

## GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 5

Thursday 20 June 2002

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

### ENVIRONMENT, AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

The Committee met at 8.00 p.m.

#### MEMBERS

The Hon. R. S. L. Jones (Chair)

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods  
The Hon. Richard Colless  
The Hon. Don Harwin

The Hon. Malcolm Jones  
The Hon. Janelle Saffin

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#### PRESENT

**The Hon. R. J. Debus**, *Minister for the Environment, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts*

**Environment Protection Authority**

Ms Lisa Corbyn, *Director-General*  
Mr A. Ramsey, *Executive Director, Finance and Administration*  
Mr S. Toohey, *Policy Services Section*

**New South Wales Rural Fire Service**

Mr. P. Koperberg, *Commissioner*  
Mr P. Hennessy, *Manager, Financial Services*

**New South Wales Fire Brigades**

Mr I. MacDougall, *Commissioner*

**State Emergency Service**

Brigadier P. McNamara, *Director-General*

**National Parks and Wildlife Services**

Mr B. Gilligan, *Director-General*  
Mr A. Diakos, *Director, Corporate Services*

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**CHAIR:** I welcome you to this public hearing of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5. First, I wish to thank the Minister and the departmental officers for attending today. At this meeting the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of Environment and Emergency Services. Before questions commence, some procedural matters need to be dealt with. Part 4 of the resolution referring the Budget Estimates to the Committee requires evidence to be heard in public. The Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings. Copies of the guidelines for broadcasting are available from the attendants. I point out that, in accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only members of the Committee and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photos.

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. There is no provision for members to refer directly to their own staff while at the table. Witnesses, members and their staff are advised that any messages should be delivered through the attendant on duty or the Committee clerks. For the benefit of members and Hansard, I ask departmental officials to identify themselves by name, position and department or agency before answering any question referred to them. Where a member is seeking information in relation to a particular aspect of a program or a sub-program, it would be helpful if the program or sub-program is identified.

The Committee has agreed to the following format for the hearing: Emergency Services for the first hour. It may not be as long as that but we will see how the questions go. In one hour's time or sooner, but certainly not later than one hour, we will then deal with Environment. Minister, will that impose any difficulties for you or your officers?

**Mr DEBUS:** No.

**CHAIR:** I declare the proposed expenditure open for Emergency Services. Are there any questions?

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Minister, in relation to the 53 new rural fire staff to conduct hazard reduction and fire control activities, will those new staff be in place to conduct hazard reduction work in winter-spring 2002?

**Mr DEBUS:** As I understand it, recruitment is about to begin and people will be coming online and going to work assisting the existing structures of the Rural Fire Service in that activity.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Where will the staff be physically located?

**Mr DEBUS:** The staff will be located at regional offices and at the head office of the Rural Fire Service and they will travel throughout the State. Commissioner Koperberg may be able to give you some more detail.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** There will be a total of 18 positions located at the head office. They will be engaged in planning and environmental services and mitigation, audit and compliance. The thrust of the legislation provides the Rural Fire Service [RFS] with the capacity to audit risk management planning processes and the execution of those plans. In addition, there will be 35 staff who will be distributed throughout the regions, of which there will be seven in the western region, three in the southern region and four in the northern region. The total for each of those regions is 16, 9 and 10 in the west, south and north. Those positions are in various categories of support work for the fire mitigation and prevention programs.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** How many will be engaged principally in administrative roles and how many will be engaged in actual hazard reduction work?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** None will be actually out there burning. The actual burning program lies principally with the land management authorities and is done principally by brigades. These are salaried staff who will be involved with the various land management and other agencies to enhance the risk management planning process, to audit those processes, to prepare the plans and to manage

the execution of those plans. These are not people who are physically going to be running around the State with drip torches. There is already a substantive labour force in place for that.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Would it be fair to say that they will be involved in administrative-type roles rather than actual field work roles?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** Quite the contrary. The mitigation and audit compliance teams are very much field people. They will be on the ground. They will be reacting to community concerns and complaints. They will be engaged in the extent of hazard reduction being carried out by a range of agencies—local government and land management. They will report back to ensure that the planning process is working effectively. Clearly, the success or failure of a program of this magnitude depends largely on it being managed properly. These people will be very much front-line managers for the program.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Will they be involved in monitoring fuel levels on various categories of land and that sort of thing? Would that be part of their role?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** Absolutely. It is very much an audit and compliance role and they will be liaising closely with bushfire management committees of which there are in excess of 100, comprising all of the agencies with an interest in fire management affairs across the board. As I said, they will be reacting—and I suspect this is an important component of their work—to community concerns about their perception of hazards close to and adjacent to assets. It is very much a front-line management function and they will be able to monitor fuel accumulations and report back on remedial action.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Do you have statements of duties prepared for those staff?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** We are in the process. One has to be cognisant of the fact that the budget applies to the financial year 2002-03 and we did not want to be pre-emptive in this regard. Those PDs are being prepared and, as the Minister has indicated, recruitment action will take place in the immediate future. This is not a short-term fix. This is a longer term strategy to ensure that the complexities associated with this type of work are addressed and, given the passage of time, these additional resources, which are significant, will have a marked impact on that level of work.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** In relation to the budgeted amount of \$32 million for the purchase of new and used tankers, how does that compare with allocations for that purpose in the preceding five financial years?

**Mr DEBUS:** It is fair to say that we are basically continuing or slightly increasing the level of tanker acquisition. The number of tankers that will have been acquired—that is new or reconditioned tankers in good condition—will approximate 2,000 by the end of this financial year, that being measured from the end of the financial year 1995-96. There may be someone who can give us absolutely precise figures. It is certainly fair to say that the level of acquisition is being held steady or slightly increased. We have made a commitment to \$100 million of expenditure during the second term of the Government's office, and that commitment will be met. That is \$100 million on the firefighting fleet.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** What proportion of tankers are currently less than 15 years old?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** There is a fleet of more than 3,000 tankers. I would have to take that question on notice.

**Mr DEBUS:** A lot fewer than there used to be.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** These assets are owned by local government and not by the State Government and until the amendments that transferred local government fire control staff to the State, we had little, if any, jurisdiction to accurately monitor the age and condition of the fleets. Those assets are still owned by local government but we can as near as possible provide that data.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Commissioner, when you provide that information you might also include a projection of the impact down the track that budget amount of \$32 million will have on the number of tankers and their ages. We are interested to see how that is changing.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** I would like the Committee to be cognisant of the fact that this is a somewhat complex matter. Much of what we have now is an inheritance of an old system. In the old days it was possible for brigades to procure vehicles out of their own funds, almost in a private capacity, and in effect sell them into the fund. This meant that the obligation for maintenance, for argument's sake, rested with local government. The vehicles themselves were almost in the ownership of brigades, or for that matter individuals. So those distant records are sketchy at best. In the last 10 years we have a much clearer picture of what we are doing.

**Mr DEBUS:** In the six years to the end of this financial year we will have purchased 2,000 tankers, either brand-new or in a renovated state of high quality. This, by itself, is a majority of the fleet that we know of, apart from those hidden away in wheat paddocks and otherwise secreted by members of brigades who do not necessarily want us to know where they are.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** And who want to use them for purposes other than firefighting!

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Commissioner, has the Rural Fire Service considered commissioning what the Americans referred to as terror tortures, which enable hazard reduction burns throughout the year as they can set fire to and ignite moisture-laden undergrowth?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** We really try to avoid the use of napalm wherever we can! There is quite a strong community reaction against that! But, in essence, we do not necessarily confine our hazard reduction activities to the winter months, depending upon the burning regime.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** But is there not a time constraint?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** Of course there is. But there has not yet been invented a methodology—at least not an acceptable one—that will allow the burning of moisture-laden vegetation.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** The devices I refer to are hand-held. The Federal American budget is now investing a billion dollars because of the fires they have had, which are comparable to those we had. Forgive the pun, but using inflammatory language like napalm would infer we are talking about dropping bombs from aircraft.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** It was just a poor attempt at humour.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** I am sorry, I did not get the joke. Again forgiving the pun, that sort of inflammatory device is a method whereby throughout the year we can attend to this problem of hazard reduction using simple drip torches in inclement weather. Is that possible?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** With respect, it is not possible to burn the bush when it is raining.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Have these devices being investigated by the Rural Fire Service?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** Not seriously, no.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Have they been investigated at all?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** Not by anyone other than those who make them. The reality is that only 10 days ago I spoke at length with the Chief Forestry Officer of Colorado, who expressed exactly the same frustration as we often do about limited opportunities for hazard reduction. The United States of America has fires not dissimilar to ours. The basic difference is that they invariably lose more assets than we do. We are up there in terms of the sharp end of technology with whatever methodology is acceptable, environmentally and from a practitioner point of view. Our frustration about when we can and cannot burn is felt universally across communities with these responsibilities. You cannot burn wet bush, even using the methodology we have. You can burn a small patch if you pour enough of the

mixture of kerosene and oil on it. You will burn a millimetre or two of the surface, or you will only burn the fuel that you drop on the vegetation. There is no other serious way of doing it.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** I will not spend more time of the Committee on this issue, but I urge the Rural Fire Service to consider this new technology. Commissioner, prior to last summer did you provide written advice to the Minister regarding the preparedness of New South Wales for last summer's bushfire season?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** I did two things. Based on the advice that was available to us from meteorological sources, I advised the Minister that the forthcoming fire season had the potential to be troublesome. But, having said that, I was also cognisant of the fact that the Bureau of Meteorology at one point, around September of last year, advised we could expect a period of average or above-average rainfall. That certainly tended to ease our concerns. Of course, that did not happen. Secondly, we were aware of some anecdotal concerns in regard to levels of preparedness, and in order to get an accurate assessment of that we commissioned an audit of things like hazard reduction, with a view to determining whether there were any impediments, whether real or perceived. As a result, we embarked upon a quite dynamic program of hazard reduction prior to the Christmas-New Year fires whenever that opportunity was provided to us.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Was that audit completed?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** Yes, the project was completed. It was not universally across the landscape. It was a random audit, if you like. It provided useful information about how the whole issue of fire management should evolve. In fact, the Government reacted swiftly to the results of that process, and as a consequence we now have in place legislation which will further improve our capacity to manage such fires. It is very much a question of continuous improvement.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** As the Rural Fire Commissioner—and appreciating that your powers have recently been expanded by new legislation that enables you to access public land, and that prior to that new legislation you did not have those powers—in your advice to the Minister regarding the State's preparedness, did you comment on the preparedness of public land?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** I did not differentiate between land tenures. The purpose of the audit was to test the validity of perceptions about the level of preparedness, particularly as it related to hazard reduction. Indeed, as the parliamentary inquiry has been told, one can never be satisfied that one has done enough, because whether or not one has done enough invariably is not known until after a fire season which produces one or other result. The audit was about testing the perceptions. As a result, steps have been taken to further improve the system.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** With the benefit of hindsight, looking back on last Christmas, would you say you did enough or not enough—not you personally or the Rural Fire Service particularly, but the community as a whole?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** If we were able to forecast with any accuracy where the next major fire was going to be, we would hazard reduce that area if the opportunity presented. But you cannot do that. These are random events.

**Mr DEBUS:** And you cannot hazard reduce all of New South Wales to a uniform degree.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** I am not suggesting that.

**Mr DEBUS:** It is not practical.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** I will repeat the question. With the benefit of hindsight, was there sufficient hazard reduction in place prior to last Christmas?

**Mr DEBUS:** If I could intervene, Mr Chairman. That is just a how long is a piece of string question. It is not a useful question, though asked in different ways. It is not useful to ask, "Did you hazard reduce enough?" when in the real world fire occurred in particular places. The question is: Was that fire reasonably well contained? The answer to that question is yes.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** The fires were reasonably well contained, Minister?

**Mr DEBUS:** Yes.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Were they?

**Mr DEBUS:** I have sometimes detected in the arguments of the Hon. Malcolm Jones a kind of position that it is possible to entirely suppress fire. That does not occur anywhere in the world, including the United States, where massive amounts of money are spent on such an attempt.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Will you allow me to speak for myself, please?

**Mr DEBUS:** By all means. I thought you were questioning me.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** I was. But you are telling the Committee what you think is behind my question or behind my other statements made outside this place. I am simply suggesting that that is inappropriate in this forum.

**Mr DEBUS:** That is up to you.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Commissioner, I asked you a question about your advice to the Minister about the preparedness of New South Wales. Is that advice available to this Committee?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** It is customary for me to brief the Minister, predominantly verbally, on events as they occur or as they are predicted to occur. Last year was no exception. The Minister and I have regular dialogue on how things are going, and the Minister will ask me what I think of the forthcoming season, and I tell him. The concern was not of sufficient magnitude to warrant a particular report to the Minister.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** This is not written advice?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** On occasions it is, and on occasions it is not.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Is the written advice available to this Committee?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** I would have to know which specific advice you are referring to.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Advice regarding the preparedness of New South Wales for last summer's bushfires.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** Preparedness in what respect—equipment, or manpower?

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** The preparedness of the Rural Fire Service to carry out hazard reduction work. You have stated that an audit was conducted, and that sounds right and proper. It was done on a random basis. If you had gone to the trouble of carrying out an audit, there would surely be results. My question would incorporate the results of such an audit. Would that have been forwarded to the Minister? If it was, is it available for this Committee?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** I should expect so. It depends. It is not just a question of one report. The issue of the audit was not preparedness in terms of resources. We knew that we had adequate resources and, indeed, the firefighting campaign demonstrated that the collective resources of the various fire agencies and land management agencies dealt with a rarely experienced campaign extremely well. That has been acknowledged throughout the Commonwealth and beyond. The audit was specifically to test the number of assumptions. The results of that audit are readily available.

**Mr DEBUS:** May I add that I have been reminded that in about October last year I actually made a public statement—I think I actually made a statement in the House and issued a press release, and that type of thing—referring exactly to our apprehensions about the coming fire season and our

general assessments of the state of preparedness. I can confirm, as the commissioner says, that we and our staff talk to each other all the time.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** I turn now to long-range weather forecasting and preparations which are perhaps in train now for next summer. Reports are already available from meteorological organisations. You refer particularly to the Queensland Centre for Climate Applications which is forecasting warm water and the warm air of El Niño revisiting our shores and creating lower rainfall and an even hotter summer. Would you like to comment on that?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** The Southern Ocean oscillating index is in the negative by three points, and that indicates a mild El Niño effect which will prevail over the spring and summer months. But I must say that there are conflicting views on that. The Singaporeans, who are the major climatic monitors for South-East Asia, dispute that that will last no more than perhaps a couple of months, or two or three months. However, on the basis that we are going to have an El Niño event, irrespective of its magnitude, as we always do we will look toward a worst-case scenario and we will prepare for it. As soon as it stops raining we will do some hazard reduction.

**Mr DEBUS:** Mr Chairman, I seek your indulgence and mention for the benefit of the Committee—and I can table it, if that is desired—that I now have a copy of the press release I mentioned, dated 18 October and headed, "200 bushfires since September signal tough fire season". In that article I gave a lot of helpful tips about how people could protect their houses.

**Document tabled.**

**CHAIR:** Of my three questions, the first relates to Cool Off Australia Day, which I assume you know will be held on the first Sunday in September, is aimed at community and personal participation in fire safety. What will be your involvement in Cool Off Australia Day? If you do not know anything about it, I can show you the information.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** If you can give it to me, I will return it to you.

**Mr DEBUS:** Mr Chairman, this is from a chap at Bucketty, and I think it is just a suggestion.

**CHAIR:** I think it is more than that.

**Mr DEBUS:** He has approached the Nature Conservation Council.

**CHAIR:** Perhaps I should send it to you so you can get involved.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** The Bucketty brigade has in fact proffered some suggestion, but it is not a recognised national, or even State, campaign.

**CHAIR:** Would you monitor how this works and how the community gets involved in it?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** Sure.

**CHAIR:** The State Emergency Service [SES] was expecting a larger allocation than was granted in the State budget—quite a bit larger, as I understand it. What were the reasons for the rejection of the SES funding bid, and how has that affected operations?

**Mr DEBUS:** The SES budget is certainly at record levels. As you know, it is the largest volunteer organisation next to the Rural Fire Service. The increase in the budget of the SES that has occurred since I have been responsible for it is in the order of 140 per cent. It went from a little more than \$11 million in 1995-96 to \$27 million currently. I think that the SES, like every other ambitious organisation, may actually want to have more money, but I think it is also fair to say that the SES has achieved a record budget on this occasion. There are a number of features to it, such as \$250,000 for the provision of computers as part of a three-year program, \$800,000 for vehicle subsidies, and \$156,000 to employ two additional part-time division controllers. The divisions program has been unfolding as well. There are 18 divisions and we are gradually placing part-time controllers in each of them as part of an ongoing program. The sum of \$100,000 was provided for sandbagging machines,

which is of great importance to the SES, and \$3.2 million will be spent on rescue equipment and resources. I think it is fair to say that the SES has been well provided for in the budget, even though I—let alone Brigadier McNamara—can think of more ways that we could spend an endless budget.

**CHAIR:** The fact that the budget that was asked for was cut down will not affect your operations?

**Mr McNAMARA:** Mr Chairman, we received this year an 8 per cent increase in our budget in real terms. As you have hinted, an amount above that 8 per cent had been asked for, but from our point of view—and I can say from the volunteers' point of view, because they are aware of the budget increase—we certainly feel that we have been very fairly treated. The money that we have been allocated will certainly assist us to be better at that next response operation. I have to say that over the period from 18 November through to the end of February, when we were challenged by a number of storms, the volunteers proved their worth. They will go on proving their worth. I think the allocation we got is fair, and the money will be put to good use.

**CHAIR:** How much additional funding will be allocated for environmental assessment processes under the proposed code of practice? Will the additional resources given to the Rural Fire Service [RFS] target this area and ensure compliance with the principles of ecologically sustainable development [ESD] in relation to hazard reduction burning? If so, how? If not, why not? How much of the additional RFS funding will be allocated in the development and implementation of the property plans and threat abatement plans under the Threatened Species Conservation Act to enable the code of practice to function according to the principles of ESD, given that high fire frequency is deemed to be a key threatening process?

**Mr DEBUS:** I think we ought to take the question on notice. I think you will concede, Mr Chairman, that there is a lot of content in it. However, the initial content—and I am sure that the commissioner can supplement this—is that the Rural Fire Service is not abandoning the principles of ESD by the adoption of a streamlined mechanism for making environmental assessments preparatory to hazard reduction. What the service will be doing is adopting, as I say, a simpler process but it will not be one that simply abandons ESD principles. It was a very complicated question.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** I almost had to say, "I beg your pardon?"

**CHAIR:** Take the question on notice, commissioner.

**Mr DEBUS:** The other thing I would like to point out is that those new resources, the \$30-odd million, is applied partly to assist local bushfire management committees to continue their preparations and to allow the Rural Fire Service to assist local councils to map bushfire-prone areas. None of those things abandons the principles of ESD, but they are all being taken up by that increased expenditure that we spoke about before.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** It is probably edifying to know that of the 18 positions at head office that I mentioned, 11 are in planning and environmental service at a cost of probably in the order of \$1 million. Far from the principles of ecologically sustainable development being diluted, there will be a very strong focus on that while at the same time achieving the hazard reduction outcomes that we need.

**Mr DEBUS:** Mr Chairman, you are possibly aware that there has been in place for some time a requirement that fire control officers, superintendents at district level, must achieve certain benchmarks in training in environmental sustainability principles. They actually have to do TAFE courses so, as time goes by, we will have more and more people who are appropriately trained in those principles doing the kind of work that we are talking about. That process is already quite well advanced. We will, however, take that question on notice.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I wish to return to the Rural Fire Service budget. In Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, on page 4145 under "Retained Revenue", the sum of \$88,600,000 is attributed to grants and contributions. I assume that is principally associated with grants that were made to cover the costs of the Christmas bushfires?



**Mr KOPERBERG:** Those grants are local government.

**Mr DEBUS:** That is what goes out of the fund.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** They are allocations to local government. There are 140 or so districts which are within the purview of local government to look after, and those grants are in fact the equipment and other services allocation to those fire districts.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Commissioner Koperberg might be looking at a different part of the document. I am looking at retained revenue, not at expenses.

**Mr KOPERBERG:** That is the insurance industry contribution to the total budget of \$123 million.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** What has changed from the budgeted amount in 2001-02? The budget amount was \$15 million and the revised budget was \$88 million. Are you looking at the same page that I am looking at?

**Mr KOPERBERG:** I think so.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I am referring to page 4-145 of Budget Paper No. 2, Volume 1, Retained Revenue. Grants and contributions for the 2001-02 budget amounted to \$15,082,000 and the revised budget was \$88,608,000. The budget for this coming year is \$16 million.

**Mr HENNESSY:** The \$88,608,000 includes an amount which was reimbursed to us from the Natural Disaster Fund through New South Wales Treasury. That is the difference in the budget figure of \$15,082,000. All that was contained in that budget figure was the local government statutory contribution. In the \$88,608,000 there is the local government statutory contribution and the recouped amount from the Natural Disaster Fund.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** So the budgeted expenditure of \$191.863 million is \$66 million below the figure allocated in 2001-02. Would it be fair to say that that is basically the difference in those figures?

**Mr HENNESSY:** That is the difference in the top part of the expenditure figures, yes.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I refer now to the budget for the State Emergency Service [SES]. I had trouble reconciling the Minister's statement a few minutes ago about the \$27 million. I am looking at total expenses in the forecast budget of \$24,971,000. Is there another couple of million somewhere that I am not taking into account? Am I looking at the wrong page, or what is the story in relation to that figure?

**Mr DEBUS:** I think you have to add an amount of \$4.9 million to your \$23 million figure. I do not have the page in front of me. An amount of \$4.9 million in capital is to be added to the figure you mentioned.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** So what then is the actual budget for this year, looking at total expenses, plus capital? Is it \$24,971,000 for the 2002-03 budget less retained revenue?

**Mr DEBUS:** It appears as though I might have undersold my achievement earlier in the evening. When I said \$27 million I should have said \$29.9 million.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** You have totally confused me now. I cannot see that figure anywhere either.

**Mr DEBUS:** That is the combination.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Do we take off that total retained revenue figure? You have added it on to get the figure of \$29 million.

**Mr DEBUS:** Total expenses on page 4-154 in the third column are \$24,971,000. On page 4-155, capital appropriation is \$4,874,000.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Is that where you get the figure of \$29 million?

**Mr DEBUS:** Yes.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** So we are still not sure where that \$27 million came from?

**Mr DEBUS:** To be perfectly frank, I am not.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I refer to the State Emergency Service and to the Volunteer Rescue Association [VRA]. At some of the centres where there is no State Emergency Service headquarters the VRA is acknowledged as the lead agency, or the primary response agency. Is that correct?

**Mr DEBUS:** It is indeed.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** It has come to my notice that those centres do not get the same sort of equipment allowances as the State Emergency Service when they are doing similar sorts of work. Is there any proposal to improve the replacement of equipment? I refer in particular to ropes and things like that, which are used only once by emergency services. I understand that they are replaced and then used only for training purposes. The VRAs do not enjoy that same level of support for their equipment. Is there any proposal to improve things for those organisations?

**Mr DEBUS:** The VRA essentially is an organisation that carries out rescues of various types. There are 230 SES units around the State, but there are only 70 VRA units. The most prominent units are engaged significantly in road rescue in places like Orange, Wagga Wagga and Casino. But many are also engaged in other sorts of rescue, for example, vertical rescue. There are specialist units for caves, bushwalkers and all sorts of things. They have a long tradition. It is an historical circumstance that all our rescue services somehow or other have come from a different origin. The VRA arose essentially as an auxiliary force for the police in the 1950s.

VRAs have had a powerful volunteer tradition. As I understand it, over a couple of generations they have fiercely resisted the idea that they should be assisted very much by government at all. In more recent times we have come to an arrangement with the VRAs that has seen them being given more assistance. Local councils give them more assistance and, at the government level, we provide assistance, especially for things like insurance. Through a capital fund we enable people to roll over the purchases of vehicles and that kind of thing. I am not opposed in principle to further improving the government assistance that goes to the VRAs, but it is a delicate question.

If you talk to them you will find that they do not necessarily want it, or that they want it in particular conditions. We have a good relationship with them and they, of course, are integrated into the State emergency management arrangements. They are represented on the State Rescue Board and we continue to work out what the future will be for that arm of our services. It is not that they are not valued—we value them greatly—but they come from a different tradition and they have a different attitude to these things. Many of them have a specific relationship with the local community that, for instance, brings them substantial income from some well-established charitable sources at a local level.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** The VRA branch that raised this issue with me is located in the township of Manilla, which is just north of Tamworth. You may be aware that the Manilla community supports a big international hang-gliding fraternity. From time to time there are accidents on the mountain. The VRA is the primary response unit for rescuing hang-gliders off the mountain when accidents occur. It is in that situation that they are concerned particularly about ropes and that sort of equipment. I might raise that issue with you privately later.

**Mr DEBUS:** I think that is sensible. Brigadier McNamara could add something to that. Significant levels of co-operation occur from time to time between SES and VRA units, for instance. I think there are a few places where they are co-located. I invite the director-general to say something

more. If you have found a unit of this sort that has a particular problem, I have a small discretionary fund which is kept just for that purpose.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Thank you.

**Mr McNAMARA:** I add to what the Minister said. We have a number of units throughout the State. The rescue capability and the flood and storm capability operate out of the one building. The members have two sets of uniforms. When they are going out on a road rescue they put on their white uniforms. When there is a flood or a storm they put on their orange uniforms and go out and serve their community. They are very community minded. In other areas where two units might be working in that same relationship, the amount of training is very close and relationships in most cases are very good. Every now and again we get the odd personality clash, but that occurs in small communities. From my experience in going around the State, it has been a good relationship. We work reasonably closely together.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I certainly was not suggesting that that good relationship does not exist in Manilla either, so I appreciate that.

**Mr DEBUS:** At Narrabri, for instance, a powerful local arrangement has been worked out. I know the people at Manilla, so if they need some ropes let me know.

**Mr McNAMARA:** They have just been given brand new headquarters. They are very proud of it.

**Mr DEBUS:** It used to be in an old cowshed at the back of the RSL club.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I refer to the fire brigade budget and to the budgeted amount of \$13.3 million for new fire stations. Where will those new stations be built?

**Mr DEBUS:** We are finishing off an extensive program of building fire stations in Western Sydney. There will be allocations to complete construction in Baulkham Hills and Glenhaven. There is also an allocation to complete construction of a station at Arncliffe. We have also been conducting an important program of fire station building on the Central Coast. It was the case until only a few years ago that large areas of outer Sydney, the Central Coast and parts of the Hunter were without adequate fire cover. Houses were not within a 10-minute fire truck travel response time. That is why we have been building so many.

Two are to be completed in Kincumber and Warnervale. In the Hunter, where there is a similar program, a lot of fire stations are to be built. Fire stations are to be built at Tingira Heights, Wallsend, Kotara, Stockton and West Wallsend. Training facilities will be commenced at Penrith, Lismore—at Coraki out of Lismore—at Newcastle and, much to the commissioner's pride and joy, more money will be expended on the number one station in Castlereagh Street—the oldest and largest of our stations.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** The parts of New South Wales about which I am particularly concerned are the regional and rural areas. I am wondering whether the fire station at West Wyalong is scheduled to be upgraded to meet occupational health and safety standards.

**Mr DEBUS:** A new station remains a high priority for the local management of the New South Wales Fire Brigades at West Wyalong. It appears that I anticipated this question. It is a high priority and we are going through the usual budgetary processes as we move towards its eventual construction. In recent years a number of stations have been built in the bush—at Dubbo, Wagga Wagga and Portland—and there have been refurbishments all over the place. I do not know whether the commissioner would like to say more about West Wyalong.

**Mr McDOUGALL:** Like any self-respecting operational organisation, the people in it would like bigger and better infrastructure. They would actually like to have fire trucks that will do 400 miles an hour—

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I understand it is an occupational health and safety issue at West Wyalong.

**Mr McDOUGALL:** It is. And, of course, we dealt with that immediately it became apparent, by removing the firefighters. That has now been corrected. However, shortly, if not right now, there is no health reason why they should not go back into the station. We do have it as part of our infrastructure adjustment plans for the future.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Can you give us an idea of when that might happen?

**Mr McDOUGALL:** It is a little difficult. There are 350 fire stations throughout the State, as well as about 20 specialist units, so we do analysis pretty well on a continuous basis. Inevitably, for budgetary purposes, there has to be prioritisation. The number one rule, of course, is OH&S. We deal with OH&S issues—and we have done so with West Wyalong—without having to build a new station. We have been in business for 118 years. I cannot give you an exact year, but I think it would be within five years.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Would you care to make comment in relation to the Nambucca Heads fire station in relation to the same issue?

**Mr McDOUGALL:** The response would be much the same. The first priority is OH&S. There are a range of issues that bring them to the surface, if you like, in terms of being put forward for allocations.

**Mr DEBUS:** But both of those stations will be rebuilt in the medium term.

**CHAIR:** The Committee will now deal with the Environment estimates.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** What is the status of the Government's promise to introduce a vehicle emissions regime?

**Mr DEBUS:** I am hesitating because there are a lot of issues here, and some of them of actually fall within the area of the Minister for Transport, those that concern inspecting. The Government is doing the following through the Environment Protection Authority: developing a cleaner vehicles action plan, which will introduce new clean vehicle benchmarks and will involve a program for the purchase of lower emission vehicles for the Government fleet. I think the New South Wales Government is the third largest fleet owner in the country. The Environment Protection Authority has been involved at officer level, and the Government has been involved at the level of representation, involving negotiation and advocacy to the Federal Government concerning the establishment of national fuel standards. The establishment of national fuel standards is a critical part of the whole question of vehicle emissions.

In a moment I will ask the director-general to go through the detail of that. New vehicle emission standards and new fuel standards are now being introduced nationally—the first tranche to be introduced any moment—and they are of core significance in the whole question of dealing with vehicle emissions. The Environment Protection Authority also runs the very successful Smoky Vehicle Enforcement Program, which we could talk with you about. As well, of course, the broader strategy concerning harmful air pollutants in the Sydney area also involves the investment in public transport, new bus transitways, and those sorts of things. We have a long-term plan called Action for Air, which continually involves all of those elements. For the sake of clarity it may be sensible to ask the director-general to give you a more precise notion of, firstly, the way in which the national emissions standards will work and, secondly, the way in which the new Cleaner Vehicles Action Program is going to work.

**Ms CORBYN:** We have quite a strong program that has been brought forward. The first step is what is called a diesel natural environment protection measure, which brings forward in-service vehicle emissions standards as the co-operative Commonwealth and State standards setting program. It means that those vehicles on the road will have standards for the first time, which will be quite significant in terms of helping to reduce vehicle emissions standards. As the Minister mentioned, there is quite a strong program in terms of promoting cleaner fuels, which is one of the core bases for

reducing emissions from vehicles. Much of the Cleaner Fuels Program has been brought forward at a national level, although we are contributing quite strongly from a technical perspective in helping to promote the phased introduction of cleaner fuels. But most importantly from a New South Wales perspective, at the State level we have also negotiated a memorandum of understanding with all the major oil companies and other fuel distributors to reduce volatility of fuel which has quite a significant impact on particularly the white haze that we see in the summer ozone, because the petrol evaporates from the cars while they are parked on the road and that fuel volatility has a significant impact on improving air quality.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** Minister, in relation to the remediation of polluted land and waterways at the Rhodes Peninsula, what is the preferred treatment method for the removal of toxins from the soil and the bed of the waterway?

**Mr DEBUS:** I will ask the director-general to answer that question.

**Ms CORBYN:** We would not specify a preferred method. What we do is ask the people who are doing the clean-up to make sure that they have proposed methods and brought forward environmental assessment processing that demonstrates environmental outcomes. Our interest is in making sure that appropriate environmental outcomes are set, and that the technology that might be proposed can meet those outcomes. We would pursue quite strongly that whoever is doing the remediation, whether it is on land or in the sediments within the bay associated with Rhodes Peninsula, makes sure that they bring forward the technology and demonstrate that it needs the environmental outcomes that are set. Quite comprehensive guidelines have been set, again through the national environment protection measure which has been developed co-operatively at the State and Commonwealth level for assessing contaminated sites that provide the sort of criteria that would be used in that process.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** Minister, how frequently are sediment monitoring tests around the deep ocean outfalls undertaken? The test results show increases in toxic compounds over the last seven years.

**Ms CORBYN:** I will have to take on notice the question about the number of sediment tests that might have been undertaken. Quite a comprehensive program called the Environmental Monitoring Program on Ocean Outfalls was undertaken, and we have a very strong scientific program through our water scientists, as well as our ecotoxicology unit, that has been looking at the potential impact that might have occurred from those ocean outfalls. My recollection of the results of the scientific reports is that they were shown not to be having an impact at that level.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** On how many days last summer were Sydney's beaches safe for swimming?

**Mr DEBUS:** The results were fantastically good. Almost all of Sydney's ocean beaches passed water quality guidelines for swimming in May. All 35 beaches passed the water quality criteria for faecal coliform, and 32 of the 35 passed the criteria for the other bacterial indicator, enterococci. As at May, for 13 months in a row the southern Sydney beaches of Wanda, Elouera, North Cronulla and South Cronulla—which had been the most polluted beaches in Sydney because of the then condition of the Cronulla water pollution control plan, which had an ocean outfall—were amongst the cleanest beaches in Sydney, and they stayed absolutely clean for 13 months in a row. Thirty of Sydney's 35 beaches had good water quality for all or most of the summer swimming season, from October 2002 April 2001. Only 10 years ago all of those beaches failed to meet health guidelines. So, though we presumably have to give you the finest of detail, I hope I am justifying my earlier claim that the results were quite exceptionally good in historical terms.

**Ms CORBYN:** May I add that we are starting a new program to pilot recreational water quality monitoring programs based on Beachwatch up and down the coast, and that program is starting as we speak. It should provide a real extension of the sort of information we have been able to provide, through Beachwatch and Harbourwatch, to the rest of the coast, working co-operatively with local councils to make sure that that information is available for the whole coast.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** In relation to the levels of methane and other gas emissions at the Castle Cove vent of the northside storage tunnel, why have emission standards not been tightened, given that students at Glenaeon school near the vent have been forced to go home regularly—some have had to change schools—because of illnesses sourced to the vent emissions?

**Ms CORBYN:** The Environment Protection Authority relies on health information that has been provided to us that there is no health impact associated with the emissions from the vents from the northside storage tunnel.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** I might take up some other issues about that on notice, because there are other issues we want to raise with National Parks. Minister, or through you to the director-general, have any national parks annual passes gone missing in the past three years?

**Mr DEBUS:** I will ask the director-general to deal with that.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** I would have to take your question on notice to give you a precise answer, but we have had some allegations of mismanagement of annual passes which have been shown to be, on investigation, unfounded. The management of annual passes by the service across the State has recently been the subject of a comprehensive audit and we are in the process of implementing the refinements to our system that that audit has recommended.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** In your answer would you be able to provide us with a copy of the audit report?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** Certainly.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I have a few questions for the director-general, in particular in relation to the operation of the Threatened Species Conservation Act. I am sure the director-general will be aware that this is an issue we have spoken about on different occasions.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** As I recall.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Could you advise us how many species are currently on that threatened species list, in all categories?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** Currently in excess of 100 listed threatened species populations and ecological communities have been identified under the Threatened Species Conservation Act, either on the original schedule to the Act that accompanied it at the time of its passage through Parliament or that have been subsequently added as a result of the deliberations of the independent scientific committee.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Can you give the Committee an idea of the cost of preparing a threat abatement plan?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** Yes, I can.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Would you care to do so?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** I am hesitating because just looking at the comparison between the cost of preparing the plan and the cost of the implementation of the Act—

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I would like some indication from both angles, if I may.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** I sensed that you might. The 50-odd recovery plans that have been either exhibited or approved to date carry with them a total cost of implementation that is expected to be about \$8 million. Approximately \$4 million of that is directly attributable to the service, and the average cost of recovery per species is currently estimated to be around \$125,000. The particular point that needs to be made about the figures on the plans is that the service managers are a \$4 million recurrent allocation for implementation of the Threatened Species Conservation Act. In addition to that, the service has received an enhancement specifically in a couple of the previous financial years

for recovery planning and threat abatement planning. So, that \$4 million went up to \$6.5 million to enable us to expedite the preparation and completion of those plans.

A total of 38 recovery plans have been approved by the Minister. A further 12 have been placed on public exhibition as draft plans, which obviously then will go through to final approval, and approximately 174 plans are in various stages of production prior to draft exhibition. The estimated total cost of recovery plan implementation for the 50 recovery plans approved or placed on exhibition to date is approximately \$7.9 million, as I indicated, and the average cost per plan is about \$160,000. I make the point that we are in the process of increasingly looking to undertake regional planning with regard to the threatened species and multiple species plans because they relate, they do not exist in isolation. We are particularly doing that in places like the alpine region, where we are working with other jurisdictions to prepare regionally based threatened species recovery plans covering the entire Australian Alps.

The other notable example is probably the Cumberland Plain in Western Sydney, where we have undertaken very comprehensive regional mapping and the preparation of a draft recovery plan, not for one species in isolation, or for one community for that matter, but for all the communities. I stress that while we will attempt to clarify what we can and answer your question, at the end of the day it will be a difficult question to answer because of the clumping and the regional integration that we are trying to achieve.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I just had a little trouble deciphering your answer. I understand the \$8 million you referred to was the implementation cost, is that correct?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** That is correct.

**Mr DEBUS:** That is how much money has been spent to date.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** That is the estimated cost of implementing the plans that have been approved to date.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I would still like to know what is the cost of preparing those plans.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** The only answer I can give on that at this stage is that we will take it on notice and attempt to give you something more specific. I stress that it will have to be a generic answer because we are dealing with groups of plans and they are in various stages of preparation.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** I would like to go on to how that \$8 million is to be met, to be paid for. The cost of implementation of one particular threat abatement plan I was looking at last night—and it related to the Bathurst copper butterfly—was \$226,900, of which National Parks and Wildlife's allocation was \$53,000, State Forests \$14,000, the Department of Land and Water Conservation \$5,000, and some other minor contributions from other agencies. It still left \$142,500 listed as unfunded. How will that be met? How will that be paid for? Is the \$8 million that the Government has allocated the National Parks and Wildlife Service allocation or is that the total the Government is going to put into the program?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** A lot of the recovery actions involved with the Bathurst copper butterfly are actions re-establishing and restoring habitat for the butterfly. That means there is awful lot of potential in-kind contribution from people like individual land-holders and land care groups who want to be engaged in planting the species that will accommodate the Bathurst copper butterfly. That is perhaps an example of the multifaceted way in which threatened species recovery has to work. It does not work in isolation, it works through programs that will be integrated across the community. I stress that the same principle tends to apply to the budget allocations. An awful lot of the survey work and monitoring work that needs to be done will be done fairly routinely as part of the National Parks and Wildlife Service activities—people in the field on the ground. Similarly, we have a pretty good collaborative arrangement with most of the people in other agencies, where simple recordings of observations can be done in that way, which minimises the absolute cash cost of those programs.

**Mr DEBUS:** My information is that of the 50 recovery plans that have been exhibited or approved the total implementation cost is expected to be \$8 million. Consistent with what the director-general has said, about half of that money would be directly attributable to the service. The other half would be contributed by other agencies and individuals, and quite often it will be in kind. Quite often it will be the time of staff of State Forests or DLWC or Bathurst council. So, that is why it is complicated to describe the actual funding arrangements. What you have here is quite admirably co-operative initiatives that draw in lots of agencies and involve a variety of different forms of contribution. As I say, a lot of it is in kind and a lot of it is in staff time, but on average—at least this has been so up till now—National Parks ends up bearing about half of the cost.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** By way of clarification, the other point that ought to be registered is the quantum of funds that have been allocated for the implementation of the State biodiversity strategy, for which the National Parks and Wildlife Service is the lead agency. We distribute some of those funds to other agencies, such as State Forests, the Royal Botanic Gardens, the zoo and the Australian Museum. A total of \$8.1 million has been allocated over four years for implementation of priority actions under the State biodiversity strategy. Some of those actions relate to things like better weed and pest management, engendering the co-operation of neighbours and stakeholders, and getting community support for the sorts of conservation measures that will assist the threatened species.

One of the somewhat unfortunate perceptions that we sometimes suffer under is the perception that the National Parks and Wildlife Service owns the Threatened Species Conservation Act and has sole responsibility for its implementation. Clearly, that is not the case and cannot be the case. What we must do is engage a collaborative effort across the entire community, across the entire State. Many of the actions that are needed are in fact very modest, manageable actions. In fact, we are finding that many of them are actions that land-holders and private property owners are very willing to undertake once they know what the connection is between a particular land use practice or behaviour and the impact on threatened species. So educational activities become a major focus of this, and then we engender that community-wide support.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** My final question relates to threatened species. I put it to you that if I went to my bank manager with a business proposal for some \$220,000 and I said to him, "Look, I am terribly sorry but there is still \$143,000 of this unfunded. Will you run with me?", he would be more than likely to reject my proposal. I have a concern that that column is shown as unfunded in those things. If what you say is correct, that is very misleading to the average person who might be looking at those things. It concerns me greatly that that underfunded column is in there at all. I have not been through the other 50-odd that might be on the approved list, but if they all contain that column and it is underfunded then there are many millions of dollars out there in this threatened species program that remains unfunded.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** I make the point that those figures are in there in order to be completely transparent about that part of the priority action for which we have allocated funds, and those parts are earmarked as things that can and should be done as and when resources can be identified or in-kind assistance can be identified over time. I would question how effective any threatened species recovery plan could be if we only include in the plan, and any tasking within it, those things for which we currently have funds, because clearly we cannot do everything at once. As I mentioned, there is also a significant synergy with other programs that are happening. It may be that we need a different heading on that column; rather than "unfunded" it is a question of saying "No specific funds directly allocated to that task".

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** That would be just as bad.

**Mr DEBUS:** Funds from other sources.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** The tasks need to be there, and the broad quantum of our guesstimate of the cost of those tasks, I think, needs to be there if in fact the plans are to be meaningful plans in the public arena.

**CHAIR:** I ask Ms Corbyn through the Minister: What action plan does the Environment Protection Authority [EPA] have to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in New South Wales?



**Ms CORBYN:** The main actions that the EPA has taken, particularly in the most recent times, on greenhouse gases—we are not the lead agency on greenhouse gases in terms of control—has been to undertake an audit of the electricity retailers. I believe that audit will be tabled in Parliament shortly by the Minister. It identified some significant concerns with the ability of those electricity retailers to achieve the targets that they were identifying for themselves and provided some useful information into the whole-of-government response on greenhouse for the Government's most recent announcements about mandatory benchmarks. From a greenhouse perspective, we also provide some significant effort into encouraging industry to bring forward cleaner production programs that have greenhouse benefits as well and promoting, with our other government agency colleagues, best practice in industrial process and waste management programs. So we have a co-operative approach and venture which is backed up by a very strong audit program that has been taking place in the past three years.

**CHAIR:** Do you have targets you are working towards?

**Ms CORBYN:** The EPA is not the body that sets targets, although I understand that the Premier has announced mandatory benchmarks that the Government will set. The EPA is participating on a whole-of-government working group that is bringing those targets forward. However, the EPA is not the one that actually sets them.

**CHAIR:** What action plan does the EPA have to remove endocrine disrupters from the environment?

**Ms CORBYN:** Endocrine disrupters is an area where there is a quite significant need for better information. We have established what we call a watching brief on international research that is under way to ensure that we get good information associated with potential impacts that might be coming from discharges from sewage treatment plants. We have been applying for some research grants to get better information on endocrine disrupters. Right now we do not have the basis for providing for the regulatory steps beyond those very strong licence conditions that we have on sewage treatment plants, but we are reviewing the research, particularly overseas, to get better information on what impacts might be associated with endocrine disrupters in New South Wales.

**CHAIR:** Obviously you are aware of the sewage implications of endocrine disrupters in the environment and the effect on wildlife and humans.

**Ms CORBYN:** We are trying to review the international literature and any information that might be available in Australia, but as yet there is no good information about where some of those impacts might be and where they are coming from. We have a watching brief on it as an emerging issue.

**CHAIR:** Will you give that a priority?

**Ms CORBYN:** As a watching brief in terms of trying to ensure that we are up-to-date with the research information, which is very scientific. That is actually being progressed. There is a significant amount of effort being brought forward particularly from America in trying to understand the endocrine disrupters. We have a person who is keeping an overview on what is happening there and encouraging further the efforts by the organisations we regulate, such as Sydney Water, to try to provide better information on potential impacts.

**CHAIR:** I have a number of questions on deer management and shooting in national parks, particularly the Royal National Park. Are you aware that precautions for public safety specified by the National Parks and Wildlife Service—including the use of infra-red cameras, a guard at the gate to areas where shooting is to occur and signs warning of the shoot—have not been implemented? What has been done to rectify this? If nothing, why?

**Mr DEBUS:** I would say with some confidence that the deer management program in the Royal National Park is the most carefully structured and monitored feral animal program that the National Parks and Wildlife Service has ever conducted. In fact, I doubt if there has been a more careful one anywhere in the country. I think you would be aware that the program was preceded by a study of a respectable scientific nature which showed that the deer population in the Royal National

Park was destroying up to 70 per cent of the understory and the new plants in the rainforest areas of the Royal National Park. It was very clear that something had to be done. As to your specific questions about special measures or the particular measures taken, I think it is better to ask the director-general to reply, although I am not aware that there have been any failures of that nature.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** I can confirm that I too am not aware of any such problems. There has been close collaboration with the local police and with all manner of other people on the deer management program. I am not aware of any such concerns as you have raised. If those details can be provided to us, I will investigate them.

**CHAIR:** As I have little time now, I will put the rest of the questions on notice and hopefully you will be able to answer them later. I turn now to something a bit different. During estimates committee questions last year I asked the Minister to provide details of the National Parks and Wildlife Service actual spending and income for the current financial year and the budgeted spending and income for the coming financial year, broken down at the lowest departmental level—that is, the unit or area level. The Minister's response was to refer to the figures in the budget papers which did not provide this level of detail.

Without a more detailed response, there is limited transparency and accountability in the spending of public money by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Did the National Parks Association [NPA] of New South Wales, after repeated refusals, apply for this financial information under the Freedom of Information Act earlier this year? Did the National Parks and Wildlife Service tell the NPA that it must pay \$6,500 for the provision of the information? If so, why, and how can this cost be justified? I request again the detailed figures on the National Parks and Wildlife Service budget and actual spending and income at the unit or area level over the past two years. Is it possible to provide that?

**Mr DEBUS:** I am aware of this issue, and I am also advised that most of the information that the NPA has requested is not available. To provide the remainder of the information at the level of detail in the form that is requested would be a staggeringly large project which would involve both a significant and inappropriate diversion of the agency's resources, and that is why the National Parks Association as applicant in the FOI request was asked to provide a deposit. The Freedom of Information Act allows for an agency to refuse access to information if it were involved in compiling and reviewing documents—and this is well established—if, as the Act states, that work would involve substantially and unreasonably diverting the agency's resources away from their use by the agency in the exercise of its functions.

I point out that the service's annual report to Parliament contains all the annual financial results. They are audited by the Auditor-General. There is more information in the budget and financial results that are contained in the New South Wales Treasurer's annual budget papers. It is not the case that the National Parks and Wildlife Service finances are without transparency. It is simply that the FOI request that you have referred to asked for a level of detail that is simply impossible to provide.

**CHAIR:** Can you advise the average—I believe you had some notice of this—age, weight and sex ratios of red kangaroos being shot currently in western New South Wales? Is it a fact that leading shooter Peter Absolum said that currently he is shooting more females than males and the average age is about two? Is it also a fact that the latest scientific research shows that the red kangaroo recruitment rate is between 6 per cent and 8 per cent a year? Will these figures show that the current population of red kangaroos is out of balance, and are you aware of that?

**Mr DEBUS:** I will ask the director-general to supplement my answer. You would be aware that this longstanding program of kangaroo management, as it is called, is the subject of a considerable amount of research. Although it is the case that kangaroo populations vary according to seasonal conditions, these days the critical focus of the program is on the long-term sustainability of the kangaroo population. That is how the program is described. I am not aware of the particular issue that you mentioned with respect to the actual number and size of the red kangaroo population.

**CHAIR:** Average age and size of carcass?

**Mr DEBUS:** Carcass weights of males and females that have been shot under this program remained very similar through 1995 to 2002. We can provide those figures. The male carcass weight has been around 22 kilograms and the female around 16 kilograms throughout that time at the chiller. That shows that red kangaroo carcass weights are essentially stable, and that is a significant finding.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Is that gutted with hoppers off and tails off?

**Mr DEBUS:** The description is "eviscerate". The live body weight is greater.

**CHAIR:** Do you have any information on the average age of those beasts? I believe the research has been done by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** I do not have with me figures on the average ages. I do have the figures on the weights that the Minister has referred to. I can confirm that those figures are weights at the chiller and the live weights would be greater. To clarify your earlier question about the work that has been done by a researcher from the University of New South Wales which has supposedly revealed growth rates of 6 per cent to 8 per cent in the population in optimal times, the issue to bear in mind is that that is a modelling exercise which needs to be reality tested. The reality testing that we do is the monitoring work that has been done for the past 20 years or so. The fact that we have the populations that we have over the last period is a demonstration, I believe, that in fact there is some question about those low figures of reproductive rates. It is one study. It is by no means the general view at this stage and we believe that there is continually improving science behind the decisions that are taken in the kangaroo management program and they are, of course, taken in the individual States and then reviewed by the Commonwealth.

**CHAIR:** I will put that question on notice.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Ms Corbyn, how does the assessment of the Mogo charcoal plant by the Environment Protection Authority conflict with claims by environmental activists in the area?

**Ms CORBYN:** I would not be able to answer off the top of my head in detail the distinctions between what environmental activists might be claiming and our view. I can tell you that the approach that we take is to review significant information in terms of the regulatory power and role that we have as an Environment Protection Authority. That is primarily related to the standard of any air emission that might be associated with the processing plant. We would assess that as to whether it achieves an environmental outcome that we believe is appropriate. In the assessment process we always begin with the necessary environmental outcome and assess whether the proposals will achieve that outcome. We have done that in association with the regulatory requirements that we would have under our legislation. We then bring forward an assessment as to whether we think we could licence a facility and, if so, what the conditions might be so that they are done at the same time as the planning assessment process is undertaken. I cannot tell you off the top of my head the distinctions because there are many different views as to what the differences might be.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Mr Gilligan, of the approximately 750,000 hectares of national parks which were burnt during the Christmas bush fires, can the National Parks and Wildlife Service estimate the numbers of fauna losses? If so, can they be broken down into categories of mammals, reptiles, birds, et cetera?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** First of all there were not 750,000 hectares of parks burnt. That was the total area burnt of all tenures, as I recall. The area of parks burnt was just over 500,000. The answer to your second question is, in short, no. We cannot estimate those numbers and we cannot categorise them because of the incredible variability of habitats and mosaics of habitats across the 500,000 hectares. It would be an impossible task.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Who has overall responsibility for fire prevention in the National Parks and Wildlife Service?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** The simple answer is the director-general, I fear. I do not think there can be any other answer to your question.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Surely in your department you take advice regarding fire prevention from someone? I would not expect you to be hands-on in that regard.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** Within the agency we have a structure that involves a central fire management unit, within our directorate of police and science based at Hurstville, which co-ordinates fire management activities across the agency. Within that same directorate we have a significant research team which has international reputations with its work in regard to fire management. In each of our 19 regions across the State we have at least one senior ranger with specific responsibility for co-ordinating fire planning and fire management within that region. Scattered throughout our middle management and senior management levels we have people who have varying degrees and many years of experience in fire management in one part of the State or other. Some of them have come from backgrounds in other agencies such as State Forests, for example, and therefore the advice that I get when going about exercising my responsibilities is drawn from across the agency in terms of that central policy, scientific advice and the operational and practical experience of people in the field across the State.

**Mr DEBUS:** Actually 900 staff members, half the staff of national parks, are fully trained in some aspect or other of firefighting.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Will the National Parks and Wildlife Service allow the existing facilities at Cabramurra, especially the accommodation, to be available to enhance winter sport visitations in that area?

**Mr DEBUS:** As I understand it we are waiting to see what offers might be made.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** With the Snowy corporatisation process running through and having just been concluded, there is still obviously an amount of uncertainty about what the options are there. We have had some preliminary discussions with Snowy Hydro people, who are themselves still exploring what they think is an appropriate way to go. I understand that there have even been some discussions with the Commonwealth about some ideas. I am yet to see any definitive proposal that might be evaluated by us. It has not advanced to that.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** For many years the facility has been virtually totally under utilised. Is it reasonable to interpret from your answer that the National Parks and Wildlife Service has no specific attitude of prohibition on those facilities being utilised?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** Certainly we do not have any fundamental prohibitions. But I draw the attention of the Committee to the fact that we have recently embarked upon a major review of the plan of management for Kosciuszko National Park, which is a process that will run on for at least 18 months. In the course of that process all aspects of facilities, infrastructure and uses of areas within Kosciuszko National Park will be considered. I imagine it will provide a useful framework for us to canvass some of those options. Some of them will depend upon which way the newly established Snowy Hydro corporate entity wants to play it as well, because obviously it is a crucial element in all of that.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Has the Snowy corporatisation only just been finalised?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** Yes.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Correct me if I am wrong, but the public submissions for Kosciuszko National Park closed in April?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** In terms of the process that we are running with regard to the revision of the plan of management, there will be an extensive consultation. I am not sure which part of that you are saying closed in April. I cannot recall exactly which aspect of the plan of management might have closed. It would have been very much a preliminary submission, if anything, for an issues paper on the plan of management process. There will be, throughout that process, subsequent exhibitions of draft plans and further community focus workshops and the like on dealing with specific issues. There is

going to be a whole array of consultation mechanisms. There is no way that the opportunity has closed in any sense.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Are stock riders going to be asked to round up horses in Kosciusko National Park? If so, can this be extended to other national parks where there are brumbies?

**Mr DEBUS:** The director-general will give you the detail, but a brumby removal program is now operating in Kosciusko National Park. It was in preparation for quite a long time. The first horses have been taken out. As I recall, the parks service is concerned above all to remove horses from the areas above the snowline, where they do terrible damage to the especially fragile environment – to the sedge and other sensitive flora.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** How were the brumbies removed?

**Mr DEBUS:** They were attracted to a salt lick and then captured. Plans exist to use riders, however, to round up and capture horses under a contract arrangement. That particular arrangement will proceed on a trial basis for several more years. I understand it is much easier to capture horses, including in the traditional Man from Snowy River style, in Kosciusko than in many other parts of New South Wales, including other national parks, where the terrain is appropriate for that to occur. There is a quite substantial monitoring committee of veterinarians, scientists and conservation and industry groups. We expect, and hope, that the program will intensify, because the horses are doing damage. A few possibly do not matter, but we now think there are 6,000. I think that was the figure I heard, or was it 2,000?

**Mr GILLIGAN:** I am hoping it will not be more than 3,000. But that is still speculation.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** There are rumours of a newspaper article about using prison labour for horse control in Kosciusko. Is there any truth to that?

**Mr DEBUS:** I think it is fair to say the Snowy River Shire Council has promoted this idea assiduously. Newspaper items appear from time to time, I suppose because it is rather interesting to think of prisoners rehabilitating themselves by chasing horses around the Snowy Mountains.

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Some of us started off that way.

**Mr DEBUS:** As prisoners? The use of prison labour is a concept to which the Department of Corrections and others in government are quite sympathetic, but it will all depend upon whether appropriate arrangements can be made. I cannot really speak for the Minister for Corrective Services. There is a prison on the other side of the mountain at Tumbarumba, a very pleasant place.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** Is it?

**Mr DEBUS:** It grows a splendid chardonnay.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** In the prison?

**Mr DEBUS:** It is called Mannus, at Tumbarumba. I apologise for these perorations. There is sympathy for the idea, but it is not clear to me whether or not it is practical.

**Mr GILLIGAN:** All of these options are being considered as part of the finalisation of a horse management plan for Kosciusko. A draft wild horse management plan was released on 31 May 2000 for public exhibition for a period of six weeks. It drew in some of those options. We are trialling them and working through them with the committee that developed the original plan.

**The Hon. MALCOLM JONES:** At page 4-117 is reference to an anticipated expenditure of \$34.8 million. Is that separately accounted for, or is it part of the revenue of the National Parks and Wildlife Service?

**Mr DIAKOS:** The \$34.8 million to which you refer is part of our total expense budget.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Minister, I expected you might have some questions on the very important issue of waste and waste management. One of my two questions relates to the litter laws dating from the year 2000. Can you tell us what impact those laws have had? The second question relates specifically to the attempt to reduce waste within the Government's own operations. I would like some information on that.

**CHAIR:** Even in Parliament House, I might add.

**The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS:** Yes.

**Mr DEBUS:** We are quite encouraged by the response of local government and, indeed, of government agencies to the new litter laws introduced last year, accompanied by an anti-litter education campaign which began in January 2002. The results are quite pleasing. There is now Environment Protection Authority research to show that 85 per cent of the people of New South Wales agree that people who litter should be fined, and another 10 per cent who agree that sometimes people should be fined—that is, dependent on the circumstances. That is about as close as you will ever get to universal acceptance that it is reasonable to have on-the-spot fines for people who litter.

We know, by the way, that people who litter actually feel very guilty about that. That is why the "Don't be a tosser" advertising campaign has people looking rather sheepishly from their car doors and that kind of thing as they drop their cigarettes or drink cans. We are able to report that 11,800 fines have been issued to litterbugs since the new laws were introduced about two years ago. We even have a sort of hit parade of councils. Willoughby has done the best, followed by Waverley, Blacktown, Sutherland, Marrickville, Shoalhaven, Randwick, Sydney City, Lake Macquarie, Bankstown and about 10 others. Local government—as well as State agencies like National Parks—has begun to take the issue seriously. We are pleased about that. The Chairman mentioned recycling in Parliament House being introduced to ensure that all of us here maintain appropriately high standards in this respect. I am obliged to congratulate my colleagues. You are all aware of those extra bins you have in your offices.

**The Hon. JANELLE SAFFIN:** I lost all my files.

**Mr DEBUS:** I should advise the Hon. Janelle Saffin that you do not put your files in them. You put in them things that you no longer want. But no doubt the Hon. Janelle Saffin has made her contribution to the 475 per cent increase in office paper that has been recycled.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** Almost single-handedly!

**Mr DEBUS:** In the last two months, instead of recycling 3.2 tonnes, as we think we have been doing in the past, it has gone up to 15.2 tonnes. Collection of glass bottles is up 32 per cent. Our calculation is that the number of bins that are taken away from Parliament House, eventually to end up in landfill, has fallen by 55 per cent. That is a most astonishing achievement.

**CHAIR:** What proportion of tossers were cigarette butt tossers?

**Mr DEBUS:** A lot!

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**

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