

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 2

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

MINERAL RESOURCES, AND FISHERIES

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Dr Brian Pezzutti (Chair)

The Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans

The Hon. Ron Dyer

The Hon. Amanda Fazio

The Hon. Richard Jones

The Hon. Peter Primrose

PRESENT

The Hon. Eddie Obeid, *Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries*

Department of Mineral Resources

Mr Coutts, *Director-General*

Ms Margaret Campbell, *Director, Strategic Planning and Policy*

Mr Galligan, *Director Resource Planning and Development*

New South Wales Fisheries

Mr Dunn, *Director*

Mr Paul O'Connor, *Deputy Director*

CHAIR: I welcome you to the supplementary budget estimates hearing for the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2. I thank the Minister and the departmental officials who have attended today. This meeting will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Mineral Resources and Fisheries. Before questions commence, some procedural matters need to be dealt with. Paragraph 4 of the resolution referring the budget estimates to the Committee requires evidence to be heard in public. The Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings. A copy of the guidelines is available from the attendant. Only members of the Committee and witnesses before the Committee may be filmed or recorded. People in the gallery are not considered to be part of the proceedings and, therefore, should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, you must take responsibility for what you publish or what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before the Committee.

There is no provision for members to refer directly to their staff while at the table. Members and their staff are advised that any messages should be delivered through the attendant on duty or the committee clerks. For the benefit of members and Hansard, departmental officials should identify themselves by name, position and department or agency before answering any questions referred to them. The Committee has decided to divide the time allowed for this hearing into thirds—one-third for the cross-bench members, one-third for Government members and one-third for Opposition members. Minister, does that pose any difficulty for you or your officers?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: No.

CHAIR: We will deal with the portfolio areas together. I declare the examination open. The Committee resolved to have this hearing because a number of questions on notice were unsatisfactorily answered. For example, question No. 6, which was asked by the Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans, asked how much money had been spent on creating recreational fishing areas since the issue of papers inviting comment. The answer was that \$18 million was committed in the 2001-02 financial year to the buy-back of commercial fishing businesses to create recreational fishing havens. However, the answer did not tell the Committee how much was spent in that year.

The Hon. RON DYER: The statement was made that answers to questions were not seen to be satisfactory to the Committee. That means the Committee by majority.

CHAIR: That is exactly what it means.

The Hon. RON DYER: You are not speaking for Government members.

CHAIR: No; although I do not recall any objection. However, it was the Committee's decision.

The Hon. RON DYER: You might not recall an objection, but one was expressed.

CHAIR: Thank you. That is recorded in the transcript. How much of the \$18 million was spent?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will add to the answer already provided. Ten issue papers were released between April and November 2001 to consult with the community about recreational fishing havens. That included one each for Lake Macquarie and Botany Bay and eight coastal regions. The information gathered has been used by our commercial operators to protect estuarine areas from commercial fishing and is available in the public domain and can be viewed on the New South Wales Government web site. Overall, \$19.5 million is being spent buying out commercial fishers to create recreational fishing havens.

CHAIR: How much money was spent in the 2001-02 financial year?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That question has already been answered.

CHAIR: No, it has not—\$18 million was committed to the buy-back. The question asked how much was actually spent.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: The closure started from 1 May. So, it does not cover a full year.

CHAIR: How much was spent in 2001-02?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: The answer is \$18 million.

CHAIR: So the whole amount was spent in that year?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: In that period, yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It was not all spent. Presumably it would be only a fraction and some would be spent next year. Therefore, it is double counted.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Once 251 fishers agreed to the formula, we were committed to spending \$18 million and it was spent. Whether they have the cheque in the mail or whether they will get it next week is another issue. However, the commitment was to spend \$18 million by 1 May.

CHAIR: That is the whole point of this hearing. The Committee wants to know how much was spent in that year, how much was underspent and what will be spent next year. That is a form of double counting.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Is it how much was spent rather than cash flow?

CHAIR: That is what we are trying to find out.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will add to this. The \$18 million included the money for the business plus certain amounts for retraining and relocation.

CHAIR: I am interested only in how much was spent.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: If you want the exact cashflow figure—

CHAIR: Yes.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will have to take that question on notice.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: The whole amount was committed.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Yes.

CHAIR: In fact, the figure was \$19.2 million.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Yes. That included the ones for which the buy-back was still being negotiated.

CHAIR: We want to know how much was spent, otherwise it appears in two budgets.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Mr Obeid, you were asked questions about your overseas travel at our last meeting.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: What number was that question?

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: You were asked a number of questions, but I am referring to questions on notice Nos 14 and 33. You failed to answer either of those questions. You were asked, for example, to provide a list of the indigenous people and communities who participated in meetings and inspections during a visit to Canada in 2001.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Let us go by numbers so that I can address each question. You are talking about question No. 14.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Yes.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: What was the other number?

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: No. 33.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That is about overseas travel. Since 1999, \$61,000 has been spent in connection with my overseas travel. The Minister for Fisheries in the last Coalition Government, the Hon. Ian Armstrong—

CHAIR: The question is what was the total cost of your overseas trips in 2001 and 2002.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I said that \$61,000 has been spent in connection with my overseas travel since 1999.

CHAIR: We are asking about the amount for 2001 and 2002. We want to be very specific.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will be very specific: It was \$61,000. The Minister for Fisheries in the last Coalition Government, the Hon. Ian Armstrong, spent more than \$170,000 on overseas travel. My official travel, and particularly the cost of the travel, has been no secret; it was detailed in the *Daily Telegraph* on 28 June last year and in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 4 April this year.

CHAIR: The Parliament does not rely on the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: The main purpose of the delegation I led was to encourage investment in and expansion of aquaculture in New South Wales and was in accordance with relevant State Government guidelines.

CHAIR: The next question asked for a list of each trip, the purpose and the cost.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I was explaining the trip and its purpose. If you allow me to finish—

CHAIR: And the cost.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have said it cost \$61,000.

CHAIR: Was that the only trip you took?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Yes. I will continue to explain the purpose, which I was about to provide. Aquaculture is a dynamic industry in New South Wales that is currently growing at 10 per cent a year. Continued growth in the industry means more jobs in country New South Wales and fresh seafood on our tables. During my official travel to the United Kingdom—

CHAIR: The Committee is asking very specific questions requiring very specific answers. The next question asked for an estimate of the cost of your overseas travel this year.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Mr Chairman, if you do not mind, I am interested in the answers.

CHAIR: You may well be, but they are not relevant to the questions.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: You have asked me a question, but you are interrupting me and do not want me to finish. The specific reason for my travel—I am giving you that—

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have already answered the question—it is \$61,000. I have said that four times.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Mr Chairman, are you asking the Minister not to elaborate on his answers because you are satisfied with short answers?

CHAIR: I am satisfied with short answers that are specific to the question.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I understand that the Minister is reappearing before the Committee today purely on the basis that you were not satisfied with the depth and extent of his answers.

CHAIR: Exactly.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: He did not answer them at all.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You are now stopping him when he seeks to elaborate.

CHAIR: I remind the honourable member of the answer we got last time.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: He is now seeking to elaborate on those answers and you are ruling him out of order.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: And calling me to order when you are constantly interrupting.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: A bit of order from the Chair would not go astray.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Minister, you were asked for a break down of the cost of airfares, hotels, car hire, and accompanying staff and officials.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have already said that \$61,000 has been spent on my overseas travel. I do not intend to travel this year, so there is no budget allocation. I will continue: During my official travel to the United Kingdom this year I met with Fisheries Secretary Stephen Wentworth and staff—

CHAIR: That is not the question the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner asked; she asked for a list of the trips, the purpose and the cost, and a break down of the cost of airfares, hotels, car hire, and accompanying staff and officials. It was a very specific question.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have provided my answer: The total cost is \$61,000. That is the only overseas travel I have done.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: You are not prepared to be accountable to the people of New South Wales?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have provided my answer and the honourable member can make her own assumptions. If honourable members wanted to understand the itinerary, what we did, the benefit to New South Wales and the circumstances of the visit, I would read on, but they do not want that.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: I asked specifically for a break down of the cost of each trip.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: There was only one trip and the cost was \$61,000.

The Hon. RON DYER: Point of order: This is not the House UnAmerican Activities Committee. The Minister is entitled to complete his answer.

CHAIR: I will make a ruling on that because the question asked by the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner was extraordinarily specific and the Minister has had notice of it. To date we have not received an answer. The honourable member is pursuing that issue and the Minister is able to answer the question or not; that is, he either can or cannot provide a break down of the cost of airfares, hotels, car hire and accompanying staff.

The Hon. RON DYER: The Minister ought to be given a reasonable opportunity to address the question put to him rather than be badgered and constantly interrupted.

CHAIR: He can be—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: To the point of order: The honourable member is asking for a series of numbers. There are categories and numbers. It is like reading a very short list. One of the problems we have in hearings is that Ministers—I am not particularly referring to this one—tend to waffle and we waste a lot of time.

CHAIR: I have heard enough. I rule that the Minister is asked to answer the specific question.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: If the honourable member wants the exact details, I will take the question on notice. I have said that the cost of the trip was \$61,000, and it was the only trip. I have been giving information about the itinerary and what was achieved for the benefit for the State. Obviously the honourable member does not want to hear it.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: We have been waiting for months. At the last hearing the Minister was given a time frame in which to provide answers to questions on notice.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Which one?

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: He did not adhere to that because he went overseas for a month. I would like to hear about that trip.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That was a private holiday, which is no certain of yours.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: So no taxpayers' funds were involved?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Of course, not. Private holidays are private holidays.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: I refer again to question on notice No. 14. The Minister was asked to provide specific information about interstate trips.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Which number?

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Questions 14 (6) and 14 (7). You said it was too early to provide an estimate.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Are you asking about interstate trips?

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Yes.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: In 2001-02 I travelled interstate once on Government business. On that occasion I attended the ninth annual conference of the Australian Prawn Farmers Association in Queensland.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Could you provide the details of that trip?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: What details do you want? I attended the conference as a guest speaker and spoke about the commitment of the New South Wales Government to prevent diseased prawns from coming into our State. I urged the Commonwealth Government to prevent diseased

prawns from coming into the country by ensuring that Customs officials check all containers of prawns to ensure that they are not diseased. That has to be done if we are to save our seafood and prawn industry.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Can you provide a breakdown of airfares, hotel costs and costs for all accompanying staff and officials on that trip?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will obtain a breakdown of costs for that trip. I will take that question on notice.

CHAIR: I refer to question 14 (1) (a). You answered the first question which was, "Does the Minister's office receive media monitoring services?" Question 14 (1) (b) was, "If so, what the annual cost in 2001-02?" Your previous answer was, "All costs incurred were appropriate to the needs identified."

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I said that my office does receive media monitoring services. The cost of our arrangements with media monitoring services was \$18,289.

CHAIR: If the media monitoring services were sourced from other cost centres, to which budgets were they allocated, and what was the annual cost?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have already answered that question. That was the cost for our arrangements with media monitoring services.

CHAIR: Is that the figure for all cost centres?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That is my office's arrangement.

CHAIR: Are the figures different for the departments?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: In 2001-02 the cost to the Department of Mineral Resources of media monitoring services was \$11,598 and the cost to NSW Fisheries was \$11,958.

CHAIR: How many different suppliers do you have contracts with, either directly or indirectly, through media monitoring services, sourced from other cost centres?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will take that question on notice. I am not aware of those details.

CHAIR: Could you supply the Committee with a list of all suppliers?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Yes.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: You were also asked question 148, which relates to ministerial staff employed at specific dates and the annual salary cost of those staff in each of those years. Can you provide that information for us?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I am allocated 10 personal staff. That number has not changed. In 2001-02 the total annual salary cost of my personal staff was \$594,207.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: And for NSW Fisheries?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That covers my personal staff in both portfolios. The lead agency, the Department of Mineral Resources, pays the bill and we are refunded.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: In answer to a similar question relating to consultants you said that it was too early in the financial year to provide the Committee with information in relation to 2002-03. Have you got an estimate now?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: No. My office does not contract consultants. Those statistics will be in the annual reports of each portfolio.

CHAIR: In answer to question 164 you were asked, "In 2001-02 how many board appointments were made by you and of these appointments how many were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders?" You replied to that question as follows, "Due to the self-identifying nature of the nominations form, no relevant reliable figures are available for Torres Strait islanders." You said the same thing in relation to people with a disability and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Question 48 (9) refers to the number of Aboriginal staff and states, "Has NSW Fisheries implemented an Aboriginal employment strategy?" In answer to that question you said, "Aboriginal employment strategy is part of the department's EEO management plan." You cannot tell us how many people have been appointed to boards and how many Aboriginal employees you have. How can you have an equal employment opportunity plan if you do not know how many people are from non-English speaking backgrounds, how many people are disabled or how many people are from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have adequately answered that question. If you require any further details about the department's EEO management plan I will refer the question to the Director, Steve Dunn.

CHAIR: I am not happy with your answer. You have not told us how many people who have been employed or who have been appointed to boards are disabled, from non-English speaking backgrounds or are Aboriginal.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: No application form in either department asks employees about their ethnicity or about whether they are indigenous or disabled. We do not look for specific distinctions. If that occurred within either department we would probably be accused of being discriminatory. That does not occur. So we not have the detailed information that you require.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: On the NSW Fisheries web site you state, "Of the 370 staff"—

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Is this the strategy to which you are referring?

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: No, this is your statement on the NSW Fisheries web site which is headed, "Aboriginal fisheries", and which outlines the corporate plan relevant to indigenous peoples.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: If staff give us information voluntarily we use that information. However, we do not seek such information, nor do we have application forms that seek that sort of information.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: The question does not relate to the seeking of information; it relates to who has been identified as indigenous fishers. On a public web site you have said, "Four persons identified at that time as being of Aboriginal descent are all employed within field services."

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That is the answer. You are asking me to clarify that issue, but that is the answer that is on the web site. We do not seek any further information when people are seeking jobs in NSW Fisheries.

CHAIR: How can you pursue an EEO strategy if you do not know how many such employees you have? You do not know whether you are meeting the Government's EEO requirements.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I am happy to take that question on notice and to put that information on the web site. If applicants do not provide that information we do not request it.

CHAIR: So you do not show how many such people are employed and what is your target?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: We do not have a target to employ a specific number of Christians, Muslims, Aborigines, disabled people, or people from other ethnic backgrounds. We have no such target.

CHAIR: So you do not respond to the Government's requirements?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I said that we do not have those sorts of targets.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: You were asked a question about office fit-outs. Could you answer that question now?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I believe that that question has already been answered. However, I am happy to advise the Committee that NSW Fisheries spent a total of \$312,000 on office fit-outs and refurbishments in the 2001-02 financial year. Those improvements ensured that members of staff were working in a safe and healthy environment. Research was conducted using adequate facilities and up-to-date equipment. I am advised that the Department of Mineral Resources did not spend any money on office fit-outs in the 2001-02 financial year.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: What about the ministerial office?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: My ministerial office has been relocated from North Sydney to Governor Macquarie Tower [GMT] in the city. The commitment to lease Governor Macquarie Tower until 2006 was made by the former Coalition Government in January 1995. The Government is committed to reducing overall costs of accommodation for government agencies in New South Wales. This will be achieved by accommodating Ministers under the existing GMT lease, creating space in the GMT by relocating public servants to lower cost accommodation elsewhere, releasing excess space to the private sector and terminating leases on offices vacated by Ministers or reallocating that space to agencies.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Were there any fit-out costs in relation to your relocation?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will take that question on notice.

CHAIR: Have your old offices been rented out to someone else?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: We have vacated those offices.

CHAIR: Are you still paying rent on it?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: We have vacated those offices.

CHAIR: Are you still paying rent on it?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I would not know. The offices are located in a building belonging to NSW Health.

CHAIR: That space is not occupied by you and it is not occupied by anybody else so far as you know?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: My questions relate to aquatic reserves. You released a consultation paper on aquatic reserves. I asked how much money had been spent on aquatic reserves and you said that there is no cost centre.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Yes.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If you are committed to aquatic reserves presumably you would know how much has been spent on them. Would you not have any idea how much money has been spent on aquatic reserves?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: In 2001-02 the amount of money allocated to marine protected areas was \$5,089,221.

CHAIR: The question that was asked was: How much has been spent?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That was last year's expenditure. You are wanting figures for this current year?

CHAIR: No.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I want to know how much has been spent up until June 2002?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: An amount of \$5,089,221 from the Marine Protected Areas Program was spent.

CHAIR: Is that what was allocated or is that what was spent?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That is what was spent.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Grey Nurse Shark Recovery Program which was researched was presumably executed. How much was spent on that program? You said that you had committed \$1 million. Have you spent that?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Yes. We committed \$1 million in recurrent funding for that threatened species program. As I have indicated to the Committee, the Grey Nurse Shark Recovery Program is a component of the overall threatened species program. The threatened species program has been operating since 1998 when legislation relating to threatened species was introduced. No cost centre is specific to the Grey Nurse Shark Recovery Program. However, in the financial years 1998-99 and 1999-2000 NSW Fisheries received a funding boost totalling half a million dollars which was put in place for a comprehensive threatened species program. In 2000-01 that funding was increased by \$500,000 to make \$1 million per year in recurrent funding for the program. We will also spend \$1 million this year.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There has been some suggestion that the area should be increased because it is too small. Has there been any research in relation to that issue?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That program is yet to be announced. We have gone through a rigorous consultancy period for the recovery plan for the grey nurse shark. The grey nurse shark was listed as protected by the Wran Government in 1984. I am advised that it was the first shark species protected anywhere in the world. Disappointingly, the species has not recovered to its previous numbers. In 2000 I listed the grey nurse shark as endangered under the new threatened species provisions of the Fisheries Management Act. Two key areas of grey nurse shark habitat in the Solitary Islands Marine Park received substantially increased protection on 1 August as a consequence of the park's new zoning plan.

The use of harmful wire traces on bottom fishing lines are now banned within 500 metres of north Solitary Islands and south Solitary Islands. The fishing method which is most deadly for grey nurse sharks, set lining, is banned throughout the whole park. Grey nurse sharks also receive significant protection from the 8,700 hectares of sanctuary zones in the park and 38,900 hectares of habitat protection zones. In addition to this, the Government has developed new rules for fishing and diving to better protect other key habitats of the sharks. These new rules were developed through extensive consultation with the community through the draft recovery plan. The draft recovery plan canvassed a range of strategies to improve the protection and recovery of the sharks.

NSW Fisheries is currently considering the issues raised during the community consultation process. The Government will continue to monitor grey nurse shark populations through the two-year tagging program. It is important to remember that some fishing methods clearly do not have the potential to harm grey nurse shark populations. Similarly, the Government's beach shark netting program has been very successful in increasing the safety at popular beaches. There has been only one fatal shark attack on a netted beach since the program began, compared to 27 attacks in the 30 years before the program commenced. So we are looking at the recovery plan. It has gone through certain consultation processes and, hopefully, we will be able to announce that in the near future.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There has been a lot of criticism of the plan not being successful. Are you committed to increasing the size of the protection zones?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Let us wait until we announce the recovery plan, because we have to talk with all the stakeholders and get a view from the broad consensus. Essentially, the Wran Government listed this species as a protected species, and we have certainly put it on the endangered list. We are preparing a recovery plan, which takes a lot of sensitive negotiations and consultation with the community. But, certainly, this Government has taken very important steps to protect the grey nurse shark. With these marine parks that we announced, the sanctuary zone and the habitat protection zone are part and parcel of ensuring that we protect not only the grey nurse shark but all relevant native species in those locations.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: When will the size of the park be reviewed?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: At the moment we have announced the sizes of four parks. Two have been rezoned or zoned—the zoning has been announced—and two have yet to be zoned. We will not be looking at that for five years.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So you will not be looking at the grey nurse shark no-take areas for another five years?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Wait until you get the recovery plan, then we will look at the benefits to the grey nurse shark in its protected areas. I think you should wait until we announce the recovery plan.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: When will that be?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: In the near future, hopefully.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Can you give us a deadline?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: No, I cannot give you an exact time. I am saying to you, "in the very near future".

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: And will that encapsulate a review date based on certain criteria?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: It will take in all the relevant issues that every sector raised. But, most importantly, it is about protection of the shark species itself and doing everything possible without totally endangering the usage for other people in those parks and those protected areas.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Are you aware that not one of the options in the draft zoning plans for the Lord Howe Island Marine Park adequately protects deep water habitat, deep vertical rock face habitats, basalt rocky shore and deep patch reef habitats, calcarenite shelf and adjacent reef habitats, fringing coral reef habitats and shelf edge habitats? Can you give a guarantee to the scientific community that the majority of all these important habitat types within the Lord Howe Island Marine Park will be protected within sanctuary zones?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: At the moment we have three possible draft zoning plans for Lord Howe Island which were released on 12 June this year. These plans were exhibited for three

months and there was broad community consultation, which closed on 13 September this year. Of course, there are various options to maintain the health and diversity of this aquatic ecosystem within the park. Most importantly, we will have to wait and see what the final draft plan will be before we can go into the nuts and bolts. I am looking forward to the release of the final round of community consultations so that we will be able to put the draft plan on exhibition again to make sure that we receive all the input. We will look at those individual issues within those plans.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Actually, there are five options: 1, 2A, 2B, 3A and 3B. Yet not one of those options covers all the habitats. One covers one bit and another covers another bit. Unfortunately, not one of them on its own covers all those habitats.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Maybe the submissions and the community consultation will raise issues that are relevant and allow us to look at that sort of thing. The whole idea of community consultation is to give them a lead by having three draft zoning plans and they can go from there. If they have their own ideas, if they have issues that they feel have not been adequately covered, that is what the consultation is all about. But let us first issue the final draft plan and let us receive the consultation around that, and we will look at what the final outcome will be.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Are you aware that there is very little fringing coral reef and deep patch reef habitat within the Lord Howe Island Marine Park, and that virtually all of it is located off the northern point of Lord Howe Island around the Admiralty Islands and along the southern east and west sides of Lord Howe Island? Can you assure the scientific community that what little fringing reef, coral reef and deep patch reef habitat there is will be protected within the sanctuary zones?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I am not personally aware but I am sure with your guidance I will be made aware, and that you and others from the scientific community will put in your submissions. All those will be considered because this Government is very firm on creating marine parks so that we have sanctuary zones and habitat protection zones. It is all about the multi-usage of those parks but at the same time protecting the different species wherever they are located. So the intention is to look at all these significant areas and locations, and I hope that after extensive consultation with the experts, the scientists, the conservationists and the other users of the park we will get the balance right.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Are you aware that the rare and protected Ballina angelfish, which I am sure you would be aware of, is known to occur at only for locations within the Lord Howe Island Marine Park proposal and all of these are found on the Ball's Pyramid shelf? Will you make sure that all the habitats for the rare and protected Ballina angelfish are protected within the sanctuary zones?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: As I said, I will rely on the experts and the community to put its final stamp on these zoning plans. But as you say, and you quite adequately make the point, there are a lot of different species in that particular marine park that need to be protected and that will all be borne in mind.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Will you ensure that sanctuary zones provided in Commonwealth waters along the east coast of Lord Howe Island and south of Ball's Pyramid at South West Rocks are complemented by adjoining sanctuary zones within the State waters of the Lord Howe Island Marine Park, otherwise there will be patches of park here and there without any continuity?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: One of the positives of our marine park zoning is that we have the sanctuary zone, which is a certain area, and a habitat protection zone, which is beyond that. So there are restrictions in the habitat protection zone and that gives it more support for the sanctuary zones. I think Steve might add to this. Most sanctuary zones are surrounded by habitat protection.

CHAIR: If I could provide guidance, it is an accepted principle that questions by the committee should be relevant to the matters referred to it for report and inquiry. In this case the budget estimates inquiry means the estimates of expenditure from the Consolidated Fund and other matters covered by the budget papers.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Being the chair of an estimates committee, I am well aware of the requirements for asking questions. So I thank you for your guidance.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I am happy to answer the question.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Thank you.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will ask Mr Dunn to expand on the sanctuary zones and the habitat protection zones?

Mr DUNN: The Hon. Richard Jones is quite right: You need to have continuity of protection. Wherever possible, we try to have habitat protection zones immediately adjacent to sanctuary zones so that you have some continuity between high protection areas and general use areas. So where possible we do that.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: You would be aware, Minister, that the Victorian Government has declared 5.5 per cent of its coastline as sanctuary zone in marine parks, including the Cape Howe Marine Park, which is adjacent to the New South Wales border. Are you proposing to have a marine park adjacent to that marine park in Victoria, up to the Nadgee Nature Reserve to complement the marine park and that it also be a no-take zone as the Victorian marine park is?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will take that on notice because I cannot detail an answer to that specific question. However, I will say that when you compare the coastal waters and marine protected areas, New South Wales has 17.8 per cent and Victoria has 5.3 per cent.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: But Victoria is all no-take.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Let me finish. We are talking about the marine protected area. We are talking about coastal waters in marine parks.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: We are talking about sanctuary zones.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Let me finish. I will give you some statistics. New South Wales has 16 per cent; Victoria has 5 per cent. When you are talking about coastal waters which are aquatic reserves, intertidal protected areas and marine sanctuaries, we have 2 per cent yet we have the same coastline. Victoria has 0.08 per cent so we have improved on this all the time. At present we only have 1.3 per cent coastal sanctuary zones but that is two parks only. They are the only ones that have been zoned; we have two more to zone. I think you will find that our multi-usage and the plans we have that it be multipurpose, our marine parks are much bigger, they are more adequate and they are more representative for their users. The most important thing is that they have been achieved through consultation. We have not just gone in there and said, "Let's declare this". It has been broad, long community consultation so that all users can get the benefit of that park. They are multi-usage. I think New South Wales will be at the forefront when it comes to marine protection of our ecology and species and at the same declaring the sanctuary zones and habitat protection zones for long-term sustainability.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: You mentioned the grey nurse shark proposal. The Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans asked you a few questions about that. You would be aware by now that there are a number of areas where the grey nurse sharks congregate.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Yes.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Can you tell us whether you will be giving those areas the same sort of protection they are getting in the Solitary Islands Marine Park?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I might deflect that to Mr Dunn so that he can give more details.

Mr DUNN: The draft recovery plan includes the same protection that is offered in the Solitary Islands Marine Park.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Can you advise what areas are being held up which are required by the National Parks and Wildlife Service for parks in western New South Wales as a result of reservations by the Department of Mineral Resources?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will take that on notice because it is detailed.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Can you assure the committee that no areas are being held unnecessarily by the Department of Mineral Resources and that these areas will be examined quickly so that there is no hold-up in the declaration of national parks where necessary to protect habitat in western New South Wales?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: No, no areas will be unnecessarily held up unless they are significant for our mineral resources, and that has been a policy of the Government and the department.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: So you will take that on notice and advise which areas are currently held up?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: As to the first part, yes, we will take that on notice.

The Hon. RON DYER: Minister, I would like to ask you a question about recreational fishing licence expenditure. In Budget Paper No. 3, under the heading "Operating Statement", is a reference to retained revenue. How is that retained revenue being spent?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: The New South Wales Government successfully introduced a general recreational fishing licence in March 2001 following extensive community consultation. All money raised from the licences placed into recreational fishing trusts, and expenditure is overseen by two angler committees—one for saltwater and one for freshwater. All expenditure from the recreational fishing trusts is accountable through the budget process, involving the angler committees. Money raised from the licence is being re-invested to improve recreational fishing in New South Wales by supporting a number of statewide projects. The anglers on the two trusts committees have supported a wide range of programs and projects that target every aspect of better recreational fishing—from ensuring we have more data on anglers' habits, better information on important recreational species and protecting precious habitats, to ensuring anglers and the community are better informed about resource conservation.

The sum of \$20 million has been allocated to protect 30 key locations along the New South Wales coast from commercial fishing. The purpose of these recreational fishing havens is to improve recreational fishing by banning commercial fishing in areas of significance to anglers. Commercial fishers were offered fair compensation, and 251 entitlements have been acquired by NSW Fisheries under the process. The Government's successful Fishcare Volunteer program has also been expanded into new areas across inland New South Wales, and now the program has been implemented in coastal areas. Support for this program is demonstrated by the number of active members, which has almost doubled from more than 140 in April this year to nearly 300 in the first week of October. Five NSW Fisheries education officers have been recruited to work closely with local communities and anglers. These education officers will help communities achieve their goals for better recreational fishing and better protection of their local fish stocks and habitat.

Other projects being funded by the salt water trust include: angler and community education programs, including popular fishing clinics for children; research and monitoring projects on species that are important to anglers, including research into striped marlin, bait fish, such as slimy mackerel, and the game fish tagging program; habitat rehabilitation projects under a small grants program, which provides funds grassroots community groups to better protect their local waterways; the trial of buoys to attract pelagic species to create great local angling spots; and the "angel ring" angler safety program. For those who like to fish in the inland regions of our State, the Government's fish stocking program supports a thriving freshwater recreational fishery. This stocking program also contributes to many regional economies and communities in inland New South Wales. Freshwater trust allocations have boosted the freshwater fish stocking program to record levels in recent years. Fish stocking is also important for helping to conserve our precious native species, Australian bass, Murray cod and golden perch.

Licence fees were used to further increase fish production and continue stocking trout and native fish species in our inland waterways. Other projects being funded by the freshwater trust include: fish habitat protection and restoration projects; preparation of advisory material, signage, brochures and booklets for the community; and the implementation of improved fish passage at artificial barriers such as weirs, to help our native species. Angler fees are also supporting a small grants program, which provides fishing clubs, councils and community members with the opportunity of obtaining funding for small, local or regional projects to enhance recreational fishing. Money raised from the licences are funding numerous projects, which are all benefiting the recreational fishing community. That is why anglers are supporting the licence. They can see that their contribution is making a difference. Details of expenditure are available on the NSW Fisheries web site on an ongoing basis, and in the NSW Fisheries annual reports.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Minister, I refer to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 2, page 13-16. I see that the Government is targeting 18 derelict mine sites for rehabilitation this financial year. Could you advise what work is being done at some of those sites to address the potential environmental and safety risks posed by abandoned, derelict mines in New South Wales?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I thank you for this very important question. Although mining has provided enormous economic benefits for the people of this State, past mining practices were not regulated as rigorously as they are today. This has left a legacy of hazards and environmental degradation. No individual or company can be held responsible for derelict mines, leaving the Government to undertake required rehabilitation works to improve community safety and protect the environment. The Derelict Mines program is an initiative which addresses the environmental and safety problems associated with those sites, and it is of significant benefit to the people of regional New South Wales. The program is administered by the Department of Mineral Resources, with assistance and expertise provided by the Environment Protection Authority, the Department of Land and Water Conservation and the New South Wales Minerals Council. For the 2002-03 financial year, the Government allocated \$1.6 million to the Derelict Mines program for the rehabilitation of derelict mines. This stands in contrast to funding provided by the former Coalition Government, which spent only \$125,000 in its last year in office on derelict mine rehabilitation.

Derelict mine sites to be targeted by the program this financial year include Lake George Mine at Captains Flat, where \$220,000 has been allocated to undertake remedial works on exposed slag heaps and safety works on hazardous areas; Mount Hope Copper Mine in the Central Far West region, where \$152,000 has been allocated to rehabilitate a dangerous open-cut area and waste dumps; Ottery Mine, near Tenterfield, where \$90,000 has been allocated to improve visitor safety; Sunny Corner Mine, near Bathurst, where \$85,000 has been allocated to conduct safety works and protect endangered bat habitats; the Broken Hill tailings dump at Broken Hill, where \$93,000 has been allocated to cover a large tailings dump and prevent the spread of dust onto neighbouring properties; West Wyalong gold fields, where \$72,000 has been allocated for safety and subsidence works; Gilgunnia gold fields, in the Central Far West region, where \$32,000 has been allocated to rehabilitate an area to improve safety; and Lightning Ridge opal fields, where \$25,000 has been allocated for safety and substance works on derelict areas identified by the Department of Mineral Resources through the continued program of large-scale environment inspections sweeps over the opal fields. Minor rehabilitation works will also be carried out at numerous sites across the State where safety and environmental issues are a high priority.

The Derelict Mines program will also be undertaking a number of site assessments and strategic projects in 2003-04. Additional funding has also been made available through the New South Wales Government's Environmental Trust, which has set aside \$3 million over a three-year period for specific large-scale works at derelict mines. These funds will be utilised for significant works at a number of mines, including: \$1,155,000 for the Conrad Mine, near Inverell; \$200,000 for the Woodsreef Mine, near Barraba; \$850,000 for the CSA excised areas at Cobar; and \$631,320 for the Yerranderie mines in the Blue Mountains. Interagency committees have been established by the New South Wales Government to provide guidance, evaluate contract tenders and help implement rehabilitation works at those sites. Works at the sites are continuing this year. The Government's continuing commitment to the Derelict Mines program serves to protect the environment, improve safety and benefits regional communities.

The Hon. RON DYER: Minister, I refer to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 2, page 13-3. I see that an issue identified is for a need to ensure New South Wales remains competitive for attracting mineral and petroleum exploration investment. How is the Government intending to attract exploration investment to New South Wales?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Thank you for this very important question. I can assure you that the Carr Labor Government is actively seeking to encourage and attract further Australian and international exploration investment to develop the State's mineral and petroleum resources. We have demonstrated this by committing \$30 million to the seven-year Exploration NSW program, which commenced in July 2000. This funding is additional to the previous \$30 million that the Government provided to the Discovery 2000 program. The Exploration NSW program includes regional geological and geophysical surveys, the application of new technologies, and upgraded geoscience information systems which provide ready access to the results of previous exploration.

In 2002-03 a total of \$5 million has been committed to special projects under Exploration NSW. These include: \$2.4 million towards new regional mapping and geophysical surveys using new technologies for minerals; \$1.5 million towards new data and projects for petroleum; and \$1.1 million towards statewide projects to further advance the geoscience information framework for the State. In 2002-03 there will be a particular emphasis on the western half of the State for both minerals and petroleum projects. A total of \$1.15 million will be spent on projects in the Broken Hill region using the latest technology to unlock new secrets in what is a significant mining field. The release of the latest airborne survey, new maps and data packages from Broken Hill will drive further minerals exploration in the region.

Further to the south, around the Murray-Riverina region, the Government will carry out a large airborne geophysical survey covering about 60,000 square kilometres between Hay and Balranald. This is in an area that contains further opportunities for mineral sands resources. A total of \$500,000 will be invested through Exploration NSW in this project, which will map the soils, outcropping geology and the mineral resource potential. The mineral-rich rocks in the central regions of the State, from Lake Cargelligo in the south to Cobar and Bourke in the north, will benefit by the Exploration NSW commitment of more than \$550,000 for regional mapping, mineral assessment and geochemical surveys.

Effective delivery of geoscience information to the exploration industry is critical to New South Wales maintaining its advantage in the global competition for exploration investment. This Government has set the benchmark with its world-leading DIGS Internet service—the online system for open-file access to the Digital Imaging of Geological Survey [DIGS] reports. Our latest Internet application, MinView, adds to DIGS the capability for the industry to graphically view the State's latest geological and exploration titles information. This Government's Exploration NSW initiative is recognised by Australia's mining industry as a critical factor in attracting and retaining exploration investment for New South Wales. This Government recognises the importance of minerals exploration in identifying new mineral deposits for the New South Wales mining industry. These exploration activities will help create new jobs and opportunities for regional New South Wales.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, if I could ask you a question about managing pests—and I am not particularly referring to those who are laughing at the moment! In relation to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 2, how is the additional \$900,000 referred to there intended to help control aquatic pests such as caulerpa toxifolia?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Thank you for this very important question. Caulerpa is a listed noxious plant that has been identified in a number of estuaries in New South Wales. It is an invasive seaweed that is normally found in warm tropical waters. However, in recent years, strains adapted to cool waters have been found in seven locations between Lake Macquarie and Burrill Lake, near Ulladulla. If the species becomes widespread, it could bring about significant changes to the New South Wales coastal marine ecology and affect fisheries productivity. I have taken this threat seriously and declared the species as noxious marine vegetation under the Fisheries Management Act 1994. This declaration makes it illegal to sell the species in New South Wales, and it is illegal to possess it in coastal waters.

The New South Wales Government has allocated new annual funding of \$923,000 per year to better manage aquatic pests, such as caulerpa. Approximately half of this allocation is being used to establish a new four-member aquatic pests task force in NSW Fisheries which will focus on caulerpa and also deal with other aquatic pests. The task force will work closely with local communities to build knowledge on ways of controlling the weed. Part of the allocation is being used to develop measures for controlling aquatic pests. These measures initially will focus on addressing the caulerpa problem in Lake Macquarie, Lake Conjola, Burrill Lake, Narrawallee Inlet and Botany Bay. NSW Fisheries has conducted a number of trials to find the best way to control the weed. The Government's funding has enabled NSW Fisheries to employ the latest underwater video technology linked to a global positioning system to accurately map and treat caulerpa beds in New South Wales waterways.

Trials using household swimming pool salt have been undertaken in Lake Macquarie and will help determine if this is the best method of eradicating the weed. They have demonstrated that the salt is effective in killing the weeds and experts are currently developing better techniques to apply the salt at the right dosage, evenly, over large areas. This extra funding means an ongoing significant program of further salt trials and control measures are being carried out in Lake Macquarie, Lake Conjola, Burrill Lake and Botany Bay. Scientists and divers have been spreading the salt on patches of caulerpa at Pulbah Island, Mannering Park and Dobell Park in Lake Macquarie. Preliminary results from this trial have been extremely positive, with the treated patches of caulerpa successfully eradicated. Last week caulerpa information sessions were held on the South Coast at Bendalong and Lake Conjola to educate the community about the pest. These early results are exciting and show a great deal of promise for future eradication works.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Minister, I refer to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 2, page 13-3. An extra \$1 million in new funding has been allocated in 2002-03 for mine safety reform. Could you tell us how improvements are being achieved in the area of mine safety?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: This is an important question because this year the Government has allocated an additional \$1 million to mine safety. This is on top of the additional \$14 million already committed by this Government to mine safety. This is being used to continue the Mine Safety Reform Program and, in particular, to improve legislation, improve processes and promote a culture of safety in the industry. The additional funding will also enable new initiatives to be undertaken to improve strata management and ventilation in underground coalmining. Strata management is undertaken to control the risks of rock falls during excavation, while ventilation provides fresh air forced into mines to avoid the build-up of contaminants and provide a healthy working environment.

A number of highly effective campaigns are also being conducted by the Department of Mineral Resources. These include developing new safety guidelines; assessment of electrical and mechanical engineering standards; stronger enforcement; improving investigations, site inspection and approvals; mandatory safety management plans for mines; an opal mining safety awareness course; and a safety communication program. Before the Mine Safety Reform Program began, mining was seen as a dangerous industry in which risks were accepted and injuries were seen as being inevitable. I believe that we are well on the way to accomplishing a total change of this industry. One fatality or injury is one too many. As result of this program, the New South Wales mining industry is now one of the safest in the world.

Another key initiative has been the creation of a dedicated investigation unit to investigate all fatalities, serious injuries or incidents that may significantly affect mine safety. Relevant information gained by the investigation unit is communicated to the industry so similar incidents can be prevented. The work of the unit has been backed up by stronger enforcement policies, which have resulted in 23 prosecutions having been undertaken. This is having a major deterrent effect across the industry. Enforcement is a vital part of improving safety culture and performance, but it is also important to achieve change so that incidents are avoided.

During this financial year safety operations staff employed by the New South Wales Department of Mineral Resources will conduct around 844 assessments of safety compliance at mine sites, many of which will be unannounced. The Government's communication program will also assist in improving safety performance. This program includes the quarterly mine safety update magazine, the annual mining industry occupational health and safety conference, and engineering safety seminars. The small mines campaign is also proving to be particularly successful. It is focused on

ensuring that small mines, mainly quarries and similar operations, have in place and work to a safety management plan. I am pleased to be able to tell members that this Government's mine safety program is delivering positive results, but I must stress that there is no room for complacency. Our program of safety culture and performance improvement is an absolute priority for this Government. We will continue to be vigilant in our efforts to improve health and safety in the New South Wales mining industry.

CHAIR: Government members have the next 7½ minutes.

The Hon. RON DYER: Minister, I refer you to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 2, page 13-8. I see that \$3 million has been allocated for the buyout of commercial fishers from the Jervis Bay Marine Park. How will this ensure that the Jervis Bay Marine Park receives increased protection?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: This Government is committed to establishing high-quality, multiple-use marine parks along the New South Wales coastline. Marine parks provide protection to important marine habitats and help conserve our marine biodiversity. We are ensuring that the protection provided in the Jervis Bay Marine Park, as well as our other marine parks, is world-class. New zoning plans for the Jervis Bay Marine Park commenced on 1 October following more than two years of extensive community consultation. All commercial fishing is banned in the 4,300 hectares of sanctuary zone, as is trawling within 15,600 hectares of a new habitat protection zone. High-impact commercial longlining, meshing and scallop dredging are also banned throughout Jervis Bay Marine Park, and purse seining is restricted to one designated area in Jervis Bay. The Government has allocated \$3 million this year to the buyout of commercial fishers in the Jervis Bay Marine Park. In 2001-02 the Government committed \$4 million, enabling 30 commercial fishers to be bought out in the Solitary Islands Marine Park. This means that the New South Wales Government has so far allocated \$7 million from consolidated revenue to buy out commercial fishers from marine parks.

The objective of the marine park buyout is to ensure that no additional fishing pressure is created in surrounding regions as a result of the new levels of protection. NSW Fisheries invited commercial fishing business owners affected by these changes to register their interest in a voluntary buyout. I am advised that there has been a great response from commercial fishers, with a large number registering their interest in buyouts for the Solitary Islands and Jervis Bay marine parks. The marine parks voluntary buyout process is part of the cost of establishing our marine parks as a resource that the whole community can use and enjoy both now and in the future. A small part of the \$7 million is also being used to make sure that areas protected from commercial fishing in the parks are clearly marked. The protection of areas in the marine parks from commercial fishing will increase the size, abundance and diversity of fish species available. This will provide real benefits for local communities that take advantage of improved recreational fishing and ecotourism opportunities. I thank the member for her question.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I note that the Government is implementing a \$3 million aquaculture initiative. What progress is being made on aquaculture strategies?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I thank you for that very important question because aquaculture is one of the important new regional industries. This Government is developing sustainable aquaculture strategies for the whole of New South Wales. The North Coast sustainable aquaculture strategy was the first plan to be developed and commenced in August 2000. It was established to promote the development of sustainable land-based aquaculture on the North Coast. The North Coast sustainable aquaculture industry development plan and State environmental planning policy, which underpin the strategy, help streamline the process involved in establishing an aquaculture venture while maintaining strict environmental controls.

This plan identifies sites suitable for aquaculture and categorises them into levels of suitability for the various techniques of culture used in land-based aquaculture. Assessment and performance indicators for aquaculture have been established based on the level of associated environmental and business risks. These indicators provide a simplified tool for identifying whether an aquaculture venture is a sustainable and viable proposition for a specific area, which also improves investor confidence. The North Coast sustainable aquaculture strategy is a progressive, innovative, whole-of-government approach to the development of aquaculture in New South Wales. Aquaculture is an important industry that provides much-needed employment opportunities to rural areas and

injects capital into those rural communities. Strategies such as this one enhance the future prospects for regional New South Wales and highlight this Government's commitment to providing sustainable regional businesses and employment opportunities.

Developing the strategies involved extensive consultation with industry, councils, environmental groups, agencies and the general community. The North Coast strategy forms the blueprint for the development of strategies statewide to promote aquaculture. Preparation has begun on additional strategies for other areas in New South Wales. The first of these was the draft Hunter and Central Coast sustainable aquaculture strategy, which was released for community consultation earlier this year. Three community meetings were held during the consultation period on the Central Coast, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie. The period for formal submissions has ended and all comments are currently being reviewed by NSW Fisheries.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: It is quite clear that the Minister has answered all the questions we sought today, and we found a couple of additional ones. We are happy to finish our time now and refer the rest of our time to other members. We are satisfied with the Minister's answers.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Minister, in the spirit of your deciding to give the Committee some information, which you refused to give us when we asked questions on notice, perhaps you might advise the Committee what is the relevance of the Oasis project to your portfolios of Fisheries and Mineral Resources?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That issue has nothing to do with my portfolios.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: None?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I do not see the relevance of what the Oasis project has to do with Mineral Resources or Fisheries.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: So on what basis were you invited to the detailed presentation from the Oasis team at the Wentworth Hotel on 13 November 2000?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: It is a question that is left unanswered because this has been dealt with in Parliament. I, along with Government members, am entitled to have a presentation on anything to do with anything happening in this State and these issues have been canvassed well in Parliament.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Can you say in what capacity you were there at the meeting?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have answered that question both in Parliament and now.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Were you representing anybody else at that meeting?

The Hon. RON DYER: Point of order: These are supplementary estimates hearings regarding the estimates of the Department of Mineral Resources and the Department of Fisheries. I fail to see what possible relevance or connection there can be between those estimates and the Oasis development, which has nothing to do with either department, let alone being mentioned in the budget papers.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: To the point of order: As I said at the outset, the Minister has decided to give the Committee some information. I just want to know of any—

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Maybe you are a little bit ambiguous about what represented parliamentarians are supposed to do. As an elected member of this Parliament by the people of New South Wales I, or any member of both Houses, can have a presentation on any economic benefit or any project that is suitable and in the best interests of people at New South Wales that is on tap. I do not see the relevance of your question about my interest, or any other members' interest, in seeking to have something presented to them. If you think elected members should be immune from being

presented with any issue relevant to anything happening in New South Wales, maybe you have got it all wrong.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Did you have any discussions with other Cabinet Ministers after that?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Mr Chair, the point of order has not been determined.

CHAIR: The Minister took the question, because the question was: did he go on his own behalf or on behalf of somebody else. The Minister answered the question but he obviously took it to be irrelevant. I thought the Minister was speaking to the point of order originally and then he answered the question so I let it roll.

The Hon. RON DYER: I have raised a point of order, being the question of relevance of any question relating to the Oasis development to the supplementary estimates hearings. I pointed out that we are inquiring into the estimates of two departments, the Department of Mineral Resources and the Department of Fisheries. There is no mention of the Oasis development in any of the budget papers dealing with the Minister's portfolios.

CHAIR: Thank you for that advice. That question is ruled out of order.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: In answer to my question about the number of anglers in New South Wales you said that there were one million.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: What is the number of that question?

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: It is question on notice No. 28.6. In the Government's fisheries consultation policy paper, which you co-released with Mr Carr in January 2000, you said that there were 2.5 million anglers in New South Wales—that is, people who fish in New South Wales at least once a year.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: For the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner's information, there has never been a detailed estimate of recreational fishers throughout Australia or in this State. However, together with the Commonwealth and all other States, a national recreational fishing survey has been progressing over the past 12 months. That information will be released soon and the estimates from that survey put recreational fishers in this State at approximately one million. That is the best information we have available to us. Any other previous estimates were estimates by different sources, or different agencies without any significant detailed data behind them. This is the best estimate that we have been able to arrive at through a national recreational fishing survey throughout Australia but managed through New South Wales.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: So you were out by 1.5 million.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have just answered that question; if you want to come to that conclusion.

CHAIR: I direct you, Minister, to question No. 15: What was the total cost of public relations activities and what is the forecast for 2000-01? In other words, how much did you spend in dollar terms on public relations for your portfolio agencies and what is the forecast for next year?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: As I said in my original answer, my departments conduct a range of activities to communicate with the community. It was difficult to answer such a broad question but I have been advised that the Department of Mineral Resources employs a media officer at a salary of \$66,333. NSW Fisheries employs two media staff and the total salary cost of these two positions is \$127,433.

CHAIR: So you do not put any advertisements in newspapers whatsoever? Is that what you are trying to tell me?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I am not aware of any of those sorts of details; they are managerial details. I will take the question on notice.

CHAIR: Thank you. How much was spent on public opinion surveys? I remind you of the last answer you gave to that question—question No. 2. The Premier issued a memorandum, 2000-28, which specifically directed government agencies not to use surveys of government clients or New South Wales citizens to elicit questions on political issues. That was the answer you gave, but how much money has been spent on public opinion?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will add to that. I have been advised that the Department of Mineral Resources has not undertaken any public opinion surveys in 2001-02. NSW Fisheries has been participating in the national recreational fishing survey, which is an initiative funded through the Commonwealth and all the States. The survey and other similar accrual surveys conducted by NSW Fisheries are about getting better data on recreational fishing levels to assist in fisheries management. I have been advised that the cost of the national recreational survey in 2001-02 was \$251,885.

CHAIR: Who spent that?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That is the cost of the national survey paid for by the Commonwealth and all other States but managed by NSW Fisheries. Three-quarters of it was funded by the Commonwealth Government.

CHAIR: How much was spent on legal expenses by your departments and agencies? I remind you that your last answer was: Expenditure on legal expenses followed appropriate reviews of the circumstances needed for such expenditure within appropriate guidelines. That is the sort of nonsense that brings you back before this Committee.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Do you not want me to give you a further answer?

CHAIR: Yes, I do. It is a shame that you did not give it to us last time when you had seven weeks to do so.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will read out the further answer to that question. Law enforcement is core business for both the Department of Mineral Resources and NSW Fisheries. If, for instance, a mining company breaks our State's health and safety laws and a person dies as a consequence, the Department of Mineral Resources will prosecute the offender. The budget for the investigations unit in the Department of Mineral Resources is \$696,323. NSW Fisheries is also responsible for significant law enforcement obligations. It is important that our fish stocks are protected for the future. NSW Fisheries employs two people as lawyers, and their total salary cost is \$156,466 for the year 2001-02.

CHAIR: What about the various court cases that your department have been involved in? How much did they cost?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will take that question on notice.

CHAIR: That is legal expenses.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Question on notice No. 26 is about the cost of aerial surveillance of recreational fishers in 2001-02. You said that it was not practicable to separately quantify aerial surveillance related to recreational fishing. Do you have any information this time?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I can only repeat the answer that I have already given: Aerial surveillance is used to direct ground-based law enforcement during compliance operations. Aerial surveillance plays an important role in locating and deterring illegal commercial fishing activity other than illegal recreational fishing activity. It is not practicable to separately quantify aerial surveillance related to recreational fishing activity.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Why on 23 May 2000 were you able to give me specific information in the House about the type of aircraft used?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That was the cost of that particular survey. But, as I said, your question was about recreational fishing. Aerial surveys conduct compliance programs for both recreational and commercial fishing.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Can you give me a breakdown?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I told you that it is not possible to separate an aerial survey into what proportion is for commercial and what proportion is for recreational fishing.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Can you give an all-up breakdown on the type of aircraft used, the number of occasions and the team sizes for recreational or commercial?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: We will take those specific details on notice.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: With respect to the question following the Hon. Dr Brian Pezzutti's question about committee surveys, you previously advised Parliament that there were community surveys in relation to the introduction of the general recreational fishing licence. Was that in breach of the Premier's memorandum about not conducting surveys out of government funds and budget on political issues?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Get your question right; you are asking about 2001-02 and my answer is for 2001-02. That was not in that year.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: So you got it in before he issued his ban?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: You asked about 2001-02 and I gave you the answer.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: You failed to provide information in relation to question on notice No. 19 regarding the number of fisheries officers and inspectors by location. You just gave a list of the locations, not the number of fisheries officers. Is that information available now?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have already given you the 101 fisheries officers in New South Wales. A number of the locations listed by you in the original question were actually research centres, hatcheries and a veterinary laboratory and were not locations where fisheries law enforcement officers were based. The number of law enforcement officer positions by region is as follows: northern region, 33; southern region, 32; and western region, 24. There are also 12 fisheries officers assigned to the fisheries investigation unit located at offices in Maclean, Sydney, the Entrance, Batemans Bay and Merimbula.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Question on notice No. 22 relates to the revenue collected for the recreational fishing fee from 1 March to 28 February 2002, which excluded agents' commission and fees and outstanding moneys. Minister, can you update that figure and also provide the figure that was generated by agents' commissions and fees and include the outstanding moneys?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I believe that question was answered adequately but I will add to it. Since March last year anglers throughout New South Wales have been required to buy a recreational fishing licence. Some 490,000 licences were sold in the first year of the scheme and sales reached \$9.95 million. Money has been placed in the Recreational Fishing Trust and reinvested in better recreational fishing. When the New South Wales Government introduced the general recreational fishing fee we predicted that \$8.5 million could be raised annually through new general licences. Additional licence sales can be expected in the first year of the scheme as people buy three-year licences for the first time. We have also estimated that approximately one million people fish in New South Wales at least once a year. Children and pensioners are exempt from the licence. They are approximately 40 per cent of the New South Wales population and represent the largest proportion of active New South Wales anglers.

The revenue raised has been used in a variety of areas, including protection of 30 key locations from commercial fishing, expanding the successful Fish Care Volunteer Program and continuing the Freshwater Stocking Program. New South Wales anglers have shown that they are

willing to support our precious aquatic resource by buying a licence. They know that their contributions will be invested to improve recreational fishing and protect the sustainability of the State's valuable fish resource.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: When is the \$9.95 million up to?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: March—the first 12 months.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: How much were the agents' commissions and fees?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Gold licences do not get any commission. It is 5 per cent for others.

CHAIR: So it is 5 per cent of \$9.9 million in that 12-month period?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Not necessarily because gold licences do not attract fees. So it would not be 5 per cent of \$9.95 million.

CHAIR: Were any of your departments or portfolio agencies fined by a statutory authority in 2001-02? It is question No. 13 on page 8 of the answers you gave us.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: No.

CHAIR: The Hon. Jennifer Gardiner asked: In relation to penalty notices, what is the reason that the number of penalty notices is projected to increase?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: What number is that?

CHAIR: It is question No. 24. Why are you projecting that they will increase?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: NSW Fisheries places an increased focus on the use of penalty infringement notices to avoid the cost and administrative burden of full court prosecutions. This will mean officers spending less time in court and in the office and more time on patrol. Since 1995 the number of fisheries law enforcement officers has been substantially increased. This means more effective compliance programs and greater levels of law enforcement. The community expects us to take action against people who break bag limits, catch and keep undersized fish and otherwise ignore the law. It is about avoiding extra time involved in court processes and ensuring more time on patrol.

CHAIR: It is so easy to answer these questions; it is a shame that we did not get the answers earlier.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I like to see you more often. I do not see enough of you in Parliament.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Question on notice No. 40 related to the cost of administering the general recreational fishing licence. You were asked to provide the total cost but you answered the question by saying that the administrative cost will not take up more than 10 per cent. You failed to provide the actual cost. Can you provide now the cost for 2001-02 and the estimate for 2002-03?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: The amount of money collected from the recreational fishing fee from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002—let us not mix up the periods—is \$8.1 million excluding agents' commissions and fees and outstanding moneys.

CHAIR: So the difference between that and the \$9.9 million figure you gave us before should give us some idea of the cost of the agents' fees. Is that right?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: No, just hold on. Approximately \$846,000 was spent on administering the recreational fishing licence in 2001-02. In the year 2002-03 no more than 10 per

cent of licence revenue will be spent on administering the licence. We are capped at 10 per cent for administration. That includes the commissions, too, that you pay to agents.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Is that enough?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: That is what the legislation provides. We are capped, to spend no more than 10 per cent on administration.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: You must subsidise it?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Otherwise different governments might decide to dip in 20 per cent or 30 per cent.

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: Is that not subsidisation, surely?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: No, not really.

CHAIR: Does that pay for the compliance officers as well?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: No, that is administration.

CHAIR: That comes out of consolidated revenue?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Predominantly, yes.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: Some of them come out of it.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I would say 85 per cent out of consolidated revenue.

CHAIR: Can you tell us exactly?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Well, 15 per cent comes out.

CHAIR: Minister, the time is up. I wonder whether you can get us those supplementary answers within a week?

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will take that on notice.

CHAIR: We need them within a week, because we will have to table fairly soon.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I will undertake to do it as soon as possible

The Hon. RICHARD JONES: The Minister may agree to take some questions on notice.

CHAIR: I do not think there is an availability.

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: He has already agreed to take some of them on notice.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I have taken that last bit on notice.

CHAIR: If you want to take some more on notice, but we really do need them back within a week.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: We will do the best we can as soon as possible.

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.