

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT

At Sydney on Friday 7 September 2012

The Committee met at 11.00 a.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. R. L. Brown (Chair)
The Hon. R. H. Colless
The Hon. C. Faehrmann
The Hon. L. A. Foley
The Hon. S. MacDonald
The Hon. Dr P. R. Phelps
The Hon. P. T. Primrose

CHAIR: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this public hearing of the inquiry into public land management by General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5. The inquiry is examining a range of issues regarding the operational, economic, social and environmental impacts of converting Crown land, State forests and agricultural land into national parks estate and other matters.

I acknowledge the Gadigal clan of the Eora Nation who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders, past and present, of the Eora Nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal persons present.

Today's hearing is our first public hearing in Sydney. We will hear from a number of key government agencies, including the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forests NSW and Game Council NSW. In addition to today's hearing, the Committee will hold two more public hearings at Parliament House and other public hearings in Bourke, Coonabarabran, Port Macquarie and Grafton. The details of those hearings are on the Committee's website.

Before we commence, I will briefly explain the procedures for today's hearing. Copies of the Committee's broadcasting guidelines are available from the Committee staff at the side table. Under these guidelines, whilst members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I also remind media representatives that you must take responsibility for what you publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside their evidence of the hearing and I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others before they start or after they complete your evidence, as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take an action for defamation, for example.

Witnesses are advised that any messages should be delivered to the Committee members through the Committee staff. Witnesses only have to make a request if they wish to table documents. A full transcript of what is said during today's hearing will be prepared by our Hansard reporters. The transcript will be available on the Committee's website in the next few days. I would ask Committee members and witnesses when they wish to speak to press the button on the microphone and when finished to turn it off. Everyone, including the people in the public gallery, should turn off mobile phones. The mobile telephones can interfere with the recording equipment. We will now proceed and I welcome our first witnesses.

MELINDA JANE MURRAY, Acting Director, Conservation Programs, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, and

TERRENCE GERARD BAILEY, Director Coastal, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, sworn and examined:

ROBERT JAMES CONROY, Acting Deputy Chief Executive, Office of Environment and Heritage and Acting Head, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, and

MARK PEACOCK, Director Western, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, and

ROSS WILLIAM MCDONNELL, Regional Manager, Western Rivers, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, and

MICHAEL NEVILLE MAXWELL HOOD, Manager Forestry Operations Policy and Programs, NSW Environment Protection Authority, formerly of the Office of Environment and Heritage, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Before we move on to questions from the Committee members, Mr Conroy, would you, or any of your staff, like to make an opening statement?

Mr CONROY: I would like to make an opening statement. Firstly, I thank the Committee for the opportunity to present today. As the Committee is aware, a whole-of-government submission is being provided by the New South Wales Government addressing the terms of reference. The National Parks and Wildlife Service, which is part of the Office of Environment and Heritage, contributed to the development of that submission. The National Parks and Wildlife Service also hosted the Committee's visit to Yanga National Park and will be providing similar assistance to the Committee when it visits Toorale National Park near Bourke and the planned site visit in the Pilliga and also around Port Macquarie.

Firstly, I would like to provide a brief introduction to the national parks system in New South Wales and to the management activities of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Following that, we would be happy to answer questions from the Committee regarding these and other matters. I point out that the National Parks staff present today cover a range of areas, including the management of national parks in western New South Wales and along the coast, pest and weed programs, fire management and reserve planning and establishment. We are also joined today by Mr Michael Hood from the Environment Protection Authority. Mr Hood was previously with the Office of Environment and Heritage during the river red gum assessment process and has a continuing role with the Environment Protection Authority in the regulation of forestry operations in this area.

The New South Wales national parks system has developed steadily over a period of more than 130 years. Our first park was the Royal National Park on the southern edge of Sydney and it was also the second national park established in the world in 1879. However, some reserves, such as the Wombeyan caves and Jenolan caves were protected well before that. The National Parks and Wildlife Service was formed in 1967 and brought together the management of a range of parks and reserves, wildlife and native plant protection and in 1969 Aboriginal site protection under the one coordinated professional arrangement. Like most other Australian and comparable international jurisdictions, the New South Wales national park system experienced particular growth from the 1970s onwards, as scientific and community understanding of various environmental issues expanded.

During this period the processes underpinning the planning and assessment of national parks has gone through a dramatic transformation. All Australian jurisdictions now work collaboratively to develop the national reserve system, applying the accepted scientific principles of comprehensiveness, representativeness and adequacy. In plain terms, the guiding aim is to ensure that an appropriate sample of all ecosystems is securely protected into the future and is well managed. The New South Wales national parks system now includes 863 parks and reserves, and protects just over seven million hectares, or around 8.8 per cent of the State. Compared to other Australian jurisdictions, New South Wales lies at seventh out of eight in the proportion of land within the national parks system, and fifth in the total area protected.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is continuing to work on the development of the national parks system consistent with the Government's commitments as reflected in NSW 2021. The national parks system serves two primary purposes, one of which is conservation. Land within the national parks and wildlife

system includes some of the most valuable habitats for our native plants and animals, it contains representatives of 81 per cent of New South Wales plant species and 88 per cent of New South Wales animal species. In fact, nearly one-quarter of all recorded threatened plant and animal species are found on parks and reserves. The parks system protects landscapes and sites of outstanding value to the New South Wales community, including World Heritage listed areas, internationally significant wetlands, ancient rainforests, all of the State's alpine areas, all of the State's wilderness areas, and extremely important geological features such as lunettes, cavernous karst, fossil sites, lava caves, periglacial features and some of the State's tallest waterfalls.

It also contains a huge variety of Aboriginal and historic heritage sites ranging from exceptional Aboriginal rock art, carved and scarred trees, and middens through to historic walking tracks, lighthouses, jails, homesteads and shearers' quarters, a quarantine station, military barracks, forts and fortifications, historic mining villages and various other convict structures, to name a few. The other fundamental purpose of the national parks system is to foster public appreciation and enjoyment of nature and heritage, including through sustainable tourism and visitor opportunities. The New South Wales national parks system is a major visitor destination receiving more than 34 million domestic visits each year and attracting significant international tourism.

While it is true that the most popular parks tend to be those around the Sydney Basin and in the alpine areas, the National Parks and Wildlife Service is working very hard with tourism and business stakeholders across New South Wales to promote rural and regional destinations and provide facilities that attract people to those parks. For example, the Committee would be aware that the New South Wales submission touches on some of these initiatives for the selected case studies, such as the investments under the River Red Gum Nature Tourism Action Plan and the three-year campaign partnership between the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Destination NSW and Inland Tourism to promote western New South Wales and the Australian Government's National Landscapes Program.

The national parks system contains a great variety of visitor assets. There are more than 2,500 kilometres of dedicated walking tracks; there is an additional 40,000 kilometres of trail on parks and reserves that are available for a mixture of bushwalking, mountain biking, horse riding and four-wheel driving; there are over 800 picnic sites and more than 660 lookouts on parks and reserves; and there are more than 470 camp grounds providing over 5,000 camping sites on parks and reserves. Consistent with the Government's aim of getting more people into parks to enjoy the outdoors and promote healthy lifestyles, the National Parks and Wildlife Service is actively looking to improve the range of options available to people. For example, we have been working with horse riding and four-wheel drive peak groups to identify areas where new opportunities can be provided and where existing facilities can be improved or better promoted.

We are also about to commence work on a stocktake of recreational fishing experiences currently available in parks and any constraints that may be affecting community access. The national parks system already offers a lot in this area but we know there is more we can do to work with the fishing community to improve its access and experience. In all our planning to improve community access, the National Parks and Wildlife Service works closely with other public land managers to try to provide the best opportunities across a whole area or region. This approach has worked well already with the Bicentennial National Trail for horseriding and for mountain bike initiatives.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Forests and Crown Lands are also working closely together with four-wheel drive groups on an iconic trails project. Management of the national parks system is a significant undertaking. As I mentioned earlier, we are responsible also for looking after almost 9 per cent of the State, including some of the most outstanding places of natural and cultural value. I should like to provide a quick snapshot of some of the management arrangements we have in place currently. The National Parks and Wildlife Service employs around 1,750 equivalent full-time staff. Around 70 per cent of all those positions are located outside the metropolitan area. A further 24 per cent are based in metropolitan park offices, largely on the urban fringes of western, southern and northern Sydney. We have an advisory council and 14 regional advisory committees that contribute to the development of plans of management and national parks and wildlife policies.

The parks service is particularly proud of its record in engaging Aboriginal people in operational management of the park system. Almost 10 per cent of the total parks workforce consists of Aboriginal identified positions and additional Aboriginal staff also are employed in non-identified positions. As noted in the New South Wales submission, the parks service also sponsors a range of training and business development programs supporting Aboriginal employment. In addition, almost 25 per cent of the national parks system is under some form of joint management arrangement with Aboriginal communities. The New South Wales

submission provides a succinct summary of the National Parks' activities in the key areas of fire, pest and weed management. These land activities are of the highest order priority in ongoing management of our parks and reserves.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service invests significant time and effort in working with other agencies and land managers, including private landholders, to tackle these threats. In bushfire management, National Parks is in a new phase of renewed hazard reduction effort. Specific enhancement funding of \$62 million over five years will double our firefighting efforts heading towards an overall target of 135,000 hectares of National Parks land treated on average each year. For pests and weeds National Parks shortly will be rolling out and implementing the new five-year regional pest management strategies covering all parks and reserves across New South Wales. These new strategies have been developed with extensive community input and will focus on cross-boundary programs that benefit both park management and adjoining neighbours.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is committed to delivering on the Government's objectives to continue building the national parks system, improving its management and making sure that the community gets the best value out of the asset. We intend to review the National Parks Establishment Plan, which is now halfway through its intended life span, to make sure that the future directions it has set remain accurate. We will also revise our reserve establishment guidelines, which provide the detailed guidance on how new national park proposals are assessed and prioritised.

A key area we intend to focus on will be enhancing consideration given to social and economic factors, including the implications for local communities and councils. This will build on the efforts we have already started to take over the last several years to gather and assess a greater range of information regarding the status of a property before any decision is made to acquire or reserve it. I understand the Committee has had a number of submissions regarding the effect of new parks on council rates.

For the case studies dealing with Toorale and Yanga, the New South Wales submission provides information regarding the particular impacts on council rates and overall council revenue. While the impacts in those two instances were less than 0.5 per cent of any council's total revenue base, the National Parks and Wildlife Service recognises that any losses may strain the ability of councils to deliver local services. As part of the review of the current systems we intend to particularly look at issues regarding the effects of national parks on local government.

In conclusion, I again thank the Committee for its time today. While we are quite proud of our achievements to date we recognise there are still some areas where we could improve our management and better deliver on the Government's priorities as outlined within NSW 2021. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have or provide further information after today if necessary.

CHAIR: Thank you. That was a very good opening statement. I remind members of the Committee that if they wish to ask questions that relate to any of the information that was provided earlier today they probably need to re-ask the question for the *Hansard* record for the National Parks panel to answer, given that the Minister may not agree to publish all of the information that was provided. With that in mind and given that you have advised the Committee that you are in the process of revising your acquisition policies and specifically the guidelines you use, and I assume you are aware that this State Government and the previous State Government held two independent scientific reviews of the marine parks establishment, would you see any benefit to your department in looking at the review of the guidelines in having the State Government set up an independent scientific review to go over what was established at the time, the tools that were used at the time and those that are available to you now and perhaps make some suggestions in that regard?

Mr CONROY: Any specialist advice that we are able to get in relation to the review of the establishment plan and the reserve establishment guidelines would be appreciated.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you for your presentation this morning. You will be aware that one of our terms of reference relates to sustainable use models. In Deniliquin we heard from a gentleman named Max Rheese who is part of an organisation called the Australian Environment Foundation. Mr Rheese suggested that the model that National Parks has for determining in which category something is reserved, for example national park and nature reserve, is in his words very twentieth century because sustainable use is excluded in the majority of land reservation decisions. He suggested that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature [IUCN] sustainable use model, which is the category we heard about this morning, should be used in more national parks. I believe that is what he may have been saying. I am not sure who can

answer this: What is the difference between that IUCN category of sustainable use and categories 1 and 2 of national parks that you were talking about earlier?

Mr CONROY: I will refer that to Melinda.

Ms MURRAY: Earlier today we talked about the six IUCN categories. Under early criteria in the 1997 guidelines only categories 1 to 4 formed part of the national reserve system that was tracked by the Commonwealth. Categories 5 and 6 are now part of the national reserve system. They do not feature very prominently. There was a slide that had statistics comparing New South Wales and other States in terms of how much they used IUCN categories 1 to 4 compared with categories 5 and 6. The overriding principle behind the IUCN categories is using land predominantly for the purposes of conservation. IUCN categories 5 and 6 do not feature predominantly in the national parks categorisation. They are predominantly used for other types of protected areas, mostly Indigenous protected areas which have a broader range of uses that might be allowed. They are obviously unconstrained by the objectives and the management principles in the national parks legislation.

IUCN category 6 can be used where there are very small portions of an area that might be used in some sustainable way but the IUCN category does emphasise that it is a very small area and it still has to form the predominant conservation purposes. Traditionally, the public protected area system falls within categories 1 to 4. Indeed, the Commonwealth funding model that it provides for the support of land purchases to add to the national reserve system applies only to land that falls within IUCN categories 1 to 4. If other agencies were looking at adding land that fits within IUCN categories 5 or 6 there would be no Commonwealth funding available to leverage towards that purchase.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Would you agree that the development of the IUCN sustainable use category came largely from the need to get some protected areas used sustainably, largely by Indigenous populations globally? Is that where it came from politically within the IUCN?

Ms MURRAY: That is my understanding. It is a feature in developing countries where Indigenous communities might be living on parks, for example, and essentially living in that protected area as well. If you look at the slide in our earlier presentation that compared the States, the States that have a larger proportion of Indigenous protected areas have a larger proportion of IUCN categories 5 and 6 land in the reserve system in their States.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Is that possibly because politically that really is the only way to get those nations protecting the areas where those people essentially live off the land?

Ms MURRAY: I have not seen a comparative of worldwide data of other countries but that is my understanding of the genesis of that category.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: In this morning's presentation, and I think Mr Conroy may have just mentioned it, you suggested that a review is being undertaken of the National Parks Establishment Plan. It was mentioned that that review would place greater emphasis on corridors and resilience. Does that mean a directive has been issued internally that national park acquisition over the next 10 years is to be less of a focus? My understanding of the 2008 document is that that is not the case and that national park acquisition is still a key focus. Is it correct to suggest there might be a slight change of focus over the next five years within National Parks?

Mr CONROY: There has been no change in internal direction or focus. The National Parks Establishment Plan still guides our acquisition program. It is quite clear from political positioning that some of the acquisitions have caused concern from local government and communities in western New South Wales. That is a prompt to review the current reserve establishment guidelines that we use in order to address the social and economic impacts of establishing new parks: primarily to see whether we can do it better.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Mr Conroy, thank you for this morning's presentation. It was very informative. I would like to turn to something completely different; I am not sure if you are the right person to ask. Would you be able to assist the Committee regarding the role the Office of Environment and Heritage [OEH] or the Environment Protection Authority [EPA] play in the logging of State forests? Is that your bailiwick or not?

Mr CONROY: A little bit. I will refer that to Mr Hood to answer.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Mr Hood, this inquiry is looking at public lands generally in our State. Could you provide us with information on the role that the Office of Environment and Heritage and/or the Environment Protection Authority play in the regulation of forestry activities in New South Wales State forests?

Mr HOOD: The Environment Protection Authority is responsible for regulating forestry activities both in State forests and on private land in New South Wales under two different pieces of legislation or two different frameworks. In relation to State forests we are responsible for overseeing compliance with the integrated forestry operations approvals, which is the primary regulatory instrument that regulates Forests NSW and contractors on that tenure. That is a general introduction as to our role. The Office of Environment and Heritage does not have a formal role in that area. The Environment Protection Authority is largely responsible. NSW Fisheries are responsible for the fisheries licence part of the integrated forestry operations approvals.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What resources are available to the Environment Protection Authority to get out on the ground and inspect Forests NSW activities to ensure the extensive provisions of relevant integrated forestry operations approvals are adhered to?

Mr HOOD: I do not have the numbers at my fingertips. We have a team largely based in Sydney, our Crown forestry operations team, who do the on-the-ground audits and respond to allegations from third parties. We have a proactive audit program that is forward planned as well as responding to allegations made by members of the public who have an interest in what goes on in State forests. There is a team of six or seven people based in Sydney who do those on the ground audits and they are supported by other staff in the section I manage, which is the forest policy and programs area. We do the policy setting and provide the strategic oversight of the compliance program.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: One of the terms of reference of this inquiry is to look at the north-east forests of the State. When you talked of third parties, I assume you are aware of the regular interest that the North East Forest Alliance takes in these matters?

Mr HOOD: Yes, I am. We receive regular correspondence, we are talking to them regularly and we meet them from time to time. They are a significant stakeholder for us.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Could you take on notice a request to provide the Committee with information on the number of people and the resources that the Environment Protection Authority commits to working with Forests NSW and inspecting those forestry activities in New South Wales public forests?

Mr HOOD: I will take that on notice. I will add that we draw on some of the other resources in our private native forestry team from time to time to help us with operations on State forests.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Any information you have would be appreciated.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Just one question but it might be slightly large so please take it on notice. I am interested in statistics. How would you respond to suggestions that the establishment of the river red gum reserves and the cessation of logging, and especially environmental thinning, has damaged the long-term protection of the forest and also, coincidentally, destroyed the local economy?

Mr CONROY: We might take that on notice.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Ladies and gentlemen, the Natural Resources Commission report for the river red gum area contained a series of recommendations. Can you tell us how those recommendations varied from the final implementation of the river red gum areas?

Mr CONROY: I might defer to Mr Hood for that question.

Mr HOOD: I have a copy of a document that is available on the New South Wales Government's river red gums website entitled "Government Response to the Natural Resources Commission's Riverina Bioregion Regional Forest Assessment River Red Gums and Woodland Forests" and dated April 2010. It was prepared as a formal response to the recommendations of the Natural Resources Commission. It sets out in detail the

responses to each of the individual recommendations. Do you want me to talk further to a particular recommendation?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I wanted a summary of what the final model looked like compared to what the Natural Resources Commission recommended.

Mr HOOD: Without going through it in a lot of detail, my recollection is that the recommendations were nearly all accepted. Some of them were supported in principle with some activities to continue afterwards. There was differentiation early on. There was a recommendation around water rules. There is a recommendation about reforming carry forward rules to allow accumulation of environmental water year on year and delivery of water in line with floodplain forest ecosystem requirements. This recommendation was not accepted by the Government at the time. Do you want me to explain why?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What about recommendations three and four?

Mr HOOD: The implementation of forest management principles and trial of ecological thinning on a large scale: In terms of the formal Government response, they were all supported and my understanding is—someone else can probably talk to this in more detail—that a trial of ecological thinning has commenced within the new national parks.

Mr CONROY: I can add to that. Ecological thinning will be a feature of adaptive management of the river red gum forests in national parks. A joint New South Wales-Victoria ecological scientific thinning design trial has been prepared, reviewed and endorsed by the joint New South Wales-Victoria Scientific Advisory Committee, and an ecological thinning trial site was established in the Murray Valley National Park to test and demonstrate to contractors the type of thinning actions required so they may then tender for the trial project to be undertaken.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you tell the Committee at what cost to Government that trial is being done and what happens to the product that is taken out as a result of that thinning?

Mr CONROY: I will defer to Mark Peacock to answer those questions.

Mr PEACOCK: As part of the Government's package for the river red gum there was approximately \$3.5 million allocated for adaptive management and a component of that includes the ecological thinning.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you be more specific about how much that was?

Mr PEACOCK: I would have to take on notice what component of the \$3.5 million relates to ecological thinning.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Could I ask a question about the purchase of the property Thelangerin? It is probably not completed yet but contracts have been exchanged, is that correct?

Ms MURRAY: That sale has been completed and contracts settled.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you tell us what the sale price was and how the sale price was arrived at?

Ms MURRAY: I do not have the sale price at my fingertips. I can take that on notice and get back to you. In terms of how the price is derived, there is always an independent valuation through the State Valuation Office. Their panel of contracted property valuers prepare a report about the market value of a property. That could be expressed in a range of prices. When we negotiate as a government agency we do make a commitment to paying a fair market value for a property, so we would be guided by the range in that property valuation.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Does the National Parks ever come to an agreement with the seller of a property to pay above market value?

Ms MURRAY: In terms of our policy on market value, we would look at the extent to which it might not take account of any special values. That is the valuation term for things that relate to other values, for example, the natural and cultural values, or the rarity of that offer that might not be reflected strictly on an

analysis of comparative sales. Our policy is that we would pay up to 10 per cent above market value if—only if—there were special values associated with that property. That is rare for us to go above the market value in the independent valuer's report, but it will occur on special occasions.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Ms Murray, firstly, in the presentation earlier this morning we covered a little bit on discussions and working with the resources department. You said State conservation areas were generally committed to exploring for minerals. You did not mention what the policy was about production. Secondly, part of the question is I got the impression—you can tell me if I am wrong—that a lot of that policy was developed in 2007-08, pre coal seam gas. Considering the small environmental impact of coal seam gas, does that change your thinking about the resources?

Ms MURRAY: Firstly, in relation to the production aspect of your question, the State conservation area reserve category allows for exploration and production activities with the approval of the Minister for the Environment, and the Minister for Heritage after the appropriate planning assessment has occurred.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: If those approvals are forthcoming, you do not have an issue with them regarding policy?

Ms MURRAY: Legally, that activity would be permissible within the State conservation area reserve category.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: My second question is about acquisitions and the people who potentially have third party impacts. I am thinking of the Gwydir wetlands now that there are significant Ramsar sites and significant amounts of environmental water going down there. We seem to have a problem with third party impacts of adjoining property landholders. I did not hear that that was a consideration in your future acquisitions, an adjoining land holder frequently getting inundations, crop losses, and this sort of thing. Is that something you would consider in your acquisitions?

Ms MURRAY: My understanding is that there are ongoing discussions about environmental water planning in the Gwydir area. The area is obviously a flood plain, and properties—including park areas and off park areas—are affected by flooding. The environmental watering decisions are made by people other than National Parks and we are essentially a recipient of environmental water, so it would be considered by decision-makers directing environmental water.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Obviously the Commonwealth water holder has a lot more water now and we are going to see a lot more water going down these systems. Is that changing your thinking?

CHAIR: The Hon. Scot MacDonald, were you referring to the acquisition policy?

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Yes.

Ms MURRAY: In terms of acquisition of water, that is really something that we are becoming less involved in as the National Parks and Wildlife Service, given the amount of water-sharing plans that now apply to the State. In our earlier discussions, we mentioned the fact that water and land are separated, meaning that owners of land who wish to sell to National Parks independently and separately sell their water entitlement.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I appreciate what you are saying about the water, there is no argument, but I did mean the adjoining land.

Ms MURRAY: In terms of our land acquisition policy, we would be focusing more on ensuring that that the boundary of the park also includes mechanisms or infrastructure involved in delivering water to a park to protect its assets. That is something that we would be assessing. I know also in the development of the reserve establishment guidelines update, we are particularly looking at putting more information into the guidelines about how we deal with environmental water-related asset infrastructure issues in part of those guidelines.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You said currently 9 per cent of lands in New South Wales are under reserve. From the Office of Environment and Heritage's point of view, what would be the optimal amount of land reserved in New South Wales?

Ms MURRAY: Earlier we indicated there is no hectare target. We also know that within different parts of the State there would be no chance of actually achieving the comprehensive adequate and representative targets that are set by the Commonwealth for certain bioregions or subregions. For example, we know that the South Western Slopes Bioregion has been cleared over 80 per cent and, therefore, to achieve a target of 15 per cent, which has been used by various Commonwealth planning bodies in the past and at an international level, that target has been extended at international level to guide a target of 17 per cent, and that is for public and private land.

We know that there are some parts of the State that will never achieve that target. Longer term, looking at how the reserve system would grow beyond its current 8.83 per cent, it is growing very slowly, and it is something that, in 50 to 100 years time, I do not think you would see it anywhere near those 15 per cent targets because there are a number of bioregions where that target is just impossible. In bioregions which are already meeting comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness targets, the imperative for park acquisition is more focused on finetuning and park management additions that tend to be very small in holdings or perimeter additions.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Excluding those where you cannot reach the 80 per cent target, how much more land would you then require to meet the 80 per cent target in those bioregions where you could acquire those significant ecosystems?

Ms MURRAY: I do not have a specific hectare target on that. We can take that on notice and provide some further explanation.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You are aware that 44 per cent of the land area of Tasmania is currently in some form of reserve or another. Would you consider that to be an appropriate level of land reservation for New South Wales?

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Why not, Peter? Why not?

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: The welfare State.

Ms MURRAY: I do not think there is any chance of New South Wales looking at the mix of land uses and our objectives in park establishment to be reaching a target like that. In Tasmania, the geographic constraints of that land would be a logical explanation for why parts of it are in the park reserve system.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: So if not 44, maybe 34 per cent?

Ms MURRAY: No, I would be going a lot lower.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Okay. Nevertheless, that is getting closer to my answer. If it is lower than 34 per cent, what is the amount?

Ms MURRAY: As I said, the target from an international perspective would be 15 per cent or 17 per cent and that is for public and private land.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Just in relation to private land, does that mean land which is effectively in its natural state because of native vegetation laws or does it have to be specifically reserved?

Ms MURRAY: The private land that is covered through the protected area network would be subject to a voluntary conservation agreement, for example. It would be a decision of a landholder in terms of how they would choose to manage that land. A number of properties would be Indigenous-protected areas, for example, which would be managed by Aboriginal communities for their natural and cultural values.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Is payment made to the landholder for entering into a voluntary conservation agreement?

Ms MURRAY: There is no payment made at the time the agreement is entered into. I am aware that some non-government organisations run grant programs through funds from the Environmental Trust for small-scale conservation projects on that land. There would also be through funding agreements for Indigenous

protected areas, which is a Commonwealth program under the funding agreement with the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth may provide funds for management of that land as an Indigenous protected area.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: For example, if a farmer had a large proportion of his or her land which was not able to be cleared for agricultural purposes because of native vegetation laws they could enter into an agreement but they would not receive any compensation from the Government for entering into that agreement although they may get it from third parties?

Ms MURRAY: My understanding was that the Nature Conservation Trust did run a program that was linked to the native vegetation laws some years in the past. That related to purchasing certain lands but as a general principle there is not funding provided for the purchase of land linked to native vegetation laws.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Mr Conroy, would you agree that in some instances in the past the reservation of land has been done more for political purposes rather than for environmental purposes?

Mr CONROY: I will take that question on notice.

CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Phelps, your time has expired. Ms Faehrmann.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Hood, why is it that Forests NSW seems to be so non-compliant and is continually found to be breaching its threatened species licence conditions?

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Mr Chair, is that question in order?

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, it is. It is about public lands management.

CHAIR: Yes, I rule the question in order.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Hood?

Mr HOOD: I think I would like to take that question on notice.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I know that the Hon. Luke Foley talked before about resources. It seems that the Environment Protection Authority relies a fair bit on conservationists on the ground spotting breaches of Forests NSW licences. Do you think there is a problem with the amount of resources the Environment Protection Authority has to undertake spot checks on Forests NSW operations?

Mr HOOD: I would note that our resources have increased in the past 12 months in terms of the amount of resources we have on the ground. There is obviously a network of enthusiastic community members who spend a lot of time in the forests reviewing the activities of Forests NSW against the licence and drawing their conclusions about how compliant or not they might be in any particular case. We are putting a lot of work into getting a strategic forward program of auditing, so I guess there is always a balance of responding to community complaints and trying to get out and do our own proactive audit program.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Can I raise World Heritage? Could you update us on where the process is up to for nomination of additional areas to the Gondwana rainforests of Australia?

Mr CONROY: I will refer that question to Mr Bailey.

Mr BAILEY: The World Heritage nomination process is actually conducted by the Federal Government. For all World Heritage nominations under the intergovernmental agreement, it is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government to proceed with World Heritage nominations where they involve serial properties over multiple States, which is the case in the Gondwana instance. There was a tentative list submission put in by the Federal Government a couple of years ago, so that has been put to the World Heritage Centre and it sits on the tentative list. It then awaits the procedure through the intergovernmental agreement for the Commonwealth to lead on.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: For a formal nomination?

Mr BAILEY: For the preparation of the nomination, yes. Because it crosses State boundaries, under the intergovernmental agreement the Federal Government leads.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Do you have any idea what time frame we might be looking at for a formal nomination?

Mr BAILEY: We do not have a time frame out of the Commonwealth Government. My understanding is that they are working very hard on a couple of other World Heritage nominations that have higher priority.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: In the Government's submission on page 3, "Economic assessments", it says, "Planning for new national parks should take account of the potential economic impacts, both positive and negative, that may accrue to local communities, business and local government." Has that in fact occurred in the case of, say, Yanga and the red gum Millewa and Toorale?

Mr CONROY: In general terms, yes it has. We do our best to ensure that when we purchase goods and services locally that it is done locally.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Are those documents available anywhere?

Mr CONROY: I can table a document that is a review of some of the regional economic impacts that the establishment of national parks have had on regional communities. I am able to table that document for the Committee, with the approval of the Chair.

Document tabled.

We are also working on a longitudinal study of the impact of establishing national parks and reserves over the last 10 years, particularly the impact on local government. That work has been completed and it is being peer reviewed at the moment. Once that is finalised I would be happy to make a copy of that available to the Committee for its information as well.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I draw your attention specifically to Single National Park between Guyra and Inverell. One of the landholders adjoining that park lost the fences in the 2002 fire. I believe that matter still has not been resolved so we are talking 10 years that a boundary dispute has gone on for. Do you think 10 years is satisfactory?

Mr PEACOCK: I cannot be sure about the particular circumstances but I am aware of one case where there have been protracted negotiations. In that circumstance we have been working with the neighbour. We have a good neighbour policy and it has provisions in relation to boundary fencing. Typically what we do is we would provide the materials for a boundary fence, either a new boundary fence or a replacement boundary fence, and the neighbour would put that fence up. Typically that balances out at around a 50:50 contribution. In a particular circumstance—and it may be the one that you have referred to—the neighbour has not been prepared to enter into that agreement.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr MacDonald. You may wish to put further questions on notice, Dr Phelps.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Returning to the issue of political parks, is it the case that Bomaderry Creek Regional Park was created not on the recommendation of the National Parks and Wildlife Service but because it was deemed to be a political fix at the time?

Mr CONROY: In relation to that question and the previous question, I can say that the establishment of all national parks and reserves across New South Wales is always with the approval of the Minister of the day and it is the Minister of the day who makes that decision. It is really a question that should be put to the Minister.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I note that some regions are approaching 100 per cent—alpine is at 100 per cent and others are well over 90 per cent. In circumstances like that, when a bioregion is full, why would you seek to acquire additional large-scale national parks? For example, if you have a bioregion already well over 90 per cent, why is the creation of Dharawal a necessary component?

Ms MURRAY: In relation to the 80 per cent target, this is sampling of the different kinds of ecosystems. While 80 per cent is an aim, it is still only four in five ecosystems of that type within the bioregion. There can be reasons to continue beyond 80 per cent where, for example, there might be finetuning of boundaries. Some of the slides discussed earlier today in relation to improving the shape or configuration of a park demonstrate that. There might be access issues relating to fire, pest or weed management that are aided by a further addition for park management purposes.

In relation to Dharawal National Park, the Government decision to recategorise land will take account of a desire on its part and within the community for a higher level of protection that is signified through using a different reserve category. The creation of Dharawal National Park signifies that the Government has responded to community interest in seeing that protected. It is moving from one reserve category to another. While the management principles behind those reserve categories are similar, they are also different. The legal set of rules that would apply to a national park are different from those that would apply to a State conservation area.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You have reserve establishment guidelines. Do you have reserve revocation guidelines?

Ms MURRAY: We have a disposal of land policy that covers part 11 land.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But that is not land that has already been reserved.

Ms MURRAY: That is right. We also have revocation guidelines that look at the circumstances where it is appropriate to revoke lands from a park. That may be linked to boundary description errors or major public infrastructure projects. A bill that has been passed by Parliament this session relates to the Pacific Highway upgrade. As a result of the configuration of the highway, there were some small revocations from a park. Our policy would be that where the revocation is for that type of reason an appropriate offset would be provided so that the net impact on the park system would be negated.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But is it fair to say that since 1967 not one park has been revoked in total or substantially?

Ms MURRAY: I will take on notice the question as it relates to the area of parks revoked under legislation.

CHAIR: Mr Conroy, thank you for agreeing to appear before the Committee today with your team. Any questions taken on notice should be responded to with 21 days.

(The witnesses withdrew)

RENATA BROOKS, Acting Director General, Catchments and Lands, Department of Primary Industries, and

MARK MATCHETT, Director, Strategy and Management, Catchments and Lands, Department of Primary Industries, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Prior to proceeding with questions from the Committee, would you care to make an opening statement?

Ms BROOKS: I understand that the Committee will be hearing from my colleagues at Forests NSW and Biosecurity NSW later today. I will make some opening comments about the broader Department of Primary Industries to provide some context. The New South Wales Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services, known as NSW Trade and Investment, drives sustainable economic growth across the State. This is done by working with and supporting a wide range of businesses and industries to advance investment, innovation, activity and improvements. The Department of Primary Industries sits within Trade and Investment and includes the following divisions that play a role in land management: Catchments and Lands—which I head up; Forests NSW—a statutory authority; and Biosecurity NSW. Other authorities within the departmental portfolio with significant responsibility for the management of public land or the management of activities on public land include the Sydney Catchment Authority, the State Water Corporation, the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation, the Lake Illawarra Authority and the catchment management authorities. The Livestock Health and Pest Authorities and the NSW Game Council also fall within the Department of Primary Industries portfolio and have a land management role but are not part of the department.

The Department of Primary Industries corporate plan includes the following key result areas: competitive primary industries operating a positive business environment; natural resources sustainably managed; Crown lands developed and communities strengthened; safe, healthy and biosecure primary industries; and excellence in client service and delivery. The current departmental structure and close linkages to other land management bodies provide a greater opportunity than has existed in the past to look across tenures and to build working relationships between agencies that share common interests relevant to land management. All NSW Trade and Investment public land managers operate in a manner designed to meet economic, social and environmental objectives and to achieve sustainable use. A variety of tools is used to formally implement and evaluate frameworks to achieve these outcomes. They include but are not limited to ecologically sustainable forest management plans used by Forests NSW, plans of management established for Crown reserves and catchment action plans, which establish regional natural resource management priorities across all land tenures.

Forests NSW is a public trading enterprise within the Department of Primary Industries. It sustainably manages more than two million hectares of native and planted forests for a wide range of economic, environmental and social values to internationally recognised standards. Forests NSW manages its estate under the principles of ecologically sustainable forest management. Each region, including planted forest regions, has a specifically tailored ecologically sustainable forest management plan. Forests NSW manages New South Wales public forests, both plantation and native forests, for the environmental, economic and social benefit of the people of New South Wales. As members are aware, the Minister for Primary Industries has announced that Forests NSW will move from being a public trading enterprise to being a state-owned corporation.

The catchment management authorities: Thirteen catchment management authorities were established in New South Wales in January 2004 with boards that report directly to the Minister for Primary Industries. The specific functions of catchment management authorities, as described in section 15 of the Catchment Management Authorities Act, are to develop catchment action plans and ensure delivery through annual implementation programs; provide loans, grants, subsidies or other financial assistance for catchment activities; enter contracts or do any work for the purposes of catchment activities; assist landholders to achieve the objectives of the catchment action plan; provide educational and training courses and materials in connection with natural resource management; and exercise any other function relating to natural resource management as described by the regulations.

The catchment action plans are the statutory non-regulatory plans developed under that Act and they are developed in conjunction with their local communities and government agency partners. They are the key plans that guide natural resource management activities across New South Wales and spatially identify priority areas and assets. They work to identify key threats and opportunities, to mitigate them and use best available scientific information. This helps build opportunities across tenures. Catchment management authorities are

currently working with their local communities and other partners to upgrade their existing catchment action plans.

Biosecurity NSW: The purpose of Biosecurity NSW is to manage risks to the economy, the environment and the community from pests and diseases, invasive plants and animals and chemical contaminants. The role of Biosecurity NSW includes leading the development and implementation of State and national biosecurity and animal welfare policy; developing and enforcing supporting legislation; managing systems for emergency preparedness, prevention response and recovery arising from biosecurity threats and natural disasters; undertaking or coordinating surveillance and tracing; and providing an effective and dynamic research capability.

A draft biosecurity strategy is in development and describes how the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and other partners such as the Department of Environment and Heritage and the NSW Food Authority, NSW Health, Livestock Health and Pest Authorities, primary producers and the general public can manage biosecurity threats across New South Wales. Biological threats and challenges include both land-based and aquatic plant and animal diseases, pest animals, insects and weeds. The annual impact of pests and weeds on primary production is in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Pests and weeds are also among the biggest threats to the survival of Australia's native plants and animals and are widely distributed on both public and private land across the continent. The legislative framework for pest management cuts across a series of statutes including the Rural Lands Protection Act, the Noxious Weeds Act, the Pesticides Act, the Game and Feral Animal Control Act and the Threatened Species Conservation Act.

In terms of Crown lands, which I guess is my area in terms of questioning—my colleagues will answer questions on the other areas—I have got a little bit of information here about how that all works. The terms "Crown land" or "land of the Crown" are sometimes used in a generic sense to mean all land owned by the State of New South Wales. In the context of today's hearing I will use the term to refer to land managed under the Crown Lands Act, the Crown Lands (Continued Tenures) Act, the Commons Management Act, the Western Lands Act and the Crown Roads Act. There is also the School of Arts and the Trustees of School of Arts Enabling Act. These are the pieces of legislation that are administered by the Crown Lands Division of the Department of Primary Industries.

Reserved and dedicated Crown land is public land in a commonly understood sense in that the land is generally available for the use and enjoyment of the whole community. Some forms of Crown land are occupied under tenure and in many cases the tenure holder has the right to exclusive occupation and use of the land. Many tenures, particularly in the Western Division of the State, are held in perpetuity as a form of tradeable land title and, hence, also represent a significant private property right. Reserved Crown land is managed under a number of administrative arrangements that include community-based reserve trusts, local government as the trust manager, Livestock Health and Pest Authorities in the case of travelling stock reserves, and Crown Lands Division staff.

Crown land under the Crown Lands Act must be managed in accordance with the principles of Crown land management, which are in the Act at section 11. These are, broadly, environmental protection, natural resource conservation, sustainable land and resource management, public use and enjoyment, multiple use and the best interests of the State, consistent with the other principles. The Crown lands estate is constantly changing as tenures and reserves are granted and revoked and land is acquired and disposed of or granted following successful Aboriginal land claims. I might leave it at that. I have got further information.

CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Brooks, that was an excellent introduction. Would I be right in saying that your department—in fact, by orders of magnitude—is the largest public land manager in New South Wales?

Ms BROOKS: Certainly a very substantial proportion of the State is managed by the Crown Lands Division, yes.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: This morning we had a good presentation from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. They described bioregions and they had goals at the catchment levels—they want to preserve this or they want to preserve that or they want to get some sense, if you like, at the catchment level. When we come down to the catchment management authorities and the property vegetation plans [PVPs] there does not seem to be a recognition, at least as far as I understand it—PVPs are at a farm level, they are quite small scale—at the catchment management authorities that you can reach those conservation goals by looking outside the farm-scale, if you like. New South Wales Farmers put up a suggestion that we should be looking at

the goals at a more regional level or at a catchment goal level, but that was rejected and we are restricted to the sort of farm-scale level. Do you have a comment on that?

Ms BROOKS: As you would be aware, the native vegetation legislation is administered by the Minister for the Environment and her department. So the role of the catchment management authorities in delivering the property vegetation plans is purely that under the overall policy settings that are developed by the environmental portfolio. So I probably cannot comment on the planning around or the policy settings for the property vegetation plans. But the catchment action plans certainly do operate to identify priority areas, priority assets for management.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I am just alluding to the disconnect between possibly the bioregion approach to it and the catchment management authorities approach to it, which is keep it at the farm level and keep it at the PVP level and it is sort of too hard to get outside of that. Am I being unreasonable?

Ms BROOKS: No, you are absolutely right; the PVPs are carried out at a farm scale. I guess within the realm of what catchment management authorities are able to do, they obviously understand what is happening at the individual farm scale in terms of PVPs and the catchment action plan to develop those broader plans. But the broader policy context, as I said, is not something the catchment management authorities are responsible for.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Could I ask you a question about the commercial inland fishing industry? When we were down in the south in the Riverina a couple of people approached us informally. The commercial inland fishing industry has nearly shut down—I do not think that is an unreasonable comment. Yet we had commercial inland fishing people saying, "If we were allowed back in the game we could help you with the carp control, the pest control. If we had an allocation or a licence for a small amount of the yellow belly and the sort of thing, when we go out catching that we will necessarily pick up quite a lot of carp and be able to contribute to environmental outcomes". Can you tell me where that is up to in that thinking? Or is commercial inland fishing too hard and it has been shut down by the Green movement, I suppose?

Ms BROOKS: Commercial inland fishing sits within Geoff Allan, who heads up Fisheries NSW. That is a question you would probably need to put to him, and I am not sure whether he has been invited to appear. Bruce Christie from the Biosecurity NSW perspective may be able to comment on carp control and may be able to answer your question, but I would have to take it on notice.

CHAIR: He is coming here this afternoon.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Page 30 of the Government's submission talks about the carrying capacity of Toorale Station being 33,000 sheep. I presume that that would be the estimated carrying capacity after the water has disappeared, the irrigation areas, if it was purely a dry land property, is that correct?

Ms BROOKS: I think I probably need to take that one on notice as well. I believe this information was supplied by the Office of the Environment and Heritage, and I just need to confirm that.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: From the perspective of the Department of Primary Industries how does that stocking rate, that is, the carrying capacity of one sheep to three hectares, compare with the carrying capacity across similar areas of western New South Wales?

Ms BROOKS: Again I probably need to take that one on notice in terms of the specific rates.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: It is probably unlikely then you will be able to answer my next question, which relates to the margin for sheep grazing at that stocking rate in that part of New South Wales. What sort of money can they make?

Ms BROOKS: No, again I would have to take that on notice. Obviously the Western Lands Act falls under the administration of the Crown Lands Division and there is information that is held by the Western Lands Commission in relation to stocking rates, but I do not have that information in front of me today. I will need to go back for that.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What is the approximate size of the Crown lands estate?

Ms BROOKS: We have some figures on that to which I will refer. The total area of Crown land in New South Wales—and I believe this is Crown land that is administered by the Crown Lands Division, not including forest, et cetera—is just more than 34 million hectares which includes the three nautical mile territorial waters zone and also the beds of waterways, which is about 42 per cent of the State.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What is the size of workforce in the Crown Lands Division of the Department of Primary Industries?

Ms BROOKS: It is a little more than 300 or so. I could not give you the exact figure but in that order.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: The division and the department are subject to the Government's labour cap, as I think it was expressed in this year's State budget. Is that right?

Ms BROOKS: As all government departments, we are subject to budgetary requirements, yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: How is the Crown Lands Division of the Department of Primary Industries responding to the budget announcement?

Ms BROOKS: The division is currently—

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Point of order: Surely that is a budget estimates question and is outside this Committee's terms of reference.

Ms BROOKS: Yes, I think it might be.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: It is public land management.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Can we have a ruling?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: To the point of order: This is a broad-ranging inquiry. Presumably members can ask about management and, accordingly, who is actually managing. The numbers and resources involved are very appropriate.

CHAIR: The question is in order.

Ms BROOKS: We are currently in the process of implementing changes to the management of the Crown Lands Division which partly are driven by the need to manage responsibly from a financial perspective. But more importantly we are also looking at changing the way we deliver services so that we have more consistent and more efficient approaches to service delivery. So we are consolidating to business centres in Dubbo and Newcastle. We are moving to a focus more on land management, rather than land administration so there are some changes underway at the moment. We are also decentralising many of the metropolitan-based functions to regional areas.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: How many jobs will go following the budget decision of the Government?

Ms BROOKS: That information has already been provided previously elsewhere. The focus of the changes is really changing the way we do business rather than losing jobs, but a number of jobs have gone as a result of the changes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: How many?

Ms BROOKS: It depends at which point of time you count from. I would like to get back to you on that one.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Will you take the question on notice and provide the committee with details of job losses in the Crown Lands Division since the budget was handed down in June and what are your forecasts for job losses into the future?

Ms BROOKS: Yes, I will.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I have a general question about the success or otherwise of the Catchment Management Authorities [CMAs] in terms of improving land condition generally. I am aware they have been established for 10 years. What improvements, in a general sense in relation to land condition, have there been as a result of the establishment of the CMAs and CAPs? What successes have we seen?

Ms BROOKS: There have certainly been numerous successes. Obviously, as I explained earlier, the way that CMAs work is that each CMA has its individual CAP and so the specific priorities for that CMA are attached to that CAP. While information and data is gathered at a statewide level that allows broad conclusions to be drawn across State of catchment reporting, for example, it is really the case study information at a catchment-by-catchment level that is most telling in terms of the changes that have been made. So there are specific examples around renovation of riparian zones, fish passage, noting an earlier question on fishing, and they are too numerous to mention but I am certainly happy to provide further examples of specific changes that have happened with the CMAs.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: At a catchment level, and in relation to weed control at the border of a national park and Crown land, does the CMA have a role to play in ensuring coordination of land management practises across tenure? Is that your role?

Ms BROOKS: The Catchment Action Plans have a role to play as part of that, certainly working across agencies and tenures to identify priorities and to coordinate action. However, there are also separate processes in place specifically from a weed control perspective which Bruce Christie would be better placed than I to talk through in detail. The two work together. I guess one of the positives from the creation of DPI—Department of Primary Industries—is that it is really fostering a better integration of the processes. For example, and moving away from CMAs, the Crown Lands Division has operated a program of providing grants in relation to weed management. We are working towards coordinating that more effectively with the noxious weeds grants process, which is handled through the Biosecurity Division of the Department of Primary Industries, so that we can get greater impact in terms of funds that are available for investment to deal with these problems.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I have heard occasionally a few rumbles about the security of the CMAs. What is your view on whether there would be a gap in land management if we did not have CMAs? What would it mean in terms of the landscape for public land management?

Ms BROOKS: I think the Catchment Management Authorities [CMAs] play an incredibly important role in planning and delivery. I think I really see those as the two core areas, apart from specific functions as we have discussed like the property vegetation planning process and that capacity around developing the Catchment Action Plans and upgrading the Catchment Action Plans and working through that process.

Just to diverge for a minute, the process that has been gone through at the moment with the Catchment Management Authorities in their Catchment Action Plan [CAP] upgrades is really working with the community to identify the assets that are valued in those catchments and to look at the threats that will destabilise the balance and the sustainability of that catchment and then identifying the key areas where there needs to be mitigation of those threats. That is proving to be a very effective process.

The two CAPs that have already been signed off for, Namoi and Central West CMA, are very impressive documents, I believe, and have certainly had that support from the Natural Resources Commission. I think that the catchment action planning process is very important and obviously the delivery of programs that deliver on the objectives of those CAPs is also an important function, and functions around capacity building, for example.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Could you provide the Committee with a couple of examples or case studies of initiatives that CMAs have done that have seen improvements in the management of public lands? The submission that the Government has provided is a very good submission but I do not think it actually talks about the role of the CMAs enough. I would strongly encourage you to submit some case studies and examples of the work you do and why it is so important.

Ms BROOKS: I am happy to do that.

CHAIR: Could you take that on notice?

Ms BROOKS: I can take that on notice, yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: The 34 million hectares of Crown land, does that include or exclude reserved land?

Ms BROOKS: No, that includes reserved land and obviously a very large component of that is the Western Division of New South Wales, which is managed under tenure.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Excluding reserved land what are we left with?

Ms BROOKS: The numbers do not necessarily add up because in some cases you have got both a tenure and a reserve arrangement, but the area under tenure is 30,786,210. I might confirm these figures afterwards if that is okay.

CHAIR: That is hectares?

Ms BROOKS: Hectares, yes. Under reserve it is something like 1.1 million.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Why do we hold so much land? Why would we not just sell it freehold?

Ms BROOKS: Certainly there have been processes in place in the past to convert Crown land to freehold. Those questions are always questions that should be asked. The Government has initiated a review of the management of Crown land and some of those questions may be asked as part of that review process. But certainly the Western Division is a very fragile environment. Most of that land is in the Western Division and there are some significant considerations around what the best model for management in that area needs to be, so I would not want to pre-empt any consideration on that issue.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: If it is a fragile environment, are you suggesting that it perhaps should be transferred to the National Parks and Wildlife Service rather than remain as Crown land?

Ms BROOKS: The way that the Western Lands Division is managed at the moment is again a productive use of an ecosystem model. It is substantially native species in that area, managed productively for environmental, economic and social outcomes. The mechanisms that are in place at the moment through the Western Lands Commission and the staff of the commission monitor the achievement of those outcomes, or certainly the achievement of environmental outcomes through the management of the leases.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You believe that if it was converted into freehold title the owners of that title would not take or would not be compelled to take that environmental—

Ms BROOKS: No, I am not saying that but these things need to be carefully considered.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I suppose you would often have a fair amount of dealings with the National Parks and Wildlife Service [NPWS]. Are they good neighbours?

Ms BROOKS: From a Crown lands perspective?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Is there room for improvement, perhaps?

Ms BROOKS: No, look, we work closely with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. We are working with them currently. We have actually got a joint program currently across tenures around recreational and tourism use. We are working with Forests NSW, Crown lands and the National Parks and Wildlife Service to look at opportunities there to have a more seamless approach. We are very conscious of the need to work effectively across tenures.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you have problems with feral flora and fauna escaping from national parks onto Crown lands?

Ms BROOKS: I am not aware of any specific problems. Obviously, as we discussed earlier, we work towards having pest control programs that operate across tenures. Bruce Christie will be able to talk about those in more detail, but we are very keen to work well with other land management agencies to address those issues.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Mr Matchett, I would not want you to come here without answering one question. Will you address the role of private forests and, more importantly, public forests in light of our considerations here, especially in upstream areas of Catchment Management Authorities and the effect that they have on downstream riparian rights?

Mr MATCHETT: Well, forests certainly are not my area of interest or expertise.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But water is.

Ms BROOKS: Water is actually managed by the New South Wales Office of Water. There is a level at which the Catchment Management Authorities are involved with water management but the Office of Water would probably be better placed to answer that.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you have anything to say about the role of forestry operations and what they mean for the Catchment Management Authorities, or do you just take what is given and try to make the best of it?

Ms BROOKS: I am not sure I quite follow your question.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you have any concerns that the extensive use of State forests and private forests in upstream operations has a material effect on the downstream riparian rights in catchment management areas?

Ms BROOKS: Certainly as part of the catchment planning process the catchment is looked at holistically in terms of the interaction of land uses and what is going on there in terms of where the threats might lie. It is well known that there are interactions between plants using water through roots, whether it is forests or other plants, and the amount of water in rivers and streams. All those things form part of the interaction within the catchment.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Can I take you back to your comment that one of your approaches to your resources is to look at more decentralisation. Can you describe how effective you think that might be? Why was it not done before?

Ms BROOKS: I cannot answer the question of why it was not done before; I was not responsible for Crown lands until 12 months ago. In terms of how effective I think it will be, I think it is an opportunity to move functions which are currently located in the city. While there are Crown assets within metropolitan areas and there will be people left within Crown lands in the metropolitan area to deal with those local issues, there is absolutely no reason why the more corporate activities, the administrative activities, for example, and the statewide roles need to be done out of the Sydney metropolitan area. There is real value in those functions being carried out in other locations which are perhaps more closely associated, like Dubbo, with the vast majority of the Crown estate. I do think it will be effective.

Mr MATCHETT: If I could just add to that. I guess there was a decentralisation program entered into probably about 20 years ago when the head office of Crown Lands moved to Newcastle, which I think has proved to be a very good and successful move for that head office operation.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: My question relates to the Western Lands Division. It has been put to me by a number of people who have properties in the area that the Western Lands Division is almost redundant. You have a very restrictive Native Vegetation Act. The Western Lands lease, if you like, was established for environmental reasons: rabbits and all the rest of it. Do you have a comment about the future need of the Western Lands Division and its lease and that sort of tenure when you have Catchment Management Authorities, the Native Vegetation Act and the Environmental Protection Act? It has been put to me that it is restrictive on the productive use of a lot of that land, its economic value and transferability and that sort of thing. Do you have a comment on that?

Ms BROOKS: I guess, as you said, the arrangements for Western Lands leases were put there for a reason. It is a fragile environment and it is important that it is managed well, because when things go wrong they can have very dramatic consequences which take a long time to fix. Having said that, the arrangements that exist have been there for a long time and, as I said earlier, I think the announcement of a review of Crown lands management is very timely because it enables us to relook at some of these questions as to whether the legislative mechanisms that we have are the right ones going forward to achieve the outcomes. I guess what I am saying is that I think the need for something that addresses the nature of the Western Lands environment from all perspectives—environmental, social and economic—remains but I think it is always important to ask questions around the mechanisms we have to achieve those outcomes, the most efficient, effective and best mechanisms. I do not want to pre-empt what the review might consider.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You might like to take this question on notice. Could you give me a value of unreserved Crown lands outside urban areas in New South Wales? I am asking for an estimate of that.

Ms BROOKS: So you are talking about tenured lands?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: All unreserved Crown lands outside of urban areas in New South Wales.

Ms BROOKS: You will give us these questions afterwards, will you not?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You can take the question on notice.

Ms BROOKS: Thank you.

CHAIR: Mr Foley asked you a question earlier about the budgetary constraints in the Crown Lands Division. I think you said you had roughly about 300 employees. Was that in the Crown Lands Division?

Ms BROOKS: Yes, more than 300. I guess I would like to go back and check the figures precisely because divisional boundaries shift from time to time.

CHAIR: Just roughly what is the budget of the Crown Lands Division?

Ms BROOKS: It is roughly \$60 million. Can I get back to you on that one?

CHAIR: Yes, you can. I am trying to get to the point of asking a specific question. The Crown Lands Division manages 32 million hectares of tenured land. You have stated on the record here that that is a very fragile environmental area. I take it that you are satisfied that the management of that tenured land from an environmental view point is satisfactory or good or best practice or something along those lines. Would that be correct?

Ms BROOKS: I think the current arrangements with the management of the Western Lands Division—of course it is not the Crown Land Division that is directly managing those lands.

CHAIR: No, it is the tenure process.

Ms BROOKS: It is the leaseholder. So the process we have in place establishes a good working relationship with the leaseholders, I would like to think, and enables those things to be managed well.

CHAIR: Can you tell me approximately how many western land leaseholders there are?

Ms BROOKS: Not off the top of my head. I probably have got it in here if you would bear with me.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: It is 8,000—it is in the submission.

Ms BROOKS: Yes, it is something of that order, around 8,000.

CHAIR: Would it be fair for me to say then that the Crown Lands Division of your department manages not only the largest chunk of environmentally sensitive land in this State, but it does it by far at the least cost to the taxpayer in this State, and you would say that you and your stewards—the 8,000 tenured

landholders—do a good job of managing the environmental condition of that land? Would that be a fair statement?

Ms BROOKS: I like to think that the people we have out there are doing a good job. As I said in answer to the previous questions, I think it is important that we always ask questions about: Is this the most effective, efficient and the best way to go about it? But I am confident that the people we have out there at the moment are achieving some good results in terms of management.

CHAIR: That department and its 8,000 stewards or helpers manage to do it for about \$5 per hectare.

Ms BROOKS: I have not done those calculations.

CHAIR: Roughly, that is pretty close to the mark. In that case you are to be congratulated.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: In the Government's submission it says that Crown land must be managed in accordance with principles of land management contained within the Act: "These are broadly, environmental protection, natural resource conservation, sustainable land and resource management ..." In that regard, when you were drawing up Western Lands agreements for those 8,000 lessees, did the National Parks and Wildlife Service have any input into the conditions that are placed on that land?

Mr MATCHETT: Not that I am aware of. I am happy to take that question on notice and give you some detail on that. Most of the leases were drawn up a significant time ago and I doubt that there would have been consultation with National Parks at that time. But certainly there are ecological considerations given to the lease terms that are included in that lease.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: How often are those leases renewed and those conditions revised?

Mr MATCHETT: They are perpetual leases so there is no need to renew them—they go on forever and ever. The conditions are reviewed on a fairly regular basis, not as a formal basis but as an interactive process between the rangeland officers and the leaseholders themselves to determine the best use and best outcomes for the properties.

CHAIR: Are changes to use, such as expanding grazing and homesteading to other uses, part of the reviews that you undertake?

Mr MATCHETT: A change of use for a particular lease can be negotiated.

CHAIR: I am talking broadscale across the State. Do you ever look at that?

Mr MATCHETT: No, not on a statewide scale.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You are aware of the State of the Environment report that the Office of Environment and Heritage produces every three years?

Ms BROOKS: Yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: The 2009 report outlines what is generally a decline in the extent of fauna and bird species. It says on page 240 that the sustainability assessments that were conducted on the species, for example for birds, showed that 65 per cent of birds that were assessed had a moderate or greater risk of extinction. I want to get a sense of what role the department has in terms of management of Crown lands to address threatened species decline in the State, or whether you have any role to play through the catchment management authorities [CMAs] in threatened species recovery?

Ms BROOKS: Obviously the Threatened Species Act applies across the State so operations on Crown land have to address the requirements of the legislation. Certainly some Crown reserves are reserved specifically for environmental purposes. I might let Mark add to this if he has any further comments to make. Within the process of developing the catchment action plans and upgrading the catchment action plans, the catchment management authorities take into account all relevant policy directions that apply generally across the catchment and so would certainly be taking into account threatened species considerations in working out what the priorities are. I do not know whether that answers your question.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Given that there are more than 800 species listed as threatened and endangered ecological communities as well and that there is a decline in a big range of species, without national parks a lot of that responsibility would fall to you. Do you think that the National Parks and Wildlife Service picks up a big part of that effort in ensuring that, as much as possible, the State tries to arrest the decline in threatened species?

Ms BROOKS: I honestly have not turned my mind to that question.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Given that a question from one of the other members earlier was about your management of Crown lands is good value for money, part of the management of land in this State is obviously around the conservation of nature and trying to arrest the decline in threatened species. Do you think that is clearly a role that the National Parks and Wildlife Service is very good at?

Ms BROOKS: As I have said a number of times, I guess we are very keen not to look at land management in silos. I think that is very important. The CAPs are one tool to do that. Similarly with the pest and weed programs, it is best to really work across all tenures. I think all public land managers have a role to play in meeting multiple objectives for the State. We do it in different ways and in part meet the demands of the local community. For example, reserves under the Crown Lands Act may—not all perhaps would—have plans of management that are developed with local input, and that again reflects the local community view of how they want to see that reserve managed. That allows some of those priorities and balances to be set.

Mr MATCHETT: I would add to that that of course national parkland was Crown land prior to becoming national park and had been managed for over a couple of hundred years to preserve its attributes. I guess that is a bit of a testimony to Crown land management of early days that ensured that the biodiversity is retained.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: In relation to the acquisition of lands by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, do you ever query why they want a particular block of land, or do you simply receive the request and then action it?

Ms BROOKS: There have been a very small number of requests, I believe. Are you reading from the submission?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: No, this is from "Reserve Establishment Guidelines" that are issued by the Office of Environment and Heritage.

Ms BROOKS: Right. Certainly there would be a process. I do not have in front of me at the moment a request.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: If they came to you and said, "We have this particular block of land we would like—three million hectares of Crown land that you currently administer—to create a new national park." What sort of inquiries do you make of them?

Ms BROOKS: We would certainly make inquiries of them, if that scenario was to arise. As far as I am aware, any recent requests would have been around marginal changes to boundaries and those sorts of scenarios rather than—was it three million hectares you were suggesting?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Okay, let us say it is something smaller—10,000 hectares.

Ms BROOKS: I mean, I would imagine that there is a matter of policy for the Government here on this question. We would certainly be asking questions consistent with that.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: For example, "Why do you need that land?", or do you just accept that they have declared it to be of such importance that it should be declared a national park?

Ms BROOKS: We would have many questions to ask them if we were approached on that point. There are questions around management.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Ultimately, the consent of the Department of Lands, or whatever the equivalent is these days, still needs to be obtained for the transfer?

Ms BROOKS: That is a ministerial approval, is it not, Mark?

Mr MATCHETT: Yes, it is. I guess the question is: If the land is identified by the National Parks and Wildlife Service as being required for a national park, then there is not a lot of questioning of that because that is a decision that they have come to. But the question more from the Crown lands perspective is whether there is an alternative use that we have for the land, or a more appropriate use that we have for the land, that should be considered prior to it being considered as part of the national park estate.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Would there be any monetary transfer?

Mr MATCHETT: That is a matter for Treasury, but generally I do not think there are any monetary transfers.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: If there were a government policy decision to simply abolish national parks, do you believe you could appropriately handle the administration of reserve lands if you were resourced appropriately?

Ms BROOKS: I do not think I can answer that question without considering it a bit further.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I do not think you can answer it at all, actually.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Why not? They currently administer 32 million hectares of land. Surely an additional 1.1 million hectares would be manageable?

CHAIR: It is 6.7 million hectares.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I thought it was 32 million hectares.

CHAIR: No. That is the national park estate.

Ms BROOKS: In all seriousness, there would be many, many questions around what those arrangements might be and what the implications of those arrangements would be. We have talked about the size of the Crown lands estate but also talked about the fact that a lot of that is the Western Division where it is managed by leaseholders, and not directly managed. There would be many questions to be asked if that scenario was to proceed.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Ms Brooks, one of the things we have been examining is the relative inefficiency of having, as you have identified, siloed land operations and siloed land administration, as opposed to having consolidated or at least highly coordinated land administration among all Crown lands. Even if we were not to suggest that it be abolished, surely there is an argument for taking those reserved lands out of the administration of Environment and putting them under, if not necessarily Primary Industries, at least somewhere a little closer to where the overwhelming majority of lands are administered.

CHAIR: That is probably a little bit hypothetical for Dr Brooks to answer.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I will put it less hypothetically.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: He is a Government member. Maybe he is not hypothetical. Maybe it is a thoughtful seeing into the future.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: If the National Parks and Wildlife Service were transferred to the Department of Primary Industries with its current funding, do you think that the Department of Primary Industries could manage national parks as a subunit of the Department of Primary Industries?

Ms BROOKS: I do not think I can answer that question without a bit more—I mean—

CHAIR: You might like to refer that to your Minister perhaps.

Ms BROOKS: I think that would be appropriate.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: On page 54 of the Government submission you are suggesting that there are probably opportunities for enhanced cooperation for the sharing of natural resource information. The submission states:

The co-location of Crown Lands Division and CMAs in the new NSW Trade and Investment structure presents opportunities for enhanced cooperation, including the sharing of natural resource information ...

Can you describe that a little more?

Ms BROOKS: That just reflects the fact that where organisations have been separate in the past, while there have been many attempts to cooperate, and some of those attempts have been quite successful at coordinating information and developing databases, there are always further opportunities to look at information that is collected in one place and using that in another. So it is looking at what we can do there.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Do I understand from that that there were inefficiencies and duplications and there is room for improvement?

Ms BROOKS: We certainly believe that there have already been situations where we have built some useful linkages between parts of our new organisation that were previously in separate departments around sharing of information. I mentioned the noxious weeds grant processes, for example.

CHAIR: I will call a halt to proceedings. Ms Brooks, thank you for agreeing to come and see us, and Mr Matchett, thank you for your assistance.

Ms BROOKS: Thank you to the Committee.

CHAIR: Would you be prepared to take any questions on notice and reply to those questions within 21 days?

Ms BROOKS: Certainly.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Luncheon Adjournment)

RAHMAT KHAIAMI, Executive Officer, Government and Community Relations, Forests NSW, and

NICHOLAS JOHN VAUGHAN ROBERTS, Chief Executive Officer, Forests NSW, and

PAUL DOUGLAS WELLS, Manager of Private Forestry Programs, NSW Department of Primary Industries, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Before we proceed, Mr Roberts, would you or either of your colleagues wish to make an opening statement?

Mr ROBERTS: I thank you for the opportunity to appear and represent the organisation that I work for. I am proud to represent Forests NSW this afternoon. Forests NSW is a public trading enterprise [PTE]. In fulfilling that role, we are expected to operate with what is termed "competitive neutrality". In that regard, we are supposed to operate as near as possible to a stand-alone commercial organisation. One of our key roles is to return a dividend to Government. Forests NSW is responsible for a land area of approximately 2 million hectares of native forests, over 200,000 hectares of planted softwood forest and about 35,000 hectares of planted hardwood forest.

I will give the Committee a feel for the scale of our business. In the last financial year we sold just over 600,000 tonnes of native forest saw logs; approximately 60,000 tonnes of cypress logs; 635,000 tonnes of native forest pulp logs; 84,000 tonnes of hardwood plantation saw logs; 2 million tonnes of softwood plantation saw logs; and 1.6 million tonnes of softwood plantation logs. In the 2010-11 financial year we turned over more than \$322 million; produced an operating profit of \$20.5 million; and paid a dividend to Treasury of \$14 million.

Our general philosophy is to run a safe and financial business while working for the environmental, economic and social benefit of the people of New South Wales. We manage our estate under the principles of ecologically sustainable forest management [ESFM] with each region—including planted forest regions—being responsible for developing their own specific ESFM plan. In addition to the forests that we manage for production purposes, we manage 121 recreation sites across the State. We have provided a range of facilities, including camping, picnic sites, caravan parking sites and associated services such as rubbish collection and toilets, as well as facilitating a wide range of organised recreational and educational events, such as rallies, school groups and orienteering events. The forests are also open to recreational hunting. Direct expenditure on recreation exceeds \$2.4 million per year.

The NSW Government has recently announced that it intends to turn Forests NSW from a Public Trading Enterprise into a State-owned corporation [SOC]. This change in governance means that Forests NSW will remain largely the same. We will still have the same basic relationships with the community and our customers but the intent is to put a board in place and to improve the governance and management of the organisation through that.

I turn to the terms of reference for this Committee and I will speak briefly about the process for conversion and assessment of forests in the past. We were involved in the restructure of the forest industry in the 1990s, through the joint State and Commonwealth Comprehensive Regional Assessments. That process involved a wide range of stakeholders, along with government agencies, industry and non-government organisations. The process of the assessment was undertaken using modelling tools developed by the then National Parks and Wildlife Service and also used inputs from our own Forest Resources and Management Evaluation System [FRAMES].

The process of conversion of native hardwood forests to national parks and other conservation tenure resulted in the Regional Forest Agreement transferring 370,000 hectares of State Forest to conservation tenure on the North Coast. The Regional Forest Agreement delivered a number of conservation outcomes and resulted in the restructure of the New South Wales timber industry. A \$140 million structural adjustment package was offered to industry to accommodate the loss of timber available. That \$140 million was for both the North Coast and the South Coast.

Subsequent to the Federal-State process, the then New South Wales Government undertook an additional process that created legislative instruments designed to streamline the complex regulatory environment in New South Wales for timber harvesting and native forests through the so-called integrated forestry operations approvals [IFOA]. The State also identified a further 68,000 hectares of State forest on the

North Coast to be transferred to national park or conservation tenure—the Icon Decision of 2003. While the focus had been primarily on the coastal timber industry until then, attention eventually turned to the western forests, the cypress, the Brigalow and Nandewar, the south west cypress forests and, of course, the red gum. The Commonwealth was not involved in these assessments and declined the opportunity to participate. In 2005, concluding the assessment of the timber values of the Brigalow belt south, 350,000 hectares of cypress State forests were transferred to national park tenure in the Pilliga. As a result, a structural adjustment funding of more than \$48 million was provided to industry.

In 2011, a further 147,000 hectares of cypress State forests were transferred from the southwest portion of the State and no structural adjustment funding was provided at that time. Forests NSW red gum forests were the last of Forests NSW native forests to undergo an assessment like that of the coastal forests. The assessment was run by the State Government with, once again, no formal input from the Commonwealth. The assessment of the western forest was conducted under the auspices of the Natural Resources Commission [NRC]. At the time of the assessment the red gum forests had not yet emerged from one of the longest droughts on record and were showing some level of stress. The NRC's final assessment resulted in the transfer of 80 per cent or 107,000 hectares of red gum forests to conservation tenure in 2010, leaving only three State forests—Perricoota, Koondrook and Campbells Island—to supply the mills, which were reduced from more than 20 to two. The funding provided as a result of this decision was \$97 million and approximately \$51 million of that was provided as structural adjustment.

The total yield to production was from 60,000 cubic metres of sawlog to about 10,000 cubic metres of sawlog and 117,000 tonnes of residue to about 65,000 tonnes of residue. I will not repeat the numbers here, but we have the various decisions that were made over the past to convert State forest to national park. I guess from a Forests NSW perspective going forward, we are very keen to continue to manage the estate we have under State Forests' tenure and look to deliver both economic outcomes through delivery of sawlogs to our customers and employment in our own business and through contractors, and also deliver on social and environmental outcomes as well. That is all I have by way of introduction. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: We will now proceed to questions.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: How profitable are the operations of Forests NSW?

Mr ROBERTS: I guess there are a number of ways of having a look at our profitability. If you look at our return on assets they are quite low. Return on assets is probably between 1 per cent and 2 per cent over the last few years. We have quite a heavy balance sheet. Most of the value in the balance sheet is land, which we carry on behalf of the State. That land we are unable to liquidate. So it is an unusual business in that regard. If you look at some of our business margins, our trading margins, they are really not too bad. They can range in figures of 10 per cent to 15 per cent margins on sales. As a forestry company I would say we would benchmark very well with other forestry companies in Australia.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What do you say about comments I have received about Forests NSW operations in that costs are rapidly escalating and timber volumes are declining? Is that a general scenario across the board?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes, that is a general scenario. It is a manufacturing problem and as sawmilling is a manufacturing industry, it is a similar problem for sawmilling. There are a number of issues we are confronted with in our particular sector. One has been, not this year but in previous years, rapidly escalating costs, particularly diesel costs, which affect our transport and harvesting operations. The second issue that has had a major impact on the contracting industry is the pressure from the mining industry for skilled operators. If you are a skilled operator and you can operate a machine out in the bush, you can operate that same machine in the mines. Wage rates for people who operate the heavy equipment in the forest—there is a lot of heavy equipment being used in the forest—have escalated quite dramatically.

The third impact is that as time goes by we tend to be logging harvesting areas that are further away from the mills and they tend to be in steeper country. So the distance and the steep country have an implication on the harvest and haul costs. Those costs have been going up. That would be a feature to some extent of the entire industry in Australia. I would say that probably native forests would be at the extreme end of that because it is such a diverse estate, but it is a common feature across the industry. There are also increasing costs in the sawmilling sector and probably one of the biggest impacts on the industry at the moment is the strength of the Australian dollar, which is facilitating low-cost imports of high-quality flooring from all over the world—even

four by twos or 90 by 35s coming out of Europe in big volumes at the moment and competing with the pine industry.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: The North East Forest Alliance [NEFA], being one conservation group with which I am sure you are familiar, has had an ongoing criticism that public forests in north-east New South Wales have never been managed on a sustainable yield basis. Its submission to this inquiry notes that in 1998 the Government adopted a sustainable wood supply strategy that involved intentionally overcutting for a further 20 years until 2018 before reducing logging volumes down to a sustainable level. The submission then went on to state, "Following a desktop yield review in 2003 the Government reduced annual commitments but increased the total volumes committed by extending unsustainable logging for another five years until 2023." Is any truth in Forests NSW logging beyond what is a sustainable yield?

Mr ROBERTS: No. We are contending with some issues. If you look at the profile of our harvest out to 2023, which is when our current contracts terminate, and if I look at high-quality sawlogs, which is the high-value product that we are really pursuing, out to 2023 we are able to sustain a harvest level of 269,000 cubic metres a year. After 2023 there is a drop in the availability of sawlogs coming out of the forest. That drop is determined, to some extent, by the specifications of the logs; how large and how long a sawlog is really defined as has an implication. There are plantations that will kick in after 2023, but they will not replace the full volume that is currently being harvested. So in terms of sustainability, I believe that we have a sustainable industry in the sense that the forests are continually regrowing after harvest. What it will mean is that the forest is becoming a younger forest, if you like, over time until 2023.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I refer now to continual reports of breaches by Forests NSW in its logging operations. A current example is the Royal Camp State Forest where the North East Forest Alliance [NEFA] found occurrence of logging of koala high-use areas. It says that this was due to a failure of Forests NSW staff to search for koala scats ahead of logging. It says that in one area NEFA identified 23 high-use koala feed trees. After the complaints were lodged by NEFA, Forests NSW went back and identified seven of those trees. I understand that logging is stopped in one area, although logging by Forests NSW continues in areas where NEFA found koala scats. What is your response to these allegations?

Mr ROBERTS: When we go into an area to harvest, we undertake an assessment of the block as to what threatened species might be evident. We have an ecological survey component, which equates to 10 hours of survey time for every 200 hectares.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Is that Forests NSW staff?

Mr ROBERTS: Correct.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Not independent ecologists?

Mr ROBERTS: No, these are Forests NSW ecologists. We have 10 hours of survey time per every 200 hectares. The ecologists will walk through and traverse the forest looking for the range of threatened species that might be in that block. If there is koala-preferred habitat, then obviously they will be focussing in on koala-preferred habitat and they will be looking for scats. In the event that we find koala scats, there is a trigger. If there are 20 scats underneath a tree, if there are scats of different sizes, which might indicate a mother and child, we institute what we call a star survey and we do transects 100 metres long from the found scats round the eight points of the compass thoroughly looking at the areas to see whether we can find any further scats. If we do, then we extend the area that we do that intensive survey through. We applied that particular methodology in Royal Camp. It is possible, given that you are doing a sampling process when you go into a block, that you can miss a scat. Two hundred hectares of native bush to find every scat would be a very difficult thing to do.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What about rainforest, for example, that is a bit easier to find scats, is it not? One koala scat may be a bit hard to find, but what about in Yabbra State Forest: three hectares of rainforest, two wetlands, numerous stream banks and potentially hundreds of feed trees for the yellow bellied glider. I understand you were fined a total of \$2,200 for all of that. That is all a bit harder to miss, is it not?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes. We had some issues at Yabbra a couple of years ago. I think one of the major issues there was the post-harvest burn, which got away from us and did transit through a wetland. That forest area also was affected by bell miner dieback, prior to the harvesting through that area. It was a fairly badly denuded forest at the time.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Mr Roberts, has the legal matter with Boral been settled?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes, the arbitration hearing has concluded.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Has there been a settlement?

Mr ROBERTS: The matter has been settled. The matter is concluded.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Do I take from that that the matters that were in dispute between Forests NSW and Boral have been resolved?

Mr ROBERTS: This is an awkward one for me. The findings of the arbitration are subject to the confidentiality provisions of the Arbitration Act and the contract we have with Boral also is subject to confidentiality clauses and so in that regard—

CHAIR: In that case I will rule that question out of order. The Hon. Luke Foley might like to ask it in a different fashion that Mr Roberts can answer.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Sure. Is Forests NSW confident that it can meet the wood supply agreement in the north-east forests of the State?

Mr ROBERTS: We believe we can. We think it is going to be challenging between now and 2023. There are certainly some issues around preferred species which are going to be very tight in supply between now and 2023 but we believe the wood is there to meet the legal requirements of all of our contracts on the North Coast. Having said that, there is an inquiry going on right at the moment reviewing our wood supply estimates to make sure they are valid and that the comment I have just made can be borne out in reality in terms of wood delivery.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Who is conducting that inquiry?

Mr ROBERTS: There is a Cabinet-in-confidence inquiry which is being undertaken under the chairmanship of John Keniry and a consultant by the name of URS is reviewing our resources data at the moment.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What is your response to the concerns expressed by some community members that there is a timber supply crisis particularly in the north-east forests of the State?

Mr ROBERTS: The circumstances the forests industry is facing right across Australia are extremely challenging for everybody. This would include the softwood industry, the South Coast industry, and Tasmania. As I said earlier, it is extremely difficult as it is for anyone involved in manufacturing in Australia at the moment. We have rapidly escalating domestic costs, weak demand as a consequence of a very weak housing market—housing starts are down around 135,000 a year and normally they would be up around 160,000—and the mix of housing has changed quite dramatically. There has been a real slide in single home developments and a lot of the development now is multi-storey. There has been a real switch around in the mix of housing so there is much lower wood consumption per house than historically. As I mentioned earlier, the strength of the dollar is encouraging very cheap imports for flooring products, even commodity grade scantling coming out of Europe, which has driven prices down domestically. So we have the worst of all worlds with rising domestic costs, lowering demand and imports coming into the country. That is making it challenging for everybody. I do not think it is a situation that is unique to the north-east of New South Wales.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Just staying with the north-east because it is one of our specific terms of reference, in order to meet your timber supply commitments are you logging more intensively than previously the forests and compartments you go into?

Mr ROBERTS: We continue looking at different ways of harvesting the forests so, yes, we do make changes to the way we go about our harvesting operations from time to time. The weather over the last couple of years has made it particularly challenging to get the volumes out to meet our contract commitments. Like any business we are always looking at ways we can do better. We are certainly focusing very hard on recovering as

much value as we can when we go into the stands and making sure we get as much volume as we can when we go into the stands.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Are you going back into an area previously logged in a shorter period of years than would have been the case previously in that part of the State?

Mr ROBERTS: We have standard return times that we have to manage to, so we do that.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Have those standard return times changed in recent years?

Mr ROBERTS: I do not believe they have significantly. A return time can be as low as five years. We have an average of about seven years over time so I believe we are meeting that requirement.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Could you take on notice a request to provide the Committee with information on what Forests NSW practice is with regard to return times?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Do you still use the Forests NSW Forests Resources and Management Evaluation System [FRAMES]?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes we do.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I have had a look at the performance audit report that was conducted by the New South Wales Auditor-General. I note that FRAMES reported that the basal area, that is the sum of the area of the cross-sections of trees removed, would not be more than 40 per cent. Is that still the working assumption that Forests NSW operates under?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes it is.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Following on from the previous discussion about timber demand, from what you said the demand for timber has fallen because of the change in housing construction methods. By how much has it fallen? Has it reduced in real terms or as a percentage of the building market?

Mr ROBERTS: The market is traditionally cyclical so we do have ups and downs but the demand is as low now as it was during the pre-GST slump and as low as during the 2009 global financial crisis.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Is that in volumes of wood?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes. Volumes of wood would be pretty much the same in terms of total wood consumption. The problem the industry faces is that during those two previous downturns there was a very rapid uptick and the industry recovered quite quickly. My sense from talking to people in the industry is that they do not have a lot of faith that the market is going to turn quickly. Normally it is literally one quarter and then the next quarter the market begins to recover. It would seem from most pundits' expectations that the market will remain depressed during the rest of this financial year.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you give us an idea of how much timber is used in Australia, what proportion of that is imported and where those imports come from? Is it plantation or wild timber?

Mr ROBERTS: Approximately four million cubic metres of softwood sawn timber is used in Australia on an annual basis and approximately 1,000,000 cubic metres of hardwood timber. The hardwood is tending to decline but if we use it as a rough number that would probably suffice for now. Imports of softwood have been quite stable for a number of years at about 700,000 tonnes per year but again it is the mix that has changed dramatically. New Zealand always used to be the dominant importer into Australia but what has tended to happen in recent years, particularly consequent to the United State housing market slump, is that the United States used to take an enormous volume of wood from Europe across the North Atlantic but as that market collapsed the European wood is now looking for new homes. If you can believe it, they can ship four-by-twos from the Czech Republic, Latvia and Estonia all the way to Sydney and Melbourne and compete with a mill at Tumut. The mix has changed and the volumes of what we would call framing timber, house construction timber, have been as high as 120,000 cubic metres a year, which would equal one good size Australian sawmill, so they

are significant. I cannot quote you numbers on the flooring industry. The tariff code items are a little confusing because there are various solid flooring products and engineered wood flooring products coming in, but the volumes coming out of South-East Asia are reckoned to be fairly significant and very cheap, very price competitive.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Are the South-East Asian forests it is coming from principally wild forests rather than plantation forests?

Mr ROBERTS: There are a number of different sources. Some of them would be wild forests. Products out of Indonesia could certainly be from native forests, natural forests, and some of the product coming out of Europe would also be from natural forests, particularly from Estonia and Latvia and countries like that.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Are those countries using wild forest management practices? Are they a clear-felling or destructive type of forestry operation compared to what happens in the native forests in Australia?

Mr ROBERTS: I have not been to those old eastern European countries to observe it myself. What I understand is that they are clear-fell operations of native forests. My understanding of regulatory regimes for New South Wales forestry in the hardwood industry would be one of the highest standards of regulation in the world.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: From an environmental perspective the Australian native forestry industry is more ecologically sustainable than those overseas native forestry operations?

Mr ROBERTS: I would not make a generalisation about all overseas forestry operations because some are very good, but there is no doubt that some are not.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Your comments on the red gum industry in the Riverina indicated some 80 per cent of the former State forests are now converted to national parks, 20 mills reduced to two, and 60,000 cubic metres of saw logs per annum has reduced to 10,000 cubic metres per annum. What is the value of those lost timber sales to New South Wales forests?

Mr ROBERTS: Can we do some quick maths? We will come back to that.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Roberts, can you explain to the Committee how you estimate what the sustainable yield of a particular forest is?

Mr ROBERTS: We use the forest resource area management evaluation system [FRAMES]. At a high level it comprises two components—an inventory component and a land area component—which we merge in a modelling sense. I will talk to the inventory component first. I will talk about the North Coast as an example but the same would apply in red gum or cypress forests. Native forests are dispersed over broad area forests and it is very expensive to send people out to survey forests to get inventory data. Across the North Coast we have about 1,500 survey plots and each one of those plots is about 0.1 hectares. We have one plot per 250 hectares across the North Coast. We send a crew out and they do what is called "cruising".

They will put a boundary around the 0.1 hectares and they will survey each individual tree or "cruise" it. "Cruising" involves observing the tree, noting its height, noting its diameter, particular features it has and what height up the tree those features are exhibited. We plug those survey results into a model called YTGGEN, which is a proprietary product we buy from New Zealand. With that software you are able to cut that tree into saw logs in a notional sense on a computer. We can generate the yield we are going to get from that forest based on that survey plot. That is the first component.

The second component is our land areas. We start off with a gross area which would be the title area. I hope you do not mind me referring to my notes but I get confused by the various modifiers we use. We then get down to a base net area: The base net area excludes buffer zones and forest management zones. Buffer zones would be around streams. We have all the streams located on the maps, we put buffers around those as appropriate to the regulation and we take that area out of the gross area to get the base net area. The base net area we then further reduce for any slope above 30 degrees. We are not able to operate above 30 degrees so we take out all of those areas. That becomes our net mapped area.

The net mapped area is then adjusted to become a net harvestable area and we apply two modifiers. One is a net harvest area modifier and one is a strike rate modifier. The net harvest area modifier is that if you look at the adjustments we have made to date they have been at a gross level: We are looking at streams—we know where they are; we are looking at steep country—we know where that is. So it is easy to determine the acreage and write that out of the model. What happens in individual blocks is when you get to a compartment there will be a rocky outcrop or a steep bluff which is a small feature that you do not pick up on the map. We have to make adjustment for those areas. That is the net harvest area modifier.

Finally, we then make adjustments for threatened species. The strike rate modifier would be the area we have to set aside for threatened species as a consequence of ecological surveys. We then end up with a net harvestable area. We have inventory which we can cut into saw logs that we can then apply across that estate. We are able to put that into a model such as Remsoft Spatial Woodstock, a proprietary modelling system from Canada, and you can grow the trees forward and cut them in the computer model to generate yields of logs over time. That is how the FRAMES model works.

There is some new technology called light detection and ranging [LIDAR], which is a radar technique where you can over-fly the forest and send a radar pulse down through the forest. You can set the sensitivity at different levels so you can take a pulse that goes through to the soil surface and determine an accurate representation of the terrain. You can then crank the sensitivity back so you bounce off the top of the canopy. We can determine forest height and density with LIDAR. We now have an incremental tool we can add into FRAMES to get better representation of what the forest is going to be like. At the moment 80 per cent of the central region of the North Coast has LIDAR coverage and about 50 per cent of the north-east region has LIDAR coverage. We are just beginning to bring that into our modelling systems now.

CHAIR: Mr Roberts, in conversations I have had with the forest industry over a number of years there seems to be a perception that the constraints that are placed on forestry to be able to supply your contracted metreage means that the larger, and therefore the more valuable stock, is becoming scarce. You may have to take this question on notice: Could you give the Committee an estimate out to 2023 in terms of land area, given you have described how you convert yield to land area, what sort of increase in availability of reserves would be needed to satisfy—pick one species, the blackbutt, which I understand is the North Coast hardwood that is the most difficult to continue to supply—would you be able to give us a calculation of what sort of additional area would need to be taken out reserves to allow you to provide those larger value saw logs?

Mr ROBERTS: We could work something up. We do not have an inventory for those areas, so we would have to get an assessment but we could probably do something like that.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I have a question about the red river gum. The environmental impact statement [EIS] published in 2009 by Forests NSW was trumpeted by the Minister of the day, Ian Macdonald. He said it was a sustainable industry with sustainable yields and everything was rosy and a year later we had a national park with lockup. What happened during that year?

Mr ROBERTS: I guess whilst we did the EIS we did not complete the planning process that was going to be associated with it. We completed the study and there was a view that the study may not have represented the issues as well as it should have done. So the Natural Resources Commission was appointed to undertake that further assessment and run its own forecasts over our yields and come up with a second view as to what would be appropriate for the river red gum.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: The Natural Resources Commission were experts in forestry?

Mr ROBERTS: They employed some people to help them with the forestry side of things.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Did they consult with you when they were preparing that?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes, they did.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Were you happy with their figures?

Mr ROBERTS: We did not agree with all the modelling they did, no.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: This is a broad question but would you know what the cost of the regulatory burden is for you?

Mr ROBERTS: We estimate somewhere in the region of \$6 million a year.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: That is a significant portion out of a profit of \$25 million?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: We have heard a couple of times that most of the conversions to national parks come out of the State forests; what sort of level of consultation do you get ahead of that?

Mr ROBERTS: What has tended to happen is that there have been formal assessments one way or the other. We have been involved in those assessments and are able to state our views as to what we think the yields are like and we argue strenuously for our business and the industry. That goes into the process and a report is finalised and the Government of the day makes a decision on what is going to be converted.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Mr Colless asked two of the questions I was going to ask. I want to hear again about hardwood and what is the likelihood of hardwood coming in from overseas that is not harvested sustainably. Would you have any idea of what that figure is and what sort of environmental impact that could be responsible for?

Mr ROBERTS: I would not have a good feel for volumes there. If you look at the imports of hardwood solid timber into Australia they are not large, they are quite small. Where there are imports, it tends to be imports of finished products such as furniture or those kinds of things—decking, instead of solid timber—that has already been converted into an add-value product. There are some concerns. The Federal Government has spent a lot of time putting in place an illegal logging bill to screen out illegal imports. I do not think it would be possible to screen them all out. It is a good attempt to make sure that we do not get illegally logged timber coming into Australia.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Some of the evidence we have heard from people indicates that there is a looming crisis in terms of forestry experts: forestry graduates who are purely forestry experts as opposed to having forestry as a part of a more generalised understanding. What is your view of that? Is that a noticeable trend that you have seen?

Mr ROBERTS: Certainly there are fewer and fewer forestry graduates. I guess I am a forester like my colleague, Mr Wells. We do not feel particularly good about the reducing numbers of foresters. I do not know that forestry is any different from any of the other agricultural type of industries. Agriculture students are also on the decline. It is more an issue that work in the regions of that forestry-agricultural sector is problematic.

What we are finding is that we have had to test our own paradigms and have said, "Do we really need foresters for a lot of what we do?" If you look at the activities of foresters, one of the key things we do is build roads to get into forests to harvest. Civil engineering skills can help. The skills we pick up as foresters are generally civil engineering-type skills. A lot of the modelling work that we do that I have talked about to date, the frames-type modelling, requires good statistics skills, good mathematical skills. Again, you can teach foresters to do that stuff, but you can teach forestry stuff to a good mathematician. We are testing our own paradigm. There is no doubt we still need foresters and there is a critical shortage. If you listen to the accents when you go to a forestry meeting anywhere in Australia, in particular you will hear a lot of Kiwi accents and a lot of South African accents. There has been an influx of people from offshore.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Would you say that that may have something to do with an extreme green agenda undercutting the more vocational curricular?

Mr ROBERTS: I do not know. I have talked to some people who have recently undertaken forestry degrees. When people talked to me about going to the University of Melbourne to do forestry, I was surprised that they went down the road to Melbourne and on the day looked at what was on the board and thought, "Gee, forestry looks kind of interesting", which I found disappointing. There did not appear to be a lot of analysis from some of the stories that I have heard. In terms of forestry schools, there is a commercial forestry stream and an environmental forestry stream and there is certainly competition between those two.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: In relation to your comments on the landed logs from the European Union, I took from your evidence that you are essentially saying that currently a landed log from the European Union is at a comparable price to a produced log in Australia for softwood?

Mr ROBERTS: It is not a log; it would be processed timber.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Is that because the European Union has subsidised that to a large extent or because Australia is so expensive?

Mr ROBERTS: There is probably a little bit of both. One of the things that the European industry does enjoy is a different carbon scheme to the scheme that we have in Australia. In Europe you can use your waste: create the pellets from the waste and feed them into the generating system. There is a benefit flowing to the industry there that we do not get. I could not argue that that is very significant, but there is certainly a benefit.

Some of the other aspects are just features of locations. In the Czech Republic, as an example, there is a Chrysler factory near a sawmill which exports to Australia and they have 2,000 containers a week going down to the Chrysler factory. The containers have to get back to the northern European port so they fill them up with timber and they get them there for next to nothing. Then you have containers coming out of South-East Asia with TVs for Europe, and the containers have to come back, so there are things going on that make for cheap freight. The dollar against the European Union is certainly helping them.

The industry recently ran an anti-dumping case against the European timber importers and they were unsuccessful in claiming dumping.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: A broader question is why does the Government need to grow forests and be in the timber industry in this day and age? Surely it is an historical anachronism from the time when if you wanted something important done you got government to do it? Would it not be better to corporatise and privatise?

Mr ROBERTS: Obviously it is a philosophical view. If you look at Australia, you would note that a lot of the plantations have been privatised in recent years and ForestrySA in South Australia is the most recent forest estate to be sold. To sell an existing forest with an existing cash flow is one thing. One of the problems we have in Australia is that we are beyond the point of self-sufficiency. We are now moving away consistently from self-sufficiency and as the population grows we will be importing more and more timber. One of the problems is that to buy new land and to plant it with trees is very expensive and the returns are very low, and you will not get the private sector doing it. The only way we will increase the plantation estate in Australia is if we can get a carbon credit for the carbon that the trees have sequestered or some other form of financial incentive, otherwise the estate is going to disappear in Australia. If you look at what has happened since the collapse of the managed investment schemes, the plantation area is stagnating. In fact, it is going backwards.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: If it is uneconomical, why do we bother with a timber industry at all? Why do we not just close it down and give the land to National Parks and import our timber?

Mr ROBERTS: Two points. I am talking about acquiring new land, so when you buy freehold land at \$4,500 to \$5,000 per hectare, it is a different proposition to utilising a State asset and growing trees on that State asset. When you have an existing cash flow and you are running a business, then it is a different proposition.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: The asset, as I understand from your earlier testimony, is going to be producing far less or significantly less in the future than it is at the current time, is it not?

Mr ROBERTS: I cannot predict what the housing market is going to do. If the dollar comes off and the housing market recovers, which most people are expecting will happen, then times will get a lot better, but at this particular point in time, we have one of those situations where you have got the worst of all worlds.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: For your business to remain viable and sustainable, it certainly does not help having large swathes of existing commercial timber areas locked up as national parks, though, does it? If the trend were to continue, it would make your business essentially unviable?

Mr ROBERTS: I take your point. One of the issues is you do need a certain amount of manpower and equipment to manage a forest and if you continue to shrink it, you do not necessarily shrink the resources that you apply to that forest in a linear fashion, so that does become more challenging. I would agree with that.

CHAIR: Has Forests NSW had any involvement, financial or otherwise, in the Planet Ark campaign to promote sustainable forest industries and the use of timber?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes, we have. We are a member of Forest and Wood Products Australia, which is an industry-owned company. That organisation is responsible for industry research and development and industry promotion. It is a bit like Meat and Livestock Australia or Wool Innovation Australia, a similar organisation. We pay a levy of 5¢ on every log we sell—whether it is a pulp log or a sawlog—to Forest and Wood Products Australia [FWPA], so our levies are approximately \$350,000 a year, so we have contributed to that program, and I am also currently a director of FWPA.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What strategies does Forests NSW have in place to address bell miner associated dieback?

Mr ROBERTS: The view that we have based on our scientific investigation is that one of the key causes of bell miner associated dieback is lack of fire through the forest so you end up with a nitrogen cycle. When you burn a forest through a hazard reduction burn, you remove all the waste material on the floor of the forest and you create a lot of nitrogen oxide, which obviously goes back into the atmosphere, which denudes the nitrogen and the trees are able to continue to survive. What happens over time if you do not have a fire is the waste material from the trees builds up on the soil surface; it is bringing nitrogen in from the air and converting it. The nitrogen builds up in the soil and we believe it gets to the point where nitrogen begins to inhibit growth of the trees. The trees begin to die back and they are attacked by the aphids. The aphids are sucking on the trees and creating areas where the birds, the bell miners can come and feed off the aphids and hence you get that particular cycle. We have done quite a bit of internal investigative work and one of our views is that one of the best ways of controlling bell miner dieback is through hazard reduction burning.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Could you provide the Committee on notice with any documents that outline your strategy dealing with bell miner dieback considering that it impacts on your operations, the health of the forests and any results of the fire management regime?

Mr ROBERTS: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Mr Roberts, I would like to afford you the opportunity to comment on the decision of the Land and Environment Court last year on the breach of the threatened species licence regarding the smoky mouse, and the very harsh comments of Justice Pepper, who stated, "The number of convictions suggests either a pattern of continuing disobedience in respect to environmental laws generally or, at the very least, a cavalier attitude to compliance with such laws". How would you as the chief executive officer of Forests NSW respond to those comments by Justice Pepper?

Mr ROBERTS: I was extremely disappointed that we were in the position of being prosecuted in the first place. There were a number of features of that particular incident that we regret and basically it should not have happened. We were conducting a post-harvest burn in Nullica State Forest and the burn was started in May; it was quite cold weather. The guys responsible for the burn lit it up and it was going very slowly. They came back two days later and it had hardly moved. They came back a week later and it had hardly moved. They came back 10 days later and it had burned through the smoky mouse habitat, so we had not provided the adequate supervision that we should have done and accordingly I am very upset that that happened. It should not have happened in our business.

We are disappointed with the comment in the sense that the last prosecution Forests NSW had had been 10 years prior to that prosecution. If we had had a series of prosecutions in the intervening years I would have felt that the comment was valid but as we had not had a prosecution for at least 10 years, we felt that was quite a harsh comment in terms of disregard for the regulatory environment, which I would like to think that we certainly do not have and that we take our responsibilities very seriously.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is certainly a better record than former Labor MPs.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Colless.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Wells, I know you are familiar with the Pilliga forest, having worked in that area sometime ago. What is your understanding of the current wood supply agreements to the mills that are currently harvesting in the Pilliga? Are they still able to continue their mill operations and is there a decline in the quality of the sawlogs they are able to access now?

Mr WELLS: Thank you for the question. The overall sustained yield balance in the cypress forests following the Brigalow decision—the initial decision was for 57,000 cubic metres out of the Brigalow when the sustained yield of the estate was about 40, but that was rectified by some additional milling exits in the southern part of the cypress belt such that the sustained yield of the cypress forest became in balance with the commitments under the wood supply agreement—about 60,000 cubic metres. That is still the case, so 60,000 cubic metres of sustained yield potential from the forests and 60,000 cubic metres of wood supply agreements to the pooled companies in the north of the State and to the grant companies in the south of the State.

At a strategic level the sustained yield allocations and the commitments are in balance. At a lower level, particularly in the Pilliga, I guess it alludes to a comment that Nick made earlier that some of the harvest areas now are becoming lower in volume. It is understandable that some of the better areas get logged first and some of the more difficult ones a bit later on. I would think that would be the case at the moment, that some of the more difficult areas to harvest in terms of lower volumes per hectare and more difficult to get at are probably playing out in the cypress just like they are on the North Coast.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What about the quality and size of the logs?

Mr WELLS: Cypress is interesting. The quality of a cypress log is derived by the fact it is an arid timber and it grows very slowly. That gives it its density and its termite resistance so the quality of the timber is actually enhanced by being slow growing so some of the difficult country actually produces some quite good timber quality. In terms of log size, and millers like bigger logs because their recovery is better, some of the forests to be harvested in the future are probably of a lower quality and smaller log size. I have actually been out of the area for a few years now but I suspect that the average logs size might be coming down—again, it is probably similar circumstances to what Nick described on the North Coast.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: You gave me a figure before of regulatory burden of \$6 million. Could you just describe the cost to Forests NSW of dealing with people who are active against you, such as environmentalists, and of dealing with that sort of action?

Mr ROBERTS: I do not have an accurate figure but I guess we could sort of estimate it. A lot of the cost actually falls on the contractor.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: So small business and family businesses?

Mr ROBERTS: It tends to be that way because the contractor will go into the bush and it is his operation which is being targeted so he gets held up and, as a consequence, loses money. To the extent that we are able to keep him whole, we try to do that but that can be very difficult in a sustained campaign.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: If there is one specific aspect of government regulation or oversight which is particularly onerous to you what would it be?

Mr ROBERTS: I think its philosophies are not an aspect but I think it might apply, and the way the regulations are currently derived is they are very input driven, so they will tell us exactly how we need to build a road and we will have to report exactly how high the cut batter is and how deep the fill batter is and provide lots and lots of reporting back.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Is that to the Office of Environment and Heritage?

Mr ROBERTS: To the Environment Protection Authority, so there is a lot of reporting and there is a lot of prescription about how we should undertake our activities. If you look at best practice in environmental regulation around the world, there has been a move more to less prescriptive and more outcomes-based regulation. We would argue for outcomes-based regulation; we would argue for effects-based regulation in that any operation does have a risk associated with it. I think we should focus on the big risks and the serious environmental risks and put all of our efforts, that is ourselves and the Environment Protection Authority, into

making sure that we control those risks, train people appropriately to make sure that we are able to avoid any consequent environmental damage. The third aspect would be moving to a landscape-based approach to threatened species conservation.

At the moment we are spending a lot of money at a site base to protect an individual. I am not saying we should not do that; we definitely should do that, but the regulation forces us to look at an individual site rather than considering the population and the surrounding forests. We know a lot about individual compartments and what is in those compartments but if you said to me, "What is the yellow-bellied glider population like across State forests on the North Coast?" I could not easily get that for you. We could piece it together but it is not an automatic consequence of what we are doing.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I will not be asking you that question.

Mr ROBERTS: I am pleased to hear that, but that is the kind of stuff we should know.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: How far back do your records go in relation to individual logging areas across the State with any degree of consistency and accuracy?

Mr ROBERTS: My colleague Mr Wells says that we have compartment histories back to the 1940s.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Are you aware of any instances of compartments that have been logged in the past having been subsequently claimed by environmental groups to be pristine wilderness when attempts have been made to relog them decades later? You can take that question on notice.

Mr ROBERTS: I will.

CHAIR: I think we have exhausted that line of questioning. I thank you, Mr Roberts, and your team for giving evidence today. It has been very valuable. Obviously members have questions that they were not able to ask. If they are forwarded to you will you be able to respond within 21 days?

Mr ROBERTS: We would be happy to do that.

(The witnesses withdrew)

BRUCE MORGAN CHRISTIE, Executive Director, Biosecurity NSW, Department of Primary Industries, and

JOHN PAUL TRACEY, Manager, Invasive Species, Biosecurity NSW, Department of Primary Industries, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Prior to proceeding with questions from the Committee, would either of you like to make an opening statement?

Mr CHRISTIE: Biosecurity is the protection of the economy, the environment and the community from the negative impacts of pests, diseases and weeds. Biosecurity is everybody's responsibility; it is not solely the Government's role. It moves across the continuum; it does not stop at a property or jurisdictional boundaries, so we must look at things in a holistic landscape way. Processes are being actively pursued at national, state and regional levels to ensure an integrated system for responding to and managing biosecurity threats. At the national level we have an intergovernmental agreement on biosecurity that was signed recently by the Commonwealth and all the States except Tasmania. The agreement is complemented by three emergency response deeds that outline roles and responsibilities and cost-sharing arrangements between all the government and industry bodies that are signatories.

The New South Wales Government has recognised the benefits of an integrated approach to biosecurity and recently established Biosecurity NSW as a division within the Department of Primary Industries so that we can centralise the management of biosecurity activities across New South Wales in the one area. Biosecurity NSW will lead the engagement on areas of biosecurity with other agencies that play a central role in management. The Department of Primary Industries and Biosecurity NSW obviously are not the only agencies involved in biosecurity. We are in the process of drafting a new New South Wales biosecurity strategy that will underpin all of our activities across the State. We are also in the process of reviewing all the existing legislation relating to biosecurity activities. Many pieces of legislation impact on biosecurity and we believe that by developing a new set of contemporary standards and biosecurity legislation we will be able to ensure that the continuum and all the biosecurity aspects are handled properly and uniformly rather in the piecemeal way that has occurred with some of the legislation that was enacted in the 1900s.

A majority of the existing legislation is administered by the Department of Primary Industries. However, other agencies such as the Office of Environment and Heritage, local government and the State Emergency Service all play key roles. Other statutory bodies such as livestock health and pest authorities and the Game Council also have active roles. We have a number of strategies—I have already mentioned the biosecurity strategy. However, Biosecurity NSW is the lead agency specifically for invasive species and it has an invasive species plan that gives an overarching framework for dealing with pests and weeds. I have copies of that for the Committee.

CHAIR: Do you wish to table that document?

Mr CHRISTIE: Yes. We have a number of other documents that may assist the Committee. We have cascading levels of draft biosecurity strategies for the entire State and an invasive species strategy. We split weeds and pests into two categories. We have a weeds action program and a number of statewide specific strategies. We have brought two examples with us. One is the wild dog strategy that was recently released and the other is the Hawkweed strategy. Underneath those we have regional pest and weed strategies and catchment action plans. These strategies are obviously designed to give direction and we are moving towards an outcomes-based approach. People will line up with the outcomes and determine the actions that they will undertake. It is not possible for government alone to deal with all these threats. These documents are an attempt to address those issues.

Our general principle is to address areas in which we will get the best result for our investment. That means we are often looking at preventing the pest or disease coming into an area. That is the first and most cost-effective way to deal with something. Finding it quickly and eradicating it is the next most cost-effective approach. The next most cost-effective approach is containing it. If it has become widespread the return decreases because obviously you need a lot of inputs. We have a curve that provides an example of what we are trying to do. The elimination/eradication end results in a much better outcome than trying to live with something over the longer term.

Finally, with respect to public lands, the main biosecurity issues we face are generally vertebrate pests and weeds. Over 1,600-odd species of introduced plants have become established in the wild in New South Wales and many of these have substantial impacts both agriculturally and on biodiversity. There are a range of invasive pests and animals that also require ongoing coordination and control. Biosecurity NSW works with the stakeholders to try and develop nil tenure cooperative approaches to dealing with these pests and weeds in particular, but also animal and plant diseases, and we also play an important part in carrying out research, particularly in the biological control agent area. It is one of the areas where we think we can get some returns if you can find a good enough biological control that works. We also try and support the land managers. But one of our key roles is trying to work as a coordinator across regions of the State to address specific outcomes.

CHAIR: Is Biosecurity NSW taking over the roles that were part of the Department of Primary Industries, such as the Vertebrate Pest Research Unit and those sorts of areas, or are you separate from it?

Mr CHRISTIE: No, that is correct; we are taking over those areas. In the past the vertebrate pests policy and compliance areas sat within my group. With the development of Biosecurity NSW the research section, which was outside of that, has now been brought into the same area.

CHAIR: As such, are you now the New South Wales Government partner, for example, in the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre? Have you take over that role?

Mr CHRISTIE: No. I have got other people who look after that. They report to me though.

CHAIR: But it is all part of your area now is it?

Mr CHRISTIE: It is all part of our area.

CHAIR: Talking about cooperation with other groups and other departments, in relation to pest control, do you have any involvement in bright ideas like the cyanide and strychnine-laced salt-licks that the National Parks and Wildlife Service decided they were going to sprinkle around the countryside to control large vertebrates such as horses and deer?

Mr CHRISTIE: Our research areas and the Cooperative Research Centre obviously are looking for effective ways of controlling pest animals and in that context we would certainly be interested in looking at any outcomes from those sorts of things.

CHAIR: Are you located at Orange?

Mr CHRISTIE: No, I am located at Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute at Camden.

CHAIR: That is the headquarters of Biosecurity NSW, is it?

Mr CHRISTIE: We have two sections, partly in Orange. Across the whole of the State we have staff in all different places, but I am located at Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute.

CHAIR: If you have not already done so would you be able to supply the committee with some sort of an organisation chart that shows where you fit in?

Mr CHRISTIE: Certainly.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Mr Christie, if I was going to go looking for blackberries for my blackberry strudel would I be most likely to find them on a private farm, a managed State forest or in a national park?

Mr CHRISTIE: We do not have a record specifically of exactly where blackberries are. I know they are widespread.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Are you aware of anecdotal evidence, which certainly I have received and I presume other members of this committee has received, that there is a substantial amount of invasive non-native species in national parks at the current time?

Mr CHRISTIE: There is certainly a perception that there are many weeds in national parks. Unfortunately, the last few years of rain has meant that there are widespread weeds all over the State at this stage.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you believe that National Parks has appropriately resourced its prevention and eradication programs for the lands that it controls?

Mr CHRISTIE: Again, it is difficult. The problem with weeds, as you would be aware, is that they are widespread and it becomes very difficult to channel exactly where you need to spend your money. Widespread weeds could soak just about everybody's budget if we kept pushing trying to control all of them. Specifically, National Parks generally work in regional groups where they decide where they can best use their money based on plans the regional groups have come together with. So in some areas they may have chosen to look at blackberries and in other areas they will have chosen to look at other weeds.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you believe that it is responsible for National Parks to increase land purchase and increase its landholdings without appropriately providing for such prevention and eradication measures?

Mr CHRISTIE: I think it is important that we look at weed and pest control on a nil-tenure basis. Regardless of who owns the property it is important they are part of the solution and control the weeds or the pests in those areas.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Certainly that is the case, but in the instances of both State forests and private farms you would find more often than not a far higher degree of active management of pests simply in both instances if there is an economic return which is occasioned by invasive species and invasive animals. Would that not be the case?

Mr CHRISTIE: I could not comment on the end result. At the moment in some areas there is quite a deal of money spent; in other areas probably not as much, depending on the regional approach.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Mr Christie, could I ask you a question that Renata Brooks said you would probably be more qualified to answer? I think it is called a flick pass. It was a question about carp in national parks. Do you see any opportunity for commercial fishermen to assist with that?

Mr CHRISTIE: The short answer is yes, but whether it is commercially viable for them to actually do it is a different question. I think there are two issues around it. Obviously when you go into some areas there are a lot of carp, and if you can take those carp out one of the problems is that they come back again fairly quickly. But in the interim period a commercial business is going to have to move around to harvest those. So, firstly, during the drought there was obviously a decrease in water and a decrease in the amount of carp. The short answer is that there is possibly an opportunity for the commercial harvest of carp to help control carp, but whether it is commercially viable will be a different issue.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: We were down at Balranald and some commercial fishermen suggested that if they had a licence or an entitlement, whatever you call it, and they were chasing yellow belly or whatever they were chasing, that they would necessarily pick up quite a tonnage of carp at the same time, which they would dispose of for next to nothing. But there was an environmental outcome—in other words, I suppose, a win-win. I was not really asking about people harvesting carp for the sake of fertiliser or whatever, but people who are going in there chasing commercial native fish, if you like, and the consequence was also suppressing the carp.

Mr CHRISTIE: I think many of us have seen different people trying to control carp. We all agree that they are not doing a lot of good for our systems. Generally what happens though is that you go in and you harvest them in whatever way you choose and they come back pretty quickly. Certainly there is research, and it is not going to give you an answer in the short term, but there is research looking at it. We have had quite a bit of money spent on daughterless carp and I understand the results are a bit iffy. But there is also research looking at a herpes virus called koi carp herpes virus, which potentially could wipe out a lot of carp. But, similarly too, rabbit calicivirus or myxomatosis. The trouble with those sorts of controls is that you put them in there, they work for a period of time while you have got a low immunity but the animals that survive build up immunity, so you end up with these peaks and troughs. I think it is important that we continue to look for ways to control them but there is no easy solution at this stage.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Are you consulted in advance when a park is proposed on biosecurity implications, whether they be invertebrates or whatever? Does someone talk to your agency first?

Mr CHRISTIE: I am not aware of it. Generally, before a park is declared I am not aware of having been asked our opinion from that perspective. Certainly we work together with parks in other ways once they have been declared.

CHAIR: Mr Tracey, you might be able to answer this very quick question. Is there any anecdotal or observed evidence of rabbits starting to boom, for want of a better word?

Mr TRACEY: Yes. I think Bruce has covered it before with a range of pests too. Certainly we have seen increasing reports of a whole range of species and it is seasonal. After a run of good seasons you get increased numbers of pests so we have had increasing reports in some areas.

CHAIR: Is anybody in your area doing any research on new strains of calicivirus, or trying to get ahead of the game, so to speak?

Mr TRACEY: Yes.

Mr CHRISTIE: Yes, the answer is the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute, Peter Kirkland's team at the institute, has been working with calicivirus and continues to work with calicivirus.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Does the assessment of poisons for feral animals come under your purview?

Mr CHRISTIE: We certainly have an input into it. We work with welfare, the RSPCA and others, to determine whether those poisons are effective. Obviously we want to make sure that they both are effective and kill the host animal, that they are not going to impact on non-host areas, and that they do not last in the environment for too long. We certainly work in those areas and a lot of the research that we have done in the past through both the Cooperative Research Centre [CRC] and the department itself has been looking at those sorts of things.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Are you familiar with and have you done some work on the current debate of PAPP versus 1080?

Mr CHRISTIE: For the specifics of that I would hand over to John, but yes we are very aware of that.

Mr TRACEY: In terms of the legislation in New South Wales, the Office of Environment and Heritage, the environment department, is responsible for pesticide legislation. Nationally it is the APVMA, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority. Where the Department of Primary Industries [DPI] gets involved is that we do work in the research area basically. We are looking at new toxins. We are trying to develop new products. We are supportive generally of the work that is done at the national level and with research groups in developing those.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the advantage of PAPP over 1080?

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Is that in confidence?

Mr TRACEY: I am not sure I can answer that one. The answer is that the jury is still out. It is still under research and they are looking at effectiveness and welfare concerns.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Are you aware of some research that was done by the wild dogs CRC in conjunction with Nationals Parks a few years ago looking at the efficacy of 1080 on eastern quolls? The research was to mound bait with blank fox-off type baits to monitor which animals were taking them. When they started using live baits laced with 1080 they found that the quolls that picked up the bait from the mound dropped the baits within two metres of the mound, which indicated to the research team that the quoll had an innate ability to detect the 1080 in the bait. Where they were baiting wild dogs with mound baits with 1080 the population of the eastern quoll increased. Are you aware of that research?

Mr TRACEY: Different research has been conducted. What I can say with the work done on impacts of quolls is that almost all the work points to the fact that there is no reduction in quoll numbers as a result of 1080 baiting. In fact, it hints at what you are saying, not so much there is an increase in quolls but certainly there is no decrease in the population. There are suggestions made about declining dog numbers and increasing quoll numbers at the same time.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: On 31 May the Government announced that it would open up part of the National Parks estate to amateur hunters to assist in feral animal control. Was Biosecurity NSW consulted prior to that 31 May announcement?

Mr CHRISTIE: The use of hunters in any context can be seen as part of a strategy. We do not look at any one particular strategy when we are trying to control dogs or other pests. Shooting is one of those options. The specifics about whether they are professional or amateur is not for us to comment on.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Was Biosecurity NSW consulted prior to the Government's announcement?

Mr CHRISTIE: We knew the Government was discussing possibilities of using shooters in various ways. As I said, the only reference that we would be required to make was to as to whether shooting was of assistance in vermin pest control. It is of assistance in its right place.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Is Biosecurity NSW involved in the current consultation process that is occurring inside government about how this will be rolled out?

Mr CHRISTIE: No.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: The website of the Department of Primary Industries shows the standard operating procedure for the ground shooting of foxes. Are you aware of that standard operating procedure?

Mr CHRISTIE: Yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Is it true that the standard operating procedure states that shooting should only be used in a strategic manner as part of a coordinated program designed to achieve sustained effective controls? It also says that it is time consuming, labour intensive and therefore an inefficient method for large-scale fox control in Australia. Although shooting can result in a localised reduction in fox numbers, it is ineffective in significantly fox populations, particularly over the longer term. It also says that young inexperienced foxes which are easily lured into the shooter's range are more likely to be killed by shooting, and then to compensate for this the breeding and survival of remaining animals is enhanced. Do you agree with that statement and, therefore, what that means for perhaps recreational hunting in State Forests if foxes are the target of that hunting?

Mr CHRISTIE: I think what it is reflecting is that if you use one form of control it will not be enough. In the case of shooting in any circumstance, if you are trying to control a population you need to look at a number of different controls in one of those areas. As you have said, shooting of foxes will reduce some foxes but we certainly look at those areas where we are trying to control foxes and make sure that we do more than just shoot.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: This standard operating procedure suggests that it potentially could result in more fox numbers if it is just ground shooting in a State forest or a national park.

Mr CHRISTIE: I will let John fill in on the detail.

Mr TRACEY: I think again it is not realistic. The government approach to this is that it is an integrated approach, so we are not looking at only shooting in any area. We advocate, and it is something that we support quite strongly, an integrated approach to pest management. We want to take advantage of as many tools as we can to reduce pest impact.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: How is it integrated in the State forests that have been opened up to recreational hunting for the past few years? Say the Game Council declares a forest open for hunting one

weekend, you are saying that is part of an integrated pest management program. Can you explain how that occurs?

Mr TRACEY: I can provide comments on that but I guess that is within the State Forests area. Basically the decision to put in hunters is up to the land manager. It certainly can be part of an integrated program, and that is our perspective, that is what we are encouraging takes place.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Have feral animal numbers been reduced in any sustained way as a result of recreational hunting in State forests? Has there been any research or any peer reviewed evidence to suggest that?

Mr TRACEY: We do not have any scientific studies at this point that demonstrate reduced impacts. But, in saying that, it is difficult to do that for a whole range of techniques. For any techniques that people are using to reduce numbers of feral animals it is challenging to get good measures of impact.

Mr CHRISTIE: If I could just add one of the difficulties you have got in trying to measure those sorts of things is exactly what we have got now. It does not matter where you go and what techniques you are using, the numbers have gone up because of the break in the drought. The number of rabbits that are out there, there are more foxes, so we need to do more wherever we possibly can to try and control feral animals, including shooting.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I think the Government's submission outlined some of the pest animals destroyed or removed, for example, and baits laid in the national parks system in 2010-11, and had quite significant numbers for the amount of animals destroyed or baits laid or removed or trapped. That is a concerted effort. There is peer-reviewed evidence that some integrated pest animal strategies work. I am just wondering whether there has been peer-reviewed evidence of recreational hunting in State forests similar to what has happened in other areas.

Mr CHRISTIE: Not the specifics of recreational hunting on its own.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I note Mr Chair earlier mentioned the potential cyanide trial that we are hearing about that the National Parks and Wildlife Service are conducting. I am hearing that cyanide is in fact possibly a more humane method of poisoning or killing feral animals than perhaps 1080. Would either of you like to comment on what you know about cyanide as a treatment?

Mr TRACEY: Yes, cyanide is relatively more humane than 1080. I think there is evidence to support that. It is quite a rapid death.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: If that is the case do you know the reason for the delay? Is it that we have not been able to target the use of cyanide for specific species? Why are we not using cyanide over 1080?

Mr TRACEY: The reason is cyanide has welfare concerns. It also has non-target concerns that need to be addressed. It is not selective. The 1080 is more selective and targeted for wild dogs and foxes in particular. Canines are highly susceptible to 1080, whereas any animal can succumb to cyanide quite quickly. In saying that, there are benefits of cyanide as well because it does not persist in the environment. It is not going to stay in the environment for a long period of time. So there are pros and cons of the toxins depending on the circumstances. I think the biggest issue with cyanide is that you have got to be very careful with non-targets and you have got to target the baiting if you are going to use cyanide to make sure that it has limited non-target effects.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You are Biosecurity NSW and the National Parks and Wildlife Service are, as you understand it, conducting trials of that. What involvement, if any, in terms of consultation or other things do you have with what they are researching? I am presuming the Cooperative Research Centre [CRC] has a role as well, do they?

Mr TRACEY: Those trials are mainly conducted by National Parks. Part of my role is the chair of the Pest Animals Councils, so they report to us in terms of how those projects are progressing. We do have some involvement and the CRC certainly as scientists discuss the appropriateness of survey design and developing these trials to basically cover off on all those things.

CHAIR: Before we move on to Mr Phelps I will just take that line of questioning a little further. What are the Federal regulators' views of the comparative safety of using 1080 for humans versus cyanide?

Mr TRACEY: The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority [APVMA] is the regulator in this case. Their decisions are based on the science. They want good evidence of non-target impacts and they want thorough investigations of these things. Efficacy, non-target impacts, and welfare are the considerations that APVMA have.

CHAIR: And occupational health and safety issues?

Mr TRACEY: And occupational health and safety. That is right. Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: We have spoken a fair bit about animals, but in relation to invasive vegetative species what are the three key threats that are facing New South Wales at the moment?

Mr CHRISTIE: It is difficult to specify because they are obviously coming from different directions. When you look at the curve we are always concerned that we have new introduced weeds that might take off. Some of those are already here and they have been brought in by the nursery industry or by animal production industries in the past. They are sitting there and we have called them sleeper weeds because we have not seen them expand in where they have been growing, but if there are changes in climate and other things there are potential—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But essentially it is existing threats in New South Wales rather than something coming in from overseas or interstate?

Mr CHRISTIE: There is always a potential from overseas as well and again we rely heavily on the Commonwealth to protect the borders. But for seeds those borders are very porous, people can bring them in any way they like. So there is certainly both overseas possibly coming in and existing sleeper weeds. The other end of the spectrum though, as you hinted to start with, is blackberries and other longer term weeds that have been here for a long time. As I said earlier, you could throw lots and lots of money at some of those particular weeds and have very little impact from a government perspective. That is why we go back to individual farmers. Where are the priority areas? It depends a little bit on where you sit on that spectrum. From a government perspective we are looking particularly at those new ones that might come in.

We have recently had a case, for example, on the north coast of New South Wales where tropical soda apple was identified. Tropical soda apple is a solanum. It is like a tomato. It was a really good example for me as to why putting the biosecurity groups together has worked. In that particular case it was recognised after a couple of years that it was up on the north coast. It was identified. In the process of getting the regional groups together to manage it our staff had a cattle person actually working in the weeds group at the time, he recognised that the fruit from this tropical soda apple was being consumed by the cattle. The quickest way to find out where the weed was going to spread, other than just down the river, was to use the National Livestock Identification Scheme to trace the cattle.

What we were able to do then was very quickly cover the whole State, notify all the local governments that had received cattle, and there was something like roughly 1,700 reports. We were able to send people out. We found five or six places where the weed had just established and they were able to eradicate it straightaway to keep the rest of the State free. That then allowed them to concentrate back on the North Coast on trying to eradicate it there. The cooperation that that engendered between Catchment Management Authorities, Livestock Health and Pest Authorities and ourselves was fantastic. Unfortunately the rains put a bit of a hole in the control program, but it is still restricted to that particular area and we hope that we will be able to eradicate it eventually.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: One of the things you hear most often from the more extreme green groups is the deliberate movement of feral animals into areas. I am thinking specifically of deer in this instance. Have you seen any evidence that there is the deliberate importation of feral animals into a particular area?

Mr CHRISTIE: Anecdotally. People have mentioned it but I have not seen specifically movement of deer in particular. It is the same with pigs. People have said this happens but I do not have any evidence to prove that one way or the other.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I think the estate is about 8 per cent, the national parks and reserves and all the rest of it, with a possible aim of getting up to about a figure of 12 per cent, 13 per cent or even 17 per cent. Do you project out three years, five years or seven years? Hence what that will mean for your budget and workload?

Mr CHRISTIE: With the creation of Biosecurity NSW one of our programs has been to develop these strategies and look at ways we can handle things more on a regional basis. We are anticipating that in getting the fragmented groups that work out there in some of these areas together we should be able to achieve more with what we have got. As I said before, the nil-tenure approach is basically to go into a region and identify what the problems are and regardless of who owns the problem to get them to work together on a regional basis. So whether the National Parks own a great swag of land versus the public, our perspective is that we need to control that. If it is on National Parks land, then they will need to provide the money to help control that.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: We have made some changes to the law and given some extra powers. Do you see any need for any more powers in that respect if you are going down that nil-tenure path, which sounds sensible and logical? Have you got all the powers you need?

Mr CHRISTIE: I mentioned earlier that we are reviewing the legislation. We have reviewed the legislation we have in place now in order to meet national requirements for exotic disease, exotic pests and exotic weeds so that we can respond appropriately. But the idea of the review is far more than just looking at what we have got now. It is to say can we change the thinking of people—as Mr Roberts mentioned before he left—and look more at an outcomes-based approach? We want to get across an approach that landholders, regardless of who they are, have obligations to do certain things.

At the moment much of the legislation is built around "We are the Government and we have got to come and tell you that you are doing something wrong before you fix it". From a biosecurity point of view we have got to get everybody thinking that, whether it is weeds or pest animals or diseases, it is their responsibility just as much as government. I would be hoping that the new legislation that eventually comes recognises that there is an obligation on everybody to control weeds or pests and so on. At this stage I would say we have got sufficient powers. We have only just recently, for example, reviewed the Weeds Act. There were some bits that were—

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Powers of entry and things like that.

Mr CHRISTIE: Before the amendments, which were only a few months ago, there was quite a difference of powers between, for example, the Animal Diseases (Emergency Outbreaks) Act and the Weeds Act. Now there is a similar approach to those things.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: So we could be in for some recommendation for some more tweaking and that sort of thing?

Mr CHRISTIE: Yes.

CHAIR: I do not know whether I have asked you this, but would you be able to supply us with an organisation chart?

Mr CHRISTIE: Yes.

CHAIR: Will you give us a list of the Acts under which you have your heads of power?

Mr CHRISTIE: We will give you a list of those.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I think it is in the back of this dogs and invasive species—

Mr CHRISTIE: That will only cover the dogs and invasive species area. There are quite a number of other Acts that we cover so we will give you a full list.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I turn to one of the biggest weed threats that we have in New South Wales coming down from the north: parthenium weed. What protocols are in place to prevent parthenium weed entering the State and once an outbreak is found in New South Wales what are the protocols to control it?

Mr CHRISTIE: Parthenium weed is one of the success stories of weeds and of how weeds can be controlled if you apply the right sort of approach to it. Any agricultural machinery at the present time is required to stop on the other side of the border, be cleaned and certified to come across the border.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Because of the recent changes to the Act?

Mr CHRISTIE: We have just changed the Act recently because we recognise that it was not just agricultural machinery anymore but mining equipment, for example, moving backwards and forwards across the border and we did not have any control over that, equally a Telstra truck or anything else. So we have just recently changed the Act, which makes sure that people stop on the other side. Again we have inspectors who are employed on a casual basis. People can ring up, make an appointment and be checked through. If somebody does run the gauntlet we have found that there is a very good local, regional response. Many times we have been advised that somebody has run the gauntlet and we have been able to chase them.

If we do find parthenium weed on our side of the border, which occurs occasionally, we are advised of where it is. We have people, not just weed inspectors but many other people—we have a very good extension program up there—and whenever we have been advised we have been able to go out and eradicate it. It is a really good example that you can do the same sort of thing for weeds as you do for animal diseases or plant diseases. It is applying exactly the same techniques. One of the reasons why Biosecurity NSW was put together was to use those sorts of techniques across a range of things.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What then are your standard operating procedures in relation to interacting with the local weeds authorities, local government and so on?

Mr CHRISTIE: In parthenium weed we work very closely with the weeds authorities. In the parthenium weed project we have an allocation of funds under the Weeds Action Plan that covers parthenium weed. In general, however, we work closely with local government, particularly through the Noxious Weeds Advisory Committee. That gives us representatives from local government, the Office of Environment and Heritage, the Department of Primary Industries and a number of other agencies and private representatives. At that higher level there is good communication and we work down again on a regional basis. One of the reasons for developing Biosecurity NSW was recognition that that could improve and one of our beliefs is that by better communication, better talking between Catchment Management Authorities, ourselves or local government we can improve on a regional approach for a variety of weeds.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: One of our terms of reference is to look at the north-east public forests of New South Wales. What can you tell us about bell miner associated dieback in the northern forests of this State?

Mr CHRISTIE: Myself very little. I will pass that one over to John.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Mr Tracey, can you help us?

Mr TRACEY: Probably not a lot. I guess in terms of invasive species we are interested in mainly the introduced species. Bell miner is obviously a native species but we have also got a range of invasive species that we target as well. Specifically about that issue I do not really have any information.

Mr CHRISTIE: Could I take that on board?

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I might put something on notice.

Mr CHRISTIE: Again in the creation of Biosecurity NSW a number of the pathologists who work in Forests NSW have now come across to us. If I can take that on notice I will be able to get some information on that for you.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: How many full-time employees do you have at Biosecurity NSW?

Mr CHRISTIE: It varies, but around about 450. There are about 280-odd who are consolidated revenue and the remainder come from non-consolidated revenue. So in total about 450.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Are you subject to the labour-saving measures that were announced by the State Government in its budget this year?

Mr CHRISTIE: I think all departments will be subject to that announcement as far as I am aware.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: How will Biosecurity NSW go about meeting the challenge set by the Government through this year's budget?

Mr CHRISTIE: We will be looking at ways that we can do things more efficiently and more effectively and again part of that is working together looking at various strategies. Certainly we are looking at things that we may not be able to do any further and looking at understanding the benefits of the interactions where government money has been going before. We are looking at principles along the lines of who is creating the risks and who the beneficiaries are where public good exists; assessing all the projects that we undertake along those lines but continuing to look for efficiencies.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Of the 450 jobs that are there at the moment, how many will disappear?

Mr CHRISTIE: I could not say at this stage.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Will you be able to provide us with some information on notice?

Mr CHRISTIE: If we are provided with the information from the Government, then we will be able to provide it to you, but at this stage I cannot provide you with that information.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: How do the efforts and resources of eradicating pests, weeds and animals from national parks compare with that across other land tenures, such as other Crown land and State forests?

Mr CHRISTIE: Do you want to tease that out a little bit?

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: In your opinion, how do the efforts that the National Parks and Wildlife Service staff go to, to deal with various pest animals and weeds in national parks, compare to, for example, efforts by Forests NSW staff, Crown lands and other public land agencies? I am not after statistics unless you can provide them to me on notice.

Mr CHRISTIE: We can provide some details on the money that is spent in those different areas if we take that on notice, but it really depends again on a regional approach as to who is putting what into where. I cannot really say that the amount of money that is spent by Catchment Management Authorities [CMAs], for example, is more appropriate than the amount of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. We are talking about different areas. We are talking about regional approaches. We can certainly talk, if there is a regional approach to a particular weed, how much the National Parks and Wildlife Service has put into that approach and how much catchment management authorities have put into that approach, et cetera.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Generally, in terms of what National Parks and Wildlife Service is trying to achieve though, is it fair to say that it would set a greater priority for trying to eradicate weeds and pest animals from within national parks compared to other public land managers—that that is one of the biggest priorities for National Parks and Wildlife Service staff?

Mr CHRISTIE: Certainly we have a good relationship with them and they have certainly joined in various partnerships to control: it is almost impossible to eradicate. We have one example, which we have distributed I think, which is a hawkweed strategy where hawkweed is only in a national park.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: What a surprise.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Just ignore him. Keep going.

Mr CHRISTIE: The point is that, in that particular case, there is a recognised weed in a national park and they are working with us to make sure it does not get out somewhere else.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: There are other examples of National Parks and Wildlife Service-managed land, of course—for example, when State forest is converted to national park or when the National Parks and Wildlife Service is taking on private property—and in those instances, National Parks and Wildlife Service staff make a concerted attempt. They have an eradication program for various pest species on that land. There are quite a number of success stories in national parks and nature reserves. I do not mean the majority by any means, but there are case studies across the State where they effectively eradicate certain weeds—I am not saying all weeds, either—and certain pest animals from those parks.

Mr CHRISTIE: There are certainly ongoing control programs in national parks to keep the lid on some of these pests and weeds, but actually eradicating them—I would have to take that on notice. We have some specifics for eradication.

Mr TRACEY: There are no specifics that we have on eradications but I agree that there are a lot of case studies in which the National Parks and Wildlife Service is getting involved and getting on board with programs. We have lots of buy-in with wild dog plans, for example, and the weeds strategies. There are good partnerships that we have got going, but again it should not be about the National Parks and Wildlife Service versus another agency.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: No.

Mr TRACEY: That is the real focus of what biosecurity is about. We are really trying to build integrated programs with a whole range of partners.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I am wondering, in terms of Forests NSW then, what efforts Forests NSW would make to eradicate or control, for example, certain weed species or pest animal species? My impression is that that would be a priority for the National Parks and Wildlife Service over State Forests. Can you explain what State Forests would do in relation to weed control, for example?

Mr CHRISTIE: It is a very difficult comparison to make because it depends on whether you make it on the amount of money that is spent per hectare of the land involved. I am not sure there is any real measure whereby I can come back and say with any certainty that one does more than the other. Our experience is when there are regional programs that are required, both State Forests and the National Parks and Wildlife Service work with us to develop those programs.

CHAIR: Mr Tracey, can I ask your opinion of the value, in terms of suppression of pest animals, for example, of the effect of continuity or continuance as against, shall we say, high peak but short duration programs that come about traditionally when funding becomes available? How important is continual pressure in terms of pest animal control?

Mr TRACEY: I think it is very important, but I guess the focus for us should be about impacts, not just overall numbers of pests being reduced; so it would be prioritising our effort in areas where we know we are going to get a reduction in impacts rather than broad-scale control. I agree: I think you need sustained control. I would just make the point that I think you are better off investing in a small number of areas where you can have a bigger impact for a sustained period of time than a broad-scale approach to control.

CHAIR: In terms of value for government dollars spent, what is your opinion of the Victorian fox bounty program—\$10 a fox?

Mr CHRISTIE: We have had fox bounties in New South Wales in the past.

CHAIR: And dog bounties.

Mr CHRISTIE: And dog bounties. The impact has been, in some cases locally, to reduce the number of animals, but in general it can be open to fraud. It comes back to what we said before: Unless you have a concerted program in a particular area, you can spend a lot of money on bounties whereas it would be better to concentrate that money on an overall project, looking at a strategy which involved baiting, shooting and a variety of other methods. The Victorians have implemented it, but their own work in previous years had shown that their returns were minimal.

CHAIR: And yet they are now repeating the program. Why would they do that?

Mr CHRISTIE: I could not answer that. They also play Aussie Rules.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Are you aware of the goat eradication project that took place in the Murray-Sunset National Park where the national parks authority got amateur hunters to take part in a sustained cull over three years and found there was a massive reduction in goat numbers?

Mr TRACEY: Yes, we are aware of that program. I guess that part of the picture for us too is getting an integrated approach and really targeting that control. They are the sort of benefits that you can see when you target a range of control measures and you really dedicate a lot of effort into one area.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But is that not the issue? That is, as the Chair mentioned, rather than peaks and troughs, it is better to have a sustained approach not only to animals but also to invasive flora? If you go through and bulldoze a whole swathe of blackberries and do nothing else for five years, you will find a whole swathe of blackberries back there in five years time.

Mr CHRISTIE: Again, one of the reasons for distributing this was to look at where you get the best return for your money. The bottom line talks about economic returns and shows that in the prevention area generally you will get a very good return, and as you move further to the right-hand side your return decreases. So if we are talking about something like blackberries, which is back over in this assets-based protection area, if there is a particular area you want to keep blackberries out, then concentrate on that area. If there is a particular area you want to protect from goats, concentrate on that area. But do not try to spread the money across the whole of New South Wales because frequently you will not make a big impact.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But my argument is this: What happens if, rather than slice the pizza, you have a bigger pizza; rather than have two or three professional hunters clearing out an area over one period of time, have 50 or 60 non-professional hunters over an extended period of time? Surely that would have a much more beneficial effect than the sort of peak and trough approach.

Mr CHRISTIE: Certainly the end result we are looking for is humanely destroyed animals in that particular case. We have no feeling one way or another; whether that is professionals or amateurs, the end result is what we are looking for, the outcome.

CHAIR: We have run out of time. Mr Christie, thank you for coming in to address the Committee. Mr Tracey, thank you for your expert advice. If the Committee members have further questions they wish to put, would you be able to reply to those questions within 21 days of receiving them?

Mr CHRISTIE: Certainly.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

BRIAN GERARD BOYLE, Chief Executive Officer, Game Council NSW, affirmed and examined:

JOHN JULES MUMFORD, Chair, Game Council NSW, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Mr Boyle, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr BOYLE: Yes. I thank the Chair and honoured members of the Committee. Firstly, I wish to acknowledge the Dharug people, the traditional owners and the first hunters and game managers on the land on which we meet. The Game Council NSW is a statutory authority and was established in 2002 under the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002. The Game Council NSW is subject to the control and direction of the Minister for Primary Industries. Under the Act, the Game Council's objectives are:

To provide for the effective management of introduced species of game animals and to promote responsible and orderly hunting of those game animals on public and private land.

Under the Act, the Game Council's functions include: representing the interests of licensed game hunters in matters arising under the Act; administering the licensing system established under the Act for game hunters; making recommendations to relevant Ministers for the purposes of declaring public land available for hunting; and providing advice to the Minister on game and feral animal control

The Game Council provides a range of services, including: an approval process for hunting clubs, organisations and associations for the purposes of the Restricted Game Hunting Licence for hunting on public land. More than 190 Approved Hunting Organisations and over 900 R-licence assessors have been approved by the Game Council NSW. The R-licence accreditation has received international recognition. It is recognised as required training in six States of the United States of America and approval by the International Hunter Education Association is pending. This will give the R-licence recognition in most States of the United States of America. The Game Council conducts the largest specific conservation hunter education program in Australia's history. This was recently reflected in a nationwide survey by the University of Queensland. Hunter education has been identified as a key contributor to safety.

Since 2004 more than 98,750 written permissions to hunt in New South Wales State forests and Crown lands have been issued by the council on behalf of Forests NSW and Catchments and Lands. Hunting is undertaken under controls developed under an AS4360 risk assessment conducted by Forests NSW in 2009. Over 3.2 million animals have been taken by licensed hunters since the licensing began in 2004, including 76,500 animals that have been taken from declared public lands since 2006.

Broad-based ongoing licensed and responsible hunting applies substantial downward pressure on game and feral animal populations on declared public lands in New South Wales. The NSW Game Hunting licensing and written permission system is continually being enhanced. It provides administrative controls and advice to licensed hunters when accessing public lands. The maps provided with the written permission indicate hunting and exclusion areas on detailed colour topographic maps provided by the land manager. The topographic maps are updated every three months or as required. Reports are issued on various aspects of the licensing data, including harvest return data and declared hunting area data.

The licensing system provides law enforcement and compliance data collation and association with licence records. Forests NSW and the NSW Police Force have access to the public land written permission data on-line 24-7. Police officers can exercise functions under the Act. Under a memorandum of understanding, the Game Council works closely with the NSW Police Force—especially the rural crime investigators and rural police officers across the State. The Game Council, land managers and licensed hunters appreciate the support of the NSW Police Force. I attended a Rural Crime Advisory Group this morning. An illegal hunting subcommittee will be established to bring all agencies together to address this issue because it is an issue of public interest.

Game Council NSW provides access for R-licence holders to a Spatial Information eXchange Viewer mapping channel and downloadable hunting maps for global positioning systems developed specifically for hunting on public lands. The council also facilitates agreements with landholders for licensed hunter access to control game and feral animals as an inexpensive alternative, augmenting and complementing other methods and programs paid for by government, land managers and landowners.

The Game Council undertakes a Public Benefit Assessment annually. The 2012 Public Benefit Assessment revealed that \$76.2 million was expended by licensed hunters last year—largely in regional New South Wales. The Game Council has an economic impact in New South Wales estimated at \$105.3 million per annum. The Council employs, directly and indirectly 1,370 people—1,020 of whom work in regional and rural New South Wales.

Game Council NSW is not a land manager or a landowner but develops, implements and manages hunting systems for land managers that are world standard. These systems contribute significantly to game and feral animal control on declared public lands. Hunting is a largely unrecognised but very significant land use in New South Wales. It is an important part of regional economies and a land use that has been part of the New South Wales culture for over 40,000 years.

The Game Council is meeting the challenge of managing hunting on public lands safely, efficiently and effectively and looks forward to continuing to deliver positive benefits for the Government and the people of New South Wales in the future.

CHAIR: Mr Boyle, would you be prepared to table your opening statement?

Mr BOYLE: Yes.

Document tabled.

CHAIR: We will now proceed with questions.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What does "to provide for the effective management of introduced species" in your objects mean?

Mr BOYLE: The Act specifies that it is for the effective management. The Game Council is actually bringing a new paradigm to New South Wales. We have never seen a coordinated control program with statewide consistent effort. By having 18,500 licensed holders continually accessing the land, we actually are suppressing the number of animals to a lower level than has ever been seen. I have experienced this across the forest. I can provide some figures in a minute. It is about bringing them down to a lower level so that we are not just doing pulse management, which has been the traditional way of control. Once we do that, other programs can then come in.

The Game Council and its hunters have taken out what used to be called the doom surplus. So those target programs, be it poisoning, trapping or professional shooting, can actually start eating into the real fun part of the population, that is, the breeding part. We are augmenting and complementing programs across the State. It has been well reflected in what is happening in Forests with the amount of money that is actually being spent. Also, if you actually get out into the forests we have been visiting for the last six years, you really notice that you do not see the animals around like you used to, such as rabbits. If you go to Pennsylvania, which I visited last weekend, you do not see goats in any part of that forest anymore, except over in the real rough stuff that goes up towards the reserves out the back.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: The Committee heard from Biosecurity NSW that there are huge numbers of feral animals because of the wet season. You just said that the numbers are better than ever before and you would show the Committee evidence of that?

Mr BOYLE: On areas outside of the State forests I have no doubt; there are reports of a big increase in feral animals. We have noticed that on the forests that get a lot of attention. The numbers and signs of the animals are not there anymore. If you drive round Hampton, you used to see deer rubs all round the edge of the road six years ago—if you are educated about these things. You do not see them anymore. You do not see the deer runs coming down and across the track.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I assume you have baseline data before recreational hunting began in State forests of the numbers of feral animal species you were targeting and that you now have statistics?

Mr BOYLE: No, that assumption is incorrect. The Game Council developed the agreement with Forests NSW. They had the ecologists and land managers. We implemented a system of hunting that is safe, efficient and effective. We can show that the catch per unit effort has increased as hunters have got used to the

forest and got to know it. Then it started coming back down again and we have had a slight pulse because of the environmental conditions. But there is a track showing that the hunters and animals have responded. The animals have responded, the hunters have been shooting them. It is called catch per unit effort. The catch per unit effort is the best way of having a look at the index of a population. The Game Council did not have baseline data for the 360 forests. That would take a massive amount of effort. We have taken some baseline data in relation to one forest where we are doing ecological deer management, and that is down in Maragle State Forest. I do not have those figures.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: If we can get on notice any information that you have, that would be great. You just mentioned deer. Why does the Game Council continue to campaign against wild deer being listed as a feral pest species?

Mr BOYLE: The Act gives us our direction and policy. The Act states that they are game animals. If you look at one of Australia's greatest biologists and ecologists, Graeme Caughley, and read his book *The Deer Wars for New Zealand*, he had a look at the situation in New Zealand. I come from there and I have worked in environment agencies in New Zealand, Tasmania and Victoria before I came here. Just by declaring an animal a pest does not get rid of it. You have to get out there. The best part of the community that can actually control animals in New South Wales is hunters. We have 148,000 people who have firearms licences with recreational hunting agreement control. If we can engage them and go to a new paradigm where we have broad-based ongoing control, that is much better than pulse control and just declaring something as a pest.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: But it is a fact that under the New South Wales Threatened Species Act deer is a key threatening process?

Mr BOYLE: It is a fact that it was declared a key threatening process on the basis of one species, which was Rusa deer, not all of the species. It is a fact that in certain areas deer have no more impact than, say, stock. The Game Council is not about protecting deer; we are about getting out there and controlling them.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You are not about eradicating them either.

Mr BOYLE: All the groups that will come before you will say that eradication is not possible. It is a really nice dream to have. It is not physically or economically possible in New South Wales so let us put in place processes and systems. Our Act is a very good one for bringing in processes and systems to engage broad-based community support to assist landowners, land managers and the community in controlling these animals, and we are doing a very good job.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: One of the Game Council's functions under the Act is to promote or fund research into game or feral animal control issues. Can you tell the Committee what research the Game Council has conducted into game and feral animal control issues?

Mr BOYLE: We are doing research on Maragle South because that is an ecological deer management [EDM] project. There are a number of other research projects that the Committee has approved. We have sponsored the hunter survey being done by the University of Queensland, a red deer impact study in Queensland that will help us with a browse tier index, and a number of others. I will have to take that on notice and get back to the Committee.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Have you done any research into pigs, for example?

Mr BOYLE: No.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Have you done any research into foxes?

Mr BOYLE: No.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Have you done any research into goats?

Mr BOYLE: No.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Have you done any research into rabbits?

Mr BOYLE: No. The Game Council has just gone through the—

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: But you have done research into deer?

Mr BOYLE: The Game Council has just gone through an establishment process and like every other government department we are doing our best with the resources we have. We are still getting through that establishment phase.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I notice that one of the research programs you have conducted—I do not have it here—was quite an extensive document into the behaviour of deer. What was that?

Mr BOYLE: I will have to take that on notice. I am not familiar with that.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: As a statutory body do you have any key performance indicators around your functions to deliver research?

Mr BOYLE: No, the Game Council has a results and services plan and a reporting mechanism that went to Treasury and to Cabinet. I am pretty sure we do not have a specific one on research at the moment.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: In how many State forests is pig-dogging allowed?

Mr BOYLE: I will have to take that on notice. There are 360-plus forests that we hunt on and I cannot give you the specifics as to what goes on with pig dogs.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Given the lack of staff currently regulating hunting and the plans to introduce shooting into national parks what plans does the Game Council have to increase funding to properly police and regulate shooting on public land?

Mr BOYLE: That is a very good question and I thank you for that. I went to the committee meeting of the Rural Crime Advisory Group this morning and we had advice from NSW Fisheries. It was very interesting to note that the number of enforcement officers at NSW Fisheries and the number of licences correlate very closely with the Game Council. It is very important to understand in relation to compliance that we work very closely with the police. All police officers are inspectors under the Game and Feral Animal Control Act.

There are currently 31 or 32 rural crime investigators across the State. We have a very good relationship with them as well as with the local police. It is not just about the Game Council; it is how we go about it. We are also using technology these days. We have remote surveillance cameras and we are using them to plan in a way that has never been done before. Compliance and control on public lands is at a level that has never been seen before in New South Wales and it is consistent across the State. That is why it is working so efficiently.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: We are hearing a lot of reports that it is not working efficiently. By "we" I do not mean this Committee. What is being done to proactively crack down on illegal shooting at night on public lands? I am getting quite a few emails and phone calls from constituents who are very concerned about hunting in State forests at night if they live adjacent to State forests. We heard recently about kangaroos being shot at camp sites. These are pouring in thick and fast.

Mr BOYLE: Legal hunting has gone on in New South Wales since settlement. I point out that hunting with firearms does not occur at night so you were probably referring to illegal shooting.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Exactly.

Mr BOYLE: With the number of patrols we have done there are very few—one of the things about the Game Council licensing system for hunters that has really impressed is the level of compliance. They have gone through and done accreditation and they are members of an approved hunting organisation. They get ongoing mentoring from their club organisation and the experienced hunters in those groups. Just having those simple steps puts up a hurdle for people who are not really interested in doing the right thing. We are very proud of our licensed hunters. They are doing a very good job and are very law-abiding.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Could you table the compliance activities you were just talking about?

Mr BOYLE: I would be very happy to supply the data.

CHAIR: How many incidents attributable to licensed hunters in State forests have you had since 2006?

Mr BOYLE: I printed some data in relation to that. The overall compliance is incredibly good. The number of compliance campaigns that we have undertaken was: six in 2008; in 2008-09 we were ramping up and there were eight—

CHAIR: I am more interested in the number of incidents that occurred.

Mr BOYLE: I will just add them up.

CHAIR: Illegal incidents by licensed hunters in State forests. Have you got a number? Perhaps you could provide that on notice.

Mr BOYLE: I can provide that to you.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Can you give us a brief on the consultations that are currently occurring inside the New South Wales Government regarding the opening-up of our national parks to licensed hunters? Where is that process up to?

Mr BOYLE: There is a steering committee that is being led by someone from Premier and Cabinet but that has been stamped Cabinet-in-confidence at this stage. You would have to direct the question to that department.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Are you not allowed to tell us about what is being discussed?

Mr BOYLE: Until the final recommendations go to the Premier and the Premier gives a direction. It is in the very early stages of that happening at the moment.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Are you on the steering committee?

Mr BOYLE: That is correct.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Will licensed hunters be supervised when they go into any national park where this will be allowed?

Mr BOYLE: That is yet to be determined for each national park and what controls will be in place. We do have a fantastic model for State forests which could easily apply to national parks.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What is that model?

Mr BOYLE: The model is that we have a written permission system. Forests NSW provide the conditions, the exclusions and the maps. The Game Council has a world-class database that manages that. We have a very good stakeholder services group as well as active game managers that are corresponding and communicating with our licence holders as well as the land managers. That is why it has been such a success.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Do you think that model could easily be transferred to those 79 national parks?

Mr BOYLE: That decision has yet to be made.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Will national parks be closed when licensed hunters enter those parks?

Mr BOYLE: That decision has yet to be made. I worked for 20 years in national parks before I worked with the Game Council. I worked in the Alpine National Park in Victoria, I was the ranger in charge of Lake

Eildon National Park and I also worked in reserves in Tasmania and in New Zealand, where hunting goes on and is working effectively. I believe that system could easily work here in New South Wales.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Does the system you talk about in other jurisdictions involve national parks being closed to the public when licensed hunters enter the park?

Mr BOYLE: In some parks in Victoria, but they shoot only about 600 goats under that program. In the parks and forests that are not closed they shoot about 35,000 deer a year. They are not closed; they are perfectly open. I used to be the ranger in charge of the Howqua Hills. I encourage you to go down there and camp. You will camp with people and see families who go there. The husband might go out hunting in the hills while mum and the kids play beside the river. It works, and it works safely.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I quote from an authoritative source, the Shooters and Fishers Party website: "National parks will not be closed and there will be no close supervision by National Parks staff." Is that your understanding of what will occur?

Mr BOYLE: You can direct that question to the chair. I do not answer for the Shooters and Fishers Party, I am sorry.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I know that. Is that a statement of fact, that national parks will not be shut and there will be no close supervision of licensed hunters when they enter national parks?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The witness has already said the matter is subject to Cabinet in confidence deliberations. The member now appears to be hectoring to try and receive an answer. The member has been told that it is still up for consideration by Cabinet processes.

CHAIR: I rule the question out of order. The member can ask a different question.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: When will the program of licensed hunters entering national parks commence?

Mr BOYLE: When it receives approval from the Premier and Cabinet, I would say.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Do you have a time frame?

Mr BOYLE: No. We hope to deliberate on it over the coming months. We have a tri-State forum next week bringing together South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales to discuss hunting management across those areas so all of the people who are involved or might be involved can discuss the issues. There is still a lot of work to be done.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: That tri-State forum is meant to inform New South Wales policymakers?

Mr BOYLE: No, it is to inform the National Parks staff on what happens elsewhere. It is part of allaying their fears. There is a lot of apprehension because of lack of knowledge of what is going on. The more people become informed about hunting they will see—and if you read the institute statistics or the Council of Licensed Firearms Owners [COLFO] report from New Zealand on the Game Council website—hunting is a safe outdoor pursuit. Once people overcome their anxiety about that—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: If the Government slaps a Cabinet-in-confidence label on this, how is it going to allay fears when you are not allowed to tell us how hunting in national parks will be unveiled?

CHAIR: Mr Boyle is a public servant so I would suggest that he is not able to answer that question. I rule the question out of order.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You are not allowed to tell us.

CHAIR: The witness has already said he is not allowed to tell you.

Mr BOYLE: We are still working through the issues.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Gentlemen, can you tell us what training conservation hunters have to do prior to being accredited to shoot on public lands?

Mr BOYLE: The first step, before they even pick up a firearm, is they are subject to the Firearms Act and nothing in the Game and Feral Control overrides that. The police will have done a background check and they have done the firearms safety handling course and got their accreditation for that. The Game Council has an accreditation system for the R-licence. We run a number of hunter education programs across the State. We have a successful outreach program. Tonight I will be talking to 80 hunters out at Capertee about hunting on Crown land. We are bringing hunter education to a level that has never been seen before.

One of the key findings of reports and research elsewhere is that hunter education is a key component of safety. It is not about formal training, it can be in the form of becoming a member of a hunting group and receiving mentoring and learning at that level. There is a definite correlation between being a member of an approved hunting organisation or a hunting club and being able to hunt safely. They have proved that in New Zealand under Inspector Green's report.

The New South Wales Government has come up with an unique system that we run and it is probably world's best standard for what is currently happening in the southern hemisphere and the control of hunting on private and public lands. There is an accreditation system for the R-licence. We have a hunter education handbook which is world standard and is recognised around the world as a good publication. We have outreach products and programs that are helping the 190 approved hunting organisations educate hunters as well.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: If I wanted to shoot in a State forest do I need to have any additional accreditation other than what I would need to shoot on my friend's farm?

Mr BOYLE: You need to apply for an R-licence. There are a number of things before you can get an R-licence. You cannot have had a prosecution in the last 10 years for trespass, theft, violence or animal cruelty.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Is it not the same for any firearms licence?

Mr BOYLE: No, it is not. You can still hunt on private land without that. To gain accreditation for an R-licence you sit an open book test. It is about educating people. We have found that hunters are hunting safely anyway. It is about furthering their knowledge when they sit the R-licence test and then the written permission actually spells out the conditions and the maps. It is a very controlled system. It is an administrative control. Mr Mumford is an occupational health and safety expert and he was involved in the Australian standard risk assessment with Forests NSW. What we have in place is a very good administrative system.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: In the case of hunting in State forests, on your website there is a "where to hunt" section: When you are allocated an area within a State forest what is the size of the area that is allocated to you on a particular day if you want to go hunting?

Mr BOYLE: There are no blocks allocated. People who hunt do not like to go where other hunters are. That is simple. There is no point in walking behind them or being in the same area that has been disturbed because you are not going to see the game. Guys spread out across the landscape. There is a spatial separation because of the way we go about hunting. You do not have to assign a certain block. We have decided on one hunter per 450 hectares. This is based on the concentrated hunting systems in Victoria under the hog-deer management system. That gives you 1,000 acres or 450 hectares per hunter. That is plenty of room to spread out on the landscape.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The number of hunters permitted to enter a given area is worked out on that ratio?

Mr BOYLE: Yes, correct.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: One per 450 hectares?

Mr BOYLE: If there is a small forest we allow two people who might be hunting together to book just for safety reasons—if you are out west and someone gets a snake bite—rather than being on their own. Otherwise it is one per 450.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Where would you put deer on that curve that we were shown by biosecurity? There was a hint that it could be eradicated, is that the case?

Mr BOYLE: Anybody who believes that deer can be eradicated—I am a deer biologist—is not a deer biologist. It is as simple as that. We are on the growth curve with deer in New South Wales and that is why we need to get broad-based ongoing community collaborative programs.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: On the resources of all of this, what is the cost to the taxpayer per annum of the Game Council?

Mr BOYLE: This year it is \$2.565 million.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: If we did not have the Game Council and game hunting, what do you think the cost would be for Forests NSW, National Parks and Wildlife Services, Crown lands, whatever, for pest control, by whatever means, shooting—well, it would not be shooting, but poisoning?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Well, it would be. It would just be expensive professional hunters.

Mr BOYLE: I could not say what the opportunity cost is for National Parks, but State Forests recently did an opportunity cost of the amount of animals that we shot last year. The opportunity cost was 2.4 million if they had shot those animals.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You pay for yourself?

Mr BOYLE: Yes. We also shoot another 700,000 animals on private land.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Can you explain to me the differences between the various licences? A person who is interested in hunting, presumably they get their standard licence and go through the standard checks. They might not even be interested in hunting. What is the exact process that they follow, including any tests that they have to do and any studies that they have to undertake to get to the stage that they are allowed to shoot in forests?

Mr BOYLE: You need a restricted game hunting licence to shoot in forests. The prerequisites for that are as I said: You cannot have a conviction in the past ten years for a range of offences; you also need to be a member of an approved hunting organisation that has been approved by the Game Council.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Could you be a general member of Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia [SSAA]?

Mr BOYLE: The SSAA is an approved hunting organisation of the Game Council. Then you send in an accreditation or you attend a course that has been approved by the Game Council. There are three or four courses that have been approved by the Game Council. If you attend the courses, they sign off on an accreditation and you can supply that certificate, and that is the accreditation that is required for the R-licence.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You then forward it to where?

Mr BOYLE: It is forwarded to the Game Council. We generally ask for details of their firearms licence, but that is not a prerequisite.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is not done through the normal firearms licensing arrangements?

Mr BOYLE: It is done through our own. There is an approval process with the Game Council. Occasionally we pick up on people who have applied who are classified as "not a fit and proper person" or do not meet the criteria. We also can check with the firearms registry to check it is a legitimate firearm number. We have got access to their web sites. Similarly, they have got access to our web site. The Game Council supports the genuine reason for the recreational gaming control.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Now I have got my R-licence, can I rock up to a State forest and say, "I would like to go shooting"?

Mr BOYLE: No.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: What is the process now I have got my R-licence?

Mr BOYLE: It is controlled. We mail out your licence and you have a licence number and a personal identification number. You then go to the Game Council web site, you log on using your licence number and your PIN. You can have a look at all the forests where you might want to hunt. The web site will tell you whether the forest is temporarily closed or has a long-term closure.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you mean closed to hunters, or "closed" so that it is open to hunters?

Mr BOYLE: Yes, it is open to hunters. There are specific activities that go on, special purpose permits for which Forests NSW may close down a forest, or like the situation recently with fires, or there could be flood damage, or some other risk to hunters. We can close those forests down and because of the contact details that we have on our database, we can contact those hunters. The level of contact that we have got now, the consistent controls across the State, it is much better than it was before.

So you can go on to the website, look up the forests, click on it. The database automatically then populates your details and asks you if they are correct, because we want your contact details and your address. As it goes down, you must fill in your registration, make, model and colour of your vehicle. That is important for the Game Council, for land managers and for the police to know which vehicles might or might not be hunters in those forests.

Forests NSW like our system because we are the only group that can provide exact details of who is doing what in that forest. If you are taking a dog into that forest, you have to put in its breed, whether it is male or female, its colour, its microchip number. Also, when you are hunting in the bush, you either have to have the animal on a lead or it has to have a radio-tracking collar. In all of the time that we have had dog hunting in State forests, there has only been one dog that was lost for a little while. It has been successful.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is quite an intense and I hate to say it but bureaucratic way of doing things, is it not? It is not just Jim-Bob rocking up with his .30-30 lever action and blazing away, is it?

Mr BOYLE: It is highly controlled, it really is.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Thank you. One of the things you said earlier was that, based on environmental conditions, there has been an increase, but there has been a decrease in the areas where hunting has been permitted. Am I correct?

Mr BOYLE: Last night I did a catch per unit effort on a couple of forests. Definitely we have seen the polls in Hampton and Pennsylvania, and the hunting response has been—we have had the polls and now the catch per unit effort is starting to drop again.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is a remarkable revelation, is it not, that where you are allowed to kill feral animals, there are in fact fewer feral animals? This may come as a surprise to some of the more extreme members of the environmental movement, but where feral animals can be killed, there are less of them.

Mr BOYLE: That would appear to be true.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is obviously a revelation.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: We are getting the evidence.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Have you had consultations with the National Parks and Wildlife Services? Would you say they are enthusiastic? Are they ambivalent? Are they reluctant about proposals for feral eradication in National Parks?

Mr BOYLE: I would say they are good public servants and are looking forward to implementing public policy.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Good answer.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: How is surveillance currently enforced to make sure that activities—it is not as if you need a bag limit. You do not need a bag limit on feral animals because the object is to get as many of them as you possibly can.

Mr BOYLE: We do planned joint compliance operations with the police. With the social media these days, it is amazing what gets put on it. Some of our young game managers are very good. We have a look at the social media and it is a good way of finding out what is going on. There are people with their thumbs up beside national parks signs with a pig beside them and a dog. It is very good information. Google also has an amazing tool that you can drop people's faces on the site and it shows you on the net where they popped up, and sometimes their Facebook and their name. Recently a patrol was planned around a Facebook—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Perhaps you can have drones.

Mr BOYLE: Well a guy was wearing the same jersey jumper in a photo when he was hunting illegally as he was when he drove into the spot where the police were. It was a great result.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Geniuses. Further on that, and something that the Hon. Cate Faehrmann raised about illegal hunting in national parks, presumably there was illegal hunting in national parks before the Game Council was formed, was there not?

Mr BOYLE: Honestly, I would have to leave that for National Parks to answer. Illegal hunting has happened right across the landscape. It would be naive to think it did not happen there.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: In the same way that you would not ban all cars simply because some idiot did a burnout down the back street, you would not seek to impose collective punishment on owners conducting lawful activities, would you? It would seem to be a bit irrational.

Mr BOYLE: There is no need. I attended a public land hunting talk down in Carabost about six years ago and some people who wanted to seek a solution wanted to ban illegal hunting, which was a challenging thought.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Ban illegal hunting?

Mr BOYLE: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I am sure we can move an Act. I am sure The Greens will move an Act along those lines. I have no further questions.

CHAIR: Does the Game Council provide any of its data on its feral animal control programs to other agencies, and do those agencies use the data that you provide?

Mr BOYLE: Yes. The data is actually the property of the land managers because we actually issue and collect the data on behalf of land managers. It is freely available to Forests NSW. We give the information to Livestock Health and Pest Authorities. If we manage it on behalf of National Parks, it is their data; they will have access to it and we will use it as well. We do use the data.

It was interesting, leading up to the debate for the recent Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill that the head of the research unit in Orange asked for data on gaming and feral animals, or pest control across the State. I thank Dr Saunders for saying that. The only people that have current data is the Game Council. I believe we are doing a good job in that area.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: How many individual users have taken part in shooting in State forests?

Mr BOYLE: We currently have 18,600 R-licences for State forests. I think we have issued 24,000 to date.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: For individual use?

Mr BOYLE: That is correct.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That is not Brian going three times or John going four times?

Mr BOYLE: I can give you the total number of written permissions to date on public land. The number of written permissions issued is 98,777. That was on 5 September.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Are those individual users?

Mr BOYLE: That is how many people booked, but the individual users are the licence holders. As I said, there are 18,600 current licence holders.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You are aware of the standard operating procedures [SOPs] of the various feral animal species?

Mr BOYLE: Yes, I am.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: And the code of practice [COP] for each of the main feral animal species?

Mr BOYLE: That is correct.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Which ensures that feral animal control is conducted as humanely as possible?

Mr BOYLE: The codes of practices and standard operating procedures are actually a guideline; they do not ensure anything.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Well no, it would be difficult to ensure that, I am sure.

Mr BOYLE: That is right.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: How do you make your licensed hunters aware of the codes of practice, for example, if they are going into a State forest to hunt pigs one weekend and foxes the next? How do you ensure that they are aware of the codes of practice for each species?

Mr BOYLE: They are not required to know about the codes of practice. What they are required to do is have an awareness of the relevant legislation under our Act and the relevant legislation is the Game and Feral Animal Control Act and the relevant parts of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. Under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act hunting is an allowable use. Also, under our regulation we have a code of practice and a good third to a half of that is directly related to animal welfare. Hunters are aware of the animal welfare requirements of it and we have never found any Act under our system that would have breached that.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: If we have the Invasive Animals Coordinated Research Centre [CRC], Biosecurity NSW, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Primary Industries all agreeing to these codes of practice [COPs] and standard operating procedures [SOPs], you are saying that the Game Council does not incorporate that into its day-to-day practices?

Mr BOYLE: The highest point of control in this area of animal welfare is actually legislation and the only legislation related to that for hunting is actually the Game Council regulation and that specifies animal welfare. Hunting is actually about getting out there, being part of the environment where you actually gain a respect for the animal at a level that people probably do not understand who are non-hunters. I can understand your question and it directly relates to what we do as part of our hunter education and the more people understand about a situation. Knowledge leads to understanding and understanding leads to respect. Through that respect you gain the control of the hunters rather than just with academic COPs and SOPs.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Of course the codes of practice also provide information on best practice management, control strategies, species biology and impact, and an overview of the available control

techniques which cover humaneness, efficacy, cost efficiency and target specificity. They are very detailed documents that have been worked out in terms of the best way of controlling feral animals.

Mr BOYLE: The best way of controlling them professionally those operations in the Game Council is about working out the best way of getting hunters involved in these programs. Those codes of practice and standard operating procedures are developed by well-meaning academics who are trying to push it in a certain direction; that is fine. The Game Council is governed by its legislation and regulation and we do take animal welfare very seriously.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: But you have no standards or procedures other than the legislation, is that what you are suggesting?

Mr BOYLE: What we are suggesting is that under our regulations it says the animal must be taken humanely.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: But there are no guidelines for all of the licensed hunters in the State in terms of what that means?

Mr BOYLE: The hunters understand about where to target the animal because otherwise you are not a hunter; you are probably a shooter. It is about targeting the animal in the right way so that it is taken humanely.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Does that include pig dogging?

Mr BOYLE: Pig dogging is a very efficient and effective way of managing pigs across the State and it has been recognised that they actually have a huge place to play. The Game Council is working with pig hunters to develop a whole range of areas so that we can bring pig hunting with dogs to a new level and we encourage the hunters to hunt effectively, efficiently—animal welfare. It is about going out there and targeting the animal in a certain way, bailing it up and then despatching it as quickly as possible. That is a very humane and ethical way to hunt and control pigs.

CHAIR: We are out of time. I would really like to go on for another half an hour because I could ask you some very important questions too. Mr Mumford, you did not have much to say but thank you for your attendance. Mr Boyle, thank you very much for coming. If any Committee members have any further questions they will put them on notice. Would you be able to respond to any questions on notice within 21 days of receiving them?

Mr BOYLE: We might need a little bit longer, Mr Chairman. I am about to go on leave. If they got them in this week, I would be happy to try and get them done before I go on leave.

CHAIR: You do have delegated officers who could perhaps answer some of those questions, though?

Mr BOYLE: I would like to sign off on them.

CHAIR: How much time do you need?

Mr BOYLE: Four weeks.

CHAIR: You have 28 days then. Thank you very much for your time.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 5.05 p.m.)