

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY****Tuesday, 3 August 2021****ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B****Chair:**

Mr M.J. Cowdrey

**Members:**

Hon. Z.L. Bettison

Dr S.E. Close

Mr D.R. Cregan

Mr P.N. McBride

Mr S.P. Murray

Mr J.K. Szakacs

*The committee met at 09:31**Estimates Vote***DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT AND WATER, \$169,429,000****ADMINISTERED ITEMS FOR THE DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT AND WATER,  
\$30,979,000****DEPARTMENT FOR ENERGY AND MINING, \$54,776,000****Minister:**

Hon. D.J. Speirs, Minister for Environment and Water.

**Departmental Advisers:**

Mr A. Fletcher AO, Chair, SA Water Board, SA Water.

Mr D. Ryan, Chief Executive, SA Water.

Ms J. Guerin, Chief Financial Officer, SA Water.

Mr D. Percevault, Senior Manager, Finance, SA Water.

**The CHAIR:** Good morning, everybody, and welcome back to Estimates Committee B. I have some quick remarks to read out prior to the commencement of the standard remarks. I advise the committee that, due to the ill health of the Minister for Innovation and Skills, the Estimates Committee B hearing scheduled for yesterday, Monday 2 August, could not proceed.

Yesterday, I wrote to the Speaker seeking his authority to defer the hearing scheduled for Monday 2 August to Wednesday 4 August. The Speaker has provided his authority to make this change to the schedule. Consequently, Estimates Committee B will adjourn at the conclusion of today's hearing and reconvene tomorrow at 1pm.

The estimates committees are a relatively informal procedure and, as such, there is no need to stand to ask or answer questions. I understand that the minister and the lead speaker for the opposition have agreed on an approximate time for the consideration of proposed payments, which will facilitate a change of departmental advisers. Can the minister and the lead speaker for the

opposition confirm that the timetable for today's proceedings, previously distributed, remains accurate?

**Dr CLOSE:** Yes.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Very good. 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 Assistant via the answers to questions mailbox no later than Friday 24 September 2021.

I propose to allow both the minister and the lead speaker for the opposition to make opening statements of around 10 minutes each, should they wish. There will be a flexible approach to giving the call for asking questions. A member who is not a member of the committee may ask a question at the discretion of the Chair. All questions are to be directed to the minister, not to the minister's advisers. The minister may refer questions to an adviser for a response, should he wish.

Questions must be based on lines of expenditure in the budget papers and must be identifiable or referenced. Members unable to complete their questions during the proceedings may submit them as questions on notice for inclusion in the assembly *Notice Paper*. I remind members that the rules of debate in the house apply in committee. Consistent with the rules of the house, photography by members from the chamber floor is not permitted while the committee is sitting.

Ministers and members may not table documents before the committee. However, documents can be supplied to the Chair for distribution. The 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. The committee's examination will be broadcast in the same manner as sittings of the house are broadcast, through the IPTV system within Parliament House via the webstream link to the internet and the Parliament of South Australia video-on-demand broadcast system.

Everyone has been a part of committees this week, I think, outside of the minister appearing, but advice received from the Deputy Clerk around the wearing of masks is, if you are able to, wear them unless actively participating in the proceedings. I think everyone has done a good job of doing that so far through the process.

The minister appearing is the Minister for Environment and Water. I declare the proposed payments open for examination. I call on the minister to make an opening statement, should he wish, and introduce us to his advisers.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I take the opportunity to introduce the representatives from the South Australian Water Corporation who are assisting me here today. I am joined by Andrew Fletcher AO, the Chairman of the SA Water Board, David Ryan, the Chief Executive Officer of SA Water, Jacqueline Guerin, the Chief Financial Officer and Darren Percevault, the Senior Manager of Finance.

SA Water delivers safe and affordable water and wastewater services to more than 1.7 million people living in South Australia. As a statutory corporation reporting to an independent board, I am pleased to list SA Water as part of my portfolio as the Minister for Environment and Water. In June 2020, the Essential Services Commission of South Australia, known more commonly as ESCOSA, provided its regulatory determination for SA Water for the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2024.

This determination enables SA Water to balance its regulated responsibilities to ensure public health, environmental, economic, technical and safety outcomes, while stretching beyond these to deliver improvements sought by its customers. SA Water's strategy, which was released in October 2020, guides the decisions the corporation makes every day to deliver the services its customers need and value now and well into the future.

Highlights from the 2020-21 SA Water budget include—and as highlighted in the Treasurer's budget speech—the fact that in 2020-21 water bills for an average business dropped by \$1,350 per year. Not only that, a small number of high volume businesses saved up to \$1 million last year on their water bills, enabling them to channel that money into other job-creating activities.

In 2020-21, the average family in metropolitan Adelaide benefited from an annual estimated saving of between \$165 and \$245 on their combined water and sewerage bills, with the average family in regional South Australia receiving an annual saving of between \$160 and \$260. As announced by the government last year, water and sewerage prices in the 2021-22 period have only increased in line with the consumer price index.

Another highlight of this budget period is the continued implementation of the Marshall Liberal government's election commitment to open SA Water managed reservoirs for recreational access. In a measure of the huge success of the opening up of our reservoirs program, as of 30 June 2021 more than 226,000 people had visited these reservoirs. SA Water works with the Opening Up Our Reservoirs Taskforce to optimise recreational use of reservoirs while ensuring that drinking water supplies remain safe.

A recent independent drinking water quality audit judged SA Water's quality risk assessment process, developed in partnership with SA Health, to be international best practice, providing a road map for other jurisdictions to follow, should they wish to open up their reservoirs for recreational opportunities in a safe, structured and sensible way.

Since the last estimates hearing, Hope Valley in the north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide, has opened up for recreational access, and recreational access at Myponga on the western Fleurieu Peninsula has expanded to include on-water activities along with enhanced onshore access. I look forward to Happy Valley, Little Para Reservoir and Mount Bold Reservoir Reserve being open for the public between now and the end of this year.

Another theme of the 2021-22 budget period is the CWMS system in the City of Tea Tree Gully. The government is taking decisive action to improve the reliability and affordability of wastewater services for customers who are part of the City of Tea Tree Gully's community wastewater management system. The government has made a \$65 million commitment during the current regulatory period to transfer over 4,700 properties and more than 12,000 residents from the existing deteriorating system to SA Water's network. Work is underway at two pilot sites and is in fact significantly advanced in Modbury, with 134 metres of sewer main having already been laid and connection of properties underway at the first site.

In May 2021, SA Water provided a plan for the transition of all CWMS customers to its sewer network to the council and residents. Major work will commence in late 2021, with the aim of completing the transfer of all CWMS properties during SA Water's 2024 to 2028 regulatory period, with the aim to complete that in the first half of the regulatory period.

SA Water's capital program continues at a significant pace during this budgetary period. SA Water's capital program focuses on delivering economic stimulus, creating jobs and ensuring that the infrastructure that is used to treat and deliver South Australia's water to households and businesses is of an adequate and high standard.

During the period of the COVID-19 restrictions, SA Water has continued to deliver its capital works program, helping its delivery partners and their supply chains to keep working. I want to take this opportunity to thank those stakeholders for continuing to push on with projects in the face of those restrictions, even in the very recent lockdown of last week.

As outlined in this year's budget, the estimated result of SA Water's capital investment in the 2020-21 period totalled \$528 million—over half a billion dollars. In 2021-22, SA Water's capital investment will be greater again, at \$598.4 million.

In conclusion, SA Water remains committed to its vision of delivering trusted water services for a sustainable and healthy South Australia. I look forward to another year of working with SA Water's board and staff to provide high quality and affordable services and driving outcomes for the people of our state.

**The CHAIR:** Lead speaker for the opposition, did you wish to make an opening statement?

**Dr CLOSE:** No, Chair, other than to thank the public servants for being here and for the preparation they have done.

**The CHAIR:** Very good. With that, we move to questions. The member for Port Adelaide.

**Dr CLOSE:** I would like to turn initially to Budget Paper 3, page 75, which details major projects, and particularly ask some questions about the Tea Tree Gully wastewater works that were mentioned in the opening statement by the minister. What is the SA Water estimated cost for transferring all 4,700 homes over?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I thank the deputy leader for her question about a project that is of great importance to the state government. We know that we are responding to the needs of the residents of over 4,000 properties, which find themselves on this deteriorating system in the north-eastern suburbs, serviced by the City of Tea Tree Gully and their Community Wastewater Management System. I will refer to that as the CWMS for the rest of the session.

The challenge here is significant. We have a system spread over a variety of suburbs, not all grouped together as I think some people from time to time think it is but actually spread across almost random streets and very difficult terrain and changing topography at some points. We know that residents have gone through a lot in recent years as that system has broken down in some cases—in some areas more than others, of course—and that has led to a whole range of problems, including wastewater entering gardens and streets and drainage systems and, in some cases, houses, which is very unpleasant.

At my direction, the government is taking decisive action to improve the reliability and affordability of wastewater services for customers of the CWMS. Through the SA Water regulatory process, the government has made a \$65 million commitment during the current regulatory period to transfer customers from the existing system to SA Water's network. As I mentioned, there are around 4,700 properties and more than 12,000 people affected by this.

We have put together a detailed transition plan. We know that it will spread over a couple of regulatory periods, not only the 2020 to 2024 period where we have allocated the \$64 million but also into the 2024 to 2028 period. That is not to say this is an eight-year process; it is a process that is likely to be finished in the first half of the second regulatory period. I think it is very important that the Tea Tree Gully community know that that is not a two-regulatory-period process.

In terms of the specific costs, \$65 million has been allocated for the current regulatory period. This includes pilot projects, which are underway at the moment. I mentioned that in my opening statement, the two pilot sites in Modbury with the 134 metres of sewers. It was great to go up there with Richard Harvey a few weeks ago and be part of the first flush in Glenere Drive at Modbury.

We went to Pauline's house and got to flush Pauline's toilet. It is something a bit different in my role. I did not imagine doing that as a minister, but I got to flush Pauline's toilet. She was delighted that it left her property and went into the SA Water sewer because that was not something that necessarily was guaranteed in the past. We are getting on with those pilots, getting a rollout model finely tuned and then we expect to accelerate delivery.

With regard to the overall cost, I am going to pass to Mr Ryan to provide a bit more clarity beyond the \$65 million or so. There is no doubt that we are going to have to provide more funding into the next regulatory period to finish this work off and that is just a process we will take through the regulatory process as we begin that with ESCOSA in due course. Mr Ryan, can you provide any more information?

**Mr RYAN:** Thank you, minister, and thank you for the opportunity to talk about the Tea Tree Gully project. It is a really exciting project for us because it is really about working very closely with the community, virtually house by house as we go through. As the minister said, we have \$65 million in this first regulatory period and what we will see and what we are already seeing through the pilot projects are some local challenges at each of the houses but we are also seeing opportunities for efficiencies, so learnings as we are going through.

This is a house-by-house project where at one house we might have to ask, 'How are we going to get around that chook pen?' The next house might be to ask, 'How are we going to get under the carport?', or whatever it is. It really is actually at that very local level that we are working through. To that end, we will get a whole range of learnings through this first stage and through this first regulatory period, and that will then allow us to better cost up and have a much better understanding as to how we are going to roll out those future stages from there on in.

The \$65 million will certainly get us through this first regulatory period and then as we start moving towards the next regulatory period and as we start to gather the learnings from these first few stages in the pilot projects, we will then be able to much better cost up the next stages of the project.

**Dr CLOSE:** How were the homes prioritised? In what order will they be undertaken? I understand there are about 2,100 homes in the current regulatory period, so presumably around the either 64 or 65—the numbers seem to vary in those answers—goes for those 2,100-odd homes. How were they chosen over half of the remaining homes having to wait?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I thank the deputy leader for that question, and it is a very important question. Again, I will get Mr Ryan to go into this in a bit more detail in a moment, but really it is a risk management matrix. Parts of the CWMS are operating reasonably well, and it is all relative, is it not? It is still much more expensive for people in the CWMS, so if you take that as your benchmark on operating well in a cost-effective sort of way, people would disagree immediately, but some of it is not in an immediate critical state. It is not all breaking down and it is not all resulting in blockages, broken pipes, sewage bubbling up in houses, gardens, driveways and streets.

As a consequence, those areas have to come after the areas of critical need. Critical need comes first, so that might be to do with topography, it might be to do with soil types, it might be to do with the age of the system. The system was installed in the 1960s and 1970s largely and it is the older parts which are breaking down the quickest and have particular challenges associated with them.

The communities that have the most frequent breaks, the most frequent blockages and the most significant frustrations are the communities that are getting prioritised over others. I think that is probably the most responsible way to do this. From time to time there will be geographical and cost-efficiency benefits from doing streets in proximity to those critical areas, which might not be quite as high up the risk management matrix but because of cost benefits and efficiencies it makes sense to bring those on to the SA Water network and off the CWMS at the same time as dealing with ones in nearby areas.

I would describe it as a risk management or problem mitigation strategy that then rolls out from there, and the more robust and more reliable the system is, I guess, the longer we will take to bring that on to SA Water's network. Mr Ryan might want to provide more information.

**Mr RYAN:** I think the minister has summed it up very well there in terms of it is a fairly standard asset prioritisation process for us. You do look at things like risks and the data that is available, and so for things like breaks and disruptions to customers there has actually been quite a lot of data that has been available and that we were able to garner from council.

You would also then look at a whole range of asset condition data. What is the work that council have been doing around understanding the state of their assets, how does that then compare to where the breaks are, and so forth. I should say it was a little bit light on for asset condition data, so we have been able to get some of that out of council. It is perhaps not what you would normally see for an asset of this size, but we have certainly used the available condition data that we have had.

You also get the data around things like customer complaints, which generally align with breaks. We have also worked quite closely with the council staff. Council staff have been able to say, 'Hey, based on even if we don't have the quantitative asset condition data, we also just know in that street we have had quite a lot of issues. That is probably an area that you should go to.' So it is a whole range of factors that we consider, and then you also obviously look at where you might bundle works up.

After you have found the highest priority, it then might be, 'Yes, but there's a street just around the corner. While we have contractors there, why don't we get them to do that street as well?' But the first pass over the top is really a risk assessment process and it is a fairly standard process that we would run from an asset condition perspective.

**Dr CLOSE:** Chair, it would be useful if the minister would take on notice providing documentation that lays out the risk assessment process that was gone through in the prioritisation.

**The CHAIR:** The minister has to agree to that. It cannot simply be made on the direction of the member for Port Adelaide. She may request that.

**Dr CLOSE:** It is a request. I am hoping that it might be responded to briefly, though, rather than another five-minute answer.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Just clarifying what is available, there is a public transition plan that outlines this, which is available. Some of the other information that Mr Ryan referred to is under the care and control, the intellectual property of the City of Tea Tree Gully, and it has been difficult to get some of that information. Some of it has been light on, some of it has been hard to reach, some of it has not existed, but the main document that outlines the prioritisation matrix, so to speak, or framework and the way that the customers will be transitioned is in the publicly available transition plan.

**Dr CLOSE:** The residents are currently paying a pretty high fee to the council as part of having the CWMS. Presumably what will be happening over the next few years is that increasingly houses will be coming off the CWMS and going on to SA Water sewerage and therefore paying sewerage rates to SA Water, but the cost of running the CWMS will remain substantially the same as a system. What modelling has been done to determine how much more those residents who are towards the end of the process will be paying to maintain the system, or will there be another mechanism used to relieve them of that burden?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** When it comes to asset maintenance, the normal way that councils do this is to either depreciate an asset in an accounting sense or set aside some sort of sinking fund to build up a bucket of money to ensure that they can undertake critical asset maintenance when something goes wrong and preventative maintenance throughout the life of an asset so as to extend its life or identify problems and potential weaknesses in the asset that can be circumvented.

Given that the City of Tea Tree Gully has for a very extended period of time—we are talking decades here—been collecting lots of money from the customers who are on the CWMS, we would have thought that the sinking fund would have been able to deal with the ongoing maintenance here. It is something of a failure of administration and leadership on that council's part that they have not been able to do that. That is really why we stepped in. It was because things were getting out of hand, the problems for the community were growing and obviously their cost burden was expanding as well.

In terms of what it will cost customers on an ongoing basis, or the City of Tea Tree Gully's rate base, that is really a matter for the City of Tea Tree Gully to model and to make public. They can obviously prioritise. They do not need to increase rates. They can look at other services and programs and projects that they provide and undertake but it is, again, not for me to tell the leadership of Tea Tree Gully council how to pay for this.

At the end of the day, we are getting on with bringing these customers onto the CWMS. The City of Tea Tree Gully is going to have to essentially manage their infrastructure out of its useful existence and it will take several years to do so as people progressively come off it. The deputy leader is right to highlight that the cost of managing the system might go down a little bit as people come off, but there is still going to be a substantial cost for the City of Tea Tree Gully to deal with.

Again, appropriate and insightful asset management should have ensured that there was an investment fund that could deal with this towards the life of the asset. It is, again, not for the state government to presuppose how this has been managed by the City of Tea Tree Gully or what they have done with their sinking fund. It is not for us to model how that is managed financially. Mr Ryan, do you have anything else to add to that?

**Mr RYAN:** We have obviously had conversations with council around this matter, and each time it keeps coming back to the same point: how council should choose to work with those customers and charge those customers into the future is really a matter for council. There are a whole range of options that are available to council aside from just increasing the bills, but once again that is their responsibility and it is not for me to be telling council what they need to be doing there.

**Dr CLOSE:** So a householder who has not made it into the priority round of getting the transition done in the next two or three years, through no fault of their own, has been left to the later

regulatory period. The government has no proposal to make sure that they are not financially disadvantaged through that prioritisation leaving them until towards the end?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I am not sure what that model would look like other than providing some sort of financial relief to these households on a sort of individual grants basis or a cheque to the household, which would be setting quite an unusual precedent there. This is a very difficult situation. We said that we would step in and essentially rescue these 4,700 households from their grim future under the City of Tea Tree Gully's CWMS. The residents I speak to are relieved that we are doing that and grateful for Dr Richard Harvey's advocacy. He has been a very strong advocate for them through the suburbs and households that are in his seat of Newland that fall under the CWMS.

There is a pathway, a reasonably efficient, effective pathway. There is a clear transition plan based on risk that from now, in fact—every week from now on—for the next five to six years will get these houses off the CWMS. We do not believe there is really any way to accelerate that, given the complexity and idiosyncrasies of the system. I am not sure what the compensatory model would look like that would reduce the costs for these households that are unfortunately burdened with being on the system.

If you take this logically, their system still works. I guess they are still getting a service the further down the track they are. The ones who are still on the system in three or four years' time will be getting a service that we probably deem to be relatively adequate at this stage, notwithstanding that that might deteriorate. They are getting a service from the council. It is too expensive and that is unfortunate, but that again is a matter to be taken up with the council's leadership, which has consistently failed to respond over a couple of decades to this and certainly in recent times.

I guess I should emphasise that the customers who have been prioritised in this period are those who have the worst services, who have the system breaking down around them. This regulatory period should see all high-priority customers transition to the system.

**Mr MURRAY:** For a slight change, minister, I would like to talk about the opening of the reservoir program. The reference is Budget Paper 3, page 75. I wonder whether you could provide us with more detail on the success of that program.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Thank you to the member for Davenport for asking that question. The reservoir opening project has been one that I think has led to so many successes for the communities that have been positively impacted by having access to these areas of public land that were for a long time locked up behind fences and, despite their public ownership, there was not access for the communities to enjoy them.

Since coming to government, we have opened a number of reservoirs across the state. The first was Myponga Reservoir in April 2019. It was a quite a historic day to get into that beautiful reservoir reserve down on the western Fleurieu. There is no doubt that the success of Myponga Reservoir has just been phenomenal. The town of Myponga has been transformed from a drive-through town really to a drive-to town. It has become a destination in its own right, and we have seen the reinvigoration of that township as a consequence. We have seen property prices soar much higher than other parts of the state in a percentage sense.

We have seen new businesses established. One of my favourites is to go down for lunch at the Valley of Yore, a cafe started by a young family in the local area, which is benefiting hugely from the opening of that reservoir. We see the Smiling Samoyed Brewery, which was there before the opening of Myponga Reservoir but has seen its patronage really go through the roof since that reservoir was opened. We have seen Myponga Kayak Hire. A local man has started up that business out of his garage really and has been able to turn it into almost his full-time job, employing local people and himself and his wife.

It has just been such a success to see an area of our state brought to life. I compare it to towns in Tasmania like Derby or Maydena—Derby up in the north coast; Maydena about an hour out of Hobart—which have seen a real invigoration of mountain biking tourism, or Melrose in the Southern Flinders Ranges. These towns get a purpose around outdoor lifestyle and can really harness it for their brand and to define what they are all about.

I think, of all the reservoir for opening projects, Myponga really has given us that opportunity to define characteristics of that town and become their reason for being. It is quite a phenomenal turnaround for that place. Having gone down there on a very regular basis—it is not that hard to get to from the southern suburbs—it is a really good one.

It is not just Myponga Reservoir. The question came from the member for Davenport, so of course I have to talk about the Happy Valley Reservoir, which will become quite a fantastic project. It is quite close to my electorate, but embedded within the member for Davenport's electorate. That will open by the end of the year, it will become a place for outdoor adventure, walking trails, picnic areas, birdwatching hides, and kayaking, with disability launch sites for kayaks. You will be able to walk up in the dam wall. I think the member for Davenport knows firsthand what this will do for his community.

It is also important to note that the opening of reservoirs is undertaken with the philosophy of national parks. The project is managed with major input from SA Water, but the public realm and the governance sits with the Department for Environment and Water, and the task force is chaired by John Schutz, the chief executive. That conservation first approach has seen friends groups established, revegetation projects, birdwatching opportunities (as I mentioned)—there is just so much that can be done.

Every reservoir has its reservoir rangers staff. They are there and providing people with education, telling them about how to experience the reservoir safely and what wildlife is there. We often hear lots about the kangaroos and whether they will be threatened or upset by this. If Myponga is anything to go by, the kangaroos will embrace it. The member for Davenport often describes Happy Valley Reservoir as a mecca or paradise.

**Mr MURRAY:** Club Med for kangaroos.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Yes. They love it, and they are fairly tame. Even though these places have not been open, there are staff going around them and people can get up close and personal to those kangaroos.

Kangaroos always want to be around water and there is plenty of food around these reservoirs for them. They are an experience for nature, an experience for adventure and an experience for people just to get away from the business of life and immerse themselves in this place. We know that people want into the great outdoors—we have seen that particularly during the time of COVID, and at this time, when people cannot travel interstate or there are local movement restrictions in place, they can get into these reservoirs.

In the north-eastern suburbs we saw Hope Valley Reservoir come into its own in recent weeks because it is in an area of reasonably little open space, so when that 2.5 kilometre exercise rule was brought in the people of suburbs like Gilles Plains, Dernancourt, Hope Valley itself and Highbury were able to get into Hope Valley Reservoir, because it was 2.5 kilometres from home, and enjoy nature.

This project has been an incredible success, it has been embraced by our community. We are on a trajectory by, I think, mid-August to reach a quarter of a million people through our reservoirs. I cannot wait to be there in December with the member for Davenport when we see the ribbon cut on Happy Valley Reservoir and see people get into nature and enjoy themselves.

**Dr CLOSE:** Budget Paper 3, page 77, SA Water. How many field people are employed under the recently negotiated contracts for supply and maintenance of SA Water assets than under the previous contract with Allwater?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I thank the deputy leader for her question. She would be aware that from 1 July, just a few weeks ago, SA Water's Adelaide service delivery project, the change of the contracts there to replace the Allwater alliance contract, has now been implemented. A lot of this work was done to improve customer service, which was a real worry of ours and was not quite hitting the mark.

To achieve this, SA Water split the contract into production and treatment and field operations to drive better productivity, operational excellence and cost efficiencies, while improving



customer service outcomes within an acceptable cost and risk profile. In terms of the specifics around the employment numbers and how that operates, I will pass to Mr Ryan.

**Mr RYAN:** As the minister has said, it is, once again, a really exciting project for us and a transition that we commenced at, I think it was, 7.01am on 1 July. This is a project where previously we have been under Allwater, where production and treatment—which is basically our water treatment plants, our wastewater treatment plants and field services, which is really our mains and the like that are out in the street so to speak—were joined together.

Under Adelaide service delivery they are now split into two separate programs of work. We have Lendlease Services, which are undertaking our field operations, and we have SUEZ, which were previously part of Allwater and which are now doing the production and treatment in the Adelaide service delivery.

The new workforce under the Adelaide service delivery is around 363 people in total. There are around 178 in the production and treatment alliance—that is the piece that has been run by SUEZ—and 185 in field operations. Obviously, we have peaks and troughs through that work, particularly, for instance, in the drier months, or whenever that may be, but that is the baseline employees. Two hundred and fifty-four came across from the previous Allwater arrangements.

**The CHAIR:** With that answer the time allocated for examination of payments in relation to the portfolio of SA Water has expired; therefore, there are no further questions. I declare the examination of the portfolio of SA Water complete and that the estimate of payments for the Department for Energy and Mining be referred to Estimates Committee A.

*Sitting suspended from 10:16 to 10:30.*

#### **Departmental Advisers:**

Mr T. Circelli, Chief Executive, Environment Protection Authority.

Mr K. Baldry, Director, Science and Information, Environment Protection Authority.

Ms K. Bellette, Director, Strategy and Assessment, Environment Protection Authority.

Mr A. Pruszinski, Acting Director, Regulation, Environment Protection Authority.

Mr R. Jacka, Manager, Finance and Corporate Group Services, Environment Protection Authority.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to Estimates Committee B, our second session for today. The portfolio to be examined in this session, which runs from 10.30am until 11.15am, is the portfolio of the Environment Protection Authority. The minister appearing is the Minister for Environment and Water. I advise that the proposed payments remain open for examination. I call on the minister to make an opening statement in regard to this portfolio, if he wishes, and to introduce his advisers.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I will take the opportunity to provide an opening statement and introduce my advisers. I would like to introduce the EPA officers assisting me today: Tony Circelli, the Chief Executive; Richard Jacka, the Chief Financial Officer; Kathryn Bellette, Director, Strategy and Assessment; Keith Baldry, Director, Science and Information; and Andrew Pruszinski, the Acting Director, Regulation.

South Australia's unique and diverse environment is a vital part of our state's character and is a strong focus area of the state government. The EPA plays an important role in working to protect and enhance South Australia's environment and is a trusted environmental regulator that helps to support and grow South Australian businesses while at the same time ensuring we protect the quality of our water, our air and our land.

As we know, the past year or so has brought an unprecedented set of challenges for many in the community as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, whilst pausing some of its proactive, inspectorate and regulatory services, the Environment Protection Authority worked closely with industry, government and the community to focus on key areas of risk to the environment.

The EPA continued to support and encourage businesses to improve environmental outcomes, re-use and recycle materials and resources and reduce pollution and the resulting environmental harm that can flow from that. The EPA continued to work towards achieving its long-term vision for a better environment for the health, wellbeing and prosperity of all South Australians and remains focused on being a high-performing, effective and trusted regulator.

During 2020-2021, the EPA progressed some of its key work, such as the implementation of legislation to assist communities reduce their waste to landfill. The EPA finalised its review of the container deposit scheme, commonly known as the CDS, and I am excited to announce the upcoming release of Improving South Australia's Recycling Makes Cents, a discussion paper to review South Australia's container deposit scheme. The discussion paper is seeking feedback on the objectives of the CDS, scope of containers, scheme approvals, return rates and governance.

In April 2021, at the environment ministers' meeting, all ministers agreed that the harmonisation of jurisdictional container deposit schemes should occur. In effect, this would see an alignment of containers, size and products, refund amounts, approvals and standards for labelling across all states and territories in Australia. This pioneering scheme has been virtually unchanged in South Australia since its introduction in 1977 as a litter control measure, with the exception of the increase in deposit from 5¢ to 10¢ in 2008 and some minor amendments along the way.

The modernisation of the container deposit scheme is estimated to result in a net benefit of \$76 million per year, and the creation of an additional 120 full-time equivalent local jobs. Progressing the review and the modernisation of South Australia's container deposit scheme will be a priority for the government coming into 2021-22.

The EPA also has a role in regulating South Australia's pioneering single-use plastic legislation. South Australians welcomed the introduction of the new single-use plastic legislation which commenced on 1 March 2021. The Single-use and Other Plastic Products (Waste Avoidance) Act 2020 bans the sale, supply and distribution of certain single use and other plastic items. I am proud to say that South Australia was the first jurisdiction to pass this legislation and, furthermore, on 1 March 2022 the ban will also include the sale, supply and distribution of oxo-degradable plastic products and expanded polystyrene food and beverage containers, such as cutlery, straws and drink stirrers.

The passing of this legislation in parliament is a great achievement for South Australians. We are protecting our environment for future generations, reducing marine and other litter, and promoting the secular economy with a shift away from a single-use, throwaway mindset.

In conclusion, I am confident that by continuing a modern and outcome-focused approach to regulation and its policy-making guided by scientific underpinning and by supporting innovation and working closely with communities, industries, research bodies and governments, the EPA will be able to effect real and positive changes for a better and more sustainable environment for our current and future generations to enjoy.

**The CHAIR:** Lead speaker for the opposition, did you wish to make an opening statement?

**Dr CLOSE:** Only to thank the public servants for their preparation and attendance.

**The CHAIR:** Very good. That being the conclusion of opening statements, the member for Port Adelaide, questions.

**Dr CLOSE:** Thank you, Chair. Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 167, refers to environment protection. I would like to talk about the EPA's role in addressing the question of the mangrove deaths in St Kilda. As the minister responsible for environment and protection, are you comfortable that there is still no finalised investigation into what caused the deaths, no remediation plan and no commitment that it is not going to happen again?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I thank the deputy leader of the opposition for her question in relation to the extremely unfortunate mangrove die-off at St Kilda. I have been disappointed by commentary over the months since this happened that would almost suggest that the government somehow orchestrated or wanted this to happen—nothing could be further from the truth. Even one dead mangrove is one too many. It is a very difficult situation and it is highly complicated. As we know, there is a private operator in the mix and two regulatory authorities, with the Department for

Energy and Mining being the lead regulator, but no doubt the Environment Protection Authority is providing a fairly significant level of monitoring, scientific and technical support and advice as a key departmental government stakeholder in this matter.

The EPA is assisting the Department for Energy and Mining with scientific advice, water sampling and the installation of a piezometer network to collect information on the groundwater levels around the ponds. In early March 2021, following discussions with the Department for Energy and Mining, the Environment Protection Authority trialled using a small portable pump and hosing to assess if hypersaline water on the western edge of the ponds could be moved southwards using this approach.

The results were very encouraging and at the Department for Energy and Mining's request the EPA installed several pumps at strategic locations to further reduce water levels in the highest risk ponds closest to the community of St Kilda. Pumping commenced on 15 March 2021, and water from the western edge of the ponds in section 2, adjacent to where most of the harmed vegetation occurs, was successfully pumped further south, with groundwater heights further reduced. The process has been successful in reducing volume in the targeted ponds and has significantly decreased levels, which reduces the likelihood of further seepage.

The EPA has measured a substantial decrease in groundwater pressure since pumping began, both on site and away from the pond. The EPA's monitoring data shows that groundwater remains hypersaline, and at the conclusion of the EPA's pumping on 21 April 2021 the EPA had pumped some 40 megalitres of hypersaline brine at the site.

On 29 May 2021, Buckland Dry Creek, the private company involved, commenced discharging hypersaline water from ponds to the SA Water Bolivar outfall channel under the existing EPA licence. Buckland Dry Creek is monitoring salinity levels and adjusting flow rates accordingly to ensure excessive salinity is not discharged. The EPA licence restricts discharge concentration to 45 parts per 1,000 to protect the marine environment. Monitoring and assessment work continues, with the EPA taking a very significant role in that.

I think that, by way of background, does demonstrate that there is a lot of work going on here. This is a matter that has been taken extremely seriously, and evidence at this stage before us suggests that there has been no material change in the area impacted, that is, that there has not been a spread of this die-off beyond that initial envelope of vegetation damage that was first identified in late 2020. It is clearly a very substantial, detailed and scientifically underpinned plan in place.

The EPA is working very closely with the Department for Energy and Mining and the Department for Environment and Water. There are regular briefings to the interested groups within the community. I think they come under a banner known as the Mangrove Alliance or something like that. This is a multipronged approach and one that we hope is working.

Of course, we do have to think to the future around restoration works, and that work is also underway. The research is underway, and the Department for Environment and Water is taking a lead role, again with the EPA's involvement in that. However, again, the results in terms of environmental recovery are quite encouraging, and there are some signs that plants are starting to regenerate, which we should all be grateful and hopeful for. Mr Circelli, would you like to provide any more insight into the EPA's role in this?

**Mr CIRCELLI:** Thank you, minister. Thank you for the question. Very much from when we first were advised in September 2020, I was very comfortable in terms of how quickly my scientists moved to develop a targeted monitoring system to give us the information we need for this particular area and to monitor the harm associated with this area. It is quite a complex system, as the minister has mentioned, and I do not think there is any one person who really understands it fully, to be frank.

There has been a real collection of scientists who have put their heads together over the last six months to understand all the different dynamics that are going on in terms of the groundwater movements in the area and also how that impacts and sustains the local vegetation environment. It has not been a straightforward issue, but certainly I think from where we started to where we are now there is a much greater level of confidence of what we need to be looking at and how we are actually monitoring.

As the minister mentioned, we set up a piezometric system in September last year. That has been a really good basis to understand what is happening adjacent to section 2, which is the area just south of Dry Creek. We have seen stability in most of those. We have not seen any further increases in any of those monitors. We have seen some more recently show some reductions in salinity, coupled with a general reduction in the groundwater level in that particular area coming up to winter.

Again, there has been some thought around how the natural flushing from the marine environment is helping dissipate some of that slug of salinity that is sitting in that area. There are some indications that that is happening. It is probably too early from our scientists' point of view to be conclusive about that. We will be continuing to monitor. Probably in about another month's time, we are planning another monitoring session, really looking at that change from winter to spring, which is an important weather and seasonal system to monitor and have a look at the change associated with that.

I think, in terms of our contribution to the area around section 2, I have been pretty comfortable. Given I guess the amount of learning that we have all had to have in terms of understanding the system, I am really quite pleased in terms of where we are now in better understanding the system and, by better understanding it, then knowing what we need to do to make sure the recovery occurs.

We are also really pleased with the more recent work happening in section 3, which is north of St Kilda. There was a direction from DEM late last year to stop pumping from section 3 to section 2, which meant that section 3 was then potentially at risk, particularly with the same sort of mechanism and the mangroves and samphires to the west of section 2.

The minister mentioned the pumping there in the last few weeks. That started in late May, I understand, so we have had probably around two months of dilutions and pumping to help stabilise the salinity levels. It was expected that that program would take months to really get those salinity levels down to I guess those pre-September levels or the levels that we were seeing last year.

Some of the early results are really quite promising with the quite sharp decrease in salinity in section 3. We are seeing roughly around about a 30 per cent reduction in salinity in the first eight weeks of pumping, which is great. I think, as we progress, that change will probably get slower as we reach that baseline, but certainly taking that level of salinity off section 3 is also really good news for St Kilda.

**Dr CLOSE:** I may come back to actions taken after the event was known to have occurred, but to go to the cause of this leak, did the company, when it pumped water into I believe it was section 2—the ponds south of St Kilda Road that appear to have leaked, from which pumping is now happening—into what was then a dry pond occur with explicit EPA permission or was it at least within the EPA licensing conditions?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I am going to ask Mr Circelli to provide the answer to this one because of the technical detail associated with it.

**Mr CIRCELLI:** Thanks for the question. Probably at the outset I would like to just raise a bit of caution about myself answering this question, because some of the aspects of the question are subject to the investigation that we are currently running. We are doing that as quickly as we can, but it is quite a detailed investigation that is currently happening at the moment. More broadly, the regulatory framework that sits over this particular issue is a co-regulatory one. It is not dissimilar to all other mining, quarrying issues or sites across the state.

Our focus has been more on the discharge of any brine from the St Kilda network system into the marine environment. With that example I just mentioned previously around section 3—that pumping that has happened in section 3—we have been more involved in that because the key thing for us is to make sure that we do not create another problem by fixing this problem, to make sure the salinity discharges are below required numbers before they are discharged into the marine environment, so we have been heavily involved in that. However, the actual detailed management of that has happened under the Mining Act through DEM and also in collaboration with SA Water, because they own some of the infrastructure that was required for the pumping to occur.

In terms of your question, the original movement of water from section 3 to section 2 is a key question under investigation by the EPA, but it was and is under management under the Mining Act through a very, very detailed plan led by the Department for Energy and Mining, which we have had and we continue to have input into as well. If there is any EPA related issues or any technical science at all that is required as part of advice in forming those plans, then we provide that as well. It is not to say we do not have sight of that, but it is not necessarily under the EPA licence.

The EPA licence does take some information from the DEM detailed management system, but as I mentioned, it more focuses on what happens outside of that boundary rather than what happens inside the boundary. I cannot go into what caused it. That is subject to the investigation, and there is still quite a bit of science going on to answer that question.

**Dr CLOSE:** Returning to the minister, what is your expectation for when this investigation will be finalised? Have you been kept up to date with preliminary findings with evidence provided by your departments, or are you sitting back waiting to see what comes out of the other department?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** This is a very complicated matter. I am of course updated regularly, probably at least weekly, and speak to three out of my four portfolio agencies—the Environment Protection Authority, SA Water and the Department for Environment and Water—about this on a near weekly basis, different aspects from each agency of course. It is almost a standing agenda item on our catch-ups when I have my meetings with the chief executives of those agencies. I regularly have conversations on how this investigation is going and not just the investigation but also the planning around recovery as well.

The investigation is likely to be concluded in the coming few months, so it should be done by the end of the year. It has been a complicated area. There are a number of witnesses from different sectors and a fair bit of scientific input required as well, so there is a high level of complexity that makes this a more challenging investigation than might otherwise be the case. But of course the Environment Protection Authority is well versed in undertaking complex investigations, and will no doubt progress that in partnership with the Department for Energy and Mining and other stakeholders in due course. Mr Circelli, do you have anything to add to that?

**Mr CIRCELLI:** It is not unusual for these types of investigations to take quite some time. There is a lot of natural justice, due process to go through. There are a number of witnesses our team have interviewed already. Part of that process is by nature quite long, and we then have to seek legal advice, and they are quite difficult issues. I guess, probably again on the public record too, this is not a straightforward issue, that something happened and as a consequence something happens. We have to demonstrate that; we cannot just say that something is the case when we do not have the evidence. Part of the investigation is acquiring our own independent experts to give us that advice around the likelihood of one action causing another action, for instance.

As you know, we have to demonstrate that beyond reasonable doubt in a court of law. That is not a straightforward issue for this particular case. We are giving this absolute priority and attention, there is no question about that, but trying to manage the expectations. First, it is not unusual for this type of investigation to be taking this amount of time, and, secondly, given the nature of the science and, as mentioned previously, where we started, that is also something to take into account in terms of the timing for an investigation of this nature.

**Dr CLOSE:** Has the minister had any feedback that any parties, either inside government or out, have been less than fully cooperative with this investigation?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I thank the deputy leader for her question. I do not believe that—certainly there have been no stakeholders within government who have not been fully cooperative. I would suggest that everyone within government has been pushing very strongly and thoroughly in the same direction, working very closely together to try to get positive outcomes here. There are external stakeholders involved, and of course, as Mr Circelli referenced, they are keen to get a level of natural justice.

They are a large entity, which has significant resources, which is why we have to dot all our i's and cross our t's to ensure that from a legal viewpoint the conclusions reached as part of this investigation are beyond reproach and that the process that has been followed is robust and follows

every part of the procedure that ought to have been thoroughly gone through. When you are investigating a third party, there can be challenges there from time to time and I cannot provide any more comment than that.

**Dr CLOSE:** To go now to the response once we were aware that there was a die-off occurring, the minister and his adviser mentioned the pumping that has occurred, particularly recently with at least five pumps operating for a time. Does the minister have any concern that in the heat of last summer there was very little pumping occurring, which allowed a great deal of crystallisation of the salt, which then made pumping all the more difficult and required additional pumps to be brought in?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I rely on the scientific advice of the EPA. We were very relieved that there was not any heat of last summer—last summer was one of the coolest summers in recent years, and that perhaps gave us perhaps a bit of a reprieve on some of the evaporation rates and the extensiveness of the hypersaline water. That was a fortunate part of last summer's weather patterns, which have continued into autumn and winter.

When it comes to the pumping regime that was put in place, we had to be very careful that this did not result in perverse outcomes and that moving water from one section to the other would not move the problem from one section to the other and/or destabilise the environment in an area where there had not been a deterioration of vegetation. These things had to be carefully studied and an appropriate evidence base quickly put in place before that pumping could occur.

We know there has not been an expansion in the die-off zone so, albeit there was a need to get a scientific evidence base established, that has clearly resulted in positive outcomes, thereby limiting the negative area, which seems to be very stable at this stage. This leads me to conclude and have a level of confidence that the approach taken by the Department for Energy and Mining and the Environment Protection Authority was both considered and robust, enabling us to draw together the requisite science and then make decisions around pumping and stabilising these different sections in a way that was informed by the experts. Mr Circelli, did you have anything to add to this one?

**Mr CIRCELLI:** I guess a number of pumping exercises happened with the salt fields. Pumping, obviously, is an inherent part of the whole system there. In terms of the response from last year, there was some initial pumping, using some of the existing large pumps that the operator had. That was the first action that needed to be taken, and that needed to be quite carefully done to make sure, again, that we do not cause another issue.

What we do not want is marine deaths as well. Trying to get highly saline material out requires quite a bit of thinking around, 'How do we dilute that enough before we can actually discharge it to the marine environment?' I think some of the salinities were three times the salinity of the marine environment, so it is not a straightforward challenge to move the material.

They started off with that and then what happened, just to be clear, is we actually issued an order on them. It got to the point where their larger pumps just were not able to get to the low levels that were remaining in those ponds. Whilst we directed them to do more pumping, we in the end decided to do that ourselves, just in terms of timing.

So we brought in these multiple pumps, really trying to understand the science of the area to see whether or not that would reduce the groundwater levels. We found that the whole pumping exercise did result in the end in a positive effect in terms of lowering that groundwater mound that had occurred by moving that water, we understand, from section 3 down to section 2.

We will be looking at that again. Obviously, there has been rain in the last few weeks, and there is now water back in the ponds. The science is really important here about whether this is actually different to what we were seeing last year, because we have now had water in the system. As the minister mentioned, so far our targeted monitoring regime around this particular area is not showing any increases and only in some—admittedly, though, only in some—are showing salinity decreases.

What we do know is that there has been a reduction in that groundwater level, which is also a very positive thing. So these are the dynamics of that system that we will be continuing to monitor over the next few months.

**Dr CLOSE:** If I turn to page 168, at the bottom it talks about activity indicators and the number of regulatory interactions, including inspections and audits to ensure compliance. How many inspections or audits were undertaken at Buckland Dry Creek salt fields since January 2018?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Because this is a complex site and because it has a fairly detailed licence associated with it, the monitoring and inspections of this site is an ongoing process, extending back historically. So that takes a number of different methods. It includes onsite inspections and it includes real-time data monitoring as well to highlight any challenges.

There has been a change in recent times because we are now looking at the outflows as well, which comes as a consequence of the challenges at St Kilda. That has added an additional level of compliance checks. There would have been numerous and regular inspections and monitoring of this site in an ongoing way with a reasonable level of continuity since the licence was put in place. I will ask Mr Circelli to provide more detail.

**Mr CIRCELLI:** I think it is the definition of whether you are saying compliance inspection versus actually attending the site. We have actually attended the site on numerous occasions. We have had detailed sampling carried out on 26 November, 22 December last year, 20 January this year, 3 March, 1 and 2 June, and we have also done some targeted—

**Dr CLOSE:** If I can just cut in—I am particularly interested before it was known that there had been the mangrove die-offs. I am interested in prior to that, after January 2018. Up until then, when was the most recent attendance on site to see how the site was going?

**Mr CIRCELLI:** Prior to the die-off?

**Dr CLOSE:** Yes, to see how things were being managed there.

**Mr CIRCELLI:** As the minister mentioned, we receive real-time and online information around salinities. That information is part of the regulatory regime that occurs under the DEM and EPA licensing system. I would have to take it on notice in terms of when we actually attended the site, if there was actually a need to attend the site prior to that.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Because the Department for Energy and Mining is the lead regulator here, they would be the ones taking the lead on this.

**Dr CLOSE:** In the near-weekly meetings that the minister has had to find out how the investigation is going, as well as working on rehabilitation where possible, has it not come up to say, 'When were we last there before September when everyone knew that there was a problem? When were we last there?' Has that come up?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** That has come up on a number of occasions and we have talked about it. I know that there has been a regular regulatory monitoring and inspection regime in place, as you would expect for any high-level mining site—as this is—particularly in the metropolitan area, operating in what has become an increasingly fragile environment over the lifetime of the salt mining, whether historically or in most recent times. We can be very confident that, as Mr Circelli said, and as I reiterated, there was a regular regime of inspections, whether that was being undertaken by the Department for Environment, the Department for Energy and Mining or the EPA. Quite frankly, we are now into an historic era beyond the assessment period which would be appropriate for these estimates.

**Mr McBRIDE:** I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 168. Will the minister outline for the committee how the Marshall Liberal government is ensuring that the major employer in Port Pirie, Nyrstar, is controlling and minimising its impact on the environment and local residents?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I thank the member for MacKillop for his interest in the work of the Environment Protection Authority and particularly around the work the authority takes to ensure that very major South Australian employer, Nyrstar, a critically significant employer in the Spencer Gulf region and the City of Port Pirie, is managed and that its environmental impacts are controlled,

ensuring that it minimises its impact on both the natural environment but also on the health, wellbeing and amenity of the local community and the residents who live in those areas.

On 1 July 2020, the Environment Protection Authority significantly strengthened Nyrstar's lead and air targets and included new conditions which, for the first time, focused on waste receipt and disposal as well as the reprocessing which occurs at the Port Pirie facility. I had the pleasure of touring the Nyrstar Port Pirie facility just last month with the Hon. Dan van Holst Pellekaan, the South Australian Minister for Energy and Mining, and witnessed firsthand the way that the plant operates.

The staff gave us a comprehensive presentation, detailing their environmental management targets which I have no doubt will continue to make a difference. It was very interesting to talk to the Trafigura team and how they are not only working hard to improve the environmental and health status in the Spencer Gulf region but also their international operations.

I think they gave the stat that they were seeking to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions across their international holdings by 50 per cent in just one calendar year, the current calendar year. I was quite taken aback by that level of ambition and I think that should give us heart that we have an operator that is professional and ambitious in terms of its environmental management, notwithstanding, of course, that it operates in a fairly tricky environment.

To be able to go up to the Nyrstar Port Pirie facility and witness firsthand the way they operate and to put on the PPE and go in and around the plant certainly gave me a greater understanding of the challenges faced but also the positive work that is in place. Given the strengthened targets Nyrstar has been required to comply with under their renewed EPA licence since 1 July 2020, the EPA renewed its licence again on 30 June 2021 for one year with no further changes made.

The EPA continues to ensure that Nyrstar focuses on effectively controlling its operations and does everything reasonable and practicable to minimise emissions. In the event that Nyrstar does not meet its licence conditions, a summary report is provided to the EPA detailing the measured lead and air over the averaging period, any identified reasons for the exceedence and any remedial action to be implemented to eliminate future occurrences of the target being exceeded.

As well as lead and air targets, Nyrstar is required to manage dust from the site. The Environment Protection Authority continues to focus on ensuring continuous environmental improvement at the Port Pirie smelter, and through its regulation a number of actions were undertaken throughout 2020 to address dust. These included the installation of real-time dust monitoring systems both on site and off site linked to trigger action response plans to reduce dust, as well as significant investment in road sealing, road sweeping and a program of upgrades and modifications to existing components of the plant. During my visit, it was good to be able to see those firsthand.

The approved environmental improvement program demonstrates Nyrstar's continued investment in actions which target the reduction of site emissions. The environment improvement program actions are progressing, with many environmental improvement actions completed to date which have focused on emissions, controls, including wastewater and area, and dust management targeting lead.

**The CHAIR:** With that answer the time allocated for examination of payments in relation to the portfolio of the Environment Protection Authority has expired; therefore, there are no further questions and I declare the examination of the portfolio Environment Protection Authority complete. Minister, I will give you a minute or so to facilitate a change in advisers as we shift to Green Industries.

#### **Departmental Advisers:**

Dr I. Overton, Chief Executive, Green Industries South Australia.

Mr J. Wheeler, Acting Director of Business, Green Industries South Australia.



**The CHAIR:** We move to the next session, which will run from 11.15 to 11.45 today and will examine proposed payments in relation to the portfolio of Green Industries South Australia. The minister appearing is the Minister for Environment and Water. I advise that the estimates of payments for the Department for Environment and Water and Administered Items for the Department for Environment and Water remain open for examination. I call on the minister to make an opening statement in regard to this portfolio, should he wish, and to introduce his advisers.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I would like to make an opening statement and to introduce departmental officers assisting me here today. I am joined by Dr Ian Overton, the Chief Executive Officer of Green Industries South Australia. Ian has recently taken over that role after the 17-year leadership of Vaughan Levitzke. It is great to have Ian on board. I am also joined by Josh Wheeler, the Acting Director of Business in the Green Industries team.

Green Industries SA's objectives are to promote waste management practices that, as far as possible, eliminate waste or its consignment to landfill and to promote innovation and business activity in the waste management, resource recovery and green industry sectors, recognising that these areas present a valuable opportunity to contribute to the state's economic growth, its environmental health and its community wellbeing.

In 2020-21, Green Industries SA continued to drive change and develop the circular economy in South Australia, delivering on programs that have economic, environmental, climate change and social benefits for the state. In 2020-21, the government entered a national partnership agreement with the commonwealth government to coinvest in South Australian resource recovery infrastructure projects that build our capacity to recycle and reprocess materials that are subject to national export bans.

Under the agreement, the state government leveraged \$18.96 million from the commonwealth government's Recycling Modernisation Fund, which resulted in joint grant funding of \$36.2 million over 2020-21 to 2023-24. Eight projects were awarded funding totalling \$35.3 million in May 2021, generating total investment of \$111 million. The creation of an estimated 500 jobs, 142 of which are direct jobs with a total processing capacity of 205,000 tonnes of material per annum, represents the single biggest investment, probably in history, in South Australia's resource recovery and circular economy sector and really sets us up for immense success into the future, continuing that national leadership.

Talking of national leadership, in 2020-21 the government's nation-leading single-use plastic products legislation passed the South Australian parliament and was enacted on 1 March 2021. This landmark legislation has banned single-use plastic drinking straws—subject to exemptions for disability or medical needs—cutlery and drink stirrers with expanded polystyrene food service items and oxo-degradable plastic products to be banned from 1 March 2022.

Other jurisdictions are following our lead and seeking advice from Green Industries as they take their own action to deal with the problem of single-use plastics. We will be maintaining our leadership position with the next tranche of products to be considered for phase-out through the release of a discussion paper later this year.

In 2020-21, Green Industries SA completed the clean-up of waste and debris generated by the 2019-20 summer bushfires in the Adelaide Hills, Kangaroo Island, Yorke Peninsula and in the South-East of our state. There was \$5.2 million spent on clean-up activity and this brought the total spend to \$21.6 million, including a contribution of \$7.6 million from the commonwealth. More than 550 properties were cleaned up, including 243 damaged or destroyed houses as well as 604 kilometres of fire-affected dangerous trees along road verges. More than 50,000 tonnes of material was managed through the clean-up process and recovered for recycling and re-use wherever possible.

Green Industries provided a further \$20.2 million in funding to support waste management, resource recovery and circular economy development in South Australia in 2020-21. This included investment in infrastructure and technological innovation, assisting businesses with resource efficiencies and market development, householder recycling education and the modernisation of collection, sorting and processing services. Combined with climate change initiatives, importantly

funded from the Green Industry Fund, this has reduced the balance of the fund from \$120.35 million in 2017-18 to \$87.67 million in 2020-21, and is projected to be \$53.66 million in 2021-22.

I look forward to building on these achievements with Green Industries SA in the following financial year. We will continue to lead the nation in the development of the circular economy, take further action on single-use plastic products and deliver business sustainability and infrastructure programs that will improve the capacity, resilience and advantage of our resource recovery and remanufacturing sector and other industry sectors. These initiatives will create a more prosperous South Australia through economic growth, job creation and improving the resilience of our natural environment.

#### **Membership:**

Mr Odenwalder substituted for Mr Szakacs.

**The CHAIR:** Lead speaker for the opposition, did you wish to make an opening statement?

**Dr CLOSE:** I thank the public servants for their preparation and for their attendance.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Port Adelaide.

**Dr CLOSE:** If we turn to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 176, the performance indicator that refers to the waste to landfill. How many tonnes of waste were sent to landfill in 2020-21?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Was that page 186?

**Dr CLOSE:** Yes.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** And the question was how—

**Dr CLOSE:** How many tonnes of waste were sent to landfill? I can see an increase, but I do not know the total.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** It says 4,000 tonnes increase. It says it on this page in the table (the only thing that is actually on that page). It says that for waste to landfill the increase was 4,000 tonnes, which was a very marginal increase. The figure you are after, deputy leader, is the total figure. Waste to landfill is 0.83 million tonnes, so 830,000 tonnes would be right.

**Dr CLOSE:** Do you have an estimate of how much of this waste could have been diverted into resource recovery streams?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The big area here is food waste. That is a massive focus for the state government. It is becoming an increasing focus, I hope, across the nation as well. We believe the increase this past year, I should say by way of introduction, was because of the unpredictability of 2020-21 caused by the impact of the coronavirus virus global pandemic and the changed ways that people moved about during that time.

Increased working from home led to more people potentially eating from home, tidying out not only their sock drawers, as suggested by Dr Nicola Spurrier, but also lots of other things and sending things to landfill, particularly things that possibly would be harder to place into the recycling bin—more random goods and the like as people tidied out wardrobes, drawers, garden sheds and things like that. It is hard to ever get a grasp on exactly the motivations and behaviour change indicators behind this marginal increase, but we do believe that the pandemic had a fairly direct result on that.

The area where we could see the greatest stepped change in reduction of waste to landfill is in green organics and food organics waste. We know that there is somewhere around 40 per cent of all waste that is in the putrescible bin. That is the red bin in most parts of metropolitan Adelaide and regional South Australia, or the blue bin in a couple of councils, making our communications campaigns tricky. It would be nice if they were all red, but they are not. About 40 per cent of that is food waste and that has to become, and has become, a real focus for the government and the board of Green Industries.

In fact, the food waste strategy was a major body of work undertaken in the most recent financial year to try to not only lift the knowledge and understanding of what to do with your particular waste but to let people know that green waste and food waste in particular can and should go in the green bin and, importantly, to support local councils through the kitchen caddy process to get those kitchen caddies and compostable bags into households, which should prompt them increasingly to do the right thing.

It is 40 per cent or thereabouts. It changes depending on the council area, because some councils have had a more historic focus on this than others, but about 40 per cent of waste in that putrescible bin can certainly be diverted from landfill, and that is the big focus for the government going forward.

**Dr CLOSE:** Obviously, the household waste is not the only source of waste to landfill, and the budget papers refer to a significant amount in the construction industry. Is there an estimate of how much of the non-household waste in the last year—which was, after all, 4,000 tonnes more than had been forecast—could have been in a resource recovery stream?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Construction waste historically is the category of our waste management that sees the highest levels of diversion, and I think it sits between 80 and 90 per cent of diversion of construction waste to landfill. Part of that is driven because construction companies—builders and tradies—want to lower, wherever possible, the amount of levy they are paying at the gate to landfill, so potentially go a bit above and beyond to sort things out. Construction waste also tends to have less variety in the items, so there is a greater level of knowledge and understanding amongst those dealing with construction waste on a day-to-day basis and in a professional sense to sort things and send them to the right places.

It might be just over 10 per cent of construction waste not going through the recycling process, but I am heartened to say that that is the area where we do strongest. We continue to look for opportunities to develop the market around using recycled content to ensure potential further pathways for that additional 10 per cent, although some of it may be very contaminated, but trying to find other products and invest in innovation so that we can get a true level of circularity, notwithstanding that some of that last 10 per cent will of course be asbestos, contaminated items or things that are just too dangerous to go through the recycling and re-use processes.

**Dr CLOSE:** Not quite consistent with the budget papers, but we will move on. How much was spent in 2019-20 and 2020-21 on education programs to reduce waste going to landfill, because we have seen a dramatic turnaround in the amount of waste going to landfill, so something has gone wrong. How much money has been spent on better educating both industry and households?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Which budget paper was this?

**Dr CLOSE:** Still in the same question—we have gone from a 13,000-tonne reduction in 2019-20 to a target of a 37,000-tonne reduction in 2020-21, yet there has been a 4,000-tonne increase. I am wanting to understand what effort was put into education programs over that period to help reduce waste going to landfill.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I think it is wrong to characterise that something has gone terribly wrong. In terms of our strategy, what went wrong was a global pandemic. That has thrown all parts of our society, from health care to transport to economic development, into a sense of chaos, and the waste industry was not immune from that at all.

There has obviously also been, in more recent times, a bit of an increase in stimulus activity with our record infrastructure spend generating a bit more construction waste as well, which notwithstanding we do well there, potentially increases some of the tonnage being developed. I do not believe anything has gone wrong here, aside from the fact that COVID-19 arrived on our planet.

When it comes to our education, we have a fairly thorough education strategy, and we have been working very hard to try to get consistency across different local government areas and different environmental organisations, to really try to home in on the type of branding and messaging we are using. That has for the last couple of years centred around the Which Bin branding. Many of us would have seen Which Bin? Vin—short for Vincent, Vinnie or Vincenzo—the actor we have on TV ads,

bus shelters, magnetic calendars, on people's fridges and on our GISA website, providing that household recycling education campaign and program.

In the immediate past financial year \$271,418 was spent on the household recycling education program, including \$125,308 on the Which Bin advertising campaign. An amount of \$1.19 million is budgeted for the household recycling education program in the 2021-22 financial year, so it is an area we are continuing to ramp up, getting that consistent message out there. We have the website up and running, which people can go to and put in their questions around what goes in what bin. We have got the TV campaigns. We have the social media ads and so on.

This is a statewide strategy to educate householders in the correct recycling practices to reduce contamination in kerbside-collected bins and improve the quality of recyclable materials collected for recycling. It includes, as mentioned, the Which Bin advertising campaign and branded educational resources for use by local councils across the state. We have been impressed by the uptake there.

Green Industries SA has developed supporting resources with local government, using the Which Bin brand to support their household recycling education programs, such as waste collection calendars, bin stickers, signage, posters and customisable social media assets for environmental organisations and, of course, councils. The government has also financially supported councils trialling weekly organics bin collections and kitchen caddy rollouts in partnership with Green Industries to help them adopt the Which Bin brand.

It has been really interesting to see the councils grab hold of that opportunity, particularly around food waste, and attempt to do deep engagement to lift the knowledge and understanding of their residents and really drive those food waste measures. I think most successfully I have seen it in the City of Holdfast Bay. I want to pay special mention to the waste management officer there, Shani Wood, a former winner of the Women in Circular Economy Leadership Award. She has driven such a strong level of engagement in trial communities in Somerton Park, Seacliff, Kingston Park and North Brighton to get people on board and doing the right thing.

I think what we have learnt from this has been that you need a very high level of community engagement. You need to get alongside communities where there are particular challenges. We know that multicultural communities pose particular challenges. I might ask Dr Ian Overton if he wants to provide a bit of further clarity on our approach to education.

**Dr OVERTON:** Thank you, minister. I would just also like to mention the Replace the Waste campaign, which we have spent \$367,000 on to simplify that process for the community to adopt the single use plastic items measures. This is to support businesses around alternative options and also the community in terms of behaviour in asking for straws and the disability exemptions as well.

**Dr CLOSE:** When the government decided to increase the waste levy back in 2018, one of the arguments in favour that was used is that there are more jobs in resource recovery than there are in landfill, which makes sense. Given that we have seen, now, an increase in waste going to landfill rather than having resource recovery, is there any estimate of how many jobs could have been created and were not because of the increase in waste to landfill rather than resource recovery in the last year?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I do not think that level of analysis has been done. We are quite clearly, as I have mentioned, looking at 2020, as many industries are, as an outlier year with particular challenges caused by the pandemic, where people's behavioural patterns and approaches to life in general have taken a very different turn from what would ever have been predicted at all.

The increase in waste produced is incredibly marginal. It is a tiny figure and in fact it is a much better result than we had feared at some points, partly because of the great leadership and management we have seen in South Australia to limit that pandemic and get back to normal far quicker. You see it even in the smallest aspects of life, where cafes and restaurants moved to takeaway cups for that period, and we have seen that move back again during the lockdown among some cafes and restaurants.

We have to support them and provide them with advice that they do not necessarily need to do that, understanding that some people do fear—and rightly so—infection and want to take as many

precautions as possible. You see it in the smallest of ways, with some of the lighter items like takeaway cups. You see it with green organics, with more people cooking at home and tidying out their pantry, doing their garden. You see it potentially with commercial waste, with more stimulus in the construction sector.

For there only to be 4,000 tonnes of waste generated outside the resource recovery process during a global pandemic is remarkable, in my view, and really does show the resilience and the leadership that we have become so well-known for across the world in South Australia, both in terms of dealing with COVID-19 but also, importantly, with regard to resource recovery and the circular economy.

**Mr MURRAY:** Budget paper 4, Volume 2, page 185, provides the detail for my question. I ask the minister whether he can outline for the committee how the Marshall Liberal government has invested in our recycling sector and what the benefits of a strong circular economy are?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Thank you, member for Davenport. There is no doubt, and I referenced this in my opening statement, that we have witnessed the biggest ever investment in South Australia's recycling industry in recent months, with eight new projects worth \$111 million being initiated through a third/third/third funding split between the state government, federal government and private entities, investing to build and modernise key infrastructure across South Australia so that we are able to respond to those international waste bans that the Prime Minister initiated and needed then to provide support to states to get infrastructure up to speed across the country in order to deal with that.

I guess from South Australia's point of view, the opportunity has been maybe a little different than in other states because in South Australia, in many ways, we had our house in order. We have that historic leadership dating back to container deposit legislation in 1977, which changed the way South Australians think in this space. As a consequence, we have the opportunity to turbocharge our innovation, our entrepreneurialism and our response to not only deal with waste in South Australia but to actually put up our hand and be a leader in the nation and potentially create jobs here by taking waste from other parts of the nation as well—something we should never be frightened of.

Waste is no longer waste. Waste is a resource and is a driver of the circular economy and if we can get that from other jurisdictions, all the better because it means that jobs are being created here in South Australia. The Recycling Modernisation Fund was the mechanism to get this money out there into these leading projects. Some of these projects are just fantastic in terms of their innovation and what they would do differently.

There was \$7,920,000 for the Northern Adelaide Waste Management Authority to process more than 40,000 tonnes of fibre a year from paper and cardboard through investment in a polishing plant. There was \$8 million for Orora Group to recycle and produce high-quality glass containers like wine bottles. They are so important in South Australia, with our state carrying the majority of wine production in the nation.

There was \$1,222,000 for Advanced Plastic Recycling to recycle common waste plastic into products which are durable, such as long-life decking, bollards and outdoor furniture. There was \$8,888,000 for Recycling Plastics Australia to maximise mixed plastic sorting, grinding, washing and pelletising. There are other projects that I could refer to, including money for the Southern Region Waste Resource Authority, funding for the Central Adelaide Waste and Recycling Authority and funding for ResourceCo and Tyrecycle.

Hundreds of jobs will be created as a result of these projects and this really builds on the \$12.4 million that we had invested since 2018 as a government in responding to and building resilience into our waste management and resource recovery sector following what became known as the China Sword crisis. We are getting our house in order, if it is not already, and I would like to say it is, across governments of all political persuasions over the last few decades. We are creating jobs and we are setting our state up for success as a national and international leader.

**The CHAIR:** With that answer the time allocated for examination of payments in relation to the portfolio of Green Industries SA has expired; therefore, there are no further questions and I declare the examination of the portfolio of Green Industries SA complete.

*Sitting suspended from 11:46 to 12:45.*

**Departmental Advisers:**

Mr J. Schutz, Chief Executive, Department for Environment and Water.

Mr S. O'Brien, Chief Financial Officer, Department for Environment and Water.

Mr B. Bruce, Executive Director, Water and River Murray, Department for Environment and Water.

Ms S. Carruthers, Executive Director, Strategy, Science and Corporate Services, Department for Environment and Water.

Ms C. Hart, Executive Director, Environment, Heritage and Sustainability, Department for Environment and Water.

**The CHAIR:** Estimates Committee B continues this afternoon. Our final session in regard to this department will run from 12.45pm to 3pm. The portfolio to be examined is the Department for Environment and Water. The minister appearing is the Minister for Environment and Water. I advise that the proposed payments remain open for examination. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Yes, I would. Firstly, I would like to take the opportunity to introduce the departmental officers who are attending with me today. To my immediate left is Mr John Schutz, the Chief Executive Officer of the Department for Environment and Water. Behind me are Mr Shaun O'Brien, the Chief Financial Officer of the department; Mr Ben Bruce, the Executive Director, Water and River Murray; Ms Cate Hart, Executive Director, Environment, Heritage and Sustainability; and Ms Sandy Carruthers, the Executive Director of Strategy, Science and Corporate Services.

I would like to thank the team here with me today, as well as the staff from the Department for Environment and Water who have put significant time and effort into preparing the budget, as well as the briefings used for estimates. This is no small task, and I commend the agency on their hard work, energy, passion and dedication towards both the budget process and these estimates, and obviously their day-to-day work as well.

The Department for Environment and Water plays a critical role in delivering South Australia's future environmental, social and economic prosperity. The department delivers practical outcomes for the state's natural places, ecosystems and wildlife. It ensures that we have secure water for the future and that people can access and enjoy our national parks, our botanic gardens, our diverse coastline and our incredibly valuable heritage places, which add such immense depth to the character of our state.

The department also drives the across-agency delivery of the South Australian government's Climate Change Action Plan 2021-25 to help build a strong climate-smart economy, further reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support South Australia to adapt to an inevitably changing climate. The 2021-22 state budget continues to invest record amounts in South Australia's environment to improve conservation outcomes, boost nature-based tourism and create jobs across South Australia.

The budget delivers new funding for the Greener Neighbourhoods program to plant tens of thousands of trees across South Australia to reduce metropolitan temperatures, increase air quality, create habitat and improve the amenity of communities, enhancing livability. We know that our green communities, our Parklands, our tree-lined streets and the parks within our suburban and urban centres contribute towards that immense livability that South Australia has recently been recognised for.

There is also significant funding for heritage conservation to restore and reinvigorate historical properties across the state, including one of South Australia's most well-known buildings, Ayers House on North Terrace in Adelaide's CBD. The hugely successful Heritage Grants Program, axed by the former Labor government and brought back by this government, will now be extended, helping to unlock conservation work and stimulate economic activity. These new funding initiatives

form part of a record investment of over \$430 million of new initiatives that the Marshall Liberal government is already delivering for the environment. This is made up of, not limited to but including:

- \$177.5 million across the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium;
- \$29.5 million to open and activate South Australia's reservoirs;
- \$128.5 million towards water and the River Murray;
- \$65.8 million on coastal protection initiatives;
- \$10.3 million to support heritage conservation; and
- \$20.8 million towards practical programs to tackle climate change.

The budget includes a number of headline projects that are being furthered alongside the historic level of investment that was provided in the budget that was handed down in the previous financial year. One of these headline initiatives is the provision of \$6.6 million in the 2021-22 financial year for the restoration and revitalisation of Ayers House on North Terrace, positioning it as an iconic heritage building, a tourist destination, an events space and the home of the History Trust of South Australia, giving this immensely important building the love, care and value that it so richly deserves.

Works will include bringing Ayers House up to an acceptable standard with regard to disability compliance, optimising building access for the whole community and enabling visitors to participate in future events and experiences, as well as restoration works to secure the heritage value of this building into the future.

Our Heritage Grants Program has been expanded. This initiative provides \$500,000 per annum over three years from 2021-22 for the continuation of the Heritage Grants Program which, as I said earlier, was reinstated when we came to government in 2018. This program provides small grants to owners of heritage-listed properties seeking to preserve and protect their assets or to facilitate the activation and the use of state heritage places as part of the Heritage Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, which I had the pleasure of launching a few weeks ago. The Heritage Grants Program covers up to 50 per cent of the project costs and will leverage funding to generate an estimated \$9 million worth of conservation works over the three-year period. That is an exceptional rate of return on the government's investment.

The Greener Neighbourhoods program has also been expanded in the 2021-22 budget. This initiative provides \$1 million in the current financial year, bringing the total program, which already had \$500,000, to \$1.5 million for this year. It then continues providing an additional \$1.5 million per annum from 2022-23 to 2024-25, expanding the scope of the Greener Neighbourhoods program, enabling regional cities with a population of over 10,000 people to apply to be part of the program and ensuring that more and more people will benefit from more trees in the ground, growing in our streets, in our parks, in our neighbourhoods, creating amenity and habitat while also cooling communities in the face of a changing climate.

In conclusion, this provides a short synopsis of a strong and practical budget for the Department for Environment and Water. I would once again like to express my appreciation for all the staff within the department who have worked in preparing information for the estimates process over the past few weeks.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Port Adelaide, did you wish to make an opening statement?

**Dr CLOSE:** Only to thank the public servants for their preparation and attendance.

**The CHAIR:** Very good. With that out of the way, we move to questions.

**Dr CLOSE:** I am going to start at the beginning at Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 130, referring to the ministerial responsibilities, and also page 131, ministerial office resources. Has the minister ever breached the Ministerial Code of Conduct?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Not that I am aware.

**Dr CLOSE:** Bearing in mind that the Ministerial Code of Conduct requires the minister to ensure his personal conduct is consistent with the dignity, reputation and integrity of parliament, can the minister inform the committee how many times he has raised his voice to members of the public in discussion about government policy?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I would say that would be a very unusual circumstance, and I cannot recall any times.

**Dr CLOSE:** Has the minister ever sworn at a member of public, including a member of a community organisation, during his term in office?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** No.

**Dr CLOSE:** Has the minister sworn at a member of a community organisation when discussing a government decision on heritage, water allocation, marine sanctuaries, developments in national parks, the death of the mangroves or any other contentious government policy or decision?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Not that I can recall. It is not my style whatsoever.

**Dr CLOSE:** How many complaints has the minister or the department received about his personal behaviour?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** None that I am aware of.

**Dr CLOSE:** Other than the one from the woman from KI. Have there been any complaints about the minister's conduct by ministerial staff?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Not that I am aware.

**Dr CLOSE:** How many times has the minister texted or otherwise communicated with a member of the public after a heated discussion to say that he has been grumpy and frustrated in that discussion and offering to sit down with the member of public?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The deputy leader would be aware that I had a robust conversation with a member of the community from Kangaroo Island, which was discussed at the last estimates, when I felt that that member had defamed me. I had a conversation with that person, which was respectful but robust. I texted that person afterwards to say that I was sorry for—I cannot recall the exact words—my tone and offering to speak to that person in more detail, I believe.

**Dr CLOSE:** Has the minister denied any organisation, group or council access to any national park for an event?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** No, not that I am aware of.

**Dr CLOSE:** Bearing in mind—

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Actually, yes, there was a circumstance where the City of Marion wanted to undertake a sod-turning ceremony, but the licence had not been appropriately executed prior to that and there was some concern about doing that event. This was in part of Glenthorne National Park with Marion council. It was decided instead that that should be held on an adjacent piece of council land.

**Dr CLOSE:** Could the minister give some more detail about what was not complete in that application?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The council had not executed its licence agreement with the state government and wanted to make an announcement before that licence agreement was finalised. I felt it would be quite inappropriate to allow that to go ahead until the benefits for the community and particularly what we call the 'conservation dividend'—when development or activity takes place in a national park—prior to that being finalised.

I felt it would be inappropriate to allow the council to undertake that sod-turning ceremony so as not to create an unreasonable expectation in the council and in the community that that project was signed, sealed and delivered. I think it is important that those licence agreements are appropriately nussed out prior to being publicly announced. The council went ahead with that, which



I thought was relatively disappointing, but we then were able to work through and get what I would deem a really good conservation dividend and social and environmental outcome for the community.

**Dr CLOSE:** Bearing in mind that the Ministerial Code of Conduct requires the minister to not wantonly and recklessly attack the reputation of any other person, has the minister ever criticised a Liberal colleague to a member of the public in a way that impugns their reputation?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Definitely not.

**Dr CLOSE:** What reflections did the minister make on the performance of the former chair of the Native Vegetation Council at the first meeting of the newly constituted council?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I outlined that I was disappointed with the leadership of the Native Vegetation Council. I felt that there was a key body of work that we should have done around engagement to bring people along on the journey of native vegetation management, which can be quite challenging. I felt that had been missed by the previous Native Vegetation Council.

The native vegetation chair was not continued in that role, which I thought was unfortunate, because I had known this person for quite some time, but I made a decision that there had to be a change of direction. As minister, I had to make it very clear to the incoming Native Vegetation Council that there is a high level of community complexity around native vegetation clearance and there has to be a significant level of engagement and education there, which I had been disappointed had not been advanced under the previous leadership of that council.

As I said, that was disappointing. I had known that chair and knew that chair's real strengths. I had known that person for more than a decade, but we made a decision to change the leadership. I explained that decision and explained where I thought the challenges were there, but did so in what I would deem a respectful way, but I did have to explain what I thought was the downside or gaps in that approach.

**Dr CLOSE:** When the minister was involved in the decision to not allow Marion council to have a sod-turning ceremony in Glenthorne National Park, how did the council respond to that decision?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The council went ahead with it on an adjacent piece of land. There is a council depot there nearby and they went ahead with that, which was disappointing because there had been a real collaborative approach. In fact, our partnership with the City of Marion is quite significant and successful in the Glenthorne precinct and there is a lot of good work happening there, but it was really disappointing that we were not able to get that agreement and tighten up that licence immediately prior to the council making the decision to go ahead with the sod-turning ceremony, or launch. I am not sure if it was a practical ceremony, but it is what it is and we were able to work it out and in the 10 days to two weeks afterwards get a good agreement struck and go on from there.

**Dr CLOSE:** What would have happened if they had decided to go ahead and have the sod-turning on the Glenthorne park site?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I do not know really. Where they were doing this work was not in an open part of the park, so it is not a part of the park where there is recreational activity. It is on the corner of Adams Road and Majors Road, so they would have accessed a strange part of the park, and it would have been inappropriate for them to do so and hold a public event there, marking a partnership project when the partnership had not been signed, sealed and delivered.

**Dr CLOSE:** Did you convey to the council that you would forcibly evict them, that they would be charged with trespassing?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** No. I do not recall exactly what I said. I had conversations with the chief executive where I said that I would not be attending, and that it was really disappointing. There was no talk about being evicted or anything like that, but I think it was probably made clear that it would not be a good idea to go ahead with that on the land when the council had a portion of land nearby.

**Dr CLOSE:** Is it the minister's practice to engage in those discussions rather than that being taken care of through the Public Service?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Usually the Public Service would take the lead on that, and there was a combination of public servants involved in this. At the end of the day, the buck stops with the minister; sometimes ministers have to have these conversations. What is a minister for if not to nut out those challenging discussions?

My job is to ensure I get the best outcome for the environment and the community. We had not got that agreement around the conservation and the social dividend, which is an absolutely fundamental part of enabling people to have access to undertake what could be perceived as development—and there was some native vegetation clearance involved with this project.

It was my view that we had to get this right, otherwise the community would be very disappointed, and I communicated to the council that we needed to get this licence agreement appropriately struck prior to the project going ahead. Now, we got there a couple of weeks later. That project is now going ahead, but also we have been able to have the council make an appropriate contribution to the ongoing environmental sustainability of that site, which had not been landed before, and also to provide a community toilet, which was lacking from that precinct as well.

So I think it is a win-win for the community. I really do think that is the role of a minister: when things are not progressing to actually get involved and say, 'No, we need to work through this. We need to land a deal here.' Yes, it might take another couple of weeks, but that is what has to happen. If I had gone to the sod-turning ceremony, and if it had occurred on national parks land, at the end of the day that would have been relinquishing a substantial part of our leverage in the negotiating process and resulted in a poor outcome.

**Dr CLOSE:** Have there been any conversations that the minister has conducted with non-government organisations that get government grants from the minister's portfolio—any robust discussions—that have involved suggesting that that funding would not be forthcoming?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** No, definitely not.

**The Hon. Z.L. BETTISON:** I will do the omnibus questions.

**The CHAIR:** Sure. Fire away.

**The Hon. Z.L. BETTISON:** Thank you. They are as follows:

1. For each department and agency reporting to the minister:
  - What is the actual FTE count at 30 June 2021 and the projected actual FTE count for each year of the forward estimates;
  - What is the total employment cost for each year of the forward estimates;
  - What is the notional FTE job reduction target that has been agreed with Treasury for each year of the forward estimates;
  - Does the agency or department expect to meet the target in each year of the forward estimates; and
  - How many TVSPs are estimated to be required to meet FTE reductions over the forward estimates?
2. For each department and agency reporting to the minister:
  - How much is budgeted to be spent on goods and services for 2021-22, and for each of the years of the forward estimates period;
  - The top 10 providers of goods and services by value to each agency reporting to the minister for 2020-21;
  - A description of the goods and/or services provided by each of these top 10 providers, and the cost to the agency for these goods and/or services; and
  - The value of the goods and services that was supplied to the agency by South Australian suppliers?

3. Between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021, will the minister list the job title and total employment cost of each position with a total estimated cost of \$100,000 or more which has (1) been abolished and (2) which has been created?

4. Will the minister provide a detailed breakdown of expenditure on consultants and contractors above \$10,000 between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021 for all departments and agencies reporting to the minister, listing:

- the name of the consultant, contractor or service supplier;
- cost;
- work undertaken;
- reason for engaging the contractor; and
- method of appointment?

5. For each department and agency for which the minister has responsibility:

- How many FTEs were employed to provide communication and promotion activities in 2020-21 and what was their employment expense;
- How many FTEs are budgeted to provide communication and promotion activities in 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25 and what is their estimated employment expense; and
- The total cost of government-paid advertising, including campaigns, across all mediums in 2020-21 and budgeted cost for 2021-22?

6. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, please provide a full itemised breakdown of attraction and retention allowances as well as non-salary benefits paid to public servants and contractors between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021.

7. What is the title and total employment cost of each individual staff member in the minister's office as at 30 June 2021, including all departmental employees seconded to ministerial offices?

8. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, could you detail:

- How much was spent on targeted voluntary separation packages in 2020-21;
- What department funded these TVSPs;
- What number of TVSPs were funded;
- What is the budget for targeted voluntary separation packages for financial years included in the forward estimates (by year), and how are these packages funded; and
- What is the breakdown per agency/branch of targeted voluntary separation packages for financial years included in the forward estimates (by year) by FTEs?

9. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, how many executive terminations have occurred since 1 July 2020 and what is the value of executive termination payments made?

10. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, what new executive appointments have been made since 1 July 2020, what is the annual salary and total employment cost for each position?

11. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, how many employees have been declared excess, how long has each employee been declared excess and what is the salary of each excess employee since 1 July 2020?

12. In the 2020-21 financial year, for all departments and agencies reporting to the minister, what underspending on operating programs (1) was and (2) was not approved by cabinet for carryover expenditure in 2021-22?

13. In the 2020-21 financial year, for all departments and agencies reporting to the minister, what underspending on investing or capital projects or programs (1) was and (2) was not approved by cabinet for carryover expenditure in 2021-22? How was much sought and how much was approved?

14. For each grant program or fund the minister is responsible for please provide the following information for 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years:

- Name of the program or fund;
- The purpose of the program or fund;
- Balance of the grant program or fund;
- Budgeted (or actual) expenditure from the program or fund;
- Budgeted (or actual) payments into the program or fund;
- Carryovers into or from the program or fund; and
- Details, including the value and beneficiary, of any commitments already made to be funded from the program or fund.

15. For the period of 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, provide a breakdown of all grants paid by the department/agency that report to the minister, including when the payment was made to the recipient and when the grant agreement was signed by both parties.

16. For each year of the forward estimates, please provide the name and budgeted expenditure across the 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years for each individual investing expenditure project administered by or on behalf of all departments and agencies reporting to the minister.

17. For each year of the forward estimates, please provide the name and budget for each individual program administered by or on behalf of all departments and agencies reporting to the minister.

18. For each department and agency reporting to the minister:

- What savings targets have been set for each year of the forward estimates;
- What measures are you implementing to meet your savings target; and
- What is the estimated FTE impact of these measures?

19. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, what initiatives or programs have been approved and funded as at 1 July 2021 but not publicly announced or disclosed in the budget papers?

**Dr CLOSE:** Still on page 131, but with the FTEs for the department. You budgeted for 1,131 FTEs this year, which is down from 1,195 last year. What program reductions does this reduction reflect?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The answer to this question is that there is not any significant change in staffing in terms of the day-to-day business of the agency. Priorities change and some programs conclude and that is particularly in relation, in the forecast, to the reduction in FTEs in the forthcoming financial year as a consequence of the conclusion of some of those big River Murray infrastructure projects that are being constructed in the Riverland flood plain, with the South Australian Riverland Floodplain Integrated Infrastructure Program (SARFIIP) and the Water Management Solutions program. These are expected to be concluded, so in the forthcoming financial year that will see some of the FTEs associated with those major projects wind up.

There has also been a change in the way the department is structured. As a consequence of the NRM boards moving out of the department to become the decentralised regional landscape boards, that has seen staff leave the DEW books, so to speak, and move out into the regions where they are still obviously continuing to work in the environmental arena but not necessarily in the Department for Environment and Water in the traditional sense. I will ask the chief executive, John Schutz, if he wants to provide any further clarity with regard to that.

**Mr SCHUTZ:** As a result of the government's reform of NRM over the period 2020-21, there were two tranches of employees transferred from the department to the eight newly formed regional landscape boards. On 1 January 2020, 270 employees transferred in the first tranche and, on 12 April 2021, 38 employees transferred in tranche two, making a combined total of 308 employees representing 280 FTEs.

**Dr CLOSE:** If we turn to page 135, the National Parks and Wildlife program, marine parks have been in a holding pattern for some time with an amendment to the management plans to reduce sanctuary zones and to create one or two, but the effect of the cuts has been suspended through regulations to stop commercial fishing in what were sanctuary zones. What is the hold-up in settling this?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I think we have to get this right. The deputy leader would be very cognisant of the fact that marine parks are complex. There is a lot of angst in the community about their existence and the scope of marine parks. If we can get a deal, so to speak—I am not sure 'deal' is the right word, but if we can reach an agreement where conservationists and people involved in the fishing industry are able to get much closer to one another in terms of their views on marine parks, that can only be a good thing.

There was a package of reforms that was developed or proposed reforms developed by the government during our days in opposition, and that was taken to the election. Obviously, there was a change of government and I, as minister, looked at moving forward with those. I quickly realised there were some parts that I did not feel comfortable winding back. I think Pearson Island was one, and there were another couple. I went through a process of talking in great depth with the conservationists and the fishers in trying to establish a position, a landing, where people got much closer. They did, and I think that was very heartening.

**Dr CLOSE:** They have an agreement. They have an agreement now.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** There was then a period when the Hon. Connie Bonaros in the other place—not really the other place; this place, I suppose—had decided to see if she could get them to bridge that final little gap. That has gone through in recent months. I think Connie's process took up to nine months of meetings. I was involved in some conversations along the way. We had people from the Conservation Council, the Wilderness Society and The Pew Charitable Trusts coming together with the various bodies that represent fishers, and they have got them closer than they have ever been before.

In fact, I think you could almost say agreement has been struck. However, it is complicated. There are financial elements on the table here. It involves a consultation process that has to be gone through, a legislated consultation process, and that takes some time. We have to understand the level of comfort the various bodies have, reality check that those representative groups involved in the negotiations are in fact representing those they purport to. I do not see any reason to disbelieve them, but we do have to get this right.

While these are not finalised, the marine parks established under the previous government remain, in a technical sense, unchanged and the fishing community and the conservation community appear relatively content with that position, because they place longstanding, long-term agreement and getting this right in a complicated space above anything else.

**Dr CLOSE:** As I understand it, this has gone to cabinet four times and you have just not succeeded in getting support from your colleagues, rather than trouble with consultation process, which Connie has managed very well.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** We are not going to talk about what goes to cabinet and what has not. I can tell you it certainly has not gone to cabinet that many times.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Port Adelaide, as you are well aware, cabinet submissions are not the purview of this budget, so I will pull you up on that.

**Dr CLOSE:** Certainly, sir.

**The CHAIR:** I will go to my right. The member for Kavel.

**Mr CREGAN:** I appreciate the call. I thank the minister for his evidence to the committee today and also take this opportunity, in view of my impending departure from this place, to thank him for his contribution to my community and also his support for me following the Cudlee Creek bushfire. He was among the first of many ministers to assist me, for which I was particularly thankful. It was an important time in my community and also one that needed the assistance of others and of ministers, and of course he immediately came to assist me. I would be grateful, minister, if you might provide an update to me on the activities of your department in assisting my community following the Cudlee Creek bushfire.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Thank you very much, member for Kavel. It has been a pleasure to assist you over the last three years and to go into your community and gain an understanding from you and your residents of the impact of that bushfire. The bushfire impact really hit two different aspects of life. There was the human impact, the loss of life and loss of property, and there was the loss of environmental habitat and the conservation impact of those fires as well. They come together at some points and in other circumstances they tend to be quite separate.

I think we come together most when you engage the community in recovery, and that has certainly been what I have seen firsthand from the member for Kavel on an almost constant basis over the last couple of years since those fires. He has been engaging the community on recovery, getting alongside them to help build resilience into the landscape and doing so in a way that may reduce the impact of future fires, which are almost inevitable—hopefully not too soon—but also doing so in a way that keeps people safer when those fires inevitably come.

It has been good to work alongside not only the member for Kavel but also the Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon. Vincent Tarzia, with regard to working out how we would create a new normal with regard to the management of public and private land in the face of a changing climate and increased risks around bushfire prevention.

Something the member for Kavel and I have talked about a lot is the need to ensure that we have that increased response to prescribed burning, cool burning, ecological burning—whatever you want to refer to them as—and at the same time ensure that you get the community buying into that, because when it comes to prescribed burning not everyone, rightly so, is comfortable with the government setting fire to the land.

It is a tricky thing, it is a complex thing and it needs a huge level of resourcing from a scientific point of view—the process of burning—from an ecological point of view, which also involves a fair bit of science, and also, importantly, engaging the community in understanding the behaviour of fire and why we undertake these burns.

Following the bushfires on Kangaroo Island, the Cudlee Creek fire and the various other fires that are often overlooked but were also impactful at Keilira and on Yorke Peninsula as well, we had the Keelty review. The Keelty review looked at the use of prescribed burning and said quite clearly that, in the face of catastrophic fires, prescribed burning is not a panacea, but it certainly saw value and ascribed value to these cool burns.

We made a commitment as a government to spend \$37 million over five years for the Department for Environment and Water to deliver an expanded bushfire hazard reduction program on both public and private land, largely focused on the Mount Lofty Ranges because we use a risks-based matrix and that is where most of the houses and properties are—the loss of life, the loss of property, is likely to occur in the Mount Lofty Ranges—and also, of course, on Kangaroo Island.

So my department, working with the CFS, working with ForestrySA, SA Water, those large landowners and the incident experts in the CFS, has been able to establish a program that is now, I believe, much better understood by the community. It is a program in which we have been able to expand the number of burns. We had a record program in this past year. You do not burn for the sake of it. You do not burn just because you can get a burn done, but we were very fortunate with

weather conditions. Prescription allowed us to have 49 prescribed burns during the autumn and 47 burns during the spring. That means we have been able to keep more South Australians safe and build that hopeful ecological and social resilience into the landscape to keep it that bit safer into the future.

Again, I want to reiterate my thanks to the member for Kavel for his enthusiastic support on behalf of his community for this sensible but very carefully managed expanded program.

**The CHAIR:** I use my discretion to recognise the member for Waite next.

**Mr DULUK:** I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 131, under objectives, being national parks. Can you provide an update on the master plan of the Belair National Park? It has now been some months since the submissions closed, so where is that at and when we can expect a rollout of some of the recommendations that came from that master planning?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Thank you, member for Waite. I appreciate that question and I know there is a high level of interest in the future of Belair National Park, South Australia's oldest national park and I believe the second oldest national park in Australia.

**Mr DULUK:** That is correct.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** It was proclaimed in 1891, so it is celebrating its 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. It is a really critical park in the state's landscape. People would be aware—and it was a vexed issue at the time, and I think it was unfortunately so—that a proposal came in, as part of the master planning of Belair, from the Sturt Lions soccer club to establish soccer pitches on the old defunct golf course site at Belair National Park. That came in as part of the community engagement process.

It is very fair to say, and the member for Waite would be more than aware of this and has spoken to me about it and asked me questions in question time about it on a number of occasions, that that community by and large did not want soccer pitches being developed on the site. I had made it very clear that I would not sanction the removal of large numbers of trees to accommodate that anyway. It quickly became apparent, as part of the consultation process and the planning process, that that just was not going to be feasible going forward.

Just because we have ruled out the soccer pitches does not mean that there is not still work to be done at Belair. Belair includes a country club, which was part of the bankrupt status—there was a golf course and the country club. We have a building there. We have two options there: (1) we can find a tenant to reinvigorate it and revitalise it or (2) the second opportunity is whether we can secure a private entity to go into the country club. We have had that out as an expression of interest process for some time and have not been successful, although there are still people looking at that and seeing if it is feasible.

There are also other ideas that emerged through the master planning process for the golf course. They were all pretty light-touch things such as linking walking trails, mountain biking. We have Escapegoat operating out of the little clubhouse there and doing mountain bike lessons and things like that. I suspect in the future what we will end up with is a mixture of trails, both walking and mountain biking, through that old Belair golf course precinct.

I have made a commitment, and this has come from many comments over the years, that we do need to keep a buffer zone of sorts there, that Upper Sturt Road is protected and that the properties to the west of that and to the south are protected—some of it is perception but some of it is reality—by having the firebreak that is created by the golf course.

It does give residents there considerable peace of mind, so we will be looking to retain a buffer zone there. That is what much of the community wants. You might end up with some revegetation at the back of the golf course where it immediately abuts the national park proper, significant levels of revegetation, but I have ruled out filling in that open space. I think you would be first to say, member for Waite, that many in your community expect that buffer zone to be retained.

One of the other proposals in another part of the park which has been bubbling along for a year or so is in relation to the Playford Lake precinct. I have been in regular talks with the Friends of Belair National Park and the Friends of Old Government House. They sort of work together, and

many of the members of the Friends of Belair National Park are also Friends of Old Government House. They have been very keen to see the Playford Lake precinct have a bit of an upgrade. We put the upgrade to that on hold for a period of time while the master planning process was advanced. We are now in a position to move forward with that. That went through council a few months ago I believe, and hopefully we will see work get underway in the coming months.

The Playford Lake precinct is a little bit run down. It requires a bit of TLC, and the budget for that I think is between \$800,000 and \$900,000 and that will see a refresh of that area. It will see an upgrade of the trail around the lake, creating a level of disability access that is not present at the moment, and will give people much more of a sense of place there. If you look right across Belair National Park, that Playford Lake area is probably in the poorest condition.

We will fund that using the parks renewal fund, which was established under Parks 2025 to do these low level revitalisation projects, to provide some TLC to these parts of parks which, unfortunately, have been run down over the past couple of decades. It will be good to work with Friends of Belair on the planning for that and I look forward to seeing that little bit of work undertaken soon.

**Dr CLOSE:** Minister, did the department recommend to you that the soccer pitches be the centrepiece of the draft management plan, or was this a decision you took?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** No, it certainly was not a decision I took. I do not believe they were really the centrepiece of the draft management plan. They were the piece of the draft management plan that drew the most public attention, because they were probably the largest single change from what was there previously, and the aspect that could be described as the most invasive to the existing use, being the defunct golf course. By no means was there any centrepiece—I think that is your characterisation, deputy leader.

The master plan was codesigned with the community reference group, with people from the friends groups, people from the Lions and Rotary Clubs, people from the Blackwood Action Group and various other interested people—I think there was a youth rep and a business rep on there. They filtered the various suggestions and provided recommendations to the department as to what should go out for broader community consultation. I will get John Schutz to provide a bit more clarity on that one.

**Mr SCHUTZ:** The soccer pitch proposal was one of the ideas put forward in a very early process the department ran to look for/seek ideas from suitable proponents for options once the clubhouse had been returned to the department as a result of the failed business that was there. The department gave no merit to that proposal, along with the others—it was just one of a number that had come in.

Once the minister decided to rerun a new process and go back out and engage the community (which had not happened at that point) more fully in a consultation process around what would happen to the area, the golf course and the clubhouse, seek the community's input into that and set up a consultative process, it became very clear that we had to put those proposals that had been received into that process.

We were very transparent with the community. We basically said, 'Here are the proposals that have already been brought forward to the department for consideration,' without any commentary from us. We were not saying that we promoted or supported them; we were just saying that they were on the table. As a result of those proposals going into the consultation process, people felt able to comment on them.

What became very clear in that process, by and large, was that the community was not supportive of the soccer pitches. Some elements of the community, in the broad sense, clearly were because they had been put forward on behalf of a community group, but the community I suppose most focused on Belair National Park made it clear through that consultation process that they were not supporters of the soccer pitches proceeding.

**Dr CLOSE:** Nonetheless, the draft management plan that went out that had the soccer pitches as a major feature did not include every proposal that had been received for suggested activity in the park. There was a decision made about what went into the draft management plan.



The decision was that the soccer pitches would go and that some other proposals that had been raised would not. I am asking: who made that decision? Who is responsible for that decision?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** We essentially handed the baton to a community task force or a community engagement body to decide which projects would get a more detailed airing in the broader community. I do not know which projects fell by the wayside, off the top of my head, because they were filtered by this community group. The community group or the community representative body, however you want to characterise them, I guess, decided which ones would go out into the community for a more detailed approach. So this was a relatively pure form of community engagement.

**Dr CLOSE:** Still on the subject of national parks and therefore page 135, the reimagining of Kangaroo Island: how much was spent on ProManage preparing the two reports on Reimagine KI?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The Reimagining Kangaroo Island Parks project I think has been a particularly successful one in terms of bringing the community along on a codesign process—and a community which has very specific and often divided views on the role of parks. I do not think it would be speaking out of turn by any means to highlight that.

You have people who are very pro-conservation on the island and those who are much more pro-development. You have people who see the role of parks as a real economic and conservation provider or enabler on the island, and then you have those who I will go as far as saying blame them for the fires of 2019 and 2020.

We sought to bring these groups together—groups like the friends groups, environmental and conservation groups on the island, business groups, tourism bodies and, of course, the Kangaroo Island Council as well. Over a lengthy period of time, really the best part of a year, maybe more, we undertook a detailed planning process. We have had external facilitators, ProManage, as you highlighted, to facilitate that.

Probably to go a little bit further than that, I guess it may have started out as a form of mediation between the opposing groups and people with different ideas, but when I was able to get over there and accept the reports a few months back I actually saw these groups having come together and developed really significant plans for the future of the parks on the island. It was not just the parks impacted by fire; it was the parks on other parts of the island as well.

Bringing those groups together has been really very successful and I think will be a lasting legacy of this body of work. I think it was important to have an independent external facilitator doing that because that person or that body, that group ProManage, were able to be at arm's length from the department and probably neutralise any ideas that the department was biased towards a particular outcome and get us on an even keel when it came to undertaking this planning opportunity. I think it also enabled some healing in the face of the fires and the economic challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic on the island's fairly fragile tourism economy.

The result is two detailed reports that outline a vision, a way forward to reimagine what Kangaroo Island's visitor experiences might look like, how parks play a role in that and how they will support environmental recovery and sustainability alongside tourism development, recovery and sustainability into the future. The engagement I think has been an important long-term investment into the future of visitor services in the parks on the island, but also into conservation on the island.

It has allowed us to flesh out ideas like the conservation dividend, which I talked about before. If there are private activities in parks, we can get a conservation benefit from that, something that is really easily articulated and, again, can be codesigned with environmental and friends groups and other local bodies. That is the work that was undertaken. It helped shape the vision for the Gateway Visitor Information Centre for Flinders Chase National Park.

We will not be rebuilding that visitor centre in the heart of the park at Rocky River; rather, we will be moving that to become a gateway site on land known locally as the Kerber land, on the site of the old KI wilderness lodge there. The whole process in that excludes staff and salaries and on-costs and the like during the previous financial year were \$386,000. I will ask Mr Schutz to add a bit more clarity there.

**Mr SCHUTZ:** As the honourable member would imagine, dealing with the aftermath of the fires on Kangaroo Island was a significant challenge for the department. We had a similar situation, but not to the same extent as in 2007 where a lot of Flinders Chase had been burnt. Luckily, that fire did not burn the same extent of private land and certainly houses. The island and particularly the island community, as we well and truly know, was significantly impacted. The department lost some \$45 million worth of assets within the park and associated visitor infrastructure.

The work that we used ProManage to do was basically in four separate elements. The first element was really to have somebody seen as independent of the department who could go to the island and talk with the community to understand their aspirations and understand how they were feeling before we launched in and started engaging with just rebuilding and putting assets back. There was a lot of emotion in that process, as one would well imagine and understand.

We used ProManage to go in and talk to community groups, the friends groups, the volunteer groups, the different sectors on the island, the different stakeholders like council and tourism and so forth, just to get an understanding of what the situation was that we were dealing with. At the same time, we were being put under significant pressure to start putting things back, start building back. We were very keen and the minister was very keen not to do that, but to just work through it in a way that gave us the best opportunity in partnership with the community.

The first body of work was just to get that sense of what we were dealing with and how the community was feeling and how would we go about this in a respectful manner. Upon receiving that advice, what became very clear was we had to work very closely with the community to rebuild confidence, to rebuild a sense of engagement. I will not use the word 'trust' because that takes time.

We then asked ProManage, having done that environmental scan and gathered that intelligence and that information, to put together for us a process by which they thought we would be able to work with the community to take them on a journey that was really about rebuilding or building the relationship, recapturing some trust, but also listening to the community about their aspirations and expectations for the rebuild for what they want to see go back. It would also be fair to say that it helped them to put forward views that were not necessarily a part of that process in regard to the management of parks on Kangaroo Island, the role that we perform and how we work with them going forward.

The second part of the work for ProManage was to build and design that process, which was to be delivered over two financial periods—so over a long period. Of course, in the middle of this COVID impacted and that got in the way, so we engaged ProManage to do that, to set up all the workshops, to do all the engagement, to work with the various sectors to bring them together and to get their feedback and their input into it over an extended period.

The third piece of work was then to bring all that together and to report for the western end of Kangaroo Island, the reimagining report which the minister has just referred to and, at the same time, we did a separate process for Seal Bay. They managed the delivery of those four pieces. The challenge was, having got partway through stage 1 and stage 2, the community started to trust ProManage. They saw them as an honest voice at the table, someone who would give frank and fearless advice back to the department but at the same time work with the community around the challenges that had to be confronted.

As a result of that, the decision was made to continue with ProManage in that way to get us to a point where we felt that we have a really solid base, rebuilt relationships, and very clear views from the community which are being built into the rebuild of the western end of Kangaroo Island.

**The CHAIR:** Given the length of that answer I will go the member for Port Adelaide before shifting.

**Dr CLOSE:** This will be the last question on Reimagining Kangaroo Island and the impact of the fires. Minister, have you held a public meeting that you have attended to allow people to tell you how they feel about what happened in the fire and the interaction with the national park service?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I have attended a lot of different events. I think I have been to Kangaroo Island nine or 10 times since the fires, including the day after the fire, so I have had lots of

opportunities to meet with lots of different people, from sitting down in people's kitchens and front yards, to walking across their farms and walking through the rooms of their house.

I first visited Kangaroo Island—I think the most traumatic day of the fire in the sense of the devastation being unleashed—on I think Friday 3 January. I visited Kangaroo Island with the Premier on Sunday the 5th and the island was still burning. I then attended again on the following Wednesday, the week after the fires, and subsequently another two times in January and February 2020. Since then I have gone back on many different occasions.

I have done everything from accepting the reimagining report a few weeks ago at a public meeting and seeing that as something of a conclusion and looking to the future in terms of the rebuild, to sitting with a young mum in her rental accommodation, having lost her property as a consequence of the fires, and just talking about how that had happened and how the interaction between parks and fire mitigation on the island had to be something that we took immensely seriously going forward.

I caught up with departmental staff who had lost their homes, people down on the west end. We had departmental houses down there and I remember in the immediate aftermath sitting down with one of our staff who ran the shop in the Flinders Chase Visitors' Centre at Rocky River, Joe Tippett, and hearing that he had lost all his stock. There were worries that it was not insured to the amount that it could have been, and having to rebuild his business, but knowing that it was going to take several years to do.

I remember catching up with Alison Buck, the ranger in charge of the KI Wilderness Trail, who lost her home. I talked through that with her, and she is obviously someone very passionate about parks and defensive about the role of parks in the best possible way. I am not saying that in a negative sense.

I caught up in the week after the fires with Andrew Heinrich, the chair of the Kangaroo Island Landscape Board. His house survived, but his son's house was lost, or seriously damaged. We walked through that and the roof had caved in. His son is a couple of years younger than me, and he had put his heart and soul into buying this property and had also lost it.

I have been to Kangaroo Island many times over the last couple of years. I do not think I can ever fully relate to the pain and the horror of feeling so vulnerable, of losing your house, of having your life under threat. I will never quite know what that is like, but I have tried everything I could over the last couple of years to put my feet in their shoes and understand how we can work with them better.

I think that healing certainly came both in an environmental sense and also in the rebuilding of livelihoods, businesses and homes. That is certainly something that has, hopefully, been advanced to an extent through the Reimagine KI project. We still have a way to go, but we were dealing with diverse groups of people. I sat down a couple of times with Fraser Vickery from Eco-Action KI and John Matheson from the Friends of Dudley Peninsula Parks. I met with them a couple of times to talk about how we manage things into the future.

If we have expanded prescribed burning programs or seek to reinstate access trails and things like that for access for CFS and for clearances, they want to get the balance right with regard to conservation and making sure that is done in a steady, methodical way. There are multiple ideas, multiple viewpoints and it is complex, but as minister you try to get out there and visit as often as possible, not get in the way, and learn from people who have been through this firsthand.

I consulted with the member for Kavel along the way as well, not in the context of KI, but he has seen firsthand the challenges, some that were the same in the Hills, some that were very different. Kangaroo Island is perhaps a little bit more complex in some ways because of its geographical isolation from the capital city and the mainland, but it has been good to talk to the member for Kavel as well as we have worked through strategies and tried to empathise.

**Mr MURRAY:** I refer the committee to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 145, which refers to a partnership with Green Adelaide. I ask the minister whether he could update the committee on the work we are doing as a government with Green Adelaide.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Thank you, member for Davenport. The Green Adelaide project initiative is, I think, a really exciting one. It is a reform out of the natural resources management reforms. It is taking the old Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM board, which we thought was quite an unwieldy entity, and it is creating a body called Green Adelaide, which sits within the Department for Environment and Water, managed by, or overseen by, an expert board.

There are some really impressive people on that board. It is chaired by Professor Chris Daniels, who I would deem to be the state's foremost environmental communicator, particularly in the field of urban ecology. He would describe himself as an urban ecologist. Chris has really thrown himself into the role of chairing Green Adelaide, and over the last year or so we have been shaping this new body.

The board has been doing a lot of work. It has established its five-year plan into the future, a fairly simple plan, taking into consideration what needs to be done to make Adelaide a greener, cooler, wilder, more climate-resilient city. That is their tagline, and they have grabbed hold of this challenge with a sense of enthusiasm and passion.

It is really saying that, although it is an urban environment, Adelaide is a human-created environment and it can actually be in many regards an evolutionary hotspot. We know that Adelaide was built in a biodiversity hotspot. We know that Adelaide has so many underlying environmental gems in this region, and it is still hanging on—sometimes in a substantial way and sometimes by a fingernail, but there are lots of really good parts of Adelaide's urban environment.

It is forever evolving, but there are great opportunities here so we wanted to create Green Adelaide, a body that would have a really sharp focus on urban greening, urban cooling and building climate change resilience across the urban landscape, because, of course, with the urban heat island effect it is particularly vulnerable to increased temperatures. We added the word 'wilder' into the tagline as well, because we wanted a city that was that little bit wilder, a little bit more adventurous and a little bit more laden with the natural world.

We are a city with the Hills in the east and the coast in the west. Every part of our city is 10 to 15 minutes' drive from one of our national parks, conservation parks, reservoir reserves or a beach along the coastal part of the city. That gives us a real level uniqueness, and I think really contributed to us being named the third most livable city in the world and the most livable city in the nation of Australia, and it really gives us an exciting foundation upon which to build.

One of the strategic projects of the Green Adelaide board is to see Adelaide named as a national park city. I do not think this is something that we should just see as a tagline because there is a lot built into the fabric of what becomes a national park city. The criteria is set up by the National Parks City Foundation, which I think is based in London but with membership and input from all over the world.

It is this idea that cities can be seen as national parks from a recreational, conservation and wellbeing point of view if the community is behind this, if this is embedded into the community and part of the community's reason for being when interacting across their urban environment. It seemed just the sort of thing that Green Adelaide could get its teeth into and drive forward, but it cannot just be a sort of academic thesis. It must have practical outcomes on the ground, it has to bring people along on the journey and it has to see the rewilding of the city.

We are looking through Green Adelaide at a number of rewilding projects, which include one that has received quite a bit of press attention. It has been the possibility of seeing platypus reintroduced into the River Torrens. We are taking a serious look at that at the moment. We think it is possible. The River Torrens has had a big surge in water quality in recent times, and it is going well. It has not had an algae bloom for the best part of a decade.

We are looking at the possibility of reintroducing or supporting the growth of populations of certain types of butterfly. We are looking at raptors in the city—the peregrine falcons that nest on the Westpac building and swoop around the CBD. It is not just Adelaide focused, of course, we have our Greener Neighbourhood grants, which I mentioned in my opening introductory statement and which are much expanded: \$2 million is available in the years through the forward estimates for councils to apply for up to \$200,000 to help plant more trees and keep streets and Parklands and other open spaces green and cool.

The Green Adelaide body is doing some really interesting things. I really hope that it embeds itself as part of the way we do environmental administration in this state and can deliver some really good urban-greening projects that simply make Adelaide a better place to live and expand the habitat across our urban environment.

**Dr CLOSE:** If I can move to Budget Paper 5, page 37, initiatives. I would like to ask about the Ayers House investment. How much of the \$6.5 million allocated to Ayers House will be used for heritage restoration works, as opposed to access, air conditioning and other maintenance?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The Ayers House project is one that we think is really important for this state to recognise and to value built heritage. We have a building there, Ayers House, which has been carefully and sympathetically looked after for 50 years or so by the National Trust. We did think, with the revitalisation of Lot Fourteen and the renewal of the old Adelaide hospital site, there was a great opportunity to activate and invest in Ayers House to give it the future that it deserves.

It is strategically located. It has immense potential and it needs to be appropriately looked after. Not to detract from the role of the National Trust, because it has been cared for over the years, but it really now needs a very substantial investment to see the heritage components of that building restored, nurtured and given a life into the future. Also, activation and adaptation is important.

I do not think the budget can be carved up into 'this bit is for heritage restoration per se, this bit is for access, and this bit is for an air conditioning upgrade', because all those things are made a little bit more expensive or a lot more expensive under the context of adaptive re-use and under the context of adhering to the principles of restoration using the Burra Charter as a sort of foundational guide.

That is the guide that shows how you give modern day access and amenity to a building such as Ayers House, while very carefully respecting its heritage values and ensuring that its historic story is told and is not inhibited or diluted by providing disability access or a disability toilet or perhaps bolting a lift to the side of the building. These things all have to be done with exceptional levels of care and nuance. That certainly will be the approach to restoring Ayers House.

There will be what I would describe as a fine heritage restoration, costing upward of somewhere around \$3 million. Then there is also the work around building code requirements and disability access works. The History Trust is going to move in there, so they are going to have, again, an office fit-out, which sits alongside the principles of adaptive re-use. I do not believe that you can just say, 'This is the heritage restoration component and this is the disability component,' because all those things meld together to create a highly activated building.

**Dr CLOSE:** Could the minister perhaps take on notice a breakdown of how that money will be spent?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Yes, I am happy to take that on notice.

**Dr CLOSE:** How many History Trust staff will be moving in and where will they have their offices within the building?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The History Trust is obviously a unit of the education department reporting to the education minister. While we are providing them with a building here, I cannot give you an FTE count on that at the moment. I think that figure might have been mentioned in a broad sense in the public domain. My understanding is that the History Trust will move into the upper floor, which is where the National Trust once had offices when they had that area as their headquarters several years ago. So there is an area that was semi-adapted for office accommodation without inhibiting the usability and the conservation values of the building. John, did you want to add anything as to where the History Trust is located in the building?

**Mr SCHUTZ:** We are still working with the History Trust around finalising some of those arrangements. Gaining access to the building and having good knowledge have to be part of informing those final decisions. Clearly, the decisions of the History Trust are the decisions of the History Trust. We are still in those early stages.

**Dr CLOSE:** Did the minister contemplate spending \$6.5 million on Ayers House with the National Trust in situ rather than moving a government agency in?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** We contemplated, as a government, providing some funding to the National Trust, having gone through the process and understanding the extent of works that were required there. The deputy leader might be aware that we actually had an election commitment, and followed it through, to give the National Trust \$500,000 towards restoration at Ayers House. But when it became apparent the extent of the cost that was required to undertake such a restoration, we negotiated with the National Trust to use that funding for another purpose, which ended up going towards some restoration works at eight National Trust held buildings across the state.

So there were certainly discussions with the National Trust about their hopes and vision for the site. But as to the extent of works required to fulfill their master plan, I guess over time it became apparent that given that we were quite keen to find a new venue for the History Trust, given their expertise and understanding and runs on the board in regard to activating spaces and bringing them to life, it was felt the better approach and one that would be potentially win-win with a restored building and a new home for the Heritage Trust and an activated building as well would be to ask the National Trust to bring to an end their tenure there—and, with support, leave—and for the History Trust to move in.

**Dr CLOSE:** What support is being provided to the National Trust, as just referred to in the last answer?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** We made it clear from day one that we wanted to respect the National Trust's history with this site and to provide them with support to move their collection. Most of the collection in the building, I understand, is not part of the building's collection so to speak; it does not go with the building. A lot of things in there are historical items or collections that the National Trust has acquired and built up over time and used Ayers House in an appropriate way as a place to store some of those things.

As a consequence, we are working with the National Trust to understand the cost of moving those items out, cataloguing them and moving them to other venues or to secure storage space. We will certainly be keen to provide the National Trust with support to transition out of the property. We are not kicking them to the kerb by any means.

We want to respectfully work through their inventory. We want to make sure we bring on board people who are experts in moving such items. We want to make sure that transition is done in a way that minimises disruption for the National Trust and transitions those collections to a new place. We will certainly be keen to negotiate a financial arrangement with the National Trust to help them move.

**Dr CLOSE:** Minister, why have you engaged a private legal firm in the dispute with the National Trust rather than using Crown law?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** That was on the recommendation of Crown law. Sometimes Crown law, when they have significant amounts of work on the books, want someone with a particular focus. In this case, it was property law and the law of property rights and leasing. Their use of a lawyer from the law firm Cowell Clarke was the preference of Crown law.

We went to Crown law as a department and said we want to work through this, and they said on this basis. I am not sure if it was because they did not feel they had the expertise or they did not feel they had the capacity because of the work they had on board at that moment and they directed us to use someone external. I understand that is quite normal for Crown law.

I have seen that a few times since becoming the minister, that they will refer government agencies and entities to external law firms, which the Crown will provide advice on who to use. John, do you want to provide any further clarity on that?

**Mr SCHUTZ:** I would just confirm the minister's advice, that it was through Crown's request.

**Dr CLOSE:** I am now going to move back to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 134, securing the future of our metropolitan coastline. How much of the foredune in the Semaphore-Largs Bay beach area is anticipated to be lost over the next year? We have already seen significant erosion, obviously, with the big storms in the last week.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The management of Adelaide's coastline is always a challenge and it is certainly a priority for the state government, as we have shown by our very significant investment in creating a pipeline to replicate what the previous government did for the southern and north central beaches between Glenelg and Kingston Park. It has always been our desire to see the West Beach stretch of the coastline up to Henley Beach South restored and revitalised and that success that has been had at South Brighton and Seacliff replicated further up the coastline.

No doubt that project is challenging. It is a project that is continually going to be interfered with by storms occurring and by that natural dynamic movement of sand from our southern beaches to our northern beaches. That is the challenge that we have to work through. We have seen over the past couple of weeks how important getting a solution here is, because the beaches have been battered.

The storms that have occurred in recent weeks have not been bad storms, but they have been consistent storms and they have eaten away at the dune which protects the public infrastructure behind it such as shared-use walking trails and eventually roads and buildings as well. There is a problem in that section from West Beach to Semaphore. It did not have a solution when we came to government, and beach volumes had been seriously depleted.

In terms of the exact measurement of how much of Semaphore is expected to be lost, I hope that is very minimal. Semaphore is replenished in a natural sense, unlike the southern beaches, so I trust some of the sand that has moved off the southern beaches does end up at Semaphore and helps replenish the dunes there. There is no doubt that there are challenges right along the coastline.

I am committed to getting this pump line in place so that we can have far less use of trucks along the metropolitan beach and take them down to a minimum, if at all, apart from perhaps at the site of pumping, and get that sand reticulated from north to south, reversing the natural dynamic process and protecting the whole length of the coastline from Semaphore to Kingston Park, which is the focus area of that beach replenishment and recovery project.

**Dr CLOSE:** Are you able to provide details of the agreement with the local community representatives in Semaphore in relation to the sand carting process? How much sand, the timing of it and so on?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** We put quite a lot of effort into working with the local community, and I think reasonably good relationships have been established over time. There is always going to be a level of angst in terms of managing those beaches and moving sand from one beach to the other, but we have attempted where possible, in a way that does not interfere or inhibit the overall project delivery goals—I do not want to go as far as saying 'getting the community on side', but getting them more comfortable with the approach that we are taking has really been an overarching aim of this project.

We have made a range of commitments around timing and around the moving of volumes of sand from the north to the south, where it collects naturally in the north. I do not have the exact figures of that commitment, but I will ask Cate Hart, who is the executive director responsible for this project, to come and talk about the agreement with the community and how that has been struck. I ask Cate to come forward.

**Ms HART:** Thank you very much for the invitation, minister, to provide some additional detail. As you are aware, we meet regularly with the Semaphore group. In actual fact, we meet with them monthly or so and we are working very closely with them regarding sand movement from the Semaphore section of the beach down to West Beach to assist in that replenishment program.

The actual volume of sand is subject to ongoing assessment along the beachfront. As you would be aware from the recent storms, there is more damage occurring in winter than in spring. We are trying to maintain, of course, the level of beach at West Beach so that we do not have any further degradation. So it is an ongoing discussion with the community.

I am not in a position to indicate a total volume because we do vary. We do beach assessments every week and we have a significant amount of work going on in terms of analysing the beach width, the height and the loss in order to determine when and how we should be replenishing sand from one part to another.

**Dr CLOSE:** That is the end of explaining what the agreement is: that there is not any specific agreement?

**Ms HART:** The agreement is actually an ongoing agreement through conversations with the group. As you would be aware and as I have indicated, we meet with them very regularly. The point of the conversation is in respect to the volume of sand being moved, when and how. We are currently shifting sand over the current period because we have responded to the community's requests to delay autumn movement into winter. It is not as ideal as shifting sand in autumn because of the tidal movements and the weather. The program in respect of moving sand is one that is undertaken in negotiation with the community, and it is very much a hands-on negotiation.

**Dr CLOSE:** Minister, is the department still investigating retention methods and measures for West Beach, not just replacement only?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Our commitment is to creating what we would see as the ultimate retention measure, which is the reticulation of the sand using the sand-pumping pipeline. We are certainly not interested in heavy engineering solutions like groynes or breakwaters. We know that they can work to an extent in terms of holding sand in small pockets of the beach, but would be very unlikely to be able to be built without very significant scaring on one side of such infrastructure.

We know that the breakwater up at Semaphore has served a purpose in terms of capturing sand over the years, but those sorts of heavy engineering solutions are to be steered away from in 2021. We know that the pipeline methodology, which was established under the previous government (I think Paul Caica was minister at the time) has worked for the southern beaches. A large injection of sand, followed by a pipeline to reverse that dynamic littoral drift between the south and the north, and as a consequence those southern beaches—by southern beaches I am really talking south of Glenelg, heading down to Kingston Park, and these areas I know quite well as some of that falls into my electorate.

I have to give credit where credit is due: by taking what was a relatively experimental approach, they have been able to build resilience into those southern beaches and create a situation where the sand dunes extend for 50 to 100 metres from the esplanade in suburbs like South Brighton and Seacliff. Those sand dunes have then been planted out with native vegetation, which then goes some of the way to holding the sand in place in a much more natural sense.

Those sand dunes down there look real—they are real, but they look like they have been there forever. However, if you look back at pictures from the 1990s, Seacliff looked almost like West Beach does today. So we know this is possible; we are following what is a relatively tried and tested measure. Notwithstanding, there are challenges around keeping sand on the beach in the short term and getting in front of storms as they roll in, particularly over the winter period. Our position as a government is to veer away from heavy engineering solutions and look at this much lower impact sand-pumping pipeline, which we know has worked in the northern beaches.

**Dr CLOSE:** What is the impact of the seagrass beds off Kingston Park when the pipeline is discharging?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** We know that getting the quantum of seagrass off metropolitan Adelaide in general is expanding and getting better over time. The pipeline outfall does not push sand way out to sea, it deposits its sand on the beach at the head of the beach.

Because the use of the pipeline is discretionary, we do not need to pump on any given day, depending on the weather, so we make decisions to pump at times where the sand as it comes out of the pipe is not immediately taken out to sea, creating a discoloration and blocking out sunlight, which would inhibit or bury seagrass. We are reasonably confident that the sand-pumping processes do not impact seagrass, but I might ask Cate Hart to provide a little more clarity on the process there.

**Ms HART:** As I have indicated, we do regular beach inspections, and we are of course bound by weather conditions and tides in terms of when we do beach replenishment programs. The beach replenishment pumping on the southern beaches is essentially guided by tidal movements and weather patterns in addition to the need. We do not pump all the time; in actual fact, the pumping of sand does not extend for more than three or four months across the 12 months and it is irregular, so we are trying to manage the beach as it is required. We work very closely with the EPA to ensure



that when sand pumping is undertaken we are seeking to minimise any turbidity in the onshore water so that that sand is not carried out over seagrass.

**Dr CLOSE:** I will just follow up slightly on that. I have enormous respect for the department, therefore I can absolutely accept that every effort is being made. Nonetheless, there is turbidity, there is a movement of sand that goes out into the water; you can see it from aerial photographs. Minister, are you saying that there is no impact on seagrass beds or simply that you are managing it as best you can?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I think this really has to be called out for the furphy that it is. There is a natural littoral drift of sand on our dynamic beaches, from the southern beaches, right down south into the Onkaparinga beaches, right through to the north around Largs Bay. That sand moves all the time. It moves much more in stormy conditions, and it will create some natural turbidity. This process that we are seeking to replicate comes as close to the natural processes as possible. The pumping does occur in low volumes; I live quite close to one of these pumping sites. They come on every few days at a particular time of year. There is a relatively small amount of sand deposited on the beach to continue that constant replenishment.

Sand would move into the first couple of hundred metres of tide, but that would be no more significant than the natural littoral drifting process. That is certainly the analysis that was undertaken by the previous Labor government, when they initiated this project under Minister Paul Caica, when the sand-pumping pipeline was examined. It was the approach of the Coast Protection Board, which has been a relatively independent organisation providing advice to government. They endorsed this approach as the most natural method that you could possibly have, the least invasive method and the one with the least environmental impacts.

There are certainly far fewer environmental impacts than the constant trucking of sand, which occurred along the beach. We have hooded plovers breeding there now. They certainly would not be able to manage under that approach. There are certainly far fewer environmental impacts than the building of groynes and breakwaters in some sort of unpleasant European style that we see in some parts of the world. We have veered away from that heavy engineering approach. We have tried to manufacture nature as much as possible. The previous Labor government gave us the template, and we believe this will work.

**Dr CLOSE:** Still on the same page, but moving to the Torrens Parade Ground. I understand that part of the changes being made at the Torrens Parade Ground Drill Hall is that a significant portion of the floor space will be taken up by storage areas. Given that in the heritage register there is a notation that the open, unrestricted form of the Drill Hall is the most significant aspect of the internal structure, is this change consistent with the heritage values of the building?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The works on the Torrens Parade Ground were funded in the previous budget and are underway in this budgetary period and seek to undertake a project there to secure the heritage values of the building and also create a home or an anchor point for veterans. That is another reason why the History Trust is moving up to Ayers House on North Terrace. In terms of the ins and outs and the specifics of that restoration project, Cate Hart has responsibility for the heritage portfolio so I will ask her to give us a bit more detail.

**Ms HART:** The improvements in relation to the Drill Hall cover quite a number of aspects to improve the overall utilisation of the hall into the future. Those improvements include new toilets to meet building code requirements, a refurbished kitchen space and the installation of storage pods, which you have referred to, and some stage facilities. The work that has been undertaken has been undertaken in complete collaboration with Veterans SA to realise the site as a really busy place for veterans and as a significant veteran hub.

It is our view that the improvements will ensure there is an exhibition and event space suitable for future activities and a number of smaller spaces to actually increase the utilisation of the Drill Hall. As you may be aware, the Drill Hall is a very large, open space, so in order to capitalise on opportunities to increase occupancy and to increase the number of activities occurring on the site it has been a desire to provide the opportunity to create smaller spaces within the hall. As such, it is the view of veterans and people working on the project that creating smaller spaces will increase the activity around the hall and will not decrease its heritage functionality.

**Mr CREGAN:** I remain at Budget Paper 4, National Parks and Wildlife, page 144. Can the minister outline for the committee how the government is delivering improved conservation outcomes across South Australian landscapes?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I thank the member for Kavel for that important question. Conservation is obviously at the very heart of the business of the state's Department for Environment and Water and my role as the Minister for Environment and Water. It is a body of work that should be the driving force behind what we are all about.

That is why I have been so delighted to see the National Parks and Wildlife Service reinvigorated and repositioned—really brought back to life—since becoming minister. It is why I am delighted to see the number of park rangers increased from a woeful 93 in 2018 to almost 140 today. It is why I have been pleased to see the volunteer park ranger service re-established and for the National Parks and Wildlife Service to now have ecologists built in to the regions and actually provide that expert ecology and science underpinning into the way we make decisions to manage the activities on park and around park.

We have worked very hard to reinstate the conservation strength and rigour of the way the department works. This has been highlighted in a number of particular projects. I think one that I have been most interested in, almost captivated by, in recent months has been securing the tenure around the Aldinga Washpool, in the very southern suburbs of Adelaide. This is a project that has been on and off for around 30 years, since the early nineties, recognising the cultural value to the Kurna people and the environmental value of having this unique washpool—semidiurnal but largely fresh water—at Aldinga.

There was a whole range of unique land tenures around there. Some of them were held by SA Water, some were under the care and control of the City of Onkaparinga, others were under the planning minister and there were another few quirks along the way. It was quite a process to get that remaining coastal freshwater and estuarine environment and lagoon system secure, but we were able to bring all those land tenures together. This will now form part of a new conservation park at Aldinga, linking in a really connected way with the Aldinga Scrub Conservation Park, almost to the immediate north.

The Aldinga Washpool is a well-known habitat for a wide range of native species, particularly birds and swamp plants of conservation significance, including a threatened coastal saltmarsh that is nationally listed as a vulnerable threatened ecological community. The Aldinga Washpool is not just of environmental significance but of cultural and spiritual significance to the Kurna people. It has been great to speak to a range of Kurna representatives, including Aunty Lynette Crocker, on a number of occasions about the importance of securing the tenure and bringing that into the conservation system.

Another really great announcement made in the last few days is the \$750,000 grants program that we have announced for our Friends of Parks groups, which do so much great work in volunteering across our parks network. We have to remember that some 21 per cent of our state—if you add it all together, it adds up to about the size of the United Kingdom—is found within our park system. It is habitat, it is critical habitat, it often contains sites of cultural significance but also it forms a really key part of our changing landscape in the face of climate change and to have that much land in the public realm and in the public estate and the protected estate is very important.

The announcement of this \$750,000 is a tenfold increase in the volunteer support grants that were previously available to the Friends of Parks groups. This will accelerate and expand the opportunities for Friends of Parks to undertake significant conservation works. We will also see the eligibility for the grants extended to programs that occur off park.

There are going to be two new funding programs: the Friends of Parks small grants program, where groups are eligible to apply for up to \$5,000 from a pool of \$250,000, and the Friends of Parks partnership program, where groups are eligible to apply for \$25,000 from a pool of \$500,000. Those will be partnership based and possibly multiyear, really giving our Friends of Parks the value, the respect and the support that they so craved and really did not have under the previous government, when such catastrophic cuts were inflicted on the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Another opportunity to compare and contrast our approach with that of the previous administration was when we brought back the Native Vegetation Heritage Agreement grants, which are known as the Revitalising Private Conservation in South Australia Program. This is a \$3 million program being delivered in partnership with Livestock SA; Trees for Life; Nature Foundation, which is the lead delivery partner; the Conservation Council of South Australia; and the Nature Conservation Society of South Australia.

Since 1980, landholders have established more than 1,600 heritage agreements to help protect and restore 1.8 million hectares of native bushland. These heritage agreements support our back-to-basics approach to landscape and nature conservation. Phenomenally, annual funding under the previous government had been reduced to just \$4,000 per annum. The ability to do very much with \$4,000 in terms of protecting and revitalising native vegetation was minimal to say the least.

The first round of funding that was released last year—\$429,000 in grant funding—was distributed to 70 recipients, leveraging an investment of a further \$530,000. That is really what this program is all about; it is recognising the value of native vegetation in terms of habitat, carbon sequestration, landscape connection in terms of connected corridors and then recognising the value that other people place on it and encouraging both parties, both government and the private landowner, to put their hand in their pocket and invest in this native veg.

In the latest round of funding, which has just been announced in the past few days, \$1 million will be allocated to nine separate projects. That sounds like a lot of money per project, but these are big projects, these are landscape-scale projects. The project is actually entitled the Linking Landscapes fund. This will see in-kind and co-contributions of \$2.06 million on top of the \$1 million which has been provided by the state government.

It was great to hear of some really big projects getting funded, including the Mallee Refuge, restoring threatened wildlife to the Eastern Eyre Peninsula, a \$203,000 grant with an in-kind contribution of over \$500,000 to expand a very large Mallee Refuge enclosure from 891 hectares to 3,828 hectares. This will exclude cats, foxes, goats, kangaroos, and domestic stock and give that landscape the opportunity to recover.

It will see the expanded refuge protecting threatened malleefowl and sandhill dunnarts in the region and reintroduce the threatened chalky wattle and yellow Swainson-pea, numbats and western barred bandicoots. Some of these lesser known marsupials will have the opportunity to really establish and thrive. It will also conduct regional fox and cat control around the enclosure and onto neighbouring properties to enable animals to expand outside the fence and to protect native wildlife more broadly.

There are a number of projects involved with this. It is not just the immediate heritage licence or heritage agreement holder. This is pulling other properties in and we are seeing other properties coming on board, signing up to heritage agreements and seeing those connected corridors of native vegetation being protected. A great one in Kangaroo Island, reducing feral pig impacts on Kangaroo Island wildlife and habitats, was a \$132,000 grant with an in-kind contribution of more than three-quarters of a million dollars, trying to get on top of feral pigs off the back of the Kangaroo Island fires using baiting, trapping and, importantly, thermal-assisted aerial culling.

These projects are really making a huge difference and showing our commitment to practical conservation works, outcome-oriented conservation works on the ground. I think these will certainly pay significant environmental dividends well into the future.

**Dr CLOSE:** I will return to the Torrens Parade Ground line of questions, page 134. I understand that there is significant disquiet amongst veterans and relevant stakeholders over the lack of consultation on the Drill Hall project, as well as increased commercial use of the site. Have you had an opportunity to meet with representatives to discuss their concerns?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I have not been aware of any specific complaints or disquiet. Obviously, that largely sits in the veterans affairs portfolio, which sits with Premier Marshall, but that is something that I will certainly speak to either Mr Schutz or Cate Hart about.

**Mr SCHUTZ:** We understand that there are some project managers running some of the works down at the site at the moment and that there needs to be further consultation with the veterans. We understand in the last 24 hours there has been some correspondence provided, which we will need to work through and provide further advice back to the minister.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Given that has appeared in the last 24 hours, I was not aware of the detail of that. This is certainly something we can look into and work through. At the end of the day, if this is going to be a hub for veterans and provide them with a place of meaning, connection and social cohesion it is going to have to be appropriately taken care of, so I will certainly follow that one up.

**Dr CLOSE:** I believe that there were two recent commemorative events held at memorials adjacent to the parade grounds, where veterans and their families had significant problems with car parking and other issues due to large commercial events taking place on the grounds. Are you aware of those concerns, and do you share them?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I would certainly be sharing them. I was not aware of them but, again, that is something that I am happy to look into in some detail. I will also raise it with the Premier in his capacity as Minister for Veterans' Affairs.

**Dr CLOSE:** This may, in fact, be a question for the Premier rather than the minister: what is the expected income over the forward estimates from commercial activities at the Torrens Parade Ground site?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** That is one that I will take on notice. I am not sure if there is a detailed projection of that, but it is one that I will take on notice and return to the parliament with.

**Dr CLOSE:** I turn to page 147, activity indicators, looking at native vegetation. Is the minister concerned that the Australian Walking Company put in an application for its development in Flinders Chase within a day of the regulation to waive standard native vegetation clearance approval processes, and that it was approved within 24 hours?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I think this was a project that had been very heavily consulted on. What was very clear for an extended period of time were the various views in the community and how the various stakeholders felt about this, so I was not surprised when that process went the way it did.

**Dr CLOSE:** Why was there nearly a five-month gap between Native Vegetation Council meetings this year?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I do not believe there was a five-month gap between meetings of the Native Vegetation Council.

**The CHAIR:** I will take one more from my right. Member for Davenport.

**Mr MURRAY:** Thank you, Chair. I refer to page 134. In the relatively small amount of time that we have left on this portfolio, I refer to Glenthorne National Park. Can the minister provide us with an update insofar as the delivery of that project is concerned?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Thank you, member for Davenport. I know that you are very interested in the Glenthorne National Park project. In fact, for some reason the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission decided to move large parts of Glenthorne into your electorate at the next election.

**Mr MURRAY:** Very wise.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Interestingly, that park has been in three electorates in three election cycles, but it is nice to see it shared around because it is such a significant project for the Marshall Liberal government.

We know that Glenthorne National Park was under very significant threat from development in the past. It was slated for subdivision, or there were great efforts made to subdivide it, and it was not until 2016 that the Liberal Party stepped in and made a very clear commitment that we would save this property from almost inevitable urban sprawl and protect it under the National Parks and Wildlife Act of 1972. That really galvanised community opinion around this.

The Friends of Glenthorne—and I have referred to friends groups in my answer to a previous question from a government member—is one of those outstanding groups that kept the flame alive for many years with regard to saving that property and highlighting its cultural heritage, its European heritage values and the opportunity that that site could create to form a corridor of restored open space between the hills behind Happy Valley Reservoir and the sea at Hallett Cove and Marino.

To be able to create Glenthorne National Park and see it come alive in recent years has been quite a phenomenal thing to watch. The master plan for Glenthorne has been developed in partnership, very deep partnership with the community. An organisation called the Glenthorne Partnership was established and they have been shaping that master plan over a couple of years.

The project is a big one. It includes multiple partners from the Office for Recreation and Sport, the commonwealth government's Environment Restoration Fund and the Adelaide City Deal, the City of Marion and the City of Onkaparinga. There have been great contributions, particularly from the City of Marion, towards BMX and mountain biking facilities, soccer facilities and towards a regional destination nature playground where the City of Marion—which I work exceptionally well with—has contributed \$2 million towards that project. It is a real show of confidence in what is being developed up at O'Halloran Hill.

The project also connects with—as I talked about earlier, member for Davenport—the open space around the Happy Valley Reservoir which will connect there in terms of the conservation values that are being enhanced. We know there is a lot of great native veg there. That will connect through Glenthorne and over towards the beach.

The revegetation project, funded by the commonwealth government's Environment Restoration Fund, will see well over 100,000 grasses, shrubs and trees planted on the former Glenthorne farm, the 208 hectares that were subdivided by Thomas O'Halloran in the late 1830s. That will be revegetated. It will become grey box grassy woodland with dense clumps of vegetation creating habitat for small birds, to try to reverse the decline of woodland birds that I directly correlate to the very savage cuts inflicted by the previous government on the National Parks and Wildlife budget and the centralisation of the natural resources management structure. So the more we can do to restore that woodland bird habitat and maybe see things like the superb fairywren and other species, the diamond sparrow and such things—I am still not as up with these birds' names as I should be—become more established through there, the better.

We have regular planting days, engaging the community almost every weekend. I was there on Sunday for a National Tree Day. It was exceptionally muddy. We are having a very wet winter. You cannot go there without gumboots at the moment, but people were enjoying it and getting their hands dirty and getting plants into the natural environment. The plants that we planted last planting season, 12 months ago, are already up to a metre to a 1½ metres high. Some of the acacias and the sheoaks are surging ahead. We are seeing that restoration taking shape, gathering pace and, in the future, we will have a 'must visit' destination in terms of conservation and recreation woven into the southern suburbs.

It was World Ranger Day on Saturday and the day after was National Tree Day. World Ranger Day saw us make the announcement that there will be a new Metro South Ranger district based at Glenthorne and they will service the Glenthorne precinct parks—Hallett Cove, Marino, Glenthorne itself—and then expand to parks such as Onkaparinga River National Park, the recreation park down there; the Moana Sands Conservation Park; Sturt Gorge, another park in the member for Davenport's electorate and not far from Glenthorne as the crow flies; down to Shepherds Hill Conservation Park on the edge of Ayliffes Road and Shepherds Hill Road.

We have created this new ranger district focusing resources around those southern parks, parks that really had not had the attention and the TLC that they might have warranted in the past, but now we are getting on with it and we are creating that physical presence. In fact, previously rangers had to come either from Belair—our best-case scenario—but often from Black Hill to look after the parks in our neck of the woods.

To have that ranger presence on site in the ranger station just off Majors Road, where you go into the car park, is just another benefit because the presence of rangers there connect people

with nature, educate them about nature, give them a better understanding of what is possible with conservation and how they can safely and enthusiastically, hopefully, connect with the natural world.

Glenthorne is occurring apace. In the coming weeks there will be a whole range of community infrastructure, car parks, walking trails—many of them accessible—signage, toilet facilities and, of course, the nature play that we are partnering with the City of Marion in order to deliver.

**The CHAIR:** With that answer the time allocated for the examination of proposed payments in regard to the portfolio of the Department for Environment and Water has expired; therefore, there are no further questions and I declare the examination of the portfolio of the Department for Environment and Water complete, and the estimate of payments for the Department for Environment and Water and Administered Items for the Department for Environment and Water now closed.

At 15:01 the committee adjourned to Wednesday 4 August 2021 at 13:00