

# PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4 - REGIONAL NSW

Wednesday 13 December 2023

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

## AGRICULTURE, REGIONAL NEW SOUTH WALES, WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES

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The Committee met at 9:15.

### MEMBERS

The Hon. Mark Banasiak (Chair)

The Hon. Greg Donnelly

The Hon. Emma Hurst (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell

The Hon. Cameron Murphy

The Hon. Peter Primrose

The Hon. Bronnie Taylor

### PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**The Hon. Tara Moriarty**, *Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, and Minister for Western New South Wales*

\* Please note:

[inaudible] is used when audio words cannot be deciphered.

[audio malfunction] is used when words are lost due to a technical malfunction.

[disorder] is used when members or witnesses speak over one another.

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**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the supplementary hearing for the Committee's inquiry into budget estimates 2023-24. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today.

I welcome Minister Moriarty and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Agriculture, Regional New South Wales and Western New South Wales. I ask everyone in the room to turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures.

Given that the majority of our witnesses are appearing today via videoconference, I'll make a few notes on virtual hearing etiquette to minimise disruptions and assist our Hansard reporters. If participants lose their internet connection and are disconnected from the virtual hearing, they are asked to rejoin the hearing by using the same link as provided by the Committee's secretariat. I ask Committee members to clearly identify who questions are directed to. I ask everyone to state their name when they begin speaking. Could everyone please mute their microphones when you are not speaking and remember to turn your microphones back on when you're getting ready to speak. If you start speaking while muted, please start your question or answer again so it can be recorded in the transcript. Members and witnesses should avoid speaking over each other so we can all be heard clearly. Also, to assist Hansard, I remind members and witnesses to speak directly into the microphone and avoid making comments when your head is turned away.

On 22 November the Legislative Council agreed for this Committee to hold a supplementary budget estimates hearing in 2023 to examine the portfolios of Agriculture, Regional New South Wales and Western New South Wales. Subsequently on 23 November the Committee sent an invitation to the Minister to attend today's hearing for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. In response, the Minister advised the Committee that she would be happy to facilitate the request of the Committee to attend the hearing. However, on Monday this week she sent further correspondence advising that she would attend via videoconference and until 10.30 a.m. only. I note this chain of events for the record.

All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. However, witnesses who were sworn at the earlier estimates hearing before this Committee do not need to be sworn again. Minister Moriarty, you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., and we are joined by the Minister from 9.15 a.m. The morning session will continue until 1.00 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m.

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**Dr JACQUI TRACEY**, Executive Director, Policy, Local Land Services, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

**Mr ANSHUL CHAUDHARY**, Chief Executive Officer, Forestry Corporation of NSW, on former affirmation

**Mr ROB KELLY**, Executive Director, Local Land Services Regional Delivery, on former affirmation

**Mr JONATHAN WHEATON**, Acting Deputy Secretary, Regional Development Group, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

**Ms REBECCA FOX**, Secretary, Department of Regional NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

**Mr SCOTT HANSEN**, Director General, Department of Primary Industries, before the Committee via videoconference, on former oath

**Mr STEVE ORR**, Chief Executive Officer, Local Land Services, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

**Mr JAMES BOLTON**, Deputy Secretary, Regional Precincts Group, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

**Mr SEAN SLOAN**, Deputy Director General, Department of Primary Industries Fisheries, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

**Dr JOHN TRACEY**, Deputy Director General, Department of Primary Industries Biosecurity and Food Safety, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

**Dr KIM FILMER**, Chief Animal Welfare Officer, Department of Primary Industries, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

**Mr DAVID McPHERSON**, Deputy Director General, Department of Primary Industries Forestry and Land Reform, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

**Mr DREW VARNUM**, Executive Director, NSW Public Works, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

**The CHAIR:** To witnesses, welcome and thank you for making the time to give evidence. We will now begin with questions from the Opposition. Before we do, to the two doctors Tracey online, could you make sure when you announce your names that you announce your full name, including your first name, for completeness for Hansard.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, on 27 November you wrote a letter to the Committee saying, paragraph 4, you would amend your plans to appear today. Then on 11 December you sent an email saying that you'll be doing this remotely. Why aren't you here in person? What are you afraid of?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Good morning, everybody, and thanks for the opportunity to participate in the hearing today. I'm pleased to be here. I'm participating. I'm here to answer any of the questions that any of you have.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Why aren't you here in person?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am the Minister for Regional New South Wales, and I am the Minister for Western New South Wales. I've had longstanding plans to be in Western New South Wales—for months, actually. I have made changes to those plans to accommodate the request that was made to me to participate today, and I'm delighted to answer any questions.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I will just redirect you. You said that you had long-term plans. When you replied to the Committee, you said that you were available to come in person; you've changed that. Why have you changed that? What are you hiding from?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm available. I'm right here participating. I welcome the questions, any questions that you have, Mrs Taylor—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's Mrs Taylor, thank you.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —or any of the other members of the Committee. You also have plenty of opportunities to put questions to me on notice, through supplementary processes.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, if this is going to work—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am available to answer.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, why are you only available until 10.30 when you said you would be available at the standard time? Why are you truncating that time to answer questions? What are you afraid of, Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am welcoming the opportunity to be here. I've had longstanding commitments to meet with communities across Western New South Wales, who are not interested in Macquarie Street politics. They're interested in what's happening in their community.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, this is about accountability. You can't squib your way out of it.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** And I am engaging with communities in Western New South Wales because they deserve to have [disorder].

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I'll redirect you. You told this Committee that you would be here. You now suddenly have plans that you can't be here. You've truncated the time. This is unprecedented. No-one has done this except you today showing a complete disregard for transparency. Why have you shortened the time when you indicated that you would be available for the full time? Why?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am available. I'm right here to answer questions. I look forward to questions about the [disorder].

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, stop doing your repeated lines that you've been given by your media advisers and answer the question. Show some respect to the process and the people of New South Wales.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are you going to let me answer the questions, or are you just going to try to bully me? I'm trying to answer the questions.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No-one is bullying you, Minister. You are really—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are you going to let me answer the questions today, Mrs Taylor?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Is that the best you've got? That's the best you've got. You didn't answer the question: Why have you truncated the time until 10.30 today when that is not what you agreed to do?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm here. I'm available to answer questions.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Right, so you can't answer the question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am in Western New South Wales as the Minister for Western New South Wales. I work for the people of Western New South Wales. I work for the people of Regional New South Wales. They are not interested in Macquarie Street politics. They are not interested in games.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, I'll just stop you there.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** They deserve [disorder] made changes to accommodate this—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We've got very limited time. Certainly today we have limited time.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and I'm here.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, my question to you is you are actually accountable to this Parliament and this Parliament is accountable to the people of New South Wales, so to sprawl out some political line of "you don't care about Macquarie Street politics"—we actually care about the people of the regions who have serious questions they want to ask you about your time as the Minister and the decisions that you're making. You have told this Committee that you would be available for the full time. You have now, as my colleague said, cut that to an hour, which is disrespectful not just to this Committee but also to the Chamber of which you are a member. You stood up and said you would make yourself available. What are you doing at 10.30 that was so urgent, that was so critical, that you couldn't allow yourself to be here until 1.00 p.m.? All of your officials are here for the whole day; what do you have to do, to leave at 10.30, that couldn't be moved, couldn't be amended, so that you couldn't accommodate the Committee's request? What are you doing?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am meeting with groups across Western New South Wales—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who? Who are you meeting with and what are you talking about?

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —yesterday and I'm continuing to do it today. I have made some changes—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'll redirect you, Minister. Who are you meeting with?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are you going to let me answer the question, or are you just going to try to bully me all morning? I'm trying to answer questions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, I've asked a very specific question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are you going to let me finish?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I don't want a general answer. You said that you are so busy that you can only allow an hour out of your time to be here today. Who are you meeting with from 10.30? What are the critical matters of importance that could not wait until later today after 1.00 p.m., indeed tomorrow, that you have to leave this Committee to go and attend to in Broken Hill? What is it that you're doing?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm meeting with community groups across Broken Hill. I met with groups—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who? Who are you meeting with and what are you discussing?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are you going to let me answer the question?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I've asked three times. I'd like to know. Who are you meeting with? It's pretty simple.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm trying to answer the question, with respect. I have said I'm here and willing to participate, and no-one seems to want to hear the answers that I'm giving, but the people of Western New South Wales do and the people of regional New South Wales do.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who are you meeting with, Minister? I'm redirecting you. It was a very specific question. Who are you meeting with this morning?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You're right to say that they do want to hear from me, and I have a whole range of meetings lined up with people because I have a job to do to clean up the mess that you left—that your Government left [disorder].

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, I'm redirecting you again. We're going to find ourselves back here many times.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am engaging with some—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I think you should get used to budget estimates hearings, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** As has been [disorder]—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who are you meeting with this morning? It's a simple question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm with this Committee this morning. I'm here, Mrs Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Well, at 10.30 a.m., Minister, with respect, you're leaving because you couldn't amend your longstanding plans that were so critical it had to—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I did amend my longstanding plans. I've already given that answer.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —go over the top of your parliamentary responsibilities in terms of integrity, accountability, honesty and transparency—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are you going to let me answer questions or are we just doing this bullying [inaudible] all morning?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who are you meeting with? It's pretty simple. Who are you meeting with this morning that you can't be here?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** [Disorder] meeting with this Committee and I'm here to answer your questions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, Minister, that is not an answer. I'm going to ask you again: Who are you meeting with between 10.30 a.m. and 1.30 p.m. today that you could not be available for the full time that the convention of this House has had for many years when Ministers appear before committees? Who are you meeting with this morning? I would like the names of the organisations and the issues, please.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And if you don't know, take it on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Take it on notice if you don't know.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm just going to wait for you guys to finish. Would you like me to answer?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'd like an answer.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't want to interrupt.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Answer the question!

**The CHAIR:** There's the pause now, Minister. I think you should take that pause and answer.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Thanks, Chair. I appreciate it. I have a range of stakeholder meetings today, both with community groups myself—as I have announced a number of times publicly before, and for many months, I'm hosting a series of round tables in regional communities—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Okay, thanks, Minister. I'll just stop you there. Are you having—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** In Bourke yesterday 36 [disorder] turned up.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —a round table this morning? Is that before 1.00 p.m., the round table? When's that on? Surely you—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm sorry, can you repeat that [disorder]?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —know the time? Open your diary now. It would be in your phone. What time is your round table today? When's that on?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've been asked a question and I'm attempting to answer it. I'm not sure what's happening—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What time is the round table? It's not hard—not a trick question. You said you've got a round table; what time is it on today?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I do have a—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, what time today?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are you going to let me finish?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's not a hard—this is not a hard—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You let me know when you're ready for the answer.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** This is not a trick. What time is your round table?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have a series of meetings, events—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Oh, for God's sake.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister! What time is your round table on?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Fox might know. Ask her.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The round table is one of the events that I'm hosting today. I had one in Bourke yesterday and 36 community members turned up—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Okay, we'll be redirecting. Ms Fox, what time—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Fox, what time is the round table today?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm looking forward to engaging with community groups about how we can fix the mess that you left—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** This is so embarrassing.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —with 12 years of neglect for this community.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, I have a question for Ms Fox. What time is the round table today? Can someone from the department answer that question, please?

**REBECCA FOX:** I actually don't know, but I can find out.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Oh, come on, Ms Fox!

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm sorry, so no-one on the call—you're all out at Broken Hill to have a meeting with stakeholders today and not one person from your entire department on here right now can tell us what time that round table is? We've been Ministers; that doesn't happen. Someone knows the time. Who knows the time?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I would remind both of you that you are under oath. A direct question, Ms Fox, has been asked of you as the Secretary of the Department of Regional NSW: What time—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** She said she'll check. There's no need to bully the department either.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —is the meeting?

**REBECCA FOX:** I've just got the information from my team: It's 1.00 p.m. today.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Right. Minister, you could have been here this morning and made the round table. Why are you not staying until 1.00 p.m.? Can you now amend your plans and stay until 1.00 p.m. so that the Committee can—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've amended my plans—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —ask you the questions?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —to accommodate the request [disorder]—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, but you haven't. You told us that you would be here and you're not going to be here. You lied to the Committee when you wrote to us and said you'd make yourself available. You haven't told the truth. We now know the round table that you said has been longstanding doesn't begin until 1.00 p.m. Will you stay until 1.00 p.m. to answer questions and be accountable to the people of this State?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm here answering questions right now, being accountable to the people—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will you stay until 1.00 p.m.? That's my question. Will you stay today until 1.00 p.m.?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are we going to answer questions or are we just doing this all morning?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, I'd like you to answer my question. Will you stay until 1.00 p.m.?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No. I've already responded to the Committee—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Right, so no. Minister, I guarantee you—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am here. I am participating.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —that this will be an issue that will continue to be problematic for you—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I look forward to your questions. This is one way for you—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You cannot flout what the committee process is here to do.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —to ask me questions; there are plenty of others. I'm very accountable to [disorder]—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You're not.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** This is a mockery and it's a joke. We all know what's going on here.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Okay. We'll move on, thank you, Minister. I remind everyone, after that performance, that everyone is under oath to the people of New South Wales and to this Committee. When questions are asked, they should be answered. Minister, are you a supporter of Local Land Services? Yes or no?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm going to answer the questions that are asked of me, and I'm going to answer them in the way would like to answer them, if that's okay, with respect.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Are you a supporter of Local Land Services, Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Local Land Services—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It is a simple question.



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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —do really terrific—I'm going to let you finish so that I can then answer the questions that you have. I'll let you finish.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Again, Minister—I will say it for the third time: Are you a supporter of Local Land Services? It's a fairly direct question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are you finished?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Do you want to start?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** What do I think of Local Land Services? Am I a supporter of them? Yes, I think they do fantastic work—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Great. Thank you, Minister. How much is the—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —supporting farmers to manage [disorder] issues [disorder] regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —Local Land Services travel budget this—

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Point of order: I don't want to interfere at this early stage, but I do think if it's worth asking a question, it's worth allowing the Minister at least a few seconds to actually begin to answer it. After a period of time you can seek to redirect, but at least let the Minister begin to answer her question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point of order: Chair, just for the record, I had to ask that question three times. It was a simple question. The Minister is openly flouting the situation of not being here—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** To the point of—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm happy to move on now to my second question, but please don't waste our time like what happened last time.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Further to the point of order—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Here we go.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** If the Minister wishes to answer, the Minister can answer in whatever way they believe appropriate.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** If the Minister answered, we wouldn't be back here again.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Being conscious of the time, let me rule. Yes, the Minister is allowed to answer in the manner in which she sees fit, but the opposing member who is asking the question can redirect. I always say that should be done in a respectful way. Obviously that is difficult when people keep talking over the top of each other. I just remind people that if there is a call to redirect, can we cease talking over the top of each other so that redirection can be done and put politely.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** If the Minister was here, we wouldn't have the problem.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's a little bit easier in person.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, how much is the Local Land Services travel budget this year compared to last year? If you don't know, could you please take it on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The specific travel budget I will have to take on notice. I will come back to the Committee.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, it is my understanding that the—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** But I will say—sorry to interrupt, but I do want to assist the Committee. Of course, the Local Land Services department people are on the line. Mr Orr might actually like to give the answer.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But they're here all day. We'll get to them later.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** We've got you for an hour. Don't worry.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** [Disorder] the Committee so I'm happy to hand over to get proper information for you—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister—

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**The CHAIR:** Order! Can we stop talking over the top of each other? There is another question being put, Minister, sorry.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No problem, Mr Chair.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, how do you justify cutting the travel budget of LLS staff when so much of the work that they do with stakeholders—farmers across New South Wales—is done on farm? How can you possibly justify that cut?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, as I was saying, I actually really support the work that LLS do on the ground, working on farm and with farmers. I've been out with them around different parts of regional New South Wales. As I've said many times on the record, I like to get out and about and travel across the regions—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Yes. Your travel budget hasn't been cut, unlike your staff.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —to understand the issues that people are facing—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You use it to escape.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The local teams, certainly, that I've engaged with, but I know more broadly, do terrific work—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, can I redirect you to the question? How do you support the cuts that you have made to the travel budget of LLS staff? It's obvious your travel budget hasn't been cut, because you've used yours to get away from coming today, but how do you justify cutting that of the LLS staff?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm here today. I'm participating today, answering questions, just in relation to that part of the question that you just put to me. I'm here. I'm answering the questions that you are asking me. There is no impact on business as usual for LLS. They do terrific work—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So you're saying there are no cuts to the LLS budget, Minister?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The travel budget hasn't been cut?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** The travel budget?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There's no cuts [disorder]—I'll let you finish.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No cuts to the travel budget for LLS, Minister? Is that correct?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, I'll let you finish. Sorry, is that the question? I don't want to interrupt you.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Yes, Minister, that is the question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Thank you. There's no impact on business as usual for the team. I think they do really terrific work—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, Minister—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, it was really specific.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and they will continue to do terrific work.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —I redirect you to the question. The question was very specific; it was about travel budgets. Please answer the question, Minister. If you don't know, take it on notice.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have answered the question and I'll continue to—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You haven't answered the question at all. This is a joke.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —answer the question, with respect. They do really fantastic work. There's no impact on business arrangements. Nobody has raised any concerns with me—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, you are flouting the process today.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are you going to let me answer these questions or are you going to continue to try and bully me? I don't really—I'm here trying to answer questions and you won't even let me finish a sentence—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Point of order: Sorry, Minister, I would like to take a point of order.

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sure.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That is the second time that the Minister has used the term "bullying", which is a very serious allegation. My colleague is not bullying the Minister. She is asking questions, which is our right as members of Parliament, about LLS travel budgets. I would ask the Minister to stop using that terminology, which is inflammatory, offensive and inaccurate. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** I do uphold that point of order. Given my previous career, I've got a lot of experience in dealing with bullies. I wouldn't say what Mrs Taylor is doing is bullying. She is trying to put questions to the Minister. Obviously, we've got the added degree of difficulty of Webex, so I ask people to stop talking over the top of each other. It's a problem for Hansard, but it's also a problem in terms of getting questions and answers done effectively. The question is still with Mrs Taylor.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'll ask the question again, Minister. Do you support the travel cuts that you have made to Local Land Services?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I support the work that Land Local Services does.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That wasn't the question, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I think they do terrific—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, again, you have made substantial cuts to the Local Land Services travel budget. Do you support those cuts?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I support Local Land Services, who do really—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I will redirect you. One more time, do you support the cuts that you have made to the Local Land Services travel budget, seeing as the most important thing they do, as you have said time and time again this morning, is get out into the regions? Do you support the cuts that you and your Government have made to the transport budget of the Local Land Services?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I support the work that Local Land Services—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'll move on. You obviously can't answer the question. Minister, why are you reducing the remuneration for Local Land Services chairs and board members?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** As you would expect, and as the people of regional New South Wales would expect, as a new government, we're having a good look at how things work—where they're working, where they're not and where things might need to be addressed. It's an appropriate time to do that. I have been quite public in telling the community and telling people in LLS that we were doing a review of the boards, for a couple of reasons—firstly, because the Government broadly committed to having a look at how board arrangements are working inside of government. That's an appropriate thing to do. That's what taxpayers expect.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'll redirect now because, obviously, you support the cuts to the remuneration, as you've said.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order: I'm very reluctant—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** She's decided to do this as a Minister. You've got to answer questions about the choices you make.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** You're then putting words in her mouth and saying, "You agree."

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You know that's not true. Let us get on with this; we've got less than an hour. If you want to do this again, we'll just have to bring the Minister back every month.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I have sat here quietly now for—you know the time.

**The CHAIR:** I accept what you're saying, Mr Donnelly. Can we be mindful of the comments afterwards?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Okay.

**The CHAIR:** I would probably agree that the Minister was saying she was supportive of the cuts, but let's move on.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** She's justifying them.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, given that you're cutting—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** With respect, Chair, you can't put words in—

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —the cost of local—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —in my mouth [disorder] finish answering the question—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I'm asking the question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —because I think people are entitled to hear the answer.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm redirecting the question, Minister—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'd like to be able to explain it—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —which is my right to do.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —based on the question that I was asked.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, just listening—given that you're cutting the cost—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** So I'm not allowed to answer the questions that I'm being asked this morning?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —of local representation on the Local Land Services board, will you also be cutting—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm sorry, can I answer [disorder]—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —the LLS rates paid by farmers?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm sorry. I wanted to be able to finish answering the question—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I'm redirecting the question, which you know is well within my rights. I'll pose the question to you again: Given that you're cutting the cost of local representation on LLS boards, will you also be cutting the LLS rates paid by farmers?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We're maintaining local representation for LLS boards, because the local representation is incredibly important. That's something that—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You're happy to pay them less—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —we found during the review.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —to do the same job though. That's what is going to happen.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'd like to be able to answer the questions, guys. This is very silly.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** "Guys". The question was are you going to be cutting the LLS rates paid by farmers? Yes or no?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The question was about the local decision-making, and I support the local representatives—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, it wasn't.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It was about rates for farmers.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and the local board representation.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We've got 18 seconds left. Are you going to be attending the LLS board meeting in Sydney tomorrow? Yes or no?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I believe I am, but I'd have to check my diary. I apologise. I don't have it memorised.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you take that on notice, just so we're clear? You're back to Sydney for that but not for today. Thanks for clarifying.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm participating in the hearing today. Right now, I'm here to answer your questions. If you'd like to let me answer the questions, I'm happy to do so.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** This is an absolute embarrassment.

**The CHAIR:** You probably didn't hear the bell over all that chatter, Minister, but we now go to Ms Hurst for crossbench questions.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, did you have any discussions with the Premier about not attending in person today or reducing the time available for budget estimates?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm here answering the questions—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No, the question was did you have any discussions with the Premier about the changes?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm in Broken Hill with the Premier. He is doing meetings today with the community—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So is that a yes?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —while I'm here answering your questions.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You discussed that with him?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm in the community today with the Premier. I travelled with—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No, the question was did you have—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —him across regional communities yesterday.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** —discussions with the Premier—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Brewarrina, Walgett and Bourke.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Did you have discussions with the Premier about not attending in person today for budget estimates and reducing the time available for budget estimates?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** With genuine respect, because I appreciate where the question is coming from, what I'm trying to—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You have no respect for anything.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You're talking about the fact that you're with the Premier. I understand that you're with the Premier. Did you have discussions with him—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm in Broken Hill.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** —about the changes?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Are people going to let me answer questions? This is quite strange.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Tell us about it.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm really trying very hard to be respectful and—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Did you have discussions with the Premier about not attending in person today and reducing the time available for budget estimates?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Ms Hurst, I'm answering the question. I am in Broken Hill with the Premier. I was travelling across regional communities yesterday—a number of them: Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And during that time, did you have a discussion with the Premier about the changes to today's budget estimates?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm in Broken Hill with the Premier. I'm participating in this forum online—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Yes or no?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —while he is doing meetings in the community [disorder] make it obvious.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, the decision to—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm participating from Broken Hill.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** In regard to you not attending in person and reducing the time available, was this a decision of yourself alone?

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, I have longstanding commitments to meet with people across western New South Wales—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So it was your decision alone as Minister—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have a job to do. I am the Minister for Regional New South Wales—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You're a liar.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So this was a decision alone—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and I am the Minister for—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** —by you as Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —Western New South Wales. I answer to regional communities.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have longstanding commitments—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —to engage with them. I respect the communities—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, I don't appreciate you—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —that I'm meeting with.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** —talking down the clock. The question is was this a decision of yourself as Minister alone?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, I have pre-arranged—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, it was a decision alone?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —meetings and pre-scheduled commitments to be in this community for many months.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** With the Premier's media department—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am participating in this hearing today.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —because they knew you'd do this. This is worse than if you were here.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm participating online.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I understand that your answer was "yes". I don't need to hear—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** [Disorder] that the Committee has decided—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** —the same lines again.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —to only call me back. The whole morning, all you've asked me—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I'm going to move on.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —is why I'm online.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I put up an amendment to the biosecurity commissioner bill recently to include other acts of animal cruelty offences. Obviously, the bill already mentioned POCTAA, but there are other animal cruelty offences that, for example, fit into the Crimes Act. In your speech of the reasons why you didn't support the amendment, you referred to the fact that the POCTAA review is underway. I couldn't quite understand that at the time, because the Crimes Act and the POCTA Act are very different pieces of legislation. Are you actually considering removing the Crimes Act animal cruelty offences and putting them under the same Act as the current offences under POCTAA?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We've made an election commitment to review the Act. You and I have spoken about it a number of times—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That's the POCTA Act. My question is in regard to the Crimes Act.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —because [disorder] to answer questions at any time and do so. We've discussed it many times. It was a commitment that we made.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** As the Minister responsible, I am doing that work.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, the question is are you considering removing the Crimes Act animal cruelty offences? I know POCTAA is being reviewed. I'm asking you if you are looking into removing the Crimes Act animal cruelty offences and putting them under the same offences as POCTAA as part of that review.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's not a specific thing that I am currently looking at, because we are reviewing the Act as a whole, which was a commitment that we made to the people of New South Wales during the election campaign. I am responsible for doing that work, and I have begun doing that work. I look forward to getting feedback from stakeholders, including yourself. My door is open to you, as you have been in my office many times to discuss this issue. You're welcome to continue to do that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can I confirm—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Ultimately, we have a whole range of people—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you confirm that—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —[disorder] that review—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** —the animal cruelty offences that fall under—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't have specific things—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —particularly in relation to the question that—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —you're asking me now.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister—

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can I confirm that the Crimes Act offences of animal cruelty will remain under the Crimes Act and that you're only reviewing POCTAA?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't have any specific plans to change the specific things that you're putting to me at the moment. We said that we would review the Act and that's exactly what we will do.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But you're only reviewing POCTAA; you're not going to review the Crimes Act offences?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not responsible for the Crimes Act; I am responsible for POCTAA. I am working through that review, so I will engage with everyone on a whole range of issues that are relevant to those discussions, including you. I am very happy to discuss any particular issues, as I said during the debate on the biosecurity amendment bill. I said on record, to you, that I am happy to engage on these issues.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I want to ask you about puppy farms as well. I am sure you are aware of the ongoing concerns from local councils, particularly regional, rural councils near the border that have been inundated with development applications for large-scale puppy farms since the ban in Victoria was introduced. I know that Murray River Council has had a 500 per cent increase in puppy farm applications since 2022. Where is your time line now in regards to the Labor election promise to outlaw puppy farming, and can we expect to see legislation at some point next year?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's another area of responsibility that I am working through. Also, you've made reference to some councils, and I will work in conjunction with my colleague the Minister for Local Government on these issues. We did make a commitment in relation to banning these big farms, and that is what I'll do.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can we expect to see legislation sometime next year?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll be working through that along with all of the other areas of my responsibility. I'd like to get it done as soon as is possible, but I do need to be able to consult and work with—listen to people across the community, and I will be doing that.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you outline the steps that your office has taken to commence the work on that legislation?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, I have commenced the work on that along with every other election commitment.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you outline the steps that you have taken?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No. I'll have more to say about it as we do it and particularly as I engage with stakeholders, again, including you, Ms Hurst. You're very welcome to engage.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** My question was that you said that you've commenced work. I wanted to understand what work has been commenced so I could understand where we are up to.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sure. As I've said in the previous answer in relation to the POCTA Act, I am considering that there are a range of commitments that we made in this space, as you would be well aware, and I'm looking at all of those as sort of a whole piece, at the moment. We'll give consideration to how the work is dealt with for each of the commitments, but I am looking at them with the assistance of the department. I guess, "in globo" is the word I would describe it as, at this point. But, again, when it's time for consultation and engagement, I'll be sure to communicate that with the public. But people are very welcome to engage with me on these issues, as are you.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have you met with the Minister for Local Government in regard to the legislation?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm sorry, can you just repeat the first part of the question?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have you met with the Minister for Local Government in regard to the legislation?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I would have to check. We've certainly had conversations.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Could you take that on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm just going to finish the answer, if that's okay. Sorry, Ms Hurst.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I think you said you'd have to check, so my question was can you please take that on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We will have had conversations—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you take it on notice whether you've met with the Minister for Local Government in regard to puppy farm legislation?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We will have had conversations, as I do with all of my colleagues. I've said to you already that I'll check, and I'm happy to come back. I don't know that there would be—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can I confirm that you are taking that on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —a specific item in my diary in relation to discussing puppy farms. We will have had discussions with my colleague, and I will continue to do that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, can I confirm that you are taking that on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, I'm really trying to answer the question, Ms Hurst.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, you said that you needed to go and check, so my question then is will you confirm that the question has been taken on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** What I have said is that, yes, I will check and I will come back.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes. It's taken on notice. Thank you.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** But what I'm saying to you is that I would have had ongoing discussions with my colleague the Minister for Local Government because we cross over on a lot of these issues. So whether there is an entry in my diary that specifically is a meeting about this, I am not sure. I have said that I will check and come back, but I have regular discussions with colleagues [disorder]—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, I've only got a few seconds left—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —the Government around a number of areas of my responsibility.



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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I just want to ask one more question. Have you had any discussions with the DPI about the election commitment for an office of animal welfare?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Have I had discussions? Yes, I'm seeking advice and information because it is something that we are working on.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have you or anyone within the department been discussing the new role of commissioner with Ms Suzanne Robinson, who is now the Director – Office of the Commissioners, and what will her role be in regard to that?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm actually not sure. I apologise. Perhaps the department officials who are in Orange may well like to provide some more details on who I've discussed it with. I'm not sure.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Hansen, if you don't have an answer—the bell has just gone, so I am happy for you to take it on notice and come back to us in the afternoon. I am just conscious of time with the Minister.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, I'm happy to answer. Can I just make sure I answer the question, Ms Hurst? So your question was have we had discussions with Sue Robinson about that independent office of animal welfare? Was that it?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No. My question was how does the Minister anticipate Ms Robinson's role in the office of animal welfare given her new title of Director – Office of the Commissioners?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** At the moment Ms Robinson's not working in that space of the animal welfare reforms, which includes, in amongst those election commitments, that delivery of that commitment of an independent office of animal welfare. So at the moment she isn't involved in those discussions, and we don't anticipate a forward role for her in that.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I might start with the Kamay Ferry Wharves. Your department did not support the project initially because of various reasons that included threatened marine species as well as the fact it is going straight through a recreational fishing haven. At budget estimates last month, Minister Haylen agreed that it was a dog of a project, but she had made the final decision to proceed with it in May. Did she or any member of your ministerial or department staff consult with yourself or your ministerial or department staff when considering whether to proceed or not with this project?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not sure. I am happy to check, Mr Banasiak. There may well have been discussions at a departmental level in relation to that. I don't know, but I will check that, and I will come back.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. It was also confirmed last month that there actually won't be a ferry service, but, in the words of Mr Collins, this will be an excellent resource for fishers. Given there is no fishing facility for disabled fishers in Botany Bay, and Maritime have confirmed with stakeholders that they have no money, what is the budget in Fisheries to provide disabled access for fishermen in Botany Bay, particularly on this wharf?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sure. In relation to the specifics that you put to me about comments from Transport—I think—and Maritime, the truth is I'm not sure of the details from a transport or maritime perspective, because that's obviously not part of my remit. But I will get that for you, and I will come back, because I understand the nature of the question. In relation to access for making fishing more accessible and particularly in relation to disability access, that is something that we are certainly committed to. We actually have a round of—

**The CHAIR:** Can I just redirect back to the wharf. Given that this is a \$78 million wharf that won't have a ferry and based on the design has only a small section for maybe half a dozen fishermen to stand on and fish and has maybe space for three boats to tie up, do you agree with Mr Collins public statement that says this will be a great resource for fishermen? Do you think \$78 million for three boats and half a dozen fishermen is money well spent?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Mr Banasiak, I'm not familiar with the comments made by Mr Collins, who is, of course, in the department of transport—Transport for NSW, sorry.

**The CHAIR:** Prima facie, would you think that is a good use of resources?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The work of Transport for NSW, in relation to whether there's a ferry or the wharf, that is in their responsibility. I don't have the details, but, as I have said to you, I will check, particularly if there have been any discussions between my department and Transport and/or Maritime. I have said to you, I'll check that and come back to you. What I would like to finish saying though—with respect—is in relation to disability access, that is a very key piece of work for us, and we are very keen to make sure that fishing

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is more accessible. There is a round of the fishing trust open for applications now, and we've encouraged people to apply for projects that fit within that remit, because it is important that we make fishing as accessible as possible. So that is something that is a priority for us, and I'm keen to see us develop better access in this space.

**The CHAIR:** I'll just move on to the topic of forestry. You were just emailed a copy of a ministerial direction from your colleague Ms Sharpe, regarding a protection of environmental policy change regarding the Great Koala National Park and the CIFOA. Do you have that in front of you?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm sorry, you just said that Minister Sharpe has emailed me. No, I don't, I'm sorry.

**The CHAIR:** No. Budget estimates just emailed you a copy of a ministerial direction. Do you have that on your email in front of you?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I will check. I don't know; I'm not looking at my email.

**The CHAIR:** While you're doing that, can I just have you confirm that it's actually the CIFOA that takes precedence when managing forestry. That's correct, isn't it? The CIFOA is the principal document governing forestry operations.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, that's correct. I don't have the document, Mr Banasiak, but I'm happy to try and answer questions.

**The CHAIR:** Are you also aware that part 5B of the Forestry Act requires both you, the Minister for forestry, and the Minister for the Environment to sign off on any changes to the CIFOA?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, correct.

**The CHAIR:** Are you aware at all of a ministerial direction sent from your colleague Minister Sharpe to EPA advising or directing them to make, in her words, "necessary improvements to the CIFOA"?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** So the question is am I aware if Minister Sharpe has sent something to the EPA? I'll have to check and I'll come back to you.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Can I just confirm something there, sorry, Chair?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, Mr Hansen.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The component you're talking about there about both Ministers needing to agree to any amendment of the CIFOA—so the coastal integrated forestry operations approval—that agreement also allows unilateral amendments of protocols within the CIFOA by the EPA.

**The CHAIR:** I will get to the protocols versus what has been proposed in a minute, Mr Hansen. Thank you.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Okay.

**The CHAIR:** For your benefit, Minister, it talks about making potential amendments to approval protocols around the koala hubs. What's your understanding of DPI's role in those hubs? What has been their involvement in creating those hubs?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** As you would be aware, Mr Banasiak, we made a significant election commitment to establish a Great Koala National Park in the North Coast. It was one of the biggest election commitments that was made and we will be delivering on it. In order to do that, and in the same way that I do in a lot of areas of my responsibility, we'll be working across government to work through what that will look like, what the details will be. As you may or may not also be aware, there is consultation going on. We've set up some groups, industry and others, to discuss and consider the issues that are related to that. I'll be working—

**The CHAIR:** Just on that, Minister, do you think there's a problem with the fact that the National Parks and Wildlife Service have sole responsibility of running that process, given that they'll be the sole beneficiary of more land for national parks?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm certainly working with the Minister for the Environment, and we're working across government to consider the issues and the arrangements as we work through delivering on that commitment. We don't operate in silos in this Government. We have to sort of work together to manage these things, but it was a commitment that we made to the people of New South Wales.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just go back to the CIFOA and the issue around protocols. Is it not correct that EPA is actually seeking changes that go beyond protocols concerning hollow log provisions? Given that it's actually

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going beyond protocols, isn't it the fact that the ministerial direction to create a protection of environment policy is actually a try-on and an overstep? You can't make changes to the CIFOA that go beyond protocols, and here you have your colleague—and you say you don't work in silos—actually making a try-on and giving her department directions to, essentially, go beyond protocols?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, as you would be aware, the EPA can amend protocols in the—

**The CHAIR:** Yes, but they're going beyond protocols. Isn't that the truth? In what they're doing with hollow log provisions, they're going beyond protocols.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I haven't seen the details of that, but I'm happy to have a look at the specific issues again. You have access to my office and have been in there many times over the past couple of weeks with questions. I'm very happy to continue that and I'll check for you.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Because that is not your job. Try and socialise it.

**The CHAIR:** Can you take it on notice as to whether the EPA is making changes beyond protocols and how does that actually sit with the co-responsibility of you as Minister for forestry and Ms Sharpe as Minister for the Environment, where she seems to be overruling your responsibility as Minister for forestry by giving a ministerial direction to her department to basically make wholesale changes to the CIFOA and you don't seem to know about it?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll let you finish and then I'll answer the question.

**The CHAIR:** Will you take it on notice as to what the EPA is doing?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** [Disorder] I'll let you finish.

**The CHAIR:** That's it. Can you take it on notice about what EPA is doing with the CIFOA?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes. I've indicated that that's something that I will look at. Just as I work with my colleagues in relation to areas of interest, I expect my colleagues to do the same with me, but I'll check the details and I'll come back.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, just a couple of quick questions. I would like some clarity. You said earlier in the hearing that this trip out west has been planned for some months. Can you advise what date this was put in your diary?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know what date things were put in my diary. I have talked about holding round tables as one example of what I'm doing—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'll just redirect you. Would you be—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —in relation to reviewing the Regional Development Act and asking for feedback around how we spend the \$350 million Regional Development Trust—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thanks, Minister. It's a very specific question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and I've been public about that for many months.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We have very limited time. You said earlier in your evidence that this had been something you'd been looking at for some months. I just want you to advise when this was put in your diary. One way that that might assist is how did you get out to Broken Hill? Have you flown commercially or did you charter?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've made arrangements. I didn't fly to Broken Hill. I was in western New South Wales yesterday, as I have outlined in my previous answer.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But I'm trying to just, with respect—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I was in Brewarrina. I was in Walgett. I was in Bourke.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm just asking a very genuine question. Obviously you live in Queanbeyan or in that part of the State. How did you get to be in western New South Wales? It's not a trick. Was it a commercial? Was it a charter, which you're entitled to do? I'm just trying to work out how you got out there.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I drove to Broken Hill, in fact, because yesterday I was in Walgett—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But from Queanbeyan? Where from?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and I was in Brewarrina and I was in—

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, this isn't a gotcha. I'm trying to work out how you got out there. You would have taken a flight at some point. We all do when we go to western New South Wales. I'm wondering, have you flown commercially or have you chartered to get out to be in the west? It's really simple. I promise. I'm curious. I just want to know.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sure, but there are a couple of different questions there. You've asked how I've gotten to Broken Hill. I drove to Broken Hill.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, from where? Where did you drive from?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Actually, no, I take that back. Sorry, let me correct the record.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm going to unpack this. Where did you drive from to Broken Hill?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I drove between towns yesterday. I've been to a lot of places over the last 24 hours. I apologise. I'm happy to work it through. I flew from Sydney to Walgett.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** With respect—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** This is so bad.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm answering the question.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sorry, you went from Sydney to Walgett. Did you fly?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, I did, and then I drove from Walgett to Brewarrina and then Brewarrina to Bourke—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So let's just go back. We don't have a lot of time.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and then flew to Broken Hill. Sorry, I correct [disorder].

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In those flights that you've taken, which you've now said you have over the course of your travel—which is fine; you're entitled to do that—were they commercial or were they charter flights?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's a mixture of both.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Okay, thank you. Would you be able to provide on notice for the Committee when those charter flights and when those commercial flights were booked, please, through the booking agency? You can take it on notice, but we would like that information, please.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll take it on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. Minister, I noticed on 10 August you met with Woolworths. Your diary disclosures don't actually outline who attended the meeting or provide detail in terms of what you discussed. Given that we know there's a big discrepancy between the prices that farmers are getting at the market and what things are being sold for, and the cost-of-living crisis is hurting everyone across the State, did you raise these issues with the supermarket chain when you met with them on behalf of not just farmers but the people of New South Wales?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, I did raise those issues, and it is an issue that I'm conscious of. I want farmers to get the best deal that they can, and I'm also, like the rest of the Government, conscious of cost-of-living impacts on consumers.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So what was agreed to or discussed at that meeting? Who did you meet with? It didn't actually list who was present. Could you tell us who was there?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I just can't remember. I'll have to check.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you take that on notice, please, and respond to the Committee?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm happy to do that. I don't remember the specific names, but I did raise those issues. I did.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Was there an agreement that you would continue to engage with the supermarket chains, that you would continue to stick up for farmers when it comes to these issues? We've got impending drought, and, indeed, you'd know—I would hope today you've checked the drought indicator—that we're more than 60 per cent drought impacted.

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We have a \$250 million Drought Infrastructure Fund to help farmers to be able to plan and prepare for drought.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But, Minister, I just want to take you back to the impact—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** So, yes, I'm very well aware of the things I'm engaging with people in western New South Wales on.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thanks, Minister, but this was more a question about the impact that we see in terms of the prices that farmers are getting—the impact and the flow-on it's having in terms of the cost to consumers in the supermarket and, indeed, a cost-of-living crisis that people are feeling every day when they go shopping. Other than meet once with Woolworths, what else are you doing in this space to ensure that, if we do find ourselves with more drought-affected communities and food security being an issue, you will be addressing this issue so that people across New South Wales don't pay the price at the supermarket till?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have announced a \$250 million drought preparedness fund, as you would be aware as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, but what else are you going to be doing in terms of engaging with the supermarket chains and the commercial side of things to ensure that farmers don't get ripped off in terms of the dollars that they get for their product? Yesterday or earlier this week at Dubbo, you may or may not be aware, the latest prices for sheep and lamb were about \$73 per animal. A year ago it was \$173 per animal, yet you go to buy lamb cutlets at Woolies and it's \$34 a kilo. Farmers are not getting fair prices. Consumers are paying the cost. You met with the supermarket chain, but what else are you going to do about it? Are you going to continue that engagement? Are you going to fight for farmers and fight the consumers to ensure that we don't end up with exorbitant prices when there is a cost-of-living crisis? What are you going to do about it?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm doing a lot to fight for farmers, because they didn't get a lot of support for 12 years.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's not what they're saying.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm continuing to work closely with them on a whole range of issues that will support them in a number of ways. You're right to point out that prices for product have fluctuated. I'm conscious of that and, in fact, I've seen reports from people saying that beef prices have gone up because of the rain. These are things that do change. I want to make sure that the system that people are operating in is as good and fair as it can be. We've made some commitments, including a dairy and fresh food advocate to work through some of these issues and I will continue—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Isn't that your role? Shouldn't you be doing that?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I will say right now I will continue to engage with the supermarkets on making sure that the prices are right for consumers, because you're right to say that we are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis and a lot of people are hurting. A lot of people in regional New South Wales are hurting and a lot of people here out west in western New South Wales are hurting, which is why I want to be able to listen and engage with them on how we can support them.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** They're hurting because they've got you.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I know that because I live in the regions. I want to direct you now to a new topic in the eight minutes we have left with you. It's in relation to the forestry issues on the South Coast which I raised with you in the House before. We know that there are about 2,200 direct full-time jobs in forestry on the South Coast that are effectively waiting to see if they'll have a job by Christmas because of that stop-work order by the EPA that's in place. When I asked you in the Chamber, you said that agencies were working together. We are now 12 days out from Christmas and nothing has happened. What do you say to those timber workers who are literally wondering if they'll be able to put food on the table on Christmas Day?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I support those workers.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How? What are you doing to support them?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** To be fair, the question in the House was directed to my colleague the Minister for the Environment, but you're right. It's a good question and these are live issues for the workforce, particularly around the South Coast. I was recently down there with the local member, Dr Michael Holland, meeting with—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** He's the member for Bega, not the South Coast.

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Okay, sure. I'd like to continue. I was meeting with some timber workers and others across the industry, and I want to continue to do that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's great. I'll just redirect you. As I said, I think we're now over 100 days since that stop-work order, particularly the one at Tallaganda. It's due to expire, I understand, on 20 December. You said you've been down there and you've met with workers. That's great, but what have you actually done? Have you sought a briefing from the EPA in relation to these issues? Have you met with Minister Sharpe? Is there a time line for when these things will be resolved? This isn't Macquarie Street politics as you call it; this is thousands of people who are wondering if they are going to have a job. What are you doing? What are you actually doing other than going and talking to people? How are you using your role as a Minister to get a resolution on these issues? What are you doing?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I think going out and talking to workers is a very key part of my job, and I will do it as much—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you need to act. You need to do something with those conversations, with respect, Minister. It's great to listen but you have to act. What are you doing, actively, to get a resolution for those workers?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll let you finish and then I'll just try to answer the question, which is what I've been trying to do this morning, all morning.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I've finished. I'd like an answer.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Okay. I think engaging directly with workers in regional New South Wales is a very key part of my role.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** What's your plan?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I take it really seriously. I don't just get briefed on Macquarie Street and then play politics with these issues. They're serious and they have real ramifications for workers.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** They are serious. Let me redirect you. We'll keep it really simple. Will there be a resolution before Christmas for that industry?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** As you've just referenced—and I think that date is correct, someone from the department will correct me if I'm wrong—the stop-work order is due for a decision on the 20th. It's due to be lifted on the 20th. Perhaps the department or Forestry will correct me. I think that's the correct date. We're working with the department, and officials from my department and the environment department are in conversations. I'm happy to ask Mr Hansen or—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We might get to that. We've got the officials all day. We'll come back to them.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We'll continue those discussions and I'll do whatever I can to support workers in regional communities, particularly—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you, Minister. Our time is really limited. You've got seven days on that one, so the clock is ticking.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, who is the Cross-Border Commissioner?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There is an Office of the Cross-Border Commissioner, and the office is doing some really great work at the moment.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Who is the Cross-Border Commissioner, Minister, at the moment?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll have to check the details of the name, but the office is functioning really well.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Do you not know who the Cross-Border Commissioner is at the moment?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We have an office of the cross-border who do really terrific work, and I don't get involved—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, the question is very simple. Would you like to take on notice the name of the Cross-Border Commissioner?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've answered the question, Mrs Taylor.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, you haven't, Minister.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is it James McTavish? Is he the Cross-Border Commissioner?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The Office of the Cross-Border Commissioner is doing useful work.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, I'll redirect you. Is James McTavish still in the role as Cross-Border Commissioner?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't get involved in the day-to-day staffing arrangements.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm sorry. That's not a day-to-day—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Perhaps I might ask Ms Fox to provide some specific details in relation to individual personnel. I don't interfere in—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You do not know, as the Minister for Regional New South Wales, who the Cross-Border Commissioner is today? Ms Fox, who is the Cross-Border Commissioner in New South Wales?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't get involved in specific or individual staffing arrangements inside the department.

**REBECCA FOX:** Today, it's Ms Kalina Koloff.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Mr McTavish has gone?

**REBECCA FOX:** Chair, I'd prefer not to comment on the employment arrangements of individual staff members.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** With respect, Ms Fox, this is not about employment arrangements. This is a very simple question, which your Minister was unable to answer, and now I'm asking you, as the Secretary of the Department of Regional NSW. You've now said that it's a new person as the Cross-Border Commissioner. The previous person has obviously gone, or have we got two Cross-Border Commissioners?

**REBECCA FOX:** I would prefer not to comment on the individual employment arrangements—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** All right, Ms Fox. Why has there not been an announcement about the new Cross-Border Commissioner?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'm not aware of any obligation to provide any announcement.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, why have you not said who the new Cross-Border Commissioner is? This is a very important position to people in regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There is an Office of the Cross-Border Commissioner who are doing work in relation to cross-border issues just as—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, you don't know who the Cross-Border Commissioner is. You've made no announcement about who the new person is, and no-one knows that Mr McTavish, one of the most well-respected people, who has a Public Service Medal, has left the department. This is farcical. Farcical.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, did you know that Mr McTavish was no longer in the role?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't deal with individual staffing arrangements.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, you leak it to the paper.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's a simple question. Were you aware that Mr McTavish was no longer in the role?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't deal with individual staffing arrangements in the department.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, I'm not asking what you deal with.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It wouldn't be appropriate. There are roughly—the department will correct me on this. I think there are over 5,000 people who work across the department, who do fantastic work.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** The Cross-Border Commissioner.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** With respect, the Cross-Border Commissioner is a public role—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It would not be at all appropriate for me to interfere or engage directly on individual employment arrangements for those over 5,000—



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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's a lie.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, I'd like to redirect you. I'm not asking you to get involved in the minutiae of hundreds of employees. The Cross-Border Commissioner is a specific public role who deals with cross-border communities every day. It was very well publicised that it was Mr McTavish. I'm asking you were you aware that he was no longer in that role? Were you briefed? Were you told that he was no longer in that role? It's a fairly simple question, Minister—yes or no?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've engaged on the work of that part of the department publicly for—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But were you aware? This is not a trick.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've been asked about it—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you know that he'd been moved? Yes or no?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm trying to participate in the hearing.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Either you were briefed or you weren't. Either you knew or you didn't.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm trying to answer the questions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How incompetent are you?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've just not really had much of an opportunity to answer questions this morning.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I asked you a question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am not sure what this stunt of politics is about but I'd like to be able to—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You guys should be embarrassed.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** This is appalling.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm trying to be helpful to the Committee. I've engaged—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You don't know if one of your senior officials was in a role or not? You're not sure?

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Mrs Mitchell, I have to hear the point of order.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What a joke. You're a disgrace.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Chair, we've got a resolution of the House that says all witnesses ought to be treated with respect. I've listened patiently and there are just constant interjections coming from the honourable Opposition members opposite, who are attempting to verbal the Minister by accusing her of lying and of being farcical.

**The CHAIR:** I think I know what comment is triggering you, Mr Murphy.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** It's really unacceptable and not in line with the House's resolution.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** What's unacceptable is your Minister.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Here it is again, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** I'll quickly rule. Some of those comments, I know, are borne out of frustration but if we can try and maintain composure through that frustration it'd be appreciated.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I understand that, Chair, but there has to be some responsibility for this Minister to answer the questions appropriately because, if not, we will be back here every single month.

**The CHAIR:** That's—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not really interested in being threatened, for a start, Mrs Taylor, or playing politics with this.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I am not threatening you, Minister. Stop using those words; it's just demeaning.



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**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm trying to engage on some really serious issues across regional New South Wales.

**The CHAIR:** I'm conscious of the fact that you need to go in 15 minutes, Minister. The bell has just gone. I'll throw to my colleague Ms Hurst.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, what work have you undertaken as the Minister to implement the recommendations of the Labor-chaired inquiry into the use of primates and other animals in medical research in New South Wales?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** As I've engaged with you on the previous answer, we are reviewing the commitments we made in relation to animal welfare at the moment. I'm looking at them as a whole and as I get advice—and that includes work in relation to medical research. So I'm getting—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, can I just confirm—you're saying that you're also reviewing the Animal Research Act?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, I'm looking at animal welfare issues and getting advice on those issues to be able to assist me to deliver on the election commitments that we made. In relation to your questions and the questions from earlier, I'm looking at a number of issues across this space at the moment as a whole so that I can work through the best way for the Government to be able to deliver the commitment that we made to the people of New South Wales.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That's right; the election commitment was a review of POCTAA, which is a different Act. I just want to ask about the Animal Research Act. Do you have any plans to implement the recommendations from that report?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll have to check the—I don't remember the recommendations off the top of my head but I'll have a look at them. I'm happy to take that on notice and check any of the specific details and come back to you. Again, you engage with me regularly on these issues outside of these sitting periods and you're welcome to continue to do that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have you received any correspondence from the Animal Research Review Panel requesting changes to the legislation in this space?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know that I've received any correspondence. I would have to check.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you take that one on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sure.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have you met with the Animal Research Review Panel or representatives of the Animal Research Review Panel since being elected?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, I believe so. Again, just to be 100 per cent certain, I will check that. But, yes, I believe so.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** In those meetings, did you speak about their position on the smoking tower models?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There is work being done on that. As you are well aware, we've had a number of discussions about that issue. I know it's a keen interest of yours. I have said to you, and I will say now in the public domain, that I'm getting advice and listening to the experts on that. That's exactly what I'm doing.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have you met with the Animal Research Review Panel about their position on the smoking tower models?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll have to check the details of that and come back to you.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Which experts are you seeking advice from?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** People across the department and there are committees, including the one that you've just referenced. I'm also happy to engage with stakeholders, including yourself, who are interested in this issue.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What about the NHMRC? Have you spoken to them about their position either on smoking tower models or the forced swim test?

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not sure. I'd have to check the details of that. I have a lot of meetings—I apologise—but I'll check the details of that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I just want to ask about Dolphin Marine Conservation Park. You would be aware that this facility recently changed ownership after it was—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** This is the one in Coffs Harbour, sorry? Just to clarify.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, correct. It almost went into bankruptcy recently, but it was sold and changed ownership. In the last parliamentary term we ran a parliamentary inquiry that found that the public attending these facilities was significantly declining and there were concerns about the feasibility of these particular facilities remaining open in New South Wales. If this facility does go broke, I'm just wondering what the contingency plan is to ensure the welfare of these animals?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** As you've outlined in your question—and I believe this is correct but perhaps the department might clarify if I'm not correct—there are new owners or a new business running the facility. I think that's correct.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, that's correct. My question was if it does go broke—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'd like to answer the question.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** —what is the contingency plan from the office, from you as Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The responsibility within my remit is about the welfare of the actual animals that are in the facility. Whether people want to visit these facilities, whether it's a decision for the public about what they do or don't do is not my responsibility.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No, that's not my question, Minister. Minister, my question is if the facility goes broke, as it was at risk of doing very recently, what is the contingency plan in regard to the welfare of those animals that are currently in the facility? Can you confirm, as the Minister, for example, that those animals won't be killed?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** In the time between when it was under the previous owners and closing before the new owners, I understand that new locations were being found. Mr Hansen, you might want to provide more detail so I can be correct on this. But I understand that was the [disorder].

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I understand all those basic details, and Mr Hansen I can talk a lot further this afternoon about it. But my question to you, Minister, was can you confirm that those animals won't be killed—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** My understanding is—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** —if the facility was to go bankrupt?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Okay, I'll let you finish.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That's the question, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sorry, I didn't hear what—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, could I just add a piece here?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No, sorry. Mr Hansen, I understand you've got further information. I'm sure we can talk this afternoon, but I've only got one minute left with the Minister. Minister, my question was can you confirm, as the Minister, that those animals won't be killed if the facility goes bankrupt?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I hope it continues to trade and they can stay where they are but my understanding is the arrangements are to find other accommodations for them. That's what I would expect if that's the situation that occurs.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can I just clarify? Earlier we were talking about puppy farms. There have obviously been several parliamentary inquiries into the issue, including one that was led last year by the Hon. Mick Veitch. You mentioned that you want to do further consultation beyond those inquiries. Can I ask what further consultation you're looking into in regard to this before legislation is introduced? Is that going to be an official process or do you mean you just need to discuss with the relevant stakeholders yourself?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's completely appropriate and proper, if I'm going to be changing legislation in line with commitments that we made, that I engage with the community and stakeholders about any changes that are proposed. That's what I'd do on anything in my portfolio. It's important that I engage with the

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community and stakeholders, and that's exactly what I'll do in relation to this—again, just as I do on any other topic.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I might just go to my questions for the last seven minutes. Going to the questions from my colleagues about the Tallaganda State Forest, is it your understanding that these stop-work orders were relating to the discovery of a carcass of a southern greater glider?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I believe that's the case, yes. I'll check again if that's—I believe that to be the case.

**The CHAIR:** Can you confirm, perhaps on notice, whether that southern greater glider that was discovered was delivered to Taronga park zoo for an autopsy and what the cause of death was actually stated as.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sure, I'm happy to take that on notice. I know some work was done on trying to determine the cause. I'll find out where that got up to and how it was done, and I'll come back to you on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Are you aware that Forestry Corporation of NSW or its contractors weren't actually in that area where the greater glider was found, up to seven months before?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The advice that I do have is that there was quite a lengthy period of time before this glider was discovered from when Forestry were conducting operations in that space. That is the advice that I have. I think you've just asked me if it was seven months. I don't know the specifics, so I'll check that. But I am advised that there was quite some time.

**The CHAIR:** If the cause of death can't be attributed to the activities of Forestry Corp or its contractors, can you take on notice why the stop-work orders are still in place?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm happy to look into the details of that for you.

**The CHAIR:** Can we go back to your comments regarding the consultative panels? Is it not the case that both Forestry Corp and DPI have been locked out of the process of deciding who gets to be on those panels or having input into who is on those consultative panels?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't believe that's the case. I certainly provided feedback. I wanted to make sure that the industry was included in the consultation, and they are. I wanted to make sure that unions were included in the process, and they are.

**The CHAIR:** What about the contractors that are directly impacted by a potential Great Koala National Park? I'm specifically talking about the ones that I brought to your office a couple of months ago. Are they being included in those consultative panels?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not sure if they are specifically or not, but I will check the details for you on that. But I would expect wide consultation. That's the process that we have said that we will engage in. If there are groups such as the people that you brought to my office, who I was very pleased to engage with, who feel as though they've been excluded, please let me know and I'll make sure that that's not the case. It's really important that we engage with everybody who has an interest in this as we work through the process.

**The CHAIR:** As of about three weeks ago, the two main contractors that do the work in this area were excluded from those consultative panels. Who is representing the contractors on those consultative panels?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's representative bodies that would be representing them in general terms, but if people feel as though—and I accept the proposition that you're putting to me—they need to be heard, as I have listened to the people that you're referring to in my office, I'm happy to engage on that and make sure that we're not making people feel excluded. It's really important, in my view, that the Government engages with people who are impacted by this. We will be delivering the park, but we have said that we'll consult and talk to people about it, and that's exactly what we should be doing.

**The CHAIR:** What input has your department had in selecting an independent economic analyst for the Great Koala National Park assessment? Has your department had any input into that?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sorry, I just missed the beginning of that because I think someone—

**The CHAIR:** What input has your department had in selecting an independent economic analyst to do the socio-economic study for the Great Koala National Park?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll have to check the details of the specific discussions that will have taken place.

**UNCORRECTED**

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I—

**The CHAIR:** Mr Hansen, I just have one more question I want to try to ask the Minister, and then perhaps we can pick up with you after she leaves, if you like. Minister, the United Nations has established an Office on Drugs and Crime that is now looking at the trafficking of illicit timber across the globe. What work is your department doing or what steps has your Government taken to review the use of illicit timber in New South Wales? What resources are you putting towards that review, if there is one?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Certainly, sustainable industry in New South Wales—which I'm committed to—is a key part of making sure that it's available and collected in Australia in a safe and sustainable and accountable and transparent way. I expect that that will continue as we continue to support an industry here in Australia. The reason I support a sustainable industry here is that I do have concerns about how the industry operates in other parts of the world where there aren't protections in place. If there are things that we can be doing to support that work, I'm happy to have a look at that.

**The CHAIR:** Just picking up on those comments, I think it was last week at the COP28 forum in Dubai that the Australian Government signed up to increase the use of timber in buildings by 2030. What steps are you taking to ensure that we have the facilities and capability to meet that increased use of timber in buildings by 2030, given that we are a net importer of timber?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You're right, and this is an issue. Certainly, for our Government, housing and building houses is a key focus for us, and so it's going to increase the need for these products. I would like for them to be available and collected in a sustainable way.

**The CHAIR:** What steps are you taking to make sure that the increase doesn't come from illicit timber from overseas countries, which then undermines our own market?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm supportive of a sustainable industry here in New South Wales to be able to meet our needs, and I'll continue to engage on that basis.

**The CHAIR:** I only have 10 seconds, so can you take on notice what work your department is doing around the issue of illicit timber and meeting that increase by 2030?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Um—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Minister. All I got was "Um".

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I thought someone took a point of order, sorry. I just paused.

**The CHAIR:** No, I think there was a comment by Mrs Taylor, but then there was a bell at the same time.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'll wait.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I believe that DPI are involved in discussions of that nature through a national process. I'm happy to get the details of how that works, and I'm happy to come back to you with the details of that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Just before we finish, Chair, I notice the Minister has used different terminology in terms of taking things on notice. She has used terms like "look into details" and "I will check". I'm just confirming for the record that that all equates to taking it on notice.

**The CHAIR:** I would have to get some guidance from the secretariat. I am advised that all those types of comments we would treat as questions on notice, and they will be highlighted. If there is a clear undertaking by the witness that they will get back to the Committee, we treat that as a question on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Is the Minister happy to confirm that?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll have to read the transcript to see what I've committed to. I've committed to take a number of things on notice today, and I'm very happy to come back to the Committee. I would also say there is a supplementary process. A number of Committee members didn't use that process the last time, but here I am, happy to answer questions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** An hour—thanks for your time.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm happy for questions to be put on notice. As I've said many times today, my door is open to every member of the Committee. Every member of the Committee—well, most of you, and certainly your parties—have been in my office to discuss issues.

**UNCORRECTED**

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, you'll be abiding with the rules of the Parliament.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm happy to continue to engage and provide all of the information that people need. I do want to facilitate the good working of the Parliament, and I certainly respect the Parliament. I work for the people of regional New South Wales, and they are the people who I'm engaged with now.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** *Hansard* doesn't pick up irony.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Thank you so much for your time this morning. I really appreciate the opportunity to answer questions, and I look forward to seeing you all soon. If I don't see you, have a very merry Christmas. Thank you, everybody, for all the great work that you do for the community.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. That concludes our time with you. You did take some questions on notice. Enjoy your break and enjoy your time at the Walgett pools. We will see you in the new year.

**(The Minister withdrew.)**

**The CHAIR:** We will now go to Opposition questions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have a number of questions for all of the officials, but I will start with you, Ms Fox. Because you're with the Minister, I'm assuming you're out in Broken Hill today?

**REBECCA FOX:** That's correct.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you advise us when that trip was organised and booked?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes. Before the start of November. This is part of a series of round tables, but I have James here doing various things today. I've had a team that I met with last night on cross-border issues. They were running a workforce project yesterday. I had a team, including Mr Wheaton, supporting the Premier on the trip north yesterday, including a round table. I've got a public works team supporting the Walgett pool, and I've got some regional development teams here, as well, doing some other work. Aboriginal Affairs are on a listening tour at the moment, so our Aboriginal partnerships team were in town last night as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you, Ms Fox. Sorry, I have a lot of questions that we unfortunately now need to put to you as officials without the Minister here. Just to be very clear, your particular travel to Broken Hill was booked and organised early in November. I just want to make sure that's correct.

**REBECCA FOX:** The arrangements for this round table were made before November, yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm talking about your travel to be in Broken Hill today. Was that booked in early November as well?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'd have to look at the exact dates. I don't do my travel; I'd have to check.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you provide that on notice? Could you also advise whether the round table had always been communicated to stakeholders to be held today, on 13 December? Were any other dates canvassed or was it always today?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'll have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I remind you that you are under oath. If you could provide that on notice, that would be great.

**REBECCA FOX:** Just to be clear, Chair and Committee, I don't make those travel arrangements myself. I don't have knowledge of the travel arrangements.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm happy for you to check with staff, but if you could let us know when those flights were booked or when travel was put in place, and also the second question of whether this 13 December date was always the date for the round table. That would be really great. Were you at any point given a direction by the Minister or her office not to appear here in Sydney in person?

**REBECCA FOX:** I wasn't given a direction. I had a discussion with the Minister's office last week about the difficulty of this time of year and for all of us to appear. We are all doing different things, based in different locations. I've got team members who have children at end-of-school events. We have difficulty—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So do we.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that. As a mum, I hear you.

**UNCORRECTED**

**REBECCA FOX:** Sorry?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I said that I understand that. I missed my kids' school presentation, so I get it. It's hard. Did you talk to the Minister's office about maybe then raising that with the Committee? We weren't given any indication that this was an issue until yesterday. I'm just curious as to what has happened.

**REBECCA FOX:** I'd like to be very clear about what we did in that process. We received a list of witnesses on Tuesday 28 November. There were 15 witnesses on that list, from memory. We went through and worked out where everyone's diaries were. We had a couple of people who were in Sydney. The DPI team was scheduled to be in Orange. We wrote a full list. We checked it early last week on, I think, Tuesday at our executive leadership team meeting or just after that meeting. My understanding is that my office sent it to the Committee secretariat on—I would have to check whether it was Tuesday or Wednesday last week. We were confirmed that Webex was fine for all of us to use, I understand, by Friday last week. If the secretariat of the Committee had suggested otherwise, we would have made different arrangements.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We've only got a few minutes, so I will have to come back to this. Mr Hansen, to you and your team, it's really hard to see—I know there are a number of people there with you. I just wanted to confirm where you're all located today.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We're in Orange.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, how long has that been arranged that you would be in Orange on this particular day?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Since the first half of this year, so probably either January or February.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, did you have any discussions with the Minister's office about not being able to attend in person? Were you given any directive not to amend your plan—or from the secretary about that?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Certainly I had a conversation with the secretary about the fact that we already had a planned and locked-in series of activities in Orange this week in preparing for resourcing and logistics for the summer ahead, before everyone goes into shutdown, to make sure we've got staff on the ground for white spot, red imported fire ants, fire responses et cetera. We were advised that advice was being sought as to whether we could continue with our current location and dial in via Webex. I believe last week we were confirmed that that was able to be done, hence why we are here in Orange today.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Mr Hansen, did you discuss it with the Minister or her office at any point?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Not with the Minister. I did flag with the Minister's office that we were going to be here and that we were scheduled to be here. Earlier I think there were two alternative dates bandied around about either 11 or 15 December and we indicated that most of this week we were tied up in meetings either in Tamworth, Orange or other parts of the State. But that was the extent of the conversations.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Mr Orr, I'm not sure where you are. It's really hard online. I have a similar question: Where are you located today? Is there a reason why you weren't able to be here in person?

**STEVE ORR:** Mrs Mitchell, I am at home in Berry on the South Coast today.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Was there a discussion with the Minister or her office about not being here in person?

**STEVE ORR:** No, there wasn't a direct discussion. The sense I got towards the back end of last week was that witnesses were generally appearing online. That's the sense that I got. That's why I joined online.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It is very unusual for an estimates hearing. I appreciate that it's a difficult situation for you as public servants.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Mr Orr, it's Bronnie Taylor here. What do you mean by you got a "sense" that everybody was going to be online?

**STEVE ORR:** That's what was on the list, Mrs Taylor.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** A "sense"—because it is really unusual for everyone to be online. I've never seen anything like this in my nine years. So a "sense"—so it was basically accepted that you would all just be online today and not come to an estimates hearing? Every estimates hearing I have seen you at, Mr Orr.

**STEVE ORR:** That's correct, Mrs Taylor, but that's what was on the list.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I want to ask Mr Scott Hansen and Ms Kim Filmer if she is available as well—it has often been raised with my office that there should be a register for animal abusers in the same way that we have a sex offenders register that's available to the authorities. Given that it can be very difficult at the moment to determine if someone is looking to adopt an animal, volunteer with animals or work with animals when they are convicted of certain offences, I'm just wondering if the Department of Primary Industries is doing any work in this space in regard to some kind of a register?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might start and then hand over to Ms Filmer. Certainly, I think that was some of the feedback that came through last year's consultation, as part of looking at how do we reform the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. I might hand over to Ms Filmer as to what—let me just say that it's still an active option on the table in terms of a register. Obviously with some of the activities we've undertaken recently, where inter-jurisdictions notify each other of anyone who is found guilty of committing crimes. Certainly, having a register would be of assistance in that notification of interjurisdictional requirements, so it's an active piece that we are thinking about at the moment.

**KIM FILMER:** I've probably got nothing more to add to that, thank you, Ms Hurst.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So you don't know if there are any works that are currently being undertaken on a register of any kind?

**KIM FILMER:** There is work being done in terms of reviewing the animal welfare framework, and that's a fairly holistic process, so lots of things are being considered.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So that's amongst the considerations in regard to the POCTAA review?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**KIM FILMER:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** There was a lot of community concern when the lions retired from Stardust Circus ended up at the Central Coast Zoo in 2021. Are you able to advise if there have been any audits or reviews on how the lions have actually settled in and on their ongoing welfare at this facility?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I don't have any up-to-date information on that. I don't know if Ms Filmer does.

**KIM FILMER:** I haven't got the recent audit information. I'm not sure if you've got any of that there, John, but they are being kept now and they would have to comply with the legislation of being in that facility.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you take on notice if there have been any audits or reviews and, if so, what was found in those audits and reviews?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, we can do that.

**KIM FILMER:** Yes.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Normally, if we haven't heard anything it's normally a positive sign, but we'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If there haven't been any audits or reviews, then you wouldn't have heard anything.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Can I come back to the conversation you were having with the Minister with regard to Dolphin Marine Magic?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I might let the Chair use his time and then I will come back to you afterwards.

**The CHAIR:** I might start with you, Mr Chaudhary. I note that you've now tabled your annual report for Forestry Corp for this last financial year. I note that one of the comments in the "Hardwood Forest Division at a glance" section says, "Around 750,000 cubic metres of sawlogs, specialty timbers and lower grade timbers is supplied annually." Those who wish to close the native forest industry, when they state publicly that the majority of hardwood timber goes to woodchip or is simply burnt after 10 years, that's grossly incorrect, isn't it?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Yes, Chair. We produce roughly about 750,000 cubes of hardwood timber. The timber is utilised in a whole variety of products. A lot of it is sawlogs. Sawlogs go into the production of both renovations and home building-type things like flooring, but also it goes into essential infrastructure like bridge girders, electricity poles, pallets for transporting food and other materials. There are industrial grade or salvage-type logs and, of course, pulp logs that come out of that as well.



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**The CHAIR:** Through you, Mr Hansen—I might be going to Mr McPherson. Mr McPherson, have you had any involvement in the reinterpretation of the CIFOA with respect to conditions or protocols based on that ministerial direction from Minister Sharpe to EPA?

**DAVID MCPHERSON:** Thanks for the question. We are aware that Minister Sharpe issued the direction to the EPA under the Protection of the Environment Administration Act to look into further protections for koalas. EPA subsequently amended the protocols, as you're aware, to deal with the koala hubs and protection of areas under the koala hubs. I am aware that the EPA consulted with Forestry Corp in terms of making that decision and how it might impact on timber supply and jobs in that particular area, but DPI hasn't been specifically involved in that particular decision.

**The CHAIR:** Are you aware of the EPA's intention to make further changes beyond protocols, specifically around hollow log provisions?

**DAVID MCPHERSON:** Yes. I am aware that the EPA has been considering a number of other changes to protocols. They provided us with a letter recently outlining, in some high level, information as to what they're considering. There are a number of species that are being considered, and a number of changes. At this stage it was high level. We weren't able to provide any particular insight on timber supply impacts, but we were able to provide some advice to them on the particular species they are talking about, because we have done some research on those species over the years.

**The CHAIR:** My little time has just elapsed. I now have to throw to the Government for any mop-up questions.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** There's no mop-up.

**The CHAIR:** The spill has disappeared. We will break for morning tea and return at 11.15.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to budget estimates.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Fox, I wanted to come back to you quickly. I had the opportunity to check in the break with the secretariat staff. The advice is that there was an email received from your office actually only on Friday at about midday to indicate that some people would be appearing online and the full list wasn't available to the Committee staff until late on Friday. I think you said earlier that you might have advised us midway through last week, but could you just reflect or check that for us?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes. I saw a list on Tuesday that had the full list with where everyone was going to be. My understanding was that my office was providing that and working with the secretariat, which I thought would have happened by Wednesday. I was advised that we were confirmed on Friday that Webex would be available.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We weren't told. Just so we're very clear for the record here—there was no indication to any of the Committee members or to the Committee secretariat prior to Friday afternoon that most witnesses would be appearing online. I just think that's important for the record.

**REBECCA FOX:** I apologise for that. As I said, we would've changed our arrangements if that had been an issue.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The other question that I have is that we wrote to the Minister on—well, the Committee met at the end of November, really, to choose this as a date. You've indicated and DPI staff have also indicated that this was a week where things were in diaries, which we appreciate. I'm just wondering why no-one raised with the Minister's office canvassing potential other dates that might work. The Committee didn't get any indication that you would have virtually all witnesses—bar two—online. Was there not a discussion about putting alternative dates to the Committee given that barely anyone's here in person? Was that something that you discussed with the Minister's office, Ms Fox?

**REBECCA FOX:** No, I didn't discuss that. I think we were originally given three or two dates. One was the 11th and I'm pretty sure the second one was next week. We were just given the date of the 13th and that was settled.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you for that. Again, I apologise. I know this is challenging online and difficult for you as public servants but, again—I think, Mr Bolton, if you're online?

**JAMES BOLTON:** Yes.



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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Where are you located today?

**JAMES BOLTON:** I'm in Wagga Wagga today.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, was there any direction not to make yourself available to be in Sydney?

**JAMES BOLTON:** No.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm nearly done, I promise, and you'll know the next question. Obviously I think Dr Jacqui Tracey—I did see she had a neck collar on, so kudos to her for being here at all when she's clearly got an injury. But I'm not sure—

**REBECCA FOX:** Mrs Mitchell, can I just jump in there? The list that we originally did—we had at least two people on that list who were on leave, which is one of the processes that we had to go through. So Ms Tracey is a substitute for Mr Liam Hogg, who I think was on leave. That was the process that we went through before getting the list and then working out where everyone was, whether people were available, where they were, whether they were on leave. So Ms Tracey was probably a late request, I'm guessing—

**JACQUI TRACEY:** And I was on leave as well—still am.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you for being here, Dr Tracey, on leave. Mr Varnum might be the only one that I haven't checked with, if he's online.

**REBECCA FOX:** No, it's Mr Brown, who is Soil Conservation Service. We didn't have an appropriate substitute for him so he's not appearing, but he's also on leave this week. Once we got the list, we went through and worked out where everyone was, who was around, where they were, whether they were on leave, whether we could get a substitute witness. And then I thought we'd provided that to the Committee. We'd certainly advised the Committee secretariat that we had a lot of people that would be online.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** My final question on this issue would be—and my colleague did touch on it. It is highly unusual to have an estimates hearing with most officials online. I just would like clarity or an indication that, when there are further hearings for this Committee, particularly the two that have already been scheduled, witnesses will do their best to be here in person. It is really hard to do it online with large numbers—as you would, I'm sure, appreciate—on both ends. Is it the intention that you would all try to be here in person going forward, as has always been the case in the past?

**REBECCA FOX:** My understanding is that this was a supplementary one. We certainly all appeared—we had many witnesses last time, some of whom had come fairly long distances, some of whom are not asked questions. My understanding—this is very close to Christmas; it's very hard to get accommodation in Sydney at the moment. It's a busy time of year. My understanding was that this was a supplementary process and we're certainly committed to making sure that we can answer the questions of the Committee at any point in time.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You're right, it is supplementary, but it was a resolution of the House and, indeed, the invitation was sent some weeks ago. It is of the same importance and magnitude as the estimates hearing. It is challenging when people aren't here in person. I appreciate the time of year as well, but it would be fantastic to ensure that something like this is not a regular occurrence, because it makes it very hard.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, I'd just like to know what—a gain, for the record—is the name of the current Cross-Border Commissioner.

**REBECCA FOX:** It's Ms Kalina Koloff.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Can I ask what the level of the position is—the grading.

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, it's senior executive band 1, which we call a director level.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** What was the grading of the previous Cross-Border Commissioner's role before this new appointment?

**REBECCA FOX:** It was senior executive band 2, which we call executive director level.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Is that more senior than the current one?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, it is.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So you have downgraded the level of seniority of the Cross-Border Commissioner, is that correct?

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**REBECCA FOX:** That's correct. We've run through a process through the Regional Development team of reviewing all the executive roles in that team. We've looked at the roles in other jurisdictions. We also had a government commitment to reduce senior executives' bands with a commensurate—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, just to redirect that—

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —you said that you had a directive to review bands. Who signed off on downgrading the role of the Cross-border Commissioner?

**REBECCA FOX:** I did.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Fox, did you discuss that or brief the Minister on that at any stage?

**REBECCA FOX:** No, I didn't.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did your office speak to her office?

**REBECCA FOX:** Not that I'm aware.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Would that be unusual—that you wouldn't speak to a Minister about that position changing?

**REBECCA FOX:** No. I generally don't speak to the Minister's office or any Minister's office about senior executive roles, certainly not at band 1 or band 2 level. Mr Wheaton is online. He ran that process in the Regional Development team and we have reduced senior executive roles significantly through an approved change process. I'm not aware—I certainly didn't brief the Minister's office on that process. I may have mentioned that it was being undertaken at a very high level so that they knew that that team was going through quite a significant period of change. That would've been the only briefings that I gave—and certainly didn't discuss individual staff members.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Let's just be really clear here, because this is really important. You did brief the Minister or the Minister's office that you were reviewing the role and that you were downgrading the role and that there was going to be a new appointment—is that correct or not?

**REBECCA FOX:** No, that's not correct. I would have briefed the Minister's office that we were running a change process in the Regional Development and programs team across all of the executives in that team. And Mr Wheaton will be able to tell me exactly how many. I think 28 roles were considered in that process.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm going to get to all those, but what I really want to do at the moment is concentrate on this Cross-Border Commissioner position. How long has the new Cross-Border Commissioner been in place?

**REBECCA FOX:** I think since last Monday—4 December. Mr Wheaton can confirm for me.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** It's this Monday—Monday the 11th.

**REBECCA FOX:** Thank you.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** When were you going to inform stakeholders that there was a new Cross-Border Commissioner?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** We've developed communications that would update our stakeholders on all of the executive changes that we've made in our group and we had planned to send that out before Christmas.

**REBECCA FOX:** Can I just add something to that? We need to make sure that that process is complete and finalised before we make any changes through that process. So there's a whole range of impacted executives. We need to work with the Premier's Department in that process through a mobility process. We need to work with the Treasury team as well and [disorder]—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I understand that, Ms Fox. I understand there's going to be a lot of that with mobility issues because there are a lot of positions that have been cut, and I really feel for these people before Christmas; these are good people. I just want to concentrate on this Cross-Border Commissioner for now, because this is a really important role to regional New South Wales. You, being out in Broken Hill today, would know how important and how valuable the work that Mr McTavish did. I mean, the man has a Public Service Medal. Let's be really honest here about what's going on. When were you going to tell the community and the people of New South Wales that Mr McTavish has been shown the door?

**REBECCA FOX:** I don't accept the premise of the question. We've been through a change process that has dealt with the executive roles in that team, and we will—

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So you've downgraded a position that was held previously, right? You've downgraded the role of the Cross-Border Commissioner, who was an essential part of regional New South Wales for a long time. Therefore, you now have someone who was awarded, who was lauded, who was so well respected by everyone. When were you going to tell the people of New South Wales that you have a new Cross-Border Commissioner?

**REBECCA FOX:** We'll do it in accordance with the communications plan and through the change process—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** In that communications plan, have you got that you have downgraded that position?

**REBECCA FOX:** That position, I'm pretty sure, Mrs Taylor, was increased—changed from a band 1 to a band 2 certainly in the time that I've been with the Department of Regional NSW, which is three or four years. It has not been a band 2 position for a long period of time. It hasn't always been a band 2 position; it was a band 1 position for a long period of time, and we've taken it back to a band 1 position—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Yes, you've downgraded it.

**REBECCA FOX:** —in line with the appropriate work point values. We go through an independent process, an mercer process, on that role. What's required of that role [disorder]—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, that's fine. It has been downgraded; there's no other way to say it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Fox, I just wanted to pick up on something you said earlier in relation to not briefing the Minister. I understand that all departments have been given directives by the Government in terms of reducing those numbers of senior roles. What I'm keen to understand, though, is the decision to downgrade that role—to use the terminology of my colleague. Are you saying that was made solely by you as secretary and there's no need to consult with the Minister on that? Is that something that you can do and you have the autonomy to decide which executives are moved on and which executive roles are gone, without having to discuss that with the Minister and the Government? That's something that you just do as the secretary—is that correct?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, that's correct, under the GSE legislation. But I don't just do it unilaterally; I run through a defined change process that has a whole range of consultation requirements and what we call "spill and fill" arrangements, where people express an interest et cetera. There's a process that sits behind it that's required under the relevant legislation.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that. I guess my point, though, is that, from what you're saying, the government of the day and the Minister of the day, Ms Moriarty, are really not giving you any direction in terms of the priorities of which positions should remain, and that there has been no conversation with her or her office about the Cross-Border Commissioner—that office. Clearly, we know it has been well publicised over the course of the six last months. I just find it quite incredulous that there is no discussion with the Minister about the make-up of the department that supports her and that you wouldn't raise that or talk about it.

**REBECCA FOX:** No, I've discussed the work plan for that team, and Mr Wheaton does that regularly with his communications with the office. So the work that's required from that team, we discuss. I don't discuss the individual people in those executive roles with the Minister's office.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, leaving individuals aside, did the Minister or her office receive advice from you? You said that you were going to be looking at these. Did they give you any direction in terms of, "Yes, we're happy for that Cross-Border Commissioner office to be cut for changes to be in there"? Was there any conversation about that with either yourself or Mr Wheaton and the Minister or her staff that that was something they were happy to—

**REBECCA FOX:** No. I can ask Mr Wheaton to confirm, but I haven't had that conversation. The other part of the decision-making in that process is that we had a budget on 19 September—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We know.

**REBECCA FOX:** —that we have to meet in relation to all of those teams. So we've got reduced budget for some of those executive positions, and so that fed into our change process across the whole of Mr Wheaton's team.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that that's the decision of the government of the day, and I respect that. I guess my point is that there is less money available for executive positions. Who does the buck

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stop with in terms of degrading or demoting the Cross-Border Commissioner? That's something that presumably has now fallen to you as secretary, and I think that that's quite concerning.

**REBECCA FOX:** That's correct, and that's consistent with—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But the government accountability is not there. The Minister is not— anyway, I just find it quite strange.

**REBECCA FOX:** My understanding is that that's consistent with the relevant legislation.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'll come back to you, Ms Fox. Just quickly, Mr Wheaton, can you just please confirm whether you had discussions with the Minister's office about downgrading the position of the Cross-Border Commissioner and replacing that Cross-Border Commissioner?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** No discussions with the Minister's office or the Minister about either the individual appointments or the executive changes that were happening in my team—only broadly that that process was being managed by myself and that that was occurring because we were realigning my team to be able to meet and deliver the Government's new priorities, the Government's new election commitments and changes to the funding that is allocated to my team to do so.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sorry, Mr Wheaton. I'm really trying not to be difficult. I have an enormous amount of respect for you and for the people online, but now your answer was—I'm not trying to trick anyone. I'm just trying to get to the bottom of this. You said that it was discussed "broadly". I just need to know because it's really serious for us in the regions with this position. It's a really important position. It's not about the person or the individual, but we have a situation now where we have downgraded a position. Obviously you're not going to get someone to apply for a downgraded position; I don't think I would. So we have a situation here. I actually know the name of the new person, now that you've said it to me—really highly respected. That's great. Good on you for that. But when you say it was more broadly, I need to know was the Minister's office informed, either the Minister or her staff, that the position was going to be downgraded in accordance with what you have to do in your responsibility by the government of the day—I appreciate that—that this was going to happen? Were they aware?

**REBECCA FOX:** Mrs Taylor, I think we've answered that question clearly: We didn't advise the Minister.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** With respect, I'm asking the question to Mr Wheaton.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** No, I informed the Minister's office verbally once that had been signed off that those changes would be made in my team.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can I just pick up, Mr Wheaton—you also said before that you needed to, obviously, align with the priorities of the Government. Is it your understanding that the work of the Cross-Border Commissioner is not a high priority for the Government, which is why that position could be downgraded?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** No.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What are the Government priorities that you're trying to meet by having that position not be at the same level?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** There are a few things for context here that might be of use to the Committee in the line of questioning. In July, a number of functions that existed within the department were moved into my group. That included the Cross-Border Commissioner role and some other activities. That then had my executive band 2 levels at seven and my band 1 levels at around 27 people that were occupied in those roles. We then had an independent process that we went through that reviewed both the bandwidth, so looking at benchmarking a cross the sector, the amount of band 2s and band 1s, as benchmarking what my group would look like, as well as the span of control of those roles.

We then drafted new potential structures at those levels that would then constitute my new executive structure with reduced roles. That is an ordinary process that is happening right across the sector at the moment to review executives and to meet the Government's election commitment of a reduction of around 15 per cent. Then, as part of those changes, we then had a process internally, following the advice and independent work that was done to put up a new structure that is for approval of the new positions to the secretary. Under the GSE Act, it is the secretary that makes the decision of appointments and assignments of people in our agency or their agency to those roles.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Mr Wheaton, just to redirect, could I ask you to provide the Committee with an organisational chart of Regional NSW at the end of June and also, then, at the end of December, please?

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**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Yes, happy to do so.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You also said, Mr Wheaton, that you previously had seven band 2s and I think it was 27 band 1s. What are those numbers now for you today? How many band 2s in your part and how many band 1s?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** There are now three band 2 roles and 19 band 1 roles.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The other four band 2 roles that have been downgraded or gone—Cross-Border Commissioner is one. What are the other three?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** There was a merging of some of those functions. The way that it works is that then essentially we rewrote all seven of the previous roles—are then delimited from the organisational chart and we rewrote three new position descriptions that would capture the work program that was previously overseen by the seven roles.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So no Cross-Border Assistant Commissioner and a downgrading of the Cross-Border Commissioner position. Is that correct, Mr Wheaton?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** As part of the process we reviewed like functions of our team that I had currently. We have what was previously called a regional development team, which is now regional coordination and delivery. The role that those respective regional teams that are in existence, and have been for a really long time, closely aligned with the coordination role that is undertaken by the Cross-Border Commissioner. Indeed they work very closely with those teams. So we took the decision to have a band 2 that would have coverage of those regional directors as well as the function of the Cross-Border Commissioner.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We'll come back to that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I look forward to those org charts.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Mr Hansen, I know you want to give clarification around Dolphin Marine Conservation Park. Before we go to that, I've got a couple of follow-up questions in regard to Central Coast Zoo. I'm happy for these to be taken on notice, if needed. Are you able to advise the rating that Central Coast Zoo received in their last two audits?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. They received satisfactory ratings, for the last two. In fact, they've received satisfactory for the last six that have been completed, the most recent of which would appear to be 18 July this year.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have any corrective action reports or other issues been issued?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'm aware that there were two corrective actions required, I believe on 22 May 2020—unrelated to the lions, however. But if I get more information on that or if someone sends me a note saying I got that wrong, I'll come back to you on that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Could you get me some more information on what those corrective actions were?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you aware if there are any animal breeding programs ongoing at the Central Coast Zoo?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Not that I'm aware of. No-one else here is aware of any, but if we, again, become aware of it over the course of the hearing we'll come back to you on that too.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You may not have that information at the moment but I assume that the DPI will have information on that soon under the new licence conditions for breeding?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Dolphin Marine Conservation Park—I know you had something you wanted to put forward from the questions this morning.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, I was just going to say that you're right, new owners have come in. Those new owners are complying with, and are going to continue to operate the park in compliance with, the previous owners' conditions. Part of their conditions was a bond of \$60,000, which we hold. That's to be used in the event that the new owners end up unable to meet their care and assistance—management of the dolphins—to enable us to make sure that that fund is used to provide for the care and maintenance until a new owner can be found. As you know,

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over early parts of this year, we were working with the previous owners and with conservation agencies with regard to the rehoming. We're confident that we could have found rehoming with accredited and appropriate alternative homes for [audio malfunction].

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, Mr Hansen, you've gone silent. I can hear you again.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I was going to say that very rarely happens, so it must be the technology.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I could still see some hand expressions, so I figured that you were still talking.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I was still waving around. Just to be really quick, we're confident we could have found homes for all of the animals with accredited and appropriate people earlier in the year when we thought that there was the possibility that it would not be continued. The fact the new owners have come in and have continued to operate to licence conditions is the eventuality that we're now dealing with. Those new owners have paid a bond that we will hold and use in the event that we need to come back in to assist and care for the animals if they are not able to do so. Again, we continue to maintain close relationships with approved, appropriate welfare entities who might be able to care for these animals should we need to place them at some stage in the future as well.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can I confirm, Mr Hansen—I think you said it was a \$60,000 bond?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You said originally that that was for the care and maintenance of the dolphins. Is it just for the dolphins? What about the other animals at the facility?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, I said dolphins but it's actually for all of the animals.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have there been any recent audits or inspections of the facility in Coffs Harbour since it changed hands?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I assume that it will have, but I'll throw across to see whether Ms Filmer or Mr Tracey have any details on that.

**KIM FILMER:** Could you repeat the question, please, Ms Hurst?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have there been any audits or inspections of the facility in Coffs Harbour since it changed hands?

**KIM FILMER:** There's certainly been a lot of communication with them, but I haven't got the exact details of the audits. We can take that on notice and get those to you if required.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, thank you. Also if there's been any inspections by the RSPCA or by any other authority, that would be fantastic if you could take that on notice as well. Thank you. I also want to know the total number of animals that are currently at the facility, if you've got that information.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Again, we'll just pull that up.

**JOHN TRACEY:** We've got 95 animals reported in total. Do you want the breakdown of those too?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, that would be useful, thank you.

**JOHN TRACEY:** Thirty-three Murray River turtles, 16 little penguins, eight Australian sea lions, three Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins, one hawksbill turtle and 34 fish, ray and shark species.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** In regards to the sea lions, I've seen some photos of the animals with quite red mouths and gums, and people have also raised concerns about the size of their night enclosure. Are you aware if there is a vet on site at the facility?

**JOHN TRACEY:** No, I'm not aware of that. I can take that on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I assume that's not a requirement for facilities like this to have a vet on site?

**JOHN TRACEY:** No, I don't believe it's a requirement. They need to have a nominated vet, but my understanding is that we don't have to have a vet on site at all times.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you know if there's been any assessment made on their teeth and gums, from those images, and whether they require any veterinary assistance?

**JOHN TRACEY:** No, I'd have to take that on notice, sorry.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That's alright. Do you know if the facility is currently breeding any of their animals?

**JOHN TRACEY:** I'm not sure of that either. I'll take that one on notice as well.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think people are happy to come back to you if there's an alternative answer come up but, as far as I'm aware, the answer to that is no.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You don't believe that they're breeding any of the species there?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's correct. That's my understanding. But as I said, if over the course of this hearing something changes in terms of the advice on that, we'll come back to you on it.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. In regards to any audits of the facility, which I know Dr Filmer took on notice, could she also take on notice what grade the audit came up with, and also if there were any corrective action notices issued with regards to that audit?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, we can add that to that list.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I have some more questions about exhibited animals generally. How many full-time or full-time equivalent staff work specifically in the exhibited animals division of the DPI?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might put that across to Dr Filmer to answer.

**KIM FILMER:** Those staff are in the compliance area of the department. We'll have to take that on notice, sorry.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** This might need to be taken on notice as well: How many exhibited animals facilities are those staff required to audit each year?

**JOHN TRACEY:** I don't have the number of facilities, but we do have the number of compliance authorisations here. There are 59 staff that have authorisations for compliance activity for the exhibited animals. But we'll take that other one on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So it's 59 full-time or full-time equivalent staff working within the DPI specifically in the exhibited animals division?

**JOHN TRACEY:** They're not all full-time. They're authorised to undertake those compliance audits. That's typically how we operate in compliance for biosecurity and for exhibited and for animal welfare. It's a whole-team approach that allows us to deploy staff where we need to deploy them. They often work on a range of activities; it's not exclusively on exhibited animal activity.

**The CHAIR:** Mr McPherson, I wanted to pick up where we left off discussing the CIFOA and that ministerial direction. Can you confirm the date that you became aware of that ministerial direction from Minister Sharpe regarding the CIFOA?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I'll have to take that on notice, but I can come back to you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. What was the process once you did become aware of that? Did you notify up the chain to the Minister that this had occurred and there may be some impacts on the CIFOA?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I'd have to take it on notice, Mr Banasiak, mainly because I was on leave when this particularly happened. I'll have to consult with staff as to what actions were taken.

**The CHAIR:** Sure, I understand. What role is DPI playing in these koala hubs, if any?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** We don't have a particular role in the koala hubs or the protocol changes specifically. However, we are involved in the subsequent processes under the State Owned Corporations Act. We're involved there in determining what the impacts might be on Forestry Corp and its business and then advising the Minister and the Treasurer accordingly.

**The CHAIR:** Is it correct to say that the EPA is actually seeking to make changes to the CIFOA concerning hollow log provisions? This isn't necessarily just changing a protocol; it's changing the foundational basis of those protocols and conditions, and changing this from a landscape outcomes framework to a more prescriptive regulatory framework. Isn't that correct?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I couldn't comment specifically on that because we haven't seen the proposed changes in detail yet. What I can say is that I'm aware that Forestry Corp and the EPA have been discussing those proposed changes. I know the EPA is very keenly aware of its limitations in terms of making changes to protocols



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only. If there are bigger changes to the actual coastal integrated forestry operations approvals, that's a matter that needs to go to both Ministers.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** In addition to that, Chair, we have had requests from EPA in recent times seeking information from our forestry ecologists with regards to information on the swift parrot, glossy black cockatoo and southern greater glider in regards to what information or data that we hold around habitat, absence or abundance in areas. Our ecologists have been providing raw information and data into EPA to hopefully help them in formulating what those protocols are. However, the IFOA is a relationship between EPA and Forestry Corporation and that's where the predominant discussions are held. That's between Forestry Corporation and EPA with regards to impact of protocols and the ability to actually implement against proposed protocol changes. That's where the majority of the discussion and the majority of the decisions sit.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Based on your understanding, Mr Hansen or Mr McPherson, a draft protection of environment policy—where would that sit in the legislative hierarchy in terms of the CIFOA? That wouldn't take precedence over a CIFOA, would it, in terms of the legislative hierarchy?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Sorry, what?

**The CHAIR:** Which has more legislative standing: a CIFOA or a draft protection of environment policy, as per the ministerial direction?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** We'd have to take that one on notice. That would be a complex legal matter. They're under two different pieces of legislation so the interrelationship of those two instruments would be something we'd have to—

**The CHAIR:** Yes, sure. I'm just trying to understand all the working pieces there. What has been your involvement, Mr McPherson—your department's involvement—in this consultative process on the Great Koala National Park? Are you a mere passenger in this or are you an equal partner in this consultation process?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I'm a member of the steering committee, which is a cross-agency steering committee that is overseeing that process. We are certainly actively involved in those discussions; no, definitely not just a passenger in the process. We've been providing advice and meeting with National Parks and the department of the environment regularly on these matters and working through how it might impact on industry, on timber supply and on jobs, but also making sure we get the best environmental outcome as well.

**The CHAIR:** Sure. Mr Chaudhary, are you part of that process?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** No, we're not part of the steering committee.

**The CHAIR:** Are you on any of the consultative panels?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Not at this stage.

**The CHAIR:** Have you asked to be?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** No.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Chair, just before you go off that line of questioning, you asked a question earlier about forestry contractors.

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We are aware that the Australian Forest Contractors Association is a member of one of those panels.

**The CHAIR:** My main concern was that the two contractors that will be directly impacted by this proposed park, which are Greensills and M&M Timber, aren't represented or don't have—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, that's right. I think, as the Minister said, instead of individual companies it's actually been representative groups that have been nominated or put forward. Hopefully they feel as though they get their voice through that Australian Forest Contractors Association to make sure their views are heard.

**The CHAIR:** To your knowledge, is that the same for the other consultative groups other than the industry one? When it comes to the community consultative group, are there associations being represented there or is it individuals?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I can answer that. My understanding is there are some associations on the community group but they would be non-government environmental associations, for example. There are also local councils on those groups as well.



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**The CHAIR:** But no individuals representing themselves?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Not that I'm aware of.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, not that we're aware of.

**The CHAIR:** This question is probably to Mr Hansen and Ms Filmer. You'd be aware, Mr Hansen, of the hunters' code of ethics that applies to R-licence hunters.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** You would be aware that within the rules there are recommended calibres for certain species of animal. For example, to shoot a fallow deer it's recommended that you use a .243 calibre or above. If there was video evidence, or other reliable evidence in print, which indicated that a hunter or someone was using less than that, taking upwards of 15 shots to do so, chasing that animal for several hundred yards and putting those 15 shots in the chest and lungs to finally induce enough bleeding to kill the animal, in your opinion, would that be a breach of the hunters' code of ethics?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Certainly, on the description you just gave then, it'd be hard to justify that as being covered by that code or, in fact, that that is somehow granted an exemption from prevention of cruelty to animals. I agree that would be a very hard case to argue.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Filmer, if something like that was brought to your attention, where there was an under-gunned approach to dispatching an animal humanely, essentially just hitting it with 15 shots per animal to bring it down eventually, would that cause concern for you as the Chief Animal Welfare Officer?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, it would. That certainly wouldn't be considered a humane method of euthanasia.

**The CHAIR:** No, I wouldn't think so. Would that be something that your division would investigate, or do you not have investigative powers? Would you refer that to one of the ACOs?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, that's correct.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** And we'd refer that either to New South Wales police, to the RSPCA or to the Animal Welfare League.

**The CHAIR:** In the 15 seconds I've got, I'll turn to marine parks. Mr Sloan, when was the draft network marine park management plan put on the Minister's desk, whether it was this Minister or the previous Minister? When was it put on their desk for sign-off?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The draft plan was put out for public consultation for a period of three months during the term of the former Government. It was brought forward for consideration by the former Government but didn't get finalised and adopted. It was then brought forward when the new Government came in and provided for consideration under both Ministers that administer the Marine Estate Management Act: Minister Moriarty and Minister Sharpe. It's under consideration at the moment.

**The CHAIR:** I will throw back to the Opposition.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to come back to the issues around redundancies or changing positions in the Department of Regional NSW. I'm happy to direct to you, Ms Fox, but if you'd like any of your other colleagues to answer, that's fine as well. This was canvassed in the previous estimates hearing, and I think there was a question on notice that pointed to the department's annual report, which at that time hadn't been tabled but now has. The figures in the annual report show that there appears to be 168 senior executive staff as at June. Is that number correct?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'd have to check. If the annual report says that's what it was at the end of June 2023, that would be correct.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you able to provide what the number is as of December? Obviously, from earlier evidence from yourself and Mr Wheaton, there's a process underway with some changing positions. I'm happy for you to take it on notice, but do you know how many senior executives there are as of today—if we want to pick a date—in that agency?

**REBECCA FOX:** Can I just clarify that annual report won't include, I don't think, the numbers for Local Land Services, which is a separate executive agency. I'm pretty sure the number across all of us is 208, from memory. But we can provide those numbers from July and currently on notice.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great—specifically within the Department of Regional NSW. I understand that there are affiliated agencies that are separate, but it'd be good to know what they were for the Department of Regional NSW as of July, and then what they are as of December. That would be great.

**REBECCA FOX:** No problem. We can provide that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In terms of some of those changes that yourself and Mr Wheaton referred to—and I respect that there are people at the end of this—is it anticipated that those whose positions will not be ongoing will be notified of that by the end of the year? Have they all been notified? I'm trying to understand where that redundancy process is up to.

**REBECCA FOX:** It will be up to different places for different people. We provide individual case management to any displaced executives, and that process is different for all of them. Some of them, for example, are undergoing interviews for a different role in a different part of government. We would case manage each individual person through that process. There's some rough time lines. The mobility process takes about four weeks—a little bit longer. I can't give you—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Would you expect, say, by February next year, that would've been resolved and finalised? I'm trying to work out the end date.

**REBECCA FOX:** By February next year, I would expect Mr Wheaton's change plan to be finalised, yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What about across other parts of the department?

**REBECCA FOX:** It's an ongoing process at the moment. Mr Bolton's team has also undergone a formal plan of change process. I think that is almost complete. Again, we still haven't completely finished the process there, but the decisions have been made. Again, we're individually case managing those executives who have been displaced.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm not Nostradamus, but I'm assuming those numbers will go down, given that you've got a target to meet in terms of reduction of your senior staff. When you provide us with the numbers from July and December, is it possible to also get some figures around the redundancy packages and the cost of that to the department for those positions?

**REBECCA FOX:** No problem. We can provide that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In a more specific area, with some of the special activation precincts—I'm particularly thinking of the Narrabri one, which is not going ahead at the moment—are there staff who were working on that project who have also been made redundant?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'll throw to Mr Bolton but, generally, the change of plans that we have run through Mr Bolton's team have taken into account the forward plan of work and what is required. I think most of the work that was being done in relation to Narrabri was probably being done by the planners who sit in the Department of Planning and Environment. We hadn't progressed very far in relation to that. But I'll ask Mr Bolton to comment further on that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That'd be great.

**JAMES BOLTON:** That comment is correct. There have been no changes to staff numbers purely based on Narrabri and that precinct not progressing. How we deliver the precincts at that front end and the strategic planning work versus implementation has been where most of the changes to resourcing has occurred. We've had a reduction in senior executive staff with the program of three senior exec staff associated with the special activation precinct program, based on the realignments and priorities of the Government—so the four special activation precincts in delivery, as well as the budget that we have in place for those.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Those three positions, are they all regionally based? Are they regional staff or are they Sydney based?

**JAMES BOLTON:** I'll take that on notice. From memory, two were regional.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Mr Bolton, maybe you could provide to the Committee, out of those positions that have been cut, how many are regionally based and how many are metro based, please.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's probably more for Ms Fox with that number that we get back.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, are you happy to do that?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, we can do that.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** My understanding is that there's a review being undertaken into the Department of Regional NSW more broadly that I think might be happening from the secretary of customer service. Is that correct?

**REBECCA FOX:** There's a review being undertaken by the department and many other departments as well, yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who initiated that review?

**REBECCA FOX:** It was run through the Premier's Department and a strategic implementation unit, is my understanding, and secretaries were asked to run those reviews to make sure that we are operating efficiently and effectively and aligned with the Government's priorities.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is it Mr Head who is conducting that review? Is that correct?

**REBECCA FOX:** He provided some assurance services. He was engaged by the Premier's Department to do that prior to being appointed as the secretary of customer service.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I appreciate you've said that it is broader—a government review—but what is the aim or the scope of the review?

**REBECCA FOX:** The aim of the review is to ensure that the department is operating efficiently and effectively, aligned with the Government's priorities. We have looked at three broad areas, which are our people, our resources and our culture, to make sure we have looked at what we do well—our strengths—and to make sure we are set up to be the best Department of Regional NSW that we can be, going forward.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is there any investigation or review into the Department of Primary Industries remaining as a standalone agency? I am happy for you or Mr Hansen to answer that. Is it being considered that the Department of Primary Industries would be absorbed into Regional NSW?

**REBECCA FOX:** The Department of Primary Industries isn't a standalone department at the moment. The Government Sector Employment Act sets out the departments, and the Department of Primary Industries sits within the Department of Regional NSW at the moment.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But is there any plan to change the current situation? Obviously you have Mr Hansen in his role. Is there any part of the review that is looking at the current structural arrangements around how DPI works?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, there are—the same as we are looking at every business unit within the Department of Regional NSW. Primary Industries is not being treated differently or looked at differently from any other division within the department.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who will ultimately make decisions about what that review discovers or recommends? Will that be you, as the secretary? Will that be the Minister or the Premier? Do you know where the end point in the decision-making process will be?

**REBECCA FOX:** It is the secretary's review, and we will make some recommendations. They will be agreed with the Premier's Department. The Secretary of the Premier's Department has co-sponsored that review, effectively, with me, and certainly the Minister has some input, as have all of the Ministers that we work with.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What is the Minister's input, Ms Fox?

**REBECCA FOX:** It's a view on what she requires the department to do, are we operating efficiently and effectively, what we do well and what we can do better in that process.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is that in a formal way? Is that through discussion? What is the process for the Minister to provide input to the process?

**REBECCA FOX:** Informal at this point in time, yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What is the time line for that review to be completed?

**REBECCA FOX:** We would expect that to be finalised by the end of January.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I might leave that for now and hand over to my colleague. We may come back.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I've got some questions about Local Land Services, which will be directed to Mr Kelly. Mr Kelly, one thing that we heard in the last budget estimates was that there was a cut to the transport budget of Local Land Services. Is that correct?

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**ROB KELLY:** There were reductions in budgets for travel. So not necessarily transport—travel.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sorry, travel—my bad.

**ROB KELLY:** That covers things like overnight accommodation and airfares. It doesn't cover vehicle costs or anything like that; they're standard. Having said that, with additional projects we've had come on, like the pig project, we have now received our funding from the Federal Government for NHT. They come with additional travel budget.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But just getting back to Local Land Services, and being a farmer myself—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you a ratepayer? Just to disclose a conflict.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Yes. I had better disclose that I am a ratepayer. That is why I am looking for rate cuts if the services are going to be cut. What I want to know is, how much the travel budget for Local Land Services has been cut? I am happy for you to take that on notice if you need to.

**ROB KELLY:** We will take that on notice, in terms of pure dollars. But what I would add to that is, particularly in relation to frontline services and delivering services to our farmers and our ratepayers, there's been no restriction or cutback in the way we deliver those services or reducing that service level.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I understand that, but how can there not be a downgrade of services if you can't get to where you need to be, so you will do more of that remotely? Because your whole role is to be on site. That is your strength. That is what you are known for. That is why you were set up. To be able to do that, you actually physically need to get somewhere, unless you are going to do everything via Webex.

**ROB KELLY:** In terms of prioritisation of services, the delivery of frontline customer services—going to site, seeing customers, seeing farmers and delivering those services—there has been no cut to that budget at all. That is the priority.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So where is the cut?

**ROB KELLY:** Take that example of going to see a farmer—going back. If you have overnight accommodation, that becomes part of the reduction in the travel budget, not the actual getting to and from the site.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But, Mr Kelly, how can that—sorry, I am just trying to think about it. With my own travel, if I drive here today it takes me five hours. I can't do that in a day. Well, I can; I can drive for 11 hours. You actually have to stay places in regional New South Wales because that is how you get somewhere. That is occupational health and safety. That is how you do things. Are you saying there is a directive that it is only day trips?

**ROB KELLY:** No. There's no directive for day trips. In terms of delivering frontline services, that is the priority. Where we've said to consider other available options would be for interstate travel to attend conferences and things like that. The reductions in terms of how we are managing that budget are not related to the delivery of frontline services.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Perhaps on notice, when you tell us what the cuts are to travel for LLS, could you then categorise that so that we understand, because I don't understand how you do your jobs if you can't travel in regional New South Wales? I don't understand that.

**ROB KELLY:** Mrs Taylor, we still are travelling; that is the point. We are not saying no to travel. If it is delivering a frontline customer service for our farmers and ratepayers, that is the priority. There has been no cut to that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But then, if you have to stay a night, you can't do that?

**ROB KELLY:** Yes, you can. You absolutely can do that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Can you clarify what you said before?

**ROB KELLY:** For frontline customer service, staying overnight is fine. What we have looked at, in terms of reducing or being more efficient in it, are things not related to frontline services: so reducing interstate travel; if you are going to have internal meetings, make sure they are done online as opposed to going for a day trip and staying overnight and then coming back; and those sorts of things.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I think there will be a lot of people out there very disappointed to see less people. I will be keeping a keen eye on that, and I am very keen to see that detail on notice.

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**ROB KELLY:** That's fine.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** As much detail as you could provide as well. Who made the decision to cut the remuneration package of LLS directors?

**ROB KELLY:** I will refer that to Mr Orr.

**STEVE ORR:** Can you repeat the question, Mrs Taylor?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Who made the decision to cut the remuneration package of the LLS directors?

**STEVE ORR:** As the Minister was saying earlier today, there was a review which was done into LLS boards and committees. That review was done by Mrs Renata Brooks, and one of the observations Mrs Brooks made was that the remuneration which is paid to LLS board members, both local boards and the State board, needs to be reassessed as a consequence of changes to governance arrangements which had occurred over time, most noticeably the changes which came in as a consequence of the 2017 Act amendments. What those Act amendments did was to enhance the role of the State board and reduce the role of local boards. There wasn't a review of the remuneration at that particular time, so what the Minister did was write to the Public Service Commission and seek their advice on what the remuneration should be. The commission's come back with that advice, and that's what has led to the decisions which have been made.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Mr Orr, can you please provide that report and that advice to the Committee on notice?

**STEVE ORR:** On notice. Thanks, Mrs Taylor.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I just want to ask about the \$2.6 million program to help combat Hudson pear in Western New South Wales. Who should I direct this to? Is this you, Mr Kelly?

**ROB KELLY:** I can answer that one.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's predominantly around Lightning Ridge, that problem with Hudson Pear. Are we committed to the full rollout of the program through to the 2026-27 financial year?

**ROB KELLY:** Yes, we are.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Great. Have there been any reports back on the success of the initial six-month funding blast on this?

**ROB KELLY:** For Hudson pear?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Yes.

**ROB KELLY:** It has been going for a little over 12 months now. I have the data here. Since December last year, when the announcement was made and the program has rolled out, over the 12 months we've treated around 50,000 hectares with chemical control; 16 landholders have been supplied with the free chemical; 18 properties were treated by contractors; the biological control agent has been spread, 30,000 of those over approximately 150,000 hectares; and 40 landholders have been contacted regarding the chemical supply program over the past three months.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Can I go back to you, Ms Fox. In roles that people are leaving now for whatever reason, are they being backfilled?

**REBECCA FOX:** It depends on what the role is. Yes, we're doing still a lot of recruitment. We're filling, I think, on average 73 percent of our vacant roles across the department internally, which means people are getting opportunities to do something different, but that is hard to answer without specifics. So generally if it's part of a change plan and a role has been delimited—and we can provide that information—that is mostly in those two areas we have discussed, Regional Development and Programs and the Regional Precincts Group. If they're not in those roles, generally they are being refilled at executive level.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, you just said that they were being filled internally, that people were being given the opportunity internally.

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** My question to you then is, if people are leaving to go and do something, is there recruitment outside? Because I presume if it is internal, then it's less one somewhere else. Would you like to provide that on notice?

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**REBECCA FOX:** We're certainly using external recruitment processes as well, yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Would you be able to provide on notice to the Committee how many positions are vacant and how many positions have been filled and to categorise that by internally and externally?

**REBECCA FOX:** Could we put a time period on that, Mrs Taylor? That might help us tailor—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** The last 12 months.

**REBECCA FOX:** Okay, no problem. We should be able to do that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Mr Kelly, also just talking about transport—sorry, I shouldn't use transport; I should use travel. I'm sorry about that.

**ROB KELLY:** No, that's fine.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** In terms of travel for LLS board directors, has that also been reduced?

**ROB KELLY:** The travel budget in general applies to all parts of LLS, so it will include board-related travel expenses.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Have any board members of LLS been asked to pay their own travel to events?

**ROB KELLY:** I am not aware of that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Could you take that on notice?

**ROB KELLY:** I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** If that travel reduction applies to LLS board directors, how are LLS board directors, now that they've had their remuneration decline and then a decline in travel, expected to do their jobs? I know you're not commenting your personal opinion, but just from your position as head of that service. I'm really concerned about it. I wish I was a fly on the wall tomorrow at the meeting, actually. What is going to happen?

**ROB KELLY:** In terms of probably answering that, I'll refer to Mr Orr.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sorry, Mr Orr. That's you just before the bell.

**STEVE ORR:** Regarding local boards and their arrangements, what we've asked to happen is that the general manager and the chair of the local board have a discussion about travel and the way in which they're going to meet. Most local boards meet six times a year, and that's not to say that's the only thing local board members do but that's the primary focus. We've asked the chair and the general managers just to work out what it may mean in terms of meeting, keeping in mind going back a few years a lot of things were done online. The State board has also made a decision. The last meeting was online. This meeting is face-to-face. And then the senior executive team, which we get together about four to five times a year, we've also reduced that back to online. So we would have two meetings at the back end of this year. We had one face-to-face and one which was online. On the remuneration, Mrs Taylor, no changes have been implemented at this point so no reductions have actually occurred. The remuneration—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sorry, my time is up, Mr Orr, but my question was actually—I don't mind about the meetings if that's what they're doing online specifically for LLS and for process. But it's about them being able to do their job on the ground and get out and see people and see things.

**STEVE ORR:** Do you want me to answer that question, Mrs Taylor, or is your time up?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's crossbench time now and I'm cutting into it and it's never a wise decision, so we'll come back to this.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Good call.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You have got to keep the Chair on side, Mr Orr.

**STEVE ORR:** Absolutely. He probably has some questions for me.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I reckon he might.

**The CHAIR:** No, it's Ms Hurst's turn.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I might go back to Mr Hansen and Ms Filmer, and Dr John Tracey. We were talking about the exhibited animals. Can I just clarify, when you say that there are 59 staff that are involved in

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compliance but they also work on other things, that there are no full-time or full-time equivalent staff that specifically work in the exhibited animals division at the DPI?

**JOHN TRACEY:** I can get some more information on that, but the approach that we take is that we want a large number of people authorised so that we can successfully deliver the programs that we have in place. So the approach is that we do have a large number of people that can undertake that compliance work. I would have to check the numbers that are fully dedicated to that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If you could take that on notice, that would be great.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** There are certainly dedicated roles in that space. I think we spoke at the last estimates—or it might have been the Office of Local Government one; no, I think it was the last one—on the fact that there is a team leader for exhibited animals, so that's a dedicated person leading, and then there are policy and project officers under that that work to that team leader in exhibited animals. So there is definitely a dedicated team. What Dr John Tracey was referring to is the fact that in the compliance space we tend to authorise our compliance officers to not only have compliance capacity under exhibited animals but also under other pieces of legislation, including, say, the Biosecurity Act.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Great. I appreciate that level of detail. If you could just take on notice the full-time time or full-time equivalent staff within the exhibited animals division, but if you wanted to add anything else in regard to the compliant staff, that is fantastic as well. Could I get a confirmation that that has been taken on notice?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. Happy to take that on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Unfortunately we can't do nods on *Hansard*. I think I asked the question and then we started talking about staff that work in compliance, but how many exhibited animal facilities are required to be audited each year?

**JOHN TRACEY:** We would have to take that one on notice, sorry. We will hopefully get back to you soon on that one.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I'm not sure if this will need to be taken on notice as well, but to advise the total number of exhibited animal facilities that are licensed in New South Wales and whether they are fixed or mobile exhibits.

**JOHN TRACEY:** We can get back to you on that one as well.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I have got some numbers on that previous question. We might be able to help out here if we can. Just in terms of the compliance activities, so in terms of how many compliance activities were undertaken last year, that is 91 activities undertaken in the exhibited animals space last year.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That is 91 audits?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Six audits, 73 inspections and 12 investigations of complaints.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And the 73 inspections and the 12 complaints, is that the charities working in that space?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, I think that would still be our officers working in that space as opposed to the charities.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is there a required number of audits that occur each year? I know that is the data from last year. Is there a minimum requirement on the number of audits that take place?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Not a specific minimum amount because obviously it will be determined upon the risk of the facilities. There will be a routine series of audits/inspections, but if we find a noncompliance, then we might have a facility such as one that we talked about earlier in which there have been six inspections done in the last 12 months, whereas a facility that has had no issues identified in the last two years might well be down to three inspections a year. So it will be risk based with no minimum amount, but the teams plan the year out in terms of a routine base of audits and inspections, and then that gets varied based on what they find along the way.

**KIM FILMER:** I've got some information on the licensed exhibitors, if you'd like that. We've got 57 New South Wales-based fixed exhibitors. We've got 32 New South Wales-based mobile exhibitors that are not a circus and seven interstate-based ones. There are two mobile circuses based in New South Wales and there are three interstate-based mobile circuses, which gives you a total of 101 exhibitors.



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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I am wondering what qualifications staff in the exhibited animals team are required to have in regard to conducting compliance audits and inspections.

**JOHN TRACEY:** The authorised officers under that legislation have to undertake some training and demonstrate their understanding of the legislation and the requirements. I think that would be a minimum. The dedicated team has a more in-depth knowledge of the exhibited animal requirements and some of the background associated with that.

**KIM FILMER:** Maybe I can add a little bit to that, Ms Hurst. The compliance area has more of a legislative function, but in terms of the technical skills and advice, that sits mostly within my team, in the animal welfare unit. We've got four staff who work in that area, providing advice regarding exhibited animals.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Dr Tracey, you mentioned that there was required training. What is that required training?

**JOHN TRACEY:** There's required training for anyone authorised under legislation to undertake compliance. It's an understanding of the legislation required. I don't really have any more information than that on hand.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is that an internal training course within the DPI?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Dr Filmer, in regard to the staff that you mentioned within the animal welfare department, are there subject matter experts, particularly for different species, where there are unusual species at any of these facilities?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, we've got expertise in a variety of animals, including exhibited, livestock and companion animals, in my team.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What species are there subject matter experts in?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We might take that on notice and make sure we don't drop out or lose a species in that list, if that's okay.

**KIM FILMER:** I think that's a good idea. That's a pretty difficult question to answer off the top of my head.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** This is probably also worthwhile: Dr Filmer sits alongside Dr Jo Coombe, who is our Chief Veterinary Officer. Their two teams work incredibly closely together. So we also draw upon the deep veterinary expertise, and that veterinary expertise then also draws upon the expertise from our bryologists and pathologists, who are all based out at EMAI. They work collectively together on issues. For example, if we did have an exhibited animal that was unwell, sick or had some problem, we'd reach across the full width of the capacity we have in our chief veterinary unit and pathology and bryology units at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute to try to come up with solutions and equip Dr Filmer's team to be able to respond.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Could I also ask how many correction action requests there have been in respect to exhibited animals facilities issued in the last 12 months, overall?

**JOHN TRACEY:** We've got, in the last 12 months, four warning letters, seven directions orders issued, 12 penalty notices, one notice of intention to suspend an authority and one notice of intention to oppose or vary terms and conditions.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you able to provide the Committee details of each of those?

**JOHN TRACEY:** We can.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We'll take that on notice and work out how much of the details we can provide on each of those.

**JOHN TRACEY:** There is some confidentiality around specific cases, but we'll provide what we can.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Hansen, if it's okay with you, I might talk to Mr Sloan about the marine park plan. Mr Sloan, can I get some clarity about where we are at? At the last round, were you saying that the draft management rules had now been presented to the two responsible Ministers?

**SEAN SLOAN:** No, Chair, that's not what I was saying. The management plan, which is a draft network plan to cover the five mainland marine parks, is separate to the rules that apply within marine parks. The rules have not been presented to the Government. That's a separate process. The management plan, which is a draft



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plan, was put out for public consultation between 1 November 2021 and 31 January 2022, and then there was work done to review and consider all of the submissions that were made. Then that draft network plan, which covers the five mainland parks—with Lord Howe Marine Park being the other park in our network—was presented to the former Government but didn't get finalised or adopted. That same draft plan has been presented to the current Government and is under consideration at the moment.

**The CHAIR:** When do you think we will see the draft management rules presented to both those Ministers, particularly Batemans and Port Stephens?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The consideration of the rules within the parks follows the adoption of the management plans. So the first step in the process is to finalise and adopt a management plan. Following the management plan, there will then be a separate process to review, and then for the Government to consider, the rules. But that process will also need to go through the Marine Estate Management Authority and the Marine Estate Expert Knowledge Panel process. Those formal processes with MEMA and MEEKP will advise the Government on the rules.

**The CHAIR:** So the draft rules will go back to those advisory committees for consultation before they go to the wider community? Is that what you are saying?

**SEAN SLOAN:** It will certainly need to go through that process. The management plan will need to be adopted and then the rules will need to be considered by the advisory structures. Then the rules will need to go to Ministers for consideration, and then they would need to go out for public consultation.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The one piece we can't anticipate is if the joint Ministers are happy with the approach of the draft network management plan, and the way in which it has picked up and identified what values and, therefore, what threats need to be addressed and how it has proposed to look at that broadly, then there's not a whole lot of change that needs to be done to the drafting of the individual park rules. But if there's a different approach that they want to be taken, then both the Marine Estate Management Authority and the expert knowledge panel would need to readjust those park rules in light of any advice or direction from the joint Ministers on that management plan, because it sets the overall template.

**The CHAIR:** My main concern, and the concern of the recreational fishermen, is that those advisory committees get to see the rules as part of that process and get to comment on the rules before they go to a wider community consultation, given that they've had a significant input into the draft plan itself. Is it the case that a lot of those recreational fishing positions on those committees still remain unfilled? I know that was a problem—last Parliament we raised that. Is that still the case?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I don't think so, Chair. I do have some information on the current vacancies on our committees. If you give me a moment, I can respond to that.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think as of 3 October there's only four vacancies that we've got across the six different committees. I think we might be able to drag up what those four are. But since we last had a conversation that number has changed significantly.

**SEAN SLOAN:** For Cape Byron Marine Park Advisory Committee there's two vacancies: one for the Aboriginal culture and tourism positions. For Solitary Islands Marine Park there's three vacancies: marine conservation, maritime industry and aquaculture. For Jervis Bay there's two member vacancies: Aboriginal culture and recreational fishing, which was due to a recent resignation. I acknowledge those numbers don't add up to the four I mentioned earlier so I'll just need to double-check those figures, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Sure. Just on notice, if you could just get some double-checking of that. Given that the top 11 threats identified in the draft plan all relate to pollution—particularly in the case of the Batemans Marine Park, you have six sewage outfalls within it, as well as a sewage treatment work adjacent to a sanctuary zone—how much investment is actually going into research into water pollution and water quality with respect to these marine parks, given that, essentially, the major threats are all pollution, and pollution doesn't obey rules around lines on maps?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** This year, 2023-24, funding under the Marine Estate Management Strategy, \$10.7 million—so about 35 per cent of the total program budget—is being spent on improving water quality and reducing litter. That's not delivered by us. That's funding that's provided to fellow agencies who predominantly take the lead in this place.

**The CHAIR:** Is that research or actually proactive action—or both?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I believe it's a combination of both but we should be able to get you a breakdown of the difference between research and actual delivery on ground pieces.

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**The CHAIR:** Yes, that would be great, on notice. Thank you.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** As I say, the key point there is that it is a third of the total budget. It recognises the fact that it is the key threat, both identified by the community and identified by the knowledge panel and the science. That is the key threat to the marine environment.

**The CHAIR:** Given that modern fishery science is moving away from a "lock it up, lock 'em out" mentality, are we still going down this route of creating zones within marine parks and excluding access for different activities based on those zones? If so, why?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might make an initial comment then hand over to Dr Sloan, to Sean. I think that there will always be the need for some form of zoning. It's really about how you tailor the rules within those zones to actually achieve the outcome that you want. I guess the easy example to give is, if there's sea grass that needs to be protected then creating a zone in which you can't anchor in that area is a logical way to protect that sea grass population. So I think we need to be more nuanced in how we use the zones than what we—

**The CHAIR:** Like a ferry between La Perouse and Kurnell?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** As you've identified, there was multiple green-light levels at a Federal and State level. You know what our views on those were—

**The CHAIR:** I do.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** —because we made a public submission on those. I think there will always be a need for a zone. It'll just be how we best use science and how, importantly, we use the—what are we trying to protect and therefore what do we need to do to protect it? The nuancing of the use of those zones is actually what modern fisheries and marine park management are moving towards.

**SEAN SLOAN:** I'll just continue on answering that question. Essentially, marine parks have a primary purpose to protect marine biodiversity, whereas our fisheries management is about managing fish stocks for sustainability and social and economic outcomes. The two complement one another, but our marine parks are not fishery management tools; they're a complementary marine management arrangement. In terms of New South Wales, we have six marine parks and 12 aquatic reserves. Some 35 per cent of the State is included in our marine parks. Inside those marine parks, 6.5 per cent are included in sanctuary zones, which are the no-take and closed areas.

Essentially, where those sanctuary zones are, that's where the highest diversity is. That's where this tension point arises with fisheries, because that's generally where a lot of fish are as well. That overlap exists. When marine parks are originally designed, the principles of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness are used—the CAR principles—and then we have the threat and risk assessment, which then we use to tailor any of the zoning and rules within those parks. The modern process—and this process is being used not just in New South Wales but around Australia and, in fact, around the world—is a threat and risk assessment approach as a more contemporary way to design protections for the marine environment. We see that as the future way that we would implement any changes.

**The CHAIR:** I will give the Opposition three minutes and then go to the Government for a mop-up before lunch.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to ask some questions about the northern New South Wales drainage reset program. I will direct them to whoever is best placed to answer. Questions have been asked of the Minister about the report from Mr Culleton, and she didn't commit to the timing regarding its release. I want some clarity as to when the Government received that report from Mr Culleton.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I can help.

**REBECCA FOX:** Mr Hansen can answer that, thank you.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'm just pulling that up. Sorry, I'm trying to look specifically for the date on which we received the report. Let me take that on notice until I can find it here. Sorry, I don't want to waste your time.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great. Mr Hansen, the Minister had said in response to a question from Ms Sue Higginson that work was underway and it was a priority. I think there were a number of recommendations in the report. How many recommendations were there?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Total recommendations, I think, are 11 total recommendations.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you able to tell us how many of those have been acted on?

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**SCOTT HANSEN:** All have some form of action against them, from what I understand, including there was initial funding committed to on-ground action as part of the flood recovery piece. That was the \$5 million provided last year for immediate action. There's also continued action through the Marine Estate Management Authority's work, the marine estate management strategy work, up on the North Coast in delivering a piece around how we change the regulatory settings to fast-track and empower quicker decision-making around maintenance of drains. They're the two key priority ones I can readily think of.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** This is why it's sometimes challenging without the Minister here, but would you be able to take on notice when the Government intends to publicly release that report? I know you can't answer that, but if you could take that on notice. Do you know how much of the \$5 million that you just mentioned has been spent?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'll take both those things on notice. But unless someone is going to correct me here, I think all of the \$5 million was expended. But I'll take on notice that actual amount and make sure you've got it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And if that money has been spent, the time line of that would be great. On notice is fine; I understand the situation.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Mrs Mitchell, I can just confirm that that program—the \$5 million is actually managed by the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation.

**The CHAIR:** Are there any Government questions?

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** No, I'll ask them later.

**The CHAIR:** We'll now break for lunch and return at two o'clock.

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to this afternoon's session for budget estimates 2022-23. I will throw to questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I might deal with some Forestry matters now. I think that would probably be, just for the benefit of the Committee, the only questions that we would have, so we might be able to let you go a little bit earlier, if we can. I just wanted to come back to this issue—I know the Chair spoke about it, and I did ask the Minister as well—in relation to the stop-work orders on the South Coast. At the first estimates hearing that we had with the Minister, there were some questions asked in relation to data on the number of protests and the impact that that had in terms of output. The response back was that that data isn't collected. I'm just wondering whether anyone could tell us why that doesn't happen.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** The data on the what, sorry, Mrs Mitchell?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Into the number of protests that are held in State forests.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** We wouldn't understand the number of protests that are happening in our forests. There are several that have taken place, particularly up on the North Coast. So you're looking for the number of protest activities that have happened?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes. My colleagues were on that hearing, not myself, but I think there were some supplementary questions in relation to the number of protests held in State forests. I don't think the answer that we got back indicated the impact that that has on output. Again, I'm happy for it to be taken on notice if that's easier, but we are just really trying to understand what is the impact, how often is it occurring and what data and costs there are that are associated with that.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Okay, I'm happy to take that away on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sorry, I'm jumping a bit, but in terms of specifically looking at Tallaganda and also Flat Rock forest, are there any general figures that you might be able to provide the Committee in terms of output last year compared with this year?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** For the South Coast?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I can tell you that the South Coast generally—because the areas of Tallaganda State Forest and Flat Rock provide timber to the South Coast. The region is broke up into upper South Coast and Eden. For the South Coast, we have been supplying at approximately 50 per cent of the pre-fire levels, and that's

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because the South Coast was impacted quite significantly in the Black Summer fires, so the volumes have gone down. We were producing as per our plan, up until the stop-work orders in Tallaganda and more recently in Flat Rock. That has had a bit of an impact, but that's a recent impact, if you know what I mean.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm happy for this to be taken on notice, but is there any further information that could be provided to the Committee in terms of that impact over the most recent period?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Sure. In terms of volume of timber that we could have—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, that would be great.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Yes, absolutely. I can take that away on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I appreciate that it's a little bit challenging and I know that there are other agencies involved, but as I was asking, I think, the Minister earlier in terms of the time line for resolution in that part of the State, the data that I have, I think, is 20 for Tallaganda and Flat Rock is 24 December. From the agency's perspective, what are the conversations with the EPA? Do you expect to see that resolved in that time frame? Is there an update that you could give us?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Yes, absolutely. We have been working with the EPA pretty much since the issuance of the stop-work order. It's a complex issue because the stop-work order has been on the basis of identification of den trees for greater gliders, and they've been questioning the adequacy of the identification of den trees. Our view has been that our operations have been planned in accordance with the environmental rules SEPP, which is the coastal IFOA, which actually requires us to carry out broad area habitat searches and not necessarily targeted species searches. I think that's where the concern that was raised by the EPA is—to conduct more targeted species surveys, and we are working with them to understand how we do that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is that a shift from the EPA to be looking at more targeted species than generally?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** It goes back to the history of this shift in the current IFOA versus the previous IFOA. The previous IFOA was based more on the targeted species, and the current IFOA was, if you like, a level higher, because it is almost presumed that certain species are already present in the environment and that you would set aside a set number of habitat trees to protect those species. So we've been conducting our operations over the last five years on that basis, but the EPA has raised concerns about that and that has been the basis of the stop-work order. We are working with them on a whole range of options, which includes conducting additional searches but also what additional prescriptions we can put in place to protect the gliders.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm trying to better understand the process with the EPA. Is that something that they come to your agency with? How does that process work? Is there a chance that this could happen in other areas with other species? What's the change of protocol? How do we keep an eye on that?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** The EPA is the regulator on native forestry for Forestry Corporation, so they could undertake a regulatory action, as they have in this case. A stop-work order is one of the regulatory actions. Then the onus is on Forestry Corporation to work with the EPA to try to address those concerns. So that's what we are trying to do at the moment. One of the things—you mentioned protocol. Protocol is actually a part of the coastal IFOA that allows the EPA as the regulator to tweak or modify the IFOA for better environmental outcomes. We are working with them to understand if they are minor modifications, which can lead to better environmental outcomes, but not necessarily a significant outcome on timber production, because if it starts to go into that territory, then it will be a requirement for the Ministers to be involved.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** More broadly, my understanding is that a five-yearly review of the coastal IFOA is due to commence shortly. Is that correct? How would that process take place? Will there be changes through that that take into account what we are seeing down on the South Coast? What's that process?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I might actually defer that to Dave McPherson because it's a departmental responsibility to carry out that process.

**DAVID MCPHERSON:** As far as the five-yearly review of the coastal IFOA, the process will commence before the end of this year. The idea is that we will draw up the terms of reference in agreement with the EPA and the Natural Resources Commission and then we will look to engage consultants, advisers and expert panels to assist us to assess whether the controls that are in place are working adequately.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How long will that review process take, do you think?

**DAVID MCPHERSON:** Up to 12 months.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Obviously I'm assuming there will be opportunities for input from industry and impacted stakeholders throughout that.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** That's correct. Ideally we'll try to get it done much quicker than in 12 months, but it will depend on the availability and the right consultants and advisers to assist us, and other matters that are going on.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I know you said it's due to start before the end of the year, which is soon given that we are in mid-December, but more information about that review process to be made available publicly—would that be early in the New Year? I appreciate that agencies and departments shut down over the break, which you're well entitled to do, but would we expect more information in January or February? What's the time frame?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Yes, we would definitely look to make sure that there is up-to-date information. The public will be notified when that process kicks off and the various stages that we will be looking to engage throughout that process, so I'd imagine before or early in January there will be information up to help people understand how that's going to play out.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That is the end of my Forestry questions. If Ms Hurst doesn't have any, then perhaps those witnesses could go.

**The CHAIR:** Is that including Mr McPherson?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Only Forestry.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Only Forestry. We will try to work through some of the others.

**The CHAIR:** From our perspective, Mr Hansen, we're happy to dismiss Mr Chaudhary, here in person, and also Mr McPherson, if you are happy.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'm half-tempted to say no. I'm sure they'd love to sit in for the rest of the afternoon, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** I know you are not happy because you are not being dismissed, Mr Hansen.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, that's all good. Thank you for that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr McPherson. Thank you, Mr Chaudhary.

**(David McPherson and Anshul Chaudhary withdrew.)**

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I just want to come back to the cross-border issue—probably to you, Ms Fox. With the changing level for that role, has there been any change to the scope of the work of the Cross-Border Commissioner with that new classification?

**REBECCA FOX:** Practically, on the ground—and I'm not as close to it; I might ask Mr Wheaton to talk to it afterwards—the work that the cross-border commissioner teams in all jurisdictions have done obviously over the last three years has been significant with border closures in COVID et cetera. There's a work program that needs to be worked out, and we do that along with memorandums of understanding with other jurisdictions. The role has been assessed independently. When that's done, it looks at a broad range of things, including how many direct reports, the funding that's available et cetera, and that has been done appropriately. Yes, the role probably has changed to a certain extent, and that's given the work that we envisage is in the forward plans and what's happening over the coming years. I don't know whether you've got anything to add to that, Mr Wheaton. You're closer to it than I am.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** There are probably just two things that I want to add. As part of an executive process, all position descriptions are reviewed, and then for all the new assigned roles they are rewritten. And so the new role description, like the secretary has said, has been assessed independently for the capabilities that match then a band 1 role. Secondly, there is still the band 2 executive coverage over the work of the Cross-Border Commissioner. The work program remains the same. It is still driven by a Cross-Border Commissioner appointment at the band 1 level, but there is then band 2 oversight of that work that has not only the Cross-Border Commissioner work but also the other coordination and, like, similar work—coordination and delivery work of each of our regional directors—as part of that band 2 role.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sorry, I apologise. There is someone in a band 2 oversight role to look at the work of the Cross-Border Commissioner, who is now at band 1—is that right? I got a bit lost in the bureaucratic language, and I don't mean to be disrespectful by saying that.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** That's fine. I accept that I'm a bureaucrat, so I'm probably answering in that manner.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We've got very great bureaucrats who work for us here in New South Wales. We're very lucky.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I prefer the public servant description, but that's okay. It is a bureaucratic process.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sorry, I'll say public servant. I apologise.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** No, that's fine. The Cross-Border Commissioner role description has been reassessed to be a band 1 role, but there is still the senior executive band 2 that has and takes carriage of the executive decision-making at that level for the cross-border work and the broader coordination and delivery work of our regional development team.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So that's who the band 1, now, Cross-Border Commissioner—

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Reports in to.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —reports in to. Okay, thank you.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** That's right.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I just wanted to clarify that. Is the updated role description of that position something that could be provided to the Committee on notice?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I think that's fine.

**REBECCA FOX:** We'll take advice on whether or not we can provide those time lines or whether we can't, but we are happy to provide whatever we can legally provide.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great, thank you.

**REBECCA FOX:** All of our role descriptions are public when the roles are advertised, so I imagine that we would be able to provide that. It would have been attached to an advertisement.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great, if you can. I would certainly appreciate it. I just want to go now probably to you, Mr Hansen, or DPI. It is just a quick one, and then there will be a few more things that we need to talk about. The Drought Ready and Resilient Fund the Minister spoke about earlier today—that \$250 million—my understanding is that there are low-interest loans available. Are you able to advise what the interest rate is for those loans?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The interest rate will be set at the particular time that someone applies for the loan, and it will be the current lending rate for either—if they are borrowing for a five-year period, it will be the Treasury bond rate of five years for that five-year Treasury bond, plus a 1 per cent margin; or if it's for a 10-year loan period, it will be the 10-year Treasury bond rate plus a 1 per cent margin.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What is the Treasury rate, then?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** At the moment I think that's 6.2 per cent, but I'll check that and bring that up in a minute.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Just so I'm clear—and I'm not—if I was going to be applying for one of those low-interest loans today, it would be the 6.2 per cent plus 1 per cent. Is that what you said? Sorry, I'm a little confused.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's correct.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And if I do it over 10 years?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The 10-year rate—and I'll just find that one at the moment. Sorry, 6.2 is the 10-year rate and 5.6 is the five-year rate.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But there is 1 per cent on top of that as well, did you say?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's right.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, this might be something that you need to take on notice. Obviously there are other funds of low-interest loans that have had offerings of 2.5 per cent. What was the rationale, if you are able to provide it, Mr Hansen, of setting it at this higher rate?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I guess the fact that we are basically offering a wholesale rate of lending here. The 2.5 per cent interest rate that's still on offer through the Drought Infrastructure Fund, which was previously the Farm Innovation Fund, is still there and available. It was obviously a program that a budget set back at a time with very different market interest rates than what we have at the moment, and it's for capital. This one is allowing operational activities to be actually covered—so, expenses—and it's intended to be there at a rate which is still at a wholesale rate compared to what they would get in the retail market but, at the same time, at a rate that doesn't cost significantly to taxpayers and therefore is able to be sustained over a longer period of time.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that applications, I think, might have only opened earlier this month. I know it hasn't been there for long. But is there any data you could provide in terms of the number of applications that have been received under that Drought Ready and Resilient Fund? I appreciate it is in its early stages, but are there any numbers?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** What are we? Fourteen days in? Last night I had a look, and there are 19 applications that have been received.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What would be the average time frame for those applications to be assessed and processed?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's a good question. We haven't got to the first one going through to be able to give you what that time frame is. Obviously, again, with these being loans as opposed to grants, where we need to make sure and double-check all the pieces around the capacity to repay and the capacity to take on that lending, we are working through that with the first 19 applicants at the moment. The average amount of those loans that have been applied for so far is just under the \$250,000 limit. I think it's just over \$220,000, is sort of the average loan application amount at the moment. And there is a pretty even spread from across the State in terms of from geographical locations, but the predominant type of business has actually been beef cattle production—has been the predominant sort of applications so far.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm happy for you to take it on notice. I know that there'll be a longer period of time for those answers with the shutdown, but if it's possible to come back to us with indicative time frames of application processing time—if you can.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** As I said, I completely understand it's in its very early stages, but any information would be useful. Thank you for that. I want to turn now to fire ants. I wanted to get some clarity on how things are going in terms of that response up in the Northern Rivers. Do we know at this point how those fire ants got into New South Wales? I know they were close on the border in Queensland some months ago. What do we know about how they've come in?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might start and then see if Dr Tracey wants to add anything. In terms of how we're going at the moment, we still only have one infected premises, which is the premises that was originally detected. That site has had numerous traces both forwards and backwards in terms of potential carrier material. I think there have been 30 high-risk premises associated with that one site. Those 30 have all been both spoken to—have had staff and, in the vast majority of the cases, dogs involved in looking for presence of. We've found no further cases, no further evidence, of anything in New South Wales either from the New South Wales suppliers to that site or the New South Wales operators who were working on that site and have subsequently worked elsewhere. Queensland have got a couple of traces in terms of suppliers of materials to that site as well. One of those suppliers of materials, a supplier of turf, I believe, was—no fire ants were found on that premises; they were found in close proximity to that site. That's probably pointing us to—the most likely source is a source via a supplier from Queensland.

But, as I said, no fire ants were detected at this stage on that property, just in close proximity to that property. That's where we think the likely source is. Every time we go to a site and look at it, we also then balloon out into another set of potential contacts that we then go and look at as well. The first week we had 13 high-risk premises that we looked at. That's now escalated above 30 and that's just south of the border. Queensland and the national program are working north of the border as well. We're really confident with phase one being completed on the current infected premises. All of the baiting and all the surveillance have been completed out to a 500-metre radius around the initial site, so we're really confident about that piece at the moment. So far the tracing is, as I said, pointing north of the border in terms of a direct movement from there.



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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Mr Hansen, earlier today Daniel Brighton's court case concluded. He has been convicted of serious animal cruelty under the Crimes Act. He hasn't received any jail time. As the DPI is aware, Mr Brighton has continued to be heavily involved with several of his family's exhibited animal facilities. Given that Mr Brighton is now subject to a mandatory lifetime ban on owning or working with animals, will the DPI be taking steps to ensure that Mr Brighton is no longer involved with animals at those facilities?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might hand over to Dr Tracey and Dr Filmer on that one. That court case was today, wasn't it?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** It was, yes. It concluded this morning.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, I wasn't aware of the outcome of that yet.

**JOHN TRACEY:** Thanks, Ms Hurst. Our teams have been watching that one very closely and we will be taking appropriate action in that case.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you let me know what that process will look like? How will you ensure compliance that he is no longer involved in the care of animals at those facilities?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, happy to do that. That will be the action taken in terms of—we'll need to follow up on the details of the conviction. But if it is a recorded conviction then anyway with the conviction is unable to work with, care for, as you've stated—so we will be making sure that that's followed through and completed.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** How will you ensure compliance of that going forward?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Compliance will be followed up as we normally do—you know, in terms of follow-up audits or inspections or the typical sort of compliance actions that we take to ensure that people are following the rules that we set down.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If he resides on one of the properties where the animals are being exhibited, do you see an issue there? Will he be allowed to remain on that property with the animals?

**JOHN TRACEY:** I'd have to check that, but I don't think that we would be able to exit him from that property. He wouldn't be allowed to care for the animals, but I can come back to you on that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will you be in regular contact with the owners of those facilities going forward, given that Brighton was originally the main point of contact?

**JOHN TRACEY:** What was the question, sorry? Have we—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will you be in regular contact with the actual listed owners of the facility?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** My understanding is that a lot of the correspondence—Daniel Brighton himself was the main point of contact. Will you now be in contact with the actual listed owners of the facility instead?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, we will.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will you still respond to any further emails or correspondence from Mr Brighton about the facilities in regards to animal care? Or will correspondence in the future need to come from somebody else at the facility?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, I'd have to check that in terms of—if he's not directly taking care of those animals but he has an administrative role, we'd just have to look at what we can and can't do in that case.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If Mr Brighton is shown to still be involved with the facilities or animal care, what action will be taken by the DPI or other authorities?

**JOHN TRACEY:** We'd take all actions available to us under the legislation in terms of the typical progress in terms of either PIN notices or then progression to prosecution, if that's warranted.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Could I suggest, given the fact that we still haven't seen the ruling out of the court yet—I think you got a flavour from Dr Tracey about how we intend to interpret and respond. It's probably a good one for us to pick up in a couple of weeks in our February hearing once we've had a chance to do a bit more of an analysis of the ruling and then start to play that out, if that's okay.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I understand that; it was just this morning. Dr Filmer, have you seen the statement released today by the NHMRC in relation to forced swim and smoking tower experiments?



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**KIM FILMER:** I have, yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What action is the department planning to take in response to the NHMRC's positioning around those experiments?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Are you okay if I jump in on this one?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, of course.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry. As you'd be aware, we're waiting on advice back from ARAC with regards to their advice on both the swim test and smoke test. That's been something that—I'm sure they will be taking note of the advice that was released today and feeding that into their advice that they then provide to the Minister.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Who is the advice—because the Minister has talked about getting advice and, when I have previously tried to clarify if that was from the Animal Research Review Panel or the NHMRC, that hasn't been clear. Who is the advice coming from, or to?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** My understanding is it's the Animal Research Review Panel that is providing the advice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** My understanding is that they've already created a position on this some time ago, before the NHMRC published their position. Is that correct?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, that's correct. They've considered it at Animal Research Review Panel meetings, but that's as much as I can give you in terms of information on that at the moment.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Has the department made any recommendations to the Minister about these experiments, based on the NHMRC position or the Animal Research Review Panel's position?

**KIM FILMER:** The NHMRC position has only been, as you say—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Public, yes.

**KIM FILMER:** —come out today, so that's now available. The Animal Research Review Panel has considered the situation for these procedures. They have considered one of those procedures; they are in the process of considering the other one of them, with a view to presenting that information to the Minister.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Has the view on one of the experiments, the one that they have developed a position on, been conveyed to the Minister's office?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**KIM FILMER:** There has been some discussion about that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is that in regard to the smoking towers?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you able to tell us what the Animal Research Review Panel's position is on the smoking towers?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Not at this point in time.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is that confidential?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** At the moment, it's before the Minister for her consideration.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is there any work being done within the department to draft legislation in regard to these experiments, or has there been any discussions in regard to changes to legislation with regard to either of those experiments?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. We have looked at what legislation would look like. In fact, we have looked at private members' bills that propose legislation to do exactly that—to look at pros and cons of different approaches that we would take as part of our preparedness in terms of what-if so that we can move swiftly if needed.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is that being done separately to the POCTAA changes, given that—I'm assuming—this would be more likely to be done as part of the Animal Research Act?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, that's correct.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You will know, Mr Hansen, that when we looked at the previous animal welfare bill, there was a recommendation that the Animal Research Act remain separate. Is that continuing as part of the POCTAA review—that that Act will still remain separate?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Certainly, the starting point in what we're looking to take forward under the reforms is actually starting with the recommendations from the committee's report late last year on the draft bill that was presented at that stage. So the advice around the separation out of the Animal Research Act is still the starting point for that. I would say that the thing that we're trying to make sure we get right—and you would be well aware of this. Any time we make a change to one of these instruments, we have to make sure it flows across to the other instruments. Again, to your line of questions this morning about the Crimes Act, no, we don't have any intention of addressing or amending anything in the Crimes Act, but we do want to make sure that anything we change under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act doesn't counteract what exists in the Crimes Act or the intent of what is in the Crimes Act. We are going to be constantly referencing these individual Acts and try to make sure that we don't end up with the sort of bandaids solutions that we sometimes end up with by doing them in isolation.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Absolutely. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** I just want to ask some questions around the Draft Trout Cod Action Plan. I imagine that Mr Sloan might be best to answer that.

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Do we have a total projected cost for this trout cod action plan over the 10-year period, even as an estimate?

**SEAN SLOAN:** No, I don't have an estimated cost to provide the Committee with today. What I can speak to is the type of activities that we will be undertaking as part of the trout cod action plan, and, obviously, those activities will be costed out and then budgeted for. At the moment, we've just completed the public consultation, so we're considering all the feedback that we've received on the public consultation on the draft plan. Obviously, there have been various ideas that have been thrown forward to us, and we need to build that into our plan going forward. The focus areas are habitat rehabilitation, protection where necessary, conservation, stocking, and compliance and education, as well as river reconnectedness—so all of the fish passage work that we are doing. We will have some estimates of what all of that work collectively will cost, but I don't have that sort of information today.

**The CHAIR:** Is it your vision that a good majority of this will be absorbed into your staff's normal day-to-day operations, or is this going to be on top of their normal operations?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Some of the work will be absorbed and will be part of the work that we're already doing with trout cod recovery, and then there will be some initiatives that will be new and revised or adjusted, based on different work that we are now doing. As an example, the work that we have been doing on breeding trout cod previously was all tank-based and hormone-induced breeding activity, but we have recently been trialling pond-based breeding activity that has yielded some better results in terms of numbers of trout cod that have been spawned. That's a new type of activity that will hopefully see us stocking more trout cod into the future. That's something that I think is a continuation of existing work but will obviously involve different approaches. There are going to be different new pieces of work done on habitat rehabilitation. In the past, we have done—I think over 5,000 woody habitats have been installed over areas where trout cod inhabit our rivers, but that type of activity involves additional funding, so there's likely to be new projects built around habitat rehabilitation as well.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just go to the section of the draft plan under "Captive Breeding, Stocking and Translocation". You've got there a medium-term goal that says to undertake surveys to accurately identify the area of extent and population size and structure of existing populations. Can you tell us how you assessed the effectiveness or success or otherwise of that last 10-year plan? From this statement, it seems like you've yet to do a lot of that work. How did you assess the success of the plan previously?

**SEAN SLOAN:** We did a review in 2022 of the work that we are undertaking. What that review showed was that we are doing the right things; we just need to do, in some cases, more of them or adjust the approach. The example I gave earlier about the move from tank-based spawning to pond-based spawning is an example of a move away from the more traditional way that we've done trout cod spawning, so—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, I don't mean to interrupt you, but did that review include a stock assessment like this statement is sort of insinuating? Did you do a stock assessment in various areas to see how well they were travelling?

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**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes, so we were doing monitoring annually of all of our native fish species, and that includes trout cod. The area that is closed seasonally between September and November, which is between Yarrowonga Weir and Tocumwal, is the trout cod spawning closure area, and that's the area that we know to be the last remnant population of self-sustaining trout cod. That survey work that I'm referring to demonstrates to us that that is the last remnant population. So the trout cod action plan has an ambition to get us to a point where we have got multiple self-sustaining populations of trout cod so that that one population isn't all that we're relying on.

The way we do that is by improving the habitat, which I mentioned earlier, by boosting the restocking activities, and the pond-spawning approach that I mentioned is showing a lot of promise in terms of being able to produce more fish. In the bigger picture, a lot of the threats to not just trout cod but all of our native fish stem from environmental issues, like the effects of climate on our river systems, which include high frequencies of drought and flooding. There's a whole range of issues that stem from the lack of connectivity between our rivers. So our fish passage strategy will play a major role in improving the recovery of our native fish species, and trout cod is just one of those more vulnerable species in the system.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just go to one of the other goals there? Under recreational fishing you have got a medium goal there of investigating the ramifications of hybridisation. With a lot of species that hybridise, there's normally a set of dominant traits from one species over another, or they're more like one species than the other. Are we seeing that with the trout cod and the Murray cod hybridisation? Are we seeing a more dominant species over the other?

**SEAN SLOAN:** No, I don't think it's a reference to Murray cod or trout cod. I think it's more the genetic diversity of the population, and obviously to have a healthy population you need a genetically diverse population. I can take a closer look at that, Chair, if you need me to and take that on notice and come back to you.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. I'm just interested in what the current school of thought will be in terms of compliance. When you might have a complete new species or variant of that species, will it be treated under the same category as the trout cod or something different?

**SEAN SLOAN:** They do look fairly similar so that compliance issue is already there to some extent. What I can say is the ambition is to get us back to a point where we can actually have a sustainable recreational fishery. We have already got that in the Talbingo dam, which is a catch-and-release fishery for trout cod, but we would like to obviously get back to that position in our waterways as well.

**The CHAIR:** You've touched on the river health and habitat, but in the plan you've got stage one, stage two and stage three, and there is very little detail as to what the difference is between those three stages. Perhaps on notice, are you able to provide the Committee some more detail as to what those three stages would look like?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes, happy to do that, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Have you given any consideration to working in partnership with farmers who have property along these key locations in terms of getting them to help improve river and riparian habitats for trout cod, whether it's giving them funding to improve fencing, giving them assistance in removing those introduced plant species, like willow and lippia, and replacing it with native plants? Is that part of your vision?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I think the way that we would pick those issues up—and I think the short answer would be yes. We would always be looking to work with adjacent land holders in these particular geographic locations where our native fish exist. It would be part of the habitat improvement piece in the action plan. We have an annual process where we call for applications for habitat action grants, which these types of activities could be included in as well. The other thing I would mention is we have a program where we're looking at improving the screening on irrigation systems across our river systems. That fish screening program that we've been working with farmers and irrigators on has yielded some excellent results. In some estimates, we know that we're saving millions of native fish that would have otherwise been drawn into irrigation systems. That's another element that would benefit trout cod stocks as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Mr Hansen, just back to where I left off before in relation to the fire ants, my understanding is that there's been some genetic testing carried out or that it's underway in terms of trying to trace the fire ants found at Murwillumbah. Is that correct, and is there an update on that work?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We have done the genetic testing, and the genetic testing is a link to the south-east Queensland genetics.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That you mentioned before, yes. How many staff are on the ground at the moment doing that surveillance and compliance work from DPI?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's a good question. I'll get the latest information, unless John has got it to hand.

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**JOHN TRACEY:** While you're pulling that up, there's a core amount of activity that is happening with the dog teams and the surveillance teams from Queensland. We have about four surveillance teams there. In addition, DPI has contracted some additional surveillance teams—another two of those. That is the core in terms of—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When you say "team", how many people are in a team? Is it two? Is it 10?

**JOHN TRACEY:** We can pull up the numbers, but a surveillance team in terms of a foot on the ground walk-through can be anywhere from 10 upwards of staff moving across to systematically search those areas that have been identified as high priority. I think Scott previously mentioned the fact that we have now cleared that 500-metre zone, so the focus of the response now is to target those trace premises going forward.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And there was about 30 of those, is that right, those premises?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, there's at least 30. I think overall we've got a larger number than that, that the team is working through. The majority of those have actually been cleared. I think they're expecting the final 10 of those to be cleared off at the end of this week. All the high-priority places have been done, and they're working their way through those lower priority traces. But it is an ongoing—it's a change all the time. The more information we get about links to properties that may have not been compliant or that we find and discover fire ants in Queensland—that's the target of the surveillance program not only in the Murwillumbah area, but across that whole North Coast region.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The Minister, when we've asked about this in the upper House in question time, has spoken about the signs that I know have been put up on roads in and out of the area, identifying for people the restrictions that are currently in place with that biosecurity threat. Do you have any information on—and, again, I'm happy for you to take it on notice—how many signs have been deployed, where that signage is and how many there are?

**JOHN TRACEY:** We've got signage on the highways—they're the fixed-term ones—in 22 locations. In addition to that, we've got at least the same number—so it would be at least another 20 temporary signs—that are targeted around roads, particularly around that Murwillumbah area. The fixed ones are going to be in place to continue that focus on preventing those high-risk carriers from coming in or making sure that they're meeting the requirements that are there. That's just one of the strategies, though, right? We're—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That leads to my next question. In terms of more broader community engagement, education activity so that people know the risks and how to identify and the control work you obviously need to be doing around fire ants—beyond the signage and those surveillance teams that are on properties—what is happening more broadly in terms of community engagement and activation?

**JOHN TRACEY:** It's a really good point because that is a big focus and priority for both DPI and the national program—lifting that community awareness and community engagement. We have thrown everything at it in terms of SMSs, emails to the affected businesses, follow-up phone calls with those high-risk businesses. We have got face-to-face, which is really important. There's been really good pick-up of the pop-up van that we have at Murwillumbah near the shopping centres there. There's been more than 200 people visit that site, so that face-to-face contact is important. We've had public forums. We've had targeted discussions with industry and those affected businesses and been working really closely. We've had some great support by and with the national program, but also Tweed council, who have connected us with the relevant people in that area, in particular. But more broadly, that's the focus that we want to see going forward and that we have been focused on for the last six to 12 months, in terms of that northern area—a focus on community engagement that's beyond just your SMS, emails, the web. We've got pick-up in terms of media. We've got Operation Victa, which is also a high-visibility program that encourages the compliance aspects of the program as well.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might add there that one of the things that we learnt the last time we had a red imported fire ant outbreak down in Port Botany was the importance of getting everyone in the local community engaged. One of the groups that we involved there, which we've successfully involved this time as well, is schools. We've actually had 309 New South Wales public schools and over 57,000 students now engaged in activities in northern New South Wales. We've got classroom materials about what is the red imported fire ant, why is it of concern, what to look for and what to do if you find it.

Our schools team has been deployed to ramp up an activity that they had been doing up there for a while, which is using the red imported fire ant as a good story for classrooms around biosecurity and what is biosecurity. We've been able to ramp that up quickly and make sure that we've got community groups, school groups and, through the council, a lot of the engagement with a lot of the local community activities to get everyone working

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towards the same outcome. You'd be aware that this was discovered by contractors working onsite who noticed something strange and reported it. But the yellow crazy ants in Lismore, that was completely a local citizen who thought they looked strange and reported them to us. We were able to get on top of that very quickly. We really heavily rely on the community's engagement on this.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Still on this issue but a different question, is fire ant bait being used up there at the moment? Where is that being sourced from?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It is. The growth regulator is being used up there on the ground. At the moment it's being supplied by the national program, which has a supply of stock of that for use in the national response.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We're also hearing reports—and I know, again, this is quite an issue for south-eastern Queensland and northern New South Wales—we've been given an indication today that there's a new fire ant nest that's been detected about 850 metres from the border in the Currumbin Valley. Is that something that DPI has been notified of as well?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We were aware that there was another detection in the Currumbin Valley, this time closer than Tallebudgera, which was the last known one. It is another detection closer to the border. Again, the national program and response is managing the onsite eradication of that one, and then any tracing and activities out of that as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In terms of the national program, my understanding is that when Ministers met earlier this year, I think it's \$592 million over the next four years, but some States haven't put the money in yet. Is that correct? That's what I thought, but is that all fully loaded and ready to go?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's the right way to interpret it. Every State had—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm happy to be corrected. I don't profess to be an expert, although I have learnt a little bit about fire ants in the last little while.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** She talks a lot about fire ants. Someone's got to do it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm happy to learn.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** You've interpreted that one pretty well. All States had an agreed budgeted amount on the table. What occurred was the fact that the national program basically came back, following a review that Dr Wendy Craig did—sorry, it may not have been Wendy—and said, "If you're going to get serious about this, this is the amount of money that needs to be spent nationally to actually eradicate out of south-east Queensland." That's the only way we end up managing our risk: the eradication out of south-east Queensland. A number of just under \$600 million was what was required over the next four years. Every State already had dollars on the table; they just didn't have those dollars up to that amount. We were able to secure New South Wales government support for an additional \$80 million, which takes our contribution for that period of time up to 95. The Commonwealth has put its money and been able to increase its allocation to what its share of that \$600 million needs to be. Queensland has, but not all States have been able to go through their budget process and get that uplift in the budget that's meant to be there. They've all got money—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So is it still the plan to try to eradicate those? Obviously that's not the case at the moment—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, definitely. Absolutely.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —because they're in New South Wales. But it's still the intention to try and make that happen?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, it's still very much the intention. Control of red imported fire ants in the US costs about \$7 billion a year, so eradication is still well and truly the goal here.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I might just move on, because I'm conscious of time and there are a few other things that we want to ask you guys, but thank you for that. It is another biosecurity issue, also on the North Coast, but in a different industry, just in relation to white spot. Obviously there has been the initial outbreak out there and there are still the biosecurity orders. My understanding is that DPI came in and, particularly for the prawn farmers, did cover the cost to clean and to destock those prawn farms in the Clarence following the outbreak. Is that correct, and what was the cost of that?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Thank you for the question. I can pick that one up. The response in total was a cost of \$12.2 million, which included \$5.7 million for contractors and on-farm destruction of prawns, decontamination and disposal. Then there was \$5.9 million for remediation and response resources, which included a lot of staff

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involvement from DPI during that period. There was around \$80,000 for surveillance during that period and then \$85,000 for lab testing. Then we've got some costs for ongoing proof of freedom measures as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ongoing what, sorry?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The one number in there that you asked for was the 5.7, which was the on-farm destruction, decontamination and disposal.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How many farms did that cover?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Three farms.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Okay. It's not cheap. It's very tough for industry, obviously, as well. In terms of the discussion with local industry going forward, reports back to us have been concern from particularly those three operators but also whether there's any direction in terms of if a further outbreak should occur, who would then come in and bear the costs of that. This was something that I did ask the Minister in the House but didn't really get a clear response. Is there any policy in terms of should a further outbreak occur, is there DPI support again, or is it up to those individual farmers to make that work—and pay?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** This isn't a black-and-white answer. I apologise in advance.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's okay.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We've had these conversations at length up on the North Coast with both prawn farmers and prawn trawlers up there. It comes down to what the next detection actually is. For example, if the next detection is in a discrete tank inside a shed with a direct link back to breed stock from Queensland and a positive detection up there, then it would be 100 per cent we would be doing everything we would do to cover the costs of the disposal, decontamination et cetera. As we have done to date, we'd be doing exactly the same thing, because we'd be confident about being able to eradicate it.

If a future detection was multiple detections over a multiple period over a multiple stretch of the Clarence River—which, I hasten to add, we have not found a white spot prawn in the Clarence River. If that was the detection, however, we would then probably shift our focus to discussions around zoning and discussions with the industry around how could the industry operate in a similar type of zoning arrangement that Moreton Bay operates under, which would be very difficult for the industry—it would take a lot of adjustment for them—but would be the most likely outcome in that scenario. We've tried to be frank with the industry about the kinds of scenarios that we would be looking at and working with them on. We would be there to support the industry regardless of which way that went, but they're two very different outcomes depending on what the next detection is, if there is one.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I appreciate and thank you for your honesty on that, Mr Hansen. But I guess from their perspective they've got to make some serious decisions about what they're going to be doing. That's not a great position, particularly for some of those families that I understand have been doing it for generations. It's really tough, I think. In terms of any budget support—and I appreciate what you said, that hypothetically it all really does depend on whether there's a further detection and what that may be—has there been any money allocated or any conversations with the Minister or with government about, should you need to provide further support, will that money be available? Is that something that you've talked to the Minister or her office about?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We've certainly had conversations about the what-ifs of "what if there was another detection" and those kinds of scenarios. If that was the case, we would take back a new plan and a new request for the Minister to look to advocate on our behalf to secure money from Treasury to be able to do that. But that, again, would be determinant on which end of that response and whether Treasury would be more than likely to come back at the small end of the response and say, "Find it from within", or at the large end of the response and say, "Yes, okay. Let's work out how we do this." We haven't put a number in front of anyone. We haven't gone and said that we may need further funding. We have just indicated the fact that we've got two years of continual proof of not having it to be able to move on and convince trading partners and other jurisdictions that we are free from white spot. Until then, we are constantly working up scenarios of "what happens if this happens" or "what happens if that happens" and having them ready and prepared. Many of those conversations are with industry to make sure that they know as much as they can to make the tough decisions they're having to make at the moment.

**SEAN SLOAN:** I was going to add to that explanation that we've also offered grants of half a million dollars to each of the three prawn farms to help improve biosecurity on farm so that if they choose to return to prawn farming their biosecurity on farm can be strengthened. Then with the commercial prawn fishers in the Clarence River, there has been a \$5.4 million package that has provided income support to those prawn fishers

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that have stopped prawn fishing. That's because the control order does not allow them to move uncooked prawns out of the Clarence River. Those fishers that have said they will stop fishing and temporarily revoke their prawn fishing endorsements have received income support payments that are in line with their historical catch records.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** This is probably more, to be honest, about the questions around the clean-up for the prawn farmers, as opposed to the fishers. But I appreciate what you're saying in terms of that package. I'm going to let my colleague go to a new topic, but I might come back to some of this.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, my question is to you. Did you get a request for DLOs from the Minister or her office for specific people?

**REBECCA FOX:** No, I didn't.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Could you also let the Committee know how many DLOs are in the Minister's office?

**REBECCA FOX:** I think we currently have six in various Ministers' offices. I've got that information. From memory, it's three in Minister Moriarty's office, one in Minister Houssos' office and two joint resources for the remaining four regional Ministers.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you very much for that. I think this question might be to Mr Wheaton. I'm going to quickly go back before the next session, when I've got other things. In terms of the Cross-Border Commissioner, you said that you had planned to communicate that before the end of the year. I was just looking at Victoria and South Australia, and they both put out releases saying that one cross-border commissioner had gone, another was coming and thanking them for their work and informing stakeholders. Can you confirm that is going to take place before the end of the year?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** That is the plan.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Will that be via media release or will that be a actual consultation with stakeholders and informing them?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** It will be via direct communication to the stakeholders.

**REBECCA FOX:** Can I just add one caveat on that? That's dependent on the completion of all of the processes that are required for that change plan, and we're not in complete control of that timing. That will be subject to that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm already getting questions after this budget estimates from the media about it, so I don't want to be the one delivering your message. I think that they probably do have to know, seeing as you've appointed someone. That's up to you guys; that's your call. I just want to get it on the record so that we all know what's happening, because it's all a bit much.

**REBECCA FOX:** We understand the importance.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Mr Hansen, the previous Government announced a \$2.5 million grant program to rehome animals that had been used in medical experimentation. The Treasurer has confirmed that will be continuing under this Government. I understand that the grants program was previously sitting with the Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology, and they have informed me that has now been moved to the DPI to distribute those funds. Can you give me an update on where that's at and when you expect applications to open for those grants?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sure. I'll throw across to Dr Filmer in a minute, but we have now had that grant administration task and the funding moved across to us. We're now working on ensuring that we build a grant program in line with the grant guidelines to make sure that we're complying with the grant guidelines in terms of the administering of that grant. In terms of our time frame for opening of applications, I might see if Dr Filmer has an update on that.

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, I can give you an update on that. We've been in communication with the grants team [inaudible] New South Wales to make sure we get it right. There have been a lot of changes in the legislation in that space, so we want to make sure we do the right thing. We've also undertaken a scientific literature review of that whole space to try to get a really good understanding and handle on where you should target money in that space. There's no point having a cash splash, as they say, into an area if you don't know whether or not that's the most beneficial. I think what's coming through loud and clear is that targeting the final stage of trying to rehome an animal is not the only thing you should be doing. We need to start right back at the beginning of that animal's life and make sure that we take every opportunity to use this money as best we can to make sure that those animals, from day one in research, from very young animals, get the very best opportunities to be able to be rehomed at



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the other end. That will mean that things like socialisation, behavioural assessment and behaviour modification, as well as what you might think of as the rehoming strategy, get considered.

We've spent some time trying to understand the space and trying to work out where we can get the best value for that money, because it should make a really good and big difference if it's spent correctly. In terms of the timing, the grants group has indicated that it'll be next year. They're hoping to be able to get it out the door by the end of this financial year, but they said that the timing on that will possibly be pretty tight because it's a fairly complex area and we want to make sure that we're setting guidelines up in the first instance to make sure that we get the best benefit from it. If we don't set it up right in the first place, we'll miss an opportunity in that space.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** In regard to the comments you made around the socialisation of animals and setting that animal up to be socialised and able to be rehomed, are you proposing that some of the grant money, instead of going into the direct rehoming, will possibly be moved into some of those strategies as well?

**KIM FILMER:** It's probably a little bit early for me to say that. That's exactly why it's going to take a little bit of time to work through that space. The evidence that we've been able to find is that if you want to get the best outcome you need to have animals at the end of the research process that have characteristics that make them suitable to be put into homes. The best chance of that happening is that you start right back at the beginning of the process, so we're trying to work out how we can utilise that money most effectively to get the best outcome across a range of things. Some of that could come back to training organisations so that people understand what the requirements are to make those animals rehomingable at the end their research experience.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What are the aspects that are coming up in this preliminary stage? Is it looking at socialising animals with other animals? Is it enclosure size? What is coming up in regard to what needs to actually change in practice to make the animals rehomingable?

**KIM FILMER:** There's a whole host of things. It's probably far too much detail for me to go into here. A good example that might indicate some of the things we've been considering would be that some research establishments house cats in facilities that look like a room in a house. If you've got an animal that lives in that sort of environment—it uses its litter tray and it behaves like a cat in a house—then that's going to make that animal easier to live in a house at the end of research rather than if it's living in a cat condo or a cat module in a research establishment. That's probably a simple example of one of the things that we've uncovered, but there's a whole host of things. As I said, it's very early stages. We want to get it right because it's a good opportunity to make a difference. We want to do this the best that we can to get the best outcome we possibly can.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If there are changes in regard to ensuring that the animals are socialised for rehoming, do you consider those as welfare improvements generally for the animals in these research establishments?

**KIM FILMER:** Can you ask that question again, please?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** In regard to socialising these animals so that they are able to be rehomed—I know that they are all still under consideration, the different aspects that could be put into place—do you consider that as "welfare improvements" for those animals within those establishments generally?

**KIM FILMER:** For this project we're certainly considering that, and the housing guidelines that are provided on the research infolink website that we have produced over the last couple of years will also support the fact that that's a very important part of the research journey for animals.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will there still be money set aside for the rehoming organisations that are then putting in the work to take on the responsibility for those animals and housing and rehoming them?

**KIM FILMER:** Absolutely. That is the main thrust of this grant. I am not saying that is not the situation, but I guess what I am trying to say is that if you just give them money and you get animals coming to them that aren't suitable or require a lot of rehabilitation or whatever—not that that's necessarily the case, but if that was the case—it is a missed opportunity to look at the whole journey of that animal and try and make corrective changes from day one so what you get at the end of that process makes them more readily able to be rehomed into a normal domestic situation.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you, Dr Filmer. Mr Hansen, police officers within the rural crimes division have written to the Rural Crime Prevention Team calling for pig dogging to be made specifically illegal. Has that police correspondence come to your department at all?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Not that I am away of, no.



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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I have one question for the LLS. Are there any plans within LLS to use the Felixer device? I note that Victoria has advised that they will not be using the Felixer device for cat management, and I wondered if there were any plans within New South Wales.

**STEVE ORR:** I might refer that to Mr Kelly. I think you'd be aware, Ms Hurst, that the regulation of 1080 is a matter for the EPA. Mr Kelly may have some additional information.

**ROB KELLY:** At this stage, to the best of my knowledge, we have no intention to use the Felixer.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Back to you, Mr Hansen, and back on to exhibited animals. I am wondering if you can give me a breakdown on how many A, B, C, D, E and F grades were issued during compliance audits of exhibited animal facilities in the past 12 months?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I won't be able to do that here, but we can obviously take that on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I note that when we talked about the Central Coast Zoo you said that it was marked as having a satisfactory audit. I am wondering if, on notice, you can also provide me what specific grade it received out of that A, B, C, D, E or F?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sure. I'm happy to do that. While we are on the zoo, there have been breeding activities, breeding programs, at the zoo. There is a combination of both breeding programs that have been undertaken as well as a series of species for which breeding is prohibited. Those prohibited ones are largely the ones that are invasive species and pose biosecurity risks—things like corn snakes, for example. But we have got a long list here of a lot of animals, like princess parrots and tawny frogmouths, that have had two or three birth numbers that we can also put in a response to you on notice so you've got a list of all of that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Could you give me that list of animals, on notice, that are breeding? That would be great.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. While I've still got you—Dolphin Marine Magic. When we were talking about the \$60,000 bond, I started saying it was for just the dolphins and then I said, "No, I think it is for everything." No, it is just the dolphins.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Okay. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** I have some questions for LLS. Mr Steve Orr or Mr Kelly, picking up on some questions taken on notice regarding the \$13 million feral pig management program, you provided some figures on notice. I am wondering if you could expand on what you mean by "extension activities". You have a forecasted figure there of \$455,336. What do you mean by "extension activities"?

**ROB KELLY:** I can take that. Extension activities include our staff working one on one with landholders or landholder groups in a number of activities. It can be through going out and doing one-on-one consultations with landholders to help advise best control techniques, and it could include also working with groups of landholders, training activities, those sorts of—

**The CHAIR:** Are you talking about those farmer stakeholder sessions, forums and stuff like that?

**ROB KELLY:** Correct, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Can I go to another set of questions I asked on notice regarding the number of authorised campaigns across New South Wales as of 12 October. There were six listed in the Northern Tablelands and 14 in the north-west but no authorised campaigns anywhere else. I understand Greater Sydney might not have many, but places like the Central West, North Coast, Riverina et cetera, have none at all. Can you talk us through the process of actually establishing an authorised campaign? Can farmers request to be part of an authorised campaign? I have had some correspondence suggesting that they put in requests and are told by their local LLS office, "No, we are not doing any." I want to understand the process.

**ROB KELLY:** In terms of the initial number of authorised campaigns received, that's significantly increased now—yes, Greater Sydney being an exclusion to that. There are around 54 now across the State, a cross all regions, and we can provide the breakdown of those and how they work across the State. Just to be clear, with an authorised campaign, it is not a term that we regularly use; it is a term that we have to use to get the qualification for the category D firearms of the Firearms Act, because it references authorised campaigns. The definition that we've used for an authorised campaign is a landholder participating in a coordinated LLS-run or a government-run pest control program. That can be either through an aerial shoot—so a fast program—or it can be through a coordinated on-ground control program of five or more landholdings. That's the definition.

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So we don't set up authorised campaigns per se. We will do coordinated pest control programs. If you are a landholder that is in that area where we are doing that coordinated pest control program and you want to participate—this is an important point: You need to be willing to participate in the program—then you would be considered as part of the definition. If you were choosing to apply for a category D firearm, you would be considered part of an authorised campaign.

**The CHAIR:** How is a farmer's or landholder's willingness to participate in that campaign then communicated to Firearms Registry, because one of the other concerns put to me is that farmers have contacted the local LLS office saying, "Hey, I am part of this authorised campaign or pest control program. Can I get a letter of confirmation to support my application for my category D?" And they have been told by the LLS, "No, we can't do that." Is there a formal policy where you will not write letters of acknowledgement stating that a farmer is part of the authorised campaign, if it is going to the registry?

**ROB KELLY:** There is a process that we go through to assess it. The landholder will apply to the registry first for the category D firearm. The registry then makes a number of checks, one of which is with LLS to determine whether they are participating in an authorised campaign. We have those details. We go through a checklist: Are they in the campaign? Do they have pests on the property? There is a whole process around that. Providing they get to the bottom and, yes, they meet the definition of an authorised campaign, then we write a letter back to the Firearms Registry confirming that they are participating in an authorised campaign. They use that then to determine whether or not the applicant is suitable. It's only one of them. We don't make the decision of whether they're eligible but it's part of the process.

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Banasiak, just to pick up on what Mr Kelly was saying there before, the process has changed. What used to happen was that the landholder would come straight to us and then go to the registry but, as Mr Kelly has said, they go to the registry first and then they come to us, and that makes the process a little clearer for everyone.

**The CHAIR:** I don't know whether you are able to pull this data out but on notice could you provide details as to how many times the registry has requested this information since the process has changed?

**STEVE ORR:** We'll take advice on whether we can provide you with that, Mr Banasiak.

**The CHAIR:** I don't need the specific details of applicants. I'm just looking at more of a number figure in terms of how many times the registry has contacted you seeking that confirmation.

**ROB KELLY:** We can take that on notice, and obviously with privacy-related concerns we'll give you what we're legally allowed to provide.

**The CHAIR:** That is all my questions for LLS. I might go back to some fishing questions. Mr Sloan, I just want to look at some more specific species and I want to get an update as to what's happening with them in terms of recovery and actions. I will start with Macquarie perch. What is happening in terms of their recovery actions? I note that the latest information you have on the website in terms of them as a species dates back to 2016. Can you give us an update as to their status and what actions you guys are taking in terms of the recovery of that species?

**SEAN SLOAN:** We have been doing some work that is collaborative work with University of the Sunshine Coast and also Victoria—collaborative work to improve the breeding of Macquarie perch and also restocking activities. That's probably the most notable piece of work that I can refer to. The work with Sunshine Coast university has been about how we can improve the success of spawning of Macquarie perch. The work with Victoria is a collaborative piece of work. Obviously the species spans the basin, and therefore we work with those other jurisdictions. In terms of more specific—where are we at with all of those things? Chair, I'll take that on notice and provide some more detailed information. But that work that I've just mentioned is probably the most important piece—the restocking and the spawning activity.

**The CHAIR:** Onto silver perch. The latest information you have on your website is a recovery plan from 2006. I'm just wondering whether there has been a subsequent plan that hasn't been uploaded or whether this is just an ongoing plan from 2006.

**SEAN SLOAN:** I'll take that on notice, Chair, and come back to you with some details. I think the response for all of these native fish will be similar because there is the same set of issues that they all face in terms of river connectivity and the habitat issues that they all face. All of those things are the same for these individual native freshwater species, but they obviously require a tailored approach. I will come back to you with the specifics on silver perch and Macquarie perch.

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**The CHAIR:** The last one is the river blackfish, which is in that Snowy River catchment area. The same thing—the information on your website is a little bit dated, so I'm just wondering where we're at with that species as well.

**SEAN SLOAN:** It will be the same for that species, and species like eastern cod fall into that category as well as all the small bodied natives. If you like, we can put together some information that covers all of those native species and what we're doing on those if that's of interest.

**The CHAIR:** That would be fantastic.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, can I just clarify—this is the last one on this one—of the DLOs, current or former, were any specifically requested by the Ministers or their offices?

**REBECCA FOX:** No, not that I'm aware.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So that's a definite? You don't need to take that on notice? That's a definite "No, none of it has been—

**REBECCA FOX:** No. I am not aware of any request for a particular DLO.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So there has been no request?

**REBECCA FOX:** No, not that I'm aware of.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'd like to talk about Regional Youth now, Ms Fox. I'm not sure who I direct that to. Is that to you or can you help me out?

**REBECCA FOX:** Mr Wheaton probably has better information than I have. That team is reporting to him. I can probably help you with some of the high level things.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Wheaton is leaving at 3.30 p.m., so if you need to—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Gosh. Sorry, I didn't know that.

**REBECCA FOX:** He's due to get on a plane. I think he has maybe a little bit longer or can do it on his phone.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's fine. I'll get straight into it. Mr Wheaton, where is the Regional Youth Taskforce?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** They've met for their four times this year. Minister Jackson met with the youth taskforce at their last meeting out in Broken Hill. They are still appointed to that role. They are appointed, as you would be aware, on the calendar year.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Have there been advertisements that have gone out for the new Regional Youth Taskforce?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** No, there haven't.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So what has happened?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** That will be up for the Minister to be able to communicate around the intentions of how she will engage with youth across the State in future engagement.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Mr Wheaton, let me redirect that. Has the department been given any indication that they need to start advertising for the recruitment of a new Regional Youth Taskforce?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** No, we haven't.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Has the department been told that there will be no Regional Youth Taskforce?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** No, we haven't.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Has the department asked the Minister's office what is going to be happening with the Regional Youth Taskforce?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** We've provided advice to the Minister on options for how the Government could continue to engage with youth and youth-related matters across both metropolitan and regional areas, given on the basis that, as you know, formerly there was a Minister for Regional Youth. That is now the Minister for Youth. So the coverage of that portfolio is across the whole State.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Were you asked to provide a dvice to the Minister's office about ceasing the Regional Youth Taskforce?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I'd have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm not trying to put you in a difficult position here, but what it would appear to be is that there isn't one. So my question to you is were you asked to provide a brief as to what other options there would be instead of having a Regional Youth Taskforce?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I'd have to take on notice specifically if we were asked for that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Has anyone from the Office for Regional Youth been—sorry, I'm not sure what the correct word is that public servants use for the review. Have any of the Office for Regional Youth personnel been let go or been reclassified or whatever the word is that I'm supposed to use that I can't find. I'm sorry.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** That's fine. The band 1 position that oversees the Office for Regional Youth and the position description that was in place for that role remained unchanged, and there have been no changes to the non-executive staff in the Office for Regional Youth either.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So the same amount of staff are in the Office for Regional Youth that were there prior to March 2023?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** That's correct.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** When we look at the funding programs that were done by regional youth, have they been continued? Say, the Summer Holiday Break program—is that continuing this year?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Yes, it is.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Is that budgeted to continue into the next four years?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** There has been no new budget allocation to extend that program beyond what was already budgeted for in, I'm going to say, 2022-23.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Will any of the programs that were being organised, administered or led by the Office for Regional Youth receive funding to continue past the last budget cycle?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** There has been no new budget allocation made to those programs.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So there is no Regional Youth Taskforce and no allocated budget for regional youth. It would appear that there are no plans going into the future to keep an Office for Regional Youth. How do you have an office when you can't pay people, you have no budget and you have no taskforce to advise you?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I think you said that there's no taskforce. There's no decision that has been made about that yet.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But it's year on year. It's 13 December.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And no applications—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And no applications.

**REBECCA FOX:** I think we should clarify the funding is available this year, and we haven't yet been through the budget process for the following years, Mrs Taylor. So the funding that that team is using this year is unchanged. I think that's correct.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That wasn't my question. My request was going forward, respectfully, Ms Fox. When I note about year-on-year property crime in Bourke from the 2021-22 summer holidays, for 2022-23 we had a drop of 54 per cent with those programs. That's fairly significant, and that was my question about going forward. Thank you, Mr Wheaton. Are we breaking now?

**The CHAIR:** We are now going into a break. We will break for 15 minutes and come back at 3.45 p.m.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Except Mr Wheaton won't be here after that.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Wheaton won't be here, unfortunately, but we'll come back at 3.45 p.m. for, as the Premier says, "continually mucking around". See you back at 3.45 p.m.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Mr Wheaton, if you could assign someone about regional youth, I have quite a few questions. Thank you.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** That's fine.

**(Rob Kelly withdrew.)**

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to this afternoon's session of budget estimates. I will hand over to the Opposition.

**REBECCA FOX:** Chair, just before you do, could I just clarify, please, that we are not breaching any guidelines. We are very happy to answer questions on Regional Youth, and Mr Wheaton has moved to Dubbo airport and will stay online as long as he can to do that. But I just want to clarify that that portfolio sits with Minister Jackson and this is Minister Moriarty's budget estimates. I just want to say it is our responsibility and our portfolio, and we are happy to answer, but I just want to make sure that we are not in breach of any protocols or guidelines.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, has the Office of Regional Youth been moved, has it?

**REBECCA FOX:** No, it sits with us, but the responsible Minister is Minister Jackson. I was just checking with the Chair, Mrs Taylor, that's all. I just wanted to make sure that we were not—and we just took advice from the secretariat, who advised that we should just raise it. We are very happy—Mr Wheaton has moved to Dubbo airport. He is very happy to answer questions. I just wanted to make sure.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That is fine. We are just finding out now. I just presumed that because it is in your department that was fine.

**REBECCA FOX:** I made the same assumption.

**The CHAIR:** I just had some quick advice from the secretariat that the questions really do need to be addressed to the relevant Minister, and that would be Minister Jackson because she is the Minister responsible.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's a shame.

**REBECCA FOX:** Sorry, I didn't hear that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's all right. Obviously there is lots to find out because she is not going to be here, probably, but okay.

**The CHAIR:** Does that mean that you won't need to speak to Mr Wheaton or have questions for Mr Wheaton again?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Not if I'm not allowed to. It would have been nice if someone had told me in the break.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Fox, that might mean that we can actually officially dismiss Mr Wheaton for the second time and allow him to jump.

**REBECCA FOX:** I'm sure he can sit there until he needs to board.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I'm happy to do so. I will also just note for the record that I have sought Committee approval to be dismissed at this time, and it was on the agenda that I was to be leaving at 3.30 p.m.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's my fault. It's not you.

**The CHAIR:** That's fine. Mr Wheaton, you leave whenever you need to.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I'll stay on until I'm boarding.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'll see you in February.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you for making the effort to try to stay for us until you can. It is appreciated.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thanks for answering the questions.

**STEVE ORR:** Chair, could we just clarify whether LLS is still required? I think Mr Kelly has been dismissed.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** He has gone.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You're fine too.

**The CHAIR:** You're fine, Mr Orr. You can go as well. Sorry, I thought you got that memo.

**STEVE ORR:** Dr Tracey will also leave as well, from LLS, if that's okay?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That is fine. Absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**(Steve Orr and Jacqui Tracey withdrew.)**

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to come back to a few more questions to Mr Hansen and the team there in Orange about fire ants again. So the \$95 million that the New South Wales Government has put in—that's the correct amount, yes? Is it \$95 million?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's correct. Over the next four years, yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Was that based on the plan that was developed a couple of years ago? Is that where that \$95 million funding figure came from?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It was based on a plan that was presented earlier this year.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But that was before the outbreak into New South Wales.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's correct, yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Has there been any work done to reassess whether that funding of \$95 million is going to be enough—obviously given that we are now dealing with the species having crossed the border? Are you confident that that is still enough money? Have you reassessed that, given the likely instances that we have seen? Has that been looked at again?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It constantly gets looked at, but the \$600 million national plan—or just under \$600 million national plan—did actually have cooked into it a number of likely outbreaks outside of the current detection areas that would need to be responded to. There have been a number of those. Whilst we had one, I think Gladstone is—there is another northern Queensland one that has occurred. So the national program does have space in it for those outlier detections and an eradication response for those. At this point in time we are comfortable that that \$600 million is going to be sufficient for the eradication in New South Wales and the successful eradication in Queensland.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I know it's hard, but is the plan for the eradication to be within the next 12 months? What's the time frame with that funding and what you would like to try to see? I know it's challenging when you've got a biosecurity issue, but I would think time would be of the essence here.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, I think it's a 10-year—I might just see if Dr Tracey has further information with regards to the time frame of the current plan. But, certainly, it's longer than a four-year plan. It's just that this next four years is an intensive effort to not only do what the last 10 years has been doing, which is trying to suppress spread outside of that area in south-east Queensland, but this is now actually looking to get into the core of that south-east Queensland circle and start to eradicate, at a faster rate, nests within that area. I might see if Dr Tracey has the time frame. If not, we can take it on notice and come back this afternoon with the time frame of what that national plan's eradication goal is.

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, my understanding is that it is 10 years. We can correct if there is any other information. In terms of the New South Wales detection, there is really good information so we do already have a lot of confidence that, having done that 500-metre strip around and not detected any new fire ants, and also our trace information, we've got really high confidence that we do have that particular one under control. There is further work in terms of surveillance and future treatments to make sure of that, but largely that is because likely flights from that nest—90 per cent of them are going to occur within that 500 metres, and 95 per cent or upwards will occur within two kilometres of that. That's where we are considering natural spread. So there has been some good work done to demonstrate with high confidence that we have got the New South Wales infestation under control.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In terms of the Currumbin outbreak—I think that's the right terminology—or the new fire nest that has been found in the Currumbin Valley, has there been any public communication out about that? I appreciate I think it's only happened very recently. But what is the process now

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for that part of the State? Again, I understand it is the Queensland Government, but how are you working with your counterparts up there? What happens now for that community and those other areas? This is 850 metres away, so that would be within that two-kilometre zone of concern. What's the process now for up there?

**JOHN TRACEY:** So the communication, as you say, is up to the national program to communicate. The important thing—if I am understanding the Currumbin Valley, what we do know about that is, unlike the South Murwillumbah one, it is likely to be very early. So they have detected that very early. That raises that importance of early reporting as a key factor. That then dictates—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I apologise; it's my ignorance, but when you say "detected very early", what does that mean?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Let me explain. What I mean by that is the nest hasn't been there very long. If substantiated and they're still doing some further work, that means that it's unlikely to have spread to additional sites from that detection. If we detect it soon after it has arrived in that location—which we believe has been the case in the Currumbin Valley area—it means that the team has already acted fast and can move quickly to clear those sites. Our whole basis of zones and restrictions on businesses and restrictions on movements is all based on that risk. So if we are able to detect the fire ant nest that has only been there a very short period of time, that means we don't need necessarily to be putting all the restrictions on the zones and the businesses in proximity or a distance from that location.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, I appreciate that there's a cross-border issue here, but are the fire ant movement controls—if that's the right terminology—in place for that area around Currumbin or not?

**JOHN TRACEY:** They are. They are in terms of—so any movements out of Queensland will have to comply with the New South Wales emergency order in place.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, I know it's part of a national approach, but I'm particularly trying to understand your counterparts in Queensland—what those communication channels are like. Do you work collaboratively as teams across the border? How long has that been in place for? What are those operational day-to-day operations? How is that working?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, it's a good question. It has been a really good example of how well we can work together. The national program is the lead. That funding that New South Wales and other jurisdictions provide that program is to eradicate fire ants, which includes the New South Wales detection. So they are the lead. New South Wales DPI, our role is a focus on assisting in surveillance, in tracing, in movement control within our jurisdiction, with the communication with the businesses that occur in New South Wales. We're working with our local governments. So there is a key ongoing role that we see in what DPI needs to do. Primarily, once you've have got a detection of fire ants that's linked to the Queensland infestation, then it's the responsibility of the national program, and they will take the lead in terms of communications on that.

At the same time, we will do additional communications, particularly where we put in place zones and further restriction within New South Wales. So we need to be able to communicate that, and it's really important for businesses to understand the new restrictions that we may be placing on them when there is a detection of fire ants in New South Wales. So that's how it works. It's an onus on us in New South Wales to be communicating to businesses within New South Wales—in particular, around movement restrictions and requirements. It's the responsibility of the broader national program to be notifying nationally what's happening, and they take an overview of how the overall program is going and then its effectiveness. They will also take the lead, then, on the overall cost of the program—how they are tracking, is it still technically feasible, does it require more budget. All of those pieces are then managed by the national program.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** A good tangible example was the Saturday morning after the detection. We had the ants given to us Friday afternoon. We were able to get them across to our scientists at our Wollongbar research institute there, and they were able to confirm it. By Saturday morning—whilst we had 10 people on the ground early Saturday morning to treat those nests, council had people there. For every one person we had on the ground, the national program had turned up with three people already on that Saturday morning, coming down from Queensland. So it has been that kind of response that we've been able to get straightaway. They've got all the chemical, they've got all the equipment, they've got the trained-up dogs—they've got all the machinery that's required. So we were able to just immediately get that down across the border on that Saturday morning. Typically, in these kind of responses, that scale-up at the start can be the make or break of the success.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's critical. Absolutely. I want to segue into a bit of a separate topic just around rural crime but also how DPI and Regional NSW work with the police; I might keep with the DPI officials at the moment. Obviously, there have been a lot of reports lately of increased crime in regional areas



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across a range of different areas. I know in previous estimates hearings when we were speaking to the police about how they collaborate, the role of the rural crime investigators—how does DPI collaborate in an instance where there could be something like fire ants, where people have breached rules? I've heard some more reports about landholders having increases in things like petrol theft because, as the price of fuel or diesel goes up, people are coming onto properties and taking tanks, and drones being used unlawfully to look at things like fencing materials and trying to come in and take that. How do you work with the police and those rural crime investigations? What's that collaboration like between DPI, specifically, and the police for those issues?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might start. We have a really close relationship with the squad and across such a wide breadth of activities, too—everything from us helping coordinate forums and workshops with farmers for them to appear at or them to come and talk about how to bolster farm security, all the way through to the fact that they are standing members of a number of our committees, such as livestock traceability committees. We seek their views and their thoughts about how we should be doing things differently and how we should be setting our laws and our legislation and our regulations differently.

At the same time, we look to bring their expertise to our stakeholder meetings and our stakeholder groups about what should be done. So we have a really close working relationship with them. We probably—I would hate to guess the frequency of the meetings. I know I meet with Cameron Whiteside probably at least on a monthly basis in one meeting sense or another. So we have a really close working partnership, working relationship, with them. We try to involve them in as many discussions to make sure that we have our policy settings right to assist them and that they are letting us know what we need to be communicating out there as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Have you found—particularly over, say, the last 12 months—an increase of reports in relation to some of these concerns about on-farm issues? I know it might be hard to offer an anecdotal view, and I am not asking you to do that. But, as I said, there are statistics that are coming out that certainly indicate that there is an increase of motor vehicle theft and those sort of issues. Are you finding the engagement has dialled up a bit in the last little while as people are dealing with those challenges?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I don't have any data on that. I just have the anecdotal piece of living in a rural environment and sort of knowing your neighbours.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Likewise. I might redirect this now to you, Ms Fox. What engagement, if any, is there between the Department of Regional NSW and police in relation to some of these rural and regional crime issues?

**REBECCA FOX:** Probably, apart from what Scott has just explained, it's sort of at the early front end in relation to the policy piece and then also in the back-end delivery. With Mr Wheaton's team, all of his regions run a regional leadership executive, where the local command of police sits on that regional leadership executive. So the data that you are talking about would be feeding through to that. That group in each region is the head of all the different government agencies, so you would have the head of the local health district, education et cetera. So that kind of information would be feeding through that. Those forums or leadership executive teams are coordinated by a director in each of Mr Wheaton's teams, and then they work out what the strategic plans and the things that they should be doing in that space. That's one example of a regular engagement. We also work with police, I know, in some particular projects. Mr Wheaton's Aboriginal partnerships team, I know, work very closely with police on particular projects in some of the northern district towns. I don't know, Mr Wheaton, if you've got time to explain some of those projects.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I would say that there are two ways that we are engaged with police in our regional team. We have projects that have been funded and are to be delivered through various community organisations as well as direct partnerships with police and other State agencies. We hosted a summit in November that brought together police, other agencies and community organisations to discuss different approaches to disaffected youth in the Central West. We certainly worked across agencies, community organisations and councils in response to spikes in youth crime in Bourke and having a better, more coordinated and collaborative approach to addressing those issues when they have spiked in the past.

In the Illawarra, our regional development team has worked with police, Youth Justice training services and Business Illawarra to help young offenders transition through to jobs. In Tamworth, in the Oxley Police Command, we've been working with their police officers and other government agencies to partner and design a program focused at young people aged 12 to 15 who are disengaged in school and who are involved in the criminal justice system. Those are a few projects that our local teams are involved in with police.

We've also been involved in funding the Youth Action meetings that are coordinated. It is a police-led initiative where they bring together agencies to address, again, a whole-of-government, place-based approach to supporting young people who are at risk of being referred into the criminal justice system. I think that the police



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have received four years worth of funding to continue the Youth Action meetings. We have our youth community coordinators on the ground as well through our local teams. There is the Guumali Youth Project that is running events, diversionary measures to assist in the reduction of youth crime. We've got an initiative—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sorry, Mr Wheaton, I don't mean to interrupt you but I've only got 30 seconds left. Thank you for those projects. The ones you talked about—Central West Tamworth, Illawarra et cetera—have any of those been funded from the most recent budget cycle or were they funded by decisions of the previous Government?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I'd have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If you could, that would be great—and any new projects in that space that were made available in this year's budget. If you can provide that on notice, that would be fantastic as well.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Sure.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have five seconds left so I will probably leave it there.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You have a plane to catch, too.

**REBECCA FOX:** In those five seconds, I might just say that some of that work is business as usual for Mr Wheaton's team with ongoing funding. The regional leadership executive that brings those people together is ongoing funding; it's not project-based funding.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's been in place for some time, is my understanding.

**REBECCA FOX:** That's correct.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, can I also try to use up another five seconds? You asked a question earlier about how many staff in the field today?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We've got 33 DPI staff out in the field today.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Fantastic. Thanks, Mr Hansen.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Before when we were speaking, Mr Hansen, you said that the \$60,000 was just for the dolphins. What is in place for the other 92 animals in case of an emergency if the money's only for the three dolphins?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, I think the bond is only for the dolphins. I don't think there's any bond held for any of the other animals.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What led to that decision? Why is there only a bond for three of the animals and not the other 92?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Ms Filmer will fill you in.

**KIM FILMER:** Just that little bit there, that's a legislated thing under section 37 of the Exhibited Animals Protection Act specifically for dolphins.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Dolphins or cetaceans?

**KIM FILMER:** Cetaceans.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** It's all cetaceans, yes. Thank you. I've got some further questions about the changes that were put in with regard to the exhibited animals. On 1 July the DPI implemented a number of new authority conditions for exhibited animal authority holders. One of those is that an authority holder must not allow breeding of any animal unless they have a written breeding plan. The plan must justify the purpose of breeding the animal. I'm wondering why these new licence conditions were implemented. Were there concerns around the breeding activities in exhibited animal facilities?

**JOHN TRACEY:** I can take that one. There's not a concern; it was just tightening up the requirements around breeding plans. Breeding plans have always been a requirement, but we wanted to be explicit in terms of the documentation of that plan so that it could be demonstrated, it could be reviewed and we make sure it's got all the necessary things in it. That was the only change there.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So there was already a rule in regards to breeding of exhibited animals? What was that?

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**JOHN TRACEY:** A requirement for them to have a plan. The change was documentation for that plan.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Right. How did it come to the attention of the DPI that that change was needed?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Just through the normal course of audits and inspections and clarifications with exhibitors. It was appropriate for us to be more explicit around the requirement to have a written, documented plan that we could review.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will the plans need to be submitted and approved by any point within the DPI or is it just something that they have to have onsite and might be inspected during an audit?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, they just have to have it available. We can be reviewing it, and it will be part of our audits and our inspections that we do review those plans. It's not required to submit, but they need to present when we do our audits and investigations and follow-ups with the exhibitors.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will there be a need to actually notify the DPI in some form of reporting format when they do breed an animal? I know that there are forms that are often submitted with deceased animals or animals that are bought and sold. Will there be any requirement to include animals that have been bred at the facility into those forms, or any other way of informing the DPI?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Again, I think that's a requirement under the licences for these exhibitors. But what they've got to be doing, then, is presenting that when we go and inspect and audit. My understanding is that it's not a required additional reporting; they've just got to be maintaining those records and make those available when we request it.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I believe there is something about a justifiable purpose for breeding an animal. What would be considered a "justifiable purpose" for breeding an animal under the new licence condition?

**JOHN TRACEY:** I might have to take that one on notice, sorry.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That's fine. Another new licence condition is around notifying the DPI when an animal is believed to have been stolen from an exhibited animals facility. Can you explain why this change came about? Has there been an issue of animals being stolen?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Again, it wasn't any specific issue. It was just that in the course of our activities, we've looked at trying to make sure that we've got everything we need in place. It is important to track and to know where animals are—and if they are stolen. Again, it was an additional requirement that we felt was needed to clarify and make sure that we've got in place.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I know that back in 2017 there were claims that when crocodiles went missing from Get Wild Animal Experiences, those crocodiles had been stolen. Are there any other notable case examples where animals have been claimed to be stolen?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Not to my knowledge, but I can take that on notice for you just to clarify that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, please. If you could also take on notice what facilities and what animals have been potentially claimed, if you do find that there are further cases?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, I'm happy to do that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Another licence condition is around emergency management plans and requiring authority to holders to develop an emergency management plan. It's understandable why this is something that DPI would be looking at given the recent years of fires and floods. Do many exhibited animal facilities have these kinds of plans already or do you think that many of them will have to develop a plan since this requirement was introduced?

**JOHN TRACEY:** I don't have details on the numbers that do. But I would say, just from knowing the industry, that many would already have plans and views on how they handle emergencies. But I don't have the details on hand in terms the numbers of exhibitors that do.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So you're not aware that most places already have plans in place?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, I think that they would, but I don't have the numbers available to me today.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** All of these new licence conditions are stated to have a six-month implementation period from 1 July. Does that mean that from 1 July the DPI will be enforcing these new conditions?

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**JOHN TRACEY:** No. That six months is from July, so they are required to have it in place then on 31 December this year. That will be some action and follow-up for us next year, to be checking in on that requirement. It is important to give a bit of a lead-in time for exhibitors that don't have the appropriate documentation—that they can develop it.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** At previous estimates hearings I have raised concerns about exhibitors illegally removing animals from the wild to be exhibited and about how difficult this would be to detect, in practice. Is the DPI doing any work to investigate links between exhibited animal facilities and underground wildlife trafficking and trade?

**JOHN TRACEY:** We do use the information that we've got available. I am not aware of any detailed look at it, but we do take action on the information that is available to us. I can take that on notice as well, if you'd like.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. I might ask some further questions about that in February in regard to what would assist the department with investigations into that space as well. Previously I asked the Minister a question that was on the New South Wales Government webpage about events in Armidale and Guyra in regard to what it says are captive reindeer exhibitions. This was quickly removed from the website after our question. Does that have anything to do with the DPI, or is it another department?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No. We don't have anything to do with any funding or any arrangement for any exhibition of captive—and I assume that they are red deer—reindeers over the Christmas period. However, what we do have is, obviously—and there is one authority holder who does have approval to exhibit red deer as a mobile exhibitor in New South Wales and, obviously, we have a responsibility for ensuring that exhibitor complies with the standards for exhibiting animals at mobile establishments in New South Wales. And that includes them submitting an itinerary for the month for their forward plan about where they are exhibiting and where they will be having mobile displays.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What company is that?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I don't have the actual name of the company in front of me.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you able to take it on notice?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And can you also find out for me if that is the company that is involved with the Government grants that were originally on the New South Wales Government website?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. As I said, I am not aware of any—I can, but I am not sure, and I am not aware of any funding being provided for the exhibition of captive reindeers by the New South Wales Government.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Hansen, I might just go back to a question I asked around the Invasive Species Council funding. You took it on notice and got back to me with an answer. Your answer says that the funding is monitored by the monitoring and evaluation—or M and E—framework. Does your department have any input into that performance matrix or that monitoring framework at all, or is that a Federal thing?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might see if Dr Tracey wants to comment on that.

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes. If that's in relation to the Invasive Species Council funding that DPI provided as a one-off—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That was \$33,000.

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes. That was part of a national initiative that was a cost-shared one. My understanding is that it wasn't about monitoring and evaluation but more looking at the biosecurity system and some initiatives around that.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Your question was not about the actual program itself, but it was about how do we monitor that spend in our program.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, my question is about the monitoring and evaluation framework that is mentioned in the answer. A lot of the measuring of outcomes is quite subjective and vague, and a lot of the outcomes are vague too. I am just concerned whether your department had any involvement in developing that framework or that matrix in measuring this performance.

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**SCOTT HANSEN:** That is something, that—if Dr Tracey doesn't know. I don't know whether we were involved in that or not, or whether we just signed on to the national program. We can take that on notice, and we can see if we can find out whether we had a hand on the pen at all on that stuff.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I have one question on the fire ants. Is what we know about how this incursion has happened going to inform any changes to the plant quarantine manual, because my understanding is that we suspect it came in on plant material. Is that going to inform any changes or updates to that quarantine manual? I note that it is dated back to 2016.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. I don't think there is anything at the moment that would lead us to suggest we need to change that, but I don't want to pre-empt what the outcome from Queensland's investigations into that might lead to. I guess the short answer is there is nothing that we have seen so far that requires us or makes us go, "We need to change the manual." At the same time, Queensland is continuing their investigation, and we are supporting them on that front. And if something comes out that does require us to, then we will move to. Otherwise, if this is found just to be a breach or a compliance issue, then we will obviously move down that path as well.

**The CHAIR:** Sure. Thank you. Can I just go to some recreational fishing trust questions? In questions in the House and on notice, I asked around the funding that was given to the Moores Road, Bootawa project, and the answers I received suggested that the program was due for completion in December 2023. Noting that this has been a very protracted issue in terms of regaining access to that river, is that project due for completion in December 2023 or are there further delays?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The project has been delayed, and it's because of a request from the council for an extension in the timing—I think, through until April 2024—and that is because they're negotiating the outcomes with landholders that are adjacent to where the structure is going to be built. It is those negotiations with landholders to get the best outcome, I understand, that led to them asking for an extension in the time frame. Our experience with these types of projects where we are supporting councils to build structures in areas that are adjacent to private land have these sorts of issues come up, so it is not unusual to have extensions requested and granted.

**The CHAIR:** To be fair, as I said, this is a very protracted issue and has dragged on for many years. Let's be frank, it is one landholder who is—according to other landholders—deliberately blocking that access road with their own material and own vehicles, simply because he does not want that access reinstated. I might follow up in February to see if we have made any progress there. Can I just go to another recreational fishing trust funding? There was a \$250,000 grant for a disability platform in Tenterfield, and it is my understanding that has also been delayed because of the local council. Can you give me an update on that? I think it was given to OzFish to build some sort of disability fishing platform for the local fishermen.

**SEAN SLOAN:** That project, again, is actually with the council with—I think it's Tenterfield Dam. It's Tenterfield Shire Council that has the project, and I think there have been some revisions to their proposal which have led to some further discussion around what it is that they want to do as far as providing access. The original proposal was to provide access to the dam and to provide a structure with accessibility, and they have come forward changing the type of structure they want to build and changing the type of access that they want to provide. That has led to further discussion, and that's what is currently protracting that project. The final sort of resolution to that isn't clear just yet. The team in DPI is working with the council just to try to make sure that that original intent, which is to provide full access to the dam, is followed through on, and that's where the discussion is currently sitting.

**The CHAIR:** I guess maybe some follow-ups from previous estimates. Mr Hansen, we've previously spoken about the BDO socio-economic study for commercial fishers, and I think last Parliament you stated that you had started a second set of data collection and the idea was this was going to continue every year. Can you confirm whether that's still the intention and when and how these results of the data will be published?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, it is still the intention and very soon.

**The CHAIR:** Very soon. Okay, excellent.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Mr Chair, can I just indicate that I will have to board a plane shortly, so can I just ask formally that I can be excused?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, sure. We said that you can go whenever you need to. Safe travels. Thank you for your time.

**(Jonathan Wheaton withdrew.)**

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**The CHAIR:** Mr Sloan, just another follow-up. We've obviously had discussions about the set pocket prawn draw, and I think in last Parliament's estimates we left off it was going back to the commercial fisheries advisory council for review or comment or feedback. Can you provide an update as to whether that has happened and what the feedback is from the commercial fisheries advisory council?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The commercial fisheries advisory council did look at the process and didn't recommend any changes to the process that is currently running.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Sloan, there was a question that you agreed to take on notice but wasn't picked up from our end and that was around the recreational fishing fee receipt figures for the 2022-23 period. You stated that it was 390,146 fishers, but there was some discrepancy between that and the figures on the website and you said you would take that on notice. Were you able to clarify whether the figures on the website were correct or the figures that you had were correct?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes, Chair. The figures that I can confirm: For the 2022-23 licensing year, the licences sold were 390,146. I think part of your question at the time was was there any change during that period when we were experiencing COVID and there were lockdowns across the State. How did that impact on the sale of licences? What I can say is that during that year previous, so if we go back to—in fact, just to give you a fulsome answer, in 2018-19 there were 470,945 licences sold. In 2019-20 there were 429,177 sold, and in 2020-21 there were 474,517. So that 2020-21 period had an uptick in the sale of licences right across the board. So we sell three-day licences, one-month licences, one-year and three-year licences, and the licence sales across all of those categories in the 2020-21 period actually increased. The next year, which was 2021-22, they dipped a bit to 376,373. We often get asked questions about that dip in the licence sales, and essentially that's most likely due to the fact that we sold a lot of three-year licences during COVID and we're seeing now an uptick if you look at the results from 2022-23, which is 390,000. That's the answer.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Sloan. I appreciate that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I think again it will be you, Ms Fox, but then you just flick me off to someone else. I understand the Regional NSW website now provides information about the Regional Development Trust Fund, and it's my understanding that the Regional Development Advisory Interim Council—it's quite a mouthful—will be appointed by the Minister. Is this correct?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, that's correct.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Do you think it's appropriate for that to happen?

**REBECCA FOX:** Chair, I'm not sure I need to comment on, or are required to comment on, Government policy in that regard.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Fair enough. I completely respect that, Ms Fox; that's fine. What selection process did the Minister go through to make these appointments?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'll take that on notice. I haven't been personally involved, so I'll take it on notice to make sure I have it accurately described.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Is there anyone online that is?

**REBECCA FOX:** No. Most of the administrative part of it has been run through either my office or Mr Wheaton's team, but I'm very happy to take it on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Are you on track to announce the council members prior to Christmas? It says that you will.

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, my understanding is that we're on track to announce as soon as possible. Yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, I'm not trying to be difficult, but I don't understand how there is no-one that can tell the Committee about the selection process, which has obviously already happened and decided because you're able to announce that before Christmas.

**REBECCA FOX:** I can tell you that it's an interim panel and it has been put in place fairly quickly to make sure that we can get moving in relation to the trust as soon as we can. That panel will advise the Minister and it's an interim 12-month appointment, and then the plan is to go out to a full expression of interest and open the panel up within that 12 months. It's an interim appointment through that process, but I'm sorry I don't have the knowledge myself.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But, Ms Fox, I understand that's an interim panel, and I thank you very much for telling the Committee that, but I'm really struggling to understand how you have an interim process that you said is going to last 12 months, you have an interim council that has been selected by the Minister that obviously is done and obviously you're about to announce but you can't tell me anything about the process. Surely some of this was run through the department.

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, it's run by the department. The process, I understand, is set out in the legislation, but I don't have personal knowledge of that process other than what is set out in the legislation that the Minister can appoint under the legislation. But I'm very happy to take it on notice and provide that information to the Committee.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Was there advice sought by the department about the appointment of the interim council?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'll have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So we have an interim council that's going to be in charge of distributing grant money and there's no-one that can tell me if the Minister's office consulted the department about that process.

**REBECCA FOX:** The department has been involved. I haven't personally been involved, so to make sure that I answer the question appropriately, I'm happy to take it on notice and come back as quickly as we can to advise—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Who has been involved? This is a really important question about funding allocation. Who has been involved?

**REBECCA FOX:** The department has been involved through the regional development team and through my office's team. We have a project team that has been working on updating the Regional Development Roadmap, and we're very happy to provide that information, but I will have to take it on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Is there someone from the regional development team online?

**REBECCA FOX:** Mr Wheaton unfortunately has just left to get on a plane.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** May I request from you, Ms Fox: Are there any briefs that were sent up? What is the information the department provided on the appointment process? Who was consulted? Who was in charge?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, we're very happy to provide whatever we can on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I don't mean to be difficult, but I just find that really hard to understand how on this major, only single grant allocation that the Minister has decided that they're running that no-one in a budget estimates forum can tell me how the selection process was made and the appointments. I find that really staggering, but anyway. Will there be equal representation across regional New South Wales on this council?

**REBECCA FOX:** I would expect so.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But do you know?

**REBECCA FOX:** I think the regulations and the legislation set out the capabilities that are required. I know there's a designated Aboriginal position on the council and the skills required in regional development—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I redirect you back to my question, Ms Fox. Obviously you've chosen it. Not you, I beg your pardon—the Minister. But the process has taken place which no-one online can tell me or the Committee anything about. My question was very direct. It was will there be equal representation across regional New South Wales? Surely, someone knows that.

**REBECCA FOX:** I'll have to take that question on notice, and I understand I'm entitled to take questions on notice when I don't have personal information that enables me to answer your question. I'm trying to provide the information that I've got. I don't have personal knowledge of that process.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Right. Okay. Do you know—and I'm not asking you for personal knowledge; I'm just asking you for factual information—will there be equal funding allocated to each electorate and LGA?

**REBECCA FOX:** I don't think the investment strategy has been determined, and one of the purposes of the interim council is to advise the Minister on the investment strategy and particularly the initial investments to be made under that trust.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is the round table that's in Broken Hill today to look at matters related to this fund? Is that correct?

**REBECCA FOX:** That's correct.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who was invited to attend?

**REBECCA FOX:** I wasn't there today. I'm sorry. I've been here. I can provide the attendees on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Was it by invitation only to attend and who was invited? I'm happy for you to provide that on notice.

**REBECCA FOX:** No problem. We can provide that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How many of those round tables have been held so far?

**REBECCA FOX:** I have a list here. We've done six to date and we've got another three or four to go into the new year.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In terms of the opportunities beyond the invited attendees, and any members of the public or community organisations who have a view in relation to this fund and how it will operate, what mechanisms are there for those people to provide input into what this process will look like?

**REBECCA FOX:** There's an issues paper which is out now and anybody can put a submission in in relation to that issues paper. The issues paper is quite detailed.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you know how many submissions you have received thus far?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'd have to take that on notice. I think the submissions period is still open. I don't believe it closes until February. I'm just waiting for my team to say—yes, February. I don't know how many we've received to date but I'm happy to take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. Will they be publicly available at any point?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, they will.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, the council is going to be announced by the end of the year and we're going to get more information on that. Therefore, it's not going to be administering any funds this year. May I ask, do we know about a time line for any future projects to be announced or administered by this council? Are we thinking midway through next year?

**REBECCA FOX:** I haven't got a time line. I'm happy to take that on notice, but I think the initial investments would be made this financial year. There is money in the budget this financial year. I would expect maybe March or April, and certainly in the last quarter of this financial year, for the first investments to be made.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I think you're going to tell me the same thing so just tell me that you're going to take it on notice, but in terms of the process to appoint the council, was it by application? I know it's appointed by the Minister and that's absolutely fair enough, but was that process then looked at from the department in terms of grading more specific applicants and things like that. Can all of that be included as well, please?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, no problem. It was a merit-based and skills-based council rather than a representative council. That's set out in the legislation, but I can provide that information—no problem.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Fox, I think you said there have been six round tables held so far. I can't quite remember, sorry. Was it six?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, we've done Bega, Wagga, Orange, Bourke and Broken Hill. Sorry, that's five to date.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Has the Minister attended all of those in person?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'll have to take that on notice. I haven't been to all of them, so I will take that on notice and confirm to make sure that I provide the correct information.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. Could you also—

**REBECCA FOX:** She was certainly at—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sorry, I'll let you finish.

**REBECCA FOX:** That's all right. I'll take it on notice to make sure I provide the correct information.



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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We assume she was at Broken Hill. We'll assume that, but if you take it on notice, that would be good. Again, could you take on notice if the Minister is slated to attend any of the forums or round tables in person in the new year as well? I appreciate that you wouldn't know that, so could you take that on notice as well?

**REBECCA FOX:** Sorry, I couldn't understand that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'd like to know, of the five that have been held, which ones the Minister has attended and which of the future forums to be held in the new year the Minister has confirmed her attendance for as well.

**REBECCA FOX:** No problem. I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But I know you won't know that and I don't expect you to.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Fox, I'm sorry because I think you'll probably take this on notice too, but to gain further insight for the Committee, how exactly will the trust fund be run? And I know you said March but when are we likely to see projects actually in the pipeline and off the ground? You know how sometimes when we're applying for grants it has to be, say, shovel ready. When will we see that? Can you provide that to us on notice as well?

**REBECCA FOX:** I can do that, yes. I think some of that still needs to be determined and developed. We're in the early stages. The money was only confirmed in September, and we'll work through what that looks like through the trust fund and through the investment strategy, but I'm happy to provide whatever we can at this point in time.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Understood. Again, this might be to take on notice, but what input and oversight will the Minister have over the recommended projects?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'll have to take that on notice as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** This is about a quite specific project so I don't expect you to have the details to hand. I wonder whether you could come back on notice with any information in relation to a grant that was approved, on my understanding, a few years ago for the Narrabri Industrial Network under one of the regional funds. I think they are under the impression that \$100,000 had been allocated, but I think only \$50,000 has been made available to them. That's the correspondence that I've received. I'm wondering whether, on notice, you could provide any information in relation to that particular grant for that organisation. It's the Narrabri Industrial Network.

**REBECCA FOX:** No problem. It's particularly in relation to the quantum?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes. My understanding is that there was \$100,000 that they believe was allocated but \$50,000 has not been provided, and they just wanted me to find out where that was up to. If you could provide any information on notice, that would be very helpful.

**REBECCA FOX:** No problem. I can do that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you so much. Back to DPI now, and sorry for all the jumping around. I apologise. I want to ask about the program for sheep and goat electronic IDs. My understanding is that in November there was \$14.4 million allocated for a program that was announced in August, and that in November about half of that money had been applied for. Are you able to provide an update in terms of the status of that funding, how many applications and whether that amount has been fully exhausted? For sheep and goat IDs— I think I said that.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, we sure can. I will just grab the precise figure. At the start of this week, I think just over \$11 million of the \$14 million had been applied for. If I use the end of November numbers in front of me, it's \$9.5 million. But I believe that in the past two weeks that number has jumped up now to \$11 million and something, out of the \$14 million.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How many individual applications is that? I'm happy for you to take that on notice.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It is 1,680 applications.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Half of that money is from the State Government and half is from Federal. Is that correct?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** For the producer grants, yes.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That 7.2 million, was that a new budget allocation or was that found within existing DPI budgets to be able to provide that?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No. I believe that was a new budget allocation to match the Commonwealth Government's 7.2.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** One of the concerns that we hear—and I'm sure it's something that's familiar to you as well, Mr Hansen—is the cost for producers in terms of those tags. Have there been any conversations between Ministers, between agencies, at both State and Federal levels about a national tag tender? I know it's something the previous Minister had been on the record on as well, to try to bring that cost down for producers. Has anything happened in that space?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** There has certainly been a lot of work in that space and a lot of conversations at that ministerial level. I know our Minister has raised it at a gmin meetings of Ministers of all the States and Territories and has continued to push the case for collective action across jurisdictions to try to bring prices down for tags through a collective sort of activity. The latest piece of work on that was the industry itself commissioned some consultancies to be able to work out whether industry should be taking the running on that—in particular, any of the national industry bodies should be running a national tender or a national process. That report has just been completed and sent round to jurisdictions. It points out some of the pitfalls of having a national industry lobby group running our national tender. It's identified some of the risks of trying to do this nationally but also some of the opportunities. We expect that the next time all agencies from across the Commonwealth get around the table, that will again be the key topic for them in this area, which is how do we ensure that collectively we do something more than just short-term subsidies for tags to try to bring the price down in the longer term?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Does DPI have any plans to hold any sort of town hall style open meetings in relation to an update on this issue? I know the Minister has met with individual stakeholders, but is there any plan to provide updates in a more public way to larger groups?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. In fact, I think we've had 111 industry events held since December last year to date, 60 presentations to stakeholders and 23 field day trade stands. We've spoken individually to over 4,000 producers, had 15 saleyard meetings and 10 processor meetings. There's a pretty dedicated team out on the road talking to producers on this at the moment, and encouraging and assisting them with uptake.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I think my question again is to Ms Fox. The Working Regions Fund, which is now going to sit under and be administered by Treasury—could you please provide the Committee with clarification as to why that decision was made?

**REBECCA FOX:** That's a decision of government. I don't have any information on why that decision was made, I'm sorry.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So that decision to take a regional fund to sit within Treasury and not within the Department of Regional NSW was made by the Government and by the Ministers, not by the department?

**REBECCA FOX:** It was made through the budget process. That's my understanding.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Was the Department of Regional NSW consulted on that decision?

**REBECCA FOX:** Not that I'm aware of.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Will there be members of the Department of Regional NSW included in the process collaboratively with Treasury?

**REBECCA FOX:** I've got no information in relation to that fund at all. We work pretty closely with Treasury on many things, and I would expect that when they set up a fund they would consult with us, but I'm not aware of any consultation that's taken place to date.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** As secretary, you would expect to be aware if there was consultation, though, I would assume?

**REBECCA FOX:** Generally I am, but I don't expect everything to run through me or through my office. I expect all of our teams to have good relationships all across government.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** In terms of funds that are delivered by the Department of Regional NSW, it's just the Regional Development Trust Fund now that you'll be doing? All the other ones—Treasury—all gone.

**REBECCA FOX:** We're managing a whole range of funds at the moment.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** In terms of grant projects.

**REBECCA FOX:** Some are on behalf of other agencies.

**The CHAIR:** I might stick with fishing matters. Mr Sloan or Mr Hansen, when is the draft policy for co-management of fisheries due to be released to the public for consultation?

**SEAN SLOAN:** We've done work on a draft policy for co-management of fisheries, which is essentially a policy to guide how we work with stakeholders when we're forming up management of different fisheries or fish species. We've worked that draft policy through the commercial, recreational and Aboriginal fisheries advisory councils, as well as the Minister's fisheries advisory council, which actually sits over the top of all of those groups and brings all of the different sectors together when there are cross-cutting policy issues like this. It's going through the final stages of departmental review and then I think it will go through the process of being put before the Minister for consideration and then out for public consultation. It's a piece of work that we've been doing that supports some of the work that we've initiated in recent years with working groups—things like harvest strategies. That work on harvest strategies is well underway and is a form of co-management. The policy is really about providing some guidance about how we do that in a more structured way.

**The CHAIR:** Would it be fair to say that in the middle of next year we might see something put out for public consultation? Would that be a safe guess?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes, Chair. I would expect some time early to mid-next year we'd see something come out.

**The CHAIR:** On the issue of cold water pollution—and I know this doesn't solely sit with you; WaterNSW obviously has a role to play here too—we know that some of the strategies or research into how we combat this have failed. I'm talking about the curtains. What other work are we doing in this space, given that it obviously has an impact on our native fish species so much?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The cold water curtain technology didn't prove to be successful. The technology that is being trialled and looked at very closely—and we've got some work underway with CSU, Charles Sturt University, on this—is looking at bubble plume technology. Essentially, the challenge that exists with cold water—the concept is referred to as cold water pollution. Essentially, you get stratification of a water body—warm water on the surface, cold water below. When water gets released from a dam into a river system, that cold water will affect all of the behaviour and the spawning patterns of fish. The bubble plume technology is designed to stratify the water before its release. It mixes it. That's, I think, the most promising concept that we have underway at the moment. Like I said, there are plans for a trial and working with CSU on that.

**The CHAIR:** Is it too early to tell us where that trial may be and for how long? Or is it very much in the development stage?

**SEAN SLOAN:** No, we do have a site earmarked. If you could bear with me, Chair, I could come back to you shortly with an indication of that site. I just don't have it at my fingertips.

**The CHAIR:** That's fine. If we don't get it by the end of the day, can I assume you'll take that on notice?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Can I go to the issue of water quality and oysters? Are you aware of the report that was just released by Southern Cross University around pesticides and water pollution in the Richmond River? Are you familiar with—

**SEAN SLOAN:** Chair, I'm not across that report. I'm certainly aware of the challenges that oyster farmers face with a whole range of water quality issues, particularly sewage outfalls, but I'm not familiar with that particular piece of work.

**The CHAIR:** It's just been released literally a couple of days ago and talks about them finding 21 different pesticides, some of which are actually banned in Australia—one particularly was benomyl, which has been banned since 2006. I guess this is probably an issue that is across a wide breadth of your portfolio area—not only farming but also fishing et cetera. I am just wondering what work is being done around the use of pesticides in and around these sensitive areas? In particular, what is being done to educate farmers and other users around some of these pesticides that may be lurking in sheds, that have been sitting there for a while, and that farmers don't realise are actually banned?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I think in terms of that report, I think I'll just take that on notice to have the opportunity to look at it and see what's in there.

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**The CHAIR:** Sure.

**SEAN SLOAN:** We do have programs of work underway under the Marine Estate Management Strategy which are designed to improve water quality overall and that does include community education engagement activities with landholders, so I think there are works, or engagement pieces, underway on that front. But in terms of specifics, if it's of interest, I could come back with a more detailed answer on what some of that work looks like.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. That would be great.

**SEAN SLOAN:** The work that I was referring to on the cold water pollution was—the areas flagged for us to look at that particular bubble plume technology are Pindari and Copeton dams, and I'll just correct myself: It's the University of New South Wales and Griffith University that we're collaborating with. We do a lot of other things with CSU, but it looks like not this one.

**The CHAIR:** No problems at all, thank you.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Chair, could I just add to Mr Sloan's previous answer on what are we doing with agriculture in this part with regards to run-off and awareness about impact on sprays and so forth? Part of that funding I talked about previously around improving water quality and reducing litter—as you identified, one of the key threats in our marine estate is that water quality issue. We'll supply you some details of the programs and activities we've got in that because that Marine Estate Management Strategy actually delivers a lot of on-ground work. The strategy is a partnership between ourselves, LLS and the environment department in terms of delivery on ground, to work with landowners to raise their awareness and to improve their practices to reduce that kind of either run-off or spray drift.

**The CHAIR:** Can I go to the cultural fishing round table and what's happening in that cultural fishing space? I note there was a meeting on 30 June. How often does that cultural fishing round table meet?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I think the meeting that you're referring to was the one where we brought all the advisory councils together, which was the Aboriginal, recreational and commercial fishing advisory councils, but we also brought our Marine Estate Management Authority into that discussion as well to look at the draft and the process around drafting a cultural fishing regulation. That was designed to get just broader ownership of what the cultural fishing regulation would look like because of how cross-cutting that issue is—because obviously we're talking about regulating the extraction of one group but all of these sectors are fishing for the same species.

That round table brought everybody together and it was a very good productive piece of work around what the cultural fishing regulation should look like. It then went back to the Aboriginal Fishing Advisory Council, which is charged in the legislation with providing advice to the Minister on any regulations that apply to Aboriginal communities. The drafting of that regulation is currently underway. I would expect sometime in the new year there will be a process run to consult with the community on that. That piece of work that you're referring to was really an initiating piece to get recreational fishers, commercial fishers and Aboriginal cultural fishers all on the same page.

**The CHAIR:** Can I go to the two local management plans that are on trial at the moment. You've got the Hastings and the Tweed. How long are those trials for? Do we have a trial term for them?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes. Both of those trials were established for a two-year period, and I know the Tweed one kicked off first. I need to double-check, Chair, the timing of it but I think the two-year period comes up very early in the new year and the Tweed one follows by maybe three to six months. They're both proving to be highly successful and those communities are highly engaged in those cultural fishing management plans. We have interest from other communities to work with us on the same process. We will do an evaluation of both the Tweed first and then the Hastings plans for the year.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Other way round.

**SEAN SLOAN:** Hastings and then the Tweed. I got the order wrong, so Hastings and then the Tweed.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think the dates are that the Hastings commenced in June 2022 and the Tweed in November 2022, so that would put their two-year trial dates at June 2024 and November 2024.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just confirm, with the development of those plans, the other sectors of the fishing community were consulted—the commercial sector and the recreational sector? Were they consulted or part of that process in setting up those local management plans?

**SEAN SLOAN:** No. We didn't go out and broadly consult on the preparation of those management plans, and the reason that we didn't is the design of the process has been put together in such a way that it can be a

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self-determination process for those Aboriginal communities. The way that we put it together was to work with the Elders in those communities and let them come to us with what limits they wanted to put on individual species and what geographic boundaries we would place around where the cultural fishing could occur, and then also things like what fishing methods could be used and who in the community would qualify to be culturally fishing against the plans. All of those things we allow to be self-determined by those communities rather than us, essentially sort of forcing those arrangements on the communities themselves.

**The CHAIR:** When it comes to bag limits and possession limits, were they asked to justify with any scientific background why they were assigning certain bag limits or possession limits to different species, or justify in any way?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes. We did go through those discussions and the important thing to bring out there is that the limits that are contained in those local management plans allow members of the community to fish for the community. They're not just fishing for themselves. If there are elderly people in the community, for example, one person might go out and catch a limit that's in the plan, but it will be to feed the whole community and those limits won't be acted on every single day. They might be for particular periods or culturally important events, so that's why the limit's different to the single daily limits that apply for recreational fishers, as an example. But just on the consultation piece, I do want to clarify as well that we did go to the Commercial Fishing NSW Advisory Council and the Recreational Fishing NSW Advisory Council to run through with them what those two local management plans were proposing. In that sense, there was consultation with the commercial and recreational fishing industry, but what we didn't do is go out to the wider community, and that was for that reason that I mentioned.

**The CHAIR:** When you went to the Recreational Fishing NSW Advisory Council and the Commercial Fishing NSW Advisory Council with what was being proposed, did that include the bag limits and possession limits?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes, it did.

**The CHAIR:** Given that, the specific species I'm concerned about is the mulloway. When both the commercial and rec guys are getting a haircut—a significant haircut—in terms of possession and bag limits et cetera, what was the justification in these two plans that they could take 20 and 20 for Hastings and for Tweed I think it was 15 and 20? Noting, okay, yes, you're catching for the wider community, but what was the scientific background or data provided by these communities to say, "Hey, 20 is sustainable," when everyone else has been reduced to one or two?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Firstly, in those local communities we did go and talk to the local tackle stores and different key fishing clubs in those communities, as well as talking to the Recreational Fishing NSW Advisory Council and the Commercial Fishing NSW Advisory Council, so that completed the story in terms of how we consulted and engaged. In terms of the question about why 20 mulloway for a person who is fishing against the local management plan in the Tweed or the Hastings, and why for a recreational person the take and possession of it is one fish per person, the answer to that is essentially what I was saying earlier, which is that a person who is fishing culturally in one of these communities will be fishing for the community.

If you take, for example, the fact that we estimate that we have around a million recreational fishers in New South Wales—we license much less than that, but obviously with elderly people and young people there are more people who are recreational fishing. The cumulative effect of recreational fishers fishing for a species like mulloway is very different to a small Aboriginal community fishing for a species like mulloway. I come back to the point that when someone goes fishing in the Hastings community for mulloway, it'll be potentially for many more members of the community, but it wouldn't be every day of the week. It wouldn't be a consistent thing; it would possibly be only a small number of times each year.

**The CHAIR:** I just think it's important to put on record that clarification because at face value it stands out as a concern, given the dire straits that we know that species is in. In my last two minutes can I go to Ms Filmer and you, Mr Hansen, around the puppy farm taskforce funding? How much has been given to the RSPCA in total for that taskforce since it first was set up?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'm just finding that as we speak, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** While you're finding that, has there been any review or is there an intended review on that funding, given that, based on my questioning at last estimates, we learned that they have closed exactly zero puppy farms down?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** In terms of a review of that funding, that funding was time bound and time limited. As you'd be aware, there was significant funding made available to the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League

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to help fund, amongst other things, compliance activities in this year's financial budget. There is continued funding, but it hasn't been allocated, nor targeted to a taskforce. I'll see if Ms Filmer has been able to track down that number because I haven't been able to. If not, we'll take it on notice.

**KIM FILMER:** We are on; I found it. In 2020 there was \$400,000 allocated to the RSPCA to employ four extra inspectors for the puppy taskforce. That was one-off funding. The RSPCA currently have two inspectors working on the puppy taskforce, but they are planning to increase that number back to four using the grant money that the Office of Local Government has given them recently. Does that answer your question?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, that's fine. I'll target my questions further to Local Government then.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Fox, would you be able to provide, and I'm happy for you to do it on notice—in fact, I'm sure you will need to—just picking up on where we left off, a list of all of the funds that the Department of Regional NSW is now responsible for administering from, say, the start of December, if that's okay?

**REBECCA FOX:** Do you mean grants funds?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, and any funds that you've got responsibility for.

**REBECCA FOX:** Okay.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you also provide—I'll make that one grants funds as well—which were the funds you were responsible for as of, say, January this year? I'm just trying to understand grants funds specifically, but also more broadly, funds that Regional NSW was responsible for at the beginning of the year versus the end of the year. But I'm happy if it is on notice and for as much as you can provide.

**REBECCA FOX:** And do you want the funds from the primary industries team, for example? Across the whole department?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, please. That would be great. Thank you. I want to ask some questions now—and these might be quite specific—just in relation to the special activation precincts and, particularly, the Moree one. There has obviously been a decision by the Federal Government in their infrastructure review not to provide funding for the Moree Intermodal Overpass. Are you aware of that decision?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What work is being done by the department or what advice has been given to the Minister in relation to the impact that that decision will have on that particular precinct project?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'll hand over to Mr Bolton, who is responsible for that program, but we've been—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Great.

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, I'll let him answer that.

**JAMES BOLTON:** We have been analysing the impact of that decision from the Federal Government on the delivery of the scope of works that we have in place. We have been engaging with the Federal Government around potential impacts for the operations of Inland Rail and the Newell Highway too. We are still reviewing the best alternative to how we get access into the special activation precinct and are providing advice to the Minister's office when that's completed.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In your discussions with the Commonwealth, have you got any information in relation to the economic impact of cutting that intermodal overpass project? Has that been discussed? Is there anything you could provide on notice?

**JAMES BOLTON:** On notice, I could definitely provide a summary of the discussion we've had with the Federal Government.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great. Thank you. I lived in Moree for a period of time. My understanding is that it would be very difficult for road trains to access that particular site if there isn't an overpass from the west. Is that part of the conversations that you are having around what other options will be available without the money for that intermodal overpass?

**JAMES BOLTON:** Absolutely. We are looking at alternative solutions to provide that grade separation or safe access to the special activation precinct. You know the site well—how we get from the western side to the eastern side is a critical driver for how we move forward.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, definitely. Is Transport for NSW engaged in those considerations? Particularly, I am thinking around the safety of heavy vehicles accessing the site. Do you speak with them as part of that work as well?

**JAMES BOLTON:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What about the local council? Obviously, they have an interest in this. Are they involved in those discussions?

**JAMES BOLTON:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, if you are happy to provide on notice an overview of that work that has happened and maybe time frames in terms of—I am assuming that you then have to present to the Minister what some of the options are, and I respect that there are budget processes if that all changes. But, for the people up there who are keen to know time lines of what may happen, any advice you can provide in relation to that would be also very useful.

**JAMES BOLTON:** Yes, we can do that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. How much funding had been allocated for both the Williamstown and the Narrabri special activation precincts?

**JAMES BOLTON:** There had been no formal funding allocation to either precinct—so Williamstown or Narrabri. Typically, the process for a funding decision—we take the precinct through a master planning process. We essentially present the final investment decision to government. Neither of those special activation precincts had progressed to that phase. So there was no—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But some money had obviously been spent on—sorry, I probably should have worded that differently. Some money had been spent on that planning work, yes, for both of those precincts?

**JAMES BOLTON:** Correct.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is there a funding allocation or a budget amount that you could provide on how much was spent to date on those projects? The bell has just gone, so I'm happy for it to be on notice, if you can provide any information on that.

**JAMES BOLTON:** We can provide that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** I will now throw to the Government.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Thank you, Chair. I have no questions.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Nor do I.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Primrose? Bring us home.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** That's a consensus.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent. There's unity in the ranks. Thank you, all. You obviously have taken a significant number of questions on notice, but we did get through a mountain of questions today. I thank you all for attending and sticking out for the whole period. The Committee secretariat will be in touch regarding those questions you have taken on notice. Obviously, the usual time period allows, but there is that shut-down period as well to consider. Thank you all for attending. Merry Christmas and safe travels wherever you are going or to from, and we will see you in February for more mucking around.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**