we have been very successful in attracting Commonwealth funding to assist with incentive programs in the past. The most recent ones have been the Non-Forest Vegetation Program, the Forest Conservation Fund and the Protected Areas on Private Land Program. Most of those programs have pretty much drawn to a close. There is some ongoing work with respect to some individual landowners but there are not specific incentives -

CHAIR - So there is no money?

Ms WELLS - Through our program there is not, right at this point in time. We are working in close partnership with a number of external non-government organisations -

CHAIR - Like the Land Conservation Trust?

Ms WELLS - The Tasmanian Land Conservancy is one in particular. They have established a revolving fund. Despite the incentives or otherwise available in government, that revolving fund is an ongoing mechanism that is available where properties that meet certain strategic priorities with respect to conservation, may be purchased through that revolving fund or other conservation incentives provided to those landowners. That is something that is available at this point in time. If the Tasmanian Land Conservancy purchases a property through that mechanism, if it is an actual purchase, they have a couple of options. They may retain it in a reserve estate and that is where we collaborate with that organisation. They may also place a covenant on that property, which again would involve our organisation and then on-sell the property with those conservation mechanisms.

Mr DEAN - Minister, on the subject of the sustainable management of rivers, has the George River situation changed the way that your department will work in this area? Will monitoring be increased? Just what does it do for management of rivers?

Mr O'BYRNE - With regard to the George River, an independent report by a very senior panel of scientists confirms that the George River has a clean bill of health and I think we should acknowledge that is important and welcome news to for St Helens community. I think it is a great result. I am not going to rake over the coals how we got to that point. I think people in the community have a right to ask questions and it is important to this Government that we make sure that we answer them and that we can go through a process to do that. But it was such a simple thing that created the concern.

Mr DEAN - With immense damage to the east coast and to Tasmania.

Mr O'BYRNE - I am now focusing on the fact that the river has a clean bill of health and we celebrate that. That does not mean that we are any less vigilant in terms of our monitoring. In fact, across Tasmania we have some of the highest levels of monitoring - and a most professional approach to water monitoring - in the country. We have been working closely with the NRM network across the State to make sure that there is a coordinated approach, that we get the data from the river that we can monitor and if there are any issues, that we quickly move to find the source of those. I am really confident. Out of this report, there will be no change because we really are doing some of the most monitoring in the country.

The report is not even 48 hours old. There were some recommendations about catchment management that we will consider and work through. Ironically, given the nature of the complaints, in terms of the records kept by some of the operators in the catchment area, Forestry was the one that was most transparent about their activities.

Mr DEAN - Minister, how much monitoring is done of the major rivers around Tasmania and I include the George River in that? How often is the water analysed, checked and monitored?

Mr O'BYRNE - The information that I have is that we do it the most in the whole country, in terms of the detail of each river at each time. I can get that detail for you.

Mr DEAN - Is there a program?

[10.45 a.m.]

Mr O'BYRNE - There is a programmatic response; it is not based on just happening to have someone in the area, it is monitored regularly and we have a whole range of data that enables us to track that. We had Warren Jones here yesterday whom I am sure you have all met, who is just an absolute expert.

CHAIR - And he is not coming today, for what reason?

Mr O'BYRNE - He is on his way. I think he is waiting for his output area. I can say that as part of our normal budgeting, we are not responding differently as a part of the George River but we have put in extra \$100 000 per year into water monitoring to maintain not only the data that we receive but maintain the integrity of Tasmania's catchment areas.

Mr WING - Do you know how much land is coming from outside the Launceston area into the river annually by way of silt?

Laughter.

Mr WING - I am not sure that you answered how much is coming in annually. We know that 30 000 cubic metres are going out - this is the land under your jurisdiction - but there are usually about 70 000 cubic metres coming in, with a build-up of at least 40 000 cubic metres, every year.

Mr O'BYRNE - Sorry, what is your question?

Mr WING - In terms of land management, are you aware that 70 000 cubic metres of silt from land under your jurisdiction is coming into the Tamar each year, at least that amount, and only 30 000 cubic metres is being taken out so far?

Mr O'BYRNE - As you are clearly very passionate about it, I will take that on notice that that is the correct figure. I am aware that there are obviously significant amounts of silt. In every catchment there is some silt coming down but I acknowledge that these amounts are more significant.

Mr WING - Following on from that, do you have any policy to prevent such quantities coming from land under your management into the Tamar at that rate?

Mr O'BYRNE - Through the TEER project and through the NRM network we are endeavouring to get a coordinated catchment approach in the Tamar. The Northern Midlands Council is a key player within that. We are endeavouring to get all of those organisations or people who are responsible for the catchment or contribute to catchment conditions around the table to work on a long-term solution. In every river there is natural siltation occurring.

CHAIR - Mr Dean, you have a question about gorse.

Mr O'BYRNE - I will just finish. Sorry, I should not pause.

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CHAIR - I am mindful that I have to keep this on the road.

Mr O'BYRNE - I know and you are doing a great job. In terms of our response through the TEER and NRM network we are trying to get everyone at the table to try to get a long-term, sustainable solution.

Mr WING - I must say that we appreciate the fact that the Premier has told us that he is prepared to have a cabinet meeting in Launceston in the near future and have Cabinet view the Tamar at low tide.

Mr O'BYRNE - I saw it a couple of weeks ago, so I am very clear about it. You would expect that my mother would not let me worry about much on her Sunday calls to see how we are travelling, and she gives me an update on the Tamar - Every second week perhaps.

Mr WING - I respect her 25 per cent influence in State affairs.

Mr O'BYRNE - She is a very powerful woman. I think that it is 22.5 per cent she quotes.

Mr WING - As you are aware, Kerry Finch and I have written, asking if you would be prepared to meet with us, notwithstanding the fact that Cabinet will be meeting in Launceston. Would you be prepared to have a meeting with us so we can discuss this?

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, absolutely.

Mr WING - Thank you very much.

Mr DEAN - I want to touch on the gorse eradication program and ask how that is progressing throughout the State, because we are seeing so much of it that it appears to be having big inroads into this State. What is happening? On private property there is the authority to require the landowner to remove it, is there not? How does that operate?

Mr O'BYRNE - I always like to answer any question that I am asked, but gorse management is the responsibility of Mr Green. I would ask that you take that question to Minister Green.

CHAIR - It actually identifies it in 3.1, Land management services.

Mr O'BYRNE - That is a whole-of-agency and again, in terms of the cut-up of responsibilities in DPIPWE, land management services is a matter for Minister Green. I apologise for that.

CHAIR - Mr Wing is so frustrated with the way that the Budget is put together that he is not coming next year to Estimates.

Laughter.

Mr O'BYRNE - I can take that two ways. There is an opportunity or we should -

Mr WING - I am boycotting all future budgets on my retirement.

Mr O'BYRNE - I see the point.

Mr WING - Can I ask one more question, and I am not sure whether this comes under this item, Minister, or under Aboriginal Heritage: that is the report done by Mr Scott Gadd about the Aboriginal heritage legislation and its implications on land management.

Mr O'BYRNE - It is under Heritage.

3.2 Conservation of Tasmania's flora and fauna -

Mr GAFFNEY - I do appreciate this is a big portfolio and the large area you are covering, and it is unfortunate for you that 50 per cent of members on this committee live along one river, but there are some other issues.

Laughter.

Mr WING - You should have said 'have the good fortune'.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, the good fortune indeed, but there are some other things. The list of threatened species and the diversity of Tasmanian plants is of interest to all of us and I am going touch on five or six issues just on the budget side of it and how you deal with that. I am sure that the clever and cunning Mr Dean will ask you some other questions at the end of my questions.

Laughter.

Mr GAFFNEY - You did mention the devil program in your opening and the success of that. Could you update us very quickly about the cost of that and how it is going? There is a lot of information out there, so do not dwell too long it, but just how it impacts on your department.

Mr O'BYRNE - I have had a number of conversations with the Federal team. There is a whole lot of information I can give you. Are you just looking for an overview?

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, just a quick overview and its budgetary impacts.

Mr O'BYRNE - We established the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program, which is a partnership between the Tasmanian Government, the Australian Government and the University of Tasmania. The program is administered by a steering committee which is chaired by the deputy secretary of my department, with representation from the Australian Government, the Australian Wildlife Health Network, the University of Tasmania, the Zoo and Aquarium Association, and the relevant departmental divisions.

The steering committee has developed a strategic plan to guide activities focused on saving the devil. The plan's vision is for an enduring and ecologically functioning population of Tasmanian devils in the wild in Tasmania. The plan has three broad objectives: firstly, to maintain the genetic diversity of the Tasmanian devil population; secondly, to maintain the Tasmanian devil population in the wild; and thirdly, to manage the ecological impacts on the reduced Tasmanian devil population over its natural range.

The program and its collaborators, along with the department's other wildlife programs, undertake a range of specific projects against these objectives. Progress has been made in understanding the disease. All results support the hypothesis that it is an infectious cancer

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transmitted between the devils - and you would be aware of that as there is quite constant information about that. Eight distinct strains are recognised and all are traceable to a single, original cancerous cell, which, I think, is quite unusual.

Since the first report of the disease statewide, Tasmanian devil sightings have declined by more than 70 per cent. In the north-east, where the disease was first reported, sightings have declined by 94 per cent with no indication of recovery. A vital component of the Save the Devil Program is the establishment of an insurance population under a partnership with the Zoo and Aquarium Association. The establishment of extensively managed components to the insurance population in fenced enclosures and on islands is being investigated. Three new enclosures are expected to be completed in Tasmania in the next few months.

Another option to manage the disease in the short term is disease suppression, which is continuing on the relatively isolated Forestier-Tasman Peninsula. Results indicate some success in maintaining the devil population at significantly higher levels than would be the case if they were unmanaged.

In addition to the insurance population, other long-term options to save the devil include the development of a vaccine. There are cancer treatment drugs and selective breeding for inherited resistance. Development of a pre-clinical diagnostic test would meet all of these conservation strategies and a possible test has been developed at the University of Tasmania and the validation of the test is ongoing.

Steps towards assessing the feasibility of developing a vaccine are continuing at the university. It is not known how long a vaccine will take to develop or how such a vaccine would be developed in a wild population. So it is a good idea but we are just working on how it can best be used. A trial of various cancer drugs is ongoing in a partnership with the University of Sydney and a specialist consultant oncologist.

In terms of the finance, we have committed \$12 million to the program over four years - \$3 million a year to June 2012. Beyond that date, recurrent funding of \$3 million a year is allocated. The Australian Government has committed \$10 million to the program over five years from 2008 to 2013 and the two governments combined have provided \$25 million to combat the disease over the five years to 30 June 2013. Again, these funds build on previous contributions by governments and there is a whole range of private fundraising that is being generated.

The program itself in terms of the money is administered by the Department of Primary Industry, Parks, Water and Environment with activities centred on the resource management and conservation division and the biosecurity and product integrity division.

In addition there is a range of collaborating institutions - as I have referred to - with access to a range of other funding sources. These include the University of Tasmania and the Zoo and Aquarium Association. I am not sure if you want to add anything?

CHAIR - I doubt there is much more anyone could add on this, thank you.

Mr O'BYRNE - I take that as a compliment.

CHAIR - It was very extensive.

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Mr GAFFNEY - We must congratulate everybody involved with the cat management legislation. I think that is a step in the right direction and it has been on the books for a long time. People were very despondent that there was very little funding - or there was no funding at all - in this year's budget to put into place some of the initiatives and some of the things we want to move on, in the direction we are going. Is that an item that is going to receive some funding next year? It is one thing having the legislation in place but it is another thing being able to act on it.

Mr O'BYRNE - Again, I like answering as many questions as I possibly can and I can say that this is a matter for Minister Green. I deal with foxes and devils and a whole range of other issues but this is the responsibility of Minister Green.

Mr GAFFNEY - We are talking about fauna conservation here.

Mr O'BYRNE - Absolutely, but in terms of the ultimate responsibility ministerially, it is Minister Green. He has responsibility for the Cat Management Regulations 2010 and it is a matter for the minister to deal with that. In regard to feral cats, I can give you some information on the Government's feral cat response but you prefaced your question about the Cat Management Act.

Mr GAFFNEY - What is covered in the Cat Management Act - the management of stray and feral cats - is one of the dot points on your website and that is what I was alluding to. So it is your department.

Mr O'BYRNE - Obviously we have an issue with feral cats in Tasmania and the department is involved in a number of activities. Feral cats are well established across the State. We know that and control efforts are directed towards those areas most likely to have the greatest conservation gains.

The department's Resource Management and Conservation Division is involved in several projects to control feral cats: assisting the Australian Government Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and Arts to develop a curiosity feral cat bait; conducting research into the impact of the proposed feral cat bait on non-target species including Tasmanian native carnivores; assisting the Parks and Wildlife Service with the Tasman Island Feral Cat Eradication Program by contributing research and expertise to the planning and operational stages of that program; monitoring feral cat and native mammal abundance before and after feral cat control programs; and assisting the Tamar Natural Resource Management Group with their cat management program in the Weymouth-Bellingham area. So there is a whole range of programs being run.

[11.00 a.m.]

CHAIR - Do you have the number of feral cats that are being caught?

Mr GAFFNEY - I know that you have alluded to the fact that gorse is the responsibility of Minister Green. I suppose now that one of the issues with the Government's responsibility of taking over the railway corridors, is that we have a lot of issues about gorse being on those railways and not pass that one over. But it does say here that gorse is an environmental weed in many national parks and other bushland areas. So it does impact on your portfolio and it is a major agricultural weed in Tasmania. What funding and what responsibilities do parks have and what strategies are they using to eradicate gorse out of the Parks areas?

Mr O'BYRNE - Do you want to save that question up for when we get to the Parks output and we can talk about it then? Is that okay because Peter Mooney is the Director of Parks I want to answer it but it would be great to have Peter here and he could talk about some of the programs they are running because it clearly is an issue for Parks.

CHAIR - We will hold that.

Mr GAFFNEY - The next one is to do with strategies to increase habitats for some of our threatened species like the swift parrot. I know there is some good work going on about increasing the acreage. Is Parks involved in that fauna and flora initiative?

Mr O'BYRNE - As you have alluded to, it is not Parks. We have committed to undertake a five year program of blue gum replanting along coastal areas at the rate of 500 hectares per annum. That is an initiative being implemented by Forestry Tasmania.

Mr GAFFNEY - That is good.

Would the minister please explain what funding arrangements have been secured for the Injured and Orphaned Wildlife Program for 2010-11?

Ms WELLS - We have maintained the same collaborative work that we have been doing for the last x number of years. We are continuing that process through into the next financial year. So we do not have funds that we provide to external organisations in relation to that. We do have some staff within our wildlife management branch who assist in coordinating the wildlife carers. The carer network - that process - is continuing as far as I understand.

Mr GAFFNEY - We often get questioned about the protection of the short-tailed shearwater. It is quite a strong lobby group and whether that is on -

Mr O'BYRNE - I have received a number of letters.

Mr GAFFNEY - I want an update on whether that is on the radar of your department or is that somebody else?

Mr O'BYRNE - No, I have personally responded to a number of constituents about that issue and it is the view of the Government that the management of the shearwater is done sustainably. I understand that there are some access issues for traditional owners. The Aboriginal community have managed to undertake their activities sustainably for thousands of years and the advice from the department is that all the activities around that species are done sustainably. If at any stage we think they are not, we will be involved.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, Minister. I will suspend the sitting so that people can have a break and a cup of tea.

Mrs TAYLOR - Chair, is that going to be the end of that particular output?

CHAIR - No, we will come back because there is a lot of foxing to be done.

Laughter.

The committee suspended from 11.04 a.m. to 11.18 a.m.

Mr FINCH - On the conservation of Tasmania's flora and fauna, I want to talk about the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program. I must declare a vested interest here as I am patron of the Devil Island Project, which has been a recipient of substantial funds from the Government and it is most appreciated. I think it is an excellent program and it is progressing now. I am wondering, Minister, about your awareness of the Devil Island Project at this time.

Mr O'BYRNE - I was briefed last week in full by Andrew Sharman. He was marvellous.

Mr WING - I think that he is watching the telecast.

Mr O'BYRNE - As a lot of people do.

CHAIR - Only in our offices.

Mr O'BYRNE - They are waiting for us to make a mistake so that they can tell us. The Devil Island Project was part of a broader brief given to me about the insurance populations. I can talk broadly about the insurance populations if you want. I would be keen to come along and have a chat to the people directly involved in the different insurance populations that we are creating. Obviously there are issues around biosecurity, the genetic make-up and making sure that the integrity of the devil genetics is not compromised by too much in-breeding and a whole range of other things but I am really keen to get involved and play a role to see if we can assist in a more fulsome way.

Mr FINCH - The driver of that program, Bruce Englefield, will appreciate that very much.

Mr O'BYRNE - I am meeting with Bruce next Friday.

Mr FINCH - Very good. There is one built and the second one is underway at Bridport but they would like to keep that private. There will be a third one on the Freycinet Peninsula.

Ms WELLS - Mount Paul was the third one.

Mr FINCH - Minister, are you responsible for this or are you going to handball to Bryan Green if there are any tricky questions or you run into trouble?

Mr O'BYRNE - Actually that is a great suggestion.

Laughter.

Mr O'BYRNE - This is mine.

Mr FINCH - Can you give me some idea of the future of this project? The money has been allocated and four will be built but from the perception of Bruce Englefield there is a need for

more. That could be restructured but there would need to be more funding available. What are the possibilities of that occurring?

Mr O'BYRNE - It really does again rely on the sites and how we are tracking and how the populations are standing up. As I said, broadly dealing with the Tasmanian Devil Program is \$25 million as a combination of Federal and State funds and in-kind support and, on top of that \$25 million, in-kind support from a whole range of organisations and that has pushed out to 2013. When you are dealing with threatened species really you do need to take into consideration how we are travelling on this. There is an absolute commitment from the State Government that we will provide resources to ensure that we save them. If we can control saving the devil and if we can have an impact on saving the devil we will, so we have a long-term commitment to these programs but it will rely on the sites and the success of the insurance populations and the experts in the field. Absolutely we have a commitment to this and this is one of our key activities in the conservation area in managing threatened species. It is a big project for us.

Ms WELLS - The insurance population strategy is one of the key components of the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program and the 'frees' that are being built through the Devil Island Project, a fantastic project, are part of that insurance population strategy. The insurance population strategy has a number of components to it so 'frees' are a very important part of that and we are certainly hoping not to stop at where we are. We have to monitor how those frees are working and if they prove to be really successful and so far every indication is that they are a really good tool so they may well form a continued part of the strategy. But the insurance population strategy and the funding we have for that also covers a number of other components so we are investigating fencing off large areas of the landscape to enable devils in disease-free parts of this State to continue as a wild population. Those sorts of landscape-level types of projects are also under investigation so the funding will have to be divided between those areas. As you are aware from the media, there is also the translocations of disease-free devils onto islands as another part of the insurance strategy. We are progressing with all of those but frees are definitely part of the mix.

Mr FINCH - Thanks very much. Minister, could I have a breakdown of where the money from your \$25 million that you mentioned is not the State Government's -

Mr O'BYRNE - That is a combination of Australian -

Mr FINCH - Can I have a run-down, please, on the costs of each component of the strategies?

CHAIR - Are you happy to table that, Minister?

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, but the State Government commitment is \$12 million and that is \$3 million a year. I can table the breakdown of where it goes, if that is the question.

Mr FINCH - Yes, please, that is what I am after.

CHAIR - Moving from the devil man to the fox man, Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - I have one further question in relation to feral cats. The problem of feral cats is well known. Fifty feral cats were trapped in the north of the State by Tamar NRM over a very short time. That number of feral cats, I am told, will eat at least 1 tonne of wildlife in a year. It is

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a huge problem, Minister. Are we tackling this problem as we should be? Are we putting sufficient funds into the feral cat program? As I said, it is a known problem and shouldn't we step the process up?

Mr O'BYRNE - We acknowledge that the feral cats is a known problem. The department's Resource Management and Conservation Division have a number of projects that we are involved in that are assisting the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and Arts to develop feral cat baits and we are working on that. We are assisting the Tamar Natural Resource Management group with their cat management program in the Weymouth and Bellingham area. We are monitoring feral cat and native mammal abundance before and after feral cat programs.

Mr DEAN - I must interrupt you there. In the Weymouth-Bellingham area the people are saying that they have noticed a lot more wildlife, and birdlife in particular, since the trapping of these feral cats.

Mr O'BYRNE - That is good news and we welcome that. There is a whole range of programs that are occurring across the State. The Parks and Wildlife Service are assisting in the Tasman Island and Macquarie Island feral cat eradication program. This is the most significant conservation program of this State Government and arguably it is one of the most significant globally in dealing with not only feral cats but rabbits and mice on Macquarie Island. All of these things are a matter of priority and we believe that there is a whole lot of work being done in this space. There are some key headline projects that we are running and we will build on the success of those. You are right, feral cats are a known problem and we have a number of programs that we are working with to try to work through this.

Mr DEAN - Moving across to the fox task force, what is the total expenditure of the Fox Free Taskforce up until today? Is it \$36million-plus?

Mr O'BYRNE - Do you want the current year?

Mr DEAN - I want expenditure from the time it was set up until now.

Mr O'BYRNE - In the years 2001-02 to 2009-10 the Fox Eradication Program and its predecessor, the Fox Free Tasmania Taskforce, has received a total of \$23.4 million from the State and Federal governments. We can talk broadly about the impact that foxes will have on flora and fauna but also on agricultural businesses. The threat is significant and we think the money that the Government is spending is well worth it to ensure that we can return Tasmania to a fox-free status.

Mr DEAN - Will we ever do that, Minister?

Mr O'BYRNE - That is the plan.

Mr DEAN - Minister, you mentioned \$23.4 million. The figure of \$36 million was bandied around and I wasn't sure where that came from so that is why I asked that question. You are saying \$23 million has been expended?

Mr O'BYRNE - That is the advice that I have.

Mr DEAN - What have we achieved with that expenditure over the time the task force has been operating? What have we actually achieved in relation to fox eradication - anything?

We now know that there is one on Bruny Island.

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, we found that scat. Physical evidence collected since 2000 indicates that an unknown number of foxes, both male and female, are present in Tasmania and confirms that foxes continue to be a serious threat to our biodiversity and economy. The current list of fox-positive evidence collected by the Fox Eradication Program since August 2001 includes four carcasses at Burnie, Symmons Plains, Lillico and Cleveland; two confirmed sets of footprints -

[11.30 a.m.]

Mr DEAN - There is suspicion around a lot of those, isn't there?

Mr O'BYRNE - from Woodstock Lagoon in Burnie; one blood sample from Old Beach and 56 scats from Burnie, Conara, Cleveland, Oatlands, Campbell Town, Spreyton, Seymour, Gladstone, Longford, Barrington, Hawley Beach, Tunbridge, Wynyard and Boat Harbour. I am reading them out because it shows the incidence -

Mr DEAN - Minister, if I may interrupt there, the question I am asking is, what has been achieved relative to the eradication of foxes with that expenditure over this period? I am not asking to go right through all of the evidence that is put forward. I am asking what has been achieved in the eradication of the foxes in this State?

Mr O'BYRNE - We are very fortunate at this stage that the level of population, as indicated by the evidence produced, is low. But there becomes a tipping point if we are not proactive in our baiting and searching for foxes and researching on scats to try to understand their range and, as a carnivore, their impact into certain rural communities. Whilst the evidence is clear, in terms of eradication we are preparing ourselves to ensure that we keep population levels to a point where we can potentially be fox free. You would acknowledge the importance to the biodiversity of our community and also the economy of the culture businesses across Tasmania. I would prefer to have kept them at low levels and to have been absolutely vigilant so that if they start to get to numbers where they cause significant issues, we will be prepared. I would rather be in that situation and just saying that we know we have x thousand in the State and here is all the damage they are creating around the State. I think it is prudent and proactive to deal with this issue.

Mr DEAN - Questions were asked in the other place, Minister, relative to the scat program and the number of scats that have been brought into the State. I think you would be aware that over the last 25 years, Tasmania has worked extremely hard in ensuring that hydatids is not in this State. You would be aware that in foxes there is a fairly high level of hydatids and one study reported that about 47 per cent of foxes were found to be carrying hydatids. What real measures are taken to ensure that the scats that are brought into this State do not carry that virus?

Mr O'BYRNE - It is important to understand the research and get as much information from the scats as we possibly can. At the moment scats are our primary tool for detecting foxes. Information that can be gained from the scats includes an accurate picture of fox distribution across the State, identification of individuals and potentially the size of the areas used by an individual and potentially an indication of the proximity of one to another. Given the uncertainty about how foxes are behaving and moving in the landscape, this information is really important. There is little information on how long fox scats remain detectable.

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In terms of bringing scats into the State, one of the reasons for us bringing scats into the State is to assist us in training the dogs so that they have fresh scats to constantly find. They need to be trained so it is important that we are able to bring those in to do it in the local community.

In answer to your question, all of the scats coming into the State are checked. There is no evidence and in terms of the biosecurity of things coming into the State, all procedures are followed.

Mr DEAN - Is there an absolute guarantee that there is no hydatids strain brought in at all and no risk of that with the fox scats that are brought into this State?

Mr O'BYRNE - There are no guarantees in life but I am absolutely confident that the robust and rigorous approach taken by the biosecurity area and by our experts in this field ensures that we will not be bringing hydatids-infected scats into the State.

CHAIR - Do you have any more in this area, Mr Dean?

Mr DEAN - I do.

Mr O'BYRNE - It might be a suggestion if I could call Penny Wells.

Ms WELLS - I may be able to provide a little bit more information on that. We bring scats into the State for two particular purposes. One is for training and maintenance of our scat detector dogs and the second purpose is we have just commenced undertaking a scat degradation trial to understand how scats degrade in the environment under different climatic conditions. We have just commenced a process in some secure locations monitoring those scats degrading over time. They are the two main reasons for bringing them into the State.

We have undergone a really rigorous risk assessment process which has included looking at the hydatids issues and we have consulted with the chief veterinary officer and the biosecurity division in undertaking that risk assessment process so we have implemented protocols and procedures such that the scats are stored in really secure locations so they cannot be -

Mr DEAN - And there is a register maintained.

Ms WELLS - That is correct.

Mr DEAN - Would there be any objection to have the register detail being released to, say, my office?

Ms WELLS - I am not sure of the exact reasons for that.

Mr O'BYRNE - I will get some advice on that.

Mr DEAN - Regarding the fox skull that was found, have you any objection to that skull being released for an independent examination by a biologist?

Mr O'BYRNE - I will take some advice on that but the inference is that the tests undertaken by the Government are somewhat askew. Do you have any doubt about the results?

Mr DEAN - Minister, there is a situation with a fox at Glenesk where information was provided which was not accurate after another pathologist became involved. That was not accurate and things changed there. So all I am asking is whether there a possibility of it being released for an examination by an independent biologist - and I am not inferring anything.

Mr O'BYRNE - We do not necessarily have a problem in principle with that and obviously we are not going to waste government money on it.

Mr DEAN - No.

Ms WELLS - Perhaps I could add just a little more information. With the risk assessment and the scats that are put out for training, all the scats are attempted to be retrieved after they have met their purpose. With the scats from the scat degradation trial - because they will be in the landscape for a longer period of time than the training ones - they are deep frozen immediately on arrival in Tasmania to minus 80 degrees for at least 48 hours to ensure that there is no risk of the introduction of hydatids. So that is an extra precaution that is taken with those scats that are brought in.

CHAIR - Thank you. We need to move on now. Mrs Taylor.

Mrs TAYLOR - I just have a very small question really.

CHAIR - None of them is small.

Mrs TAYLOR - Thank you, and that is relating to your performance information output group 3, pages 11 to 15, and it is in relation to the changes in status of threatened species and I see that threatened species show a decline in status. In 2007-08, 50 threatened species showed a decline. In 2008-09, 11 showed a decline. You have no predictions for 2009-10. I think it is admirable that you hope that there will be no decline in status of any threatened species last year and in the future but it is probably unrealistic. Do we yet have any indication of 2009-10 figures?

Mr O'BYRNE - I will ask Penny to answer that question.

Ms WELLS - I do not have that data; we are collating it at the moment.

Mrs TAYLOR - It would be nice to think that there will be no threatened species but in relation to carp, for instance, the effect that is having on some fauna and other predators - and climate change for that matter.

Ms WELLS - We will be collating that data for our annual report over the coming weeks and months but I have not got that figure with me here.

Mr O'BYRNE - Will we take it on notice?

MS WELLS - It will not be available before -

Mr O'BYRNE - Closer to the date we will know where we are at.

Mrs TAYLOR - They are not indicators, they are actually results?

Mr O'BYRNE - Mmm.

Mrs TAYLOR - There is a significant drop between 2008 and 2009 from 50 to 11?

Ms WELLS - It is an interesting indicator; I could go into a lot of detail.

CHAIR - And, sadly, we will not be able to have that today. Is there a short answer?

Ms WELLS - I was just going to say that this is the same indicator on targets as the Tas Together targets so we have reflected that in here as a community.

CHAIR - Hence the TT?

Ms WELLS - Yes.

Mr WING - Minister, Mr Dean has asked this question in our House but for the record here I would like to ask it, perhaps on his behalf. We understand that quite an armoury has been built up by the Fox Eradication Taskforce. Could you tell us how many weapons that force has accumulated, the cost of them and also the reason for them?

Mr O'BYRNE - I will have to take that one on notice. That is a particular bit of information which is quite detailed. I can undertake to get that to you as soon as we possibly can.

Mr WING - Thank you.

CHAIR - Mr Dean, I know you have many, many questions in relation to the fox task force but I know we will be back in the Parliament very soon so you can continue on. I will move now to output group 7.

Mr DEAN - Can I ask one further question on the scat to clarify a position with the scat collection?

CHAIR - To the minister?

Mr DEAN - To the minister; everything I ask is to the minister. I was told that the scats that are placed in the field are collected and removed - I think that was the indication made. What is the position with the scats? I am aware of two properties where the scats were weathered and the dung beetles were identified as having got into one or two of the scats. What efforts were made to remove those scats from the field? Was the ground dug up around the scats? How did the removal of the scats occur from some of the properties?

Mr O'BYRNE - I am not aware of those particular instances.

Mr DEAN - How does it occur?

Ms WELLS - We have a protocol with respect to retrieving scats. We GPS the locations of the scats used for training and if the scat has been removed by predators or trampled into the ground or degraded because of weather conditions in the short time that it is out there, efforts are made to locate the scat and if within a certain time they cannot be found, no we do not dig up the

ground. What we do is note that location and should there be any future scats found in that location then they would obviously be treated with caution with respect to providing evidence of foxes.

Output group 7

Environmental Protection and Analytic Services

7.1 Environmental and pollution control -

Mr O'BYRNE - I would like to welcome to the table Mr Warren Jones.

CHAIR - We know how much Warren enjoys this Estimates process.

Mrs TAYLOR - I have a couple of specific questions. The first one is in relation to noise pollution. You would be aware that residential noise complaints generally comprise the biggest category to local councils - about barking dogs, noisy cars, boisterous parties and loud music.

Mr O'BYRNE - Sometimes all of the above.

Mrs TAYLOR - All of the above, yes. Well, they seem to spark one another off. I am glad of the action that has recently been taken by government but is it possible to establish perhaps a central phone point for complaints so that hot spots can be identified on a larger than just a local government basis? That is usually what happens - the council gets rung up or the police get rung up but there seems to be no strategic statewide way of dealing with it.

[11.45 a.m.]

CHAIR - Maybe we could put the minister's phone number?

Laughter.

Mr O'BYRNE - It feels like we already have, in terms of some of the calls that I receive. First of all, the context within which I answer you - and I acknowledge that you have accepted that the Government has improved the regulatory framework for managing neighbourhood noise - the Environmental Management and Pollution Control Regulations of 2004 were amended in February of this year to improve the management of neighbourhood issues.

The amendments have extended the restrictions on hours of use for musical instruments, amplified sound equipment, stereos, motor vehicles, motor vessels, and outboard motors in residential areas. These items cannot be used outside specified hours, especially if they can be heard within another person's home. Hours of use are also now specified for all statutory public holidays, extending previous restrictions that applied only to Good Friday and Christmas Day.

For example, the regulations limit the time that vehicle and intruder alarms are allowed - I know that sometimes in our neighbourhood we do hear those alarms - in situations other than emergency and accident in line with relevant Australian Standards. The time limits are 90 seconds for older cars and 45 seconds for newer cars and five minutes for intruder alarms on buildings as well. There is a whole range of things that we are doing in this space.

The EPA division has also researched other options for improving the management. These options include the establishment of a noise mediation service, a dedicated phone line, a

specialised noise unit, like the CSI EPA noise unit or something, and a register of noise complaints.

A mediation service is likely to be the most cost-effective approach to resolving many neighbourhood noise disputes. The EPA division will continue to seek funding opportunities to support a trial service to be run through the RMPAT - Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal. The dedicated phone line registering unit would largely, we think at this stage, duplicate local government and police activities in this area and it would be costly to implement. Nevertheless, we will continue to seek ways to assist those parties in managing it.

The first port of call is usually the police and there is a whole range of responsibilities in terms of industry noise, neighbourhood noise and general public nuisance issues. It is important that we do not seek to replace those bodies when we do not have the authority. The police ultimately have the authority in many of these cases, so it is appropriate that they maintain those. I understand the currents of your question.

Mrs TAYLOR - It is a bit 'chicken and egg' because there are many times when, if it is out of hours, for instance, local councils do not answer the phone; in many cases there is no-one there after hours, so then people tend to ring the police. I am not sure that it the best use of police time, always to be dealing with that.

There are certainly some instances where police are the right people to deal with it, but there are many of instances where they are the only people they can call, so they call them and they are actually wasting police time.

Mr O'BYRNE - I agree that it impacts on the Tasmanian police force, but in dealing with neighbourhood noise usually those situations can potentially escalate and it is important that we have appropriately trained people with the skills and the legal enforcement to manage those things appropriately. I do not think it would mean sending a public servant out to deal with emergency issues. One of the issues that has been raised with us is that there is not enough power to deal with some of these noise issues. We have upgraded the regulations, we have done a lot of work in that area and we want to see how that works. If there are continuing issues over time we will look at it, it is a work in progress, but I think that now there is more legislative response or power we have to give to different tiers of government and agencies to respond.

Mrs TAYLOR - A mediation service sounds like a good idea.

Mr O'BYRNE - I think so.

Mrs TAYLOR - I had a question in relation to ongoing monitoring of the Derwent River. I am sorry to mention another river, folks.

Mr FINCH - I am waiting to follow on.

Mrs TAYLOR - The Derwent Estuary Program has made an enormous difference to managing the river and particularly in that they have got everybody on board who deals with the river. What are the latest evaluations of the health of the Derwent River? I am aware of course of their website and the reports that come regularly.

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Mr O'BYRNE - I am glad that you recognise the important role of the Estuary Program people. I have met with them, I had a full briefing on their activities and some of the work that they are doing, the remediation work and the work of local councils all up and down the river -

Mrs TAYLOR - Industry.

Mr O'BYRNE - Industry, with Nystar and others.

Mrs TAYLOR - Marine industries as well.

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, they are doing an amazing job. They are doing a power of work in that area.

Mr JONES - I can provide some comment but I am sure you will probably have a look at the website and we probably have as much detail or depth of knowledge as I can give off the cuff on that. But there has clearly been a major trend of improvement over the past decade or so and we have, fortunately, now have the data so that we can look back and can make very valid comparisons. There is no doubt that there is a trend of improving health in the river. As you aware, as we get more knowledge, we are able to make better management decisions and also to identify where the remaining threats are. There are issues such as looking at environmental flows coming down the Derwent River that are now becoming important, and also the nutrient input from the aquaculture industry is becoming an issue that is on the radar and needs to be looked at.

But, as I said, without getting into the nitty-gritty detail, there is no doubt there has been a general trend of improving health and that has coincided with a significant reduction in the pollutant loads going into the river from major industry and sewerage treatment plants.

CHAIR - Can you swim in it?

Mr O'BYRNE - Yes, I think in parts of it, at times. In terms of the work that has been done, obviously the Derwent River was one of the most heavily polluted rivers in the country, if not, the world. The work that has been done over the last seven years by the DEP is fantastic; the information from the data that we were able to get out of it, because of the collaboration and because of the goodwill around the table to resolve it, has been of enormous assistance to us in terms of our whole-of-government response and how we assist and work. Again, other tiers of government - the council and Federal Government - have played a role as well in terms of assisting those funds.

Mr FINCH - On the subject of the rivers, I am wondering, Minister, about the monitoring of the health and the siltation. Is there any measurement or any monitoring of the health of the Tamar River, particularly in the City of Launceston area, the upper Tamar area?

Mr JONES - You would probably be as aware as I am of the evolution of the TEER program, - the Tamar and Esk Rivers program - which we have modelled basically on the very successful Derwent program. One of the first steps in that was creating an inventory, if you like, of all the monitoring being done. The Environment Division, as we were then, back in 2003-04, put a major effort into monitoring the health of the Tamar River and one of the first steps in the TEER program was to draw that all together into a State of the Tamar Estuary Report. The Tamar and Esk Rivers monitoring program has then developed on the basis of that knowledge, a monitoring program which the, now, EPA Division has been contributing to over the past couple

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of years. So there is a strategically developed monitoring program like the Derwent program. That is done in partnership with a number of the industries and other stakeholders, including the Hydro I think, along the river.

So, there is an ongoing program of monitoring to keep a handle on the health of the Tamar.

Mr FINCH - What is the EPA monitoring in respect of the Tamar?

Mr JONES - I do not know. I would have to take that on notice. As I said, it is not an EPA monitoring program, it is a TEER monitoring program that we contribute to. We provide in-kind support in that we provide a boat for carrying out some of the mid-water sampling. We also provide analytical services to the value of about \$70 000, I think it was last year, through the Analytical Services Tasmania laboratory and, as I said, the TEER program. We have been very conscious in developing this program but it is not a program run from - if you like and you want to be rude about it - bureaucrats sitting at their desk in Hobart but it is a program being -

Mr DEAN - You do not mind, do you?

Mr JONES - Some people would.

Mr O'BYRNE - - It depends on where you live.

Mr JONES - It may be said in a derogatory manner on occasions.

Mr DEAN - Yes, right, it probably is.

Mr JONES - It is a program that is developed and owned by the people who live in the area and, as I said, our role is a support role rather than a driving, controlling role.

Mr FINCH - Through you, Minister - should it not be the other way around, though, Mr Jones? Should it not be a more of a driving role for the EPA to have that understanding itself of what is going on in the river ?

Mr JONES - I think in some respects that is more of a matter of government policy. Warren's role with the EPA is to fulfil a number of statutory obligations and I think that is more of a government-wise political decision about who should take care of it. The Government of the day has made the decision that the TEER program in the monitoring of the Tamar River is the most appropriate body to do that. The EPA will become involved if there is obviously a spill or if there is an issue of significant environmental potential or real environmental damage and that is where the EPA does play its role. The decision by the Government is in terms of monitoring but taking the lead role is a local on-the-ground organisation. It is like the NRM and TEER

Mr FINCH - Are you aware, Minister, of what is in the TEER program and what they are actually monitoring and maintaining and I suppose evaluating as far as the health of the Tamar is concerned?

Mr O'BYRNE - The TEER program is building upon the State of the Tamar Report 2008 and the Tamar Estuary Management Plan 2008 to gain a holistic understanding of the health of the waterways and it has adopted a catchment-to-coast or an integrated catchment management approach. They are looking at it not just in the case of getting a sample, which monitoring of the

waterway requires as a matter of course, but also getting an understanding of about where it comes from and how it is going. I am confident that the TEER program is playing that role and maybe in a meeting that Mr Wing has suggested between the three local members in Launceston maybe we can talk more about that and if you think that is inappropriate or if you think that it should be done by another organisation we can have a conversation about it. I am not saying 'No' at the moment based on the information in front of me. The TEER and NRM approach is the most robust and it has worked very well in a whole range of areas. There is obviously testing that happens as a matter of course in all of our waterways and the Tamar will be treated no differently to any other river or catchment area, so there is no lack of support or lack of attention paid to it. If there is a suggestion, as you have suggested, about an independent authority, we will have that conversation.

Mr FINCH - It was only my concern in respect of some time ago - and the member for Launceston might help me here - the dangerous situation for rowers and swimmers and anybody who happened to fall in the Tamar River.

Mr WING - That continues.

Mr FINCH - Yes, there is a dangerous situation.

Mr WING - This item is described as environment and pollution control and I emphasise the word 'control'. I would like to ask what is being done to control the environment and pollution in the Tamar River particularly at the upper reaches?

Ms O'BYRNE - Again, you can provide a broad answer to that. It is really an NRM framework. There is a whole range of activities not only in the Tamar River but across the State on catchment management. Some of the recommendations out of the George study that was the report recently handed down two days ago in relation to the George River in St Helens made some recommendations about how catchment areas are managed in terms of agricultural usage, industry usage, a whole range of implications in terms of the upper catchment area management. We are going to look at those reports.

There has been a whole body of work done by the NRM, a network across the State in improving that and they have been building relationships with farm owners, with industry and with local councils. I think we have got a lot better about understanding water catchment areas because each catchment area has its own peculiarities. But out of the report there may be some implications for us and we will consider those.

[12.00 p.m.]

Mr WING - I am appreciative of the work done by NRM North; it is mainly in assessing the situation and not taking action to control it. As this item is dealing with control of the environment and pollution of the Tamar, I am not aware of any action being taken at all to control the pollution which is out of hand and to protect the environment.

Mr O'BYRNE - I will now refer to Warren in terms of the question.

Mr JONES - Under the Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act the EPA's responsibility is to regulate what we call level 2 activities directly and we do that across the state obviously and including activities that discharge into the Tamar and Esk River catchments.

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Off the top of my head the majority of those would be wastewater treatment plants and some treatment facilities. But in the case of the Tamar that would also include the likes of Timco, Rio Tinto, the Beaconsfield gold mine and the Bell Bay power station. They would be some of the larger facilities and they would also have aquatic discharges. We regulate all of those, if you like, larger point sources of pollution that go into that catchment and into that river.

In relation to what is called in the trade the diffuse or area sources, which are the run off from agricultural use, forestry use and the like, that is approached through the NRM structure. It is obviously not amenable to the same sort of regulations that apply to a point source.

Mr WING - Was it felt that pollution in the Tamar River is under control? There is ample evidence to the contrary.

Mr JONES - That is the purpose of the TEER program - basically to get a strategic approach towards that. I think for some of those industries we would be comfortable in saying that they are in a good level of compliance with the emission limits and those emission limits are appropriate.

In relation to wastewater treatment plants, as you would be aware there is a new structure being put in place to manage wastewater in Tasmania. There has not been a particularly good level of compliance with wastewater treatment plants throughout the state and we are currently negotiating wastewater management plans with each of the three regional wastewater authorities. They will set out their programs for upgrading sewage treatment plants and wastewater treatment plants over the period from now until about 2015.

We will be sitting down and agreeing with them on what the priorities for upgrades are and there is no doubt there is some need for some upgrades in the Launceston area that will be part of that program.

Mr WING - Is silt regarded as pollution and, if so, what is being done to control that?

Mr JONES - Silt is obviously a pollutant in certain circumstances and the approach to that as you are aware is through the TEER program. The funding that the Government put into the GH&T study to look at options for controlling and the support for the TEER program which looked at the sources and origins of silt in the catchments.

Mr WING - But that is only involved with studies. What is being done to control it?

Mr O'BYRNE - We have had a number of discussions, a number of questions which we have answered on the silt issue in Launceston. I feel we have done this, haven't we?

Mr FINCH - We have been doing this - eight years for me.

Mr O'BYRNE - I understand that but in terms of -

CHAIR - We certainly have a strong interest, a strong focus.

Mr O'BYRNE - In terms of running out of time, I understand there is a strong interest and the Premier is committed to bringing the Cabinet to Launceston to talk about this issue. The State Government has contributed significant amounts of money to assist the Tamar River area.

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We continue to show our goodwill by wanting to sit down and making sure we can get a long, sustainable response and if we can solve it we want to do that. You have those commitments and I think the point has been made, and I think in regard to pollution, Warren has answered your question.

CHAIR - Thank you minister. We take your point.

Mr WING - In the interests of compromise I will go along with that and look forward to the discussions.

CHAIR - He is very amenable, the member for Launceston. Minister, can I have your view on the Federal Government's decision to provide the funding for the Mt Lyell remediation project diverted to the fox task force. Do you support that redirection of funding?

Mr O'BYRNE - We support the funding to the fox task force -

CHAIR - I do not need a precis of that. Do you support that?

Mr O'BYRNE - In relation to taking the money away from Mount Lyell we were very disappointed about that. That was a very important remediation project dealing with significant issues. We will continue to lobby the Federal Government and we are hoping to be able to put a bit of pressure on at Federal election time to see if we can get an announcement. It was an important project for Tasmanians in terms of the remediation of the tailings dam at Mount Lyell. We are going to continue to fight for it.

CHAIR - We need that on the record, that you are going to fight for the funding. Any other questions not relating to silt or foxes?

Mr FINCH - Yes.

Mr O'BYRNE - Don't tell me that foxes have been taking silt down the Tamar in a little knapsack.

CHAIR - The members for Apsley and Western Tiers get the blame for most of the silt.

Mr DEAN - They have been surfing across to Bruny Island so it is possible.

Mr FINCH - Blame is not being apportioned anywhere. We just have to find solutions to the problem.

From the figures on page 11.25, table 11.16, I want to get an understanding of this exceedance of PM10 standards. We have 2009 at five and 2010-11 at six. I want to get an understanding of the reading of the air quality and how the department feels about the air quality in Launceston, whether we are meeting the challenge of reducing that environmental pollution and what the immediate future holds for air quality.

Mr O'BYRNE - I will do a quick precis answer and then hand over to Warren as he is the expert in the area. As you know, there has been a whole range of measures taken over the previous years in previous governments to improve the air quality in Launceston. The natural inversion layer creates a real issue with wood fires and other such pollution. I can talk about the

new blanket system which gives us across the State a whole range of improved data so that we can pinpoint what is in the air and the levels of the PM2.5s and the PM10s and all that sort of stuff. I have had long conversations with Warren about this but it is best if he answers it.

Mr JONES - We have come a long way in the past decade, as anyone living in Launceston would be aware. We have a very neat graph showing the exceedances of the PM10s in Launceston over that decade which started in 1998 at 50. The national standard is that it should be no more than 5 exceedances. Through what for me has been a very satisfying relationship with the Commonwealth Government and local government, the council and the community have taken this issue on very seriously. With all the efforts and all the work that has been done we were able to drive that level down to zero last year. There were no exceedances. I think that we can now say that Canberra is the wood smoke capital of Australia rather than Launceston.

Laughter.

Mr JONES - That is a good-news story. Is there more to do? That answer is yes. We all know that when we set the standards back in 1998, PM10 was the only one that there was enough information to set a standard on but even at that time it was known that the finer particles, which we know as PM2.5, are the most dangerous ones from a health perspective.

We have been monitoring PM2.5 for a number of years now and we are getting quite a good data set on that. There is what is called an advisory reporting standard which is a sort of standard you are having when you are not having a standard. It is the target that we have been aiming at and I believe that within a year or two there will be a national standard for PM2.5 and that will be the same as the reporting standard. If we look at the number of exceedances in Launceston for the PM2.5 reporting standard, because a lot of the particles in wood smoke are those fine particles - roughly 80 per cent is a good rule of thumb - we find that we still have a number of exceedances above that PM2.5 standard. Last year, for example, there were 12 exceedances of the PM2.5 standard in Launceston; there were four in Hobart, which also has zero PM10. What that is telling us is there really is still a challenge to go with. We have come a long way but we would like to be driving those down.

If I look at the statistics for the past four years, we have looked at what have been the causes of exceedances in Launceston and it really comes down to bushfires, four exceedances; planned burning, 14 exceedances; woodheaters, 51 and 'uncertain', which is in that period of May where we have both planned burns going and wood heaters starting to fire up, 16.

There are two sources there that we can do something about to reduce those exceedances; wood heaters we clearly need to do more work on and planned burnings.

Mr FINCH - Minister, with this performance information that we see here provided to us, would it be better to eliminate the PM10 readings because they are obviously under control, and then maybe have a performance indicator on the 2.5s which are, as Mr Jones said, causing some issues.

Mr O'BYRNE - I think that is a sensible suggestion. I think in some respects what we would probably do is put both in. People have expected to see PM10 so it is important because if we take out PM10 and just put in 2.5 it will be a conspiracy - what are they hiding from us- so the sensible response will be to put both in so that we can have that data over a number of years to

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show the improvement. I have no problem at all with giving people information so I think that is a sensible suggestion.

Mr DEAN - Has the matter of methyl bromide been raised yet? I want to raise it to find out where the State department is going with this because it is planned at this stage to release it in my area in the Bell Bay area so I have an interest in it.

What is the State doing in relation to this? I do not accept a lot of what is in the media but it indicated that this could happen at sea, it could happen in other places. Will this State move into real discussions with this because there is a lot of angst in the Burnie area in particular. I have had a lot of people contact me about it from my area as well. Where are we going with this, Minister, and what can we do?

Mr O'BYRNE - I think there is a whole range of things that we are doing. The export of logs and the biosecurity issues are a responsibility of Mr Green but as far as my ministerial portfolios are concerned, clearly workplace standards and occupational health and safety for the workers are crucial issues. We are making sure that Workplace Standards are absolutely involved. It would not be occurring if it was the view of inspectors from Workplace Standards that it presented any danger to the workers in terms of the process itself.

Mr DEAN - Minister, I can keep the question and ask it again there but it is the pollution side at this stage that I was concerned about.

Mr O'BYRNE - I will ask Warren to explain the jurisdictional issues in relation to this and the complexities of dealing with it. Broadly, obviously any use of any chemical has to be regulated.

[12.15 p.m.]

Mr JONES - It is a complicated jurisdictional area and I do not really want to make it any more complicated but in essence if you look at the environmental issues you can divide them into two categories. One is the release of methyl bromide as an ozone-depleting substance, which it is quite a powerful ozone-depleting substance. That is regulated now by the Commonwealth. We used to have regulations in our State legislation to regulate ozone-depleting substances but in 2007 the Commonwealth basically said to us there was so little being used around Australia that it would take over the centralised regulation so we now have no role in regulating as an ozone-depleting substance and under the Montreal Protocol it has been recognised that methyl bromide is still a very effective quarantine fumigant and I guess the balance has been made that the protection of the environment that can give by preventing diseases and insects getting into other countries has been weighed up against the ozone-depleting substances and under the Montreal Protocol it is still permitted for use. As I said, that ozone-depleting substance regulation side of it is with the Commonwealth and under the Commonwealth regulation it is allowable to use methyl bromide for this purpose because it says so in the Montreal Protocol.

In terms of the other category of, if you like, calling environmental concern as being a public health one, effectively the use of the chemical and the protocols around how it is used are set by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medical Association, the APVMA. Again, that is not our jurisdictional area of control. The APVMA sets the conditions for use which are intended to include environment protection through the label use. We then have the quarantine side of it where they have to inspect the logs to make sure that they are okay for going to China and then there is also the workplace standards side of it.

To cover off, I have been aware of the issue and I have been liaising with my colleagues elsewhere within this agency and the Biosecurity Productivity Division where both quarantine and chemical management sit and also with the Director of Public Health. As I said, that second area of what is safe in terms of humans, I have been looking to the Director of Public Health to provide advice on that and he has been active in doing that and has recently fed some information back to TasPorts, I believe, about what his views are as to what is necessary to manage the public health risks for that. As the minister mentioned also, Workplace Standards are involved in terms of saying what is safe for workers' use.

Output group 8 Parks and wildlife management

Mr O'BYRNE - I would like to welcome to the table Mr Peter Mooney.

CHAIR - He has been waiting very patiently. Welcome.

Mr WING - Minister, are you aware of the great concerns held by Ben Lomond snow sports business operators and other people who use Ben Lomond about the inappropriate attitudes of some officers of the department and some rather crass decisions that have been made from time to time?

Ms O'BYRNE - I think that is a subject of an opinion in terms of views.

Mr WING - It is.

Mr O'BYRNE - I know that Ben Lomond National Park, including the ski field, is one of our key assets in the National Park portfolios. We provide sewerage and water supply. We supply road maintenance of \$40 000 per year; snow clearing is \$15 000 per year; a service day use shelter; maintain building for use by ski patrol; funding to support ski patrol, \$20 000 of which \$15 000 supports the commercial businesses to employ a mid-week ski patroller. Obviously there are park entry fees that generate only \$40 000 of those combined figures and a cost of winter operations for Parks is approximately a \$250 000 impost on the Parks and Wildlife managing it. I am not aware of the particular cases you refer to but I can say, as part of our new announcement of \$4 million per year, that is not only going into front-line park rangers but it is also going into ensuring there is appropriate training with more human resource support for our people. There are times when there are differences of opinion about management. I am confident that the Parks and Wildlife Service will fulfil their duties respectfully and appropriately. If there are examples where that has not happened, I would like to hear about them particularly but I am confident, through Peter and I will put it on the record, that I have met a whole range of parks people and wildlife people across Tasmania and they are doing an amazing job and they are thoroughly decent people, trying to do the best for the State under, previously, some pretty tough circumstances. But now I am absolutely proud to be the minister in announcing this significant injection in what is one of our greatest natural assets.

Mr WING - That is good to hear. I do not have any complaints and have not heard any about officers in others areas except Ben Lomond. But I have heard very substantial complaints about the viability of businesses and the whole usage of this very valuable facility. I notice that in budget paper 2, volume 2, page 11.27, there are a number of Parks areas that have been subject to satisfaction tests and that bears out really what you are saying. But I also notice that Ben Lomond

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is not included there which I think is just as well because that would really seriously affect the satisfaction rating in that case.

I did arrange for three business operators on Ben Lomond, snow-time business operators to meet with your predecessor in Launceston before Christmas and they gave many detailed particulars of the unsatisfactory management and decisions and inappropriate decisions made by officers in Ben Lomond. In this discussion that she had with me following that meeting, privately, I know that she was contemplating appointing an independent person to investigate these complaints and we discussed possible people to be appointed. So you are probably not aware of that.

Mr O'BYRNE - I am not aware of those specifics.

Mr WING - I would be quite prepared to arrange for these people to come and meet with you at some time convenient to you and I think they will have a desire to do that, so they can elaborate again about the details of their concerns which are really very serious.

Mr O'BYRNE - Okay. If they are as serious as you say, of course I will meet with them to determine to work through those issues. I am not sure, Peter, if you have been looking to act, to sit down with people -

Mr MOONEY - We would be prepared to meet with the three people.

Mr WING - I will contact your office then and make the time. Thank you very much.

CHAIR - It is also included in my correspondence - this same issue.

Mr O'BYRNE - Another northern Midlands council has also been involved in a couple of issues with the building code up there with building structures as well. But we are really keen to sit down and have a chat with them.

Mr FINCH - I have a question with some detail, Minister, and Mr Mooney might be aware of the detail of this. There has been some anger over the functioning of the shuttle bus service at Cradle Mountain. The service is becoming increasingly used and increasingly important. At the June, Queen's Birthday weekend, probably before and after, it was frustrating many users. The problem is that since the move of the visitor centre from near Cradle Lodge at the entrance of the national park, it has been impossible for people to board the bus near the Lodge or the old visitor centre building to go into the Ronnie Creek car park or to Dove Lake. They have to board a bus, heading in the wrong direction, to the new visitor centre, then change to another bus going into the park. Some of the bus drivers there say that this is a nonsense. How did it come about and can that issue be fixed? Are you aware of complaints or issues from that relocation of the visitor centre?

Mr O'BYRNE - Obviously it is such an important asset and Cradle Mountain has been under enormous pressure from increasing tourism numbers over the years. That is another reason for the importance of Three Capes. We have had to institute a number of management decisions to ensure that the area can be used sustainably and appropriately, and the permit system during the summer and busy walking season has been one of things.

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In terms of the particular issues that you raise around bus shuttles, those have not been formally raised with me - I am not sure if Peter Mooney has anything to add to that - but I will look into that for you. We have had to take a number of measures just to manage the number of people who go through there. There was that incident recently where there were a couple of car accidents and a bus involved. Unless Peter Mooney has anything to add, my view is that we have instituted a number of measures to ensure safety and to ensure that there is appropriate access, egress and exit from the national park.

Mr MOONEY - That change has been a very recent change and on a trial. We are going through a process of a lot of discussions this winter to try to make it better for next summer. It is fair to say that we have changed some of the bus pick-up points, but the complaints are from the bus drivers and not necessarily from the users. We have no complaints from users. The complaints are actually coming from the drivers.

Mr FINCH - Who would a user complain to - generally the bus driver?

Mr MOONEY - We have up to 10 staff on duty any day there at Cradle Mountain and all the users have access to the staff.

Mr FINCH - Okay. I might investigate this further and see if there are users.

Mr O'BYRNE - This is such a natural asset to Tassie.

Mr FINCH - I am glad to hear you say that you are making these changes because of increasing usage - which is fantastic. It is a delicate area and it has to be managed properly.

Mr O'BYRNE - Sure.

Mr FINCH - I have another question on this. How is the old visitor centre building going to be used? It is a former exhibition space and it is hardly suitable for staff accommodation. I am just wondering, is it to be demolished, is it to be utilised in some way?

Mr MOONEY - No, it certainly will not be demolished. At the moment we are in a transition zone where it has been agreed that a new business centre will be up on the airstrip at the main entrance point that we use now, but we have not developed all the planning schemes and approvals yet and also the funding that is required for that. At the moment we have a temporary situation where the transit centre is being used as a business centre and a transit centre, so it is the entrance for the national park. The old visitor centre is still used for staff offices. There are up to 17 staff who have their offices located in that centre and there is also a community meeting room that is used regularly, and there is a gallery space. That is still used. But what is not being used to a large extent is the interpretation area inside and that is what you are talking about perhaps.

That is what is missing at the moment but it is only a temporary situation until we can get a new facility built on the airstrip, and as I said, we are going through the planning process. The development application has just gone through Kentish Council and it has got a green light, so we are stepping through the approvals process at the moment.

Mr FINCH - So there is no budget allocation for that; I am wondering what a facility like that or what that development is likely to cost, do you have any idea yet?

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Mr MOONEY - That has not been scoped out completely, but it is fair to say that it is a reasonable sum of money.

Mr FINCH - When would it be hoped that that facility is ready to be utilised and to help with the organisation of the area?

Mr MOONEY - We are planning to have that up and going within the next five years.

Mr O'BYRNE - It will be part of the future Estimates; no doubt we will give you updates on how we are going.

Mr GAFFNEY -. What funding is available for a weed management strategy for national parks, and is it a question of containment or eradication? I am looking specifically at gorse as well because that is a real pain to get rid of.

[12.30 p.m.]

Mr MOONEY - It is best to describe the reserve system in several components. We have 19 national parks and then we have many other reserves. You may be referring to the many other reserves. The actual national park proper are quite sound for weed management and invasive species, such as gorse, we are quite on top of that in our national park proper. But the other reserves, such as the Nut at Stanley, and many river reserves and many coastal reserves have all sorts of elements of weed incursion to varying degrees, mainly because they are attached to private lands on the boundaries, such as farm lands, et cetera. I cannot give you a figure on each individual weed species that we are managing, but we do have a weed management strategy that we outlay, each year and ongoing, and it goes through the list of higher order species down to the lower order, as you probably understand, they are nationalistic. We have quite a ruthless program with weed management but, I have to be honest, we are not on top of it 100 per cent in all the reserve parcels we have in Tasmania.

Mr GAFFNEY - Do you allocate a certain funding for that or is it just part of the overall budget?

Mr MOONEY - We work on partnership funding mainly and the predominant groups that we work with are local government and NRM organisations, because a lot of it is attached to the Australian Government funding grants. NRM have a very good system to get access to that funding, so we basically piggy-back on that and we have a partnership process where we value-add to that so that you have better utilisation of resources. A really good example is a gorse control program on the west coast that we have with the two municipalities there and the NRM in that region, and we all pool into a central fund and then they use several contractors for a program across boundaries so that the boundaries are seamless and that works quite well. We try to do that around the State.

Mr GAFFNEY - My last question in regard to this one would be: are there any transport routes that go through national parks and reserves, like rail or road? Do you have issues with the Government cleaning up those gorse-infested areas that might go through the rail or the road? Who funds that? Is that out of your budget or does that come out of DIER?

Mr MOONEY - Again, it all depends upon the circumstances of the particular location. The Lyell Highway is a good example - 58 kilometres of that goes through the middle of the major western World Heritage area and we have a very good arrangement with DIER on the

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management of that. We have plenty of easements, we have railways and it is the same as our power easements with Transend or Hydro, depending on who owns that particular powerline; we form relationships and have long-term arrangements of weed eradication, but again, it is all at a different level and with different organisations.

Mr GAFFNEY - My last question - through the minister - is to do with table 11.18 where you have performance information - park satisfaction and visitor numbers. I would have thought that some of the visitor numbers for places such as Narawntapu would be available; I am interested in why those visitor numbers are not shown in this table. It could just be an oversight or something.

Mr O'BYRNE - We just use those sites as an example. We can get you that information about all of the parks and all the visitation numbers so I can take that on notice.

Mr MOONEY - Most of the parks.

Mr O'BYRNE - Most of the parks.

Mr GAFFNEY - That would be good.

Mr O'BYRNE - We can extend that information.

CHAIR - Thank you, Minister, and obviously that will probably give somebody something to do over the lunch break.

The committee suspended from 12.33 p.m. to 1.31 p.m.