

UNCORRECTED PROOF

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 5

Thursday 17 September 2009

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

Mr I. Cohen (Chair)

The Hon. R. L. Brown
The Hon. R. H. Colless
The Hon. C. Cusack

The Hon. E. M. Obeid
The Hon. C. M. Robertson
The Hon. H. Westwood

PRESENT

The Hon. John Robertson, *Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, Minister for Energy, Minister for Corrective Services, Minister for Public Sector Reform, and Special Minister of State*

Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water

Ms L. Corbyn, *Director General*

Mr S. Smith, *Deputy Director General, Climate Change, Policy and Programs Group*

Ms S. Barnes, *Deputy Director General, Parks and Wildlife*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

CHAIR: I declare this inquiry into budget estimates 2009-10 open to the public and welcome Minister Robertson and accompanying officials. At this hearing today, the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Climate Change and Environment. In accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, you must take responsibility for what you publish or what interpretation you place on anything that is said before the Committee. Guidelines for the broadcast are available at the table. Any messages from people attending in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber support staff.

Minister, and officers accompanying you, you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers while at the table. I ask that all mobile phones be turned off because they interfere with Hansard's equipment. Each section has been allocated 20 minutes and there will be a mid-hearing break. The return date for questions on notice has been agreed generally to be 21 days, if the Minister is happy with that. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning.

LISA CORBYN, Director General, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water,

SIMON SMITH, Deputy Director General (Climate Change Policy and Programs), Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, and

SALLY BARNES, Deputy Director General (Parks and Wildlife), Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: We do not take opening statements at estimates hearings, so we will go straight to the Opposition for questions.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, at 3-14, notes:

The department has instituted a new standardised procedure for tracking visitations to parks, resulting in more accurate counts of park visitors compared to past estimates.

This resulted in a forecast of 22.88 million visits being revised to 38 million visits. How is the department able to be off the mark by 60 per cent?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: As you know, I have been in this portfolio 72 hours. On the basis of that, I will ask Ms Barnes if she would like to respond.

Ms BARNES: In 2008 we invested in a new visitor tracking survey to give us some robust estimations of visitor numbers—who was coming and where they were going. Up until then, what we had used was a variety of methods that were not consistent across the State. We were using visitor counts on roads in some areas and we were using ticketing data in other areas and extrapolating that data into an estimate. It was always between 22 million and 25 million. When the State Plan came into place and had a target of increasing visitation by 20 per cent, we realised we needed to get more rigorous around the tracking of those numbers. What we did was a search to see what other park agencies were doing and what best practice was.

In the end we adopted a system very similar to Parks Victoria, which was a telephone survey. Rather than doing physical counts, we had a telephone survey that was done every month. A certain number of people were interviewed every month, and that was being used to give us an annual figure. That gave us the 38 million which, I have to say, was a pleasant surprise for us. The other good news was that visitation studies showed that 90 per cent of people going to parks were either very satisfied or satisfied with their experience there.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is that a contracted service?

Ms BARNES: It is. It went out to tender. It went through the tender process. The tender was awarded and people did the work over two financial years.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can I ask who is doing that work and what the cost of it is?

Ms BARNES: Yes. The work was done by Roy Morgan Research. They did 15,000 interviews for a four-week period, as I said, for 13 weekly periods. The cost, all up, over the two years was \$298,000.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is it possible to have a copy of their report?

Ms BARNES: Absolutely. A copy is on the parks website. It is very interesting reading because it gives as information about where they go. We definitely know now that the most visited parks are the Blue Mountains, followed by Royal, Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove and Kosciuszko national parks. We know that the parks are most popular with 29 to 39 year olds, but mainly single people. Not a lot of families in those ages go. We know that some groups are underrepresented as visitors, particularly 18 to 24 year olds. Even though quite a few baby boomers go to the park, while they go often, they do not go in proportion to the number of baby boomers. That helps us to work out where we might be able to increase visitors to the parks. It helps us plan what we might need to provide to attract new visitors to the park. The most popular things were walking.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How are you capturing figures for international visitors?

Ms BARNES: Tourism groups have that sort of survey. They do it through airport tracking, in and out, and we use that as well. We add those. This is just domestic, and we add the others on top.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So that 38 million is a domestic number?

Ms BARNES: That is a domestic number. It is 31 million adults and 7 million children.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: For the international visitors, is that information available as well?

Ms BARNES: Not on our website, but on the Tourism New South Wales website. I am not sure of those figures, but they do know that, similar to local domestic visitation, Blue Mountains National Park is top of the list, and then there were the Sydney parks.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Would it be possible for you to assist us by getting a copy of that report to the Committee from Tourism New South Wales?

Ms BARNES: The international visitors?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes, the international one, and then I can put those together.

Ms BARNES: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Thank you very much. In a call for papers on a proposal for new sporting fields at Lake Cathie, Greg Croft, who is the regional manager of the Mid North Coast region, notes in an email dated 7 May, "I'm camping at Werrikimbe this weekend and will provide a detailed report on the state of the place. I'm told it's really run down since I left – cattle, pigs, 4-wheel drives, weeds, rubbish – unhappy tourists, et cetera." Minister, what circumstances have led to this park becoming "really run down"?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will ask Ms Barnes to answer that.

Ms BARNES: Could you give me the name of the park again, please?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It is Werrikimbe.

Ms BARNES: I am not sure of the details of that. What I do know is that our staff have very high standards, so we tend to want to keep things in the best condition possible. I need to follow up on that.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Do you have any figures on per hectare funding for national parks?

Ms BARNES: Actually, I have a graph I can show you on hectares and expenses. Would you like me to pass you that?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes. That would be terrific.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Would you like mine?

Ms BARNES: What we have done is look at budget expenses for 2004-05 and then tracked expenses against the growth of the reservations system. The top line is the budgeted expenses and the bars are the reservation sites.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Perhaps you could take on notice my next question, which is: What action has been taken to address this situation at Werrikimbe?

Ms BARNES: Absolutely.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Kosciuszko Centennial Program commenced in 2006, to be completed in 2026, and had been funded to the tune of \$2.367 million to 30 June 2008, with an allocation in the 2008-09 budget of \$800,000. The project's estimated total cost was \$16.4 million. This means that 14.4 per cent of the program was funded to 30 June 2008, with 19.3 per cent to have been funded to 30 June 2009. However, it did not appear in the infrastructure statement for the 2009-10 budget. Was the \$800,000 allocated to the Kosciuszko Centennial Program for 2008-09 actually spent, Minister?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will ask Ms Barnes to respond.

Ms BARNES: The fund is being spent on visitor infrastructure and also restoration of things like Kosciuszko huts and Kiandra courthouse. A lot of work has been done on the new Thredbo Valley walking track, which is a 20-kilometre multipurpose track that will link people from the ski tube right to Thredbo. It will be an all-weather track. In terms of funding, the total expenditure on the centenary projects, which includes capital and operating, over 2006-07 to 2008-09, was \$5.5 million. There is an \$800,000 allocation in the 2009-10 budget, which will be used for camping area and walking track upgrades, a new lookout on the Snowy Mountains Highway and restoration of the historic Kiandra courthouse.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can you give us the details of the funding for that program?

Ms BARNES: Sure. Do you want it now?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes, thank you.

Ms BARNES: That is over and above what I have said?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes.

Ms BARNES: I will take it on notice and provide more details.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That program was to cover a wide range of items, including trying to reduce road kill and all sorts of things. You can take it on notice.

Ms BARNES: Yes, and I can give you every detail. What I can say is that our director goes and talks to the community every year and gives it an update on how that money is being spent, gets its input before he finalises the budget for that. So I can give you all those details.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That is mainly with the tourism groups?

Ms BARNES: No, a whole range of stakeholders, I believe.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Overwhelmingly the money is being spent on roads and infrastructure in the park, is it not?

Ms BARNES: No, there is money also going to scientific research and to wildlife projects. I can get you all those details.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That would be great. Can you tell me what the park revenues were?

Ms BARNES: In the last—

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Financial year, and what they are projected to be in the next financial year.

Ms BARNES: Do you have any revenues in particular you want?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Just your visitor entry fees.

Ms BARNES: A range of revenues come into the park system that are retained by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and spent on visitor and conservation projects. The first one is the park use fee program, which is around annual passes, daily passes and camping fees. In the last financial year the revenue that came in was \$17.4 million for, as I say, day use, camping fees and annual passes. The revenue that came into the system through leasing and licensing in the last financial year was \$18.9 million. Additional revenue of \$350,000 came through our commercial recreation and tour operating system.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can you give me the projected figures for the current financial year?

Ms BARNES: I do not think I have those with me but I can give those to you on notice.

Ms CORBYN: We will be publishing our annual report, as everyone is required to do. Many of these programs will be covered in our annual report.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In relation to the actual park budgets, I have never seen a budget for a particular park. I understand that in some cases parks have been grouped together. Can you describe how those budgets are organised? I am particularly interested in the budget for the Blue Mountains National Park.

Ms BARNES: It is probably best if I run through our administrative arrangements and how we work on the budgets from that perspective. The parks and wildlife group is the public face—we manage it under the banner of the National Parks and Wildlife Service but our budget sits within the budget of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water. The parks and wildlife group gets an annual allocation. From that we have field branches, policy branches and tourism and partnership branches and other expenses.

The money that goes to the field branches gets divided into regions and then that money gets divided into areas. We do not do a per park budget, because what we try to do is landscape conservation. We try to look at the priorities in each branch across the State and allocate funding for those. So there is not a budget per park. There is a regional budget and then on top of that there is other money that comes through.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Which budget is the ranger's salary funded from?

Ms BARNES: That is funded from the whole budget.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In terms of the number of rangers in the Blue Mountains national park, where would I find that information?

Ms BARNES: I can give that to you in a question on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am interested in knowing obviously what the funding for that national park has been over the past two years and what it is for this year.

Ms BARNES: I can give you the funding for the region but I cannot give you the funding for the individual national parks because the region looks after a number of national parks and it is a budget for the region.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Does the region then have a budget for the individual parks?

Ms BARNES: No, because rangers look after a number of parks and the money moves around, depending on where the priorities are. At the moment some of our priorities are around signage, particularly in the Blue Mountains National Park, and around improving tracks. That may change from year to year so what we

need to do is prioritise conservation priorities and visitor priorities across the State and within each region. Within each region the regional manager has the ability to move money around from area to area, depending on where the priorities are at any particular time.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So where is the accountability to the local community?

Ms BARNES: The accountability lies with the annual report, as Ms Corbyn said. We deliver on our corporate plan. The other accountability lies in the regions having regional advisory committees and they talk about priorities with those regional advisory committees and they report to those regional committees on what has been achieved. Usually they do that once a year. They also have regional operation plans where they list their priorities and discuss those with me. Last year I sat down with each of the regional managers to talk about their priorities, and I will do that again in the next couple of months.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is it true that only one ranger is now allocated to the Blue Mountains National Park?

Ms BARNES: There are rangers allocated to all the parks in the Blue Mountains region. At any one time there could be a number of rangers in the park. I have been in the Blue Mountains National Park and there have been a number of rangers working on different projects in that park.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How can I track whether the resources are increasing or declining to support that national park?

Ms BARNES: To support the parks in that region or that park?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That one in particular.

Ms BARNES: I can tell you the activities that will be undertaken in that park in the next 12 months.

Ms CORBYN: But it is by region. We track by region because there are many parks within a region.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Has the funding for the regions been maintained in real terms in this budget?

Ms BARNES: If you look at the graph I supplied, when you look at the expenses that we apply to parks and the growth in the hectares, you can see that the funding has been maintained across the system.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So that is a real growth—

Ms BARNES: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That is funding—

Ms BARNES: That is expenses.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It is based on the base year of 2004-05.

Ms BARNES: Yes. It shows that as we have increased hectares our funding has increased as well.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is that adjusted for inflation?

Ms BARNES: That is our total expenses, yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Adjusted for inflation.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Actual year dollars.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Why is the base year 100 if it is not adjusted?

Ms BARNES: Because that is how we are showing it in that we have tracked it from 2004-05. We wanted to make sure that we are tracking our funding, that the funding that we had to spend on parks was comparable with the hectares coming into the system, and that shows in fact it is a bit ahead.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But is that taking account of inflation?

Ms BARNES: I think so. I can get back to you on that.

Ms CORBYN: It would be.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Following on from that, the 2009-10 figures which show it at about 130 per cent of the 2004-05 figures, is that in 2009-10 dollars or 2004-05 dollars?

Ms BARNES: That is in current dollars.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So it is not adjusted.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You are not comparing apples with oranges because the increase in the size of the reservation is fixed yet there is an inflationary figure in the funding?

Ms BARNES: No, the increase in the reservation changes every year.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Slightly changes.

Ms BARNES: Yes, slightly changes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I accept that but the increase in the money has inflation tacked on top of it as well.

Ms BARNES: I can come back and explain it.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: It should be in 2004-05 dollars if it is to be relevant.

Ms BARNES: I can go back and look at that if you like.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I can see that the graph is meant to demonstrate that you are increasing your spending per hectare, but it is very uninformative, if I can put it like that. There is no information about what the dollars are. There is no indication of what the 100 as a base relates to and there is no information about—

Ms BARNES: Those figures are in the budget papers. This was just a way of showing the hectares matched with the expenses. I can go back and give you the expenses every year. They are in the budget papers.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: This is for the national parks and reserve system. That would be great.

Ms BARNES: Yes. The parks and wildlife group is in the budget.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Perhaps I can ask this of the director general. The department's budget appears to us to increase by less than inflation. Is that correct?

Ms CORBYN: I have our increase—I have not done the calculation recently about what the inflation rate was but our budget increased from 2008-09 to 2009-10 from \$986 million to \$1.078.7 million. I am sorry, I cannot give you the comparison with inflation. Our budget increased to \$1.078.7 million, from the department's perspective, and that includes personnel services that we cover.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I suggest that if you had to adopt saving strategies to fund pay rises then in real terms your budget is less?

Ms CORBYN: The Government has been quite clear that we got an increase for salaries of 2.5 per cent and we need to cover the remainder of the 4 per cent. But my reading of this is that change in our increase in our budget is 9.4 per cent but that is not just salaries, so it is our total budget. I cannot give you the numbers off the top of my head on consumer price index.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will take the question on notice and come back to you with details of the increase by comparison with inflation so that you have a clear understanding of wages and savings.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am told that national parks has had its budget increased in real terms which would suggest that there has been a significant increase in some area of the portfolio. Will you highlight what those saving strategies have been?

Ms CORBYN: We have been quite clear on the efficiencies we were trying to get. As the Minister said, we will take that question notice and come back with how that increased compared to inflation and the savings strategies.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: My question is: What are those significant saving strategies?

Ms CORBYN: We could come back to you with our overall approach to saving strategies. We have been quite good as a department to make sure that we have met our budgets.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am sure that they would be top of mind because it is a really important part of your role. Will you provide details of a few of the major saving strategies?

Ms CORBYN: Yes. We can tell you how we have achieved our budgets, yes.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will get back to you.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: An indication of the efficiency of your department is that in the past financial year your dollars cost per hectare has dropped.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will refer that to Ms Barnes.

Ms BARNES: Our total expenses per hectare, as that graph shows, in terms of an index, is increasing.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But we do not know if it is adjusted for inflation.

Ms BARNES: I can bring it back and adjust it.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: There is a great difference between your figures today and the ones I have brought to these estimates committees in the past couple of years. I will provide the Minister with a copy of my figures and I ask him to take on notice a question as to which one is accurate?

CHAIR: That is fine.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Yes, I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: I note in this budget year \$91.883 million has been allocated to the Environmental Trust to be distributed against grants and subsidies. What is the reporting onus on recipients of grants under the Environmental Trust? How and by whom is the expenditure audited? How often is the expenditure audited?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I can see the Hon. Rick Colless snickering but with 72 hours in these matters, I will defer to the appropriate bureaucrat to answer so that the committee gets answers today.

Ms CORBYN: The Environmental Trust has a very systematic approach to not only the evaluation of its grant programs but also the giving out of grants and the checking of whether the recipients actually undertake the work. We have reporting requirements by the recipients. The amount of detail is dependent on the size of the grants. We want to make sure that we do not create a huge bureaucracy for small grants but we actually have

good accountability. Recipients have to report to the trust. In some cases people go out from departments that are familiar with the topic that the recipients might have received grants on to actually check to make sure that the work has happened on the ground. We have audited accounts as well, so our accounts are audited from the Environmental Trust.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Per grant?

Ms CORBYN: There is a range of different layers of auditing that actually happens. Most recently the Auditor General has done an audit of the overall Environmental Trust program and how we actually administer the grants. The trust stacked up very well in its grants administration. In fact, in many ways it is a model grant administrator, and we have been approached by a number of other people to provide our systematic approach so that they can manage their grants in the same way. We also audit the accounts so we have a separate independent audit program that is run within the department. We have an independent audit Chair that looks at our overall auditing program within the department and how we administer those. Those annual financial audits happen every year, of course. The auditing of the individual recipients would depend on the length of the grant and how big that grant program is. So there is quite a systematic approach, but it is geared to the size of the grant. If it is not too big it will not be as onerous an auditing process as a bigger grant program.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Will you provide details of what is the percentage overall of the number of grants that are field audited?

Ms CORBYN: Not off the top of my head, I am sorry. I will certainly take the question on notice. We do have a fairly rigorous program.

Mr SMITH: The way it works for most grants is that an advertised call for applications is made and a technical committee, which includes independent people, assess the applications against the criteria. Recommendations are made to the trust which itself decides which people get which grants. The offer of a grant comes with a formal legal agreement to which milestones of performance are attached. Normally a portion of the grant is advanced on acceptance and then next remaining portions of grants are only paid when the recipient certifies that progress has been made in accordance with the agreement. Then at the end of each grant a final acquittal is required whereby there is, depending on size, some kind of audit sign-off by an independent party that all of the requirements of the grant have been met, and the grants are not put to bed in our records until we are satisfied that all of those steps have been followed.

Ms CORBYN: To give you an example, the trust has some grants that would be about \$2,500 to schools, up to much larger grants in the hundreds of thousands of dollars through to some larger grants to councils. So we would try to judge, based on whatever the grant is, how rigorous the auditing is.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Is there a complete list of grants distributed in any one year?

Ms CORBYN: The Environmental Trust publishes and lists the grants in its annual reports.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Is it correct that you will provide on notice a rough proportion of the grants that are field audited?

Ms CORBYN: Yes, we will take that on notice.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: I would like to ask a question about the Marine Parks Authority annual budget. Could you inform the Committee what the actual costs of the authority were for the 2008-09 period, compared with the budget? Can you provide a breakdown of those costs, roughly into administration and compliance, and other areas, like policy? Did the Marine Parks Authority receive any additional funding from other sources, such as research, compliance and enforcement, from fines et cetera?

Ms CORBYN: The accounts for 2008-09 will be published in the annual report specifically. We have in 2009-10 an allocation of \$5.3 million recurrent to manage our six national parks. That is an increase of \$800,000 on the 2008-09 allocation. I do not have the breakdown with me, but that will be published in our annual report.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: That is fine.

Ms CORBYN: Those funds are for on-ground management for research and monitoring, for education and community programs, and also for compliance programs. The parks did receive some funding from our department as we wanted to make sure there was an adequate setup for the Batemans Bay and Port Stephens marine parks, but I think that was for a one-year period. But our annual reports will have the breakdown of the financial management in 2008-09.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Finally, are Fisheries officers and/or Waterways Authority officers co-warranted with National Parks officers for compliance within the marine parks?

Ms CORBYN: We have two sets of compliance processes at work. One is under the Marine Parks Authority, and those Marine Parks Authority officers all work within our department. But Fisheries management officers also do compliance for the Fisheries Management Act, and they liaise with each other to make sure that they understand the compliance programs and seek to ensure that they are co-ordinated.

CHAIR: Minister, I would like to ask a question that I think you would be able to answer. I appreciate the difficulties that you are having, being new to the portfolio. I have a list of national parks and I would like you to have a look at it, if you would. Are you familiar with this list of national parks?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I am familiar with some of them, yes. Some, I have even been to.

CHAIR: Can you explain what this list of national parks and nature reserves relates to?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No.

CHAIR: You have not seen this list of national parks in any Cabinet meetings?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No.

CHAIR: Would you be able to advise how the New South Wales Government would be able to make representations about which national parks will be declared as open for hunters and their dogs to engage in recreational hunting, or when section 20 of the Game and Feral Animal Control Act has to be complied with? You are saying that you have never seen that list in any Cabinet meeting or any meeting in recent times?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: That is exactly what I am saying. I have never seen that list before.

CHAIR: So you are not aware that that is a list of requests, if you like, of national parks to be included for access?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Access for what?

CHAIR: For shooters, and in some cases their dogs, to go into national parks as proposed by the Shooters Party private member's bill.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have not seen that list that you have just had handed to me.

CHAIR: You are not aware of this list of national parks whatsoever?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will say again: I had not seen that list before it was handed to me today.

CHAIR: Minister, given your new portfolio responsibilities, would you be concerned about allowing shooters, and dogs accompanying recreational shooters, into national parks that include Kosciuszko and Barrington Tops, which are on that list?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Could I make it clear that I do not need to have been in the portfolio for 72 hours to know that the Government has made it completely clear that we are opposed to hunting in national parks. Equally, we need to ensure we have a program to eradicate feral animals in New South Wales and in national parks. I am happy to have Ms Barnes outline exactly what that program is and what we do in our parks to eradicate feral animals.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Chair, do you propose to table that list?

CHAIR: I am happy to table it.

Document tabled.

Ms BARNES: Like all landholders across the State, National Parks has responsibility to manage pests and weeds, and we do that across the State. Our preference is to work across tenures, so working with other land managers and landholders on programs that are about culling specific feral animals for specific purposes. As the Chair would know, there are about 30 species of introduced animals that are considered pests and about 1,350 introduced plants that are considered pests. The priority for those pests and weeds are identified in the New South Wales Invasive Species Plan, which is managed by the Minister for Agriculture, and on the ground in particular it is co-ordinated by the Livestock Health and Pest authorities. Our preference is to work with them on a co-ordinated approach to pest management and feral animal control. With them, we plan our programs for specific species at specific times, because that is considered best following scientific studies.

We also have a preference to use a variety of methods of feral animal control. Our preference is to have an integrated program that includes things like baiting, trapping, mustering and shooting, and, sometimes, chemical controls. That depends on what we are trying to get and at what time, and sometimes we do a combination of all of those. This year we have spent about \$33 million on pest and weed management. So far, the results have been very good in terms of what we have been able to achieve.

We were talking before about our 18 administrative regions. Each of those has regional pest strategies whereby they document their priorities, species and programs. As I said, it is about controlling wild dogs, foxes, feral pigs, feral goats, deer, horses and rabbits if required. I can tell you about the results of those programs, if you wish. For example, in western New South Wales we have been doing programs around mustering goats off reserves around Bourke, so Nocolche, Culgoa and three or four others, including Tooral. We have had contracts where musters come in and take the goats, sell the goats, and then pay us a fee for taking the goats. In the last year, and so far this financial year, we have taken off about 21,000 goats in those areas. That works very well.

Another area is Kinchega National Park. We have made sure there is incentive for the contractors to take off goats and no incentive to leave them there to breed. We have been trialling a process whereby we have one contractor in for a certain period, and then another contractor, so that the first contractor obviously wants to take off as many as they can before the other one gets the chance to take them off. That also seems to be working very well. We have done a lot of work around Tooral, the new park out near Bourke, on pig control. We have worked with the Livestock Health and Pest authorities and local catchment management areas, and have taken off about 3,300 pigs, some by aerial shooting and some by follow-up on-ground shooting. At Tooral in particular, we took off 2,000 pigs to start with, from both our properties and neighbouring properties, then another 3,000 from neighbouring properties, working in with other land managers.

Once we have taken the animals off, be they goats or pigs, we are starting to fence areas, to make sure they do not come back onto the reserves. We are a bit like farmers: we are into growing things, but instead of crops we are growing vegetation, and we do not like vegetation being eaten by pests any more than farmers like their crops being eaten by pests. Out there, goats in particular rub up against rocks and often damage Aboriginal paintings and Aboriginal art. So we have a program out there to protect Aboriginal art from pests like goats. I could go into more detail, if you wish.

CHAIR: I appreciate the work of National Parks and agencies in feral animal control. I think it is very effective.

Ms BARNES: I cannot stress enough how it needs to be across the landscape. We are not an island; we must be connected to the other landholders and work in with them. That is working very well in places like Yathong and in the new parks.

CHAIR: In light of that, Minister or Ms Barnes, what advice does the National Parks and Wildlife Service provide in terms of the impact of allowing dogs into national parks?

Ms BARNES: Our policy is that the only dogs that are allowed in national parks are companion animals. But, I have to say, with the mustering activities near Bourke we have given consent for people to bring

dogs onto the park for that particular purpose. So we need to have fit-for-purpose use, but in general dogs are not permitted in national parks.

CHAIR: A specific function?

Ms BARNES: In general they are not permitted.

CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, you previously declared your support for the Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill 2009. Will your position change given your new-found responsibilities as Minister for Climate Change and the Environment?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The Government does not support that bill.

CHAIR: No, but my understanding is that you have previously indicated your support for that bill. Is that not the case?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Not that I can recollect, no.

CHAIR: You have not indicated any support at any time?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: What was the occasion?

CHAIR: I am asking you.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The Government's position is clear; that is, it does not support the bill that has been introduced by the Shooters Party.

CHAIR: I will not name Ministers at this point but other Ministers have indicated that they support that bill.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: And you are saying that I have. And I am asking, when?

CHAIR: I am asking you.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: You said I have. I am saying not to my recollection. When are you saying that I said it?

CHAIR: My understanding is that there have been meetings where you have supported that bill.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: What meetings?

CHAIR: I am asking you.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: What meetings?

CHAIR: Well, I am asking you Minister.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have given you the answer.

CHAIR: Are you saying that you have never in any way indicated that you support the Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill 2009?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The Government's position is clear.

CHAIR: I am asking you what is your position.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have answered.

CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, I turn to issues of waste management and resource recovery. What is the average yearly cost to operate the Sustainability Advantage Program? What financial contribution do scheme participants make?

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: You are out of time, Chair—and you chopped me off!

CHAIR: I got the question on the record, so he can give an answer or take it on notice.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: I got my question on too.

Mr SMITH: The Sustainability Advantage Program is one of the ones that the department is most proud of. It offers the chance for us to help pay for an extra person to sit with the leadership of an organisation—that could be a community-based organisation, or a business, or a government department—and for the leadership group to undertake a diagnostic activity where they look to assess their own environmental performance and to choose which areas they want to set targets for improvement for themselves. We then offer a number of modules of areas where the company or the organisation could choose to improve. Our most recently developed module is on energy efficiency, for example. Then through the program we provide access to people who we have worked with to train, who we are confident can give really high-quality technical advice to each of the organisations.

Some excellent results have been achieved either in energy efficiency or they have become more efficient in water or reduction of waste. Some companies working in clusters realise that their waste is actually a useful input for their neighbour for another industrial process. So we could certainly provide more information about that. I will take the specific question about the cost-sharing arrangements on notice and provide the information to you.

CHAIR: Sure.

Mr SMITH: It is really worth having a look at, because it is such a strong program. It is very popular with the participants.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Smith. I do appreciate the efforts in that area. It is now time for Government questions.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Minister, my question refers to the New South Wales Jobs Summit. What is the Government doing to stimulate jobs in the low-carbon industries that will need to respond to climate change?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will use this opportunity to talk about things that the department has been doing under my predecessor, just to be clear about my answer being in that context. We all know that we have experienced very difficult economic times and even as the economy shows signs of recovery the effects of the global economic downturn could be with us for some time yet. The effects of climate change, however, will be with us for much longer. The New South Wales Government has recognised the opportunity to be a leader on supporting jobs in the new industries that will be developed as we respond to the challenges of climate change. The Government's Jobs Summit held in February was an opportunity for the Government to hear at first hand from the business community and environment groups about the challenges posed by the economic downturn, and to develop new ways to address it.

Since then, the Government has implemented some key initiatives that are helping to build the skills and the investment environment that will support real jobs, that will help the whole community to tackle climate change, whether it is driven by implementation of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, the National Renewable Energy Target, the need to deal with our waste more sustainably or the desire of business and the community to embrace energy efficiency. There is real work to do and real jobs will deliver the solutions.

We are focused first on energy efficiency, because in this area we can readily save money, create jobs and better protect the environment. Our six-step \$150 million energy efficiency strategy is the strongest in the country. There will be hundreds of jobs delivering 22,000 audits and energy efficiency installations for low-income families—these can save each household up to \$95 on power bills; 6,000 audits and retrofits for small to medium businesses; and a Sustainability Advantage Program for 1,000 larger organisations. Our recently legislated energy savings scheme creates a market for companies that can deliver specialised energy saving

services across commercial buildings, industries and homes. By 2015, it is expected that this scheme alone will create or protect more than 1,000 jobs for electricians, engineers and suppliers and cut power bills by more than \$50 per annum for every household in New South Wales.

The Government is also focussing on building up skills to help us tackle climate change programs. I would like to emphasise that most so-called green jobs are not new types of jobs. They are mainly today's jobs, taking on new skills to tackle climate change. The Government is providing \$20 million for energy efficiency skills development. This includes \$5 million worth of funding for Green Skills Business Incentives. The incentives are for three primary groups within small to medium enterprises: managers, supervisors, occupational health, safety officers and environmental officers. These are the groups who will lead change in addressing sustainability within their businesses. The \$20 million also includes funding to upskill the people who teach the apprentices and tradespeople of tomorrow. But we are not merely focussing on energy efficiency.

The Premier has announced the establishment of six wind energy precincts. As a result of the Commonwealth renewable energy target legislation, 20 per cent of all Australia's power will be generated from renewable sources by 2020. The New South Wales Government is making sure that every support is given to investment in renewable energy investment in New South Wales. We expect that more than 2,000 new wind turbines will be built in New South Wales over the next decade, delivering hundreds of jobs in regional New South Wales in design, construction and operation. We are also committed to attracting large-scale solar projects under the national Solar Flagships Program and promoting investment in other renewable energy technologies such as bioenergy. Fast-tracking renewable energy development is one of the best ways the Government can support jobs in this growing sector. It has two major benefits—job creation, coupled with a significant boost to our efforts to transition to a lower carbon economy.

The Premier is driving a practical program so that New South Wales can get on with a clean energy future. In July he announced that the Government will offer a global \$5 million prize called the New South Wales Energy Challenge Prize. This announcement has clearly restored awareness of New South Wales on the clean energy radar around the world. It continues our tradition of leadership in climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, which started with the world's first, and still second-largest, greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme. This Government is carefully and consistently building up the capacity of our industries and our workers to be clean energy leaders, and in the process we are supporting jobs in the short run, and building our capabilities for the future.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, what is the Government doing to help households and businesses to address climate change at the local level?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The New South Wales Government is getting on with the job of implementing the landmark Climate Change Fund, which is targeted at helping families, businesses and communities to fight climate change with practical and simple solutions. It also helps to contribute to New South Wales' economic stimulus package in local communities. Twenty million dollars are being spent on an energy efficient schools program to upgrade lighting and implement energy efficiency projects with programs already completed in 21 schools.

The \$30 million Public Facilities Program is available to State and local government, education and community facilities to support water and energy-saving initiatives. Under the first round of the Public Facilities Program, \$10.7 million was allocated to 53 projects, saving 170 million litres of water and over 9,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year. Round two closed on 30 April this year with funding available under two streams—demonstration and community savers. The latter, which was announced on Wednesday, will fund simple, low-cost water and energy savings measures in community facilities. Yesterday I announced the results of the community savers stream, with \$5.9 million allocated to 247 projects to improve water and energy efficiency in clubhouses, community centres, preschools and aged care facilities. Together these projects will save 125 million litres of water and 4,560 tonnes of carbon pollution a year.

The Climate Change Fund also provides a \$40 million Renewable Energy Development Program for renewable energy pilot and demonstration projects, such as solar and geothermal power stations. This will help position New South Wales at the forefront of the transition into a low carbon economy so that our State can reap the investment to flow from the Commonwealth's agreed 20 per cent Renewable Energy Target. In the first round, \$27.3 million has been allocated to seven projects generating or displacing grid electricity by more than 390,000 megawatt hours, reducing summer peak demand by 11,400 kilowatts and saving more than 400,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions a year. Projects funded under the Water and Energy Savings funds are

continuing under the Climate Change Fund. Under the contestable funding rounds, \$28.3 million was allocated to 49 energy savings projects, estimated to save 139,000 megawatt hours of electricity a year and more than 150,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

Similarly, under the Water Savings Fund, \$55 million was allocated to 99 water projects in the Sydney region, estimated to save 12.6 billion litres of water a year, and \$3.4 million was allocated to 39 projects on the Central Coast, estimated to save almost 500 million litres of water a year. The Climate Change Fund also includes \$100 million in rebates for solar and gas hot water, rainwater tanks, energy efficient insulation, and 4.5 star washing machines, allowing home owners to make positive changes at a grass roots level. The Residential Rebate Program has been very well received. More than 120,000 rebates have been provided since July 2007, saving \$12.2 million on annual household water and power bills. The rainwater tank rebate provides up to \$1,500 for households to install a tank and connect it to toilets and washing machines.

At 31 August 2009, 28,475 rebates for rainwater tanks had been paid, a fantastic response to the program. These tanks are estimated to save around 1,280 million litres of water each year, and there will be more savings as more tanks are installed. At 31 August 2009, 40,208 applications for hot water system rebates had been paid. These improvements to households are estimated to save more than 100,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year. Water heating is the largest use of power in homes, and it is very encouraging to see such a large uptake of low-carbon water heating across the community. A total of 13,302 applications for insulation rebates have also been paid, saving another 6,650 tonnes per year, and over 38,000 rebates were paid for 4.5 star washing machines from 1 August 2008 to 31 August 2009, representing a saving more than 900 million litres of water per year.

The Government's Fridge Buyback scheme has also been very successful. More than 10,000 inefficient fridges have been taken out of circulation in Sydney and Wollongong. This simple measure has saved 10,000 tonnes of carbon pollution and \$1.6 million per annum from household bills. The program is also being extended to regional areas and more people will soon be able to take advantage of the benefits of this successful program. With assistance from the New South Wales Government these initiatives will equip households and businesses with the support they need to fight climate change at a grassroots level.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: What action has the Government taken to reduce greenhouse gases and address the impacts of climate change?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I thought we just heard that.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: It is a different question.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The New South Wales Government has been an early leader on climate change policy and a range of measures have already been implemented to tackle greenhouse gas emissions and the effects of climate change. In 1998 New South Wales was among the first jurisdictions internationally to take steps in the formation of carbon rights for the purposes of emissions trading. The New South Wales Greenhouse Gas Reduction Scheme was one of the world's first mandatory greenhouse gas emissions trading schemes. Since 2003, the scheme has provided incentives for 204 greenhouse friendly projects, which have saved or offset 69 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. From my briefings with the department I can tell the Committee that currently the scheme is the second largest regulatory carbon market in the world after the European Union's scheme.

New South Wales was the first jurisdiction in this country to set emissions reduction targets, of a return to 2000 emission levels by 2025 and a 60 per cent reduction on 2000 levels by 2050. In May 2008, the New South Wales Government committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2020. As a first step, the Government put in place a sustainability policy, which includes targets and strategies for the New South Wales Government to lead by example in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from energy use. The Government's record of achievement is backed up by a substantial investment for delivery.

New South Wales is also leading the way on energy efficiency, which has dual benefits in reducing emissions and energy bills. In 2008, the Government announced a \$150 million package of measures under the Energy Efficiency Strategy, along with the introduction of an economy-wide, legislated New South Wales Energy Savings Scheme. The funded measures include: a \$63 million energy efficiency retrofit program for low-income households; a \$15 million energy efficiency audit program for small businesses; a \$20 million, five-fold expansion of the highly-regarded Sustainability Advantage Program, to improve the energy efficiency and

broader sustainability performance of medium to large businesses in New South Wales; and a \$20 million energy efficiency skills training program, to ensure our tradespeople are properly prepared and skilled to deliver the Government's ambitious energy efficiency programs.

The New South Wales Government is also rolling out its Climate Change Fund, which includes the \$100 million Residential Rebate Program, which provides rebates for hot water systems, insulation, rainwater tanks and washing machines. The New South Wales Government also knows that we need to be prepared for the predicted increases in sea levels affecting our communities along the coast. In order to promote a consistent, adaptive and risk-based approach to managing projected sea level rise impacts, the New South Wales Government released a draft sea level rise policy statement in February this year. The proposed benchmarks are a sea-level rise of 0.4 metres by 2050 and 0.9 metres by 2100, relative to 1990 mean sea levels. The draft has been out for public consultation and the Government is now finalising the policy statement after a public consultation process on the benchmarks.

The New South Wales Government was pleased to see the legislation for the Commonwealth's expanded national Renewable Energy Target scheme pass on 20 August this year. It will help drive major new investment in the generation of renewable energy. In February this year the Premier announced the establishment of Renewable Energy Precincts, aimed at facilitating wind energy investment, development and uptake in New South Wales by streamlining the planning and approvals process. Again from my briefings I can say the New South Wales Government is working to ensure that the State is well placed to capture a significant share of the investment made in renewables to meet the agreed Renewable Energy Target.

We are also active in pursuing opportunities provided by the Commonwealth's solar flagship. On June 2009 the New South Wales Parliament passed the Electricity Supply Amendment (Energy Savings) Bill 2009. The Energy Savings Scheme, which commenced on 1 July this year, will help to reduce future rises in household electricity bills by an average of up to \$50 each year and cut greenhouse gas pollution. The New South Wales scheme will work alongside the Commonwealth's proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and will operate until 2020, unless it is replaced by a national energy efficiency scheme.

The Sydney Carbon Market Task Force is advising the New South Wales Government on making Sydney the carbon market hub for the Asia-Pacific region. That task force is chaired by Martijn Wilder, partner and head of Baker and McKenzie's Global Climate Change Practice. In June 2009 the New South Wales Government announced details of a new solar bonus scheme for New South Wales. The scheme is set to commence on 1 January 2010 and is a net feed-in tariff model. It will pay the owners of rooftop solar photovoltaic systems for the renewable energy that they feed into the national electricity grid. This is one of the most generous schemes of its kind in any State in Australia.

On 31 July 2009 the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, on behalf of the New South Wales Government, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Local Government and Shires Associations, committing the two levels of government to work together on priority areas in adapting to climate change. We will focus on the assessment and management of infrastructure risk and share information and legal considerations on projected climate change impacts. This partnership combines the efforts of these governments to combat the impacts of climate change at both the local and the statewide level. The New South Wales Government is also developing a new climate change strategy.

The New South Wales Climate Change Action Plan will build on the progress that has already been made under the 2005 greenhouse plan. It is based on a new analysis about the projected impacts of climate change on New South Wales and new Commonwealth Government climate policies. The plan will reflect what the community and key stakeholders told us about the issues that need to be addressed, and clearly articulate how New South Wales will act in the three priority policy areas of emissions reduction, climate change adaptation, and prosperity in a low carbon economy. All these initiatives demonstrate that the New South Wales Government is comprehensively addressing the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, as a courtesy to you I will address my questions through you but, if you prefer, I am happy to address them directly to officers.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I might have a go. If I am able to do so, after 72 hours, I am more than happy to take it on.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I appreciate your position, and I was certainly not seeking to impugn your reputation.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I am not taking it that way.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: My question relates to modelling for what you just described as the Government's generous feed-in tariff proposal. Page 26 of the report to the Ministers, which was dated February 2009—it took some months before it was released—states:

Complex modelling of the effect of different scheme design elements on uptake rates would have taken a significant amount of time and was not undertaken. Instead, working within the prescribed time frame the task force undertook an analysis of simple financial calculations based on assumed uptake rates.

Considering that no such modelling was done, how did the department produce a figure of \$220 per household cost increases under the Coalition's policy, which is for a gross feed-in tariff, when no modelling was undertaken by the New South Wales solar feed-in tariff report to Ministers?

Mr SMITH: I believe that Industry and Investment NSW produced the response to that \$220 figure. You might want to address that question to officials who attend with the Minister in his portfolio responsibility as Minister for Energy. Not to avoid the question, it is our understanding that with every feed-in tariff scheme an assessment has to be made as to how many people will seek to access the scheme. To my knowledge, in every jurisdiction the government in question has placed some form of ceiling or review point to establish how big it might get.

Photovoltaic panels are not the most cost-effective renewable energy power source; they are quite a high-cost source. Undoubtedly, they are an important part of our future technology. From my understanding the key point of the policy is that we want to get things moving on photovoltaic panels at a much faster rate than has been occurring. That is why such a strong and generous scheme has been put in place. The scheme is exceeded in rate only by the Australian Capital Territory and is more generous in eligibility criteria than any other State. The Government has made a strong approach. Clearly, if you make an open-ended commitment as to how many people might access this scheme, it will have an impact on electricity prices for everybody and for the people who do not have those panels.

The Government received advice from the task force that was prepared jointly by people from our department and Industry and Investment. Although we did not do a detailed modelling, because no-one knows the capability of the industry to roll out the panels and the desire of householders to have them on their roofs, we looked at what has happened in other jurisdictions with different rates of uptake and recommended certain thresholds at which reviews will need to be undertaken to ensure that costs do not blow out.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Are you saying that the Government did not know about its own modelling?

Mr SMITH: No, that is not what I am saying. The Government was presented by the task force with the most probable scenario of rate of uptake in relation to different options for the amount of the feed-in tariff and made recommendations as to how broad the eligibility criteria should be, the total number of participants who should be encouraged to participate in the scheme, and when a review ought to be undertaken to ensure that the scheme is achieving its objectives.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: You keep saying that this was based on modelling, but the report states that modelling was not done.

Mr SMITH: I do not think I used that word. If I did it was not my intention to do so.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It was not modelling as such; they were just assumptions?

Mr SMITH: They were assessments of probability based on an analysis of what had happened in other jurisdictions.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Government arrived at a specific figure of \$220 per household, costed on the Opposition's policy. I am trying to establish what modelling was used to arrive at that figure of \$220.

Mr SMITH: As I said earlier, that question should be addressed to officials from Industry and Investment.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: You were not apprised or consulted about that modelling?

Mr SMITH: No. That information was prepared by Industry and Investment.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Has the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water seen that modelling?

Mr SMITH: We have not seen the details of that calculation.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Minister for Environment made that statement to Parliament. It is quite a surprise to learn that the department is completely unaware of that figure.

Mr SMITH: I think the important point to recognise is that the administration of this new arrangement is the responsibility of the Minister for Energy who, at the time, was not in the lower House of Parliament. I believe that Minister Tebbutt was discussing the matter. She was in the lead on that day on that issue, so she provided that information.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I realise that I have both Ministers with me today.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: But you cannot ask Energy today.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am not allowed to ask Energy today. When the Minister for Environment spoke about this issue she was not serving in a dual capacity, therefore, she gave positive advice to the Parliament of that figure of \$220. I direct my question to you, Minister. How could the Department of Environment, which has not seen the modelling and does not understand the figure, have provided that advice to the Minister?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will take that question on notice and come back to you on that point. I am not in a position to give you an answer. Mr Smith sought to give you an answer. In order to ensure that we give you a clear and thorough answer we will take the question on notice and come back to you.

CHAIR: That is fine, Minister.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Who was she representing when she said that?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Opposition.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No, no. Was she representing the Minister for Energy in the House?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Well, she could have only otherwise been representing Commerce, and I think she was speaking—

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No. In my other capacity in the upper House I know that I have been representing the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Fair Trading. It may well be that she was acting for the Minister for Energy at that point.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: No. It was a question asked on 2 September 2009 by Paul Pearce:

My question is addressed to the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment. Will the Minister please update the House on measures being taken to drive growth in green jobs ...

The Minister goes on to talk about the \$220 figure. There was absolutely no question in our minds that as the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment she had costed the Opposition policy at \$220. We were looking forward to estimates to understand the basis of that costing because we based our figures on Access Economics.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will take it on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Okay. I might congratulate her on being the only Minister to avoid the estimates this year. She has done very well. Is it possible to get an overall figure on how much climate change funding is going to the Department of Housing and the Department of Education and Training this year for retrofittings that will make buildings more sustainable?

Mr SMITH: Yes. We will take that on notice. Can I just clarify, are you interested in only this year?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Sorry, I have had this problem when I have listened to answers as well. When I say "this year" can I perhaps refer to the 2009 year and the budget figures for the 2010 year?

Ms CORBYN: Do you mean 2009-10?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I mean 2008 and 2009 actual and 2009-10 projected.

Mr SMITH: We can provide that.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am interested in the assurances you are making that those funds are spent on genuine energy savings measures and not being swept up into the maintenance budgets of those departments.

Mr SMITH: Yes. The way we administer the Climate Change Fund on behalf of the Minister is that moneys provided to other government agencies are done under conditions very similar to the giving of a grant to a non-government organisation. There is a clear set of milestones and reporting because we have to prepare a report on the Climate Change Fund that the Minister provides to Parliament each year disclosing exactly what the money has been used for. Obviously, we hold that as a very serious responsibility.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In contrast to the Environmental Trust, the Climate Change Fund has been criticised by the Auditor-General for not doing as many audits. The figure he gave was that only 1 in 10 projects was being audited.

Mr SMITH: Can you explain which Auditor-General's report?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Auditor-General's performance report on environmental grants.

Mr SMITH: The Auditor-General did not look at the Climate Change Fund. He looked at the Environmental Trust and the Government's coastal floodplain and estuary program.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I apologise for that suggestion. I guess there is major anxiety in a lot of suggestion to us that some of this money is just being used as substituting other effort for maintenance projects, particularly in schools?

Mr SMITH: No. I think you will see from last year's report and this year's when it is released on the Climate Change Fund that unequivocal statements are made on good evidence that all of these moneys are used for the purposes of the fund. They are set out in the statute that established it. So you do not need to worry about that.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Minister, can you tell us what the rates are for the feed-in tariffs? What rates are they paid at?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Off the top of my head, the proposal is that the net feed-in tariff will be 60 cents a kilowatt hour.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Let us talk in terms of green and black tariffs and wholesale and retail rates. If I decide to tick the box and buy green energy, on my electricity bill I am paying the retail green rate, correct? If I have a photovoltaic system on my roof and I feed back in, it gets paid at the wholesale black rate, is that correct?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: My understanding is, and I stand to be corrected, that it is a rate set. Every kilowatt hour that goes back in that you do not use in your household will be paid at 60 cents a kilowatt hour.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Is that less than the green retail rate?

Mr SMITH: No, it is about four times more than the going retail rate.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So there is now a positive encouragement for people to put those systems on their house if they are going to be paid more for their feed-in tariffs than they pay for taking electricity out?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: But not to the same level, as I understand it, as they would if you set a gross feed-in tariff. If you set a gross feed-in tariff, every kilowatt hour that is generated out of that photovoltaic cell will be paid in at a rate whereas what we are proposing is net. It is much less than it would be if it were a gross feed-in tariff.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: It is the kilowatt hour rate that is important.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, the environment department licenses pollution basically from the energy sector. How are you going to resolve that? Do you see a poacher-gamekeeper conflict in your borrowing? How are you going to resolve that?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I noted your comments I think on Saturday night's news about poacher-gamekeeper. One of the key challenges for all governments is how to prepare and respond to climate change. Frankly, the way to a sustainable future runs straight through the energy portfolio. That is the point to make as to why they have both been placed with me. We need to ensure that New South Wales is ready for a clean energy industrial revolution and that we can gain the lion's share of the jobs and the industries that are going to come out of this carbon-constrained future in which we find ourselves. The Premier has charged me to deliver on all these important priority areas. I think that is the point to make. The role of the energy Minister is to ensure that New South Wales has a reliable supplier with increased use of renewable energy while the environment Minister determines the State's environment policies.

The issue is that on greenhouse gas emissions the National Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme will drive investment decisions by the private sector on fuel choices in the future. On other issues—air, water quality and waste—regulations are undertaken under the guidance of an independent board through the Environment Protection Authority. By law, the board and the EPA regulatory staff are not subject to directions by the Minister. I do not see that as a conflict or poacher-gamekeeper, to use your terms, because EPA is at arms length from the Minister. I have no capacity whatsoever to influence what it does. The reality is that the two departments collaborate on policy and programs. I am hopeful that that will increase even more so with me having both of those particular areas. I will give you an example. They share responsibility for energy efficiency, the solar bonus scheme, GGAS and the new energy savings scheme. Frankly, I think it makes sense that one Minister is charged with both areas.

Ms CORBYN: If I could comment just from a regulatory perspective. When the Protection of the Environment Administration Act was passed back in 1997, I think it was, it was very clear and unusual at the time in that there is a section in that legislation that actually says the EPA is not subject to the direction or control of the Minister in instituting or approving prosecutions. With other activities in terms of our licensing, if the Minister makes a decision in the public interest that would influence licensing, that decision must be tabled in Parliament. If the Minister gave us a direction, that would have to be tabled in Parliament. It is unusual in a piece of legislation like that, but it is quite clear.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In the past the EPA has been a separate government authority, which, of course, would mean that there was no such conflict. But the reality is that the staff of the EPA has been integrated into the environment department. Therefore, in a sense, like the Minister, they serve two masters. There is a conflict running right through the organisation.

Ms CORBYN: There still is an EPA.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But the staff are employed by you, are they not?

Ms CORBYN: The staff of the EPA at the time as a department also had the same circumstance because we had a Minister and a board. The circumstances basically are not different and we have been quite clear to make sure that there is a distinction. So, we have an environment protection regulation group and we still maintain the EPA board. So, the circumstances for the staff—

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: My point is that sometimes the same people have to listen to you and sometimes they must not listen to you, is that the situation?

Ms CORBYN: To the Minister?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: No, to you as the director general?

Ms CORBYN: No, they listen to me as the director general. But the question really was about whether the Minister had a conflict of interest. The legislation is quite clear about the Minister's roles when it comes to our regulatory authority.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So, because of you, you are saying the Minister does not have a conflict of interest—because you are independent?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No.

Ms CORBYN: No—because of the legislation.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I understand that, but I am talking about the actual practical staffing arrangements. They are all employed by the Department of Environment. Is that correct?

Ms CORBYN: Yes.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: She is trying to imply that there is a conflict where there is none, on every occasion

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We do not acknowledge there is a conflict. I know where you are going with this, but the reality is that there is by law a board and the EPA regulatory staff are not subject to my direction.

Ms CORBYN: On prosecutions.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: On prosecutions, yes. Therefore, there is no capacity for a conflict when it comes to me having the portfolio of Environment and Climate Change, which covers the EPA, and being the Minister for Energy.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, is the board administering the day-to-day operations of those Department of Environment staff who now have assumed statutory responsibilities for the EPA?

Ms CORBYN: I have statutory authority for the EPA. The staff report to me, as they did previously under the EPA Act.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Those staff report to you?

Ms CORBYN: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: You are saying they report to the board of the EPA?

Ms CORBYN: No. I report to the board, subject to its responsibility, but I have the day-to-day administration of the department and the EPA.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The EPA board is only making a small subset of decisions—

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: But this is analogous—

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: —particularly in relation to preparing documentation for an application for exemption in relation to pollution of waterways, for example, from a power station?

CHAIR: I think the Minister wanted to answer.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I was going to say that this is analogous to the DPP and how the DPP operates under Justice now.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But it is a separate statutory authority. It is not analogous at all. You appoint the director general, and you can fire the director general. I think we are all very, very aware that Mr Cowdery cannot be fired by Mr Hatzistergos—no matter how much he may want to. He cannot.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: But in terms of your notion that somehow I am interfering in a decision to prosecute the owner of this generator, I have no capacity whatsoever to do that. In fact, if I did, I would be in breach of the law.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, I am not accusing you of interfering.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I know you are not, but you are implying that I will.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am asking you if you are in a situation where you are preparing a proposal for the application to be exempted or to be allowed to pollute—

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: But those—

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: On the other hand you are—

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No. When it comes to the generators, I am the portfolio Minister, but I am not the shareholding Minister. The Minister for Finance and the Treasurer are the shareholding Ministers for the three State-owned corporations that generate electricity in New South Wales. Again, I have portfolio responsibility but I do not have responsibility in terms of how they make their applications and what detail they put in those sorts of areas. It is not my area.

CHAIR: The Minister has answered reasonably, I think. It might be a good question for next year's estimates. Please continue.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, would you agree that the Department of Energy is notorious for being a reform-resistant area of government?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I think you had better ask that tomorrow.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Okay. I am asking you as the Minister for Climate Change.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No, I do not.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: As the Minister who is responsible for changing that function.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No. I will indulge you and say, "No, I do not", but frankly that should be asked tomorrow.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But as the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, your answer is that, no, they do not have a problem. Is that your answer?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No, they do not have a problem with?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Culture, in terms of resisting reform.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: What sort of reform?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It could be a range of reforms from privatisation, to investing and investigating renewable energies, to having more generous to feed-in tariffs—a range of reforms.

CHAIR: You are out of time. If the Minister would like to answer, I will allow him to answer, or else you can ask the question in the next round.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: It is fairly wide ranging about what sort of reform. Frankly in 72 hours, I do not think I am in a position to make judgement, either way.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Minister, I would like to get clarification on some comments that Ms Barnes made earlier relating to the costs of feral animal control. I understand that the total budget for fire, weed and pest animals is about \$58 million. Is that correct?

Ms BARNES: Yes.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: And the budget subsection for pests and weeds is about \$33 million.

Ms BARNES: Yes.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: So therefore for fire, \$25 million—obviously. Of the \$33 million, can you give the Committee a breakdown of the weeds and pests?

Ms BARNES: I can. I thought I could.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: You can take it on notice if you like, and come back.

Ms BARNES: I will take it on notice.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Great. Just a quick question on pest control—the previous Minister, in answer to a question on notice in the House, said that the National Parks and Wildlife Service used approximately 1.4 kilograms of sodium monofluoroacetate, which is 1080 poison, in the last 12 months. I have two questions: Does the National Parks and Wildlife Service, in its use of 1080, have its staff mix their own baits, or do you buy proprietary baits?

Ms BARNES: I will have to take it on notice.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Either way, can you tell the Committee what approximate number of baits that is?

Ms BARNES: The number of baits?

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Baits manufactured out of the 1.4 kilograms of sodium monofluoroacetate.

Ms BARNES: I will have to take it on notice as well.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Also in answer to a previous question today, you were talking about the mustering of goats. I take it that it was on a far-western property—Taralla, or one of those?

Ms BARNES: A number of the far-western parks.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: You stated that, under those circumstances, authority was given for dogs to be used to muster those animals.

Ms BARNES: That is my understanding.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Thank you. The question is: Does the National Parks and Wildlife Service publish any indication of how many feral pests are controlled or killed every year by the department?

Ms BARNES: In our annual report there will be a number of examples of feral animals that have been killed.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: That was not what I asked. The question was: Do you report in any way the total number of animals that you control for the budget that you have?

Ms BARNES: Not the total number in one place. That is because it is very difficult to actually estimate the total because we are doing across-tenure programs. We are doing a lot of baiting and sometimes you cannot hold up the actual animal that is being culled. There are a range of reasons why it is difficult to do headcounts, but where we can, we do. Where I can supply them to you, I am more than happy to.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: You are quite right in your assertion that when you bait, you cannot tell how many animals you have killed or what type. Thank you. They are all the questions I have.

Ms BARNES: Can I just make a comment: You can get an estimation whether your baiting programs have been successful, not by counting carcasses but by actually looking at the response to those baiting programs to native animals—for example, penguins, bandicoots or a whole range of other things. There are a whole lot of ways that you can actually measure success of baiting programs.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Since I still have some time left, Chair—

CHAIR: No. You have lost it, I am sorry.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: In regard to the types of baits that you use, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has done extensive research. In trying to test whether native carnivores take baits. As I understand it, all of that testing was done on dried kangaroo baits—hard baits.

Ms BARNES: This is for wild dog baiting?

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: For wild dog or fox baiting, to try to judge the impact on native carnivores.

Ms BARNES: I am not sure whether it was hard baits or others, but I can take it on notice.

Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Secondly, can you tell me, if you do mix your own baits or buy baits, are they hard baits or are they soft baits?

Ms BARNES: I will take it on notice.

CHAIR: Minister, I will ask you generally first of all how you would rate the New South Wales Government's performance on waste of ordnance and resource recovery currently?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have to say, from what I have read, well. But, as I said at the outset, 72 hours into the portfolio I am not sure that I am in a position to pass judgement at this stage.

CHAIR: I will pass around a graph. Minister, I would like you and your departmental representatives to have a look at this graph, which is based upon data from "Waste and Recycling in Australia", Final Report (2008) by Hyder Consulting. The graph sets out New South Wales performance on recycling, energy recovering, leachate treatment and gas capture compared to the national average and other State jurisdictions. Why do you think recycling rates in New South Wales are at least a third lower than the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Victoria?

Mr SMITH: We will need to respond in detail to check these figures and their source because you have only just presented them to us now.

CHAIR: Sure.

Mr SMITH: You may be aware of the targets that the Government has set and the progress that has been made in relation to some of the issues that you have here. There are different reasons why different States have different performance. Some of it could be good or bad policies and programs. In other cases the

characteristics of different cities and population distributions have a profound impact. Of course, it is much easier to recycle in a compact jurisdiction. That is why you find the Northern Territory has the worst, because it is so much more expensive and difficult.

CHAIR: Sure, but South Australia, for example, has the best and that is very much like the Northern Territory.

Mr SMITH: It is probably best if we take it on notice and review the figures.

Ms CORBYN: We have a national packaging covenant, and the New South Wales councils have not signed up to the national packaging covenant. So there may be some reflection on the fact that other States have had projects that have been able to be funded—

CHAIR: Are you saying local councils?

Ms CORBYN: Local councils have not signed up from a New South Wales perspective. As Mr Smith said, we have a strong strategy and we are tracking how well we are going on the aggressive targets that are set in the strategy. There is a range of different programs that have different levels of participation within New South Wales.

CHAIR: Are you saying that, for example, with container deposit legislation or incentives the New South Wales councils are holding that back?

Ms CORBYN: No, I was not commenting on CDL. I was commenting on the national packaging covenant and its participation and the programs coming through that. One of the things you need to look at from an overall waste perspective in recycling—and Mr Smith might be able to comment more about this—is while South Australia may have particular percentages in containers it has a different level of recycling for papers and for cardboard. New South Wales levels are higher in those categories because of our strong recycling program. So you need to look at the waste stream as a whole.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: So that I am clear, in terms of the response to that graph, we will take it on notice because obviously you have just given it to us and there is no detail that says how it is arrived at.

CHAIR: The graph is just a pictorial indication that paints a clear picture, perhaps clearer than the questions I can ask. I will put it to you in just a few questions and you can answer as you will. I am not saying the graph is the be all and end all. This is what has been extrapolated, and you can disagree with that. Whether you look at the graph or not, I suggest in accordance with the graph that gas capture rates in New South Wales are 15 per cent worse than the national average, which will roughly equate to about one million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year. Perhaps you or your staff could comment on that.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No, we will take it on notice. I will not deal with the graph.

CHAIR: It is not the graph. I am putting it to you that they are 15 per cent worse.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will take it on notice.

CHAIR: We are generating a third less energy proportionately from the waste stream compared to Victoria and South Australia currently.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I do not know where you get that figure from.

CHAIR: Are you aware of that?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I am not sure where you get the figure from.

CHAIR: I got it from Hyder Consulting.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have not seen the report. I am not in a position to comment on a report I have not seen.

CHAIR: If that were the case it would be an area of concern, would you agree?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will not comment on a report I have not seen.

CHAIR: Perhaps you will take it on notice as well—

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I did not take the last one on notice. I said I will not comment.

CHAIR: So you will not take it on notice.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will not comment on a report I have not seen. If you want to forward a copy of the report to me and then give us the questions—

CHAIR: That is taking it on notice. So if I get you a copy of the report would you take the details on notice and reply within the 21 statutory days?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Provided we get the report within the 48 hours, yes.

CHAIR: I simply add to that so that you have the complete package. Why are leachate management rates in New South Wales 58 per cent compared to 72 per cent to 75 per cent in Victoria and South Australia?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I am sorry, I did not catch the beginning of the question.

CHAIR: The leachate management rates. My understanding is that New South Wales has some 58 per cent compared to 72 per cent to 75 per cent in Victoria and South Australia.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I think it is the same as the last response. Give us the report because I assume you are relying on that report.

CHAIR: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Give us the report. We will take it on notice.

CHAIR: Considering New South Wales has the strongest price signal in the market in the form of the landfill levy and the best resource regulator in the country, why is New South Wales failing so significantly on these key performance indicators for waste management and resource recovery?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Is this the report again?

CHAIR: No, it is a general question.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Sorry—

CHAIR: I said that considering that New South Wales has the strongest price signal in the market in the form of the landfill levy and the best resource regulator in the country, why is New South Wales failing so significantly on these key performance indicators for waste management and resource recovery?

Mr SMITH: I will happily respond to that because, as you said, we have the strongest incentive for recycling and waste avoidance of any State in the country. We have clear targets about total waste in placement, amounts of recycling, recovery of resources and reduction of toxic compounds within waste materials, and we are making excellent progress on all of those things. I would not accept that we are in any way behind other jurisdictions. For every at least four criteria that are in the chart, there are 400 criteria that could be selected and each presents a partial picture about the situation in each jurisdiction.

It is remarkable that so much progress has been made on kerbside recycling as a result of the instruments that have been designed to incentivise that within councils that waste to landfill in New South Wales has increased only 3 per cent over the past few years, while the population is growing at between 1 per cent and 2 per cent per annum. The population and the economy are growing, but the amount of waste ending up in landfill is basically stable. That represents the sum of the remarkable achievement of a whole set of program

settings and waste levy increases. I reject that we are in any way falling behind. In many respects we are a leader.

CHAIR: I have another graph, and you can use it or disregard it. I thought I was being helpful with this graph. I would like the Minister or the departmental representative to look at this graph. You may dispute its validity and that is fine. You can answer that way. The graph relates to municipal waste, commercial and industrial waste, and the construction and demolition waste performance targets for New South Wales. In general terms, would you acknowledge that such data demonstrates that on previous performance New South Wales will miss the 2014 target of recycling 66 per cent of municipal solid waste by 13 per cent?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I guess the point I make is that we do not accept the premise of your question. I am assuming this is the same report as the report graph.

CHAIR: Yes. I have included the graph for illustration value to make it clear so that there is no doubt, but it is fine if you want to disregard it. Will New South Wales meet the 2014 target of recycling 66 per cent of municipal waste?

Ms CORBYN: We have taken the development of the waste strategy and the aggressive targets in the waste strategy seriously, and we have made quite significant progress, as Mr Smith said. We think we are on track for municipal in particular and we have done a fantastic job on the construction and demolition sector. With the efforts that are being focussed on the municipal sector, we have moved in a substantial way and I think we are on target for achieving the 2014 target. I would have to say from my perspective that where our attentions have turned is the promotional sector, because the commercial sector is very challenging. It is a difficult area to get waste programs in commercial buildings for a very wide range of reasons, including the original way they were built and the difficulty that we have in getting waste out of some of those commercial buildings. We have quite a strong priority on trying to ensure that we progress a commercial strategy that tackles this difficult area.

CHAIR: Does asbestos have a role in foiling these targets?

Ms CORBYN: I do not think so. Mr Smith might be able to help me. There is always a chance of a problem with contamination of waste. In our building in Goulburn Street we have just brought in, as part of our sustainability advantage program, a new waste system which has substantially changed the amount of waste that we as a department have produced and ensures that we recycle appropriately. It has made a substantial difference but it is quite challenging to have buildings retrofitted and to get commercial building owners to focus. We are seeing progress in some of that area but it is the priority area for us to concentrate on.

CHAIR: Do you differentiate between commercial industrial waste and construction and demolition waste? They are two separate streams.

Ms CORBYN: In the waste strategy there have always been three categories: municipal, commercial industrial, and construction and demolition.

CHAIR: I note that on the commercial industry it is only 2 per cent off?

Ms CORBYN: We were very good on commercial.

Mr SMITH: Construction and demolition.

Ms CORBYN: Construction and demolition—we have been excellent in that area.

Mr SMITH: I have some facts that might be useful to reflect on. When we set these targets on municipal waste we were recycling 26 per cent and now in Sydney it is 42 per cent. When we set the targets for commercial industrial we were on 28 per cent and now in Sydney we are on 42 per cent. When we set the targets for construction and demolition we were on 65 per cent and now in Sydney we are on 70 per cent. So they are very substantial changes across all of the sectors. The asbestos issue is one that relates to construction and demolition but that is probably the one where we are the closest to target already, so that is not a problem.

CHAIR: Do you have any other strategies other than what we have heard about so far that would make New South Wales the leader in waste management and meet the 2014 targets?

Mr SMITH: The helicopter view looking across all the states of Australia shows us that the big standout in New South Wales is the waste environment levy. That creates a framework where it is secure and desirable to invest in alternate waste technologies. We have a great combination where the Government-owned waste operator, the WSN Environmental Solutions, has turned from substantially a landfill operator and monopoly government waste collector and depositor into blazing the path on alternate waste technologies. That has really shown the rest of the market how these alternate waste technologies can be put in place. We are going to find that the recently announced further increases to the waste environmental levy will take us to a tipping point in just a few years where we will see very dramatic reductions in waste as new plants come on line.

There is quite a list of new plants that are either in the planning process or for which approval has been granted and I think what we will see, as the global financial crisis settles down, the cost of credit and availability of credit issues are addressed, is essentially a booming construction of alternate waste plants that will take some big chunks out of these numbers and help us achieve our targets.

CHAIR: Since 2001 how many extended producer responsibility schemes has the New South Wales Government implemented?

Ms CORBYN: We have a priority statement that we have put out on extended producer responsibility. We have identified a range of different wastes on which we are bringing focused attention. If different waste categories bring forward voluntary programs, then they have an extended producer program in place, but it is a voluntary program, so a number of those are actually progressing.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That is none so far?

Ms CORBYN: No, we have voluntary schemes in place now.

(Short adjournment)

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, the idea of the landfill levy is to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Correct.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Are projections of revenue from that levy based on your projections of how much waste will go to landfill?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Have the targets that you project for landfill been met?

Mr SMITH: What do you mean by targets?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Has the amount of waste going to landfill been met? Have your annual targets been met?

Mr SMITH: Built into the forward estimates for landfill levy proceeds are our expectations of the gradual reduction of the amount of waste going to landfill.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Correct. So, are your expectations being met?

Mr SMITH: Yes. We are very close to the amount. Looked at either from the revenue side or the waste side, it is the same thing, because it is one number multiplied by another. Our revenue receipts are on or around the forecasts, which in turn are based on our achievement of the waste reduction targets. So, although the dollar per tonne figure is to go up each year over the next few years, based on the Government's recent changes, the total revenue will not rise as quickly, and eventually will diminish.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The amount will match your projection for what is happening?

Mr SMITH: Yes. It is all tied up with the package. Those are the targets.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The projection that you had for this year was that the environment levy would add an extra \$20.5 million to the budget bottom line in 2009-10, but this year's budget, as opposed to the mini-budget, actually shows an increase of \$45 million for 2009-10. Why are you now projecting an extra \$25 million compared with what you were projecting in the mini-budget?

Mr SMITH: When we set forecasts, they are based on an assumption of the level of economic activity, the amount of resource efficiency and recycling that occurs, the changing rates per tonne that apply, and also the extension of the area of coverage of the levy. As you know, it has been extended all the way up the north coast and will also include the Blue Mountains. So it is a combination of all of those factors that leads to the forecasts.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: With respect, all of those factors were included in the mini-budget, so those factors have not changed. The mini-budget measures were taken not that long ago. To understate the amount of revenue from the levy by \$25 million would suggest that you are—

Mr SMITH: I am not sure there is that discrepancy. Perhaps we could take the detail of the question on notice and get back to you with a detailed explanation.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Do you have the projections in front of you?

Mr SMITH: No, I do not.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: You do not have any figures relating to waste?

Mr SMITH: No.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Can we take the detail on notice? That way, you will get a detailed and accurate answer.

CHAIR: Minister, it is your call whether to take the question on notice.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We will take the question on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: As you are taking the detail on notice, could I ask: Would you accept that you are getting more revenue from the waste levy than you anticipated?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: That is part of what we are taking on notice.

Ms CORBYN: I am not sure of the numbers that you are using.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am comparing the mini-budget projections with the current budget projections.

Ms CORBYN: The budget was announced, and then the mini-budget came in. The mini-budget did change because the Government made decisions about raising the waste levy and extending the waste levy, so that you would expect the numbers would go up.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That was the whole idea of the mini-budget. Policy announcements were made at the time of the mini-budget that the levy would be extended and that the rate would go up, and therefore the mini-budget projected additional revenue of \$20.5 million.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: To provide you with the right answer, we will take the whole question on notice. If there is particular detail that you want, you might place that on the record.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I understand that, Minister. I guess the point that I am trying to make here is that you are—

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I understand the point you are trying to make. But for us to give you a satisfactory detailed answer, I think we need to take the question on notice so that we can go away and do the work.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I do appreciate that. Can I just ask you conceptually, because any agency that is getting tens of millions of dollars more than they anticipated would notice that.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I understand what you are saying, but the point I make is that no-one here has the mini-budget figures and the budget figures, and that is why we want to take it on notice, so that we can go away, look at the two figures you refer to and give you a detailed answer. As we do not have those figures, we are not in a position to provide that today. I do not think that is unreasonable.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But these are the budget estimates, and the levy is a major source of revenue.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We are entitled to take questions on notice, and that is what we want to do to give you a detailed answer.

CHAIR: The Minister has every right to take on notice any question that he feels is best practice for him. That is the Minister's call.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Just to clarify this, because obviously this is an important issue and I wanted to talk about projected revenues from the levy, are you not able to answer conceptually?

Mr SMITH: It may be worthwhile if you would clarify what you think is wrong or what the problem is, because we are always having to adjust the forward estimates for levies based on the combination of factors I mentioned. We cannot determine exactly when new recycling plants or alternate waste technology plants will come on line. We cannot control how the economy is going overall, how many buildings are being erected, and so on. Basically, we have a set of intelligence and from that we try to figure out what is happening in the marketplace and how effective the signals are that we are sending. So those figures are always being updated. But I did want to point out that the revenue from the waste levy goes to the Consolidated Fund.

Ms CORBYN: We do track the waste levy to make sure we understand what revenues are coming in and what revenues are not. Generally, we have been well on track with the budgeting that we have done. There have been some changes because of the global financial crisis, with a bit of a downturn in waste generated. But, generally speaking, our tracking of the waste levy is quite good.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: My concern is that the income from the levy is increasing.

Mr SMITH: We would expect that because the rate per tonne has been increased substantially.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Correct. But what policy changes have occurred between the mini-budget and the May budget to cause the increase?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I think we are going around in circles. I will go away and look at the figures. I understand you want to know how there is a difference, if there is a difference. I am not in any way conceding that there is a difference. But for the purpose of moving on, if there is a difference we will come back in our answer and respond with the detail.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Would you take on notice my question, which is: if you accept what I am saying—

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I do not accept that. We will go away and look at it.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: If you do, can you explain how that matches up with your actual landfill projections?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will take all of that on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Thank you.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That was hard won!

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am sorry, but this is a major source of revenue for the Government. It was not unreasonable to think that the Minister may have had information about the levies. Another outcome is on a related issue. When the Government increased the price of waste, the amount of illegal dumping also increased. What new measures have you taken to deal with the illegal dumping associated with the increase in the cost of waste?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We do not accept the premise of the question that there is an increase in illegal dumping as a result, unless you have something.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Go and look on any roadside.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No, you are making a statement. We do not accept that premise unless you have some basis for it.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It is well understood.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No, and I think Mr Smith will be able to deal with this. We have taken steps to guard against it.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That is my question. What are the new measures that you are instituting to ensure that it does not happen?

Mr SMITH: Each time that the Government has increased the waste levy, additional resources have been provided for both the department and local councils to put on enforcement and education campaigns to tackle the threat of illegal dumping. Quite a few years back, before the recent increases, people were concerned about a potential increase in illegal dumping, but to my knowledge that did not eventuate. We put on extra staff in the Sydney area and we did the first set of increases. We gave money to councils to set up what are called regional illegal dumping squads and they use a combination of techniques including aerial surveillance and targeted enforcement campaigns. With the most recent increase, the Government provided additional funding for extra staff to be employed in the regional areas where the levy had been first imposed. That is happening now. Extra people have been put on in Coffs Harbour and up the coast and so forth.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can you provide more information on that?

Mr SMITH: Yes, we will take it on notice and give you a list of the extra money and what has been done.

Ms CORBYN: The other thing that we have done, because this deals with financial matters as well as waste dumping matters, is that we have a core financial audit team that does audits for the waste levy financial calculations. We have a team of people who not only go out and look in the field about where the waste might be dumped, if it is going to be dumped, and how to put preventative programs in place, but also from a financial perspective to make sure that the calculations that people do are correct.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes and I think the Sydney Catchment Authority thinks it is a big problem because it has now set up cameras to try to stop people from illegally dumping.

Ms CORBYN: Yes.

Mr SMITH: Yes, it is always a potential for someone to break the law. The key point is: do you have a strategy and resources to detect and deter. And we do.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Which is why I asked my question, with respect. Returning to the issue of the Shooters' bill, which was raised earlier by Mr Cohen, are you ruling out reopening those negotiations in relation to opening up national parks? I ask for clarification of the answer that you gave earlier.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No, to be clear on it, I said that the Government's position is clear. We are opposed to the Shooters' bill, we do not believe that hunting should take place in national parks, but equally we recognise that we need to have a program in place to deal with feral animals in New South Wales. That was my answer earlier, and it is still my answer.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I understand that. We had a position of supporting such a program involving all resources in national parks supervised by the National Parks and Wildlife staff. Is that still open to negotiation?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: You have been a member of this place longer than I have, and you would know that it is common practice with any legislation to negotiate with all parties when the House is dealing with legislation. I do not think that this is any different from anything else that we do.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is negotiation ongoing about those matters? Is that the position?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I have not been involved in any negotiations, so I cannot comment. My point is that with any legislation, and you would know this better than I, there is negotiation with all the parties sitting at this table about legislation that is to be progressed through Parliament. That is the normal process of legislation, as I understand it.

CHAIR: I will make an appointment to discuss it with you then.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: There is a different perspective from the Opposition side.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I did preface my answer by saying that you may know better than I do.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I do not, Minister. In addition, do you rule out supporting game parks?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I think the Government's position is clear on that as well.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: And that is your position?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I am a Minister in this Government and the Cabinet. And that is the decision.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: With respect, a lot of Ministers give personal opinions in the media about this. I am trying to separate the personal opinion from the Government's policy. My question relates to endangered species, in particular the grey-headed flying fox and the looming season where the department is issuing licences to shoot endangered species. What do you anticipate will happen this season? Will you issue licences? What number of licences do you anticipate?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The Government seeks to ensure the conservation of all threatened species, flying foxes included, but recognises flying foxes can damage trees and fruit crops and disturb people in residential areas. The current policy for mitigating commercial crop damage by flying foxes advocates full exclusion netting as the only reliable method for protecting fruit crops. However, there is provision for licences to be issued under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 to allow fruit growers to shoot a limited number of grey-headed flying foxes. The Government announced on 11 August that it is developing a new policy on flying fox management. The policy will be informed by the work of an expert panel, which was convened by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water to review the current licensing system.

The panel consisted of experts in ecology, agriculture, animal welfare and socioeconomics. A report from the panel raised concerns about the practice of culling flying foxes and suggested that netting be used to protect fruit crops. Development of the Government's new policy will involve a detailed economic analysis of options outlined in the panel's report. The new policy will take into account community concerns and the protected status of flying foxes without imposing unreasonable hardship on farmers. In the interim, licensing arrangements will be maintained, supported by upgraded shooting protocols to improve animal welfare and a targeted compliance strategy. Animal welfare groups and farmers will be consulted on the new protocols.

I note that the grey-headed flying fox was listed in 2001 as vulnerable under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 because the evidence suggested that its population in New South Wales had declined by 30 per cent in the preceding 10 years. This is thought to be primarily due to the loss of natural feeding habitat through clearing of habitat vegetation. The current policy of the Department of Environment, Climate Change

and Water makes clear that the department does not generally support disturbing flying fox camps except where there are unacceptable impacts on human health or damage to property.

The department often works with local councils to develop management strategies and assist local residents to live alongside flying fox colonies. Licences to shoot flying foxes are issued in limited circumstances. In the 2008-09 fruit season, 27 licences were issued to authorise the shooting of 875 grey-headed flying foxes. Licence returns indicated that 590 individual grey-headed flying foxes were culled.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: What are "targeted compliance activities"?

Mr SMITH: There are two parts. One part is to ensure that those who have been granted a licence comply with its terms. That involves on-site visits at night to orchards to ensure that protocols are followed. The other part is to detect illegal shooting of flying foxes, where people have not sought or have not been granted a licence. Obviously, we know the areas where this could occur because it is to do with orchards. The park rangers are the main people who undertake this work, with police. Because the licences require farmers who shoot flying foxes to notify the neighbours that shooting may well occur, if someone is doing it illegally neighbours frequently hear the shooting. If they have not been told that shooting is going to occur they ring the police and the police treat that as a potential firearms incident. That gives us the leads to be able to investigate to see whether people are undertaking illegal shooting.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I understand that a lot of farmers will just discharge a firearm in the vicinity of flying foxes to move them on, rather than shoot them. Does that constitute shooting flying foxes if they are just discharging firearms but not actually shooting flying foxes?

Mr SMITH: No.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How many prosecutions have been mounted in the past in relation to compliance?

Mr SMITH: We will have to get those statistics for you. I would emphasise that it is not a large group of people who are involved. On the North Coast, most orchardists have used nets because they provide for protection of fruit from flying foxes and other risks. In Sydney, some orchardists have installed nets on at least part of their properties, but others have not. I met only two weeks ago with the Flying Fox Advisory Council, which has members of animal welfare organisations, conservation organisations and farmers. The point we have reached now is to try to understand the scope of the industry. How many farmers are there who have not yet netted their crops and what are the benefits of netting of crops in terms of improved yield of fruit and avoided costs of farmers having to be up at night to try to protect their crops? Then we have to work through the total cost for that to become the required practice. Would there be a role for public support of farmers in implementing the policy? The stakeholders have understood that. Farmers say to me that they do not want to shoot flying foxes but also they do not want to stand by and see their crops destroyed, because that is their livelihood. Everyone is working together pretty well to see what we can do practically to make a transition. I think that is a very good process.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: We agreed the solution a long time ago. The Government needs to support it.

Mr SMITH: It is also a matter of resources being finite and every government has to choose what it is going to spend money on. If money is to be spent on those things, which are an integral part of the farmer's business, the Government would need to understand what is for public benefit and what is for private benefit.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: I have two questions related to a couple of wildlife management programs. You may have to take them on notice because they are detailed questions. Can the Minister advise the total number and the breakdown by species of kangaroos harvested under the kangaroo management plan in the non-commercial zone? Secondly, can he advise by number and by species the number of waterfowl taken under the game bird management program?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: You were right. We will take both of those on notice.

CHAIR: With regard to air quality, what percentage of all environmental protection licensees have agreed to negotiated pollution reduction programs [PRPs] as part of their licence?

Ms CORBYN: I will have to take that on notice. We report on that regularly and we certainly report on that in our annual report. We monitor the number of pollution reduction programs that are negotiated each year. It varies from year to year; it is not straight up or down, depending on the particular types of issues we are dealing with at the time. I will have to take it on notice to give you the actual percentage of the 2000 or so licences that we have.

CHAIR: I understand that the number in 2008-09 was the lowest in four years.

Ms CORBYN: It varies because in a couple of previous years we had a huge number of pollution reduction programs with Sydney Water because of the big program they had with their sewerage treatment plants. However, they completed all of those so we would not expect to have that large number again. It very much depends on what the circumstances are, what we are licensing and what upgrade programs might be in place. It is not something that you would expect to increase continually.

CHAIR: What percentage of all environmental protection licences operate under load base licensing?

Mr SMITH: I cannot give the number but it is worth explaining the difference. The load base licensing scheme is for all the largest emitters of air and water pollutants in New South Wales. There are thresholds of amounts of pollution and types of activities that cause a facility to be required to come into that scheme. Last time I looked about one-third of licensing facilities were included in the scheme. Under that scheme there are two main features: there is an annual limit, a cap, put on the total amount of pollution that can be released from a facility, and then there are incentive fees that apply to a list of pollutants that are relevant for that activity. The less the industry pollutes, the lower the fee. That is obviously put in place to be an economic incentive for the industries to find ways to reduce emissions.

CHAIR: I appreciate that. Could you advise why we have not seen a substantial improvement in the pollutant load indicator for total accessible air and water pollutants?

Mr SMITH: Yes, I can. The population has grown, the economy has grown and the amount of pollution has been roughly stable. We are seeing a slight progressive breaking of the nexus between economic and population growth and the amount of pollution generated. That is a result of improving technology over time.

CHAIR: Has the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water formulated a health cost for each tonne of pollution counted towards the total assessable air and water pollutant derived from the pollution load index? If that is the case, what is the cost per tonne of pollution emitted by the load-based licences?

Mr SMITH: Not for all pollutants because not all pollutants cause health costs. Some pollutants are listed because of the environment impact. That can be particularly for water pollution where we are not so much worried about the impact on human health. So we could not readily assign a cost, but we have done quite a lot of detailed work in relation to air pollution and the health costs of air pollution. I would be happy to provide that information.

Ms CORBYN: It is not necessarily related to load-based licensing, which is an economic instrument to actually get people to reduce their pollutant load. The air quality goal standards we use are nationally set from an ambient air quality perspective and they are health based. They were developed in collaboration between the States and the Commonwealth under the National Environment Protection Council and they have a health basis. As Simon said, load-based licensing is not necessarily strictly driven by health.

CHAIR: Increases in PLI or pollutant load are not addressed by increasing the load-based licensing fees?

Ms CORBYN: They are in part, but not necessarily always health based. Other standards that we use are health based.

CHAIR: Could you give an example where load-based licensing fees have gone up?

Mr SMITH: Do you mean the rate payable or somebody's fee?

CHAIR: Either actually, whatever is relevant to the issues?

Mr SMITH: The fee is calculated as a result of multiplying the number of kilograms of pollutant released and the relative harmfulness of the pollutant—is it more a garden variety or a highly toxic substance—by an adjustment for the sensitivity of the receiving environment. Within all of the industries added to produce an index some industries, for example, sewerage plants that have instituted an effluent re-use program instead of discharging waste water into the environment, will experience up to 100 per cent reduction in fee. There will be other cases where an air polluter has installed some kind of pollution control equipment, a scrubber or precipitator, or switched to cleaner fuel, and will experience a reduction in fee. There will be others with an existing plant which, although continuing to operate lawfully, might just have bigger throughput because they got bigger orders or worked more hours, so their fee will go up. But the key thing is that there is a cap within the licence. The upper threshold is determined by the original assessment of when the thing was built so that we can be confident that surrounding people and the environment are not at risk.

Ms CORBYN: Also about two years ago the Government actually raised the air load-based licensing fees specifically as an economic instrument to make sure there was more focus on that.

CHAIR: On a subject close to my heart, considering the Federal Government's focus on world heritage areas and cane toads in the Caring for our Country grants, what is the New South Wales Government doing to address this key threatening process in northern New South Wales?

Ms BARNES: The National Parks and Wildlife Service, and the broader department, is the proud owner of an award-winning teacher education kit called Trap That Toad. If you would like me to send you a pack, I will. It includes a rubber toad, I think, and a whole range of things you can use.

CHAIR: A rubber toad?

Ms BARNES: Yes, I think. It is a toad. It is education so it is around alerting people to the issue, helping them identify the toads and then giving them information about what they can do. As you say, the toads are a priority in the Federal Government's Caring for our Country bid. We, like you, have not been successful so far.

CHAIR: Why has a Caring for our Country grant not been provided to deal with the cane toad population in New South Wales?

Ms BARNES: Not to the department. I need to take that on notice, but I was hopeful there was one maybe to a community group to help to drive that project. But I will take it on notice.

Ms CORBYN: The Commonwealth Government has acknowledged that other States started with more pressure on cane toads than New South Wales initially.

CHAIR: Is that right?

Ms CORBYN: Yes.

CHAIR: One of the original release areas is my home area at Byron Bay.

Ms CORBYN: Yes, as they are coming down, I think.

CHAIR: No, it was an original release area. Therefore, it is a primary problem area, as far as I know.

Ms BARNES: Certainly our programs concentrate on that northern part of New South Wales for that reason and also on alerting travellers. We do quite a bit of work in holiday periods alerting people to check their cars and make sure they are not bringing hitchhikers back down when they are coming from the North Coast.

CHAIR: Do you have any plan or strategy to work with private landowners adjoining the border and Nightcap world heritage areas to stop the spread of the cane toads in those areas?

Ms BARNES: I do not have details on those parks in particular, but I know we are working with communities on the North Coast and the Catchment Management Authority [CMA] as well, which is very

interested in this program. Once again, it is better if we do it as an integrated program and work with the schools, the CMAs and community groups.

CHAIR: What percentage of the \$19.1 million local government grants program for estuary coastal and floodplain management activities will go to the coastal management program?

Mr SMITH: That program is in my area. I can give you that figure on notice.

CHAIR: Thank you. What was the 2008-09 budget for the local government grants program for estuary coastal and floodplain management activities?

Mr SMITH: I will give you that on notice as well.

CHAIR: What budget has the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water allocated to support joint management of national parks in New South Wales? Is the budget more or less than in previous years?

Ms CORBYN: I can start while Sally is looking for the detail. We have a very active program for joint management with Aboriginal communities. We have had an increase in funding to be able to negotiate new joint management arrangements with Aboriginal communities. We have found both park management and connection to country to be positive and potentially employment initiatives with Aboriginal communities. We have about 16 co-management arrangements in place. I will hand over to Sally to deal with the dollars.

Ms BARNES: As Lisa said, we have negotiated 16 Aboriginal co-management or joint management agreements for national parks and other protected areas. Four of these are Aboriginal owned parks that are leased back to the Government—hand-back parks. One is leased under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, that is the Worimi Conservation Land. We have four indigenous land use agreements. We have also been progressing a number of less formal but just as important agreements with Aboriginal people. We have seven memoranda of understanding, including at Mungo National Park with the Darug people, a whole range of parks on the Central Coast and Hunter ranges area, and Kinchega National Park. In April this year we signed an MOU with the Saltwater People in Taree, which was very significant. It led to one of the largest Aboriginal ceremonies since 1930 being held in that area with men. These arrangements are fantastic in allowing Aboriginal people access to parks for connection to country and also connection to culture. We have also a memorandum of understanding with the Goobang and Snake Rock Aboriginal area near Peak Hill. We are keen to continue this and do more work with Aboriginal communities facilitating their connection to country. We want to negotiate a further 13 agreements with Aboriginal communities over the next three years. The 2009-10 budget papers identified \$1.2 million for this purpose.

Ms CORBYN: Extra.

Ms BARNES: We are well funded in this respect. We also have funding for what we call our Aboriginal partnerships program, which allows a range of community development programs with Aboriginal people.

CHAIR: Does the allocation of that funding include the amount spent by the Department of the Environment, Climate Change and Water negotiating the amount of rent and other benefits that will be provided to the Aboriginal owners when the park is handed back? What amount and percentage of funding has been spent on negotiations on parks that are yet to be handed back?

Ms BARNES: I can get the details of that for you, but our budget includes money for negotiations. Obviously, we do not know where we will end up on the rent perspective, but there is money in the budgets for rent, for management of the park and also for community development programs.

CHAIR: What role has the New South Wales Minerals Council played in the Government's position on cultural heritage reform?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: We do not look after the Minerals Council, so you are better off asking the Minister for Primary Industries.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: That was the last Minister.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Right.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It is Planning, actually.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Okay. It is certainly not us.

CHAIR: That has nothing to do with you. Okay.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Ms Corbyn can elaborate.

Ms CORBYN: We do actually have a piece of legislation, the draft exposure bill, that is out for public consultation. That deals with Aboriginal cultural heritage. We have had consultation with a range of different stakeholders, including the Minerals Council, but it includes a range of other people as well; the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, and a range of others. We are doing a wide range of consultation on those provisions to deal with Aboriginal heritage impact permits and the regulatory process for protecting cultural heritage.

CHAIR: Could we categorise the New South Wales Minerals Council's input on Aboriginal heritage reforms as significant?

Ms CORBYN: They are a stakeholder, like other people are stakeholders. Anyone with an interest in regulatory provisions—I would not say that they are any different than other stakeholders that we have been targeting the consultation at.

CHAIR: Has the Government given any consideration to the establishment of an Aboriginal heritage commission to ensure that Aboriginal people have more control over decisions relating to objects and sites?

Ms CORBYN: One of the issues that has been raised, as we do the consultation process for the legislation I have just been speaking about, that is, the Aboriginal cultural heritage provisions in the National Parks and Wildlife Act, is that the New South Wales Aboriginal Land council and a range of Aboriginal communities have raised the issue of broader reforms. We have always said that this would be a staged reform process from our perspective, but we want to actually try to correct some inequities in the legislation, as it currently exists at this time.

CHAIR: Thanks. How many of the 13 catchment management authorities [CMAs] have functional committees to advise on Caring for our Country and Aboriginal culture and heritage issues?

Ms CORBYN: Catchment management authorities do not report to me, but I deal with them regularly. I know that a number of them have Aboriginal reference committees. I know that the northern rivers, the southern rivers and the Murrumbidgee do, and there may be others. We can come back to you with the actual numbers that have Aboriginal reference committees.

CHAIR: Sure. You can take them on notice.

Ms CORBYN: What was the second part of your question, I am sorry?

CHAIR: Functional committees to advise on Caring for our Country and Aboriginal cultural and heritage issues.

Ms CORBYN: I do not know about that. I have not heard of them having separate committees on caring for our country, but they have actually prepared Caring for our Country applications. Clearly, we would need to ask the catchment management authorities about that, but I know that many have Aboriginal reference committees. They are fantastic. I have to say that I have been in the Murrumbidgee to see a team they have that is doing river restoration, which is absolute fantastic.

CHAIR: Down there with the red gums?

Ms CORBYN: Yes. But it is more about removing willows and a range of other things. But I know the Murray Catchment Management Authority as well. I have spoken to them. They have said that they would like to have a similar sort of program.

CHAIR: What is the status of the Aboriginal natural resource management action plan that was to be revised under Two Ways Together, as referenced in the 2007 State Plan update on the E4 target?

Ms CORBYN: The Natural Resources Advisory Committee, which is an advisory committee on natural resources to the Minister and me, has developed an Aboriginal natural resources kit. That committee has met with all of the natural resources agencies in our cluster to propose that we promote that Aboriginal natural resources approach. All of the NRM agencies have agreed to see how we can actually use that very positive kit that has been developed by the advisory committee.

CHAIR: Thanks. Just in relation to the Climate Change Fund, the annual New South Wales greenhouse gas emissions are projected to be 165.4 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2009-10. Applying GHG emissions savings achieved by the New South Wales Climate Change Fund in 2007-08, which totalled 259,311 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent for projected 2009-10 emissions, the New South Wales Climate Change Fund would reduce New South Wales emissions by 0.001 per cent. What type of emissions reductions as a percentage of total New South Wales greenhouse gas emissions should the New South Wales Climate Change Fund be achieving in the future?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Take it on notice.

CHAIR: Eddie, these people know what they are talking about.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: They are good. These people are good.

CHAIR: I want to get on with the communication.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Give them a bit of credit, Eddie.

CHAIR: Support your staff, Eddie. Thank you, Mr Smith.

Mr SMITH: The Climate Change Fund is only one part of the Government's overall response to climate change. I think where we are heading, which is where the Government has been wanting it to go, is to have a national cap and trade scheme that will cap and cut emissions over time. As the Minister outlined in his earlier response, that is why we have a whole suite of activities that reach out to all different sectors of the community to help them do their bit in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The big shifts are going to come as we change energy systems. That is why the Minister was talking about the clean energy agenda. We do have a high-emitting fossil fuel source of electricity in eastern Australia. Luckily ours is cleaner than the other States, and our emissions per capita in New South Wales are lower than the Australian average because we have—

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Black, quality coal.

Mr SMITH: Yes, and we have had the Emissions Trading Scheme and the Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme going for many years. We are doing well, and there is a lot more to do. Our emissions have not been growing, even as our population and our economy have grown. The Climate Change Fund is just one part that has a range of objectives. Part of what the Climate Change Fund is about, when focusing on emission reduction directly, is helping to facilitate the adoption of new technologies and to educate the community about their application.

It would be wrong to evaluate all of those programs simply on the basis of cost effectiveness to reduce emissions because we know it is not right that simply putting a price on carbon from Canberra was going to fix all these problems. We had to reach out and help people to make changes. That is what the Climate Change Fund is looking at.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I just wish to clarify whether this is our last set of questions.

CHAIR: We have agreed to go until 5.30.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Thank you. At Taronga Park Zoo, how many elephants are in calf? What budget has been set aside to ensure that additional space will be provided to meet the needs of the growing herd? Do you want to take that on notice? I do not expect you to know that off the top of your head.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: No. I think there are three, off the top of my head.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I think there are three in calf. In terms of what we are doing for additional space, this is part of the global program.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It is part of the program. It is just that they will need more room when they are born.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am just trying to ascertain that that has been funded.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I think we will probably have to take that on notice. My understanding is that there are three in calf.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Thank you very much. When are you releasing the State of the Parks report?

Ms BARNES: We plan to release the State of the Parks report before the end of the year—towards the end of the year.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In relation to floodplain management, is it the case that the staffing levels for effective full-time resources of the Urban Floodplain Management Program have reduced from 31.7 in 1996-97 to 15.75 in 2004-05? What is the current staffing level, and can you give me the figures for full-time staff and resources?

Ms CORBYN: I think we would not have the earliest staff figures because we, as a department, only assumed responsibility for the floodplain management program in 2007. I would be unable to provide you with earlier figures. Simon may very well be able to provide you with the figures that we have actually got, otherwise we will need to take it on notice. I know that we have worked hard to, if you will, share resources to make sure that we have an appropriate focus on floodplain harvesting, which is generally managed from the Office of Water, whose estimates committee hearing is on tomorrow. But we have floodplain management people as well within the department.

Mr SMITH: When that branch was first set up, that was about five departments ago.

CHAIR: How many Ministers?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: They have not had a very nice time.

Mr SMITH: We were set up with a specific mission, which was to tackle flood issues—to protect urban areas from flood, to improve the health of estuaries and to deal with coastal erosion issues. The way that we deal with those issues now is not in a single, standalone branch; those issues are dealt with with input from our regional land use planning people, our science branch, the people in the Office of Water, who are now within the department. All these people together work on these matters.

We do not normally try to have large separate bunches of branches of staff, where we roll in all the different skills and just leave them working on a single issue. We find that it is more effective to have people structured differently. The economists tend to stay with the economics group and they come in and help when there is an economic issue. The scientists are all lined up with the other people who have scientific skills and they come in and help in that respect. Clearly, a great deal of work is being done on flood. We have given

hundreds of grants to local councils to help them plan for flood and to support them in building levee banks and so on.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Do you have a figure on the staffing in that unit?

Mr SMITH: No but I will get that for you.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: On the point about keeping the economists together and that sort of thing, is it the case that professional engineering staff in the urban flood plain management program has been reduced to a third of the level it was a decade ago?

Mr SMITH: I am not sure but I would not be surprised, and the reason for that is pretty clear. When the program was started there were hardly any engineers available in councils or in consultancies to undertake the work that is now performed by those people. We are evolving. In the past the State Government actually did the work for councils, design councils' levee banks, and was very hands-on in project management. Councils have come a long way. Our role is much more now on setting up the policies and providing the funding support to help councils meet their own responsibilities because councils are the bodies responsible for managing flood risk in New South Wales.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: My understanding is that flood plain engineering is a very specialised area and they are very qualified and experienced people, and it is completely unrealistic to expect every local council to have that expertise. The councils are raising with us concern that the Government no longer offers that expertise, hence my question.

Mr SMITH: Yes, sure.

Ms CORBYN: When we did our previous restructure one thing we did was to send a strong signal that coastal is very important from our perspective. Mr Smith and his people are undertaking a review of the coastal area to make sure that we understand what the programs were, where the attention needed to be, what sort of skills we needed within the people. That review is coming to a conclusion. We have not quite finished that because we understand the priority. It was probably prior to our time of having them as a department. There had been a prolonged drought happening. Sometimes people shift their focus. When we received that program in April 2007 we made it a priority to make sure that we did a review and understood the priority support that would be needed. So that is coming to a conclusion.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Will you take my question on notice?

Ms CORBYN: Yes.

Mr SMITH: Of course. In doing the review it has become clear that the big priorities on flood and coastal program will be dealing with sea level rise and potentially more frequent intense flood events.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That is exactly my concern. I am concerned that with sea level rise we will lose the focus on flooding because they are completely different problems.

CHAIR: They can combine. They can become a community problem.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In relation to the flood levees around the State and the quality, if you could take my question on notice I would be appreciative.

Ms CORBYN: One of the other things we are doing is working collaboratively with our colleagues in the Office of Water to put in an application for a priority project on flood plains as well as flood plain harvesting. We are seeking funding from the Commonwealth. It is one of the areas we are looking at from an inland perspective.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is that a Caring for Country application?

Ms CORBYN: No, it is under the water program.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Perhaps you can take this on notice. How many applications have you made for Caring for Country grants and what has been the outcome?

Mr SMITH: Yes. Lots.

CHAIR: Did you want to answer that, Ms Barnes?

Ms BARNES: In terms of the Caring for Country grants to do with the establishment of the national reserves system, we have been extremely successful in those grants. I do not have the final figures but I think we have got the biggest swag of money of any State. The Commonwealth likes the way we plan the reserve system. It likes our strategic approach. It is impressed with the national parks establishment plan. In fact, it is now asking other States to take a similar approach.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Has your department responded to the Torn Blue Fringe report published by the National Parks Association? What was the department's response to the recommendations contained in that report?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The New South Wales Government has an amazing system of national parks and reserves, including marine parks. We have established a world-class system of marine parks that conserve the marine environment while providing opportunities for sustainable use, including recreational fishing, commercial fishing, diving, boating and marine tourism. Six marine parks have been established at Cape Byron, Solitary Islands, Lord Howe Island, Jervis Bay, Port Stephens-Great Lakes and Batemans Bay, which cover about 34 per cent of New South Wales waterways. The Marine Parks Authority is currently reviewing the zoning plans for Solitary Islands and Jervis Bay. It held public consultations earlier this year. I will be seeking briefing on the next stages in this process very soon.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I was particularly interested in the department's response to the recommendations contained in the Torn Blue Fringe report. Has the department responded to those recommendations?

Ms CORBYN: The Marine Parks Authority has considered advice and provided it for government's consideration. The Government has not considered that advice yet.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So it is not available at this time?

Ms CORBYN: It is not available.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What new marine parks, if any, are being considered by the Government?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I understand—and I think you have been in the House when I heard former Ministers say this—that the Government has no intention at this stage of establishing any more marine parks. So now we can stop the petitions from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I can assure you that the petitions will not stop. There is a lot of anger in the community up and down the coast and inland about the Torn Blue Fringe document.

Ms CORBYN: There has been some confusion because that is not a Government report.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: We understand that. That is why I asked the question along those lines. Are you aware that the Government has spent more than \$30 million in three years on marine parks to close the State's fisheries and force recreational and commercial fishers into smaller areas?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I think that is one of the great misnomers floating around about these marine parks. My advice is that in 80 per cent of those marine parks you can fish, dive, boat and do all sorts of things. We are talking about a very small part of those marine parks that you are not able to—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You cannot fish where the fish are—just go and ask any fisherman on the coast.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I am sorry, I do not accept that. If you are suggesting to me that the fish are in a small pocket of 20 per cent of the marine park and there are no fish in 80 per cent, I do not accept that to be the case.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You need to look at some of the fishing programs.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Maybe I will.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Are you aware that the Government's decision to create marine parks without community consultation has hurt local coastal businesses and communities?

Ms CORBYN: We have local advisory committees for each of the six marine parks. So there is quite a bit of consultation. Currently we have two zoning plans under review. There is a requirement that they be reviewed after five years. So there is extensive public consultation, including the widest range of not only commercial and recreational fishers but also environment groups and local communities. As part of the Marine Parks Authority I have met with the two advisory committees. The whole Marine Parks Authority went to meet with them. So quite extensive consultation is underway on those zoning planning reviews. There is a requirement that the review reports that are undertaken be sent back to those advisory committees. So there was quite a wide public consultation process run and then the advisory committees also have a separate process where they reviewed the review reports for the zoning plans.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Who is on those advisory committees?

Ms CORBYN: I do not have the detailed list of every advisory committee in front of me but they have commercial fishers, recreational fishers, environment groups, local business people, local councils represented from their areas. I have met with the Solitary Islands Advisory Committee and the Jervis Bay Advisory Committee. We also have a Marine Parks Advisory Committee overall and on that are commercial fishers and recreational fishers who are very active and very constructive in their comments. We have an Aboriginal representative, a marine scientist and environmental groups who provide broad overview comments to us. And then each marine park has an advisory committee itself. It is a very wide cross-range of representation. There are people who do not necessarily see eye to eye on the advisory committee—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: But they are not being listened to.

Ms CORBYN: No, they are very constructive in coming forward so they have spearfishermen and commercial fishers who bring different perspectives to the table. Certainly at the two meetings I have attended they have been very positive about the role of the marine park in their local area generally. In relation to the Solitary Islands and Jervis, which are the two that have had zoning plans in place for five years, the majority of the comments are that the marine park is working pretty well. That is their comment.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: One recommendation in the Torn Blue Fringe report is to close most of the estuaries—for example, Lake Cathay near Port Macquarie—to all fishing. Do you know how, if Lake Cathay were to be closed, that would impact on the local community and the tourism industry in that area?

Ms CORBYN: One of the concerns our department had in looking at the Torn Blue Fringe was that there was no analysis like that in the report, so the socioeconomic impact was not analysed associated with the recommendations. Having looked at the report itself it was not able to determine some of those things. It was one of our concerns with the Torn Blue Fringe. It needs to be said again that is not a Government report.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I understand that. I was just hoping that you would say you were going to tear it up.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Whose report is it?

Ms CORBYN: It was the National Parks Association, which is a non-government body.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you concur with the figure of \$30 million that has been spent on the creation of marine parks over the past three years?

Ms CORBYN: I have the figures for this year which I mentioned before which was \$5.3 million in recurrent funding for those six parks. I do not have the three years added up.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Does that money come jointly from NSW Fisheries and the Department of Environment and Climate Change?

Ms BARNES: The Marine Park Authority has provided budget. The Marine Park Authority staff now reside within the department but the authority is chaired by the Department of Premier's and Cabinet and the director general of the department that is responsible for fisheries and our department: it is a tripartite body.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Will you advise the Committee if any research has been undertaken that recommends re-establishing dingoes in national parks? Do you have plans to reintroduce purebred dingoes into any national parks in New South Wales?

Ms BARNES: I think this question may have come from *Catalyst*?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: No.

Ms BARNES: There has been research by an independent scientist student around the Blue Mountains National Park, in that area, who looked at where dingoes move, how far they go and what they eat. I do not have those results with me but I think anecdotally it showed that the dingoes were a higher order predator that were actually playing a role in potentially reducing fox numbers and other feral animals. That is all I know in terms of what that program said. I have not seen any proposals to reintroduce dingoes. In fact, we have dingoes in a number of parks and in a number of areas we protect dingoes when we do wild dog baiting. I have not seen any proposals to do that.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you rule out reintroducing purebred dingoes into national parks?

Ms BARNES: I have not seen any proposals or signs.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Will you rule it out?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: It is a policy question.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Will the Minister rule it out?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will take it on notice.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: My question relates to the Tooralee property that was recently purchased by national parks. What are the numbers of native animals on Tooralee now that domestic and feral animals have been removed? Are the numbers of native grazing animals on Tooralee sufficient to control the vegetated growth to prevent a fire hazard developing?

Ms BARNES: I do not have the list of species that were assessed as conservation values when we purchased Tooralee. There are a number of species on Tooralee. Obviously removing the pests allows more vegetation for those species. The very first thing we do when we get a park is work on fire plans and fire management plans and hazard reduction plans. We are undertaking that work now to prepare for any hazard reduction work we need to do there. In fact, the western branch has upped its rate of hazard reduction over the past 12 months enormously—I cannot tell you the percentage. The first thing we did with Yanga was put in substantial fire trails, firebreaks, worked on fire in particular. We will do the same for Tooralee.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What are the guidelines for hazard reduction burning frequency in national parks?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: The temperature hit more than 30 degrees on the weekend, a prelude to what we know will be a very hot and dry summer. The aftermath of the devastating bushfires in Victoria in February has demonstrated to us the impact that wild fires can have on communities. We are looking closely at the interim findings of the Victorian bushfires royal commission and will examine its recommendations to see what lessons we can learn from what happened in Victoria earlier this year. We know that climate change will

mean that bushfires will only get worse. Size, duration and intensity have increased over the past decade and will continue to increase with climate change.

Government research suggests that very high to extreme fire risk days may become 10 to 50 per cent more frequent in all State regions. This could have serious consequences for the safety of our community and bushfire risk. The unseasonably hot and dry conditions we experienced recently led the Minister for Emergency Services to announce that the start of the official fire season has been brought forward in some areas. The National Parks and Wildlife Service has a strong record in fire management and in anticipation of a very hot and dry summer we are getting ready for the fire season.

I have been advised on how it has been necessary to methodically change firefighting practises over time to better meet the threat that fire on our landscape and climate present. For example, we have clear principles in place that ensure hazard reduction exercises are aimed at safeguarding human life from property. We have about 900 very well trained firefighters. All bushfire prone land, including our parks and reserves, are covered by bushfire risk management plans and bushfire operational plans.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Will you take that question on notice?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: As a sign of goodwill we will take it on notice.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Earlier you took on notice a question in relation to the number of baits used by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Will you break down that information into those baits that were ground-baiting stations and those that were aerially baited?

Ms BARNES: We can.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: In the budget balance sheet I notice the current assets of property, land and equipment is valued for land and buildings at about \$2.13 billion. I assume the vast majority of that valuation would be land rather than buildings. Is that right?

Mr SMITH: Yes.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Who valued them and on what basis were the lands valued?

Ms CORBYN: We do have a regular valuation program. We do it every five years, I think—somebody is going to nod at me to tell me that is correct—and we have a standard valuation process that we actually use which is audited each year as we go through, and the way we have actually approached valuation in our accounts is then audited each year by the Valuer-General.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: So the Valuer-General does not do the valuations for you?

Ms CORBYN: No. We organise for the valuation ourselves.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Do you pay local government rates on any of your land?

Ms CORBYN: National Parks do not pay local government rates. There may be other lands that are not actually in the national park system on which we do pay rates.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Other categories of land?

Ms CORBYN: Yes.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: No, I was referring broadly to the national parks estate.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I think Ms Barnes might indicate what National Parks does with local councils in terms of access to staff, machinery and the like. That information might be useful in the context of National Parks not paying rates but doing other things.

Ms BARNES: Like schools and other charities, National Parks does not pay rates. However, we are often a major work force in a regional town, and therefore bring in lots of salaries and expertise. Also, where

possible, we use council plant and equipment for work that we do in a park. We have a policy of trying to purchase our goods at the local towns. So, for example, when we bought Yanga we began purchasing in Balranald. The local shopkeepers saw a noticeable increase in the purchase of plant and equipment, fencing equipment, motor vehicles and a whole range of things that you purchase when you establish a new park. So there is a range of benefits that a new park will bring to an area.

CHAIR: As well as a huge influx of tourists.

Ms BARNES: As well as an influx of tourists. Western New South Wales does not have a huge number of tourists compared with the rest of the State, but the national parks are becoming more and more of an attraction to people who might not have gone out there before. I was at Bourke last week and met the vice-chair of the regional advisory committee but who also runs and manages the local caravan park. She is very happy; she has seen an increase in visitation in the last year or year and a half of about 10 per cent. That is at the same time that we did work at Gundabooka National Park, putting in new walking tracks. We have a new walking track from the camping area to Gundabooka Mountain, where there was never a track before. We and local Aboriginal people have done a new walk through to fantastic Aboriginal paintings. They will start to see an increase in tourists and of interest, with people going out west. It is from a very low base, I know, but there will be an increase.

Ms CORBYN: Ms Barnes just mentioned Barradine, so I will not take up too much time, but I attended the Pilliga Discovery Centre launch. We have built not only the National Parks offices but also a fabulous community resource. The builders were all hired from the western New South Wales area. That gave a quite significant boost to Barradine, which had a really positive view about our participation there.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Do you have any estimates done of the in-kind value to the communities over the whole of New South Wales?

Ms BARNES: Not over the whole of New South Wales. But we do studies in different areas and track those. I can give you information about where we have done economic studies and benefits.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: If you could do that. Is information available on the method of valuing National Parks land every five years?

Ms CORBYN: Yes.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Could that be made available, please?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Yes.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: The graph presented by Ms Barnes shows reservation size compared to budget expenses. Does the term "budget expenses" apply to net cost of services?

Ms BARNES: No. It is the total expenses.

CHAIR: Minister, I do not want to delve into the politics of it, but if there were a Coalition government are you concerned concern that marine parks, sanctuary zones and protection zones potentially could be completely gutted without reference to the scrutiny of Parliament through regulation?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Normally, I would not deal with hypotheticals, because I am John Robertson, not Geoffrey. I am not sure because there seems to be some conflict between Mr Colless and Ms Cusack about just what is going on with marine parks. I think we can probably draw our own conclusions.

CHAIR: Do you concede that under another government regime the protection of the sanctuary zones of marine parks could be radically changed without reference to Parliament?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I would concede that a whole range of different policy areas would be radically changed.

CHAIR: Minister, under the energy efficiency and renewable energy programs, businesses receive more funding, some \$27 million, and have more programs, some 51 programs, compared to households at

\$9 million and 9 programs, yet energy savings and greenhouse gas emission reductions are very similar. Page 6 of the annual report shows that quite clearly. What does this indicate to you, Minister? Taking those figures into account, would you change anything in order to get maximum emission reductions and energy efficiencies, for minimum cost, by focusing on the household programs?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Obviously the Government is committed to getting maximum reductions at minimum cost, and that is the focus. For a response regarding the detail of your question, I will hand over to Mr Smith.

Mr SMITH: The largest of all programs in the energy efficiency space is for low-income households. That is more than \$60 million that is going to 220,000 households. The figures in the Climate Change Fund represent only a portion of the effort that the Government is putting into all of these measures. As the Minister said, the guiding principle is cost effectiveness. I would mention that that is not the only thing we try to do with the fund. We are trying to demonstrate and support the penetration of new technologies into a wide range of settings. So that is not the only way that we look at it.

CHAIR: Does this indicate that the low-hanging fruit, so to speak, is in demand-side abatement and households and as such should be prioritised?

Mr SMITH: No, because often the work we might do with a business is to support the development of a new technology, which will then go on the market and be much more widely picked up.

CHAIR: According to the 2008 annual report of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, 6½ million hectares of New South Wales, or about 8 per cent of the State, is protected in national parks and reserves. How many hectares have been added to national park and reserve tenure since March 2007? You can take the question on notice if that causes you some difficulty.

Ms BARNES: I have the number for last year, but not back to March 2007. In 2008-09, 62 areas, totalling about 129,500 hectares, were acquired under part 11 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

CHAIR: Why are voluntary conservation agreements and wildlife refuges important to biodiversity and land use management? Considering the low uptake of conservation agreements, are further economic incentives, such as proportional rate exemption from Livestock Health and Pest agencies rates, necessary to provide a small incentive to increase landholder participation?

Mr SMITH: There are two main types of agreements that have been in place for many years. One is voluntary conservation agreement and the other is a wildlife refuge. The voluntary conservation agreement is the higher-level agreement, which is attached to the property title in perpetuity. There are benefits that flow to the landholder from that. Those are exemption from land tax and exemption from council rates. They already provide a good incentive. One of the reasons that we have introduced the biodiversity banking scheme is that it offers a further, superior return to the landholder. It provides for landholders to commit to managing land for conservation as a genuine income-earning activity. So this will be the main area of growth that we expect in future years.

CHAIR: How many hectares of mapped old growth forests have been reassessed and made available for logging under approved private native forestry property vegetation plans since the code of practice was introduced?

Mr SMITH: This is about the transformation of logging on private land for it to become sensitive from being an unregulated activity to being an activity subject to regulation in order to raise the standard of forestry and conservation practices. Under the new arrangements, when landholders wish to undertake logging on their land they may do so only if they enter into an agreement that sets out the rules under which that can occur. There are exclusion areas from logging, which include rain forest and old growth forests. It is not permitted to undertake logging in those categories of forest at all. The process you referred to is the determination of which areas are in fact rain forest or old growth area.

CHAIR: You are saying that there is no old growth or rain forest logging on private land at this time?

Mr SMITH: Correct. The starting point for determining the classification of the forest type is the mapped layers that were prepared for the regional forestry assessments over recent decades.

CHAIR: So you are reassessing potentially what one might consider an old growth or rain forest to fit in with the private native forest logging ratio?

Mr SMITH: The default position is simply to adopt the maps that were used in the forestry assessment. There is the scope for the landholder to say that those maps, which were prepared for a high scale broad area assessment, are not actually true in the case of his or her property. We have a protocol where scientists examine aerial photographs and if necessary undertake site inspections to determine whether an area is rain forest or old growth. There could be some cases where the original classification was incorrect or there could be some cases where, lawfully, because previously—until the Government changed the law—it was legal to log rain forest and old growth forest.

CHAIR: There were no regulations.

Mr SMITH: Yes. It could well be that since that early mapping was done that logging has taken place and the land no longer meets that classification.

CHAIR: How many hectares of mapped rain forest has been reassessed and made available for logging under the approved private native forestry property vegetation plan since the code of practice was introduced?

Mr SMITH: Having given you all of the background on that, I would like to take that on notice. It is a matter of detail.

CHAIR: Sure.

Mr SMITH: But it is a very important process. It is an industry undergoing a profound change and an improvement, so we have to get this right and work through it with people. The key thing is that it used to be lawful to log those assets. Way back in the Wran years, the Government ended logging of rain forests, but that applied only to public land. So this is a complete change to regulation of logging on private property.

CHAIR: What studies has the Department of Environment and Climate Change done on the water volumes and flood frequency needed to improve the health of the Ramsar-listed Hunter estuary wetlands?

Mr SMITH: I will have to take that on notice.

CHAIR: That reminds me of an historical event, which I was absolutely delighted about. When the Hon. Eddie Obeid was the Minister for Fisheries he started the process of reinundating the Hexham Swamps, which was a very great initiative. I understand that it has not gone much farther than a small lowering of the floodgates, but can anyone give an assessment of where that is up to? I understand that for both conservation and professional fishing that is a massive potential prawn breeding ground, amongst many other species.

Ms BARNES: You should still be pleased in that we are continuing that program. Because it is fairly groundbreaking, or ground softening, we need to learn as we go. So it is a matter of opening gates, closing gates, and seeing how far it goes.

CHAIR: Is it still active as a process?

Ms BARNES: Definitely. Our people in the Hunter office, Robert Quirk and his crew, are very keen on this program. I flew over it about six or eight months ago, and they were very proud to show me where the gates are opening and closing. There are houses nearby, so we have to do a trial and see where we have got to, and see what the effects are. We have to work with the landholders. It is still an active program.

Ms CORBYN: In fact it has been a huge collaborative program with the Catchment Management Authority. There have been Commonwealth and State governments and a variety of State agencies coming together as well as the Catchment Management Authority to progress this. It has been a major initiative and it deserves credit.

CHAIR: Could you give an assessment on the percentage of reinundation? How far down the track is the project?

Ms CORBYN: It has only just started. In fact, the Catchment Management Authority just launched it.

CHAIR: The Hon. Eddie Obeid promised it eight years ago.

Ms CORBYN: But it was quite a substantial effort to try to deal with all the landholders. This is quite a difficult issue, and it is not just opening floodgates and letting everything happen. We really have to plan it properly because salt water is coming back into systems that have been acclimatised to a different way. It takes very careful and detailed negotiations. There were lots of negotiations with individual landholders to bring the land into the system, but also then a very careful assessment of how to manage it so that it did not do more damage by saltwater inundation. It had to be done gradually. It is a fantastic result.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Pity that the South Australian Government was not as brave.

Ms CORBYN: It will have significant implications, not only for fish but also for a range. In fact, there are some old disused rail lines that from a national parks perspective gives a great opportunity for the community to get in and see and experience what is happening in that area. It is a fantastic outcome.

CHAIR: Any other example of that type of reinundation activity. Of course, we have massive floodgate infrastructure in the north of the State.

Ms CORBYN: The Environmental Trust has funded a number of projects with Fisheries in particular, and had a dissemination program to get the advice out on a range of different places up and down the coast to help deal with acid sulphate soils as well as fisheries issues. They are smaller projects, not as big as the Hexham Swam project, which has taken substantial millions of dollars and a very comprehensive plan. But there are some smaller examples up and down the coast that the trust has funded.

CHAIR: Minister, would you consider withdrawing section 120 approvals for logging in river red gum forests by Forests NSW until such time as the DECCW is allowed into the forest to conduct assessments?

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: The answer is no.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: River red gum forests in the Riverina are very significant from an environmental perspective as well as for the social and economic fabric of regional areas. Balancing their protection and long-term sustainability of forest operations is a big challenge. River red gums are recognised for their exception biodiversity and cultural values, including wetlands of international significance and significant breeding habitat for migratory birds. The protection of the red river gum forest is an issue that has been frequently raised with the New South Wales Government. I understand that there are several vulnerable species in the region and that the forests are stressed by current drought conditions and by changes to natural flooding regimes. This is also impacting on the forestry industry in the region.

In this region we are looking for a balanced approach that protects both the important environment values and jobs. The New South Wales Government has an excellent track record on reaching balanced outcomes. For example, regional forests agreements in the southern and Eden regions have resulted in around 400,000 hectares of new national parks and nature reserves as well as reliable access to timber resources in the State forests. In keeping with this record the New South Wales Government has asked an independent body, the Natural Resources Commission, to undertake a regional assessment of forests in the Riverina. This assessment will include consideration of the environmental and cultural values of the forests as well as their social and economic role within the region with the aim of ensuring a sustainable timber industry into the future.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Excellent answer. I could not have written it better myself.

CHAIR: The Opposition now has six minutes for questions.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, can you explain why the Government has failed to declare as wilderness, under the Wilderness Act, the Green Gully addition to the Macleay Gorges wilderness area of 12,600 hectares which was acquired following a major fundraising campaign by the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife in 2003?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Why is wilderness land that has been gifted to the National Estate facing such unacceptable delays in gazettal?

Ms CORBYN: We put a significant effort into the wilderness assessment process and getting the guidelines right and bringing forward wilderness designations. We have put a massive effort into rewriting the wilderness assessment guidelines to make sure that they appropriately deal with both assessing the valleys and interacting with the community.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can I ask that you look at the White Family wilderness?

Ms CORBYN: If it is up near Yengo, we have just designated Yengo as a wilderness area. If you give us the details of the White Family we will look at that.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I recently visited Montague Island and it was fantastic. I congratulate you on the work that has been done to make the island feral free. When are programs to eradicate rodents likely to be introduced to Lord Howe Island?

Ms CORBYN: There is quite a significant program for rat eradication for consideration by Lord Howe Island. A separate board manages the island. It has applied for and been successful in the past in getting grants under Caring for our Country. There is a very significant scientific basis for trying to bring forward the rat eradication program on Lord Howe Island. It is quite a sensitive matter for many community members there, so it takes some time to make sure everybody understands and is not concerned that the baits that would be used for rat eradication would harm either people or the environment. It is several years before that program will be—

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is there a target commencement date?

Ms CORBYN: It depends in part on Caring for our Country grants as well.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How much funding do you believe is required?

Ms CORBYN: I cannot answer that because I am not actually on the Lord Howe Island board.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But it is going to be funded by the Department of Environment?

Ms CORBYN: It is dependent on the grants coming forward from Caring for our Country.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Do you know what the budget would be if money were available?

Ms CORBYN: There is a budget but I do not know the figure because I am not on the Lord Howe Island board and I am not responsible for that activity.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I will take it on notice because I am.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: When is Fridge Buyback going to be extended to the regions?

Mr SMITH: It has been extended to regions progressively. It is in the Illawarra and the Hunter.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: When do you envisage it will be extended to the rest of the State?

Mr SMITH: They have not committed to take it to the whole State because it is not cost effective to do so in extremely remote areas. I will give you an update on notice of the schedule for the other regional centres.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: You indicated it was going to be extended so I was wondering if I could get some more information on that program.

Mr SMITH: Sure.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I want to ask about funding for the department's website, particularly in relation to national parks. Is it possible brochures for parks could be included in the web pages for the individual parks? Can more be done by looking at what States such as Queensland do?

Ms BARNES: We are looking to improve our website. It is better than it was but it still has a way to go. We are working on a whole range of issues to improve information and also maps and track notes on the site. We uploaded information yesterday or the day before. We have a partnership with Wildwalks and we have updated information on the Blue Mountains in particular. We will have them do the walks and the track notes for us and upload them to our website.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How many visitors did you have to your website last year looking at national parks?

Ms BARNES: I cannot answer that question.

Ms CORBYN: We monitor the number of hits on our website but I do not know that we break it down by national parks.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I think it is across the website, which is a pity because it is a great resource for tourism. People want to research their visit before they go and there is no information. You have to go to the office if there is an office.

Ms BARNES: They have the contact numbers for the office. In fact, people who are going to a park should always ring the office first. It is not a bad practice to ring the office.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Does the Government have a policy position regarding the erosion of Belongil Beach at Byron Bay?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I know where it is!

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am thinking particularly of protecting the wetlands behind the spit.

Mr SMITH: The framework is that the local council has to prepare a coastal zone management plan, which sets out how it is going to deal with coastal erosion processes. I have been to Byron to visit the mayor to see how they are going with developing their coastal zone management plan. They are way behind; they have taken a long time to do it. Our staff have reviewed the draft plan that is in preparation. I have written to the council recommending some improvements be made to the draft plan because I do not believe it adequately addresses the situation. Belongil is a phenomenal area of coastal recession. If you look at the cadastre of the property boundaries, the access to those properties is on a road that is now under water. There are photographs showing the coastline being several hundred metres out to sea when that first subdivision took place. There is a very rapid rate of coastal recession, which is a natural phenomenon.

The Government's position has been that the council needs to work with the landowners to tackle the difficult challenges and it needs to take a reasonable commonsense approach. It needs to be a framework under which people can protect their property as erosion takes place. We have to recognise that that area should never have been subdivided 100 years ago. It should have never been a place for people to put houses. The Government wants the council to work with the landowners to work out the best thing that can be done in the circumstances.

CHAIR: Would you agree that when the retreat strategy was first implemented that council was under administration so a State Government-appointed administrator was part of the decision-making process?

Mr SMITH: The Government's approach over the years has been to work with the council on how it manages the issues. A wide range of studies has been undertaken on the alternatives and it is now time for council to come forward with its coastal zone management plan on how they are to be managed.

CHAIR: You will be well aware that there are only two houses along that strip that historically were there before the retreat strategy was in place. Every other house on that strip has a warning caveat on its title about the possible inundation of the area.

Mr SMITH: Yes. I do not know whether it is two but I know that the majority of the properties were constructed after the development control plan made it clear that the area was at risk of erosion and any structure to be built had to be movable.

CHAIR: All landowners bar a small minority were well aware of the coastal erosion issues when they bought into those properties over the last 20 years.

Mr SMITH: Yes, we are aware of that.

CHAIR: Has a reservation program been funded for the Gardens of Stone Stage 2 reserve proposal and, if so, what progress has been made in relation to the reservation and when will these reservations take place?

Ms BARNES: I would like to get you the detail on notice but I can say we are working through a process around Mt Airlie and then moving across to Gardens of Stone.

CHAIR: Has the department considered the economic benefits outlined in the 2009 report jointly commissioned by the Blue Mountains Conservation Society and the Colong Foundation entitled "Seeing the Gardens—the other Blue Mountains Nature-based Tourism and Recreation in the Gardens of Stone Stage Two Park Proposal" and reported on the report's estimates of economic benefit following the reservation of the proposal area?

Ms BARNES: I received a copy of the report last week or the week before and had a look through it. It is a very interesting report that raised some interesting issues. It had some fantastic photographs, which were really compelling about the conservation values and the interest to visitors. We are having a look at it and in the next month or two I would like to meet the authors and go through it and then provide advice to the Minister.

CHAIR: What is the total level of funding allocated in the agency to undertake reform of tourism operations within national parks?

Ms BARNES: I will have to get exact figures for you. Because parks are for conservation and also enjoyment and appreciation and because they can do so much to enhance regional communities we are looking at where it is appropriate to support tourism. The majority of our staff have backgrounds in ecology and science and while they are very supportive of visitation and increasing visitation, they have asked in particular if we can assist them with some specialist skills in tourism, promotion, web design and that sort of thing. We have been looking at how we resource that but I will get you an answer.

CHAIR: There is a lot of talk in the bureaucracy about a change of focus on tourism in national parks and the encouragement of "glamping"—glamour camping. Is there any move to encourage the light and integrative use of national park facilities without putting glamour camping within the boundaries of national parks?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Our national parks contain some of the most beautiful natural places in Australia. This Government has worked hard to expand our national parks system. We are committed to continuing this process. We are equally committed to creating a range of opportunities for families, retirees and tourists to get out, see and enjoy these unique places. Our parks have the potential to support nature-based tourism, tourism to Australia and then tourism to our regional communities. The Government's Taskforce on Tourism and National Parks made over 20 recommendations on how to enhance the level of nature-based sustainable tourism in parks compatible with the conservation of the natural and cultural values. The Government is working through in implementing these recommendations. For the first time New South Wales tourism and conservation experts have come together to agree that small, low-impact eco-style accommodation is the most appropriate facility for a park setting. They ruled out any new large-scale developments, such as hotel or motel style accommodation resorts, golf courses and sports stadiums as inappropriate. It is worth putting it on the record because there is a level of confusion about it, or misinformation.

CHAIR: Glamour camping?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: I am not sure what your definition of glamour camping is.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: It is probably sleeping on a mattress.

CHAIR: It is very much upmarket. It is actually impacting on the basic values.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: But what is your definition?

CHAIR: Perhaps you should consult your bureaucracy because that has been discussed.

Ms CORBYN: One of the things we have been quite clear about is that we do not want to impact on the conservation values. It is quite clear that we want people to come into the parks to appreciate the conservation values of those parks as well as just the public enjoyment they can have.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Can I help you there!

CHAIR: Thank you Minister and your staff. Congratulations on your initiation as environment Minister.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Thank you Chair and everybody. It was most pleasurable.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: If it is all right with the Minister, we will put our further questions on notice.

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Yes.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.