

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land

Dunkeld — 29 November 2016

Members

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Executive officer: Dr Christopher Gribbin

Witness

Mr Richard Hodgens, environment officer, Moyne Shire Council.

The ACTING CHAIR (Mr Young) — Welcome, everyone, to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee's public hearing in relation to the inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land. The committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land, and the evidence is being recorded. All evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

I welcome Richard Hodgens, representing the Moyne Shire in their environment office. Today's evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a full proof version of the transcript within the next week. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. If I could just get you to state your name, position, and invite you to open up. We have got time for a 10-minute presentation and for you to say what you do and your views on the inquiry, and then we will open up to questioning from the committee.

Mr HODGENS — My name is Richard Hodgens, environment officer at Moyne Shire Council. I have been there around seven and a half years now; before that I had worked for five years for Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority. I have lived in south-west Victoria pretty much all my life, so I am probably considered almost local to Port Fairy.

One of my major responsibilities at council is looking at pest plant and animal control, particularly on land that council either owns or manages. Usually it is Crown land but sometimes council does own parcels of environmental-type land. Moyne Shire, if you are not familiar with it, is quite a large shire — about 5500 square kilometres — a very small population of about 16 000 people, and lots of small rural localities like Port Fairy, being the largest town with about 2500 people, so a very, very rural shire with significant issues. Council budgets are generally pretty tight, and if we tend not to get external funding for doing things, it is only the very squeaky wheels that get grease. There are a lot of things that we would love to do; often we just are not able to do them.

The two major pest animals that we undertake control work on are rabbits and foxes. I am sure if short-billed corellas could be put on there we would probably have them as a pest animal as well, but they are the main two. With regard to foxes, we undertake a fairly comprehensive program on a Crown land reserve known as Griffiths Island at Port Fairy. It is a 37-hectare parcel of land that is about 150 metres off the coast of the township, joined to the mainland by a causeway. It contains a very iconic lighthouse, a walking path that probably around 100 000 tourists a year walk around and about 10 000 short-tailed shearwaters — *Puffinus tenuirostris* — that burrow into the sand, a very iconic feature of Port Fairy and certainly a great tourism attraction.

It also is a great attraction for foxes who treat it as a bit of a smorgasbord of a food source. Shearwaters are pretty smelly — you can smell them a mile off and the foxes come running. Council has been the committee of management for that Crown land parcel since 1902, in its various predecessor forms. Unfortunately Council's focus is more upon infrastructure-type issues traditionally than environmental issues, so council tended to look toward the state government or the department in its various names to try to help manage that sort of land. If the department did not help, then interested members or groups within the community would tend to come out and undertake works.

I am estimating that around the early 1980s — I know that a member of Warrnambool Field and Game will talk in a bit more detail after me and has probably got a bit more knowledge — there were lots of rules and regulations rewritten around south-west Victoria, and Griffiths Island was one of those. So I am assuming that around that time the department made contact with Warrnambool Field and Game and asked them to come and conduct an annual fox shoot on the island. I would imagine that was in response to the public saying how many bird deaths they had seen out on the island and that they wanted something done. I think it is more through the goodwill of individuals within the department and individuals within Warrnambool Field and Game that that annual fox shoot has continued until this day. I do not think there is any great strategic reason for it — it just kind of happened — but we are very glad that it happened.

In 2010 council assisted local Rotary clubs in doing some environmental works out on the island, and as a result of that and some media coverage — not always favourable — it got people talking about management of the island. Council assisted in the setting up of a community group, the Friends of Griffiths

Island, who now provide advice to council and liaise with council about environmental matters out on the island. Amongst the many things they were concerned about was shearwater deaths, which seemed to be increasing, so after receiving very little love from the department they lobbied council. Council eventually allocated some budget towards doing some works out there, so we instigated a fairly comprehensive program that we have continued going through. That includes removal of harbour for foxes, den fumigation, a baiting program and also Warrnambool Field and Game were kind enough to up the number of shoots from one to four per season, so there are two undertaken before Christmas and two after Christmas.

From council's perspective the fox shoots tick a lot of boxes. There were an awful lot of complaints that council was receiving and they have tapered off. We are seen to actually be doing something, which is always a good thing. There is the involvement of members of the community in volunteerism and the direct cost to council is approximately \$400 worth of meat from the local butcher and a couple of hundred dollars worth of advertising across the year. So it is a very good return for very little outlay in that regard. Community acceptance seems to be quite high. I do not want to steal any thunder from the Warrnambool Field and Game representatives, but we do not get any complaints. It seems to be very professional. Everyone has come on board. Since we went from one shoot to four shoots a year — it involves closing the island — the public has made no complaints. It is very, very well accepted.

OHS-wise we are assisted obviously by it being an island. You can close it off at the one entry-access point. That certainly helps. It is treeless in the main, so you get good lines of sight. There are not people jumping out from behind bushes or anything like that. The use of an experienced incorporated community group that has skills, knowledge and has developed their own processes and protocols over a period of time certainly helps. I think if you were starting afresh now, it would possibly be a bit of a challenge. We have not found any of the hurdles insurmountable. We have worked together and there have not been any incidents or reports of near misses or anything like that. We are very happy with how the program runs, and that is a credit to the Warrnambool Field and Game group.

On a bit of a sidetrack, I am aware that the Friends of Griffiths Island looked at employing the services of a professional shooter on the side to that. This would have been back in about 2011. They obtained a quotation for services and did a bit of a dummy run, where they did not actually shoot anything but went out to see whether or not it was practical. My understanding is that it failed due to the challenge of getting the shooter on nights when it would be suitable. If it was suitable, then the professional shooter would be out shooting on private property somewhere else. We are very fortunate that Warrnambool Field and Game, having a reasonably large membership, can book it in in advance and go, 'Yes, we'll definitely be there on that night'. I think that is probably the main reason. Also funding-wise, the group relies on small donations and membership and stuff. I do not think they would be able to afford more than one or two shoots, at best, to be able to do that. It is idealistic, but it just never went ahead.

With regards to rabbits, I will just talk briefly on that. We conduct rabbit control on six municipal roadsides that lead down towards the coastal reserve. We also do control programs within Southcombe Park within Port Fairy, which is council-owned public land. We have done the works in Port Fairy irregularly over about a 20-year or so period. Last year we were lobbied by the Peterborough community to perform rabbit control on Peterborough Foreshore Reserve, which is Crown land. If you know Peterborough at all, basically where the golf club is — around that sort of area on the coast there. So in the township but a Crown land reserve.

I personally do not believe that performing rabbit control in peri-urban environments is a very worthwhile exercise. It is very time-consuming, resource-intensive, and there are very minimal returns. We do not get a lot of support from neighbouring private or public landholders when we do those works. We are limited in what we can do. You might like to go and rip up areas, but then you would be ripping out native vegetation, which is not an ideal example for us to be setting. If we conduct shoots, there are concerns around OHS. If we do baiting, there is every possibility that bait might be taken by someone's pet. It is a real challenge for us in that situation. There is also no money available for us to do it, so council digs into its pocket. It has got other pressures. It is just a very challenging environment.

I have given a bit of thought as to whether or not community hunting organisations would be able to help us in that sort of situation. I certainly think that while shooting has its dangers, in certain circumstances — Peterborough is a great example there, where you could actually close the reserve off, ask your shooters only to shoot towards the ocean — chances are you are not going to hit any non-specific target anyhow, but I think that you would be able to reduce the risk significantly. I think the cost benefit would be enormous. A program such as that would cost well under \$1000, whereas the baiting and den fumigation works that we conducted in Peterborough last year, as an example, would have cost council \$5000. We are looking at an absolute minimum 20 per cent reduction in costs, so it is quite significant. Again we are probably aided by the fact that groups like Warrnambool Field and Game are used to volunteering and giving their time, and that is very good of them. If we had engaged professional shooters, the costs would have blown out significantly.

Again, using Peterborough as an example, lots of private landholders have farming-type properties and agriculture properties adjoining the townships. Only there it seems quite weird that the farmer can go out and undertake their own control works, including shooting right nearby the town, without needing to really inform anybody. Yet when we have the same pressure in a small rural township — it might only be a couple of hundred metres away — everyone throws their hands up and in the end says it is too hard. Maybe we need to try and work around that somehow. I do not think it is too hard. I think it is well accepted by the people. If you get the timing right and use the right sort of people, I think there could be great benefit there.

So I guess in summary, council's experience, particularly with the Griffiths Island situation and Warrnambool Field and Game, has been very, very positive. We think it has definitely benefited the natural environment, and the social aspects are certainly very high. Acceptance from the community has definitely been very high. If there were further opportunities to encourage it, we would certainly investigate them and probably implement them.

The ACTING CHAIR — Thank you very much for that. That was a really good general insight into what is happening. You have spoken mostly about rabbits and foxes. But before I get into any questions about those, are there any other types of pests that you are involved with? Just from council's perspective on the cost, could you include the plant species and things like that that you actually have to maintain, and what sort of percentage of costs do you put towards that compared to animal pests?

Mr HODGENS — From an animal pest point of view, it is really only rabbits and foxes. There are deer — no question of that — but because our shire is pretty much largely void of overstorey vegetation, we do not have a lot of great habitat for them. The area that does, it would be coming from private land. If we were receiving requests, we would look to try and work with, say, timber companies as an example of an area where the deer would be found. Yes, we are very limited in anything other than those two species, to be honest. With regard to pest plant species, African boxthorn is probably our number 1 habitat for rabbits and foxes to at least reside in and under. We spend probably in the order of six figures — be right on about \$100 000 a year — controlling mainly boxthorn but blackberry as well. They are probably our major two species of concern. They are fairly widespread.

Again, I am probably like a bit of a broken record on this, but the willingness of the private landholders to join in tends to be fairly minimal. We will do areas, particularly along roadsides in the coastal zones, where it is clearly growing over the fence. The times when we make contact with the private landholders, we usually get told where to go; not all the time, but generally speaking they are not willing to come on board. Some form of compliance work or declaring more zones where you must do works otherwise you will get a land management notice, that would certainly aid us.

I am aware down at Killarney Recreation Reserve of a huge rabbit problem there. The local cricket club asks us fairly regularly to perform rabbit control, and we have resisted to date simply because the neighbouring property owners and land managers, so Parks Victoria and private landholders, just will not do anything on their land. I feel that we would be basically throwing money away at nothing. When you have got significant habitat on three sides of the reserve, it would be tokenistic what we would be able to achieve.

The ACTING CHAIR — The engagement between landholders and council is something I was going to ask you about later. But since you have mentioned it now, would you say your biggest problem is from private landholders or the public land spaces?

Mr HODGENS — Public, yes. It is very, very hard to get Parks Victoria to do much.

The ACTING CHAIR — And is it recognised that there is an increased problem with pests in those public lands?

Mr HODGENS — Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR — And specifically rabbits around there. Are there any other examples you can think of?

Mr HODGENS — It is usually rabbits. I am aware that Parks Victoria does some baiting in some areas. There have been times when we have gone, 'Okay, we'll try and partner up, and we'll do our control at the same time as you do, or you let us know when you're starting and we'll come on board as well', or vice versa, and for some reason the communication lines just get blurred and it does not happen.

There was one year that Parks Victoria went, 'We're not even doing a program this year', and we had already set ours up to align with what theirs was in the previous year, and they pulled out. There was another instance, I think it was last year, when we were doing works in Southcombe Park in Port Fairy. When Parks Victoria needed work done, we would use the same contractor; they would come and do works for us on the way to do parks' or on the way back. At the last minute, Parks Victoria went, 'No, we're not proceeding'. That meant that our program had to be reduced because the costs were going to be extra.

The ACTING CHAIR — Are their reasons that parks are giving you for going back on that? Is it a cost factor, for example?

Mr HODGENS — Yes, they always say it is insufficient budget. It just wears thin after a while. I mean, I do not have an awful lot of budget either, but we somehow manage to get something done. They just struggle to get anything done.

The ACTING CHAIR — And with private landholders, how do you go with the engagement with them?

Mr HODGENS — Often it depends on their relationship with the council. If they have had a souring incident at any stage in the last 50 years, then they might not perceive us very well. If we have got a reasonably workable relationship, sometimes they will come on board. It really does depend on that individual approach. I tend to write letters in the old-fashioned snail mail way, remind them of their legal responsibilities and say that the council has been doing works or has received requests from the public and that the council might be able to assist the next time we are around there; if not on a fee-for-service-type arrangement, then we might be able to work something out on a handshake sort of deal.

Sometimes they come on board, but in the main, especially if it is in an urban-type area, not very many take it up. Last year when we did Peterborough Foreshore Reserve I wrote to 350 people in the township with individually signed letters, and even then we only had two people respond to that, so that gives you an idea in the urban environment.

The ACTING CHAIR — Has it been explored trying to put private landholders in touch with clubs or associations that do shooting, hunting and pest control that way?

Mr HODGENS — No, we have not.

Mr RAMSAY — The relationship with Landcare groups — Landcare traditionally does coordinate rabbit baiting and poisoning, and you have not mentioned much of them. Are they active in your space?

Mr HODGENS — I love Landcare and would do as much as I can to assist Landcare groups. They seem to be not active in the way that they traditionally were. Heading back as a youngster, there seemed to be a lot more sort of on-ground action, where the private landholders would group together and do rabbit control in areas, and they would lead council or VicRoads or Parks Victoria or whatever along with them in their works, but it just does not seem to be the case anymore.

There are not an awful lot of groups in our area. They tend to be a Landcare Network where they take on kind of, I guess, broader scale projects rather than specific areas. In my seven and a half years in council we have not had contact from a Landcare group regarding rabbits. Foxes, yes: out at St Helens there is a project being undertaken by the Basalt to Bay Landcare Network that has been quite successful, but council's involvement there is quite minimal given the road reserves are only one chain wide and generally quite treed — one of the rare areas that has trees. So there is not an awful lot that we can do to assist because we simply do not manage land in that area. If they want assistance with contacting neighbouring landholders, they are more than welcome to come and ask us, and we would help, but they tend to know via the bush telegraph who owns which parcels pretty quickly. Certainly in areas it could be improved, I think.

Mr RAMSAY — Yes. They are very active around my area, and also DEPI have coordinated rabbit poisoning programs. In fact they follow through on prosecutions for those who do not comply with their, I think, biannual rabbit baiting programs. So there is the big-stick approach that DEPI are currently using for some animals at the moment for non-compliance.

Mr HODGENS — It seems to be more of a priority further to the north than in Moyne Shire unfortunately. We do not seem to see a lot of that action. I am not aware of there being a rabbit control area in our Shire where the department comes out and takes the big stick approach.

Mr RAMSAY — I know you have got a few on the Peterborough golf course, because I had to zigzag my way through.

Mr HODGENS — Amazingly with the request from Peterborough that was made not via the golf club. When we contacted the golf club and said, 'We are going to undertake works because the community said', the golf club went, 'Okay, whatever you'd like to do, but don't involve us. We've got no complaints'.

Ms WARD — It is how Simon gets a hole-in-one, you see.

Mr RAMSAY — There are more holes in the green than one. Sorry, I have just a couple of quick ones. The funding is an interesting one that Daniel raised, because our notes say it is around 131 000 that council contributes to pest and weed. You have indicated about 100 000 to weed, or boxthorn principally —

Mr HODGENS — And a bit of blackberry.

Mr RAMSAY — and blackberry — no gorse — so that does not leave much for pest control. And you have responsibility for roadside management, I think.

Mr HODGENS — Yes.

Mr RAMSAY — What is the state government giving for support in relation to pest and weed control?

Mr HODGENS — So out of the annual budget we get, I think it is, \$67 341, which is actually an increase from what it had been two years ago when it was \$50 000. About three years before that it was about \$12 000.

Mr RAMSAY — Is that for the weed component, or is that for both?

Mr HODGENS — That is for weed and pests, yes.

Mr RAMSAY — Through parks, or where does that come from?

Mr HODGENS — It comes through the former DEPI, which would now be the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. It is kind of a mix across three departments, I think. I get confused with which one I am writing to about it. It has got to be approved by one department, but you send the paperwork to another department and then get the money from a different department. As long as we get the money, we can do the works.

Mr RAMSAY — Well, it is not much. The professional hunter — you mentioned it, and I just tuned out for a fraction of a second in relation to the work on Griffiths Island. What was the outcome of using the professional hunters?

Mr HODGENS — The Friends of Griffiths Island group asked for a quotation from a professional hunter that lived locally who — —

Mr RAMSAY — And could not get him at the right time. It was a timing thing.

Mr HODGENS — Yes, so basically it looked good on paper, the concept of it, and then they went, ‘Okay, we’ll do a dummy run’. He came out and looked and went, ‘Okay, I can see where the best habitat would be where I could position myself and shoot’ and whatnot. But any time that the actual conditions were suitable, they would ring up and say, ‘Hey, is it going to work for you tonight?’, and he would go, ‘Well, unfortunately I can’t because I’m out shooting at such and such’s property’. That happened to them half a dozen times, and I think they kind of went, ‘Oh, well. It sounds great, but if you can’t get the fella, it’s not really much use’.

Mr RAMSAY — They are just not reliable, are they, Daniel? They are not like direct shooters.

The ACTING CHAIR — No, we are out there all the time.

Ms WARD — You were saying in your presentation that you are now up to doing four shoots a year. Is that right?

Mr HODGENS — Yes.

Ms WARD — And when did that start?

Mr HODGENS — I reckon 2012 would have been the first year.

Ms WARD — Yes, okay. How long does each shoot last for? Is it a day and night or a couple of days and nights?

Mr HODGENS — No, we ask that the island is closed at 6.00 p.m., and it is generally about 3 hours from dusk. I do not want to steal any of Anthony’s thunder, but it is around or getting in towards dusk, then making sure there is no-one on the island in those few hours while there is daylight and then conducting at night. If it is a morning shoot, it is 6.00 a.m. until about 11 a.m.

Ms WARD — Are they usually around the same time each year, or are there triggers?

Mr HODGENS — Yes. So the Short-tailed Shearwater has a very specific life cycle that is within a week’s variation each year, so we can plan that the first shoot is always just before the birds arrive back from their migration. The second shoot is while they are away on what is known as the honeymoon period, so when they have mated and are flying away. Then the last two are conducted just as the adults have flown away so the chicks are left and are flightless, and then right at the very end of the season when hopefully there are not very many chicks left there might still be foxes living out there.

Ms WARD — And what consultation or information does council have in terms of letting people know that the island is going to be closed and there is shooting happening?

Mr HODGENS — There are public notices in the newspaper. We are very fortunate that there is about a kilometre gap between the nearest houses and where the causeway is. We do not write to the people, but again, because it has been going for 30-plus years, it is just known in the community. At the time when the

friends group was established we went through this rigmarole again and there were a lot of newspaper adverts and stuff at the time, and articles where they talked about the group wanting to increase fox control. The advertising said that, and it is just accepted. The visitor information centre, which council runs, gets prior warning of the dates so any visitors that come into town they will say, 'People, you cannot go out there tomorrow morning', or Wednesday night or whenever. Again we try to schedule around when there are not any school holidays or any major events in the town.

Ms WARD — So you do what you can to reduce any impact on the 100 000 visitors that you get a year?

Mr HODGENS — Yes, that is right, but as I am sure Anthony will tell you, people are generally very accepting of it. The shearwater is the environmental attraction of the area. If you are doing anything that you can say will help them survive and protect them, people go, 'Oh, yeah, it is just an inconvenience, and we'll have to come back another time'.

Ms WARD — And how many hunters usually participate?

Mr HODGENS — That is a question that you are better off asking Anthony.

Ms WARD — Is there any consultation with council about who goes in or how it is coordinated? Are they totally autonomous?

Mr HODGENS — No. We leave that with the Warrnambool Field and Game group.

The ACTING CHAIR — Just quickly, I will talk about funding again, which is probably going to confuse people that I am not talking more about the rec shooting and am more interested in the funding.

Mr HODGENS — No, you are right.

The ACTING CHAIR — In terms of parks not conducting some of the programs that they should have or, as you were aware, were going to conduct and some of the reasons being funding, something that we will probably look at at the end of this committee is how the funding model is or maybe how things might change based on evidence that has been given. What would your opinion be on that? Would you think it would be more value to provide extra funding to council for council to do pest management controls that they are doing, or is it an increase in Parks Victoria's budget that needs to be met so they can do some of those things, or is it a combination of both? What do you think the best way to approach that would be?

Mr HODGENS — As an immediate response I would say, 'Look, Parks Victoria needs an increase in budget', but then I do not see a lot of output coming from Parks Victoria with the increase in money. So unless there are key deliverables, the situation where council's \$63 000-odd worth of funding is that the State Government requires a plan and it is agreed by the community and it is adopted by council and it goes through a bit of a process and there are actually key result areas that come out of that. Whereas if you just give Parks Victoria increased funding, they will just go, 'Okay, we'll spend it on a million other things or won't spend it on anything'. If they were to be given extra money, you would need that list that says, 'And we're expecting rabbit control here and fox control here' and that sort of stuff.

The ACTING CHAIR — So some sort of regime to make sure they are accountable for actually delivering that?

Mr HODGENS — Yes. I think councils are certainly much better at that. I am not saying they are squeaky clean and perfect, but they are certainly much better at that than what Parks Victoria seems to be.

The ACTING CHAIR — Do you have any experience with other councils in the region and how they do the same thing? Do you communicate with other councils in the region?

Mr HODGENS — Yes, we talk to equivalents in neighbouring shires. Certainly the fox control side of things for us seems to be unique compared to the others, but that is not to say that they do not have their own innovative ways of doing things. Rabbits in the urban area seem to be their main focus, again because

you get people complaining about those more so than they do in the rural areas. In the rural areas the private landholders are probably more likely to take matters into their own hands rather than to involve council.

Yes, I guess it is a case of the officer's time being limited, and like me, I am the one environment officer, and the neighbouring shire has got one and the neighbouring shire on the other side has got one and a half. It is a very time-intensive process to go through. I think everyone wants to help and wants to undertake the work, but it is just around that consultation, bringing people up to speed and getting them to accept what is going on. I think that is the harder part. It might not be as simple as just going, 'We'll give you \$20 000 more to undertake pest work'. That actually might not be that much of an incentive. It is more of a time factor thing.

The ACTING CHAIR — You mentioned before that you do not have a big problem with deer, which is probably understandable given the terrain, but what about cats and dogs? Do you have any issues or experience with that, and what do you guys do to address that?

Mr HODGENS — It is certainly not like the wild dog situation you have up your way. It is not reported in at all. With cats, I would actually attribute some of the bird deaths on Griffiths Island to domestic cats and dogs for sure. Is there a wild population? I do not see any great evidence of it; no-one has brought it forward. It is certainly not an issue that seems to be rumbling in the community.

Mr RAMSAY — Just in relation to shooting and poisoning, what is the best outcome using either of those two tools?

Mr HODGENS — I think you need to use the two together in all honesty. On the shooting side of things, OHS-wise council is very risk averse and probably struggles with that in that urban-type setting. They would prefer not to. I still believe there are enough controls there to be able to close areas down and undertake shoots, but as a general rule council would be typically against shooting. Baiting I think is a little bit hit and miss depending on the season. I would much rather us undertake both when we can. Again you are resource limited in that you might tee up the shooters to come at a particular time, and the weather is really bad and there is no return. Similarly you might tee up your baiting program and there is enough feed around, and the bait is not taken. It is not an exact science I guess. Council dealt with this when they were doing rabbit control at Southcombe Park. We need that integrated approach of removing the harbour and perhaps changing the vegetation type within the high-use areas to something that is a little less bushy. There are a number of factors involved there. I would not ever lean towards one over the other, but certainly it gives council the heebie-jeebies when they hear the word 'shooting'.

Ms WARD — With the \$63 000 funding that you received this year from the state government, how is that worked out? Do you put in an estimation of what your costs are for the year as a percentage? How is that figure arrived at? Do you know?

Mr HODGENS — I believe it is based on length of roads.

Ms WARD — In terms of your pest and weed control?

Mr HODGENS — Yes.

Ms WARD — So it is a percentage of your length of road? There is a formula based on your length of roads.

Mr HODGENS — I cannot give you details on the actual formula, but a few years ago when it was \$50 000 it was \$50 000 if you had more than 2000 kilometres of municipal roads. Warrnambool City Council, as an example, at that time got about \$400 or \$500 worth of funding because they only have a couple of hundred kilometres of municipal roads. Then through the refining of the grant process they came up with some kind of formula so that it could be adjusted and you could potentially get more funding based on that, and other councils would get less funding. There is probably a coefficient in there that is for the extent of weed problem as well, but it is predominately based on length of road.

The ACTING CHAIR — If there are no more questions, that will do us for now. Thank you very much for coming in.

Mr HODGENS — Awesome.

The ACTING CHAIR — It was really good evidence you presented.

Ms WARD — Are you cool if we follow up if we have got any further questions. Can we write to you or send you an email?

Mr HODGENS — Yes, definitely. I really appreciate the opportunity to talk and good luck with inquiry.

Witness withdrew.