

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 7 August 2002

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A**Chairman:**

The Hon. R.B. Such

Members:

The Hon. I.F. Evans
 The Hon. G.M. Gunn
 Mr K. Hanna
 Mr M.F. O'Brien
 Mr J.R. Rau
 Mr M.R. Williams

The Committee met at 11 a.m.

Department for Environment and Heritage and
 Environment Protection Authority, \$90 778 000
 Administered Items for the Department for Environment
 and Heritage and Environment Protection Authority,
 \$4 702 000

Witness:

The Hon. J.D. Hill, Minister for Environment and
 Conservation, Minister for the River Murray.

Departmental Advisers:

Mr A. Holmes, Chief Executive, Department of Environ-
 ment and Heritage.
 Ms A. Harvey, Deputy Chief Executive.
 Mr N. Newland, Acting Chief Executive, Environment
 Protection Authority.
 Mr R. Janssan, Acting Director, Corporate Services.
 Mr G. Leaman, Director, National Parks and Wildlife
 South Australia.
 Mr P. Conniff, Senior Project Officer, Office of Chief
 Executive.

The CHAIRMAN: The estimates committees are a relatively informal procedure and as such there is no need to stand to ask or to answer questions. The committee will determine an approximate time for consideration of proposed payments to facilitate the changeover of departmental advisers. I ask the minister and the lead speaker for the opposition to indicate whether they have agreed on a timetable for today's proceedings.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN: Changes to committee membership will be notified as they occur. Members should ensure that the chair is provided with a completed 'Request to be discharged' form. If the minister undertakes to supply information at a later date, it must be submitted to the Clerk of the House of Assembly by no later than Friday 23 August. I propose to allow both the minister and the lead speaker for the opposition the opportunity to make brief opening statements if they wish.

There will be a flexible approach to giving the call for asking questions based on about three questions per member alternating each side. Supplementary questions will be the

exception rather than the rule. A member who is not part of the committee may, at the discretion of the chair, ask a question. Questions must be based on lines of expenditure in the budget papers and must be identifiable or referenced. I have taken the view that unless members stray away from our focus, then I do not ask that they identify each line because it takes up a lot of the time of the committee.

Members unable to complete their questions during the proceedings may submit them as questions on notice for inclusion in the *Assembly Notice Paper*. There is no formal facility for the tabling of documents before the committee. However, documents can be supplied to the chair for distribution to the committee. Incorporation of material in *Hansard* is permitted on the same basis as applies in the house, that is, that it is purely statistical and limited to one page in length. All questions are to be directed to the minister, not the minister's advisers. The minister may refer questions to advisers for a response.

I also advise that, for the purposes of the committee, there will be some freedom allowed for television coverage by permitting a short period of filming from the northern gallery. I declare the proposed payments open for examination and refer members to Appendix D, page 2 in the Budget Statement and Part 8, pages 8.1 to 8.4, volume 2 of the Portfolio Statements. Minister, do you wish to make a brief statement?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I do. At this stage may I thank all these officers for being in attendance today and for the efforts they have put in to prepare for the estimates. The government's election platform envisaged three agencies in the broad area of environmental management and protection to support the environment and conservation and River Murray portfolios, namely, the Department for Environment and Heritage, which includes a new Office of Sustainability to drive the sustainability agenda across government; a new Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation; and an independent Environment Protection Authority separate from the Department for Environment and Heritage, reporting through its own board to the Minister for Environment and Conservation.

The broad role of the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) is to work with the broader community to secure a thriving future for South Australia characterised by a healthy environment, healthy communities and healthy people. DEH is a diverse agency with principal responsibilities for the following:

- management of South Australia's national parks, botanic gardens and coastline;
- protection and management of state heritage;
- the conservation and restoration of the state's natural ecosystems with an emphasis on the public reserve system; and
- the provision of environmental and geographic information.

The Office of Sustainability has a major role in ensuring that environmental issues are properly addressed across government. This includes developing a comprehensive role in cabinet processes as well as a broad role in providing information and education programs to raise the level of awareness of sustainability and eco-efficiency concerns in government, business, industry and the wider community.

The new Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation—and I might say at this stage that I am talking about all my portfolios, so I will address the committee only once and not do it again this afternoon—was established on 8 April 2002 from the former department for water resources

and the Sustainable Resources Group of Primary Industries and Resources South Australia to deliver a range of policies, programs and advice on practices relating to the integrated management of natural resources. The agency is focusing on the management of the state's land and water resources, including the River Murray, in sustainable ways that promote development while sustaining biodiversity conservation.

The EPA is the state's peak environmental regulator and was established as an independent administrative unit under the Public Sector Management Act on 1 July 2002 with a vision for excellence in environmental protection. Its purpose is to protect and enhance the state's environment through the Environment Protection Act 1993 for all South Australians. The revamped EPA will have a greater focus on regulatory functions through an enlarged authority board to be chaired by the chief executive of the EPA who is yet to be appointed.

The structure of this year's portfolio statement is primarily the same as for 2001-02 to make comparison easier. Minor variations have occurred which reflect the transfer of the Office of Recreation, Sport and Racing and the Office of Volunteers to other ministerial portfolios. Further changes were required to reflect the abolition of the Department for Water Resources and the establishment of the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, particularly the transfer of most of the Sustainable Resources Group from PIRSA.

To facilitate ease of reference, the output classes (as presented by DEH, the former DWR and PIRSA) have not been changed from the 2001-02 portfolio statement. Output costings are indicative as a full overhead allocation has not occurred. Internal budgets for the agencies are still being finalised and a new output structure is likely to be implemented during 2002-03. The 2002-03 budget has been presented in a similar manner to that of 2001-02. The budgeted financial statements have not separately identified the Environment Protection Authority, and its budget has been incorporated within the statements of the Department for Environment and Heritage because significant work is required to develop the detail that is necessary for a separate set of financial statements.

Many of the detailed aspects of the establishment of the authority are currently being resolved. The environment protection output class provides an indication of the resources being committed to the EPA. However, some care needs to be taken in analysing this data as resource transfers are still being negotiated. The overhead allocation to output classes is only indicative, and this output class also includes expenditure and income associated with the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. The budget reflects a marginal increase in the DEH operating expenditure of \$2.6 million.

This reflects the commitment to a number of new initiatives by the government and the effects of carryover from 2001-02. Many of the larger expenditure initiatives within the environment and conservation and Murray River portfolios are included within the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation. When the total expenditure of the portfolio is considered there is an increase of over \$16 million of operating expenditure since 2001-02. The budget of the Department of Environment and Heritage reflects a conservative approach in its estimate of 2002-03 commonwealth Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funding given that stage 1 of the program is coming to an end.

No allowance has been included for commonwealth funding from this program in the budget papers, although latest indications are that the state will receive of the order of

\$2.2 million. Revenue in the 2002-03 budget appears to have decreased by approximately \$7 million compared to 2001-02. However, this has been distorted by a number of one-off revenues that occurred last financial year, and the assumptions already mentioned about NHT funding. A number of new revenue initiatives are planned for 2002-03, including an increase in minimum rent for crown leases and the introduction of a load-based licensing framework for pollution discharges.

An ongoing base capital investment program of \$11.1 million continues when the effects of carryovers and a \$3 million one-off land purchase are removed. Key initiatives at DWLBC include implementation of the proposed Murray River legislation and the water allocation plan, Murray River environmental flows, the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative, prescription of the state's stressed water resources and the Waterproofing Adelaide scheme. The government is committed to achieving enhanced efficiencies and effectiveness in service delivery where ever possible.

As part of restructuring the portfolio, I have endorsed the principle of a range of services being delivered on a portfolio-wide basis and a review has commenced. Services being investigated for possible delivery through a shared service arrangement include payroll financial services, prudential management and information technology. The various services are being considered on a case by case basis to determine the most efficient, cost effective way to deliver them. The review is considering current investigations into shared service arrangements at the whole of government level.

As a result, some services within the portfolio may be best delivered through whole of government arrangements or on a portfolio-wide base, while others would be continued to be provided at the departmental and/or divisional levels. The review will be completed later this year followed by implementation of those recommendations endorsed. Resources for the review are covered within existing portfolio funds.

I would now like to outline some portfolio highlights. The Department of Environment and Heritage has achieved a number of significant initiatives, and these include:

- A boost of \$900 000 provided to the Botanic Gardens to enable a master plan to be developed and for capital works to be commenced.
- An additional commitment has been made to coast protection with increased funding of \$12.4 million from 2003-04 to 2005-06 for coast protection works, including sand replenishment. During 2002-03, \$1.25 million will be spent to continue pilot projects and to finalise the metropolitan beach strategy.
- Work will commence on a \$1.1 million project to upgrade the Stenhouse Bay jetty at the Innes National Park on Yorke Peninsula.
- \$300 000 has been allocated for planning and design work for upgraded facilities in the Belair National Park and \$300 000 for visitor centres in the Gawler Ranges National Park.
- In recognition of ongoing community concern about the incidence of dog attacks, I have released for public consultation the Responsible Dog Ownership Strategy discussion paper. This discussion paper includes the government's 10-point plan to reduce dog attacks.
- \$50 000 will be provided to introduce a biennial symposium on architecture and urban design, and \$50 000 to launch a heritage cemetery fund.

- The WildCountry philosophy has been introduced to our protected areas management program to enable us to construct a system of interconnected core protected areas surrounded and linked by lands managed under conservation objectives.
- Plans for a community consultation process to enable the creation of a dolphin sanctuary in the Port River and associated waters are well advanced.
- The investment of an integrated framework for coast, estuary and marine users through a new Coast and Marine Act are also progressing well.
- The Office of Sustainability has been created to provide the focus for environmental innovation across my portfolio and across government, business and the broader community. The office will consider key issues for a South Australian sustainability agenda, such as energy use, waste management, water conservation initiatives and biodiversity conservation.

With the establishment of DWLBC, the government has initiated several developments that I will briefly outline:

- The integration of existing institutional Natural Resource Management (NRM) arrangements. An NRM Integration Project Task Force comprising officers of DWLBC, DEH and PIRSA has been established to progress this. The task force reports to a project steering committee comprising the chief executives of those three departments and the Chair of the Natural Resources Management Council (NRMC), Mr Dennis Mutton.
- The initial consultation process for the River Murray Act has begun. This act is proposed to give the government clear powers over the way in which the river is used and to control planning, irrigation practices, pollution and rehabilitation programs. A draft bill is being prepared and will be available for a further round of public consultation in early September. I propose to introduce the bill to parliament in November or December this year.
- Waterproofing Adelaide is a key part of the government's environment and conservation policy and DWLBC, in partnership with SA Water, is developing a long-term strategy for intelligently managing the water resources available to Adelaide and its environs.

The revamping of the Environment Protection Authority has commenced, and the Radiation Protection Branch of the Department of Human Services has been transferred to the EPA. This move gives the EPA the expertise and resources to oversee the environmental effect of uranium mining and will take a lead role in the control, storage and handling of radioactive materials and waste in South Australia. The next phase of the revamp of the EPA is to amend the Environment Protection Act of 1993, in particular to strengthen the authority board. A series of bills will be introduced shortly to parliament dealing with revised governance arrangements, general amendments (including a new offence of pollution), along with increased penalties for offences.

Extra resources include a new allocation of \$378 000 for enhanced water quality monitoring programs and \$200 000 to commence the analysis and assessment of emission data to monitor pollution trends and to support the introduction of load-based licensing for industry over a four-year period. Environment protection policies (EPPs) will be finalised and implemented for water quality and waste resources. An EPP for noise will also be progressed and an EPP for site contamination will be initiated. My portfolio is about to take a broader role in environment protection and sustainability across government, business, industry and the wider

community. Funding has been targeted to achieve the greatest benefit for the environment and these initiatives demonstrate the government's strong commitment to the environment and conservation.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the member for Davenport wish to make an opening statement?

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: No, thank you, sir.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Davenport.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Will the minister explain why he has not accepted the suggestion of the Office of Sustainability to have a board of approximately 12 people meeting on a regular basis, but will instead opt for a smaller group comprising environmental lateral thinkers meeting on a less regular basis?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I have not made any decisions about how we should structure advice to the Office of Sustainability. What I am contemplating is some sort of council advisory body on broader sustainability issues. The number and the nature of those people have not yet been decided. A range of options are available and the honourable member has mentioned a couple, but we have not yet worked through the detail of that.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Will the minister guarantee that the Department of Environment and Heritage will remain separate from the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation for the term of the government, and will all the departments maintain a separate CEO for the term of the government?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That is really a question you should ask the Premier. I am not in a position to guarantee departmental structures; that is his prerogative. As I understand it, the intention is to maintain separate departments. That is our current thinking. We have no secret agenda to change that. We are proceeding to appoint CEs to both the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation and the EPA. The interview process has been gone through for the former, and we are now talking to an individual about an appointment. In the case of the EPA, we are certainly intending to keep that as a separate entity, because that was a pre-election policy commitment. We are going through the process of appointing a CEO in that area as well. So, subject to the right of the Premier to make a change at any time, there is no intention to collapse those bodies into one or two entities.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Will the minister clarify that? The minister did not really address the issue of maintaining separate CEOs. Even if you maintained the department, you could have a CEO over the two.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I will make that plain, too. The intention is not to collapse the CEOs but to have separate CEOs. As I said, we are going through the process of finalising appointments in the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation. We will certainly have a CEO in DEH. We have an acting one in the EPA, and we will have a permanent one there shortly. So, we would not go through that process if we were planning to get rid of one or more of them.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: The minister has put in place a new structure including the Department of Environment and Heritage, the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, the Environment Protection Authority, and the Office of Sustainability. Is there a portfolio CEO? Is the portfolio CEO the CEO of DEH and, if so, do all the CEOs of the other departments or agencies report to the portfolio CEO?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: No, there is no portfolio CEO as such, and there are no reporting arrangements between the CEOs. The three CEOs meet regularly, and I have asked Mr Holmes, who is the CE of DEH, who is the most senior of the CEOs, to act in an informal way to get those groups meeting. However, there is no portfolio CEO in the same way that I guess Kate Lennon is in the justice portfolio.

Mr O'BRIEN: I note with interest that page 8.6 of the Portfolio Statement makes reference to developing a framework for the introduction of load based licensing. In its report 'Environment Protection in South Australia', the Environment, Resources and Development Committee of the parliament recommended that a significant component of licence fees be based on pollutant loads rather than the scale of operation, as currently applies for most licensees in order to enhance the incentive to reduce discharge of pollutants. What action is the government taking on this recommendation?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The honourable member may have noted that this morning I put out a media release in relation to this. I am happy to amplify on what I have previously said. In addition to the inadequacies of the licensing system identified by the Environment, Resources and Development Committee, a detailed review by the Department for Environment and Heritage revealed a number of things. Firstly, fees that are collected now cover only about half the cost of the licensing system, with the taxpayer meeting the additional cost; secondly, financial incentives currently available for licensees to improve environmental performance are heavily focused on water quality issues and are available to a very small proportion of licensees; and, thirdly, pollutant load discharge limits are rarely prescribed in licences while they are an integral part of load based licensing systems used interstate.

So, in order to address these issues, a major overhaul of the licensing system is planned over the next four years, and this includes a move to full cost recovery. The transition strategy will target industries and pollutants that are most suited to load based licensing and where the potential benefits of its application are the greatest. Industries where there is potential to extend the application of load based licensees include petroleum and chemical production; metals and mineral processing; food and beverage production; animal husbandry and aquaculture; and pulp and paper works. The new system will make greater use of load discharge limits in licensing conditions as a technique for controlling pollutant discharge loads.

The government also intends to introduce an extensive range of additional incentives for improved environmental performance that will be available to all licensees in order to enhance the effectiveness of licensing in achieving improved environmental performance. These incentives include fee reductions for entering into environment improvement programs; reprocessing industrial use for reuse; and credits for off site reductions.

The first phase of the transition strategy in 2002-03 will be a 25 per cent increase in licence fees that will begin to address cost recovery issues. It will also include extensive consultation regarding the introduction of the reforms, with a range of stakeholders including all licensees, local government, relevant state government agencies, Business SA, other business associations and conservation groups. This load based licensing approach is used certainly in New South Wales, Victoria, and Western Australia, with different models in each state. It appears to be working well. It provides not only a benefit for the environment by penalising those who

pollute the most but also an incentive for those who care to try to reduce the amount of pollution that they are putting into the environment. There is a financial benefit, too. After all, waste is just a product that has been misused by a company.

In terms of the fees that are being charged, I want to put on the record as well that, even with this doubling of the fees in South Australia, we will still be very competitive compared to the Eastern States, which have in place a significantly higher fee regime than we have here.

Mr O'BRIEN: I note with interest that page 8.22 of the Portfolio Statement makes reference to the establishment of an Office of Sustainability within the Department for Environment and Heritage. What is envisaged, and what role will this office play?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I announced on World Environment Day that we were establishing an Office of Sustainability, and I indicated a number of functions that it would have, as follows:

- Develop future scenarios for South Australia and identify practical measures for responding to them. The office will need to identify the key issues for a South Australian sustainability agenda—population, energy, water, land quality—and will need to develop means to glean, manage and disseminate global knowledge about these issues. From all this, the office will need to identify those areas where it is likely to make the greatest impact for its efforts. Consideration has also been given to the formation of a council on sustainability, as the member for Davenport mentioned, and it would take the form of some sort of round table forum or some other body. This office will need to provide support to that.
- Develop broad strategic directions for the environment and conservation and River Murray portfolios, and seek to integrate those agendas and develop strategic frameworks across government. It is expected that the office will develop planning frameworks for the environment and conservation and River Murray portfolios. This will perhaps provide a pilot for collaborative cross-agency strategic planning that might be extended—at least at the high level—across government; that is, the office might expect to be involved in the whole of government strategic planning process, possibly run at cabinet level. That will ensure that a sustainable development agenda is driving decision making across the board.
- Critically evaluate proposals from all areas of government to ensure that cabinet is able to take an integrated approach to considering options. Over time, I would like to see the office take on a similar role in relation to other government agencies that Treasury and Finance have. So, where Treasury and Finance assesses a proposal from a particular ministry from the point view of the financial bottom line, I would like to see the Office of Sustainability over time develop the capacity to do the same kind of assessment but from an environmental bottom line.
- Develop and implement accountability and reporting tools with an emphasis on sustainability. We referred to what we call green print in the state of environment reporting. We have statutory responsibilities currently conducted by the EPA to report on a regular basis against a whole range of indicators. We would like to transfer that responsibility to the Office of Sustainability. In addition, we want to have annual benchmarks established, and then annual statements about how the government has gone in reaching those benchmarks.

- Ensure that an appropriate legislative framework is in place across the environment portfolios. The office will need to form a view on the completeness and efficiency of environmental legislation. Consideration also needs to be given to interactions between specific environment legislation and other legislation. The office will also seek a role in ensuring that ecologically sustainable development principles are incorporated into all legislation over time.
- Ensure effective policy coordination across the environment and conservation and River Murray portfolios.
- Support the focus on innovation in the public, private and business sector. In the initial period, this will present a considerable challenge for the office. The initial task will be settled on our understanding of the scope of the term innovation. Given the office's limited resource base, this is likely to be an area where we particularly need to work closely with other agencies, possibly towards virtual organisations and service delivery models.
- Raise public awareness of sustainability and eco-efficiency issues.
- Maintain a green business unit to provide advice and support to developing innovative green ideas.

I will just expand on that briefly. As shadow minister and now as the minister (and I am sure that the same applies to the member for Davenport) I get a lot of business groups coming to me with great ideas for saving the Murray or reducing air pollution, doing a whole range of things, and they tend to go to other agencies of government and not be treated as seriously as one would expect. Some of them probably have worthwhile inventions and ideas, but we need to work out a way of assessing that, so we are looking at establishing a green business unit so that those potential businesses have somewhere that will be sympathetic, will assess what they are doing and will help create a bridge into the other processes of government, which can allow development of those ideas.

Mr O'BRIEN: The government is committed to establishing an independent Environment Protection Authority (EPA) with a suite of legislative tools to enable effective environmental regulation. Will the minister advise what action the government is taking to improve the delivery of environment protection policies for the revamped EPA?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The revamp of the EPA is going very well and is taking place in stages. The commitment to give the EPA its own staff has been achieved, with the original agency staff transferred to a separate administrative unit, called the Environment Protection Authority, on 1 July this year. As we promised during the election campaign, the radiation section of the Department of Human Services was also transferred to the EPA on 1 July. This move gives the EPA the expertise and resources to oversee the environmental impacts of uranium mining as well as the safe storage and handling of radioactive waste and other materials. The EPA will also use this resource to manage an audit of radioactive material in South Australia to enable the government to make an informed decision about the amount and nature of the material and how it should best be stored.

The Radiation Protection Branch, as it is now called, will also be involved in the government's inquiry into the environmental impact of using the acid in situ leach mining process in South Australia. Two policy staff from the Department of Environment and Heritage have been moved to the EPA to give the authority the ability to streamline preparation of environment protection policies (EPPs). The

priority for the EPA is to finalise the policies for water and waste resources that have been in progress for some time and to develop EPPs for noise and also for contaminated sites, on which work is to begin in the coming months. We have also transferred there the inspectorate from the Water Resources Department, so they are included now in the EPA.

The next phase of the revamp of the EPA is to amend the Environment Protection Act, in particular, to give the authority more teeth. A series of bills will be introduced into parliament, as I noted previously, which will look at a whole range of governance issues, including amendments introducing new offences, new penalties, and so on. Members should note that the government has advertised for a chief executive. Applications for the position have closed and I expect interviews to be taking place pretty soon.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Referring to Output Class 7, 'Coordination and advice', the minister has announced an audit of known sources of radioactive waste in South Australia to be undertaken by the EPA, which now includes the Radiation Protection Branch. The audit can find three possible results: the material is stored safely; the material is stored unsafely; or a combination of the two, that is, some stored safely and some unsafely. Regardless of the audit's findings, the state government faces the same policy questions for the safe storage of low level radioactive waste created in South Australia:

1. Store the low level radioactive waste in a purpose-built national facility proposed at Woomera.
2. The South Australian government could build a central storage facility, or a number of such facilities, to store the low level radioactive waste.
3. The South Australian government could leave the existing waste where it is currently stored and store future generated waste in our towns and suburbs, or move the waste and store it in another state or country.

Can the minister think of any other possible outcomes of the audit or alternatives available to the government to store low level radioactive waste that has been or will be created in South Australia?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: This is an issue of great interest to the public and also to the parliament. We have been dealing with it through legislation before this house, so many of these issues have been canvassed. I did not take note of all the options that the member raised, but he has pretty well described the field. I do not want to pre-empt the outcome of any review, but the member is probably right that the alternatives include: that it is all stored safely; that none of it is stored safely; or that it is a mixture of those two. I suspect that the last of those alternatives would probably be the outcome, but we have to go through that audit process. I point out that we also have waste that is of medium level stored in South Australia in some of those facilities around the place, so we will be auditing the medium level waste as well.

I think that is where the inference in the member's question falls down, because his party is opposed to the intermediate level dump being in this state. That raises the question: if you are opposed to the intermediate level dump, what do you do with the intermediate level waste that we currently store in South Australia? Do we build a purpose-built facility, leave it where it is or ship it out of the state? I noted in the *Australian* today that it seems that all the state premiers around Australia are saying, 'We don't want the national intermediate level facility in our state,' which raises the question of whether or not there will be an intermediate

level national storage facility. It may be up to each state eventually to find a way of storing that intermediate level material in its own state.

I understand that we have something like two to three cubic metres of the material in South Australia, a relatively small amount, so what do we do with it? Even under the scenario suggested in the federal government's proposition for a low level dump in Woomera, it is envisaged that each state would develop its own interim storage facility as a kind of halfway house or holding station before the material is shipped off to Woomera. So, each state, as I understand it, will have to develop some sort of facility to deal with waste that is in its state. The commonwealth envisages us having some sort of state-based facility, and that state-based facility will have waste in it, I would imagine, most of the time, because it will only be transferred to the central national facility on an annual basis or every two years or a bit longer; it will not be done on a daily basis.

Users of radioactive material that is at low level would transfer material there and it would be stored there, and then on one day every year or two years the material would be shipped off to Woomera. For all that time, except for perhaps one day every two years, the facility will have waste in it. In effect, that is pretty similar to one of the options that the member is suggesting, that we would have a low level facility. It is an option that we would certainly have to look at, involving a low level facility in South Australia to store that waste. Even if the commonwealth proposition goes ahead as I am saying, we would still need to have such a facility. For the medium level waste we will probably need to have a similar facility. Even if the commonwealth is able to find a state that is prepared to have the intermediate level facility, it would still imply some sort of interim storage facility in this state.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: If the minister bears with me, this is a five-part question, although I think he will probably give the same answer to all parts:

1. Will the minister rule out using the purpose-built national low level waste storage facility built at Woomera for the storage of low level radioactive waste currently stored or created in the future in South Australia?

2. Will the minister rule out the state building a central storage facility, or a number of such facilities, to store low level radioactive waste currently stored or created in the future in South Australia?

3. Will the minister rule out leaving the radioactive waste currently stored in towns and suburbs in those towns and suburbs?

4. Will the minister rule out storing low level radioactive waste created in South Australia in the future in our towns and suburbs?

5. Will the minister rule out moving the low level radioactive waste that is currently stored in South Australia or created in the future in South Australia to another state or country for storage?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: It is a bit like one of those television game shows: can I call a friend or ask the audience?

The CHAIRMAN: We all missed out on the IQ test last night. I think we rated zero, and that probably says something!

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Mr Chairman, I was watching that program in the gym, and it proved to me that my eyes, rather than my IQ, were what was failing, because I could not see the details on the screen. I know that all the member's

questions are designed so that he can put out a statement saying that the minister refuses to rule out X, Y or Z.

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That is a good idea. The point is that we are undertaking a proper process to work out what waste there is in South Australia. We are getting the appropriate people (and that is the Radiation Protection Branch of the newly independent EPA) to go through and look at all the waste that is stored and the conditions under which it is stored, and to make some recommendations.

The Hon. G.M. Gunn interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I'm sorry; what was that? If you are going to interject, Gunny, let me at least understand what you're saying, mate. Take your hand away from your mouth.

Mr WILLIAMS: He said, 'What about the stuff that the Labor Party put at Woomera?'

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Okay. We won't get into that.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! There will be no interjections.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: We will go through a professional and thorough investigation of what is stored, and the EPA will make some recommendations. It may make recommendations about any of the options that the member for Davenport has raised. We just cannot answer hypothetical questions at this stage.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I refer to page 8.7, Output Class 1.1. The minister has announced the transfer of the Radiation Protection Branch from the Department of Human Services to the Environment Protection Authority, and that is the group that will be undertaking the audit, as I understand it, of the known sources of radioactive waste. When was the last audit of known sources of radioactive waste undertaken in South Australia, what was the cost of that audit, and what is the commencement date, the proposed completion date and the cost of the new audit?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I understand that the previous audit (I think I read something about it just last night) was in 2000. We will check this, but I think it was in 2000. I think it was only a partial audit; it did not go through all the sites. But I will obtain some details for the member. I could not tell the member how much it cost. The plans are for an audit of storage facilities to be undertaken this financial year. A project brief and scoping study for this target is being initiated, with the project plan to commence in the next two months. I am advised by Mr Newland that the allocation put aside is \$50 000.

Mr HANNA: I note that the budget makes reference to the Labor policy of revamping the EPA to give it independence and more teeth. How is that going?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: It is going very well, thank you very much. I think I addressed this question a few minutes ago. The process we have gone through is to create an independent body, and that occurred on 1 July 2002. We have provided it with some additional resources, including the radiation branch, some officers from water resources, a couple of officers from the Department for Environment and Heritage, and also some additional cash resources. We are going through a process of introducing some legislation over the next few months that will give it greater powers and have a broader regime of penalties and powers. We are on track to achieve the policy announcements that we made during the election period.

Mr HANNA: I am interested in the reference to amending the Dog and Cat Management Act. Will the minister please explain how he intends to address the ongoing community concern about the incidence of dog attacks?

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: This is an issue to which I have given a great deal of attention, in recognition of the ongoing community concern about the incidence of dog attacks. I have spent considerable time reviewing previous work on legislative reform, the recommendations of the Dog and Cat Management Board and the public submissions received in response to the former government's discussion paper. On 14 July, as the member knows, I released for public consultation the Responsible Dog Ownership Strategy Discussion Paper, and that contained a 10 point plan to reduce dog attacks. Those points include identifying menacing dogs and ensuring that they are responsibly managed. Currently, in order to be identified as a dangerous dog, a dog has to do something dangerous. That is a little late, because once it has done something dangerous it is quite often put down. So, it is a bit of a pointless exercise. We want to have a means of identifying dogs that are potentially dangerous. There is no fee involved in this, but we would like councils to have the authority to identify dogs that are menacing and then to put in place a regime of controls to protect the public. We would also like owners of dogs to identify them as menacing so that, in some ways, they can protect themselves.

We would require all dogs to be kept on leads in public streets and, in the longer term, in all public areas, unless the areas have been designated by councils as off-lead areas. But we will need some phasing in time for that. We would increase the penalties for people who repeatedly let their dogs wander. We would make the owner of a dog and the guardian of a child responsible if the child is injured while in the vicinity of a dog without adult supervision (that is similar to the kind of regime that is in place in terms of swimming pools). We would make sure that guard dogs were traceable through a register, using microchipping and freeze branding. We would restrict the type of dogs that pet shops are allowed to sell. We would increase penalties for people with large dogs that are allowed to wander unleashed. We would place restrictions on owners if they have owned a dog that has been declared dangerous or destroyed on council orders, and we would give councils more flexibility to enforce registration fees and dog laws. We would also educate the community about ways in which to reduce the number of dog attacks.

The responses that we have received so far have been fairly positive. I think most people see this as a sensible structure. There might be one or two questions about some of the issues but, by and large, I think it has received a good response. The closing date for public comments is 15 October, and the government will then progress the amendments to the Dog and Cat Management Act through the parliament.

There is one issue that needs to be addressed, namely, the Dog and Cat Management Board. I am talking to the Local Government Association about the restructuring of that board. I think, from memory, the board has seven members, one of whom is appointed by the minister, and six of whom are appointed by the minister but on the advice of the Local Government Association, yet the board makes policy in these areas. I am not sure that that is the right structure. I think that, if the Local Government Association is to appoint the majority or all of the members to the board, it should take responsibility for the body and manage these issues itself.

If, however, the Local Government Association and councils want the state government to maintain this control, I want to be in a position to appoint the majority of members to the board. We cannot have it as it is now, which is a halfway house, and I think we need to work that through. The

LGA seems sympathetic to my concerns, and is being very positive.

Mr HANNA: I note the reference to the establishment of a dolphin sanctuary in the Port River and the Barker Inlet area. Will the minister please explain the current status of the proposal and how the community can have input into the process?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I thank the member for Mitchell for the question, because it gives me an opportunity to inform the house of the establishment of this sanctuary to protect the Port River and Barker Inlet bottlenose dolphins. I understand that 20 to 30 bottlenose dolphins can be found in the Port River-Barker Inlet area on almost any day throughout the year—although I must say that, on the day Mike Bossley and I took the Premier out to find them we were singularly unsuccessful.

The permanent presence of such a substantial number of dolphins so close to a city of more than one million people appears to be internationally unique. As part of its 20-point Green Plan for the Environment, the government has a policy commitment to create a dolphin sanctuary in the Port River and at Barker Inlet. I have appointed an executive steering committee to investigate the creation of the sanctuary. Dr Mike Bossley of the Australian Dolphin Research Foundation chairs this committee, which is required to provide a report to me by the end of this year identifying options that will optimise the protection of the dolphins, the Port River and Barker Inlet habitats and associated ecosystems. The mayors of Port Adelaide, Enfield and Salisbury and a representative from the Barker Inlet Port Estuary Committee are also members of the committee.

Integral to the development of the report is a requirement to seek information from the community, industry and government to properly understand stakeholder issues. An 'Issues Paper and an Invitation to Contribute' publication is being prepared for distribution to community, industry and government stakeholders. The Port Adelaide Enfield council and the Salisbury council are assisting the committee in the identification of key stakeholder groups that will be contacted as part of this information gathering exercise. It is anticipated that this, along with a series of public meetings, will provide the steering committee with a range of options to develop the best and most sustainable option for the protection of dolphins. The public meetings will be advertised in local newspapers and the *Advertiser*.

Dolphins are a top of the food chain predator and therefore indicators of the health of the environment in which they live. Threats to the dolphins are numerous, including: habitat degradation, toxic pollution, marine litter, introduced marine pests and pathogens, and harassment and deliberate and accidental death and injury caused by human actions. Many of these threats have caused significant community outrage resulting in demands on government for appropriate action. I look forward to receiving this report. It is fair to say that there are protections in place to protect individual dolphins, but there is nothing yet in place to protect their habitat. Clearly, the Port River is not the most pristine of habitats, so we have a job ahead of us. We will try to identify where the habitats are, look at what the threats are and, over time, address those threats.

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, you have responsibility for the Animal Welfare Act. I do not expect a comprehensive answer to my question, but the issue of whipping horses in horse races is one which I have recently taken up with the SAJC and the Veterinarians Association, and I have had an

answer from one of those. Will you consider moving to have this practice banned because, in my view, if it does not cause pain to the animal it has no effect, so what is the point of doing it? If no jockey can whip a horse, then no jockey can be advantaged or disadvantaged.

The SAJC responded by saying that it is introducing a new English whip, which is a Clayton's whip: that is, a whip when you are not getting a whip. It seems to me to be a nonsense in this day and age that we need to whip horses. As I say, if it does not hurt the animal and make it go faster, what is the point of it and, if no jockey is able to whip a horse, then no jockey is advantaged or disadvantaged over any other? So, I do not see any justification for continuing this practice. I do not know whether you have received any representations on it, but I believe this issue needs to be addressed. It is not the greatest animal welfare issue, but I think this practice has little justification.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: In the 4½ years during which I have been either shadow minister or Minister for the Environment, you, sir, are the first person to raise this matter with me as an animal welfare—

The CHAIRMAN: Letters.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That's true. Lots of people who care about pigs, dogs and chickens write letters, but no-one has written to me about horses. I am not aware of this being a particular issue, and I am not sure what happens in other jurisdictions, but I am happy to get some advice and come back to you.

The CHAIRMAN: That is all I am asking. The SAJC said that it would take disciplinary action if someone significantly harms a horse but I do not think that addresses the real issue because I do not think that whipping is justified. I am just asking you to have a look at this issue.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I certainly will. There is a code of conduct which deals with how horses can be treated particularly in that kind of an environment. My guess is that there are many more things that can happen to horses which cause a greater degree of pain, but I will obtain some advice.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: My first question relates to the freeholding of shack sites at Port Clinton. I raise this issue because one of my constituents has approached me on behalf of a group of shack holders. He has been involved in a lengthy and bureaucratic process which has gone on for longer than *Blue Hills*, and I would like to know where we are at. Hundreds of people with shack sites in South Australia have been able to freehold their property quite properly. I am aware that there has been some resistance within the bureaucracy to some of these applications for freehold for reasons which I cannot understand.

Mr Keller of Robertstown on behalf of these people has been in continued correspondence with me. To put it mildly, he cannot understand why there has been such resistance. My constituent advises me that there has been some difficulty in dealing with the council. I have decided that the best way to approach this matter is to raise it here today. Let us get all the difficulties out in the open. I sincerely hope that the process will be either to assist these people to freehold their blocks or, if that is not going to be done, to tell them and let us finish it once and for all. My own view is that they should be able to freehold these shacks. They have occupied them for a long time and they want to improve them.

By way of an example, for years the people at Blanche Harbor out of Port Augusta were stopped from freeholding their shacks. Now they have freeholded them and the improvements on those properties are absolutely outstanding

and have greatly improved the economic welfare of Port Augusta.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The former Liberal government, which was elected in 1993, had a policy of freeholding shacks. As the member said, hundreds (if not thousands) of properties have been freeholded. The former government introduced a policy about freeholding which is aimed at freeholding but not at any cost; certain standards have to be met such as the treatment of effluent and so on and there are various compliance processes. This policy was not developed by the Labor Party or by this government, but I have made it plain to both officers and the public that we will not change the policy. So, there is no reason why shacks that meet the standards set by the former government will not be freeholded.

I am not sure about the exact problems in this area. I can only imagine that they may be having trouble meeting the standards put in place by the former government. Most of the shack holders were freeholded pretty quickly. There are various parts of the state going through pretty long processes because of the difficulties in complying with the standards. I am happy to look at the particular example raised by the honourable member, but I assure him that the policy and the standards have not changed.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: The aim of my question was to try to bring the matter to a conclusion.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am sorry, I meant to address that. I agree that if we are going to say no we should say no and not muck them around. We should not pretend that they can do it if the circumstances are such that they should not. I will certainly have my officers look at this matter.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: My second question also concerns freeholding. In the north of South Australia there are people investing in the tourist industry and doing an outstanding job. William Creek is not a place in which a lot of people want to invest. There is one person who has established an excellent take-away facility and camping ground and another who has built a permanent home there. For some unknown reason which I cannot fathom they are being prevented from freeholding their properties.

In relation to the tourist operator who has provided outstanding service to the people of South Australia, they have, behind their shop, a camping ground which is very well patronised, with excellent facilities but, because they only have it on a limited lease, they are prevented from obtaining extra funds from financial institutions because there is no security. There is no reason known to man or beast why these people should be prevented from freeholding their property. What they want to do is to improve it as there is an ongoing demand.

If Lake Eyre happens to fill up again, and hopefully it will, the demand for the tourist facilities will be tremendous. Eighteen months ago, there was a tent city there. The airstrip has been improved and there are fuel supplies for aircraft. A couple of weeks ago I raised in the parliament, and read into the record, a letter from a person who has built a nice home just out of William Creek—there are a few people who want to live there. Why would the government want to be so mean, miserable, nasty and bureaucratic as to stop these people from providing extra services? Why can the government not give them a freehold title? There is no reason except to say that there appear to be certain people in sections of the department who do not want people to have secure title.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: This is another particular example, and I will need to look at some of the detail. I will just like

to make some general observations. Firstly, the kind of implied criticism that departmental officers are prejudiced against the member's constituents I think is untoward. Officers of the department have responsibilities to apply the rules that are in existence, and they try and cooperate with people. But sometimes the rules say that you cannot do things. That may be a policy decision which needs to come to government, and I can accept that. Governments can change policy decisions from time to time. As I understand you are talking about the pastoral—

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: The township and adjoining the township of William Creek.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: So we are talking about land which is pastoral land. I take advice in relation to these things from the Pastoral Board, which is properly set up to look at these kinds of issues. I am happy to have a look at it, I am just not aware of the particular circumstances.

The Hon. G.M. Gunn interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Without getting into a discussion about it, I do not know enough about the detail. I will happily have a look at it, but I just make the point that neither the department nor I arbitrarily make decisions to hurt people. I do not think it is being mean-spirited. People are trying to do difficult jobs and apply the rules that exist. I do not know all the facts about the circumstance, but I will happily have a look at them, and have officers have a look at them, and get advice back to the member. There may well be issues to deal with liability and there may be costs associated as well that I am not aware of, but we will certainly have a look at it.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: I appreciate the answer, but we have reached a stage where there are more and more people travelling in Outback South Australia. The member for MacKillop and I recently did a very extensive tour. The first thing that hits you is the number of people travelling; and there will be more people. Therefore, they need to have good facilities and those facilities should be in areas where you can control tourist activities. That leads me to the next question: sometime ago there was a review or inquiry into the future of the township of Innamincka. At the time it was established by the former state government I was of the view—and maybe I was having a Sir Humphrey carried out on me—that this was to put it off because there were real problems for people wanting access.

History has a wonderful way of repeating itself: some 10 or 12 years ago the government of the day, in its wisdom, decided to cancel a number of freehold allotments at William Creek when it was put in the regional reserve. I went to the minister with a group of local residents and pleaded with him to have commonsense apply and not do this. But, Sir Humphrey won. Now, in Innamincka, they are all surveyed and you cannot get a freehold block in the town because of the most foolish escapade that was entered into. There are now people who want to have residential land there, and they want to do other things, because there are more and more people going through there.

There is a proposal to redevelop the hotel in Innamincka, so there was a need to take the township out of the regional reserve and let the people there get on with providing the services which are needed. I know the minister is getting advice, and I could make a very lengthy speech on this subject but I do not know whether he wants me to give him all the history. But I have to say to him, let's get on with it. The proposed development of the hotel is very significant and important. In a couple of weeks the member for MacKillop, myself and another colleague are going there to the races and

we do not want to be accosted because nothing has happened—because we are quiet country people and do not like those sorts of aggressive stances.

Mr WILLIAMS: We're looking for a good tip from home!

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: That's right, we are, and we are looking forward to enjoying ourselves. So I ask the minister: can he bring us up to date on what is happening? I could make a lot of other comments in relation to the staffing out there, but I will not do that; I will talk to the minister privately about that. All I say to the minister is: let's get on with it, for goodness sake.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I think the member makes an excellent point in terms of increased interest in tourism in the Outback. I recently announced some new tracks which will allow tourists to get through the Outback, and I apologise to the member for doing it in his electorate without letting him know.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: The bureaucrats never told me. They obviously did not want me to know. I have caused them too much trouble. That is probably what is.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: No. It is my fault. I should have let you know. They appreciate your input, member. I think you do make a very good point. We do need to work out how we will deal with tourism infrastructure in the Outback.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: You don't want them camped everywhere.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Exactly true, you do not want them camped everywhere, and there will be increasing numbers of people from Sydney and Melbourne and Brisbane with their four-wheel drives looking for somewhere to take them. We want them to come to our state and to spend their money, and we need them to be looked after. We do not want them getting lost or stranded and all the rest of it. So we do need infrastructures. I agree with you, and I do think we need to develop a plan, and perhaps we can talk about that in a more general sense. But I do have some advice in regard to Innamincka Regional Reserve, which I am happy to provide to the member. The National Parks and Wildlife Service has investigated annexing the surveyed township of Innamincka out of the Innamincka Regional Reserve to facilitate the township's future development. This has not been progressed pending the release by Planning SA of a plan amendment report for public comment. It is expected that the Minister for Urban Development and Planning will release the draft PAR shortly and the National Parks will consider annexing the town out of reserve following adoption of the PAR.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: I think both houses have to agree, don't they?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: You may be right, I am not sure. So, this has been progressed. I guess the work was initiated under the former government, and, no doubt the former minister did that on the member's urging. So we have not stopped the progress of it as it is going through the appropriate bureaucratic stages—and I say that not in a derogatory way. It is important to have good process so that we get good outcomes, and we would expect to get some advice about that pretty shortly.

Mr RAU: Minister, I have a question in relation to sand carting. The question has a number of parts but it is all the same question. In relation to the cost of the sand carting which is currently taking place in South Australia in the metropolitan coastal strip, can you please advise us, first for the current budget year, what the budgeted expenditure is in relation to sand carting? Can you also advise of the projected

expenditures in however many out-years you have, so that we get some idea as to whether that is a stable or accelerating expenditure? The second part of the question is: if you are able to give those figures, are you or any of your officers able to advise the estimates committee as to how, if at all, those costs have been affected by the couple of constructions that have occurred, first of all, at Glenelg, where the rock groyne has been extended out as part of the Holdfast Shores Development and, secondly, at West Beach where another rock projection has been built by the state government, again ostensibly as part of that project?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I thank the member for that important question. I have in front of me some figures which I will go through, and, if I have not answered all his questions, the honourable member might come back with a supplementary question and pick up the bits that we have left out.

The current annual Coastal Protection Fund is \$790 000 a year. The Department of Environment and Heritage is funded directly for additional coastal protection expenses for Adelaide: that is at \$1.25 million a year, and we put the two together. Transport SA is funded for sand management at Glenelg and the West Beach Harbour (this is the point about the constructions), and that is \$1.76 million per annum. I have made comments in this house and outside before about my outrage at the fact that taxpayers have to fund that amount each year to allow those constructions to continue to operate.

Future costs for the protection of Adelaide's coastline will be higher, and the government has committed additional funding of \$12 million approximately, commencing in 2003-04 year, to implement appropriate strategies to protect the metropolitan coast, following a public consultation process. The current allocation of funds generally for developing a strategy for Adelaide's beaches in 2002-03 year (and that includes the Coast Protection Fund, which I have just referred to) is \$2.698 million, and that is broken down as new strategy review projects, \$570 000; the Glenelg seawall upgrade, \$500 000; the Semaphore offshore breakwater—we are going through some discussions about that—\$290 000; and the Adelaide Metropolitan Beach Review carryover of \$328 680. The total cost of the Semaphore breakwater when it is fully implemented will be \$1.3 million.

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, in relation to Glenelg, you said that there was a cost of \$1.7 million per annum to 'keep the construction going'. Was that correct?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The former government was hell-bent on having the development at Holdfast Shores and the West Beach Boat Harbour. The ongoing cost to the taxpayers of that decision, in terms of sand management, is \$1.726 million a year.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that for Holdfast Shores and the boat harbour?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: As I understand it.

The CHAIRMAN: What is the breakdown between those two?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: It is really part of Transport SA's budget so it is not administered by my department.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that to keep the Patawalonga channel open, or is it purely to keep the beach covered in sand?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: It is to keep the channel open.

Mr RAU: I have a supplementary question, and I would be more than happy for this to be taken on notice. Could you please get back to us with the actual cost of sand-carting to government, across departments? I appreciate that you have

given us elements of it, but what I am looking for is a global picture of how much the South Australian taxpayer is paying per year, presently, in order to have sand moved up and down our coast by trucks, whether that is dredging it out of the sea in the first place, right through to dumping it again, and how it is likely to be panning out over the next few years. Secondly, is it possible to say whether those constructions that we have spoken about have actually added to that overall cost and, if so, to what extent?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I think I have pretty well answered all of that, but I will certainly review the honourable member's question in more detail. Maybe what we can do is have a look at it over a couple of years, as the sand-carting costs vary from year to year because of the strategy that is implemented. For example, the former government in the mid-1990s, I think, dredged a considerable amount of sand off the Port Stanvac/Christies Beach area and carted it to Brighton. That was three or four years' worth of sand—in fact more—done in one go, so there was considerable cost in doing that, as a one-off. As a result, there has been no additional cartage of sand, for those purposes, for a number of years. But that sand will eventually run out and some other means of achieving the same outcome will need to be implemented. So, it does vary. Maybe what I can do is give the honourable member some total costs of sand-carting over a period of time and projected into the future.

Mr RAU: The Portfolio Statements make reference to progressing the Adelaide Coast Protection Strategy. Can you advise us as to the status of this project?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am delighted that the member has asked me a question to which I can give an answer, and I am pleased to advise the committee in relation to this. As members would be aware, Adelaide beaches are not officially maintained to provide coast protection. Whilst the coast is currently protected with successful beach replenishment, further investigation into new sources is needed to supply future and ongoing requirements.

A new strategy is needed and alternative methods of coast protection require investigation. Clearly, however, a new coast protection strategy would be expensive and would need to be staged over a few decades, rather than years, so the department has appointed a project manager to develop the Coast Review Strategy, and will shortly commence baseline coastal engineering modelling work for the strategy. The department will shortly advertise for a communications officer to facilitate public consultation and awareness of coast protection issues for metropolitan Adelaide, and this awareness campaign is expected to commence this calendar year.

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, before calling the member for MacKillop, an issue I have raised with you by correspondence is with regard to educating people to understand basic ecology and ecological principles. As you know I have, in my correspondence, referred to people of non-English speaking background, but it also applies to those who have English as their native tongue. I find that government agencies are still doing inappropriate things. For example, the Department of Road Transport is planting cold-climate trees which will result in leaf litter, which will damage our riverine systems. What is your agency doing to try to educate not only the wider community, and including those from non-English speaking backgrounds, but also other government agencies that still do not seem to understand the principles of ecology?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am aware of your interest in this: we have had at least two conversations about it previously, and you have written to me, as you have indicated. I think

you make a very good point, sir. The whole European culture in South Australia, and Australia, is based on importing European traditions into this culture, and that included planting European trees and gardens, and the rest of it. There are environmental consequences in doing that. Biodiversity loss is one issue but also, as you say, it has an impact on river systems, as leaves and branches from non-native trees get caught up in the system. I agree with your point. We do need to address this.

Through the establishment of the Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation Department, we will develop integrated natural resource management planning, not only in the rural and regional parts of South Australia but also in the metropolitan area. I am hopeful that the current catchment boards will be altered to undertake planning and implementation of policy in relation to water issues, as well as biodiversity, vegetation, and soil issues, so that we can develop a greater understanding of the relationship between water, plants and soil, and, hopefully, a change in attitude and behaviour to the planting of non-indigenous trees. So, I guess that is one aspect of it.

In terms of non-English speaking people, the government generally would support ensuring that people who did not have English as a first language or could not read and write in English should have access to the same information. As I have said before, I will have my departments look through your suggestion to see if we can accommodate it.

Mr WILLIAMS: I have a series of questions, and I may pray the indulgence of the committee, because it might go beyond three questions. They are all on the same subject, concerning Mundulla Yellows in the South-East. I have had contact from many people over the last few weeks concerning the current research program, or lack thereof, into Mundulla Yellows. A number of issues have been raised and I wish to raise them with the minister before the committee. On 29 May this year, the minister said in the house:

Both the federal and state departments have become increasingly concerned about the quality of the research that has been undertaken—

in reference to Mundulla Yellows—

and it was decided that a new research program be negotiated with the University of Adelaide.

What concerns were raised at both the state and federal departmental level about the current research?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am not a scientist, so I cannot give a scientific explanation, but I can give the advice that I have been given. The research had been going on for some time and the commonwealth in particular was concerned about the outcomes and the chances of actually getting a solution to the problems. A peer review was undertaken by, I think, three highly qualified scientists. As I understand it, those scientists cast doubt and had criticisms of varying degrees about the processes being undertaken. I am not in the position to review or even comment on that, but it is appropriate for governments to take advice from experts, and we took advice in this instance.

The commonwealth in particular was of the view that its future contribution was contingent upon this research being reviewed. A workshop was held in Adelaide on 9 and 10 April 2002 to further review previous research and develop a draft strategy for future research. An executive summary of the workshop is being completed. The commonwealth requested that research directions with Adelaide University be renegotiated. The university was offered a contract in

March 2002 but the researchers did not accept the terms, so we are going through the process now of inviting research institutions, including the Adelaide University, to submit expressions of interest to continue the molecular research.

DEH took the issue to the 31 May 2002 meeting of the National Land, Water and Biodiversity Committee, a subcommittee of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, and that committee resolved to establish a national task force to review work on Mundulla Yellows over the next 12 months, commencing in September, and to make recommendations to the ministerial council. This is expected to lead to greater engagement and a national approach to the problem. Funding for a comprehensive research strategy will be identified.

As I have told the house before, a commitment from the government to funding the next phase of research is in place. Both the national parks and the commonwealth will allocate a total of \$132 000 in this financial year for the research. Further support will then depend on outcomes and funding. I understand that there is a great deal of concern in the community about this. I think a lot of that has been flamed by the person or persons who were doing the research and who were somewhat disgruntled that their particular project has not been proceeded with. I can understand that. As the government—and I hope you would agree—we have a duty to monitor what is being done with government money and particularly what is being done to resolve what could well be described as a potential crisis for our native vegetation. If we were to just allow this program to continue because the people said it worked, we would not be really fulfilling our duties.

I have restrained myself from criticising the researchers, and I do not criticise them now, but I would just say that their public advocacy and their surreptitious advocacy for their own cause does not deter me from following the appropriate course of action, which is to take proper advice from scientists, review the process and get a team in place which can achieve outcomes.

Mr WILLIAMS: The minister has answered several of the inquiries that I have had, but there are still more. The minister mentioned the workshop that was held on 9 and 10 April, and he mentioned also that an executive summary to that is being written up at this stage. Can the minister make that available to the committee? Can the minister also make available a copy of the so-called peer review into the research that has been carried out at the Waite Institute?

The complaints that have been made to me are that in fact the scientific community has been unable to get hold of a copy of the so-called peer review—and I use that terminology advisedly—but they do believe that the review panel did not consist of people with the relevant expertise which would make them capable of assessing the work that has been carried out already at the Waite Institute. I have had this brought to my attention by several plant pathologists who claim that the peer review was carried out by ecologists who they suggest would have very little understanding of exactly what the research is about.

Can the minister also make available a copy of the review into the research, the review that happened last year I understand, giving the names and qualifications of the three people who I understand were involved in that review process?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am not sure of their status and who owns those documents and whether or not they are bound by some confidentiality agreement or copyright. If I

am able to give them to you, I will certainly provide them. I do not know what level of protection they have. I cannot give a blanket answer. I imagine that the names and professional qualifications of the scientists are public knowledge. I do not have it with me but I will certainly gather that information for you.

As a non-scientist, it is appropriate that I take advice on these matters. The commonwealth is 100 per cent on the same wavelength over this. They were, if anything, more critical of the research program than were our departmental officers. I think the three scientists have a collective experience of some 75 years amongst them. It seems to me that the argument is being put that there is nobody capable of reviewing the work of this particular scientist: that her skills and training are so unique that nobody is able to review them. If you follow that logic through, that means that that particular research scientist should just be allowed to do whatever research she wants indefinitely without any review process. Well, I just reject that.

They may not have identical qualifications to the person being reviewed, but as scientists they know about scientific approach and methodology. That is where the criticisms lie, as I understand it. Can I just assure the honourable member and his constituents that this is not about either the federal or state government not being committed to trying to resolve the problem: it is about our trying to get an outcome as to what causes Mundulla Yellows and if you can do something to prevent it from spreading. We are putting the resources available into achieving that outcome.

I think the debate and discussion promoted by the particular research scientist and her fan club is puerile and sterile. They should just get over the fact that they are no longer doing the work. They are entitled to apply for the research grant. Decisions have been made; they will not be unmade. We can get all the documents and stuff we like, but it will not change that reality.

Mr WILLIAMS: It is very interesting that the minister talks about the research scientists at the Waite. I understand that the head of the research team, Dr John Randles, is world-renowned in his field of plant pathology. In fact, he is a recipient of an American phytopathology award, which is recognised as probably the gold medal in that scientific field. It amazes me that departmental officers, both at the state and federal level, are coming up with this sort of thing. It has been brought to my attention that a lot of egos are involved in this whole process.

There is some substantial embarrassment within the relevant departments because it took Geoff Cotton over 20 years to get anyone to take any notice. There are a lot of dented egos at the moment. I have very genuine reasons for raising these issues. I think it is unfortunate that the minister, in referring to the particular researcher at the Waite, uses the terminology 'fan club'. Some of these people are very eminent scientists and have extremely good records. I am trying to encourage the minister to look a little deeper and, perhaps, look outside his department for some advice, because I think that the advice he is getting may be tainted.

With regard to the advertisement for expressions of interest into the research, will the minister advise the committee why a departmental officer contacted the Institute for Horticultural Development, Knoxfield, Victoria, and encouraged that institution—against its original desire—to lodge an expression of interest for this research program; and will the minister confirm that the tender lodged by the

Knoxfield team was accepted after the advertised closing date of 4 July?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am not aware of the detail of that tendering process. I can certainly provide information for the honourable member as to whether or not it was lodged after that date. I do not know to whom the honourable member is referring as the officer who contacted that body, but I imagine that, if they were doing their job, they were trying to encourage a good range of research teams to apply. That sounds to me to be pretty sensible. The honourable member raised the name of a particular research scientist. I do not know that person, but there is no problem with that particular individual, and his expertise is acknowledged.

There has been a proper process of review of the research program. As I said, I have not criticised any of the scientists publicly: I have just acknowledged the fact that there has been a review; that it was unanimously held; that there were problems with the research program; and that better outcomes could potentially be achieved by going through a different process. Certainly, that was the strong view put to us by the commonwealth, but it was agreed to by officers in South Australia. We are going through a process to try to get a good outcome. It is not about whether the ego of this or that scientist is being bruised. That is irrelevant.

And it is also not about the egos of my department. I think it is incredibly unfair to suggest that somehow or other they have sabotaged this program because they did not identify Mundulla yellows at the same time that Geoff Cotton did. It just does not work that way. I have been down to the South-East with Geoff Cotton. I sat in the car with him for several hours, and I think he has pointed out to me every tree in the district that has Mundulla yellows. I feel something of an expert myself. Part of the problem, of course, just generally, is that a number of trees go yellow (I am not suggesting that this is an issue with the previous research team), but not all the causes can be attributed to Mundulla yellows. There are other reasons that cause the leaves of trees to turn yellow. Some people have a view that it is caused by road spray, and so on, but that would appear not to be the case.

Mr RAU: The Portfolio Statements make reference to continuing to develop the parks system. Will the minister please advise how many staff are employed to manage the parks system?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Yes, I can. I am glad that I can answer this question, and I thank the honourable member for the opportunity to inform the committee about the government's commitment to provide adequate staffing in our parks. Currently, 302 staff are employed in eight administrative regions to manage the park. This includes 97 staff classified as rangers. The former minister may recall that, in 2001, 106 ranger positions were recorded. The change in number to 97 ranger positions does not reflect any fewer staff. I make this point because the General Secretary of the PSA talked about ranger positions going as a result of the budget, and she may well have picked up this figure.

The change in number reflects the fact that five bush management advisers and one wildlife officer were recorded as rangers in 2001 but have now been reclassified as being in the scientific stream. It is not that there are any fewer people or that the jobs are different: they have just been classified differently. Further, two temporary ranger positions and one casual ranger position have been discontinued, as those positions were created and existed only to cover vacancies while permanent ranger positions were being filled.

Mr RAU: The Portfolio Statements make reference to the addition of 316 hectares of land to five parks as part of the Greater Mount Lofty Parklands. Will the minister please advise whether he will continue this program into 2002-03?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: This issue was of great interest to the former minister, the member for Davenport, so I am pleased to inform him and the committee about the government's intention in relation to, and its continuing commitment to, the Greater Mount Lofty Parklands, Yurrebilla. As members are aware, Yurrebilla promotes a holistic approach to the management of conservation and recreational land in the Mount Lofty Ranges. It extends from the Aldinga Scrub Conservation Park in the south, which is within my electorate, to Para Wirra Recreation Park in the north. I am pleased to advise that funding for Yurrebilla will continue in 2002-03, with \$505 000 being allocated.

Yurrebilla will continue to be supported by the community-based Stakeholder Management Group. I am pleased to inform the committee that I have appointed as Chair of that group the member for Fisher. Key programs of Yurrebilla will include:

- the development of an integrated management strategy;
- continued program of addition of lands to parks;
- partnership with the Department of Corrections to manage woody weeds in the Mount Lofty Ranges; and
- contributions to the implementation of biodiversity conservation initiatives, including phytophthora management and the declining birds of the Mount Lofty Ranges.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Referring to Output Class 2, page 8.10, the previous Liberal government supported the protection of the Coongie Lakes from mining and exploration. The Liberal government had agreed with the Conservation Council that it would negotiate with the mining interests to present to the government a joint proposal for government consideration to protect Coongie Lakes from mining and exploration. The 2002 state election was held prior to any announcement being made. Will the minister please advise the committee whether the Conservation Council and the mining interests are still negotiating the protection of the Coongie Lakes from mining and exploration and, if so, what is the time frame for the announcement?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The government's commitment is to ensure that key areas such as the Coongie Lakes are protected from mining and exploration. Under the previous government, a joint DEH/PIRSA task force developed recommendations on the future of petroleum activities in the Coongie Lakes area for the environment and mining ministers to consider. No decision was made on these recommendations. Between April 2001 and March 2002, current petroleum production licensees in the Cooper Basin—primarily Santos—negotiated the memorandum of understanding with three conservation groups, namely, the Conservation Council, the Wilderness Society and the Nature Conservation Society regarding petroleum activities in the Coongie Lakes area.

The memorandum of understanding has been presented to the government for consideration. The Department of Environment and Heritage and PIRSA are preparing further options for consideration based on the memorandum of understanding and the task force recommendations. It is expected that this approach will include an exclusion zone and a buffer zone where limited activities could take place. These options will identify both the environmental values protected and the cost associated with any potential loss of access to petroleum resources. The government will consider these options to determine the best solution for ensuring that

areas of environmental significance are protected while minimising restrictions to establish resources.

The new zone or zones will be established through the Innamincka regional reserve management plan. The resources allocated at issue for 2002-03 fall within existing staff, time and operating allocations, and a specific allocation of resources is planned for 2003-04 for the production of the Innamincka regional reserve management plan which will establish and define the zoning and conditions for petroleum activities in the Coongie Lakes area. So, putting it in simple terms, we received a copy of the memorandum of understanding which was jointly produced by the Conservation Council and others, and Santos. The next stage was to work through that with the mining section of PIRSA and my own department. We are going through that process. It is fair to say that we are making pretty good progress. I hope that in the not too distant future we will be able to make an announcement.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I will watch that with interest. I was advised for 18 months that they were making good progress, so I will be interested to see how long it takes. We certainly agree with the principle. In relation to Output Class 4, why is the minister proposing that several senior management positions be created in the Botanic Gardens at the expense of operational needs?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I do not have a briefing note on this matter. Of course, the Botanic Gardens is run through its own board. I have asked a similar question of the Botanic Gardens board, and I am assured by the Director—I think that is whom I asked, although it may not have been the Director—that this is a reshaping of the management structure, not a creation of a new level of bureaucracy. It is just a re-prioritising of activities within the Botanic Gardens. It is fair to say that we have a new Director in the job; he has been there about one year. He is substantially changing the philosophy that governs the way the Botanic Gardens work. He obviously will not change things overnight, but he has a new dynamic approach to the Botanic Gardens. We have committed some extra funding to help through that process. It is also a matter for him to get the staff lined up to do the kinds of jobs and deal with the priorities he has identified.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: As a supplementary question, in its July 2002 journal the Public Service Association is saying that the Botanic Gardens are creating several senior management positions at the expense of operational needs. It may well be that they are having a restructure. The Public Service Association is saying that the operational needs are losing out to management expense. Is the Public Service Association right in its concerns?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am advised that the Public Service Association has met with the Director since the publication of that article in July. I gather that its concerns have been addressed. I can certainly say that the association has not raised with me any of these concerns. I would have expected it would have if they were ongoing concerns, but I will check that. I am happy to get back a more detailed response. The advice I have is that those concerns have been addressed by one-to-one meetings.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I refer to page 8.1, Output Class 2. The *Sunday Mail* of 14 July this year reports that parents could be gaoled if their unsupervised child is savaged by the family pet dog. The paper quotes the minister as saying:

If a child aged under six was left alone and attacked by a dog, the owner of the dog and the guardian would be held jointly responsible and may be charged with reckless endangerment.

The article continues:

The laws will be identical to leaving children unsupervised around swimming pools.

What laws and penalties apply for leaving children unsupervised around swimming pools, and when were they introduced? How many people have been charged, and how many people have been convicted since the laws regarding leaving children unsupervised around swimming pools were introduced?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am pleased to get an opportunity to talk about the importance of establishing a regime whereby adults do not leave children unsupervised with dogs—not just with so-called dangerous breeds or large dogs but with any dogs. The evidence that has been given to me is that about 60 per cent of dog attacks in Adelaide each year involve dog attacks in the family home. A significant number of those involve children, to the extent that at least one child is hospitalised each week with serious injury. In the discussion paper we put out I attempted to address that issue—how do you change behaviour at home? We can have dogs on leashes outside, we can identify dangerous dogs and do all those kinds of things.

My thinking was that we should send a clear message to the community, particularly families who have children and dogs, that they will not be excluded from this regime. In the draft document I said that we should treat the risk of dog attacks in the same way as we treat the risk of drownings in pools, that is, there should be some onus on parents and adults to keep children and dogs separated. If there was a failure to comply with that, then a penalty could apply. The recommendation was reckless endangerment. That is the statement in the document. It is poetic licence by the newspaper to put the headline, 'Dog owners may go to gaol'. It is highly unlikely that that would ever be the case. However, in severe cases where a child had been put in a situation with a dog where there was a high degree of negligence or even culpable behaviour, that would be a reasonable outcome. As to the legal issues, I do not have any answers with me at present. However, I am happy to get some information back to the member on those.

Mr O'BRIEN: Page 8.16 of the Portfolio Statements makes reference to the development of a site master plan for Adelaide Botanic Gardens and Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens. What is proposed?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: As members may or may not know, formal plans for the Botanic Gardens date from 1874 in Adelaide and 1965 in Mount Lofty. The master plan that has been proposed will provide a framework for day to day operation or long-term decision making which will facilitate prioritisation of activities and provide a basis for accountability. The master plan is proposed to include Adelaide and Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens. Wittunga Botanic Gardens will be considered at a later stage. The master plan will comprise:

- a review of the gardens' principles, policies and plans;
- a conservation study of the gardens' living and built fabric in the context of the gardens' contemporary role as a cultural and scientific institution; and
- site master plans for the Adelaide Botanic Gardens and the Mount Lofty Botanic Garden.

A preliminary master plan brief has been endorsed by the board of the Botanic Gardens and the State Herbarium. Key milestones include: selection of appointment of contractors—July/August this year; completed conservation study—September this year; and draft master plan—June next year.

It is envisaged that the project will be undertaken over a two year period at an estimated cost of \$300 000. The board of the Botanic Gardens and the State Herbarium has agreed to contribute to this project from board funds.

Mr O'BRIEN: Page 8.12 of the Portfolio Statements, volume 2, refers to the coast and marine output. Will the minister advise of efforts to protect the coast at Beachport?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The progressive loss of a protective seagrass covered sandbank is exposing the Beachport foreshore to increasing attack from storm waves. This has management implications for both the foreshore and a boat launching facility that was recently approved where the loss of protection is occurring. Recently, the Wattle Range Council accepted a proposal from the minister to form a Rivoli Bay Foreshore Advisory Committee to prepare a Beachport Foreshore Management Strategy within a six-month time frame. The committee will comprise the Mayor and Chief Executive of Wattle Range Council, the Manager, Coast and Marine Branch, NPWSA, and a representative from Transport SA. The Foreshore Management Strategy Plan will:

- explore the reasons for the loss of the seagrass and underlying protective sandbank;
- detail the implications of the loss of the protective sandbank to the foreshore;
- explore remediation strategies that are available to restore or manage the loss of seagrass;
- identify the important amenity values of the foreshore and strategies to maintain, improve or develop these;
- fully explore options to integrate parking and boat launching for a recreational boat ramp facility with the commercial boat use of the commercial boat yard and slipway;
- explore the use of Crown lands adjacent to Glen Point for parking;
- recommend a site for a recreational boat ramp from Glen Point to Cape Martin;
- investigate the integrity, conservation importance and management requirements of the coastal vegetation at Glen Point; and
- ensure that facilities, protective works and beach maintenance programs are integrated.

The sum of \$40 000 has been provided from the Coast Protection Fund to undertake the investigations, and \$50 000 has been allocated by Transport SA to provide temporary protection from waves at the existing boat ramp until a decision has been made on the final location of a boat ramp facility. This matter has been a difficult one to deal with, since the community has split views. I am not sure which part of the community is in the majority, but my interest has been to try to protect the local environment.

It is true to say that, when the original advice was given through the department, the full facts as to the impact on seagrass were not known. We now have those facts, and we want to work with the council and other interests to ensure that there is a good outcome, so that not only does the community get the boat launching facility that it requires but also we can maintain environmental protection. I commend the Mayor and the Chief Executive for the professional way in which they have worked through this with the government and the department.

Mr O'BRIEN: The government has indicated a clear intention to maintain and conserve the state's heritage assets. Will the minister advise what action he has taken to try to resolve the situation that has developed over recent years with

the conservation of the building known as Belmont in North Adelaide?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: This has been a matter of some controversy and has been in the *City Messenger* on a number of occasions. The reference is to the state heritage listed property Belmont, which was purchased in 1989 by Ironwood Pty Limited. A heritage agreement requiring restoration work to be undertaken by the then new owner was put in place, so they were obliged in a period of time to undertake a particular amount of restoration work so that the building would be finished. This has not occurred. Some restoration work has been undertaken since the purchase, but the failure to complete the agreed work has caused considerable community criticism of the owner and of the government.

I decided to meet on site with the owners, so on 27 June I met with Mr Vince Oberdan and his family and inspected the property. This meeting confirmed advice that I had received previously that, whilst the building has been made structurally sound and seems to me to be generally in good order, it presents to the public as being dilapidated, with windows boarded up and so on, particularly when compared with the adjoining property, known as Kingsmead. Unlike Belmont, the heritage agreement entered into over Kingsmead has been met, and the building is a good example of heritage protection of one of our more important buildings.

My discussions with Mr Oberdan were cordial and frank, and I understand the commercial interests he has and is trying to maintain, but I made him aware that the government intends to exercise its responsibility in relation to the building. I said that I would be happy to work with him to try to get some agreement. It is my intention to meet in the near future with the city council to see whether we can develop a strategy to get some work done. Without going into Mr Oberdan's commercial interests, I think he has been a bit frustrated in his inability to get planning approval for certain things, and we have to try to work with the council and with Mr Oberdan to see if we can get something that is satisfactory to council. It may well be that the things he is seeking to do are not within the appropriate planning regulations, so we need to get something that he is happy with and they are happy with so that we can progress the matter. If we do not, the only option is for me as the minister to intervene and bring the building back into government control. That is not something I particularly want to do, but that is an option.

[Sitting suspended from 12.57 to 2 p.m.]

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Can the minister inform me whether the government will be more than doubling the EPA's investigation group over the next six months?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I would not have thought so, but it depends how you calculate things. Let me obtain some advice on that matter. The answer, in fact, is yes. As I said, it depends how you calculate it. We have four in that group now. We have included the 3.5, I think, from what was water resources, and we are to employ three additional investigative officers.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I refer to Output Class 2.2, Coastal Marine Management Services. The previous government outlined a detailed program of developing marine protected areas. Can the minister confirm that the government will meet the timing program for the marine protected areas, as promised by the previous government? I will read them into *Hansard* for the minister's benefit.

With respect to the Mid and Upper Spencer Gulf area, the marine plans were to be completed by 2001-02, the marine protected areas declared by 2002-03 and the marine protected areas management plans declared by 2003-04. With respect to Central (Gulf St Vincent and Lower Spencer Gulf), the marine plans were to be completed by 2002-03, the marine protected areas declared by 2003-04, and the marine protected areas management plans declared by 2004-05. With respect to the South-East and Lower Eyre, the marine plans were to be completed by 2003-04, the marine protected areas declared by 2004-05 and the marine protected areas management plans declared by 2005-06. With respect to the Far West and West Coast, the marine plans were to be completed by 2004-05, the marine protected areas declared by 2005-06 and the marine protected areas management plans declared by 2006-07.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I have had a couple of discussions with officers in the department, and I told them that we would not go through the processing again in relation to marine protected areas and marine parks; and that, while it was not necessarily the kind of approach that we would have perhaps taken if we had begun the project, given the amount of consultation and discussion involved, we would keep the work that had been done and, as much as possible, stick to the time lines. I am advised, though, that some of those time lines may slip a small amount, given the fact that there was a change of government and some of these issues were not addressed in that interregnum period. But, as much as possible, we will stick to the original process that the former government initiated. I guess in this area we have reasonable bipartisanship, and we would like to put these marine protected areas in place as soon as we can.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I refer to page 8.6, Output Class 1, Environment Protection. The highlights for 2001-02 show that the Adelaide Coastal Study Stage 1 has been completed. Will the minister make a copy of that report available to me? Will the government be proceeding with stages 2 and 3 of the coastal study? If so, will he say at what cost and in what time frame, and what are the funding arrangements for the completion of stages 2 and 3? If the government is proceeding with stages 2 and 3, why is it doing so, when the minister opposed the Adelaide Coastal Study in the first place? I will jog the minister's memory. He said, as reported in the *Advertiser* of 30 March 2001:

When are we actually going to see some action to fix up our marine environment?

Given that the minister never supported the coastal study and bagged us in every piece of media in the state, why is he now proceeding with it?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I have been anticipating this question for five months now. I guess I would say fair point; the member has scored a point there. It is true that we will not stop the coastal water study. I will read some of the detail of that. I could put some blarney around it, but the reality is that we will continue it. I assume that the member is entitled to receive a copy of the report: I see no reason why it should not be made available to him. I will certainly ensure that he receives it.

The coastal waters and ecosystem off Adelaide have been severely impacted by industrial sewage and stormwater discharges. This is the result of an extensive loss of seagrass (at least 4 000 hectares over the last 30 years), an increase in sand movement, degradation of reef systems, algal blooms and poorer water quality. Many of these issues are inter-

linked, so attempting to manage one can impact on others. There is a poor understanding of how the different components of the ecosystem off Adelaide interact. Attempting to manage the system effectively without this understanding can be fraught with difficulties. There is a real risk that costly decisions will be made with inadequate understanding of the consequences.

In response to these issues, the EPA has initiated the Adelaide Coastal Water Study. The aim of the study is to develop effective tools based on good science that can be used with confidence for the sustainable management of this complex ecosystem. The study is supported by a number of key stakeholders, including the Department for Environment and Heritage, the EPA, Transport SA, Torrens, Onkaparinga and Patawalonga catchment water management boards, the Coast Protection Board, TXU Torrens Island, Mobil Refining Australia, SA Water, the Local Government Association, the South Australian Fishing Industry Council and the Conservation Council.

Stage 1 of the project was completed in March 2002, and that was preparatory to stages 2 and 3, which are about to commence. Funding for the remaining stages has now been secured, and it is likely that South Australian researchers will have a major involvement in this work. The project will be completed in 2004. Studies have been costed at approximately \$2.8 million. Stakeholder organisations have agreed to fund the study. Research institutions such as universities in South Australia have indicated that they will contribute approximately \$1 million of additional in-kind support to the study.

The CHAIRMAN: Can the minister provide an update on air quality in Adelaide? Has it improved, or is it improving? I understand that the minister's department monitors air quality at places such as Hindley Street and Thebarton. Can the minister provide some information on the current situation—is it improving, getting worse, or is it static?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: As the member would know, 12 monitoring and meteorology sites have been established in metropolitan Adelaide. The locations are Netley, Gawler, Northfield, Elizabeth, Kensington, Kensington Gardens, Thebarton, Gilles Plains and Parkside. There are eight sites monitoring pollution in regional SA, plus meteorology sites. Those locations are Port Pirie (where there are four sites), Whyalla (two sites), Port Augusta and Mount Gambier. A hot spot monitoring caravan has been located at several sites. Currently, it is located at Mount Gambier. A further two monitoring sites are to be implemented this year at Noarlunga and Tea Tree Gully-Modbury.

An air quality index has been developed and is automatically calculated from data downloaded from monitoring sites. The index shows air quality at five levels: very good, good, fair, poor and very poor, based on the NEPM standard. The index will be made available on the EPA web site in the near future (the member for Davenport laughs; obviously, he also has heard that answer before). The operating budget is approximately \$250 000. This year's budget has not yet been finalised. Some 10 FTEs are currently employed in the air quality monitoring role.

With respect to whether or not there are observable improvements, I am advised that, in general terms, there are observable improvements, but there are pockets where this is not the case. I can perhaps get—

Mr HANNA: This building.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: It could well be. If there is any specific data the member wants, we could certainly find it for him.

The CHAIRMAN: Is it mainly from motor vehicles, or is it industrial pollution?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: It is mostly, as I understand it, from motor vehicles. Perhaps I can ask Mr Newland, head of the EPA, to expand on that matter.

Mr NEWLAND: The majority of air pollution in Adelaide is caused by motor vehicles. I think that about 40 per cent of the total pollution load is from motor vehicles. The rest is from a combination of factors, but largely associated with industry activities.

Mr HANNA: I understand that the term of appointment of members of the Bookmark Biosphere Trust expired on 30 June 2002 and that the minister has decided not to make any further appointments. What alternative arrangements will be put in place to maintain the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve program, and will the minister continue to support it?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The management of this great initiative has been problematic for some time, and I guess it is fair to say that there has been a breakdown in the relationships between a number of the parties, so the process was not really working. The trust was established in 1993 to provide strategic advice on the development of national park reserves within the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve in the Riverland. As the program has evolved, the community has indicated a very strong desire to have more direct influence over the decisions affecting lands within the biosphere. Environment Australia (in cooperation with the Department of Environment and Heritage) has facilitated a number of community workshops in recent months involving land partners and the broader community. As a result the community has agreed to the formation of a new governance model which will include representation from a wide cross-section of the community and participating organisations.

The model provides for a committee of 12 members, and it has been resolved that, apart from Environment Australia and National Parks and Wildlife SA each being offered a position on the committee of management, one position will be reserved for representation of the local indigenous community. I am pleased to advise that the new committee has now been appointed—indeed, one of its members is the member for Chaffey—and I have indicated to the community that my department will continue to support and actively participate in the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve program and, to that end, will provide administrative support to the new committee during its establishment phase over the next 12 months.

Mr HANNA: Will the minister inform us about the fauna rescue groups that do so much good work in rescuing and caring for our cuddly, furry, native friends? Do they have to pay for permits, etc., in order to do their work, and what sort of red tape is involved?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: This issue has been of ongoing concern to fauna rescue groups for some time. It is complex because of a range of animal welfare issues, biosecurity issues and concerns about illegal trafficking in wildlife. Soon after I became minister I asked National Parks and Wildlife to review the current arrangements under which people seeking to rescue animals and birds had to pay a fee to do so. There was great concern in the community because they had to pay money to rescue an animal, yet someone else could go out and get a permit to shoot them for nothing. It seemed a bit ironic.

I have recently approved a proposal to create a new and simpler class of permit that will not cost animal rescuers anything but will ensure that illegal animal traffickers do not use the rescue system as a front for wildlife trafficking, and welfare and biosecurity risks will be minimised. The permit will be easy to obtain and paperwork will be kept to an absolute minimum. Amendments to the wildlife regulations will be required to put this proposal into effect. This should improve the relationship between animal rescuers and National Parks and Wildlife SA so that they can get on with protecting our wildlife in a cooperative partnership. I know from talking to people involved in fauna rescue that they value the relationship they have had with National Parks officers and they want to maintain it on that good footing. They did not like being put into a position where they had to be answerable in a bureaucratic way to that group.

Mr HANNA: As part of the government's pre-election undertakings, a commitment was given to establish a heritage advisory committee to provide advice to the minister on heritage matters. What has been happening with that?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Prior to the election I announced that we would set up a heritage advisory body. We have done that and are in the process of finalising the membership of the committee, and it will meet I think within the next couple of weeks. The first meeting will be in the old cabinet room in the newly renovated Heritage Building (once known as the Treasury Building) which is situated on the corner of King William and Flinders Streets. The committee will function as an advisory body to me. Its role is to advise on strategies to coordinate and improve built heritage programs within South Australia; to advise on strategies to develop a whole-of-government approach to South Australia's non-indigenous heritage; and to undertake such other tasks as I from time to time request of it.

Membership of this body includes representatives of government agencies which have something to do with heritage: Planning SA, DAIS, the Department of Environment and the History Trust. Rod Matheson, who is the head of the Heritage Authority, is the chair, and I have invited the Property Council, the Institute of Architects and the National Trust and, I think, one or two others to participate.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: My question relates to the general attitude of the government in its dealings with the general community. Is it the government's aim to cooperate with the rural community, the farming community and the tourist community? I cite a couple of examples. Over the last couple of years constituents of mine have been far from happy when faced with the attitude of, in particular, the EPA and one or two other organisations. The mayor of Quorn was most upset when officers of the department refused to return his telephone calls in relation to the rubbish dump at Quorn. He is an elected official and he understands parliamentary life because his father was a member of both state and federal parliaments and he ran around this building as a small child.

My second example relates to the difficulties which the sawmill at Wirrabara had in relation to its ongoing operations. The third issue relates to what happened with the Port Augusta Racing Club's continued use of oil on the track. The general view from each of those groups was that they were frustrated and caused a lot of unnecessary concern when a little bit of commonsense and understanding would have prevented a great deal of heartbreak for these communities.

The second issue that I want to raise with the minister relates to the attitude of some inspectors. I pose the question: is it government policy to go on to people's properties

without advising them before or afterwards? I know the answer to that question, but I am interested in the minister's response, because I think it is important that government dealings with the community ought to be conducted in a cooperative and friendly way. Many people are concerned. Another example that concerns me is that officers of the Pastoral Board have now suddenly taken it upon themselves to become very efficient because there has been a change of government.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am always pleased to engage in philosophical discussion with the member for Stuart about the nature of bureaucracy and rural life.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: They've sent me here 11 times; it's my job to stick up for them.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: They just want to get you out of the rural community. They think that putting you down here in the city is a good idea.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: Some don't want me down here; I know that.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The member for Stuart has been here long enough to know the standing orders.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The member for Stuart—shy and retiring as he may be—and I get on quite well, and I am happy to answer his general question about whether it is the intention of the government to get on with people in the rural community. The answer to that is definitely yes; we are very keen to work with rural communities. We recognise the important part they play in our state's economy. Increasingly, they are being recognised as an important factor in maintaining protection of the environment because as well as being farmers and landowners or land-holders they are the ones whose activities most directly impact on the environment. We need them to do their job properly so that the environment of South Australia is protected. More and more, I think that people in rural communities are switching on to environmental management systems and understanding the benefits of good environmental management not only for environmental purposes but also for economic purposes. So, in general terms, yes, I do want to get on with them.

In relation to my portfolios, the Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation Department, which is a new department, will be particularly focused on rural communities, and I am very keen to engage, through that department, with rural communities in integrated natural resource management issues, and included in that is the Native Vegetation Council, which is now within the department. To assist in that process we have appointed Dennis Mutton to chair a council and advise on how to engage and how to get the government's policies into action. I must say that I have had many discussions with rural communities about our plans in this area and, I think, by and large the responses have been pretty positive, and we want to maintain that positive relationship. I say that to the member sincerely.

When it comes to the EPA, the point I would make to you is that the EPA is an independent authority and is something like, I suppose, the SA Police. It has a policing function, and it is there to ensure that the laws are maintained in relation to environment protection. Like the SA Police, there is an easy way and hard way of doing things and, by preference, I imagine the police and the EPA want to interact in a friendly way with the rural community. I imagine that in most cases that would be the case. There may well be instances where either party, the EPA or the person with whom they are discussing issues, might get a bit hot under the collar, but that is just human interaction. That happens from time to time. It

is not part of any policy regime to send the EPA out to terrorise rural communities.

The member mentioned three specific cases. The first was to do with the Mayor of Quorn and the second was the sawmill. I understand that that was an issue that went on for almost 10 years, so it was not a case of the EPA rushing in to try to close it down. It had tried to work with them over a very long period of time to sort out the issues but, ultimately, there are laws in the state relating to environmental protection, and one cannot continue to breach those laws.

In relation to the Port Augusta racetrack, when I was in opposition I went to Port Augusta and looked at the track. I understand the EPA has been working with the jockey club, and I understand that commonsense has prevailed, as the member—

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Commonsense is always important. I do not know what was nearly stopped. I do know, however, that the amount of oil being used has been reduced by half. The result in terms of the suitability of the track for racing is, I understand, as adequate as it was with double the amount of oil. Monitoring has occurred, and there is no observable impact of the oil on the watercourse or any other environmental impact. So, the EPA is generally satisfied with the arrangements and racing will be able to continue in Port Augusta. In relation to the Mayor of Quorn, I am not quite sure what has happened there, but we can follow up any particular issues there.

Just in terms of rural community interactions, as the member may know, the EPA has opened offices in Mount Gambier and, most recently, in Murray Bridge with the aim of having much closer relationships with people in rural communities, and those offices will be there on an ongoing basis and be able to deal with issues before they become problems.

Summing up, I say to the member for Stuart that there is not a city/country divide. Maybe there is the perception that there is in various parts of the state. People in my constituency think that people forget about the southern suburbs once they go over O'Halloran Hill. But we are one government and one set of government agencies, and we want to deal fairly with all citizens, wherever they live.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: I would like to raise with the minister something near and dear to my heart, and that is the management of national parks and adequate fire control measures. I note that in recent weeks the Country Fire Service has warned farmers and property owners to begin precautions now to protect against summer wildfires. It goes on to say in what was, I think, a general media release across the state:

Basic wildfire protection includes the establishment of wide lawns, paths, driveways around homes. . . completely surrounding all buildings, sheds and stock-paddocks with well cleared firebreaks. . . making use of natural resources. . . and having adequate firefighting equipment.

Will the minister say whether his department—particularly national parks—is continuing with a program of adequate fire preparation in its parks, because it is has concerned me for a long time that you will get lightning strikes somewhere and you will have a huge fire, which then disrupts the whole community at tremendous cost to taxpayers? I would suggest that in some cases we should have better firebreaks in the parks, as a precautionary step, as this would enable people to better maintain the parks. I suggest to the minister that the process of hazard reduction—burning off in some of these parks—ought to continue. The slight mishap that you had in

the first one should not be used as an excuse or reason not continue. I say to this committee that this is an area in which I, in my younger days and as a farmer, had a lot of experience.

I do say to the minister that the current law which prevents people from putting in firebreaks in excess of five metres is long out of date and has not served its purpose. Most people who have experience of these things, including some people in the minister's office, would tell him privately that it is a nonsense and that farmers and others should be able to put in bigger breaks to protect the public and to make it easier when we get these wildfires created by lightning or other activities, which no-one can prevent. We want to take steps to ensure that we give ourselves the best chance to control them as quickly as possible.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: It is fair to say that the department and I, and the government generally, share the honourable member's concerns about fire management in national parks. I think my colleague, the Minister for Emergency Services, answered a similar question in question time a month or two back, just immediately after the Messent fire issue. It is true that when you light a fire in a national park, or anywhere else for that matter, you cannot be 100 per cent certain about how it will go. Weather conditions change—

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: Get it alight quickly around the perimeter—as quick as possible.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That's right. So, we are not going to be deterred by the mishap there. I guess it was not a mishap in one sense: it was part of the predicted outcomes that it would burn in the way that it did, and it was controlled in a professional way. National Parks and Wildlife works closely with the CFS in these matters.

I will give some further information to the member: national parks, in fact, has the responsibility to manage fire and land under its control, to both ensure the protection of life and property and also to maintain biodiversity value. So, we need to do it for a range of reasons. Park districts have an annual program of preventive works to assist in achieving these objectives, and national parks maintains fire access within reserves to assist with bush fire suppression.

Planned burning and slashing will be undertaken to minimise the fuel loads within reserves, where there is a risk to adjoining life and property. In particular, a number of hazard reduction burns are proposed for the Mount Lofty Ranges in order to reduce the risk to life and property in adjoining parks. Fire management plans will be completed for Flinders Chase National Park and Morialta/Black Hill Conservation parks. A round table for and between key stakeholders will be put in place to discuss prescribed burning in parks, and we have a budget allocation of \$890 000 this year for fire management in parks. This includes \$215 000 on seasonal preparation works in readiness for the fire season, including training, maintenance of equipment and fitting out of firefighters with protective clothing; \$205 000 allocated to fire-related operations to undertake bushfire prevention works, fire access, maintenance and fuel reduction programs in strategic locations across the state; \$250 000 to be spent on upgrading fire equipment throughout the state to ensure districts are adequately resourced; and a \$220 000 operating budget for support to regional management by a specialist fire management section of four full-time staff. Additional staff salary costs are variable based on the extent of these works and fire suppression activities. Fire suppression is funded by the DEH risk management fund, as the amount varies according to the number and severity of wild fires.

I share the member's concerns about fires in national parks, and I have asked the department to do some further and more detailed work on the risks that we face and look at the measures that we might need to put in place to address those concerns.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: I am interested in the minister's proposals concerning the integrated management of soil conservation boards, pest plant boards and other government representative committees. It has been put to me by people, particularly in the Outback of South Australia, that there are large distances required to travel, and if you live on one side of South Australia you are not familiar with some of the facilities on the other side of the state, and therefore the ability to make a proper contribution will be somewhat less than it would be if they were more localised.

Where there are small populations, the same people are often involved, and too much of their time is taken up by having to deal with water boards, soil conservation committees and others all piled into one. I refer particularly to those people with a limited amount of time. Has the minister considered this matter in relation to his proposal to integrate a lot of these committees?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Yes, I have. In fact, one of the strong motivators for going through that integration process was advice I had received from the Outback areas, where lots of committees were set up, including soil boards, water boards, pastoral boards, pest plant boards—you name it—and it was often the same people who were attending the various committees. They have asked whether or not it would be sensible to bring them together in some way so they could deal with a range of business items at the one set of meetings. So, it was to help address that issue that I embarked on this process.

This will be done through the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation. I have said to all those groups—the water boards, soil boards, and so on—that I have made three decisions. First, there will be an integrated natural resource management process, planning and so on. The boundaries we will use will be water catchment boundaries, so that we stop the arguments as to where the boundaries ought to be. But in each area it is up to those various bodies as to how they organise themselves.

I guess the simplest case might be Kangaroo Island, where there is one clear boundary and a relatively small population who are relatively close to each other. The distances to travel are not that great. We could have one committee which looked after all these issues at one set of meetings once a month or whatever. In the Outback areas, you might have a central committee which perhaps does not meet quite so frequently, but a series of subcommittees can concentrate on various issues in parts of that Outback region. So you might have a western part, an eastern part or a central part: I do not really mind. I want them to tell me the model which will work for that district. So the South-East might have a different view from the West Coast, and so on.

I have agreed upon the boundaries. I have said they will develop structures, but the nature of the structures is really up to them. That is why I have Dennis Mutton and his team to go through a consultation process to really try to get this to work properly.

The CHAIRMAN: There was a brief announcement a few weeks ago by the Catholic Archbishop, Phillip Wilson, indicating that the Catholic Church was very much committed to protecting the environment. It did not receive much press coverage, but it followed some statement by the pontiff when

he stressed the importance of the environment. I understand that the Anglican Church also has set up a group, and I think the member for Unley might be involved. Have you had any meeting with heads of churches in South Australia in order to facilitate what I think is a great step forward for the churches to be actually committed to protecting and enhancing the environment? Have you considered meeting with the heads of churches to build on that very positive statement by Archbishop Phillip Wilson?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Since being a minister, I have not, although prior to being a minister I met on occasions with a group that was set up through the Catholic Church to look at environmental issues. We set up an informal luncheon group where there were up to a dozen people who met to talk about environmental matters. I applaud the churches for taking an interest in these issues. I have not had meetings with them but I am happy to take on board the suggestion that the member makes. We need to get everybody linked up with commitments to improve the environment. If the churches are prepared to put resources and energy into it, I commend them for it.

The CHAIRMAN: Like other members, I am contacted by people (especially those who suffer from asthma and so on) concerned about wood-burning heaters being used in domestic premises. I understand that the government is looking at this whole issue. Are you aware of a scheme which operates in New South Wales where an incentive is paid for people to convert from wood-burning fires to gas? I think the compensation is about \$700 or \$800. I am not sure whether it is funded by the New South Wales government or the local councils, but I am told there is a scheme in New South Wales which financially encourages people to switch from burning wood to burning natural gas.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: You are asking all the difficult questions today! I am not aware of that New South Wales scheme. I would be very surprised if it were the government offering the incentive. I imagine it is the gas company, because they have a vested interest in getting people to burn gas rather than wood. National guidelines are being developed for wood fires, coming from a range of points of view. I think the member may have seen a media release I put out a month or two ago with respect to a conference in Adelaide looking at wood fire and the draft recommendations introduced by the commonwealth through the ministerial council meeting.

There are great concerns about the illegal clearance or removal of trees, both living and dead trees, from important native vegetation areas, and the loss of habitat for various birds and animals as a result of the removal of those trees. That is one of the concerns. The other concern is the burning of inappropriate fuel in inappropriate devices. I am aware of the issue generally, but not the particular program referred to by the member. If we can get some information on it, we will certainly have a look at it. We might encourage the gas company to take it on board.

The CHAIRMAN: It is a government initiative, not a gas company one. Whether it is local government or state government, I am not sure.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: We will get some information.

The CHAIRMAN: Just following up on the point of the member for Stuart, I have been an advocate of cool burns in national parks for some time, obviously having regard to the ecological values of particular habitats. I guess that in South Australia we do not have a lot of historical practice in relation to cool burns. There has not been much research done here,

although I believe there has been in Western Australia and Victoria. What concerns me is that we still have people building houses in close proximity to some of the national parks and then in effect blaming the national park for posing a risk. If you drive through the hills, you will still see today houses being constructed, and in my view this is suicidal. In time, the residents will be critical of the adjoining national park, when that park, in the case of the one at Belair, has been there for over 100 years.

I raised this issue with the Minister for Emergency Services and the Minister for Urban Development and Planning because I think that the various agencies need to get a handle on what is still happening in relation to inappropriate location of housing and inappropriate housing design. People remove the understorey but it is, in my view, absolute madness. Housing is still continuing on pockets of land that have some ecological value but, in terms of fire, people are putting themselves at risk and also putting the lives of CFS and national parks people at risk.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That is a very important point and, as the honourable member has said, it is really a planning issue about the location of housing. Too little regard has been taken of the possible risks associated with constructing homes near national parks. I agree with the honourable member's assessment, and I will happily have discussions with my colleagues about that issue.

The CHAIRMAN: Although the Upper Sturt Primary School is not in my electorate, my ancestors were involved in developing the original school, which was of stone construction on the south slope. In recent years we have built a non-stone school right next to the Belair National Park which faces north and which, in my view, is a recipe for disaster. We have not learnt from the lessons of the pioneers. We are still engaging in what I think is inappropriate building and, in this case, school building practice right next to a national park which, at some stage, must burn; but we still seem to replicate the mistakes of the past and not even learn from those of the pioneers.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I take your point, sir.

Mr RAU: The Portfolio Statements make reference to introducing the WildCountry philosophy—which sounds very interesting—for development of a protected area system with interconnected protected core areas. Will the minister please explain what measures have been put in place to implement this policy?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Before I answer that question, I have just been given some information in relation to the District Council of Quorn which might help the member for Stuart. I understand that the District Council of Quorn has two licensed landfills. The council had approval from the EPA to burn waste at the landfill for a period of 12 months, which expired last October. When the licences were due for renewal recently council requested the ability to continue burning at the landfill. In response, the EPA asked council to provide a review of the previous 12 months of burning to ascertain the environmental impact and advised that the authority wanted to be satisfied that council had considered all other options for waste minimisation. Request for this information was made on 12 July this year, and to date no response has been received from Quorn. It sounds to me that there is a breakdown in communication between the two bodies but, now that the matter has been raised in the committee, I am sure that will bring it to a head which, I guess, is what the honourable member attempted to achieve.

The Hon. G.M. GUNN: The attitude of the officer was quite unacceptable to an elected official.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I will happily talk to the honourable member privately about that. In relation to the issue of WildCountry, it is a cornerstone of the government's environment policy and aims to produce a system of interconnected core protected areas, each surrounded and linked by lands managed under conservation objectives. WildCountry acknowledges that extensive ecological damage has occurred in South Australia since European settlement, and that repairing this damage still requires landscape restoration on a unprecedented scale.

The WildCountry project aims to protect and restore all species and ecological communities across their natural ranges and their ability to maintain or maximise their range. It also looks into the long term to protect areas large enough to absorb the larger scale perturbations through climate change or catastrophic events without a significant reduction in ecosystem resilience. This provides the opportunity to establish landscape-scale conservation objectives and to ensure that conservation programs, such as reserve acquisition, feral plant and animal control and revegetation, are strategic and working towards these objectives. Partnerships between organisations and individuals—government and non-government—will be crucial to WildCountry's providing an effective means of achieving ecological recovery. A National Parks and Wildlife SA ecologist has been assigned to develop a strategy for implementing WildCountry in South Australia. I look forward to developing a WildCountry model for South Australia and making an announcement about that in the near future.

Mr RAU: Following the significant recent discovery of a breeding Australian sea lion colony on a small unnamed rocky islet off Scaale Bay on the state's West Coast, what measures is the government taking to ensure the protection of this rare colony?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I have received strong representation from the Friends of Scaale Bay about the protection of this colony. One of my first acts as minister was to approve a process to have the islet and surrounding reef proclaimed as a conservation park under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. Administrative processes are presently being worked on to facilitate formal proclamation and naming this new conservation area. It is anticipated that this will be finalised later this year. Government is particularly supportive of having this area secured in the National Parks and Wildlife estate. It is a relatively small area—about 14 hectares in size—but its conservation value is significant. According to Dr Peter Shaughnessy from the CSIRO, this area is the fifth largest breeding Australian sea lion colony in the world. Another unique feature is the presence of New Zealand fur seals alongside the Australian sea lion. It is rare to see these species cohabit the same area. We are going through a process of trying to get the proper protection. It is a unique area, and only relatively recently was it understood that such an important colony existed on that site.

Mr WILLIAMS: I briefly hark back to the earlier questions regarding Mundulla yellows and make the comment that I feel that it is somewhat disappointing that the Department for Environment and Heritage does not share the enthusiasm for South Australian-based research that, obviously, the Minister for Science and Information and the Premier have both talked about during estimates hearings with which I have been involved. I certainly hope that the minister will have another look at what is happening in his

department with regard to the research that has been carried out at the Waite Institute into Mundulla yellows.

I had the opportunity to inspect the research establishment and to take on board the fact that the institute has been monitoring some plants for up to five years. It would be a pity to throw all of that away on the whim of some people who possibly do not understand what is being done there. Recently, I was in the Upper South-East and it was brought to my attention that several roads run and terminate at the boundary of the Ngarkat park. Some years ago some of the local landholders placed a set of gates at the end of Snoswell Road, I think it was, so that the wildlife that belongs to the minister (in their opinion) is contained, to some extent at least, inside the park.

It was brought to my attention that departmental staff have recently removed the gate and, as a consequence, the wildlife, principally kangaroos, are coming down Snoswell Road, which is not far from the edge of the park, to the Dukes Highway. Of course, between the Dukes Highway and the park is the Adelaide-Melbourne railway line. The local landholders find that the number of kangaroos coming onto the side of the road is causing not only problems to them and to their farming enterprises but they are also causing traffic hazards to both the railway line and the roadways, including the Dukes Highway. Will the minister explain why the department would take that action, and what is the problem with having gates at the entrance to a major park, such as Ngarkat, and expecting people entering the park—and I know that the minister is probably keen for people to go into and utilise the benefits of the park—to stop and open a gate?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The trouble with animals is that they really do not read signs terribly well. They just do not understand that they belong in a park and not in a natural landscape from which their forefathers came. As I mentioned in response to another question, one of the concepts we want to develop is wild country, so that there are linked areas of reserve and private land to allow animals to roam in as normal a way as possible. I am bit flummoxed about how to answer the question. I am happy to have the matter investigated. I not aware of the issues, but there is always a similar issue to the one raised by the member for Stuart regarding how national parks and neighbours who are involved in farming practices get on. One hopes that would happen at a local level on a cooperative basis so that these issues did not have to be raised in parliament. I am not entirely sure, but I will have a look at it for the member.

Mr WILLIAMS: I am sure the adjoining land-holders are not interested in having a wild zone in their backyard and on their farms. It is possibly only a small issue. I am wondering whether there is some policy that prevents them from keeping their wildlife within the park. As members would be well aware, over recent years Ngarkat has been devastated by bushfire. A number of apiarists in my electorate provide a very valuable service to both the horticultural and agricultural industries across the state. One of the things that the apiary industry absolutely requires is wintering sites to keep their bees—to maintain their bees over the winter. Ngarkat has traditionally provided a large number of sites for bees. It has been brought to my attention a number of times now that some people are agitating to have bees excluded from at least parts of Ngarkat. Is it government policy to maintain the status quo with regard to bee sites in Ngarkat, or does the government intend to have fewer bee sites in the Ngarkat park?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: In general terms, I was pleased to sign recently a memorandum of understanding with the apiary industry to allow just what the honourable member is talking about to occur under approved conditions. Those conditions were worked out between apiarists and the Department for Environment and Heritage. I gather that a process of discussion had been going on for a long time as to how this should happen. So, in general terms there should not be a problem. Apiarists do have access to national parks under whatever the agreed conditions. There may well be a localised dispute about Ngarkat. While it is appropriate to have bees in national parks under certain circumstances, it is not appropriate to have bees in every park. There is a desire to have part of Ngarkat preserved in its more native state, which is free of feral animals, birds, insects and so on. I gather that the matter has been worked through. My advice is that discussions are happening with regard to what the parameters of that might be. In general terms, we are happy to have apiarists using the national parks. I gather that a good agreement has been reached between the two sides. I am happy to have another look at the member's concerns.

Mr WILLIAMS: My third question involves native vegetation clearance applications. Some years ago I had a meeting with some people from the Native Vegetation Council secretariat. They put to me that they were working through trying to develop a ready reckoner or self-assessed application type form where a landowner who wanted to make an application to clear native vegetation would, merely by filling out the application form, go through a certain process. By the time they had completed that process, they would have a pretty good idea of the environmental value of the vegetation that they were wanting to clear and of how their application would be viewed by the Native Vegetation Council. In other words, they would self-assess the situation purely by filling out and answering the questions presented in the application form.

At least four years ago it was suggested to me that the department was working to have such an application booklet, form or whatever produced. Quite recently, I was at Norwood meeting with a constituent and some people from the Native Vegetation Council. Much to my dismay, this does not seem to have got off the ground in all that time. Can the minister assure me and the committee that he will redouble the efforts to have this completed?

I note that the minister has recently increased substantially the fees associated with making an application for native vegetation clearance. I can understand the necessity for the fees, because the assessment process is very costly. Surely, if the assessment process gave the landowner the tools to do most of the assessment himself, in the first instance in some cases he would pull out before making the formal application because he would be convinced in his own mind that he has not going to get very far with it. Secondly, a lot of the groundwork would have been done and would not need to be done by the Native Vegetation Council or its assessors, or they might merely need to audit the work that had already been done by the landowner himself or by some other person acting on his behalf. Can the minister give an assurance that he will seek to have that work towards having such a self-assessment application process put in place?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am happy to take on board that suggestion. Native vegetation is now part of the Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation Department rather than the Department of Environment and Heritage. However, I will not not answer the question on that basis. What the honour-

able member is saying sounds sensible. If there is a quick and easy way for potential applicants to work out whether they will get approval and what the costs might be, it would be very sensible to do it. Everybody would win out of that; I quite agree with the member. I am not too sure where the process is at. The Native Vegetation Council may have completed and not done anything about it, or it may have decided that it is just too difficult. I just do not know.

Mr WILLIAMS: It could have gone into the too-hard basket.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: It could well have done so. I am happy to have some work done and find out where it is at. I am happy to have the work done. If it is possible, we can have it implemented. I just do not know; I will have to get some advice on it. I understand it is still within the statements but that the responsibility has been transferred to the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation. We are dealing with restructuring things.

Mr WILLIAMS: According to the budget (page 8.13), native vegetation services comes under Output Class 2 under National Parks and Wildlife.

Mrs HALL: Why has the minister cancelled the funding for the \$30 000 tender for the Marble Hill ruin that was let in about May or June this year?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I put on the record my appreciation of the hard work done by the Friends of Marble Hill. I went out there on one occasion in opposition, at their invitation, to have a look at what they are doing. They certainly have a big job ahead of them. As the member knows, the residence was destroyed by fire in 1955. Since 1994 management of the property and opening it to the public has been largely undertaken by the Friends of Marble Hill. A commitment was made by the former government to fund a development plan for the site and buildings on the assumption that funding would be available. Sadly, as has often happened, no funds were made available.

A risk assessment of the site was carried out in 2001 and matters were identified involving action needed to make the site safe for public visitation. National Parks and Wildlife has allocated \$80 000 to undertake this risk management work, which should be completed by the end of this year. When that risk work has been completed, a report will be prepared examining the options available to the government to conserve the building and to manage the site.

Mrs HALL: Given the minister's response, I will be interested to hear a little more about this because, as the minister would be aware, there have been a number of reports, significant resources, a number of plans and considerable promises made to do something about Marble Hill over a number of years. The most recent report, the Danvers Conservation and Dilapidation Report, was completed in May 1998 and released for public comment in February 1999, and that report showed, as I am sure the minister knows, that there was some very urgent work to be done and considerable money was recommended to be spent.

Reading the background of this amazing place, it seems to me that, for one of our prime heritage sites, very little money has been committed by either state or federal government over far too many years. I understand that they are hosting a conference in 2006, and this last plan laid down some future development options for them. I would be very interested to know what the minister plans to do to progress by, first, putting some resources into it and, secondly, turning it into a place that is safe for the public to visit on the regular opening days.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I think I answered the issues of safety and how much money was available. It is one thing to get a report together that recommends the expenditure of a large sum of money, but it is another thing actually to find that money to do the work. We have many heritage buildings and places that could all have a lot of money spent on them, but where do you get the money? The member's government was in office for 8½ years and did not find money in that time to put into this. We have been in government for five or six months and I can tell the member that I have not found the money in that time, either. I will get Mr Holmes to give you some further detail about what is going on.

Mr HOLMES: I think that the matter is simply one of priorities, and the \$80 000 that has been allocated to do the essential safety work deals with the issues that the member raised. That is, \$80 000 has been set aside to deal with the immediate issues of site safety for visitors. Beyond that, the thought of spending \$500 000 or \$600 000 on Marble Hill has not ranked in the priorities.

Mrs HALL: Can I get a commitment from the minister that there will be serious consultation with the Friends of Marble Hill in the near future about assessing where they go from here? As the minister would be aware, they have put numerous hours and personal resources into this project over many years, and I sense a degree of frustration developing in their work. I know that they are very determined. It is very important, in my view, to South Australia's heritage in this area. Whilst all of us can have a different priority list, I would like a commitment from the minister that serious consultation will involve the Friends of Marble Hill in future planning.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I share the member's sentiment in relation to Marble Hill: it would be wonderful to have the resources to repair it but, as the CEO of DEH has just said, it would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and, realistically, that money is not available. I do not want to pretend to you, to the committee or to the Friends of Marble Hill that I am going to find that money. I am more than happy to meet with them and to have officers meet with them and discuss it seriously, but I do not want to give them any kind of expectation that we are going to magically find that money. I have met with them formally on at least one occasion and informally on several occasions, at Friends of Parks meetings, etc.

I know that they are absolutely committed to it and they do a fabulous job. There are not a lot of them, and they work very hard. I would love to be able to find the money to do it, but we have issues to do with fire in parks and a whole range of matters, all of which have priority. I am happy to meet them and have serious discussions with them, but I just put it in that context, that I do not think there is any magic solution.

The CHAIRMAN: I refer to Craighburn Farm at Blackwood, which is in the electorate of the member for Davenport. The previous government paid Minda Inc. \$3 million for open space. Sadly, the buffer zones that people thought they were getting did not occur, but I understand that the open space component of that land, which runs to several hundred hectares, is due to be handed over to the state government in the near future, I think at the beginning of next year.

Is the minister's department involved in negotiations with the City of Mitcham or the Planning Department as to which agency will have control over that land and what possible uses it will be put to, whether it becomes part of the Sturt Gorge Park or whether it is treated in some other way? I would be interested in knowing what process is being

undertaken now because, as I said earlier, I understand that the handover will be probably in six months' time and it is a very big piece of land, which someone is going to have to manage and have some arrangement to manage.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I will need to take most of that question on notice, but I have been advised that Planning SA has been in discussions with the council through the MOSS program, and my department has had some involvement in that, although not to a large extent. But the particular questions that the Chairman has asked I just do not have the answers to, so we will take them on notice.

The CHAIRMAN: I believe that it is important that active work be undertaken in the next few months to ensure that someone has the issue under control.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I do not expect the minister will know the answer to this and assume that he will take it on notice. Referring to Output 2.1, page 8.11 of Budget Paper 4, volume 2, will the minister advise on each example of where land under Crown lease has been contaminated and the government left to clean up the contamination, and will he advise the cost of each clean-up?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I would like to be able to surprise the member, but we will take that question on notice.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Referring again to page 8.11, Output 2.1, which is 'Biodiversity conservation services', will the minister rule out closing Crown land regional centre offices during the term of the government? The minister is aware that they have been under review. I would be interested to know whether the government is going to close any or whether he will rule that out for the term of the government.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: We have now set up a select committee looking at Crown land. If we were to freehold all Crown land, there would not be much point in having offices to deal with it. I would not want to rule anything in or out but I have no current intention to alter the arrangements. I will not rule in or out any decision that may be made about the situation in the term of this government, covering the next three or four years.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I refer to Output Class 2.4. Is the minister considering reducing the allocation to the Native Vegetation Fund from its previous allocation of \$935 000? If so, why, and by how much? If not, will the minister rule out any reduction in the allocation to the Native Vegetation Fund during the term of the government?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: We are, in fact, reducing the fund, I think, by \$50 000.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I have a supplementary question. Now that the fund has been reduced by \$50 000, will the minister now rule out taking departmental administration costs out of the Native Vegetation Fund during the term of the government? There has been an ongoing internal battle for some years about the department's trying to charge administration costs to the fund. Now that the minister has reduced the fund, there is less money available. Will the minister rule out the department's being able to charge administration costs to the fund?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am aware of the issues. I think I asked the member questions about this matter when the roles were reversed. As I said before, the administration for the Native Vegetation Council and for the issues in relation to native vegetation have been transferred to water, land and biodiversity. Once again, it is a hypothetical question: what will we do over the next three or four years? There is no intention to change the existing arrangements, other than to

say that there has been a small reduction in the amount of funds that are available.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I take it that the minister is not ruling out the charging of administration fees to the fund. I refer to Output Class 2.1, Biodiversity Conservation Services. The budget papers show that the minister proposes a further 50 new heritage agreements for the year 2002-03. I note that the number of bush management adviser visits to the heritage agreement properties is budgeted to be 90 for the year. Does the 90 visits by the bush management adviser include one visit to each of the 50 new heritage agreement properties?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am advised that no one-to-one correlation is built in, but it is highly likely that each new heritage agreement would have at least one visit.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: This is a follow-up comment for the minister. He might want to look at that, because that leaves 40 visits for the remaining 1 216 heritage agreements, which means that they get a visit every 32 years. Whether or not that is the intention, I am not absolutely sure. I refer to page 8.8, Output Class 1.2. The minister has highlighted penalties for illegally obtained competitive advantage. Can the minister please explain what he means by 'illegally obtained competitive advantage'? Can he give just one example in South Australia where a company has illegally obtained a competitive advantage? What will be the size of the penalty, who will be liable for the penalty and when is the minister looking at introducing the legislation to establish such penalties?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Is the member talking in relation to the EPA?

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Yes.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The system that I am proposing to introduce is based on arrangements that are in place in the United States through its EPA. A system is in operation where a standard penalty applies for a particular kind of breach of the EPA act. It might be, say, X thousand dollars—say it is \$10 000—for a breach, yet the company may be able to make a profit out of that breach of X plus Y. Under the arrangements that are in operation in the United States, the penalty can be increased so that that competitive advantage is withdrawn. So, it acts as a disincentive to a company to breach the standards. It seemed to me to be a very sensible way of sending messages that companies cannot breach and ignore the standards because it is cheaper to do that than to compete properly.

I have not sought out examples in South Australia. I think it is a good concept that a company should not obtain a competitive advantage by ignoring the law. I know, from talking with people in business, that the nature of the rules within the EPA now is such that it is pretty difficult for the EPA to get a prosecution. It has been put to me that a number of businesses think it is worth taking the risk because the chances of being caught and prosecuted are fairly minimal. It is my intention to change that and, as I said, we have made the EPA independent. We also want to change the regime so that it is easier to get prosecutions. That will send out a message to businesses that they cannot ignore the law. But, in addition, I want to add this other provision so that a competitive advantage that might be obtained by polluting is no longer there.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I refer to page 8.8, Output Class 1.2. The minister has indicated that the government is looking at extending the range of offences and penalties under the Environment Protection Act. What new offences and penalties is the minister looking at introducing? What is the

timing of the introduction of these new offences and penalties? Under the new offences and penalties, who will need to undertake community service orders? Who will supervise the community service orders, and what is the budget for the supervision of the new community service orders?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The question is really pre-empting the legislative process that the government will go through. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, the EPA and the Department for Environment and Heritage are in the process of preparing legislation for me, and I will be able to deal with all those issues during that legislative process. We want to consult widely about all these things. I think I will have to wait until we go through that legislative process before I start answering those kinds of questions.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN (Mr Hanna): I remind the member that he might even obtain more information taking it a step at a time, rather than asking these multi-barrelled questions.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: And I remind the Acting Chairman that I assumed that the minister would take the questions on notice, because the legislation was not before the house—and he did take them on notice. So, I thought that through. But I appreciate the Acting Chairman's advice.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Fine; the member may carry on.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I refer to Output Class 2.3, Park Visitor Services. The proposed revenue has increased from \$11.059 million to \$11.779 million, an increase of \$720 000, or 6½ per cent. Can the minister advise of the proposed increase in National Parks and Wildlife entry fees for each of the parks?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The member would probably be aware that an escalation factor of 4.2 per cent has been used generally by the state government for the setting of fees and charges. This took effect from 1 July and it was based on the formula developed by the former government. The state government approved the escalation factor as a weighted average of recent movements in both the CPI and public sector wages costs in order to maintain the government's real level of income. So, the fees for entering national parks would generally be in line with that.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: If the entry fees have been increased by only 4.2 per cent how does that reconcile with the revenue increase of 6.51 per cent?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: There are three answers to that question. Some elements have gone up more than 4.2 per cent. For example, subscriptions for *The Chain* magazine have increased by 20 per cent to \$12 for an annual subscription and by 15.8 per cent to \$22 for a two-year subscription. These increases are necessary to meet increases in production costs and prices have remained unchanged in the past three years. That is one example.

Under the National Parks And Wildlife Act 1972 six monthly renewal fees for a number of wildlife permits depart from the standard indexation rate in order to consistently apply the principle that six-month renewals will be charged at half the 12-month rate plus a 10 per cent admin charge. Application of this principle aims to reflect the additional costs associated with processing six-monthly renewals. We anticipate increased compliance and increased visitation, particularly to Kangaroo Island where the most recent development has occurred. I hope that facility will be opening in the next month or so, and I will make sure that the member gets an invitation.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I will appreciate that; I missed out on an invitation to Morialta. I must ask the question about the koalas on Kangaroo Island. I refer to Outlook Class 2.3—park visitor services: will the minister advise the current status of the koalas on Kangaroo Island? Will the minister be proposing a cull of koalas on Kangaroo Island or will he rule out a cull for the term of this government; what was the budget for the koala program on Kangaroo Island for 2001-02 and what was the estimated result for 2001-02; and what is the budget for 2002-03? In his answer, the minister may want to give an answer to a similar question, which is: will the minister advise the status of the koalas in the Adelaide Hills, and what population control measures is the minister putting in place to control koalas in the Adelaide Hills?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: A simple answer to the first question is that they are in the same happy state as when you were minister except there are probably a few more of them now than there were then. A week or two ago I put out a statement announcing a monitoring process for koalas in the Adelaide Hills. The number of koalas is increasing and there are corresponding management issues.

Regarding Kangaroo Island, a sterilisation/translocation strategy for koala management on Kangaroo Island was adopted in 1997 consistent with the National Koala Conservation Strategy, which rejected culling as a management option. Since 1997 \$1.4 million has been invested in this program, 3 700 koalas have been sterilised and 1 400 of these have been relocated to the South-East. The population size was originally estimated at 5 000 in 1996 but in 2000-01 a comprehensive survey estimated the population to be about 27 000. Browse damage is far more widespread and severe than originally thought. In 2002-03, the National Parks and Wildlife Service will continue the existing sterilisation/translocation strategy on the island, and about \$200 000 has been budgeted for this financial year.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I refer to Output Class 4 (page 8.16). Will the minister rule out any cuts to the funding of Beechwood during this term of government? I know that this issue is of great interest to the minister.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am glad that the honourable member has asked me this question. As he knows, I asked him questions about this many times. The Beechwood Garden is an aberration in terms of botanic gardens, because it is really a private garden which is open to the public on just a few days a year. A 1995 review of the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium identified Beechwood Garden as outside the Botanic Gardens' core business and recommended sale of the property. The board of the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium supported this recommendation and reaffirmed this position as recently as 3 May 2002.

The terms of an indenture agreement limit the garden's opening to the public to a maximum of six weeks during spring and six weeks during autumn. Beechwood Garden attracts about 2 500 visitors annually, yet I think the cost to government of the park is well over \$50 000. I will refer to that in a minute. Divestment of this asset would address the perceived inequity in public funds managing largely private space particularly in the context of increasing maintenance costs. A land management agreement under the Development Act 1993 or a heritage agreement under the Heritage Act 1993 would protect the heritage values of the garden outside of the Botanic Gardens' cover.

A range of options is being considered. It is my view that it should not be a botanic garden and that it inappropriately is listed as one. It costs a lot of money—\$52 100 a year

(inclusive of staffing on the site). A grant of \$11 000 a year from the Department of Education and Children's Services assists in employing an apprentice horticulturalist. As the member would know, the garden was purchased in 1980 for about \$185 000, and it is currently valued at something in excess of that. We are looking at the options. I point out to the member that, in order to make any substantial change, I would have to get the agreement of the parliament, so I would be looking for his full cooperation in a more rational approach to this issue.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: My next question will be of interest to the chair. I refer to Output Class 1.3 (page 8.9). The former Liberal government has taken a number of actions to address the level of train noise throughout the Mitcham hills. Will the minister say what action the government is taking to reduce the level of train noise in the Mitcham hills, and what is the budget that has been allocated to this program?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Noise caused by trains passing through the Adelaide Hills, particularly in the electorate of Davenport—

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: And Heysen and Kavel.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: —and Heysen and Kavel as well— has been a major source of complaint to the EPA. The noise is mostly caused by the interaction between the rails and wheels and is a high-pitched shriek. The EPA carried out monitoring and trials of a track lubricating system designed to eliminate wheel squeal. The trial was not successful and the EPA is watching with interest trials on an updated system and a new approach now being carried out in New South Wales. If these trials are successful, the EPA will consider how best to implement trials in South Australia. Costs associated with monitoring this issue are met from within the EPA's normal operating budget.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Referring to Output Class 2, page 8.10, did the concept plan for the Rocky River precinct, which included the demolition of Lonzar's Lodge, have the support of the Kangaroo Island Council, Tourism Kangaroo Island and the Kangaroo Island Consultative Committee?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am glad that I can have another go on the Lonzar's Lodge question. I had a phone call recently from somebody involved in the scouts on Kangaroo Island who fully supported my actions in relation to Lonzar's Lodge. I am not aware of the particular views of the bodies that you referred to, but the reality is that a moratorium was placed on the demolition of the residence known as the Lonzar's Lodge at Rocky River in about 2000 to allow further consultation and representations to be made. As I have already told the house, I did not feel constrained by that moratorium. It was not a policy position that I had reached. I received advice from the State Heritage Authority in May this year rejecting the nomination of the residence for state heritage listing, so I overturned the moratorium and the residence was demolished in accordance with the Rocky River Precinct Development Concept plan, along with a number of other residences at that site.

The long-term benefit for the development will be enormous because the Lonzar's Lodge site was right in the middle of a key viewing area. The rehabilitation of that site, and the other demolition sites, is proceeding in accordance with the Rocky River Precinct Development Revegetation and Site Rehabilitation plan. The demolition costs for the house were \$13 741. However, retention of the residence would have resulted in maintenance, repair and refurbishment costs of about \$60 000 in the short term. So, not only did it

comply with the overall precinct development, and improve the general amenity of the area, there were some savings to the budget. I understand some people were upset about the demolition, and I am sympathetic to them but I had to make a decision. I did that and I think that the member, if and when he comes over for the opening of Rocky River Visitor Centre, will be pleased by the overall effect.

The CHAIRMAN: It having passed 3.30 p.m., I declare the examination of the votes completed.

Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity
Conservation, \$52 857 000

Administered Items for the Department of Water, Land
and Biodiversity Conservation, \$16 538 000

Membership:

Mr Brindal substituted for Mr Gunn.

Departmental Advisers:

Mr P. O'Neill, Acting Chief Executive, Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation.

Mr P. Hoey, Executive Director, Murray Darling Division.

Mr R. Wickes, Executive Director, Sustainable Development.

Mr B. McLennan, Executive Director, Resource Management.

The CHAIRMAN: I declare the proposed payments open for examination. Does the minister wish to make an opening statement?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Thank you, Chairman. I made a general statement this morning at 11 o'clock which covered both departments, so I will not go through that again. To the departmental advisers who are accompanying me, I thank them in advance very much for the work that I know they have done in preparation for today and the work that they will do today. I also thank the officers from DEH and the EPA for their help for the first few hours of today.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Unley, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr BRINDAL: No, sir. I want to refer to the penalty levies. As you know, we made a mistake in the last few years, and I acknowledge that the opposition helped us out by clarifying the matter of when penalty levies needed to be put in place, which was from memory prior to 30 June. I understand that you have done that. If so, what has the level of penalties been set at this year? Was it only slightly increased or was it increased markedly?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am advised that the levies were increased by the Liberal government and we have increased them by CPI in this most recent round. They have been implemented in time, as I understand it. They were gazetted on 4 July this year.

Mr BRINDAL: Congratulations to you and the officers for getting them in on time. It was a bugbear of mine. We put them up considerably last year on the grounds that it is not an excess water charge but a penalty for misuse. I was concerned because, a couple of months ago, I think in the *Sunday Mail*, there was a photo of somebody with a whole load of fruit and vegetables deploring the cost of their excess water bill. I was beside myself because, as the minister would understand, it is not an excess water bill but a penalty for misuse of the

resource. Despite that considerable increase last year, it worries me that there are growers in the Bolivar area in particular who consider that it is their right to draw down as much as they want.

Will you be considering ramping it up next year, because I think you are aware that that aquifer is salinising badly, to the point where it may well be irretrievable, in an area unlike most in the state where they can also get effluent re-use from Bolivar? Unlike many other people in South Australia, they have three streams of water. They choose to overuse the aquifer only because it happens at present to be the cheapest point of access, and obviously they do not yet see the penalties as sufficient.

I wrote to them last year—and I presume the minister may or may not chose to consider doing likewise—actually saying that to draw down excess water was an abuse of the conditions of their licence (and I was so advised by the officers) and, if they chose to do that two years in a row, I would consider cancelling their licence. You, not I, are the minister, and it is your policy that is now in place, not mine. I simply offer the minister the information that the last government said that, and this government, if it wanted to as the successor, would have an absolute right to implement that action.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I acknowledge the member's real and sincere concern about this issue. I guess this is an issue, as with so many other issues, where there is strong bipartisan support. I guess it is a first to have an opposition shadow minister asking whether the government will put up taxes and charges.

Mr BRINDAL: It is a penalty, not a tax or charge!

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Or penalties or fines. I am happy to have a look at that. If the fines are not sufficient to get a change in behaviour—and that is why you have a penalty in place—clearly it needs to be reviewed. It may well take some time to help the community there understand that it is not just an excess water bill, because there is a culture developed out there over time that it was an excess water bill, so we may need to go through an educative program. The member suggested writing to them again to remind them of their responsibilities. I am happy to take that on as well. We can review all this in consultation with the local boards.

The member is right: there is only so much water there. There is an environmental impact and there is also an economic impact. If you take too much water out, you will ruin the resource, and the economic development of that area in the future will be affected. So, I thank him for his bipartisanship, and we will certainly look into it.

Mr BRINDAL: You have my absolute word—and I have to go to my party room as you have to go to yours—but I anticipate the support of the opposition in anything you do to fix the paradigms over water in South Australia. Privately we have discussed the need for a shift. When water is valued at nothing, people assume it is worth nothing, when perhaps it is our most valuable resource. I can absolutely assure you that, while the opposition will carefully scrutinise everything you do, it will not be to the point of being obstructive if you can make water achieve the value it should have in South Australia.

I refer to Budget Paper 4, volume 2, and Output Class 1 at page 8.43 which shows that the first two targets for 2002-03 state:

- Coordinate further implementation of the State Water Plan 2000 and prepare the annual report to parliament on progress with implementing the plan by 30 September 2002.
- Commence preparation of the 2005 State Water Plan.

Can the minister give details of the current progress of the full implementation of the State Water Plan, and in addition, has he any ideas yet—and he may well not—of what new components and improvements he might introduce in the 2005 plan?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I thank the member for his offer of support for actions that we may take. We would want to do that on a bipartisan basis wherever we can. The Report on the Implementation of the State Water Plan was completed by the Water Resources Council and forwarded to me as minister on 2 July 2002. That is a report into the implementation of the State Water Plan 2000.

The report found that the overall implementation of the plan has been satisfactory and that significant improvements in water management have been made. The establishment of catchment water management boards in the majority of the state has enhanced community awareness of water issues and provided a good basis for future sustainable catchment management.

In relation to the two targets for the coming financial year, I can indicate that they are as follows:

- Coordinate further implementation of the State Water Plan 2000 and prepare the annual report to parliament on progress with implementing the plan by 30 September this year.
- Of the 47 actions contained in the state water plan, 39 have either been completed or are on target for completion by the due date. Eight have either not been completed by the target deadline or are behind schedule, but work is progressing to complete them as soon as possible.
- One of the key actions not yet completed is the legislative framework for integrated natural resources management.

Progress on this matter was delayed with the election in late 2001 and, obviously, early 2002, but is now on track for completion in early 2003 as one of my high priority actions. As the member would know, and I have mentioned it in this house a number of times, we are well in train to have integrated natural resource management practices in South Australia. We have a new department, the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, and, just this month, we have begun an extensive process of consultation and discussion with various groups right across South Australia—regional and in Adelaide—about how we proceed to the next step.

Other actions currently in progress to be completed by the end of 2003 include a stressed resources assessment, implementation of the integrated dry land salinity program and the flood plain management strategy. Several actions are ongoing or have targeted completion dates beyond 2002-03. An annual report on progress with implementation of the plan will be prepared by 30 September 2002 and submitted to parliament just after that. The State Water Plan 2000 is continuously under review as part of the implementation of the annual reporting process. This information establishes the foundation for the formal review of the State Water Plan for republishing in 2005. We have gone a fair way down the track to implementing the recommendations. Most issues seem to have been ticked off but a number are still being worked on, and in the next few months we will know where we are at. We now have the process in train to develop the next water plan.

Mr BRINDAL: I noticed in this morning's press an article about SA Water, a sewerage pipe breaking in the Field River system and several million litres of sewage discharging, which I found interesting because Field River just marginally bypasses the Myponga reservoir. It flows in there only as a result of 10-year flood events. In that instance I thought it

was good that it did bypass the reservoir. I notice that as Minister for Environment and Conservation you have the right to get a levy from SA Water for the discharge of nutrient-rich sewage into the gulf and from a number of other polluters, too.

In that context, will the minister consider or has he considered—especially in the context of the next State Water Plan—licensing local government areas in respect of the discharge of their stormwater run-off into our creek system? The minister will be aware that the discharge from our road system is, in fact, probably more noxious to the environment than the pollution from, say, the sewage works because at least the pollution from the sewage works is either biological or—

The Hon. J.D. Hill interjecting:

Mr BRINDAL: Yes, but it contains only phosphorous or nitrogen, whereas the stuff that comes off the road contains light distillate, sometimes heavy metals and, in addition, large quantities of rubber. At present, as the minister will know (and I am the shadow minister for local government), local councils find it quite easy simply to discharge the water and say, 'It's up to the catchment management boards to fix it up.' Were they to be licensed at the outfalls and told, 'You can discharge only up to this quality water. If you discharge over that, and if there is too much in it, you will pay a levy to the government', I think that you would have a strengthened resolve on the part of local government and a better partnership towards good environmental outcomes than we currently get. That elaboration is about whether the minister will consider that as part of the next water plan.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am happy to take on board the suggestion that has not been put to me before by anyone else. I am happy to have a look at that and talk to local government and other key players. I have been advised that the Field River flows past the Happy Valley reservoir rather than the Myponga reservoir.

Mr BRINDAL: I do not know the south as well as the minister does.

The Hon. I.F. Evans interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: It is in the same general direction, as the member for Davenport says. Fortunately, the break in the pipe occurred pretty close to the mouth of the Field River and not anywhere near the reservoir; so, the potential for damage on that particular break was not very great. That raises a range of issues about how we should manage these incidents. The EPA has been meeting with SA Water to try to design some better protocols so that at least we know what is going on more quickly, because in the past it has taken some time before we got the full picture.

Mr BRINDAL: On the matter of protocols with SA Water, the minister will be aware that he has responsibilities under his ministerial portfolios for the water resources of Eyre Peninsula. I note that his colleague the Minister for Government Enterprises has released a master plan for water on Eyre Peninsula. I am sure that the two ministries have been cooperating, as they did during the last government. How does the minister resolve the difficult contretemps that can develop between SA Water, as a corporate entity rather than as a ministry, and his department?

As minister for water resources, I was forever aware that my officers would try to assess the resource and there was almost continual pressure from SA Water either to deny the veracity of our results or to say, 'It'll be all right. If we draw down that little bit too much for a couple of years the resource will recover.' Has the minister made any progress

on this? As he would be aware (and it is the same as the Virginia exercise), if SA Water draws down too much and if it damages the aquifer it will look to the ministry for environment and say, 'Well, it wasn't our fault: in the end it was the Minister for Environment and Conservation who signed off, not us. All we did was to take the water we are allowed to take.' It was as difficult a problem when we were in government as it is now for the minister. Is the minister making any progress towards resolution of the problem?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I suppose the honourable member is asking generally about the relationship between SA Water and the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation. My relatively short experience has been that it has been pretty good, and I will perhaps give some examples of the nature of the relationship. I have appointed Anne Howe, Chief Executive of SA Water, as the Deputy Commissioner to the River Murray-Darling Basin Commission. I was very keen to have Ms Howe and the CE of Primary Industries (who is the Commissioner) represented on that body because the main water issue facing South Australia is the Murray River and how we should use the water from the Murray River.

I really wanted SA Water involved because it is important that we work together to deal with Murray River issues so that we are not seen as the advocates for conservation and SA Water as the advocate for exploitation. We need to be on the same wavelength, and that has very much happened. There has been good progress. In addition, we have embarked on a program called Waterproofing Adelaide, which is remarkably similar to the previous government's integrated water systems program. Anne Howe is chairing that process, which is very much about developing strategies for the sustainable use of our water resources in the longer term.

As the member would know, for much of the time Adelaide is dependent for up to 90 per cent of its water supply from the Murray River, depending on the particular rainfall for a given year. Representatives of the CSIRO gave evidence before the Murray River select committee—of which the honourable member and I were members—that sufficient water is falling on Adelaide to provide adequate water supplies for the residents of Adelaide without having to rely on the Murray River at all. We are very keen to see that developed. Anne Howe, as the head of SA Water, and officers from my department are participating in a cooperative way in that venture. In addition, as I said, I have the EPA working with SA Water to develop better protocols for relations. We are going reasonably well.

It is interesting to think about an organisation such as SA Water. Some months ago I was talking to one of the heads of Sydney Water at a Murray-Darling Basin Council meeting. The member mentioned the word *contretemps*, but we were really talking about the contradiction between the duties of an organisation such as SA Water or Sydney Water. It has been corporatised, so its main function is to try to make profits. How do you make profits if you are supplying water? You supply more water. However, it is also under pressure to reduce the consumption of water, because we have a broader public policy consideration. These are contradictions. So, how does a corporation do that?

The way this corporation in Sydney is contemplating it is to see itself as a supplier of services rather than a supplier of water. It is embarking on a program to provide goods and services to consumers to reduce water supply. So, instead of just being a supplier of water, it might be a supplier of rainwater tanks, dual flush toilets and shower heads that use

less water. It might also be the supplier of maintenance systems. It is arguing what it recognises, namely, that people are quite happy to have this new technology that will reduce their water use. However, it requires more maintenance. You have to clean out the gutter and the cistern, and a lot of people do not want to do that, given their modern lifestyle. This company is looking at providing those services so that it can increase its profits and turnover at the same time as reducing demand on water. It is really just a matter looking at the business in a different way. That is pretty smart thinking.

Mr BRINDAL: The minister would be aware that it is exactly the same for SA Water, which is why there is the eternal problem about why SA Water never seems to be able to come up with a workable set of figures for the reuse of effluent water. I think it is because the cost of the treated water is too low. The minister touched on the capacity for Adelaide to be self-sufficient in its water needs in the future.

The minister would also be aware from that same select committee of the work of Salisbury council at present. One of the limitations, though, is that the aquifers under the Adelaide Plains are various in nature. The sand aquifer runs around below the hills face zone at P1 and P2, and there are fractured rock aquifers all over the place, as well as underground river systems. There has never been a need to proclaim the Adelaide Plains as underground aquifers.

The problem with that is that, with councils like Salisbury now investing quite large amounts of money in wetlands to clean up water and then pumping it into an aquifer, in theory somebody who owns an adjacent block of land can simply put down a bore and take water from that aquifer. It is, mathematically, water that Salisbury council has collected, invested in by polishing and putting underground, yet it cannot be protected for the reuse of SA Water. It was suggested to me that the only way it could be managed was by proclamation of the aquifer. Has the minister considered that, or does he have any alternative proposals that will at the same time encourage people into stormwater retention and reuse, and thus benefit the environment?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That question raises an important issue. We are very much at the early stages of proper water management and our understanding of the resource and how we get access to it. I have said many times that I commend the work done by the former government in terms of setting up the water catchment boards and the state water plan. That is only three, four or five years old at the very most. These are pretty early days. I can envisage a time in the not too distant future when we will bring into the scope all the water resources, and have them all managed, allocated and dealt with in a comprehensive way. That is very much what this waterproofing Adelaide plan is all about: how do we best use the resources we have available to us to get the outcomes that are consistent with good environmental management and also good economic outcomes? I find it—as I know the honourable member does—absurd to think that we take water out of the River Murray; we treat it, expensively; we put it into everybody's house; and it all gets used once as it is flushed down a toilet or put down a sink. It then has to be piped elsewhere, where it is once again treated with another bunch of chemicals, and then we put it out to sea, where it starts to kill off the seagrass. It is not a very sensible system. I agree with the honourable member. The matter of the Adelaide aquifers is not currently on the agenda, but it is obviously something that will have to be on the agenda at some stage in the future.

The CHAIRMAN: What is the minister doing to bring about greater integration and more effective water management in the state? I highlight the matters of the water catchment management boards, stormwater management issues and the big picture issues. To what extent are these being integrated, coordinated and focused in one cohesive plan?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Through the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, we are committed to implementing integrated natural resource management. Of course, in rural areas we will integrate soil issues, biodiversity issues and drainage issues, along with water management issues. We are now going through a process of working out the detail of that. That is well in hand. In the Adelaide area we have particular issues with flooding—and there are some problems in rural areas.

Today, I, along with Johanna McLuskey, President of the Local Government Association, released a report of the catchment management subsidy scheme review. The LGA and the state government—and this was initiated by the former minister—undertook a review of the catchment management subsidy scheme because, as the honourable member would know, the former government reduced funding to that scheme, and there was an outcry from local government. The LGA and the former government initiated a review of that. That review has found that about \$124 million worth of work needs to be done to address the issues of flooding. That is a measure of how much needs to be spent. At the current rate of funding it will take about 30 years on a 50:50 basis. The report recommends that it should be done over the next five to 10 years, and it talks about the need to have the catchment boards involved in that process. I have released this report today, and I am referring it to a local government forum that my colleague the Minister for Local Government is establishing so that we can work through this.

Currently we have catchment boards dealing with a whole range of water issues in the metropolitan area and local government dealing with flooding issues. It seems pretty silly that we should have them separated. We need to bring them together in some way. This review—and it is a good review which I commend to members—is the way of proceeding. It provides something of a breakthrough.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: As a point of clarification, the way I understood that answer, the minister was suggesting that consideration be given to moving stormwater management to the water catchment boards. Therefore, the \$124 million worth of backlog of capital works required to stop the flooding would then be able to be funded out of the water catchment levy. Is the minister suggesting that the stormwater and flooding mitigation work done by local councils should be able to be transferred into the water catchment levies?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: No, I am not suggesting that. This is a report that makes some recommendations. It has not been endorsed by the government: it is merely a report that was paid for by the LGA and the state government. It addresses the issue of the role of the levy and the role of the water catchment boards. Recommendation 11 says, for example, that all applications for funding are to be examined by the CMSS Advisory Committee for consistency with catchment water management plans. Councils are to be encouraged to prepare urban stormwater master plans, with support from catchment water management boards, which includes requirements for appropriate allowance for reuse, improvement of stormwater quality, promotion of water efficiency, enhancement of environmental values and future infill

development. I would encourage people to look through it, but it raises the issue of funding—

Mr BRINDAL: Are you making a submission?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: We well may: I am just releasing it today for the first time. It raises issues about how these things might be funded. The point is that at the current rate it would take some 30 years to complete on a 50-50 basis. If it were to be brought forward over a 10 year period, that would mean that funding from both state and local government would have to triple. We do not have the resources to do this, and nor did the member's government; that is why the funds were reduced. I doubt very much whether local government would have the funds to do it, so it raises the question of how you do it.

It is a useful study and we need to work through it and see the options. One of the options may well be having the water catchment levy brought into play. It may be that, after the first five or six or whatever years of the water catchment boards, some of the capital works will have been done sufficiently to free up some of that resource to help with drainage and flooding issues.

The CHAIRMAN: Some members of the committee might appreciate a copy of that, if it is possible later.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Certainly.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the minister see merit in having one metropolitan area water catchment management board or at least combining the Patawalonga and the Torrens boards?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: As it happens, I do see some merit in that. As part of the process for trying to develop integrated natural resource management, we are looking at how various bodies should be brought together, and there is some logic in it. The commonwealth, for example, sees the whole of Adelaide-plus as being an integrated natural resource management area for its purposes, and we would very much like to have structures in place that the commonwealth, as well as the state and local government, can relate to. Given that most of the population of South Australia is in Adelaide, we would not want one big nameless bureaucracy that is remote from people.

We have to find a structure which the commonwealth can relate to and which has an overarching Adelaide-wide focus, but we also need local bodies that the communities can relate to. One of the strengths of the catchment boards in Adelaide has been the kind of connection they have with local communities. I live in the Onkaparinga catchment board area, and I think that body has communicated pretty well with the local community. They are accessible, you know where the office is—it is pretty close to the Chairman's office, in fact—they are easy to get to, and they visit local members and talk to councils, so they are accessible. If it was just one body, you might lose that kind of relationship. We just need to look through how we might structure it, but there is some merit in the suggestion. We would not want to lose that local focus while we were doing it.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there any plan to give more teeth to those water catchment management boards? At the moment they are really toothless tigers. They are the son or daughter of the EPA in that regard, I guess.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I suppose it is a matter of whether bodies such as that, involving a whole range of functions, should have teeth or whether it is best to give the teeth to the EPA. We have transferred the water inspectorate to the EPA. Experience shows that, if you have bodies that are trying to work collaboratively with people and get them to change their behaviours through positive programs, and so on, you do not

get as much trust if they think that you are going to ping them for breaching the rules. It is better to give those functions to another agency. That is by and large the way we have approached it.

There is an issue in relation to planning, though. I am not sure that the current planning rules sufficiently take into account the views and advice of the water catchment boards, and I think that we need to strengthen that role. Under the River Murray Act that we have put out for consultation I, as minister, would have a much stronger planning role in relation to that catchment than exists in relation to other catchments. It is a matter of trying to get the balance right, but I agree that it would be an improvement if the catchments had a stronger role in planning.

Mr O'BRIEN: Can the minister inform the committee of what steps the government has undertaken to increase its activity to eradicate branched broomrape?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Eradication of branched broomrape remains a state and national priority. This dangerous weed poses dual threats to both export markets and to production. The government is supporting this positive approach to eradication by land-holders in the community, and is earmarking \$7.6 million for the program over the next four years, with \$922 000 available this year for a range of initiatives. We intend to eradicate branched broomrape over the next 10 years; that is our policy commitment. We want to do this in collaboration, of course, with the land-holders in the area where branched broomrape is in existence and also with the other states and the commonwealth. There are provisions through the Primary Industries Ministerial Council to fund outbreaks of pests, animals and plants. This has been successfully considered for funding.

Through the national body we are receiving, for this year, \$2.292 million, and the South Australian government has put in \$0.922 million, so we have a total allocation this year of \$3.214 million. Industry, via the Grains Research and Development Corporation, is providing about \$300 000 for national and international research projects. These funds, contributed as part of the state government's partnership with land-holders to eradicate broomrape out of the Mallee and Australia, will support work designed to ensure that farmers remain viable while efforts to eradicate the damaging pest continue. It is really very important that we keep the farmers on side here, because if there is a breakdown of discipline this weed can escape to anywhere in the state. The majority of the \$922 000 that South Australia is putting in will support land-holders in the broomrape quarantine area and will resource two incentive schemes for land-holders, and the remainder will support research that is vital to the program.

That \$922 000 initiative is provided in this way: \$250 000 has been allocated to provide for the administrative costs for businesses that agree to enter an arrangement to comply with the requirements of the code for the control of branched broomrape; and \$450 000 has been allocated to support growers in the broomrape area who introduce farming systems that contain and eradicate branched broomrape. In addition, about \$220 000 has been allocated for critical research to identify more manageable and cost efficient fumigant for branched broomrape seed destruction that has an acceptable environmental impact. Program staff are working through the details of administering these schemes at the moment.

These incentive schemes are in addition to the existing grants scheme for support, with some herbicide cost that applies to farming businesses that have paddocks infested

with branched broomrape, and a herbicide grants scheme allocation of \$200 000 applies. The state and industry currently is undertaking an enhanced research program seeking alternatives to the expensive and environmentally hazardous use of the fumigant methyl bromide, which costs something like \$13 500 a hectare to apply. In summary, we have a scheme, we think it will work and we think that, and over time, using a range of initiatives, we will be able to eradicate this pest.

Mr O'BRIEN: What is the government doing in respect of the catchment management subsidy scheme?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I think I answered this question in part before, but I will give a more complete answer now. The government has retained the current level of funding at \$2 million for this scheme. I have received a report (to which I referred earlier) from the Catchment Management Subsidy Scheme Review Committee that was appointed in 2001 by the former minister for water resources and the then president of the Local Government Association. The review has confirmed that there is an extensive list of outstanding works that qualify for funding under this scheme, and that is estimated at \$88.5 million worth. The review identified additional major works required to address persistent flooding problems, with an estimated cost of \$35.5 million, which are outside the current capacity of the scheme and which will require specific funding consideration. Under current funding arrangements, it will take up to 30 years to complete these projects.

I have accepted the major recommendations of the report (I have accepted them in terms of receiving them) and will begin negotiations with the Local Government Association on the current level of funding that is provided, with a view to reducing time for completion of the projects. The negotiations will take place under the guidance of the local government forum that has been established by the government for the purpose of working cooperatively on issues of state wide importance to local government. Part of the negotiations will include consideration of a formal agreement that provides a degree of certainty for local government in regard to the level of funding that is to be available from year to year. I am keen to work with local government to resolve the funding issue and to clarify the question of responsibility for stormwater drainage and flood mitigation.

The program offers opportunities to incorporate modern engineering practices to achieve solutions that improve environmental and aesthetic outcomes. This can extend to the capture and storage of stormwater for future use and the incorporation of wetlands in the design of drainage schemes. Involvement of the catchment water management boards in addressing the question of stormwater management is important, and the review has made several recommendations that will clarify the role of the boards. So, that is where we are at. But we hope that, over the next few months leading into the next budget rounds, we will have some views about how we can proceed with this problem.

Mr O'BRIEN: Are any new investigations being carried out into the ground water resources on Eyre Peninsula?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The major ground water resources are located in two principal areas: the southern basins at the southern tip of the Eyre Peninsula and Musgrave along the western side between Elliston and Lock. Other discrete ground water resources occur throughout the Eyre Peninsula, and are used to supply the small coastal townships along the western side of the peninsula. Below average mean monthly rainfall since 1992 has resulted in little or no recharge to

these ground water basins, causing widespread declines in ground water levels across all basins, including those where no extraction occurs. Since 1985, the water level decline in the Uley-Wanilla lens has been about 4½ metres, while in the more important Uley South lens the decline has been approximately 2½ metres. Ground water levels are currently low across the Eyre Peninsula, and appropriate risk management is required.

One risk management option being considered by SA Water is the desalination of brackish water. The department, in conjunction with SA Water, is undertaking some preliminary investigations to develop focused investigation programs, although it is recognised that ground water cannot sustain the long-term demand for potable water throughout Eyre Peninsula. The level and scope of these investigations will be dependent upon the capacity of the department to redirect funds to these investigations, as requests for support funding for the bilateral process were not able to get that level of resource.

In addition to the above work, DWLBC is currently assisting SA Water with the development of a master water supply strategy for Eyre Peninsula to develop alternative water supply options. The information is expected to be released for community comment within the next few months. It is of considerable concern how we look after the resources in that area.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I am not sure whether I have this exactly right because, as the minister commented previously, the budget papers are difficult to read from year to year. It appears that last year's natural resource based infrastructure project (which included things such as the Upper South-East Dryland Salinity and Flood Management Plan, the Loxton Irrigation District Rehabilitation Scheme and Lower Murray Reclaimed Irrigation Areas) was allocated \$37 million. There is now only about \$1.029 million left in Primary Industries for the Brukunga mine site rehabilitation, and the rest has gone into the minister's portfolio. The total amount allowed for the natural resource based infrastructure project in the minister's portfolio is \$29 057 000 (Output 5.3, page 8.54). That appears to be a reduction of \$6 million from last year to this year. Is that right; if not, will the minister reconcile those amounts for me?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I will need to get some further information, so I will take that question on notice. There may be certain elements that have not completely come over to us yet, and there may be some discussion with PIRSA about what does come over.

The Hon. I.F. Evans interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am not doing too badly. I will have to take that question on notice and bring back some information for the honourable member.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: I refer to Output Class 1 (page 8.43). The stakeholder briefing paper 'Natural Resource Management Integration of South Australia' outlines the proposed funding arrangements. It states:

The project will review existing arrangements for NRM funding across the state with an emphasis upon levy generation.

Will the minister rule out any new levy as a result of the new proposal, and will he rule out an increase in existing levies to cater for changes that may result from the review?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The process that we are going through is to look at the various bodies—water catchment bodies, soil boards, animal and plant pest control boards,

drainage boards, the NAP, the NHT, and a whole range of things.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: The dog fence?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am not sure that the dog fence is included in this process. We are certainly looking at the act, but there is a range of bodies that we are looking at, and part of that process is to work out the budgeting that goes with it. I do not have any fixed view about this. The government is not doing this as a way of reducing expenditure. We want to ensure that the integrated resource process that eventually comes out the other end has proper allocations provided to it, and the various sources of funding at the moment I suppose will be direct from state government coffers through the water catchment levy and through charges that might be raised by the various elements for the delivery of services and also by local government.

As we go through this process, we will need to work out how all those elements can be included. It may well be that suggestions are put to us about how that ought to happen, but I am not ruling anything in or out at this stage. I just want to get advice from the communities and the Dennis Mutton council that I have established about how best we can do this. If we do have integrated resource management, it would be sensible to have a common budget with appropriate allocations for the various elements of the programs that are currently managed by a disparate range of groups.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: In setting up the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, the minister established a Natural Resource Management Integration Project Task Force comprising senior officers of the department. Is the project being undertaken by that task force reviewing existing funding arrangements (including the catchment environment levy, the dog fence levy and animal, plant and control board funding) with a view to moving away from the current exploitation of federal government hand-outs?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I cannot say that that was in my thinking. I am not sure whether the committee holds those views. We are trying to establish bodies on the ground in regions which have responsibility across all the natural resource management issues and which can operate whether or not the commonwealth is around to put in funding, because at the moment we have all the bodies which the states established, and the commonwealth has come in and said that it will give us some money but we had better establish integrated natural resource management committees. So, they sit over the top of the state and local government bodies and really have overlapping functions. In fact, the personnel on these bodies is pretty well drawn from many of the existing bodies. So, you set up a double kind of level of bureaucracy just to satisfy commonwealth accounting procedures.

I have had a couple of conversations about this with federal minister David Kemp. I said, 'These are the processes we are going through. You want integration; so do we. We want reasonably large regional groupings, and you want that, too. Let's set up this structure that can work for us and also work for you.' So, it develops a consistent set of management priorities and programs; we put in the money from the sources indicated by the member; and the commonwealth tops it up. If the commonwealth decides not to put in any money because it cannot sell Telstra or for any other reason, it will keep operating.

One of the great frustrations for people in rural areas is that the commonwealth comes in and sets up a new program; it takes a year or two for that program to get under way; a lot

of money is wasted in the first couple of years because it has to be disbursed; and the projects are not really well thought through. By the time the commonwealth has worked out what it is doing, it is out of the field, and then you get all these expectations from groups with expertise. I just do not think it is a very functional process.

I want to set up a structure which can operate whether or not the commonwealth puts in money so that that level of expertise and those understandings can be maintained and funded through the other processes. That is just one of the side issues. I do not know whether that answers the honourable member's question. Is that the direction in which the member's question was headed?

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Not really, but that is interesting information. My last question is: as part of the compact with the member for Hammond, he wanted a levy on all irrigators. Has this been considered in any form, including increasing existing levies, and will the government rule out imposing any new levy on irrigators?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I have to say that I am not too sure that that was part of the compact. The member for Hammond had a view about the capacity of local government to rate water users in the same way as it rates land users. The particular example to which he referred was in his own district where there is considerable expenditure by local government on infrastructure (roads and so on) which is damaged by people who do not actually own much land but who have a high water use and high production as a result but do not contribute to the maintenance of the infrastructure.

I think the member for Hammond was after an amendment to the Local Government Act which would allow councils to rate water users in the same way as they rate land users. I am not responsible for this bit of territory. I can get some more information for the honourable member from other ministers about how that is proceeding, but I have made no commitment and there is no policy commitment to increase rates for irrigators across the board in the way described by the honourable member.

Mr BRINDAL: Do you as minister intend to retain and/or expand and enhance the WaterCare program? You will recall that it was launched just before we lost office. It went off-air until about six weeks after you became minister, then I saw the program, so I presume that you ran it to its conclusion. I have had very positive feedback from it and I presume that you have too. I am just seeking your views on whether you will retain or expand and enhance the program, given that we both agreed that neither of us wanted to appear on it, and we did not.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: You want to appear on it?

Mr BRINDAL: No. You told me that you would not object to it so long as my face was not on it and the closest we got was that frog.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: You said that, not me. You are right: I recall the conversation well. You kindly said, when you launched the program, that in part you set it up because of urging from me during the estimates committee that the money for education and public awareness programs that was collected by water catchment boards could be better spent if better coordinated. So, certainly I support that approach. As you say, it was launched at the beginning of this year. It went through the program that was, I think, anticipated for it. I have no intentions of killing off that approach. I am mindful of the fact that we do have a WaterCare and a WaterWatch program in the EPA and I am trying to work out ways to better coordinate that. It seems a bit silly to have two

education-focused programs, one called WaterCare and one called WaterWatch, but I think we do need to have a coordinated approach to educational programs. I have not made any decisions about anything in relation to it. I am certainly not intending to stop that style of programming, but I am very keen to see whether there are ways of getting better outcomes for the dollars we spend.

Mr BRINDAL: I accept what the minister said. I am pleased that he has an integrated portfolio because we, too, would like to have achieved integration. It was a bit difficult because it came under two different ministries and, as the minister would be aware, some territoriality can take place with the boards seeing themselves as having a particular little bailiwick. WaterCare started because I told the catchment boards that it is what they were to do. It has run its course now and, unless the minister tells them that that is what he would like, one wonders whether it will continue. That is why I asked the question.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Thank you for the opportunity to have a second go. We have the boards of the two groups talking to each other. We are going through some fairly major structural changes within the department as we bring about integration, so I guess there have been a few other things on the agenda. When we have the integrated approach we may have a broader focus, so that instead of WaterCare it might be EarthCare or EnviroCare, or something else, and over time it might raise a whole range of issues. I really have not engaged terribly much in thinking about it at this stage. I am fully supportive of the idea that what moneys are spent on education and public relations are being coordinated and driven at a central level, because I do not think there is any point in each of the boards producing any number of glossy pamphlets and putting them in letter-boxes around the community.

It is much better to have a television, radio or bill-board campaign, and I think the WaterCare program did strike a chord. It was unfortunate the way that it was interrupted by the election and lost some of its momentum, but I think it did have an impact and that jingle was very effective. It was driving me crazy after just a few hearings of it, so no doubt it was getting the message across to various people. We need to go through an auditing process to check to see that it actually hit the mark and I guess that is part of the review. All I can say to the member is that I am committed to that sort of approach: I just have not yet made any sharp decisions about how to proceed.

Mr BRINDAL: On the integrated natural resource program that you are about to embark on, I know it is early days and there is a lot to be done, but do you propose community consultation and do you yet have any strategy that may get over a problem which I see, namely, that we have at present perhaps too many little boards and committees? They have expertise and everybody has a pet subject. People who are on weeds and pests seem to love weeds and pests and people who are on water love water. If all of this is integrated how do you think we might get over the problem that you then dilute the expertise too much? You have people sitting there wanting to talk about water all night and it is only two agenda items, or people who are interested in pests and plants not wanting to be involved because there is too much talk about water. Do you see this as a problem and do you have any solutions yet? How extensively will you consult the community? I feel that the fear of diluting the expertise will be one stumbling block in bringing it all together.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: They are very real issues that you raise and I think we must be mindful of addressing them as we go through it. We have a task force which has recently begun to engage with the community. The committee is meeting with communities around the state with the intention of engaging with the key members of communities. By that I mean those who are currently members of soil boards, water boards, drainage boards or integrated natural resource committees. So, we are going around community by community talking with those people. I have already met with each of those groups at least once—not the individual boards, but I have had meetings with the chairs and executive officers of the water catchment boards. I have met with similar people in the soil boards and the integrated natural resource committees.

I have met with them and told them what my views are and I have said that I have taken three policy positions. One is that there will be integration. The second is that we will use the water catchment boundaries—more or less—as the boundaries so that we do not have squabbles about boundaries. Thirdly, we will go through this process relatively quickly: I would like it to be done by Christmas time. However, I have said that how we do it in each community is really up to the community itself, because each community is very different from the other: Kangaroo Island is different from the Outback, the South-East is different from the West Coast, which is different from the Fleurieu Peninsula, so the structures that are established will be different in each area.

For example, I would imagine that we have a board, a council or body of some sort in each area that was an overarching body that represented all the areas of expertise and local government and departmental people and so on. Then it will have a series of subcommittees. There might be one that focuses on water, one that focuses on plants and one that focuses on soil: that might be one model. However, as I said to the member for Stuart when he asked a similar question earlier, in the Outback area, given the vast distances, we may have a board which meets relatively infrequently, maybe once a quarter, but with smaller bodies which are geographically focused and which look after all those issues in their little patch. Otherwise there are just not enough people to go around all the issues. For Kangaroo Island we might just have one board which picks up all the issues and can manage it. Because Kangaroo Island is relatively concentrated geographically, the issues are pretty apparent, so we can do it that way.

So, I am wanting to engage with the community about how we do it. I think that that is important. Advice was given to me that I should make some clear decisions about where I wanted to go but allow the communities to develop the detail of it. I am very keen to engage with local government and the broader community too. But, at the moment, we are going through and talking to the key players, who I guess are the leaders in their communities, and it will then be up to them to take it further. The response we are getting so far is fairly positive. I guess the crunch time will come when decisions have to be made and some people may find themselves without a key spot which they may have had in the past.

Mr BRINDAL: I am very pleased to put on the record that I am delighted that the minister would say there is not a one size fits all answer. That can be part of the worst aspect of the problem. One of my concerns was how you can come up with a model that actually fits metropolitan catchments as equally as it fits country catchments. While pests might not

be a control problem down in the electorate of the member for Mitchell, for example, they certainly are in Unley. We have a lot of rats, for instance, but perhaps the problem caused by noxious weeds is not high on the agenda in Unley. That was going to be my next question, but thank you for having answered it.

The next question relates to Output Class 2 on page 8.45 and a progress statement on the 21 South-East artesian wells, the five Great Artesian Basin wells and the program to replace the 40 GAB drains with piped systems. It is indicated in the eleventh dot point under targets for 2002-03. We were in fact an exemplar to Queensland and New South Wales over the Great Artesian Basin. I think our work in the South-East is nationally recognised. Is the progress on track and on target?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The key strategy, as the member probably knows, is to rehabilitate the identified old and poorly constructed wells to stop water wastage and to recover artesian pressure to ensure that maximum economic benefit can be achieved from this valuable groundwater resource. Some 120 wells have been identified in the project area (that is the Kingston, Lucindale and Robe area) as requiring rehabilitation. This is a nine year project, with all on-ground works to be completed by June 2010.

Landowners receive a 100 per cent subsidy on backfilling the old well, a 30 per cent subsidy on the drilling of a replacement well, and a 70 per cent low interest loan repayable over five years is available if required. Replacement grants and loans are administered through PIRSA Rural Finance. On-ground works commenced in April 2000, with five trial abandonments. Some 46 wells have been completed to the end of June 2002, and over 95 per cent of well owners have indicated their willingness to participate in the scheme to date.

With respect to current and future strategies, there has been a development of trials to demonstrate irrigation efficiencies and new higher yielding plant varieties to increase our productivity. There has been a consultancy in conjunction with the Limestone Coast Economic Development Board to identify development opportunities in order to encourage higher economic return and investment potential, and a further 20 wells will be undertaken in the 2002-03 works program to be undertaken from January to April 2003.

The total estimated cost of the project is \$5.5 million and total funding secured is \$2 286 100, of which the State Government Investment Fund has contributed \$1.1 million, the Natural Heritage Trust has secured \$480 000 through DWLBC, and about \$1 million has been funded through the Natural Heritage Trust via the Mid South-East Irrigators Association. Additional state funding of \$74 300 is sought for this year to match Natural Heritage Trust funding received in this year. It is anticipated that no further additional state funding will be required for this project, subject to all loan moneys being repaid and no significant inflationary changes.

That is a fairly good deal, and it has been going very well. We have to commend the irrigators in the South-East for really embracing this. I know they can be a bit problematic from time to time, but they have embraced this very well. The understanding of water issues generally, not just in the South-East but particularly in the South-East, has grown immensely over the last few years. The kinds of debates that we have had in here I guess have been reflected in those communities. Whilst it has perhaps been painful from time to time, one of the side effects of that is a huge understanding of the issues, and a very strong commitment to dealing with water

conservation and ensuring that there is an ongoing viability of the resource.

Mr BRINDAL: Before I defer to the member for MacKillop, is the minister considering introducing amendments to the Water Resources Act to take greater account of an ability to reflect triple bottom line-type accounting practice in the issuing of resource? In the member for MacKillop's area, I think it is, there is a very successful barramundi farm. The farm is successful because of the ambient temperature of the water that they can extract, but it happens to be very old fossil water.

Therefore, there is a question about whether that is an efficient use of the resource. It is ancient water and cannot be replaced, as the minister would know, and it is used to grow barramundi. I am not knocking this individual enterprise, but one wonders whether that is the best use of very ancient water when barramundi grow quite well in another habitat. At present, it is beyond the capacity of the Minister for the Environment or any minister for water resources to actually consider other than the use of the resource. You cannot really say that this is a good resource, and that that is not, as I understand it.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I certainly support the point the member is making. I would say that the whole of government really needs to adopt a triple bottom line approach. Within DEH I have an Office of Sustainability, and that will be arguing and developing a broader understanding in relation to those issues. That applies also in DWLBC, particularly as we now have sustainable resources as part of the portfolio. I refer the member to Output Class 1 on page 8.44; the last target listed for 2002-03 states:

Further develop an implementation program for ecologically sustainable development policy and triple bottom line reporting for the agency.

So, we have built it in as a policy objective. Certainly, the Water Resources Act will be reviewed. As a result of the integrated natural resource approach, I think it will have to go through a process of legislative change so that we can build all those principles across the integrated natural resource platform, and the Water Resources Act will be a key element of that and largely a model for dealing with the other issues.

Mr BRINDAL: I presume that, if you wanted to bring in a River Murray Act, you would have to open the Water Resources Act at least in part to make the two fit?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The River Murray Act will involve the opening of a large number of acts. We want to bring in other legislation in addition to that.

The CHAIRMAN: Following up what I asked earlier today and building on what I think the member for Unley was focused on a little while ago, what liaison is there between your agency and other government agencies, the LGA and councils? I use the example of tree plantings on arterial and non-arterial roads. I point out that I am not against exotic trees, but I am against their being planted in the wrong places where their leaves end up polluting our waterways.

What mechanism exists on an ongoing basis for your people to interact with other agencies so that they are singing the same tune in terms of biodiversity and all these other aspects? Do you have a mechanism in mind to help ensure that it does happen in a coordinated, thematic way?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Yes, we do, and we have a range of mechanisms, I suppose. First, as I said before, we are setting up an Office of Sustainability, which will try to have an overarching view of developing policy to deal with those

kinds of issues within water, land and biodiversity. It does contain those three elements—the blue, the green and the brown—and has integrated natural resource management planning. So, over time, within each catchment area, there will be a development and implementation of plans which bring all those elements together.

I hope that one of those elements will include a view about the appropriate vegetation that should be planted within each area—vegetation which is appropriate for that area and which is native to that area. If we can get this system to work people will have a greater understanding of the reasons for doing this. I would like to see, in each catchment, the establishment of something like a friends of the catchment group which, in conjunction with officers, can be responsible for planting appropriate kinds of trees in that area. We would also want the local government authority involved in that. In relation to broader consultative processes, I meet with the LGA regularly on a one-to-one basis. I will also be a member of the local government forum, which will meet regularly with the LGA in a structured way to deal with broader whole of government issues. Certainly, the reason I will be a member on that body is that there is a huge overlap between my portfolio and local government waste issues, water management issues, trees and all the rest of it. There are huge overlaps.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Dogs.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Dogs, as the member for Davenport is quick to remind me. In addition, the cabinet has a series of committees, one of which is chaired by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. Members of that committee will also include me, the Minister for Energy, and the minister responsible for local government and urban planning. In addition, once a month there is a meeting of chief executives of the agencies: the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, DEH, PIRSA and Planning. Local government is also involved in NHT and NAP assessment of projects. We are trying to work in a seamless way with local government.

I guess that the honourable member is asking how one achieves an impact at a detailed level on the ground: is it an indigenous tree or is it a tree from elsewhere? I hope that we can develop biodiversity plans which operate at a local level and which are backed up by water and land plans that say, 'As a policy, we should ultimately replant native vegetation in our council area rather than non-indigenous trees.' I agree with the honourable member that that is where we must go because the eco-consequences of not doing that are severe.

The CHAIRMAN: I realise that we develop an EIS for major projects but, with respect to, say, something like Portrush Road or Belair Road, is there a mechanism where DRT comes to you and says, 'We plan to put a road through here', or, 'We are going to build a bridge there'? What is your department's view of such a project in relation to water disposal, vegetation, etc.? I am talking about those micro-projects that, in the long term, probably have a more significant impact than the big hit magnesium-type plants.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am not aware of what relationship exists between DRT and other departments. From my experiences as a local member I know that when a road is built the policy is that 1 per cent of the funding is to be put aside for landscaping and vegetation. A commercial road that runs down the spine of my electorate is being redeveloped or rebuilt over a period of time. I wrote to the then minister for transport (Hon. Diana Laidlaw) and asked that a green corridor be built alongside that road using indigenous trees,

and the minister was very supportive of that. The road is not finished so we have not started the corridor. I am happy to take up the honourable member's suggestion with the Minister for Transport to see whether we can develop a policy in relation to that.

The CHAIRMAN: In relation to Belair Road, I am not sure who signs off on whether the drainage works associated with the upgrade of that road are compatible with, say, what the catchment management boards want to do or what your department's big picture is on water; or whether DRT just says, 'This is where the drains are going.' I am trying to get an holistic approach to these things that reinforces what you seem to be doing, which is, I think, commendable, and that is to have an integrated approach to the environment.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The honourable member is correct, and I appreciate the positive comments. We are going through a process of restructuring our departments to try to get the bits that are internal to us integrated. We then need to take the bigger step as to how we deal with local government properly and how we deal with transport, planning and all the other government departments that have an impact on the environment. The environment and conservation issues are, of course, issues that cover all government activity, economic developments, social activity and the rest.

We must develop a model, and part of that thinking is to establish this Office of Sustainability, which can have a whole of government approach and inform on the activities of not only all the elements of my portfolio but also the broader government agenda. I agree with the honourable member: we certainly want to do that but we are not yet there.

The CHAIRMAN: Another aspect relates to ETSA and councils. I know that Mitcham council has said to me that, instead of having these dwarf trees that have been hacked and will be hacked for years to come (unless we get a lot of money for undergrounding), let us have a systematic replant of appropriate trees that look nice, and so on, but there does not seem to be that coordination. The ETSA legislation prohibits the planting of indigenous trees the council wants to plant in the area. Consequently, we get this sort of impasse of no action and putting up with something that is second best. If the minister takes that on board that would be great. Are there any more questions?

Mr BRINDAL: With the minister's permission, could we extend beyond 5.30 p.m.?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: We are in the members' hands. We will stay here until 6.30. The officers will not change because we call it Murray River; it is really a seamless process. Members should divide the time as they want.

Mr BRINDAL: The member for Davenport has one further question and the member for MacKillop has two, so perhaps we could just finish those off.

Mr WILLIAMS: The minister will be surprised by this question but it relates to irrigation in the South-East.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I would be disappointed if it did not.

Mr WILLIAMS: With regard to the so-called rainfall tax (and I know what the minister said recently about this), it is not something that I started: it was started by the *Border Watch* in Mount Gambier. My concern is that the approach of the minister's predecessor and the minister is unworkable. How can the minister rationalise giving a forest grower a licence to use the rainfall, because it will have an effect on the recharge if he does not apply the same sort of restrictions to other crops and other land use practices, which also have an effect on the recharge that occurs under that land? A range

of crops and practices, I can assure the minister, will have an effect on the recharge. How can the minister rationalise that for forest growers but not for others? Does the government intend to apply restrictions such that land-holders in general—in the Lower South-East at least—will be required to have a water licence some time in the future merely to grow a rain-fed crop?

Mr Brindal interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: We could do it in stereo.

Mr WILLIAMS: I will put the question the other way around: will the minister rule out that this sort of—and I will use my terminology—nonsense will be applied to any crops other than forests?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am glad that I have been lumped together with the former minister as being responsible for bad policy, because it is obviously the whole world against the member for MacKillop in relation to this issue.

Mr Williams interjecting:

The Hon. J.D. HILL: No, the honourable member has one friend in the upper house who agrees with him, but he is also, I think, flogging a dead horse. This is obviously—

Mr WILLIAMS: I happened to win two elections on it.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That is true.

Mr WILLIAMS: A pretty good straw poll.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That is true. This is obviously an issue of great moment for the member for MacKillop and for many of his electors.

Mr WILLIAMS: For a lot of his electors.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Yes; and it is important how we resolve these issues in the South-East for the whole of the local economy, the local environment and for the state of South Australia. The former minister, his predecessors and I have worked our way through these thorny issues as best we can given the inexact science and the highly charged political atmosphere that exists in the South-East. I will not recite the history of the select committees and so on, but by and large we are pretty close to addressing all the issues. The member asks how I can justify something in relation to forestry when something else might turn up in the future. If something else turns up in future which is an issue that causes the water resources to be stressed and threatens the local economy and the local society, we will address it. However, that does not mean that we should not address forestry at present.

I make it plain: no rainfall tax is envisaged, planned or has been thought about. I am glad the member says it is not his invention but rather that of the *Border Watch*—a fine newspaper—which carries debate on this issue in its columns and has done so for many years. No rainwater tax is intended or planned, and nor is a licensing system planned for forestry. However, we have to develop a way of bringing into account the water used in the forestry industry, otherwise it will be reallocated or allocated to some other potential user and the resource will be stressed. That is the beginning and the end of it. I know the member for MacKillop has a view about how we ought to do that which is radically different from the view adopted by me and the former minister. We can keep debating that, but we have moved on. While one or two members of this house may still hold that view, the reality is that 45 others have moved on and have implemented a policy that is based on reality. The reality is that we now moving towards a significant change in the way the water is dealt with.

As a result of federal competition policy, the relationship between water and land has been effectively broken. There is no necessary nexus between the two, other than you need

to have land to put water on. However, you can buy and sell water licences separately from land title. In some areas, the water licence is more valuable than the land; in other areas, the reverse is true. That is the current reality. We will not close down sections of the irrigation industry to allow people to double dip. We and the department have been working for some time with elements of the forestry industry. There was a meeting a few weeks ago which I gather was reasonably positive. I was given good feedback from that meeting. A number of questions were asked about the 26 point plan that the former minister had raised with the forestry industry. As best I understand it, those issues are still being worked through with some of the blue gum industry. I gather some of them are relatively happy. That is where we are at. I am happy to say it all again if the honourable member asks a similar question.

Mr WILLIAMS: I take it then that I can go to the South-East and tell the land-holders there that the first 35 000 hectares of lucerne that is planted is fine but thereafter people will require a water licence to continue expanding that form of crop on their land?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am sure the member will go to the South-East and, in that venerable publication the *Border Watch*, tell his electors whatever nonsense he chooses; that has been his track record. The reality is that, if the water supply is being threatened by whatever cause, we would be derelict in our duty as members of this place if we did not work out how to deal with it. But to go off and say, 'If you grow lucerne, you'll be taxed or have to get a water licence' is premature in the extreme, because there is no policy or activity to do that at all.

Mr WILLIAMS: The minister's answer is most interesting. I question that the water resource is being threatened by blue gums. The minister is getting some pretty odd advice there, as did his predecessor. The minister would no doubt be aware that a group of Upper South-East land-holders were getting up a petition to present to him with regard to working through the water allocation plan for the Upper South-East. In the plan land-holders talk about hitting a trigger point when extracting water from one of the confined aquifers. The bureaucrats behind the planning process have been putting to the local community that it is a good idea to have these triggers. However, they did not want to have in the plan any consequence of getting to those triggers, other than to say that the water industry bureaucrats would look at the matter at that point. Does the government agree with that policy, or does the minister think that, if you identify a trigger point, there should be some consequences arriving at that trigger point, other than just having another look at it?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I will get Mr McLennan to give a more detailed answer to that question. The answer is the same as it would be to whatever question the honourable member asked about water resources in the South-East. There is only so much water, we need to look after it, and we need to have mechanisms to do that. This is part of the planning process.

Mr McLENNAN: The member is referring to the fact that, if you hit a trigger point, for example, with an aquifer draw down, there might be some measure in the plan that indicates that the minister should take some action. One of the difficulties with water allocation plans is that, because they span through a five year period, the action that you might take in four years' time might be significantly different from that which you might take tomorrow. Even though you might have the best intentions of taking some sort of action now for something that might happen in three or four years,

we have been advised by our legal profession that the plan cannot dictate what you should do in five years' time. You can use other methods and mechanisms such as the catchment plan to spell out any activity you might take if you hit a trigger. However, we were advised that the water allocation plan is not the document for that to happen in.

Mr WILLIAMS: In the Upper South-East there are two sets of aquifers. There is an unconfined aquifer underlain by a series of confined aquifers. Pumping from the confined aquifers is causing a severe loss in head pressure. As a consequence, a lot of the landowners are using that aquifer to provide stock water, because it is high quality water. The unconfined aquifer in the north-west of the Upper South-East, principally around the Coonalpyn area or north-west of Tintinara, is too saline for stock water. The extensive draw down means that the farmers' pumps are no longer adequate to provide stock water unless they go to the expense of lowering their pumps or changing the type of pumps they are using. There is discussion about instituting some form of cost sharing so the water users will pay into a fund that will be used to compensate those land-holders who have been traditionally pumping and who need to modify their pumping system.

There is a lot of concern in the area, since it has been suggested that those paying into the fund will not only be those pumping from the confined aquifer but also those pumping from the unconfined aquifer. Those irrigators are having no effect on the drawdown and not causing the problem. Would it be the policy of the government to cause someone who is not creating a problem to be forced to pay compensation to those who are the losers, I guess, from the problem that has been caused by another party or series of parties?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am not aware of the particular instance, but the member has an interesting view of taxation: that only those who cause a problem should be responsible for contributing to the solution. If that were the case, I guess all of us would choose different rates of taxation to pay, depending on our own view about how much we were responsible for a particular problem. I will get Mr McLennan to answer that.

Mr McLENNAN: As the member would be aware, the board is currently negotiating a cost sharing arrangement to assist farmers to lower bores if necessary, and the details are still being fleshed out at the moment. The considerations of the board have not come to the minister at all for any agreement or non-agreement on any of the cost sharing arrangements but are still under negotiation at this time.

Mr WILLIAMS: As the minister is well aware, everything that is happening with the water plans in the South-East stems from the COAG agreements and the principle that water use should reflect its true cost. If that principle were applied here, there would not be any need for negotiations: the whole thing would be sorted out in a trice. But it seems that, because only about 13 licence holders will be pumping from the confined aquifer, the catchment board has decided that the cost to those people would be too great, so they will spread the cost to all the other water users. To use the minister's analogy, why not spread it to everyone else who lives in the community—rather than just that small subset who happen to be water users—and who are not impacting on the aquifer?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: As I said, I am not aware of the detail of that. I know what the member is saying and will make sure that I look at it very carefully when it comes to me.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Mine are very short questions. Output 5.1 on page 8.53 raises the issue of food and fibre plans. I am just seeking clarification whether the food and fibre section of the former Department of Primary Industries is now under the minister's portfolio.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: No, it is not. I am not sure why that detail is in there.

The Hon. I.F. EVANS: Similarly, page 8.6, Output Class 1, raises the issue of aquaculture. I want to confirm that aquaculture is not in the minister's portfolio area and will not be for the term of the government.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That is right. As I think I answered before, it is certainly no plan of mine to bring it in but, if the Premier were so determined, that would be up to him; it is his responsibility. But there is no plan that I am aware of to bring it in, except in the sense that the EPA has a role in the licensing of aquaculture now, as the member would realise, and we will have a role there. But the general management of it is not part of my portfolio. It would be inappropriate to be in my portfolio, because it is really a user of the resource, whereas Environment and Conservation is the manager and regulator of the resource.

I am getting a note here about the food and fibre plan. I gather it is in the document because the NRM contributes to these outcomes, so it is a reallocation of these resources. It is just an accounting process. Perhaps Mr Wickes can explain the reason why it is there.

Mr WICKES: When we were part of Primary Industries—and we still are working with them—some of the big outcomes in the food and fibre plan were the reallocation of resources, like the movement of water to better, high quality crops. We are setting up processes that help some of those outcomes, and that is built into the food plan.

The CHAIRMAN: According to the agreed schedule, we move now to the Minister for the River Murray and the topic, not surprisingly, is the River Murray.

Membership:

Dr McFetridge substituted for Mr Williams.

Mr BRINDAL: I acknowledge the work that the minister has done since he became minister for this area. I also acknowledge that the government has seen fit to place importance on this matter by establishing a Minister for the River Murray and a River Murray Act. It was not something that we deemed to be necessary at the last election but, nevertheless, I do not think it is something that can be criticised. The minister decided that perhaps I was slightly aggressive and that he was going to use more honey and syrup when it came to his colleagues interstate. I would therefore like to ask him whether thus far he thinks the honey or syrup approach is working or whether he might be coming around to the view that we have given them 100 years of honey and syrup and he might need to lace it with a little bit of salt or a whip occasionally.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: As I have said many times, I think an appropriate policy framework for this government to act within is based on cooperation with the other states involved in the River Murray Darling catchment. They are Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and, to a lesser extent the ACT and, of course, the commonwealth. We said that we needed to have good cooperative arrangements with them. We need best practice here in our state and leadership from the commonwealth and, in particular, financial leadership from

the commonwealth. I am sure the member would agree with me in relation to that element, at least.

What have cooperative arrangements brought? I think, in the few months that I have been Minister for the River Murray, a considerable amount. The first thing, I suppose—and I think this was a substantial outcome—was that the River Murray-Darling Council agreed not only to discuss the issue of environmental flow but it also agreed to take that measure out into the community for direct consultation with community members. It basically agreed, for the first time ever, that more water needed to be put back in the Murray River, and established three benchmarks: 350, 750 and 1 500 gegalitres extra water. If we could reach the upper level, that would be a significant improvement in the quality of water in the Murray River in South Australia. It would certainly mean that the mouth of the river would be more likely to be open, and it would mean a whole lot of improvements for our state. It is something that we desperately need.

It was clear to me when I became the minister that the Murray-Darling Basin Commission had recommended that the council debate that issue, and it appeared to me that one or more of the other states was planning to veto that matter being placed on the agenda. I had a couple of options, I suppose: one was to work behind the scenes to persuade them of the error of their ways; and the other was to jump into them publicly. I chose not to do the latter but to do the former. As a result, the item was placed on the agenda. Interestingly, when it was placed on the agenda, New South Wales argued for the higher level to be included—that is, the 1 500, because I think the original commission figure was 750. New South Wales said, ‘No, 750 is not enough. We need to talk about 1 500 extra gegalitres.’

I think that was a substantial change, and those who have been attending these council meetings for a very long time tell me it was probably the most productive council meeting. I am not suggesting that it is a result of my honeyed approach to these issues—I guess that is partly coincidental—but I think we had an impact on the other states by working with them cooperatively, sitting down and talking with them and persuading them. If I had got into them through the media and bagged them, I think I would have entrenched a negative view that had been developing, and we would not have achieved even a discussion of the issue.

The second thing, I suppose, that we have achieved was done directly by our Premier with the Premier of Victoria, and that was an agreement to find an extra amount of water (a relatively small amount, I agree, 30 gegalitres; but still that is an expensive amount of water) to flow down relatively soon. Officers of the Premier’s department and my department are working with their Victorian counterparts with respect to how we can spend that money and achieve the outcomes that we want.

Mr O’BRIEN: I move:

That the time for the sitting of the committee be extended beyond 6 p.m.

Motion carried.

Mr BRINDAL: I congratulate the minister on that: it could well be that a case of good cop, bad cop—alternating—works in the commission as it does elsewhere.

Mr HANNA: This minister is the good cop.

Mr BRINDAL: That is what I am saying.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Can I interrupt and say that I appreciate the kind words of the member. I do not denigrate

his role in raising the profile of this issue when he was the minister: he certainly did a very good job of focusing attention on the issue both in this state and elsewhere. He might be right, but I think we need a very long-term good cop; that is my feeling.

Mr BRINDAL: Perhaps not so long term—or perhaps I can change my stripes. I think that the minister and the council should be congratulated on what they have done so far. It may, in some measure, be due to the fact that it is just a happenstance of political times in Australia that all the state governments concurrently share a basic philosophy. The minister mentioned New South Wales, which is an interesting example. He may be aware that, at about the time of the changeover, New South Wales had an environmental allocation to one of its wetlands, and I was askance to find out that it had traded the allocation—sold or leased it—to get money for the environment this particular year. It was a fair argument, from New South Wales’ point of view. The argument was, ‘This is a wetland system: it needs an occasional drying out. Now is the drying out time, therefore, we can take our environmental water and trade it within New South Wales.’ I think the minister would share with me some degree of shock that, at the same time as the Murray mouth was just about closing, one state should say, ‘Because our environment doesn’t need it, we can put it on cotton or rice.’ While I commend the minister for his approach, that is when sometimes I think a little degree of righteous anger does not hurt.

My next question is about something closer to home. The Premier managed to hit me with a big stick over one issue (not without some justification), that of the Lower Murray swamps. We consulted and consulted (as this government is trying to do) and they had a million reasons why it should never come to fruition. Frankly, at the time of the change of government I was a little sick of reasons why it should not come to fruition and I was starting to say to the officers, ‘We need to get a bit of action on the Lower Murray swamps, not just more talk.’ In view of the fact that it might be politically sensitive, I ask the minister: is he prepared to start to wield the stick? The minister will know that this is the biggest embarrassment for South Australia: it is really our only black spot. It is a very important industry, and I do not denigrate the industry. But I do honestly believe that they can do a heck of a lot more a heck of a lot more quickly than they are doing it. It is about time they were dragged screaming to the table and did the right thing by South Australia. Can the minister comment on the current position?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am happy to give an answer. I hope the honourable member does not mind if I give a reasonably detailed answer—

Mr BRINDAL: No.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Good—because I have some information here. I have been down to the swamp area and met with the locals. Certainly, this is an area in which the Speaker has a great deal of interest. We have had some negotiations with him and the concerns that he had about the irrigation systems have been resolved. We are now in a position to proceed.

We want to work closely with the Lower Murray irrigators to implement a suite of reforms. There are 24 separate irrigation areas in the Lower Murray that are flood irrigated to grow dairy pastures. The main reforms are as follows. There will be revised water allocations in line with the River Murray Water Allocation Plan. The new allocations provide enough water for efficient irrigation of pasture and, if

irrigation ceases at some future time, they ensure that some water will remain within these areas for environmental land management. The member would know of this, of course.

I approved the new WAP on 1 July this year, and Lower Murray irrigators will receive their amended licences by the end of this calendar year. New licences will be issued under the Environment Protection Act. These will require irrigators to make improvements to farm and irrigation practices to reduce significantly the pollution load on the river from irrigation wastewater. Irrigators will need to demonstrate continuous improvement through an environmental improvement plan and conform to a code of practice. The new licences will be introduced on 1 July 2003.

In terms of self-management of government areas, two-thirds of these areas are currently owned and run by the government. The eight areas concerned will be transferred to irrigator control. We are currently implementing transitional self-management arrangements to give irrigators operational responsibility for the areas. The actual transfer of control of assets to irrigators will occur when irrigators formally convert to private districts, probably starting late next year. Meanwhile, irrigators are currently considering their options for setting up a new regional entity to service their needs in the future.

Following a comprehensive options study in 2001, the former government approved the rehabilitation of the most viable parts of these areas for continuation of flood irrigated dairying, as this was found to be the option with the highest net economic benefit. We support this decision. I have gone through the research on this myself, and it is quite convincing.

A further study that has recently been completed has assessed the appropriate level of public funding contribution to restructuring and rehabilitation. Cabinet will consider its position on the amount and method of provision of public funding in the near future, and I hope to be able to announce our funding offers in October this year. I expect that there will be a significant public funding contribution based on public benefits as incentives to irrigators to restructure and rehabilitate their areas. This will not cover the whole cost, and irrigators will be expected to contribute in line with the significant private benefits from rehabilitation. As the member knows, that has to be negotiated.

The state nominated Lower Murray restructuring and rehabilitation as one of its top priorities for funding under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. I guess that happened when the honourable member was minister. It has proposed a preliminary budget of \$22 million as joint state-commonwealth funding contributions to the cost of restructuring and rehabilitation. Some spending has already commenced. An amount of \$2.18 million was approved in the first round of NAP funding for a demonstration of the proposed wastewater reuse system, the upgrading of inlet structures, restructure planning for a number of areas, and irrigator capability building. A submission has been made for further funding in the second round. This would enable expansion of some of the current existing initiatives, as well as additional measures to progress the restructuring and rehabilitation of these areas. I hope to hear the outcome of this within the next couple of months.

Restructuring and rehabilitation will take five to seven years to complete. When it has been fully implemented, there will be significant benefits to both irrigators and the community. By minimising waste, irrigation water use will reduce by about 40 per cent, and by recycling what wastewater is left

on farms the pollution load on the river will reduce by about 80 per cent. Irrigation for dairying will then be a much more environmentally sustainable and an economically viable industry in the Lower Murray, and river health will be significantly improved. So, we will reduce the amount of water that is being used. It is anticipated that we will take various bits of land out of use, and what water is not used in either salinity control and/or irrigation will be used further on land to irrigate other areas.

Mr BRINDAL: Higher levels?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: Yes, higher levels. This is almost best practice. It is not quite there, but there is no better method of irrigation known at the moment. As you know, and you have made this point yourself, this is the blot on our copybook. We have to get this right because this is what the other states point to when we criticise them. We have to get this right: it is going to cost dough but there is a process in place by which we will achieve the outcome that we need in the next five to seven years. So, I am pretty excited about this and I commend my officers and the irrigators in the area, and yourself, for the work that has been done.

Mr BRINDAL: I would like to congratulate you all because you are a lot further down the track than I thought you would be, so that is very pleasing. I think the government policy settings are quite right. The only bit that I would add which I was keen on—and perhaps the government could help facilitate this—is that in Israel, when I was there, NETAFIM, in particular, have a subsurface irrigation system which they would be keen to trial. I saw in Israel a whole soccer pitch where the grass was growing beautifully, and it was subsurface irrigated. There is a gentleman up there—your officers can tell you his name: it just eludes me for the minute—who believes that overhead travelling irrigation would be best.

I am not fixed with either system, but I just wonder whether we are not in a world where there may be something better than flood irrigation. I suspect that might happen anyhow because, now that there is an allocation for flood irrigation, the efficiency gains can result in direct financial benefit, as the minister will understand. Therefore, there is an imperative. I suspect that the imperative before was not past flood irrigation because that will give them maximum allowable volume of water. They might then trade some of it and become efficient, and it is the COAG sort of principle. Perhaps we did find something that was a bit better than flood irrigation. The industry is good but flood irrigation, as the minister would know, is not an efficient use of water.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That is generally the case and I must say that I was surprised when the scientists who briefed me and officers of the department on this went through it. But, for the particulars of that location, it would seem to be ideal. That is not to say that a new technology may not develop which could be better. In relation to salinity control, as you know, you have to keep the land moist to keep the saline level down. It is also soil that cracks easily and you need to keep it moist to stop it cracking. The other systems of applying water allow cracking and the loss of water. There are also the problems of tracking and the nature of the soil.

When all these things are taken into account, it is almost designed for flood irrigation and, if we can reuse the water with appropriate laser level slopes and fix all the infrastructure problems so we are not getting leaks and evaporation, it actually stacks up as being a pretty good option. It may well be that in years to come there will be something else but it

would have to be significantly better to beat 80 per cent usage.

Mr BRINDAL: That is true and that is a fair enough comment. Minister, could you provide a breakdown of exactly how much the estimated total cost of \$62 million which you have allocated to the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality will be spent? This is on page 35, dealing with the capital investments statement. I do not mind if you take that on notice.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: We will take that on notice.

Mr BRINDAL: Similarly, could you detail any other projects under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality that are planned for the coming year, and what the cost of each of these projects would be?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: We will take all that on notice.

Dr McFETRIDGE: My experience with the Lower Murray flats is such that I certainly commend you on what you are doing there in trying to reduce pollutants returning to the river but, having owned property at Wellington, I know that the state of the river there is deplorable. I see in the budget that \$200 000 is to be put aside for a feasibility study to build a weir at Wellington. My experience is that the river at this point is over 60 feet deep, having used a depth sounder on a fishing boat, which might suggest that \$200 000 is better spent on Paringa Park Primary School or something such as that rather than on building a weir. Certainly reducing the environmental flow by building another blockage in the river is not something that I would be supporting, and I am sure that the minister would not, either.

The water quality in the lakes is absolutely deplorable and we have to maintain that environmental flow. I have witnessed dairy farmers in Lake Albert and, if the water they are using on their pasture and certainly using to wash down their dairies was milk, the total bacteria count would force the milk to be chucked out. The levels of nitrogen are such that they are having to vary the types of fertiliser they are putting on the paddocks because there is so much nitrogen in the irrigation water. To build a weir at Wellington is something about which the minister should negotiate with the member for Hammond. Certainly the \$200 000 could be better spent on rehabilitating the flats rather than building a lock.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I guess the member was making an observation. I can say that we have negotiated with the member for Hammond and we have allocated resources for this, and I will give some background. Currently, the freshwater lakes are artificially maintained at a mean water level of 0.75 metres Australian height datum (AHD) but can vary between 0.6 and 0.85 metres. Evaporation from the lakes is estimated to be around 745 ggalitres per year. If you quantify that, it is about \$750 million. So there is quite a loss. The point that the member for Hammond has made and continued to make for years is valid. If we could work out a way of saving that amount of water, it is worth looking at. The investment of \$200 000 is not that significant.

Mr BRINDAL: What we actually need is the environmental flow at the mouth, is it not?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I do not think it is more than we need but it is half of what we are trying to find nationally. Prior to barrage construction, water levels are thought to have fluctuated between 0.2 metres and 0.9 metres, with a peak in spring and a trough in late summer. In 2001, the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) prepared a report that analysed a number of water saving proposals for the lower lakes. The options included the construction of a weir at Wellington. The report concluded that a weir at Wellington

would maintain water levels in the river between Wellington and Lock 1 and would allow relocation of off-takes currently drawing water from the lakes, and evaporation from the lakes would be reduced by about 30 to 60 ggalitres.

A number of potential impacts of a weir at Wellington were identified, including reduced lakeshore erosion; substantial impacts on recreation and tourism activities; increased tidal prism that may or may not decrease siltation at the mouth; increased salinity in the lower lakes; substantial changes to the habitat in the lower lakes; and substantial changes to the freshwater and estuarine fisheries. A morphological model of the Murray mouth is currently being developed by the MDBC to improve our understanding of sediment movement into and out of the Murray mouth. When developed, the model will assist improved management of the lakes and barrages to optimise environmental outcomes, including minimising the risk of mouth restriction or closure.

There are a number of potential impacts of constructing a weir at Wellington that are not clearly understood at this stage. Investigations into the feasibility of a weir at Wellington would need to include a socioeconomic study that could clarify these issues. Completion of stage 1 of the morphological model will provide additional information that will further inform the Wellington weir proposal. As the member said, we have allocated \$200 000 to investigate that proposal. This may not provide the solution to increased water, but it may well be part of it. It is worth looking at seriously and, as I say, the MDBC has treated it seriously and it is working its way through it. We will keep working with it to see where it gets to and to see what we may need to do in addition.

Dr McFETRIDGE: I appreciate the fact that building a weir at Wellington will enable you to manipulate the levels of the water in the river, but I imagine the consequence of that is that the lakes would become brackish, and in some reaches quite saline, I would imagine. What would be the cost of supplying alternative water to the people who are pumping from the lakes for dairies or viticulture, for example?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That is what we are looking at: socioeconomic elements. This is a kind of mud map approach I will put to you just now, but imagine there is 750 ggalitres of water. Let us say we could save 500 ggalitres of water by doing the engineering down there. That is 500 extra ggalitres worth \$500 million. Maybe we might need to invest \$100 million or \$200 million in infrastructure which fixed up the problems that you dealt with or compensated the people who would be disadvantaged by changes. That would still leave \$300 million which you could put back into the water flow or you could take the water and sell it somewhere else.

One option would be to take that \$300 million or take that water and allow further irrigation away from the mouth, sell it to irrigators, get \$300 million, and invest that and buy more water from somewhere else and bring that down the system. That is what we are talking about. I am dubious that it will be as simple as that, but that is a possibility, and it is worth investigating to see if it is feasible. If it were feasible, we could set up a situation where it is a win-win. Obviously there are consequences, and quite dramatic consequences for the people who are currently resident and getting economic benefit out of that area, but it is worth looking at. Certainly no-one will rush in and do anything dramatic on this.

Dr McFETRIDGE: With respect to pumping stations on the river for houseboats, has the government allocated any funding for an increase in the number of pumping stations for pumping out the effluent from the holding tanks in the houseboats?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The Labor government's policy for saving the River Murray includes the following commitment: to control leakage from septic tanks in rural areas by assisting the partnership between the River Murray Catchment Water Management Board and local government. As the member would probably know, all houseboat and river craft over a certain length on the River Murray require an on-board system to contain toilet waste which can then be disposed at specially constructed waste disposal stations. The state government funded the construction of 12 stations along the River Murray during the 1974 to 1976 period of the Dunstan government. The cost of the operation and maintenance of these stations is approximately \$100 000 per annum. Currently this service to houseboat users is provided free of charge. The stations are now more than 25 years old, and although they have been maintained to a reasonable standard, a due diligence process is being undertaken to prepare an assets renewals program to ensure the stations meet contemporary structural, environmental and licensing standards.

The government is currently examining whether the stations need to be renewed to meet contemporary structural, environmental and licensing standards. The future ownership and funding of these stations needs to be resolved, and it is proposed to engage houseboat representatives and local government in a review of this. An asset management plan for the stations is also being prepared. It is likely that the stations will require upgrading to bring them to contemporary structural and licensing standards, and the costs of any future upgrading requirements are currently being addressed for consideration in next year's budget and budgets beyond.

Mr BRINDAL: With respect to the member's questions on the Lower Murray Lakes—and I know you were drawing a mud map—but would it not also be a matter for at least argument that if there is a place at which the fresh waters of the river system can be taken for human use, the best place to do it is from the lower lakes or as it reaches Wellington? It is a matter of historic fact that the lower lakes were in fact brackish, but we turned them fresh. If they became brackish again, you are actually mining water from a fresh water system as it enters its saline environment, which is surely the safest place to do it. Is it also not a fact that the historic catch in the brackish areas of the River Murray was worth something like \$13 million a year, and because of our engineering of the system, that is now down to \$1 million? There may be some economic opportunities in terms of estuarine fisheries. You were drawing a mud map: I am drawing a mud map. I am simply asking whether those two matters might not also be part of your consideration.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The member is right, and I have heard him make this point before. It is true that if the system is changed around, opportunities will be provided for some and disadvantages will occur for others. It is a matter of balancing them. I agree that you would not want to change it unless there were significant gains, and that is what we have to assess.

Mr BRINDAL: I want to further explore the reuse of effluent. The Thames is a good example of European rivers. Between Windsor Castle and the sea it is mathematically a fact that any drop of water is reused six times, including through two or three human digestive systems.

As you pointed out in an earlier answer, we have difficulty using our water efficiently once before we get rid of it. At present, health laws preclude water, regardless of the quality to which it is treated, being returned to the River Murray. So, we have the constant spectacle of endless golf courses being

built over the Riverland to accommodate local government effluent. The argument is that it is just possible that some human bacteria could enter the river system if we allow the discharge. Obviously, that completely ignores the argument that a dead cow, a dead platypus or a dead anything in the river might cause more problems. The basis of the question is: can you or will you examine a regime in which it may be possible to use the waters of the river more efficiently, rather than them becoming—as soon as they go for human use—by definition, waste.

Allied to that question, because it is on houseboats, some work was being done on a biological system of tanks that would at least allow the grey water from the houseboat to be treated biologically and then discharged back into the river. Hopefully, it would be taken out at quality B and returned into the river at quality A. So, all of these little houseboats would be acting like worms in the ecosystem, running around slightly purifying quantities of the river. Is the government prepared to look at both of those as possible better models for the future?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I agree with you. As we have always said, this issue is largely bipartisan, and it needs to be. I went through a long and arduous process with some of our colleagues developing a policy in relation to the River Murray. One of our strengths in South Australia is that we have, more or less, a common position in relation to the River Murray and how we should deal with the associated problems. That puts us in a strongly advantaged position with the other users.

As I have said before today, our government's policy, and your government's policy was similar, is to look very closely at water management issues so that we can look at making ourselves independent of the River Murray. I guess part of that process is examining how we can reuse water.

It is an issue, too, for the Murray-Darling Basin Commission—whether or not along the whole stretch of the river it is possible to have cleaned water, which has already been used for other purposes, returned to the river. If we could find a number of gigalitres from that process, that would mean less pressure on irrigators to reduce their allocation. In the process of finding the 1 500 gigalitres, if that is the figure that is determined, we will have to do a range of things: first, get irrigators and other water users to be more efficient in the way that they use the water—that is, reduce their use but with the same output; and, secondly, make sure the infrastructure that provides the water to them does not leak and does not bring about evaporation.

The third option, of course, would be either compulsorily, or with money, to acquire water licences and allow the water to come that way. The fourth option would be to allow return to the river of water that has been taken and used for other purposes. That may be one of the cheapest and most efficient ways of getting water flow. I do not think we should rule anything out, and I am happy to take that on as an issue.

Mr BRINDAL: I notice that some members of the press are in the gallery. I should put on the public record the opposition's thanks to the minister and comment on his cleverness. The Chairman of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission was visiting us, as was Don Blackmore, the Chief Executive. The minister was called away and he asked me, very graciously, to propose the vote of thanks, which I did. I told the Chairman that this showed the bipartisan nature of South Australia and that, if the commission wanted to take us on, it was taking on not only the whole of South Australia

but also the press. I think that should be on the record, because I do not think the press was present on that occasion.

On the matter of sleeper licences, the minister would be aware that, since it was imposed, we have kept very well within the cap. The minister would also be aware that we imposed the cap based on a mid-1970s extraction (unlike our neighbours) and that that was based on late 1960s usage. Having had a good record for that, there is a problem, namely, that, if all the sleeper licences in South Australia were to be activated at any one time, we would exceed our cap. I do not know of a solution but just that there was a problem that we intended to address.

It did strike us that to keep legitimately within our cap forever we would either have to buy back the sleeper licences or reduce the current allocations to irrigators (or at least talk to irrigators about the preferred option) because, if you reduce their allocation, obviously the value of their licence will increase. They might not lose much but they would probably have to go out and buy the sleeper licences themselves. Alternatively, if they put into a kitty and bought back the sleeper licences they would keep the allocation.

I suppose the third and less palatable alternative for us when we were in government—and I am sure for Treasurer Foley—was for us to buy it out. But as it was not to our advantage necessarily to buy it out, this was the reason we intended to go to them and discuss it. Is the minister aware of that problem and is he taking it up?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am certainly aware of it. I guess that, in the overall scheme of things, it is a relatively minor problem. I do not know whether we have ever reached the stage where we have overused our allocations, so it might be a hypothetical problem. I would not want to suggest that we put resources into it until it became a real problem. Advice I am receiving is that most of those sleeper licences are different from the sleeper licences that, perhaps, exist in New South Wales. They are held by irrigators as a kind of back-up for tough times. It may well be that South Australia never goes over the cap.

I guess it is an issue that we need to keep monitoring, but I would not advocate putting resources into that. There are higher priorities. The whole issue of the nature of licences, both in South Australia and in the other states, is being addressed by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, which is reviewing the whole issue of water trading and what the products ought to be. We do need some clarification of what the products are so that a market can be more easily established. As the honourable member knows, one problem is that it has brought into the market licences that have never before been used, and that fact led to New South Wales exceeding the cap. Perhaps it is one of the issues that can be addressed in that review.

Mr BRINDAL: In terms of the works of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, the minister will know that some weir reconstruction has been done, I think, on the Torrumbarry Weir, and certainly there was a huge problem with the Hume, which was basically rebuilt. Our weir structures are ageing, as the minister would know, and there is a very strong argument in terms of environmental manipulation and the loss of interconnect between the flood plain and the river. Perhaps one of the solutions is progressively to re-engineer our weirs to allow us not so much to change the medium pool level but to allow us at certain times to bank up water, flood the flood plain and to let it go.

In line with that, I am also told, and the minister for water resources is doing this with some of the metropolitan

reservoirs, that for as little as almost a metre of fall, instead of putting a turbine vertically you can put it horizontally and so generate from as little as a metre of fall supplementary electricity supplies for rural towns, which in itself would be valuable and, I am told, cost effective. Is the minister putting, or will the minister put, pressure on the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to ensure that we are getting our fair share of works and, specifically, the types of works that will allow a re-engineering not to suit the irrigation needs of the river necessarily but, rather, the environmental needs and perhaps derive some economic benefit for this state?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am advised that in April 2002, following scientific advice that the river is healthy, the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council approved in principle a number of initiatives designed to improve the health of the system. Those initiatives include a range of measures costing \$157 million over seven years, covering structural and operational changes and investigations to make the best use of water currently available. I am advised that we are optimistic about getting a substantial cut of that fund.

In relation to power generation, that is certainly something my colleague the Minister for Government Enterprises is keen to promote. He is also the Minister for Energy, so he is doubly keen to promote it. There is microtechnology around which allows generation of power. It is sensible to do it. We have entered into a deal with a couple of hydroproducers to do that in the case of a couple of reservoirs in South Australia. It is very sensible.

Mr BRINDAL: What short-term action is the commission, or are you as minister, leading to prevent possible closure of the mouth this summer? During the past two or three summers we have had a problem. Does the minister have a contingency plan?

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That is the 3 000 gegalitre question. Because of the number of drought years, the amount of water coming down to the mouth has been reduced, as you well know, and the advice I am receiving is that there is a high probability that the mouth will close this year. That is really discouraging. I understand the advice is that a channel will be maintained so that fishing boats can get through, but the capacity to clear the mouth by dredging or other systems is just not feasible. The one positive, I suppose, of having the mouth closed is that it may close at the time of the next Murray-Darling Basin Council, which is meeting in Adelaide in November.

Mr BRINDAL: You could walk them across it.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: It is my intention, if possible, to have a picnic on the mouth.

Mr BRINDAL: Good luck; I will support you. I had to fight some of my officers who thought the Murray mouth was too far away for any ministerial conference.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I am having similar issues about trying to get the number of people down there.

Mr BRINDAL: I will drive them down there.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: You would drive anyone anywhere! It is a serious issue, and there is a strong chance it will close this year because of the lack of rain. There are ongoing problems, of course, about the extraction of water, as the honourable member knows. Almost 75 per cent of the natural flow is removed. It is made particularly bad because we have had a series of dry winters.

Mr BRINDAL: I noted this morning that Broken Hill is talking about carting water this summer. I presume that means that the Meningie Lakes must be down to an almost

critical level, because that is where they draw their water supply from.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: That is correct.

Mr BRINDAL: Before we conclude, I ask you to congratulate your Queensland colleagues. I have been very sceptical of Queensland, but I have a lot of time for this minister and I note he is trying to do some good work. Given that some cotton interests are massively powerful and massively well resourced and wealthy, I note that the minister and Premier are trying their best. If you would congratulate them, that would be good.

The Hon. J.D. HILL: I will certainly do that. I think Stephen Robertson is doing a good job, and the Queensland government has obviously decided to take on this big issue. I will pass on that comment. In the interests of concluding, I thank all members of the committee for their indulgence of me today and I thank my officers for their hard work in assisting me.

Mr BRINDAL: Will the minister advise the committee which initiatives, contained within the government's compact with the member for Hammond, have been allocated to this portfolio? How much will they each cost, and will these costs be met by new or existing funding? Will the minister identify, with respect to the Murray River portfolio, which outputs and measures have been merged or redefined and the dollar value of those changes? Will the minister advise the committee how many of the 600 jobs to be cut from the Public Service will be lost from within the Murray River portfolio?

Will the minister advise the committee how many reviews have been undertaken or scheduled to take place within the

portfolio since the government was elected? Which matters do these reviews pertain to? Additionally, which consultant or consultancy organisation has been hired to undertake this work, and what is the total cost of these contracts? For all departments and agencies reporting to the minister, what is the share of the \$322 million underspending in the 2001-02 financial year claimed by the government? Additionally, what are the details of each proposal and project underspent, and the details of any carryover expenditure to 2002-03 which has been approved?

Will the minister advise the committee of the number of positions attracting a total employment cost of \$100 000 or more within all departments and agencies reporting to the minister, as at 30 June 2002, and estimates for June 2003? For each year 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06 and from all departments and agencies reporting to the minister, what is the share of the total \$967 million savings strategy announced by the government, and what is the detail of each saving strategy?

The CHAIRMAN: I declare the examination of the votes completed. I lay before the committee a draft report.

Mr O'BRIEN (Napier): I move:

That the draft report be the report of the committee.

Motion carried.

At 6.33 p.m. the committee concluded.

Corrigendum:

Page 151, column 2, line 64—Substitute 'we' for 'I'.