

# **PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4 - CUSTOMER SERVICE AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Monday 5 September 2022**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area**

## **AGRICULTURE, WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**CORRECTED**

**The Committee met at 09:30.**

### **MEMBERS**

The Hon. Mark Banasiak (Chair)  
The Hon. Scott Barrett  
Ms Abigail Boyd  
Ms Cate Faehrmann  
Mr Justin Field  
Ms Sue Higginson  
The Hon. Emma Hurst (Deputy Chair)  
The Hon. Taylor Martin  
The Hon. Peter Primrose  
The Hon. Mick Veitch

### **PRESENT**

**The Hon. Duguld Saunders, *Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Western New South Wales***



## **CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS**

**Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:**

**Budget Estimates secretariat  
Room 823  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the initial public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2022-2023. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal people 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 Dugald Saunders and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Agriculture and Western New South Wales.

Before we commence, I make some brief comments about the procedures for today's hearing. Today's hearing is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. Proceedings are also being recorded and a transcript will be placed on the Committee's website once it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. All witnesses in budget estimates have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018.

There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or certain documents to hand. In these circumstances, witnesses are advised they can take the question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they should do so through the Committee staff. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Finally, could everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister Saunders, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament.

**Mr SEAN O'CONNELL**, Chief Executive, NSW Rural Assistance Authority, Department of Primary Industries, sworn and examined

**Ms REBECCA FOX**, Acting Secretary, Department of Regional NSW, affirmed and examined

**Ms SUZANNE ROBINSON**, Director, Animal Welfare, Department of Primary Industries, affirmed and examined

**Mr SEAN SLOAN**, Deputy Director General, Fisheries, Department of Primary Industries, sworn and examined

**Dr JOHN TRACEY**, Deputy Director General, Biosecurity and Food Safety, Department of Primary Industries, affirmed and examined

**Mr DAVID McPHERSON**, Deputy Director General, Forestry and Land Reform, Department of Primary Industries, affirmed and examined

**Mr DARYL QUINLIVAN**, NSW Agriculture Commissioner, Department of Primary Industries, affirmed and examined

**Dr KIM FILMER**, Chief Animal Welfare Officer, Department of Primary Industries, affirmed and examined

**Mr JONATHAN WHEATON**, Executive Director, Regional Development, Department of Regional NSW, affirmed and examined

**Mr SCOTT HANSEN**, Director General, Department of Primary Industries, sworn and examined

**Mr STEVE ORR**, Chief Executive Officer, Local Land Services, affirmed and examined

**Mr ADAM TYNDALL**, Director, Policy and Reform, Local Land Services, sworn and examined

**Mr ROB KELLY**, Executive Director, Regional Operations, Local Land Services, sworn and examined

**Mr ANSHUL CHAUDHARY**, Chief Executive Officer, Forestry Corporation of NSW, affirmed and examined

**Ms KATE LORIMER-WARD**, Deputy Director General, Agriculture, Department of Primary Industries, affirmed and examined

**Ms JACQUELINE TRACEY**, Executive Director, Policy, Strategy and Reform, Local Land Services, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

**The CHAIR:** Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 12.45 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. We are joined by the Minister in the morning, and in the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.15 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During the sessions, there will be questions from Opposition and crossbench members only. If required, an additional 15 minutes is allocated at the end of the morning and afternoon sessions for Government questions. We thank everyone for their attendance today. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Good morning all, and good morning, Minister. This first batch of questioning from me will be primarily about biosecurity, so I'm not sure if you want to get the biosecurity experts to the front desk.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Jump up, John.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** On that, there are two things I want to say. First of all, I acknowledge the outstanding work being undertaken by the staff in the biosecurity space across a range of matters that we are about to discuss. I think it's pretty important to acknowledge that it's a bit of an unusual time. I put on public record our appreciation for the work they are doing. The second thing is, Minister—and I think I've said it in public forums before—that whenever you put money on the table for biosecurity, I am going to back it in and I am probably going to say that we need more. That continues to be the case. You put money on the table for biosecurity and we are going to back it in because we really do need to spend a lot more on biosecurity.

I will start off with the Varroa destructor mite in the beehives. There are a few things that I want to work through, if we can, at a bit of a pace here. As you can imagine, no doubt, your office is also getting these same emails, so this probably won't be too much of a surprise over the next few minutes. Minister, can we just go back to when the outbreak first occurred out of the Port of Newcastle? There are a series of sentinel hives around the port, is that correct?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** That's correct, yes.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Who is responsible for inspecting those hives?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** DPI staff inspect those hives.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** How often are or were they being inspected?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It's a variation between six to eight or 10 weeks depending on what's happening, and that certainly occurred during that time.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** What was the inspection routine immediately prior to the identification of the varroa mite?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** For the exact routine I would probably hand to Scott, but I can say that it was within a normal inspection time frame. One of the things that was impacting at that time, you might remember, was quite severe flooding in all areas, including in that particular part of the world. The planned inspection probably was held off a little bit, but it was still within a time frame that you would expect those inspections to occur. Scott, have you got something around those time frames?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. I might just add, the typical process would be that our inspectors would go and place the miticide strips and the sticky mats in the sentinel hives, leave them for a couple of days and then come back and pick them up. They would do a round loop to do Newcastle, then Botany, then Wollongong and then package up and send those mats to Orange Agricultural Institute for inspection. That occurred in—just looking at the last six months because it goes back in time—February and it occurred in April. There was an extra two-week gap between the middle of April to the end of May because of the flood impact, in terms of timing. But, then again, end of May, and it was in early June that those mats that got taken out were then part of a sample routine that went through Botany, Wollongong, sent off to OAI and then that's when on 22 June we had the positive detection.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, there is a chance here for a bit of clarification as well. You and I both know that there is a biosecurity regime in place involving the Federal Government, State Government and industry around this. That's correct?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes, absolutely. From a biosecurity perspective, everyone has a role to play; we have a role. At that point in time, actually, we had taken on the extra role that was previously done by the Federal Government. They had decided to remove hives from Wollongong and Newcastle and just maintain Sydney. The department had decided that it was significant enough to make sure that we kept hives at Newcastle and Wollongong, so that was done. Notwithstanding that, beekeepers themselves are well aware of the fact that they are a hugely key part of the biosecurity plan for New South Wales particularly. Everyone has a role to play.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** The compensation is also already determined, really, as a part of that exercise, as part of that agreement.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Absolutely. There is an agreement between the State and Federal governments and industry. In this case it's a national deed of agreement that forms part of a plan that is an ongoing plan agreed to, so that when something happens there is a set-out plan which is being followed.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, some of the emails that are coming through to my office and those of our colleagues, no doubt coming into your office and your colleagues' as well, are to do with the fact that a lot of the commercial beekeepers are without income if they're within the zone. I have a couple of questions. I'm being told they still say that there is no date for the eradication to occur. Is that correct, Minister? Are we still working—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Well, that's not really correct, no. I mean, there's been ongoing eradications.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** At the start, there was some initial eradication that was done and then the teams really spread out to do more surveillance to try and find out where, possibly, the mite may have got to. So initial eradications were done in all the infected premises that we knew about at that point in time. Then the teams moved out to do meaningful surveillance. We then saw the removal of that yellow notification zone, the 50-kay zone. That happened a few weeks ago now. So we've still got the purple and the red zones there. But after all that surveillance was done, it became clear that we had reached that outer limit. Going back in now meaningfully doing the eradication, and that's a difficult thing to be doing. There is no doubt about that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** But people who are in that zone are being informed, whether they're recreational or commercial, they're being informed ahead of time about a date that's planned. And I've spoken to quite a few beekeepers who have had this, and they're notified, they're asked about how they would like that eradication to occur. So in some cases, you can keep your hive wear. If you don't want your hives to be completely destroyed, you can keep the actual hive wear and just have the bees euthanised and then the remains removed and keep your hive wear, or you can choose to have the entire thing burnt, if you like.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Thanks, Minister. Do we know what the exact figures are that are being offered for compensation, particularly for commercial apiarists?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Commercial and recreational are different.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Commercially, it actually depends on what you do. So your operation will be different to your neighbour's operation and will be different to down the road. So there is a formula that's been worked out. Again, it's part of an agreement that was done at the national level, in consultation with the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council, around the best way to compensate, depending on what you do. So you receive compensation for the bees themselves, you receive compensation for the hive wear, depending how many frames you've had in your hives, depending how many different straps—all of the gear you use is accounted for in a different way. So your operation might be worth more than my operation and it's actually accounted for that way. But each and every commercial beekeeper is registered. All of the equipment has been noted. Any of the euthanasiation that occurs is noted at the time and agreed to. And we're going back in now and ratifying exactly what's been done and talking about the compensation that is then available for those commercial beekeepers. And recreationally, it's \$550 per hive. If you want to keep your hive, it's \$200 for the bees. That's all been agreed to, again, by the apiarists association.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Thanks. Minister, is it true that the commercial beekeepers can't apply for compensation until such time as their hives have been destroyed or the bees have been euthanised?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** That's essentially correct, yes. I mean, you're not getting paid before your bees have been euthanised. But as that happens, the compensation is available very quickly. And I understand it's difficult if you're looking at income and you haven't had any income. The other thing you're being paid for is lost income. So you may not have the income, there are support mechanisms in place. But you are being compensated for things like fuel, lost income, honey production, a range of things that aren't recognised for recreational that are recognised for commercial.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Is that compensation being delivered through the RAA?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes, it is.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Because I will come back this afternoon and asks questions, Mr O'Connell; if you can wait there before we get too excited. With the recreation beekeepers, one of the issues I have no doubt has been a problem has been identifying where all the recreational hives are. How confident are we that we know where all the hives are in this major zone?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Pretty confident. That's the work that's been done and that's why we moved from the eradication to start with—to actually do all the tracing surveillance work. We've had literally hundreds, in some cases a few hundred people a day, on the ground working out of the Maitland local command centre and working out from there to go from premises to premises and actually locate where those hives are. A recreational beekeeper can have one hive or two hives or 60 hives that aren't registered for commercial, but they all need to be registered. That's one thing, I think, that this has shown, is the case for ensuring if you have any hives, you need to be registered as a beekeeper. That's for a number of reasons. One is so we know where you are and the other one is so we can trace where you've been. That's something that I think the recreational groups are now really starting to understand more. Certainly commercially, they're very much in favour of having some sort of traceability for their own good into the future.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** If you're in the blue zone, are you allowed to move your hives yet?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Sure, as long as you apply for a permit, you can move your hives. That's been in process now for a couple of months leading up to pollination. So if you're in the zone that isn't currently a biosecurity zone, you're able to apply for a permit. You need to show where your hives have been for the past two years. You need to go through an online course with Tocal to show that you actually understand the process. You need to do an alcohol wash and provide a stat dec that you don't have mites. And then there is monitoring as you move as well and ongoing compliance that you need to be doing.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Thank you. We're probably going to come back to that this afternoon, Mr Hansen. I have a bit more detailed questions. Minister, white spot on prawns, there's been a recent outbreak of white spot. Can you update the Committee as to the status of that as of today's date?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Sure. Firstly, the good news about that is that it has been contained very quickly and the other good news is that white spot doesn't affect any human consumption of any seafood, particularly of prawns. There was a very small outbreak of less than 400 prawns at a location on the North Coast. It was taken care of very quickly. There's been tracing and there will be ongoing tracing there just to make sure there isn't any other possible outbreak at the facility that was in question. There has been testing of waters nearby and at this point in time there is no other suggestion of any other movement of white spot from that location.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Thank you. Minister, lumpy skin disease. Sorry, Mr Hansen?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Can I just add that when we're talking about outbreak there, it's actually detections within tanks, inside an indoor facility.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Just so that no-one gets concerned it's outside.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, it's pretty important that we make sure it's not out in the wild; it's actually in the farms. Lumpy skin disease—we're going to come to foot and mouth as well in a minute—but as I said, the biosecurity team clearly has a lot on their plate right now. Minister, what are the preparations around lumpy skin disease that are currently taken place in New South Wales?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Lumpy skin—it sort of does tie in with foot-and-mouth disease.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** But all of the preparations we're now doing after possible outbreaks of either/or lumpy skin and/or foot-and-mouth disease. We recently at the biosecurity conference held in Dubbo at the zoo—

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I would have loved to have had an invite to that, too, Minister.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I think you did receive an invite. You didn't receive an invite? Well, certainly your Federal Minister received an invite and he presented on the day. The preparations are around preparedness, is the main key. So in the budget this year there was \$164 million around a range of programs. We announced an extra \$65 million on that day around preparedness, and that includes everything from mRNA vaccine preparedness, of which we already have the team working at EMAI on a possible lumpy skin vaccine. That's now pivoting to foot-and-mouth disease as well with a synthetic vaccine, similar to what we saw during COVID. All of that knowledge that we can get from industry overseas, working with MIT in Boston and companies in Canada, we've already got some of that IP that they're developing. The team has already been in very close contact there. So were fast-tracking all of that work. There's also work around literally training people. So that's one of the big things and a learning out of the UK, where they've had quite a few of these diseases previously. In a hook-up I had with the chief veterinary officer of the UK, one of the things she mentioned was actually training people now to be ready to help deal with whatever happens in the future is a really good thing to do. So that's absolutely what we've done.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, does that training include assisting farmers out in the field for identification purposes?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Absolutely, and we've already been rolling out—I'll check on how many we've done, but we've done about—

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** You could take that on notice and get back to us.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It's alright. The LLS team will know. We've had LLS in the field literally every week now doing town hall meetings with farmers, talking about the signs to look for for lumpy skin and full foot-and-mouth disease. They will continue doing that. Steve, how many have we done of those?

**STEVE ORR:** Thanks, Minister. We've done 157 different events all up. Some of those have been quite specific on FMD and lumpy skin disease, whereas others we've been running other things and we've added in FMD and lumpy skin disease into those events. All up, I think we've had about four and a half thousand people attend those meetings.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Okay, thanks.



**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** And that will continue, because one of the things we do need to do is alert the landowners as to what they're looking out for but also how to deal with something if something happens, and then also training frontline workers. That would include stock and station agents, saleyards operators and all the staff in saleyards, freight operators. People that are already involved in that industry are going to be key. We need to know what happens if there is a stock movement that occurs; where are animals going to go; and how do we start preparing for that? That's what Scott and the team will actually be working on meaningfully around preparedness for that but also training people to know what the role is when certain things happen.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Heaven forbid if there is an outbreak, but if lumpy skin or FMD is identified, the deployment regime, I guess from biosecurity but also LLS—one of the issues that has been raised with me is the shortage of vets in regional New South Wales. There is a shortage of just about everything these days, but a shortage of vets. What are the arrangements in the event that it is identified—either FMD or lumpy skin—and the process for deployment?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Part of the work we will be doing now is around getting those vets onboarded and making sure they are part of that training. There are district vets with LLS, there are vets through DPI and there are local vets that are in private practice that will all work together on that. If we have an outbreak of foot and mouth, there would be an emergency order very quickly declared. Scott, you might be able to talk to exactly what that then sets out.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** You are right. We have identified where there are some narrow points in the funnel in terms of skills and capability. Part of the package of funding that we have just been given is actually to bolster training, not just for vets, but also for para-vets—for veterinary nurses and for technicians—and also to train up others to do things like vaccination, to do things like disposal, to do things like inspection and so forth. That is a key part of what we are doing over the next 12 months in terms of building that resource up. Bear in mind that the moment we get a detection, it is a national response; it is just the State in which the detection occurs has the lead.

Heaven forbid it's a New South Wales detection, in every other State and jurisdiction we have arrangements and plans in place to be able to draw upon their veterinary expertise and their veterinary capability to be able to flood the State with numbers that we need on that front. In terms of the actual response, we would have immediate access to the State emergency control centre and the SECON would act as a support for us in terms of bringing the resources that we need together from across all of the New South Wales Government, and then all of the private providers out there who also would have a key role to play.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Again, heaven forbid if it happens, but then destroying stock becomes pretty paramount and generally in large numbers if you look at the experience in England. Have we made arrangements for then burying or burning of the stock?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** That is part of what we are doing now, because you do need to work out where things would happen and how, without interfering with water aquifers, without being close to large population areas. All of that is part of what we are doing now. Again, it is all learnings. Scott and the team have been working on scenarios like this for a long time. I think the UK example that we heard about has given a bit more clarity about what did or didn't work in their cases. Learnings are important and the expertise we have in our team means that we can have a very clear direction of what we need to do. That \$65 million is record funding. No other jurisdiction has done that before, including the Australian jurisdiction. New South Wales has really put the hand up and said, "We will lead on this." I am catching up with Murray Watt again shortly to talk about the expectations of New South Wales, for other States and also the Federal Government to follow in and be able to do that same sort of training around the country.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** If this does happen and you have to destroy a large number of stock—as you would know, there are a number of farmers who have invested heavily, over generations in some cases, and are pretty proud of their own genetics within their herd or flock. What are we doing to assist those farmers in protecting their genetics or are we leaving it for them to do themselves?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Again, it probably needs to be at a Federal level, to be honest, and I will talk to Murray about this in coming days. The thing that has been talked about is a gene bank and whether there is a national one and/or a State-based one. Again, it is something that work has occurred on before. There does need to be a bit of agreement around some of the products that are manufactured, often overseas, that we need to start doing in Australia to help with that, to help with the flushing, to help with the storage. All of those things—there are some little blockages at the Federal level that we need to get through. Scott, can you talk about some of the gene banking technology we do have?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** If I come back to your original question, it will be a mix. There is not a doubt that the majority of major genetic studs within the Australian context are already gene banking for the genetic

improvements that they have been building over decades in terms of the work that they do. They are already actively doing that. This is about how do we make sure it's widely coordinated or that there is some form of awareness of rules. So, for example, one of the key things we need to make people aware of is the fact that once an outbreak occurs, it's too late then to start gene banking.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, it is too late. You are probably way ahead of this. Thank you. More to come.

**The CHAIR:** I might pick up on Mr Veitch's obsession with weeds. Minister, Hudson pear—are you aware of a petition circulating calling for urgent government intervention and dedicated positions to combat Hudson pear?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I am not aware of a petition, no. But we have done a lot of work on Hudson pear. Particularly in my part of the world and west of the State, there have been numerous programs running, including biological controls. That's been hampered a bit by wet weather, but they are ongoing nonetheless. I was up there in Walgett not that long ago talking to some of the landowners around what they are doing individually and as a combined team in working with some of the county councils around both spraying programs and biological controls. So, I am well aware of the issue and there's a lot of work and a lot of money going into doing everything we can to eradicate it.

**The CHAIR:** Can you explain why the free chemical program for landholders has ceased, given it is a fairly expensive chemical to spray: I think 800 bucks for a 20-litre drum? Obviously, if farmers have significant Hudson pear on their property, it is costing them tens of thousands of dollars. Can you explain why that free chemical program has ceased?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** When did that cease?

**The CHAIR:** I am not too sure. I have just been informed by farmers that it actually has ceased. You could seek advice.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I am not sure when it ceased. Have you got any information about that?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps take it on notice to find out when it was ceased and why?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I think you were alluding to the breeding facility out there in Lightning Ridge. Why don't we have a full-time, dedicated staff member for that facility?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** We have the county council that does the work there. Our regional weeds—

**The CHAIR:** But there is no-one actually at the facility full-time dedicated to managing that facility. Perhaps on notice, what is the current breeding capacity at that facility? Is it at its capacity in terms of breeding?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It certainly hasn't been because of the wet weather. That actually caused significant problems because of the incapacity to breed during the wet weather.

**The CHAIR:** Would you agree without actually having a dedicated staff member at that facility it would be hard for any facility to be working at an optimum rate?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It's not a facility where there is active human intervention. It's a facility where there is literally a container of the moths, essentially.

**The CHAIR:** What about dedicated, full-time staff to actually be applying this chemical? We are just relying on, essentially, the volunteers.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** No, we use LLS staff there all the time. All LLS staff across the western region are involved in a program. I have met with many of them and talked to them about the work they do. There are serious programs. The Castlereagh Macquarie County Council in that part of the world is the one that works with LLS. They receive annual grants. They have top-up grants. There are people on the ground literally every week doing that work. The suggestion there is not somebody there full-time, I think, is not really accurate. They may not be there every single day but they are there.

**The CHAIR:** Given that you are now seeing Hudson pear in Narran Lakes national park wetlands, five kilometres from the lake's edge, there is serious risk of it entering the Barwon-Darling River and then ultimately the Murray. Obviously, once it does that, we have got really no hope of controlling the spread, do we, Minister?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I would take more of an optimistic view than you would, perhaps. At the moment we are dealing with record flood levels in all sorts of parts of the State.

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate it.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** When flooding occurs, it is very hard to control the spread of weeds and Hudson pear is one. There will be others that we see in different areas of the State that we haven't seen before. I can assure you that LLS staff work their butts off. We have an early needs program, particularly for the North Coast, targeting all of those problem weeds that might pop up in places they haven't been seen before. The LLS teams on the ground are very well placed to identify, work with councils and county councils to make sure we do everything we can, and landowners, because it's a mix of everyone being involved. It's not just pointing the finger at one group. If people are working together, then we achieve far better results than if people are doing it one off.

**The CHAIR:** I totally agree. But there are concerns that maybe a lot of landholders are lifting above what they should have to. Given that we are seeing incursions of this Hudson pear in national parks and Crown Lands and travelling stock routes, there is an argument to say that perhaps more needs to be done from the Government perspective. I appreciate that you're under the pump on many fronts in terms of biosecurity, but here is a case where despite the work that we are doing it is still spreading and increasing in severity. Clearly what we are doing isn't enough to actually abate the problem. Would you agree?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I would agree that you could always do more but then where do you draw the line? Hudson pear is one of a number of weeds that are of concern.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Harissia.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** But again, LLS has staff on the ground each and every day. We have regional weed plans specifically focused on identifying the problem weeds in that region and then tasking on-ground work, including working with the county councils and the local councils, to do everything we can. But landowners are a massive part of it. If you're a landowner, you need to be working with LLS particularly. I think, Steve, we have a good record of doing that.

**The CHAIR:** Just on that note, how does LLS deal with—I guess you'd describe them as absent landholders. We hear a lot of good work being done by individual landholders spending thousands of dollars, but then there is a landholder next door who is never there and isn't as up to speed with their responsibilities. What is LLS doing to work on that absent landholder?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Steve, will you take that one?

**STEVE ORR:** Yes, I'm happy to take that one. Thanks, Minister. Mr Banasiak, we are about to put out the strategic weed plans for each one of the regions now for public consultation and public comment. That's the framework by which we deal with weeds collectively across each one of the LLS regions, not just on private land but across all particular tenures. The way in which we do that is to involve all land managers in relation to the management of weeds, be it on national parks, be it on TSRs or be it on private land. They are going to be going out shortly for comment. But to the Minister's point, LLS has significant staff resources in the field helping landholders. Equally, local councils have their own resources in the field as well and they are the compliance authority. If there are landholders doing the wrong thing, be they on private land or be they absentee landholders, it's the responsibility of those local control authorities to deal with those issues.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Good morning, Minister.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Good morning.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I want to ask you about the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry*, which as you know would have been recently released this month after about a seven-year development. The standards include a phase-out of battery cages over 10 to 15 years, depending on how long ago the cages were installed. Are you committed to actually implementing the national standards, including the battery cage phase-out, in New South Wales along with the other States and Territories?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** What I'm committed to doing over the next six months is to work with industry around the expectations that have been set out in those Federal guidelines but about how to make it work meaningfully in New South Wales.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you talking about a time line to make a decision or a time line to work out how it will work in New South Wales?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** A time line to work out how industry actually wants to see things move from here. The Federal Government has its own jurisdiction. Each State and Territory has its own set of guidelines

to work with. There is no imprimatur from the national level to actually have those rules imposed on other States. We will work at a New South Wales level, having seen those guidelines and standards come out, but we have our own opportunity to do that with industry now.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will there be a meeting of the agriculture Ministers scheduled—I know you said that it is State by State, and obviously the States will make their own decision, but the reason this has gone through a national process is because any sort of change still has to have some kind of national focus, given the effect it would have on people in other States if only one State made a change. Is there any kind of agriculture Ministers' meeting scheduled to discuss the implementation in each State? Is that coming up?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Not that I'm aware of specifically around poultry. There is certainly a Ministers' meeting coming up where we are talking about a range of topics. I'm not sure that this one is part of that agenda. But we've already started the work with industry around expectations of what could occur. I think there would be further discussions by all jurisdictions. Early next year is the time line I'm aware of, but I'm not sure if any other in-between ministerial meetings might look at that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You said there have already been some discussions with industry as to what could occur in New South Wales. Are you able to give any kind of indication as to where things are heading at this point?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Look, it is a difficult area. When you talk about eggs, there are a few things that you can look at. One is the cost of eggs and the availability of eggs. We have seen recently an undersupply of eggs, which are a really good protein source relied on by many families around New South Wales. That's part of the feedback I get. There is also feedback around how free-range, barn-laid and pastured egg systems work in conjunction with cage egg systems. There is a lot to work through. There are perceptions around how things work and there are realities around how things work. I think it's important to do some of that work back with industry and look at what they want to do at a State level. We are the largest producer of eggs so I think we need to be setting our own standards and guidelines and working out what will then lead the way for the rest of the country. But it's not a quick fix and I think people need to be aware of that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, you've talked a lot about consulting with industry. I know in media statements you have talked about talking with farmers, businesses and looking at the consumer issues. Will you also be considering the impact of the proposed changes on animal welfare? I notice that you haven't mentioned that either today or in the media.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** In what way?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Obviously the entire change of moving away from battery cages is a change for animal welfare. Will you be considering animal welfare? You've talked about consulting with industry and you've talked about looking at consumers. Will you also be considering animal welfare?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Absolutely. Everything we do considers animal welfare, but that also includes free-range and barn-laid eggs, which have welfare concerns and biosecurity concerns, to be frank, as well. Birds that are outside are far more of a risk as far as avian influenza into the future, spotty liver and a range of things that occur in outdoor birds that don't occur in indoor birds. There is a balance of things to be looked at. Absolutely, animal welfare is a part of all of those thoughts.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will you be consulting with animal protection organisations in regard to the impact of the standards? I know you mentioned you would be consulting with industry. Are you planning to consult with animal welfare experts as well?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm sure they'd be included in consultation.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you have any particular animal protection organisations that you plan to consult with on this?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** RSPCA is one that already does work in that space. I can't commit to working with anyone particularly, but when you talk about consultation, I think it is a fair expectation that you would talk to a range of those groups.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Talking about stakeholders and the groups that would be consulted, when I look at the key stakeholders under the DPI for the purposes of targeted consultation with the development of animal welfare regulations, I note that the Animal Welfare League NSW and the RSPCA are there as enforcement agencies. But there is actually nobody within the targeted consultation representing animal advocacy or animal welfare expertise. Why is that?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm not sure.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you think it's appropriate that the Minister that obviously has control of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, which is the primary animal cruelties Act, is not including animal protection organisations within the key stakeholder groups?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It's something we could discuss. I think the industry representatives that are there cover a fair bit, bearing in mind that every single industry group has animal welfare at its heart. The way you are framing that question would suggest that people don't have the welfare of animals as part of what they do each and every day. I can assure you that is not correct.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Good morning, Minister.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Good morning.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Could I refer you to current coastal forestry operations? The Natural Resources Commission released a report in June 2021. On page 126 of that report there was a clear recommendation that we do much more in terms of protecting our hollow-bearing trees and our recruitment trees on the basis that we need to protect those hollow-bearing and old tree-dependent forest fauna. We know we have just seen the greater glider up-listed closer to extinction. We know yellow-bellied gliders are about to get there, as are a number of other animals. Are you ready, willing and able to increase the protections to hollow-bearing trees and the recruitment system of those hollow-bearing trees in logging operations across New South Wales?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** At the start, can I just clarify what report you are talking about?

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I am talking about the NRC's *Final report - Coastal IFOA operations post 2019/20 wildfires June 2021*. It was tabled in Parliament the week before last but it has been available publicly, and to you, since June 2021.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I think you'll find—I won't talk about that report specifically because, as you would know, it is cabinet-in-confidence. It may have been tabled but it is not for me to break that cabinet-in-confidence. But around hollow-bearing trees, I think everyone is well aware of the need to continue to work at an industry level around making sure that everything is done that can be done to protect hollow-bearing trees. Forestry Corporation, for example, is working with the EPA around better clarification on how that actually looks on the ground. I know it is something that they are working very diligently towards ensuring we have the correct policy in place, and it is followed absolutely, from my perspective, to the letter of the law.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, the question was quite specific: Are we willing to take the advice of the NRC and actually increase the efforts that we are currently required under the IFOA in relation to hollow-bearing and retention trees?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** As I said, if you're specifically asking about the report, I won't be discussing that report.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** No, let's not talk about that report then, if you want to put that aside. Minister, are you as the Minister willing, able and ready to require better protections—as experts other than the NRC have recommended—to increase the hollow-bearing tree requirement and, most importantly, the retention requirement for future hollow-bearing trees within logging operations in New South Wales?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** There are already requirements in place that do have to be followed.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Is that no? We are not ready, willing and able to increase—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** No, it is not no. We are already working with the EPA and the EHG on following specifically those guidelines.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** To increase the efforts that we are currently making in relation to hollow-bearing and recruitment trees.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** That is already in place. There are specific rules and regulations around hollow-bearing trees in State forests and how they must be regarded.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** And we are willing to increase those efforts?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Absolutely.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** In light of the recent and—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, could I just add one piece there, if I may, which is that obviously as a species' status changes—such as sugar gliders, for example—as their status changes, that also acts as a trigger that enables the EPA to consider whether the current provisions within the IFOA are in fact suitable and sufficient. If they find

that they are not, they actually have the capacity to either change the protocols under which Forestry Corporation operates, which they can do in consultation with Forestry Corp; or to actually change the conditions of the IFOA, which obviously requires the support of both Ministers. There are triggers there that are in place, should there be a change in the status for a species, that enables that kind of a review to occur.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Mr Hansen, are you suggesting, because the greater glider has just been uplisted and we are likely to see the yellow-bellied glider any day added to the list, that we should be re-looking at the hollow-bearing retention rates that we are currently applying?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I am saying that the current system is in place that enables a review to be undertaken by appropriate agencies to work out whether to increase or not.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I will stick with the Minister's commitment that we are doing that and that we are looking at that. In relation to the fairly significant compliance and regulatory responses and actions that we have been seeing over the past couple of years in our public forests, and the Forestry Corporation coming under regulatory responses of noncompliance, are we doing anything, Minister, in relation to the approved and planning schedules of compartments in Boambee, Collombatti, Conglomerate, Orara East, Clouds Creek, Kangaroo River, Little Newry, Nambucca, Oakes, Orara West, Tamban and Wild Cattle Creek State forests to ensure that we are not going to see more noncompliance, particularly in relation to the pattern of noncompliance which relates to the giant trees and the failure to retain those giant trees and habitat and hollow-bearing trees?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Can I start by saying that all of the operations that are run by Forestry Corporation are done within the scope of how they should be? Now, there have been some unfortunate mistakes made along the way. Can I say that since I've been in this role, every meeting I have had with Anshul—who I will pass over to shortly—has been around the fact that I expect at the highest level there to be 100 per cent compliance? There is no excuse for not getting it right. There have been some occasions where both human error and technological error have caused problems but, to me, that is unacceptable going forward. Forestry Corporation is very well aware of the expectation from not just me but from the community on getting things right. To your specific—

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** So will you require them?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I don't know enough about those specific operations but, Anshul, can you take that on board for me?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Yes, absolutely. Just to reiterate, Ms Higginson, our expectation also is that we comply 100 per cent with the environmental regulation. In fact, by and large—we carry out hundreds of operations in State forests each year, and the majority of them are fully compliant with the law. But, as the Minister said, sometimes unfortunately, due to human error, unintentional mistakes occur. When you look at them, the majority of them occur in an office environment where a map has not been updated or something along those lines, and that has resulted in a contractor going into an exclusion zone. But these incidents which we are talking about have happened more than two years ago. Some of them go back to 2017. The reason I say that is because since that point, particularly over the last two years, we have really recalibrated our compliance regime. We have put more staff on the ground; we have performed more pre-arborist audits. We have really elevated the compliance. We have re-inducted all our contractors to make sure that we get better compliance outcomes. We are starting to see that improve as well.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Is that in light of the—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Ms Higginson, your time has now well and truly lapsed. I will pass to the Opposition.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, I want to go back to some biosecurity issues. On the role of the wild pig population, particularly as it comes to foot and mouth disease, what work are we doing to assess that? Are we increasing any eradication programs for the wild pig population?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes, absolutely—and significantly, in fact. We have done, through LLS, an incredible range of different operations over the past little while, including this year. There have been over 30,000 feral pigs, wild pigs, eradicated this year alone. There have been significant projects that are targeted in the Riverina, where over 40,000 pigs were eradicated 12 to 18 months ago. We are using baiting, aerial shooting and a range of different methods to bring some of that under control. We have invested a huge amount of money. Over the next 12 months it is nearly \$23 million we are investing back with LLS to actually target some of those species around making sure that, as much as possible, we can get those levels of wild pigs and other animals like deer under control.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I am glad you mentioned deer—that is a good segue. Minister, the Illawarra Wild Deer Management Program—how much has been spent, do you know, on that in the last couple of years? Has there been any increase in the deer-culling programs in the Illawarra?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I am not sure specifically about the Illawarra.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Happy for you to take that on notice and I can come back to you this afternoon, if you want, Mr Orr?

**STEVE ORR:** Yes, we will take that on notice, Mr Veitch, and come back to you this afternoon.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** The Chair is quite excited because I am asking about deer in the Illawarra.

**The CHAIR:** I could have answered.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Do you tend to increase, though, the eradication?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Absolutely. The focus is very much back on animals like deer and pigs, as I said, because of the fact that we know there have been significant numbers building up on that Illawarra escarpment, for one, but in other parts of the State as well. There are several programs that are already running, but there is, absolutely, through LLS—with that uplift in funding—a plan to very much target those animals again in different ways. There are different ways of targeting the operations, depending on where you are. Peri-urban areas are very difficult, whether it is in the Illawarra or on the North Coast. There are lots of interactions between urban areas, beach areas and wild animals. It is a very delicate scenario. There is a lot of training involved, but also there is a lot of collaboration between LLS and landowners to make sure that things work properly—and with councils.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, I asked this last time and I know Mr Hansen is pretty good at reading what I did last time—he is usually prepared. Prosecutions by LLS of public land managers—now, the question was taken on notice last time and we came back with a response as it relates to weeds but not pests. Can I just ask, particularly since the 2016 Act came into operation—where, as you say, biosecurity is everyone's responsibility—how many prosecutions of public land managers have there been since 2016 for pests?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** How many, Steve, any idea?

**STEVE ORR:** Is this in relation to weeds or is it in relation to—

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** No, pests. Animal pests.

**STEVE ORR:** Animal pests. Again, I'll come back to you, Mr Veitch, in relation to the numbers of prosecutions in relation to public land managers, if that's your question.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, public land managers.

**STEVE ORR:** I'll come back to you this afternoon on that, Mr Veitch.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I know the Minister, the same as I, every time you go out farmers will say, "I spend lots and lots of money on pests and weeds on my land but I look across the fence and the public land manager doesn't seem to be doing as much." I would just like to know LLS's role in that and just how many prosecutions—what is the compliance action? What does that picture look like?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes, to be fair, different land managers have their own regimes, if you like. National Parks would operate slightly differently to how LLS operates within State Forests and Forestry Corp. The requirements are all slightly different for different agencies.

**STEVE ORR:** I think the other thing, Mr Veitch, as the Minister was alluding to, the additional funding which was announced a couple of weeks back will certainly assist and ramp up pest animal control activities right across the State over the next six months. And they will be joint efforts. It just won't be on private land; they will be joint efforts including public land managers.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** We might explore that a bit more this afternoon, Mr Orr. It is actually pretty important. Minister, I want to move on now away from biosecurity—not that it is any less important—to commercial fishing. I have had the time to go through the economic and social indicators for the New South Wales commercial fisheries. I think in April 2020 the report came out. I know the chair has probably got a folder full of questions as well about this. But just a couple of things, Minister, what is your take on those reports of the status of the commercial fishing sector?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I think the commercial fishing sector has been under pressure for quite some time with new rules and regulations, sustainable yields and how that interacts with a commercial fishing

operation. I haven't got the specifics of that report right in front of me now, but I'm happy for Sean to provide any specifics if you want specifics on that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I will explore this with Mr Sloan this afternoon in a bit more detail. I really want to know what your take is on those reports that have come out. Some of the commercial fishers who have been in touch with my office have raised concerns about those reports. There is a criticism—not my word, one of the words that was used by one of the email correspondents—around the authenticity of those and what is the actual intent of those assessments. If I need to put to bed this, Minister, these reports are not looking at the compensation that may be required if you were to shut out a complete fishery. Would that be the case?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm not sure what you are referring to exactly.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** One of things that is circulating now—it has come to my office, and I dare say Mr Banasiak has seen the same thing—is that these reports that were prepared are actually another way of determining what compensation may need to be paid if you want to shut out a fishery in the commercial fishing sector.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Are you talking specifically about the southern fish trawl, for example, going to the Commonwealth?

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** No, no.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I am not sure what you're referring to.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I will give you an example. Say you want to shut down the Estuary General Fishery. Were these reports in any way used for that purpose?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Not that I'm aware of, no, and there is certainly no intent to shut down any fishery. Can you provide any detail on that?

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Mr Hansen or Mr Sloan?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Can I just make sure I'm hearing the question right, and that is the fact that we are now consistently and reliably collecting the economic data about how Fisheries is performing—which is something we do across all other commodities across all other areas of Primary Industries—that that's being interpreted as giving us a benchmark for a shutdown or buyout of a fishery would be, in which case the answer is no. The data has been collected as a result out of recommendations that came out of the reforms that said one of the pieces we were missing was a consistent underlying benchmark for how the commercial sector was performing. Now, when were they experiencing financial difficulties? When were they getting uplifts? That's what that data is intended to be. It is not getting a valuation on a fishery for the purposes of buyout.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Thank you. I think I might leave because I think the Chair has a few more questions around commercial fisheries.

**The CHAIR:** No, keep going.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** No, I'm not going to steal your thunder. The floods on the North Coast, the member for Lismore has raised with me a couple of issues around the floodwaters on farming land, particularly the sugarcane farmers where there are these large channels, I guess, and the floodwater is sitting in these channels. They really need quite large pumps to remove the water from those channels. Again, Minister, what assistance has been provided to those farmers to assist in that level of flood recovery for their farmland?

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Look, specifically around the drains, that became one of the most noticeable things on some of the visits that I have done, and you have been on at least one of those.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** John Culleton has been appointed. I can't remember the exact date, but it was a few months ago now I appointed John Culleton as the Agricultural Drains Coordinator committed to find some short-term, medium-term, long-term solutions to the drains. Some of those drains are small. Some of them are like large canals and have weirs on them. But the more travelling I did with some of the sugarcane growers particularly, it showed that there is a consistent problem, no matter what the size of the drain is. And some of it relates to unknown requirements previously; some of it relates to red tape from a council perspective; some of it relates to some of the requirements for fisheries. So there is a range of things. John has been specifically on the ground for the past couple of months liaising with landowners around their local drains and what some of the solutions might be.



The first thing we are trying to do is if there is a simple paperwork thing that can be done, we are trying to do that. If there is some work that needs to be done to clear a drain, with approval from the EPA and there can be a standardised version of doing that, we are trying to find a way to standardise some of the simple things that can be done. And then at a larger level there is trying to find out the cost, the implications and the number of changes that would need to be done on the larger scale around things like weirs. So there is a lot of work going on there. I have had a couple of meetings with John and other stakeholders up there in the last couple of months and we are getting close to some really good, quick, fast solutions and then there will be more to come after that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** These drains have been an issue for quite a while. I was up there—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes, 30, 40 years.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, we had an inspection of one of those drains a couple of years ago and the water was actually, I would suggest, in this particular place near toxic because they weren't allowed to let it back into the waterways.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** And that's part of the concern. If you have acid sulphate soils, their releasing it back into the river can cause problems, but if you do it at the right time, it actually helps clear it out and get it away from the environment. Lots of different parts to the answer to that one, but work is being done.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** The time frame?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** He has literally been doing it for the past couple of months. Last time I met with him would have been probably four, five weeks ago on the north coast of Ballina. We are continuing to, as quickly as we can, get that done. I think it is by the end of this year he will have a report back to myself and to the director general on some of the more medium things. Anything we can do now, he is trying to do right now with councils, but for the longer term planning, that would be a report that comes back to us.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Has this flood been the catalyst to try to determine a longer term solution to what has been a decades-long problem?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Look, it probably has been. It is one of those things where when you have the worst-case scenario of a flooding event like we have seen—there has been more water than anyone could have ever expected or thought that could happen—and it then shows that there are problems within that system. I acted very quickly. John has a lot of experience with fish passageway. He has been leading a taskforce on that in previous years and was an obvious person to shift into that role very quickly, given it became one of the largest problems that emerged while I was up there.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** The other question around the floods up north relates to damage to DPI's asset itself. I think a lot of people don't realise, but DPI has a number of assets that were impacted by the floods. Can you provide us the status of two things: one is where are we up to in restoring those assets, and, two, how much is it costing us?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It is probably something I will hand to Scott, if it's okay?

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The vast majority of our assets up there that have been damaged, and it is either across not necessarily Wollongbar but a number of our other stations, have been insured and, as such, we've been making claims back on our insurance to be able to remedy and rectify. At the moment, the majority of the infrastructure damage has actually been claimed back through insurance. Obviously, that doesn't take into account any lost pastures, any lost trials et cetera. I think we lost two head of livestock as a result, where our staff, because they live on site, had not only to take care of themselves and their families but also took care of livestock and moved them to higher ground. When the livestock did get dispersed, they were able to get out and find them and help bring them all back together. The vast majority of all of our damage is actually covered by insurance.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I should say that LLS, which received some significant damage in Lismore particularly, is now co-located at the DPI site at Wollongbar. So there has been great collaboration in making sure that everyone is getting what they need as far as support and office space and that sort of thing.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** That's good. It is very good of Mr Hansen to allow Mr Orr to move his people.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Vice nice. We are very collaborative here.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Very accommodating.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Just on that, how is the welfare of our staff that were affected?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It has been an extremely difficult time, as you well know. When you visit areas that have been impacted by the worst natural disaster ever, it's very difficult. And we had both LLS and DPI staff involved of flood rescues of people and animals. In the early part we tried to provide as much support as possible. People are literally doing what they can to help their family and other families around them survive at the time. We had a number of incredible people involved in rescues of other people and then on the ground helping landowners recover from what has been an indescribable event. As Minister, I'm extremely proud of and grateful for everything that staff have done across the board. There is assistance available through the EAP for all of those staff, and I think there have been meaningful efforts from all levels to try and encourage people to reach out and seek the help if it's required. That will be ongoing.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Okay, thank you. Minister, can I move on to the role of the NSW Agriculture Commissioner? As I understand it, there's a second report being prepared by the Agriculture Commissioner?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes, the Agriculture Commissioner is doing a report specifically around land use conflict, particularly focused on large-scale renewable energy. That was something I tasked him to do earlier on this year, and he's due to report back in the next few months around how that's going. We've done a number of sessions together. He has done a number of sessions and taken submissions from landowners right around the State about both transmission routes and also the actual large-scale renewables, whether it's wind turbines or large-scale solar. That report will come back in and it will be considered by Government when it does.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Has the Government responded to all the recommendations from the Agriculture Commissioner in his first report?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** No. Part of it was taken on board. Then very quickly I formed the opinion that we needed to move in a second direction on this. We will respond to both of those at the same time. But I think one of the more noticeable things in the first report was around where land use conflict was heading, and that's why we decided to very quickly pivot and get this report done at the same time.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Things like HumeLink, which down my way is clearly quite a substantial issue, was that a part of the—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** All transmission routes are. There are some realities around humans and requiring electricity from somewhere and getting it to somewhere else. But very much a part of the role that the Agriculture Commissioner will play is feeding back in some of the literally on the ground concerns around all of the things I've mentioned previously, and if there are other solutions that people have come up with, how we look at them. That's in conjunction with EnergyCo, which is driving most of that now for the State Government. So the Agriculture Commissioner is working very closely with the planning department and EnergyCo and making sure that we have a good pathway into the future. Daryl, if you wanted to make any comments about how it has gone from your perspective—

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I'd like to explore this if I get time this afternoon with Mr Quinlivan, because there are a few aspects of this, particularly, for instance—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Just to clarify, HumeLink is an AEMO. It's not really a State-controlled thing. But EnergyCo has a place in that, and the work around Wagga Wagga that we're looking at as far as renewables is—

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Is that around Mates Gully?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes. So it's all part of the same thing, but HumeLink is a Federal project, so it is slightly different. But I'm sure there will be some information that comes through.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** It's causing some serious angst right along the proposed transmission corridor. It doesn't matter whether you're at Bannaby or down to the Ellerslie valley on Yaven Creek—people are quite concerned.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Your Federal colleagues might be able to help you out with that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I think they might have inherited something they're trying to sort through. I want to explore it a bit more this afternoon with Mr Quinlivan. The main thing I want to know from you, Minister, is: Will you respond to both reports at the same time? Is that your plan?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes, essentially. The first report came out and there were a few key things that were obvious to me out of that. One was the land use conflict piece. Rather than taking time and responding to the entire report that the Agriculture Commissioner had done, we decided to pivot very quickly and continue

his role in another direction to make sure that we were targeting the most serious of those concerns, which was land use conflict. So that will be responded to at the same time.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** And so a whole-of-government response to both reports is the plan?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Do you think Mr Quinlivan will be doing a third report?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I don't know. Have you got something he should do a third report on?

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Well, as you know, land use conflict is a serious issue.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It really is. We'll hopefully get some good, clear guidelines out of the report, but if we need to pivot and do more work very quickly, we will certainly attempt to do that. But I think things have evolved even over the past two years around what people think of when they think of large-scale renewables and the expectation of communities now around the social licence for large-scale renewables. I think it's an important piece to do. That's why I wanted to do it. If it brings up some things that we again need to pivot on and clarify, then we might do that. I can't pre-empt what the report might say.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Isn't the issue here, Minister, that you've got some prime agricultural land? I look at Mates Gully as I drive past there, and on those flats there is some prime agricultural land. And they're concerned about large-scale solar farms going on that very good agriculture land. That's the nature of the conflict that's going to take place—the benefit for the State but we also need food and fibre.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** We do. There are probably several ways that I'm trying to pivot that sector into other areas and have been for a couple of years, looking at ways of rehabilitating mine land, for example, where, rather than trying to replant with trees, we can pivot and look at covering with solar panels. Formerly utilised and disturbed land is, to my way of thinking, a really good opportunity to increase our renewable footprint, and that's certainly something that we've got support on from the energy Minister and the Treasurer. Part of that is around finding other land that is usable and minimising the use on that ag land as much as we can.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** So will there be a Government response before Christmas? I can put that in my diary.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I would expect that.

**The CHAIR:** While the secretariat hands up a document to you, I just thought I'd close a loop on the Hudson pear issue for the moment. Are you aware that both the task force committee and some of the local councils support the idea of a dedicated staff member solely for Hudson pear management? No?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm not.

**The CHAIR:** Let's move to forestry. I wish I could show you this video but I can't, so I'll just give you a screenshot of it. It's a video of your former colleague Ms Cusack basically making some false accusations while she's on a working forestry site with no PPE and no permission. She has also been part of a group that has sought to disrupt forestry operations in Ellis State Forest where they're physically chaining themselves to equipment in such a way that it requires police rescue to come from three hours away to get them, which means it wipes out the whole day.

You would appreciate, with the floods up there, this has probably been the only week and a half or two weeks that these operations have been able to go ahead. Then you've got these clowns disrupting operations. Given that we've got right to farm laws that we brought in in 2019 and given that we've just passed other significant legislation to deal with disruptive protests, what are we doing here in this situation with these laws when clearly they're either not being administered or not enforced, because they keep coming, day after day? The forestry workers are at their wits' end. They're in tears because it is the one week they've had to put some food on the table for their family and it has been destroyed by these clowns.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It is disappointing. There are laws that are enforceable, and the police do everything they can—literally, physically—to try and prevent any of the blockages that do occur. The main concern I have, to your point, is for the workers, who quite literally are worried about putting other people's lives at risk. When you're in a forest scenario with large machinery and people popping out from behind trees and bushes, it is dangerous. It is reckless and it is unfair to the forestry operators, who find it very difficult to focus on what they're doing when they're concerned about other people who might be there. It is almost impossible to have enough police officers on the ground to stop this happening. I respect everyone's right to protest, but I do not respect people going into the forest and putting their lives and other people's lives at risk. I would suggest that they do it on the outskirts, where it is a safe place to protest. My expectation is that people do think about the other

humans they're impacting by doing this. Police will keep doing what they can, but it is almost impossible to blockade the blockaders from entering all of our forest sites.

**The CHAIR:** Do we need to look at strengthening our work health and safety laws as another alternative?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** What does that do? You literally can't stop the hundreds of people, sometimes, that turn up to a forest. Strengthening laws might be part of that, but it's not going to stop this sort of activity happening, is it? That's the reality. The Deputy Premier has taken really strong action against illegal protesters of all kinds. We've seen people stringing themselves on trucks and on cranes and disrupting rail; it's the same in that case. He's committed, as police Minister, to do everything he can. I would just ask the people to respect other humans and think about their mental health.

**The CHAIR:** Agreed. Moving onto another issue, Minister, at the last estimates on 15 March I asked a few questions regarding a DPI Fisheries staff member who was caught illegally fishing in Jervis Bay Marine Park sanctuary zone. At the time, did you feel it necessary to seek any level of briefing from your department on that matter after you heard that line of questioning? I think you'd left for the day.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I don't recall that, no.

**The CHAIR:** After estimates, I asked a series of follow-up questions seeking some further detail—question No. 8832, for those playing at home. Can you talk me through the process of how you came to answer those questions when they were put to you? I'm oblivious to the process you go through when we put written questions. Do you go directly to Mr Hansen or Mr Sloan? And then, from there, where do they seek the answers from?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Look, I don't recall that specific question you are asking. I don't know what that question was—883?

**The CHAIR:** It was a whole series of questions seeking more detail on the actual event and compliance of the event.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** And did you receive the answers?

**The CHAIR:** I did receive the answer, which we'll get to in a minute. Mr Hansen or Mr Sloan, do you recall the Minister seeking answers to those questions?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think I recall. I'm not sure I've got the right one in my head, so we can come to that in a moment. But in terms of the process piece, it does get referred down to the department. The department then either sends it out to the relevant branch level or to deputy director generals or directors to complete the answers. They get drafted back up. They get put through a parliamentary liaison officer back up to the Minister's office. They review the answers and then, if satisfied, they submit them. If not, they send it back, asking for either more information or for us to be clearer in some of the responses, and we send them through.

**The CHAIR:** So in the case of this series of questions, which was really going to the heart of the matter in terms of when, where, how, et cetera, how far down the chain did that go, Mr Hansen?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It depends on which ones you're talking about. If it was the one about the impact on fish and on sustainability of the marine park of a penalty infringement notice being issued to an individual—

**The CHAIR:** That was part of the line of questioning, but there were probably about nine or 10 questions.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** One like that, I daresay it probably didn't get too far down the track for details because, obviously, the answer of a single individual being caught, as opposed to—

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate that.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think your follow-up question was, "Why don't we then release and let everyone fish in marine parks?"

**The CHAIR:** More specifically, though, the questions that went to the heart of the actual matter in terms of when, where, how—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Okay. Those pieces would have gone—

**The CHAIR:** How far down did that go? Did that go to Mr Sloan? Did it go to the compliance officers?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** They would have gone all the way down to the compliance officers involved in that action so that we could get the data and information around all those pieces. Those ones do actually require us to

go down to the authorised officers to get the information but, again, some of those other questions were able to be resolved without having to go down to compliance officers to ask them.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, before we got cut off by the timer you were making comments around the fact that consulting with industry about welfare—you sort of implied that there was no need to actually consult with independent animal welfare experts. I'm wondering how many dedicated animal advocacy organisations you have actually met with since you took responsibility for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm not 100 per cent sure on that, but can I clarify? What I was implying before the time cut us off was the fact that industry organisations also, at their very heart, have animal welfare as part of what they do because they have to. Landowners, farmers of all kinds—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But, Minister, do you also recognise that there is a really important place to actually consult with independent animal welfare experts as well, outside of industry?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Sure.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. I've had a look at your ministerial diary. You've had one meeting with the RSPCA and one meeting with the Animal Welfare League since you took over the portfolio, but no meetings at all with any other animal protection organisations. In comparison, you've met with NSW Farmers nine times this year. As I understand it, there have been several animal advocacy organisations that have requested meetings with you. Why haven't you taken up those offers and actually met with some of those independent welfare experts given, as you say, it's important to actually include them as well?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm not aware that I've had any other requests that have come through from anyone particularly. But I think if you also look at my diary, you would see I've been reasonably busy during that period of time. Any suggestion that I have not met with anyone for any reason apart from being rather busy, I don't accept. Apart from probably official meetings, I've seen RSPCA at several events that I've been at; same with the Animal Welfare League, who were part of the flood recovery efforts up there. I literally went and visited them on a couple of occasions, so I think I've taken everything on board from animal welfare organisations, despite your assertion that I haven't met with a couple of them that I'm not sure about.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Talking about RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League, in the last budget estimates you committed—which I was quite pleased about—to a review of their funding, specifically for their enforcement costs. I think there have been about three inquiries now where I believe there has been a recommendation that their enforcement costs are covered in full by government. I'm just wondering if you can give us a bit of an update on that review into the enforcement funding?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Certainly. It's underway. It's now happening, and we'll have a report back at some point that points to exactly what you're talking about, but the review is underway.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you have any idea when it will be finalised?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Not specifically, no. But it started in the last few weeks, I think. I'm not sure of the official date it started, but it is underway now.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And will the review be made public once it's finalised?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I think so, yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. I'm wondering what the review will actually put together. I understand that the two organisations have been very clear with their budgetary needs and, as I said, there have been a few inquiries now with some pretty solid recommendations. What are you hoping that this review will actually reveal that we don't already know?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm not going to pre-empt what the review might actually look at. But I'm aware that all organisations, whether they're animal welfare or not, would always like more money to do whatever they do. They are given significant amounts of grant funding every year. If we use the RSPCA as an example, we've spent over \$10.5 million on refitting the—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But I believe a lot of the money that has gone to these organisations is around the rehoming costs. Can I assume that this review will be targeted towards the enforcement costs?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I think the review will be whatever it needs to be around the funding for those organisations, bearing in mind that compliance is done by New South Wales police as well as these organisations. There's a shared responsibility there. The RSPCA receives over \$400,000 every year in a grant. Part of that is around them doing compliance work, but part of it's around them doing other work.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Which I think is less than 2 per cent of their costs, just to put that into perspective.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** And we spent \$10.5 million on upgrading their facilities at Yagoona.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** As I said, they've got those rehoming costs as well, and that's important. I'm not saying it's not important—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** But there's constant support there from Government.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** —but I'm just talking about the enforcement costs at this point in time. Can I get a commitment from you, Minister, that that review will be completed and made public before we end up in a March election?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I can't commit to knowing exactly what time frame that will be. So, no, I can't get that commitment to you right now.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So it could take longer than March next year?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It could.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I want to talk to you about the Game and Feral Animal Control Regulation 2022. You would have been aware that there was significant community backlash around some of the proposals that were put forward around allowing children under the age of 12 to hunt with weapons and to allow teens to hunt unsupervised. I know now, obviously, they didn't make it through to the regulations. Those proposals seem to have been scrapped, which is good news. I want to know how those proposals were put forward. Was there a section of the community that was advocating for those proposals to be put on the table and considered?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It was one of those things where it's part of a process, the draft regulation being up for review. So it was a review process that was due to happen anyway. There were submissions—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But I'm wondering about those two very specific—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** They were suggestions that came forward from submissions. When you do consultation, people put forward submissions. They are then assessed by—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Weren't the proposals put forward before the submissions came in?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Scott?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think we need to be clear. I've seen a number of people make the misleading statement that the proposal that was out in that draft regulation was intended to give eight-year-olds access to weapons to go hunting. That's not the case.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Removing the age limit would allow anyone, wouldn't it?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It continues to be the case that if you're under 18, you can't have a licence for a firearm. Therefore, this wasn't about changing—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No, I'm not talking about firearms. We're talking about weapons. I think it was about bow hunting and hunting with dogs.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** This was a proposal that had been worked up through the game advisory board. The intent there was the idea that—at the moment, a child down to the age of 12 can get a licence to be able to participate in hunting, that's without a firearm, with parents or with elder siblings. If you took that down to the age of eight, that would enable more children to go through the education component that's required for the licensing part. Keep in mind that there is no licensing requirement on private land hunting and, bear in mind there is no limit as to the age at which they can accompany without participating in the hunting process. When I say "participating in the hunting process", that can be the spotting of animals or so forth.

That was an idea about trying to take down the age at which education programs were developed. It got put into the draft regulations and it got taken out for consultation. The feedback that came back in was mixed in terms of the support for greater education versus the potential for younger people to be in potentially dangerous situations. So the department has erred on the side of caution in recommending regulations that didn't make that adjustment. But I come back to the intent of why they were written up in the first place. It wasn't to allow younger children to go out there with weapons to kill. It was actually to increase the number of people who are already participating, or already accompanying others, to be able to be part of the training program and have recognition for that training.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** We'll come back to that.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Since the land management code came into effect in 2018, your Government has approved over half a million hectares of land clearing, 150,000 hectares of which is woody vegetation and native grasses; non-invasive native species. That's an area over 500 times the size of the Sydney CBD. Do you think that's acceptable?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** To be clear, authorised clearing is clearing that has been given approval. Of that authorised—that figure you're quoting, the 500 and something, includes invasive native species.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I acknowledge that. So 150,000 hectares, 500 times the size of the Sydney CBD, is non-invasive native species. That's a huge area. Is that acceptable?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Not as far as land scale in New South Wales; it's a very small area. And 4 per cent of that that was approved has actually been cleared in any way, shape or form.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I agree. I'm glad that you mention that.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Misguided figures don't help anyone.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** You would acknowledge then that three-quarters of the actual clearing doesn't have the requisite approvals. That's concerning, isn't it?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** No, 4 per cent of the authorised approvals is done.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** All you're describing is a ticking timebomb for land clearing approvals which haven't been acted on.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Not at all. What you're suggesting is that land managers—

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Then let's talk about the clearing that's actually occurred. Three-quarters of it doesn't even have the requisite approvals. How do you explain that?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Well, that's not true.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** It is; it's in the report.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I disagree.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Unexplained clearing: 74 per cent for the last three years.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It's not unexplained, it's unallocated.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Unallocated; you've changed the name.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** There is a difference between—

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** But most of that is either—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Do you understand—

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** —without the requisite approvals or illegal, right?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Do you understand what unallocated clearing is?

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I do. More so than you, I suspect, because I've been asking questions about this for three years. Changing the name of it doesn't change what it is. It doesn't have the requisite approvals, does it?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It does have the—it's taken on notice and the landowner, for example, can assess a pasture, a paddock, and say, "If it is less than 50 per cent native pasture then I might put that paddock back into cropping."

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Okay. How much of the unexplained clearing has been that?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Hang on. And if I choose to go back into cropping, then you would suggest that I have engaged in an illegal activity, which I completely disagree with and it is completely non-factual.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I look forward to you reporting on how you explain the 74 per cent of unexplained clearing, because I've asked your officials and the environment Minister's officials and what I get is, "We're still talking about how to describe it."

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** There are different land classifications, as you know, and unallocated clearing falls into—it can be clearing for a fence line. It can be for—

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** How much is for fence lines?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** —power poles.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** How much is for power poles?

**The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT:** Let him finish.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It can be for putting back into pasture. So it can be a range of things.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I'll put all those on notice and I look forward to hearing the percentage of the unexplained clearing that's been allocated to each of those. That would be useful for the public to be aware of.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I would suggest that also people need to be aware that of the clearing that is authorised, 4 per cent of it is actually done, and our landowners, our farmers, are fantastic land managers. There is nothing wrong with having authorisation to clear land for productive agriculture.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** In 2019 the Natural Resources Commission reported that the Part 3 - Pasture Expansion rules represent a statewide risk to biodiversity. Since that time approvals for Part 3 have quadrupled. That's hugely concerning, isn't it?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Do you want to feed people?

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** So you're okay with a statewide risk to biodiversity? You're okay with landholders destroying—there's not enough cleared land out there to feed people; is that what you're saying?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** What I'm saying is that if people have authorisations to put crops in where there is less than 50 per cent native pasture, then they are able to do that, and that is not illegal.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Most of this clearing wasn't authorised.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It is unallocated.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** It's a bit Orwellian, don't you think? Last week the environment Minister confirmed that the biodiversity Act and the LLS Act will be reviewed. It will go through a statutory review and he signed off on the terms of reference. Have you signed off on the terms of reference?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I have.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** So part 5A and part 5B of the Act and the land management code will be subject to the review as well?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** We're looking at an overarching statutory review.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** No, it's a simple question. Will the code be subject to the review?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** No.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** The code that actually defines how most of the clearing occurs will not be reviewed?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** At this point in time we are looking at the overarching statutory review. We're doing the terms of reference around how that will look and those terms of reference will be made public shortly.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** That's extraordinary. The rules that your own independent natural resource adviser have warned are a statewide risk to biodiversity will not be reviewed as part of the statutory review?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** The statutory review and those terms of reference will be out shortly. I've signed off on them and they'll be out shortly.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** So they'll be made public, will they, the terms of reference?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** But what you're saying is that the code won't be reviewed?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I am sorry, I shouldn't have said that. I'm not sure whether it will. The terms of reference I haven't put out there yet so it's not part of that discussion.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Mr Orr, can you help?

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Field, under 212 of the LLS Act, it's pretty clear what a statutory review is to do. The statutory review is to review the Act since it's been in place, for the last five years, in the context of—

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** So not the code? Simple.



**STEVE ORR:** —the objectives of the Act in line with the terms of the Act. That's what the Act actually talks about in the context of the statutory review.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Will the code be reviewed, according to the terms of reference that the Minister signed off on?

**STEVE ORR:** That's a matter for the Minister to talk about in terms of his terms of reference. But statutory reviews are typically about the objectives which the Government originally laid down when they put the legislation in place, as you'd be aware, along with how they then relate to the terms of the Act.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Right, no review. Minister, has there been any assessment on the likely increase in timber harvesting that will result from the remake of the private native forestry codes?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It's hard to have an actual volume, but the renewable farm forestry in New South Wales accounts for about 30 per cent of all of our high-quality sawn timber. The huge increase in support that we are providing through LLS and the way that the new codes will help truly provide mixed farming opportunities for people, particularly on the North Coast, is a significant way of increasing the high-quality sawn timber into our mills and supporting jobs and supporting regional areas.

**The CHAIR:** It now being 11.00, we will break for 15 minutes for tea and coffee.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back. I will go straight to the Opposition.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, I just wanted to ask some questions around commercial fishing. Some of these may actually relate to the Rural Assistance Authority as well so, if you have to, feel free to throw to the erudite and learned CEO of the Rural Assistance Authority. Minister, I put a question on notice— I'll take the Chair's lead: It's number 217; I'm certain you'll know what that is—relating to fees and levies received by DPI from commercial fishers over the last few years. One of the things I note out of your response—I'm wondering, are the commercial fishers paying their fees and levies?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Sean? Sorry, I don't have that exact answer.

**SEAN SLOAN:** I would have to take it on notice to get the exact details of every single licence holder. We have about 1,000 commercial fishing businesses. From time to time we have individual businesses that, for whatever business reason individual to them, are not paying their fees and instalments. But, by and large, the fees are being paid as a general rule.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Mr Sloan, if you could maybe provide those figures for this afternoon, that would be good. Depending on your answer this afternoon, I may explore this a bit further. Essentially, what I'm after is what the non-payment rate is and what the length that they stay in arrears for is. I'm looking at if there is a cohort of people that may need support. That leads me to the business adjustment package, Minister, that then Minister Blair rolled out as a part of the commercial fishing reforms a few years ago. A part of that business adjustment package included a loan or loan arrangements which, I think, was operated through the RAA. Are people paying those loans or are they seeking to defer payment of those loans at this point in time?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I might have to defer to Sean O'Connell on that one.

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** Mr Veitch, I might come back to you. I can get the figures through our monthly arrears report. If I can, I will come back this afternoon.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, come back to me this afternoon and we can explore that. Again, you can see where I'm going here. I want to see if there's a cohort of people that are maybe not paying those loans.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, before we leave that subject, one of the things to take into account is the fact that over the last couple of years, because of fires and then because of floods, there have actually been fee waivers announced and put in place by Government across commercial fishers and a number of the aquaculture industries. A number of those will impact on the figures that both Mr Sloan and Mr O'Connell will be able to get because they actually give people a break from both paying as well as paying loans.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I think we can explore that this afternoon because there are a number of factors or elements to the capacity to pay which arise from those reports I spoke about earlier. I will go to cultural fishing, if I may, Minister. Last year in November the Legislative Council passed a resolution that essentially asked that the secretary of the department be asked to review cultural fishing compliance—issues around commercial fishing breaches—to determine whether or not they actually related to commercial fishing or whether they related to something else. Minister, has that taken place? Did you direct Mr Hansen to do so?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I can't remember if I specifically directed him to do that piece of work. There has been a fair bit of work done in that cultural fishing space. Scott?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We did, Mr Veitch, and we conducted a review of all compliance matters at hand and provided a report back to the Minister and to our general council to get advice with regards to actions going forward.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Has that advice been returned?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Are you able to enlighten the Committee at all around whether or not we had to withdraw from any proceedings because of that advice?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We did.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** More than one?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. It's a difficult area to go too much further into because we don't want to give an indication as to what is free range.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Does that involve costs?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might take that on notice and come back to you in this afternoon's session on that. We did a review and we looked at all matters before us at the moment. We looked at those matters in which we thought that there was marginal benefit in proceeding with versus those that were a severe enough circumstance in which to proceed, and we have moved forward accordingly.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** If you can bring some of the information that you can convey to the Committee this afternoon, that might be handy, Mr Hansen. I have a bit more around cultural fishing. I notice with interest that you have appointed recently, Minister, some Indigenous fishing inspectors.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes, some Fisheries officers. One of those was Jamie Sproates, who I met at AgQuip at Gunnedah a few weeks ago. There has been a long history, actually, of Indigenous Fisheries officers. We have specifically started targeting Indigenous officers to relate back to their community and their country. I think it's a really good way of them talking to community about the expectations of the cultural aspect of fishing but also the regulatory aspect and keeping fishways healthy into the future. We have four specific positions that have been identified and now filled. There are others already in the system anyway, but we'll continue to focus on that. I think it's important to note that we are looking at avenues of trying to have Aboriginal commercial fishing established in a slightly different way as well. We are working through a process on how that might look and how that might work to encourage Aboriginal members to actually take part in commercial fishing.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, those positions you announced recently, are they full-time permanent positions or are they on a short-term basis?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Full-time, yes.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** How many Aboriginal identified positions are there within DPI-Fisheries now?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** That's difficult.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** There are 14.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Is there a budget allocation for Aboriginal cultural training for staff in DPI and Fisheries?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** There certainly is training but I'm not sure about a budget allocation. Scott?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It's not called out specifically as a budget allocation, but it's part of the requirements for training across not only DPI but across broader New South Wales. In addition to that, a number of our branches have their own dedicated training modules as well.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, I want to go to LLS now, if I could. There are a number of items here for LLS. The first one is to do with cybersecurity training for farmers around their awareness of their own cybersecurity risks on farmland. Do we employ any extension officers in LLS that would assist in that?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Not specifically in that space but we have people who would absolutely help. We have a range of programs through DPI and LLS that help do that. Steve, have you got a specific program around that?

**STEVE ORR:** No, we don't have a specific program on cybersecurity, Mr Veitch. We do run a number of agricultural extension programs about trap preparedness, soil management and livestock management in a general sense. But in terms of cybersecurity on a farm, I will check and maybe come back to this this afternoon.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** There is also the Rural Crime Prevention Team that does a lot of work—Cameron Whiteside and his team, which has increased by another 10 recently. We made that announcement at AgQuip as well. They are probably more the ones that do specific work with landowners on cameras, positioning of cameras, security on gates and fences and the different ways of doing that work meaningfully. They've upscaled in some cases, where there would be a team of one, it's now doubled and that provides more ability to actually visit more landowners. They're at all of the shows and all of the ag fairs around the State, talking to people constantly about that. So it's probably more of a rural crime prevention team role, I think.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Thank you. As you know, I like reading ministerial diaries; certainly your predecessor knew that. I notice you've had a couple of roundtables with regard to natural capital markets.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I met with an individual in Moree who raised a bit of an issue which I had not come across previously. So I'll pose this to you and see if this has been raised in those roundtables you've had. Essentially, the revenue that this individual is deriving, in some instances the tax office is determining that it is actually off-farm income, which is quite bizarre because it actually relates to the operation of the farm. So it's not primary production income, which then flicked the switch on the percentage of revenue he has derived from his farm to meet the primary producer's requirement. His view is this may be an issue for biosecurity offsets. It may be an issue if you engage in natural capital markets. Is there any advice being provided, Minister, or any research being undertaken to determine how that income would be treated for farmers?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** That's the first time I've heard that specific quandary but, interestingly, actually your Federal colleagues again have sort of followed us in on natural capital. Mr Albanese was at the Bush Summit and outlined some of the thoughts around a similar style to what we've already started doing in our natural capital space. Obviously, taxation's also a Federal issue, so I think the Federal Government probably needs to lead on how that might actually then be incorporated into their programs, which essentially tail into our natural capital idea and how that would need to work from a primary production scenario. But I think it's one that the Federal Government should do some work on, definitely.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, part of this also is the information that farmers obtain before they enter into these markets or venture down this path. Again, in your roundtables, are people questioning the calibre or the level of information that they're being provided with to help make informed decisions?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Absolutely, and one of the things is the roundtables are literally that—it's about talking around what people would like to do into the future, what they're doing now, what they see the opportunities as being. We rolled out the primary industry abatement program earlier on this year, again supporting different ways within normal farm operations, making some simple changes to actually access some more organic matter in the soils and extra carbon sequestration and be rewarded for doing that. So it's about trying to find meaningful ways where you can actually be paid for not changing too much but accessing a bit more carbon in the soil or in your plants and therefore being recognised for it.

But, there is no quick, easy solution to that. It's about measurement, it's about the payment around that measurement, and it's around drought versus flood versus normal times and how you account for all of that. So the roundtables really were the idea of, what do you like and what do you not like? There are some policy frameworks that would have to be set up and, again, at a State level, it also feeds into what the Federal Government is now saying it wants to do following on the back of what we've already started doing. I think there will be opportunity, but you do need to talk meaningfully around what people actually want, how they would value it. And I think people mostly are excited by the opportunity. No-one quite knows exactly what the opportunity will be yet, but we need to keep working towards what that will be.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** What's the time frame for that?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** There's certainly a budgeted amount in there to help support people. The first—probably the next year—will be around doing more of that work. The Minister for the environment and his team will be doing work from their side of things, we'll be doing work from our side of things to try to find some

common pathways around what people want and expect. And then probably a year or so down the track, there would be—again, with the Federal Government input—some specific ways of dealing with things.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, there is a degree of excitement. There's also a degree of trepidation.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes, and some people are already in the market. Some people are already being paid for offsetting mallee scrub in a certain area. They're getting paid carbon credits for it. Others aren't. So there's a mix of people already in the system and there is a mix of opportunities. Probably blue carbon is another good one for the North Coast, for example. So there's lots of opportunities. We're just trying to make it something that will actually work for people and pay them for doing the right thing.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I think there's a long way to go yet.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** But there is a degree of trepidation. With regard to LLS, Minister, in the budget—and you might be able to explain this to me because, for the life of me, I couldn't work it out myself—it talks about a reduction in the employee-related expenses in the budget papers for LLS. What does that relate to?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It's pretty simple. Soil Conservation moved out of LLS into the Department of Regional NSW, so the employment moved across as well. Simple as that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** So it's gone from LLS to?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Department of Regional NSW.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** A budget note or a little tab down the bottom would have been really handy. That would have eased my angst, I reckon.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Blame Steve.

**STEVE ORR:** Just checking you're reading it.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I did read the budget. Like other shadows, we like reading these budget papers. Minister, another thing about LLS, Ms Fox has probably briefed everyone here, but I want to know how many drones does DPI have at the moment and how many drones does LLS have at the moment?

**REBECCA FOX:** I've got the total number. It's around 150 CASA registered across the whole department.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** So that's Fisheries, LLS, the whole lot.

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, Public Works. Surveyors use them, for example.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Is there a program of purchase, replacement, maintenance?

**REBECCA FOX:** There is. It's done under our purchasing policy. So they're generally worth between about \$2,000 and \$3,000. So they're purchased directly in accordance with our standard small purchase policy.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Again, my issue here is around cybersecurity. These drones capture lots of information flying over farmers' properties and the like. Do we install our own software? What's the cybersecurity risk profile of these drones that we've assessed?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes. So it has been assessed and I'm told—we've got a drone working group that looks at those kind of issues. So they ensure compliance with the regulations and the data keeping and the continuous improvement in that space. I did have something around software and firmware. It's managed the same way that we manage all of the information that we keep across the department in accordance with our cybersecurity policies.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I might have a couple more questions this afternoon just on drones. This round of estimates questions for me, I am pretty fascinated around drones.

**REBECCA FOX:** Mr Veitch, the information I have here is that the software is checked to ensure the safe operation of the drones and to ensure that the firmware is operating on the latest version, including the current no-fly zones and as specified by CASA.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Thank you for that. Minister, the other question I have looking towards the future is around hydrogen. Have you or have you asked the department to do any work around identifying opportunities that might arise from a hydrogen economy?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Not specifically. There are other government departments doing a fair bit of work around hydrogen of all kinds. At this point in time, we've been focused on things like biosecurity. Hydrogen will certainly provide opportunities for energy for the farming sector, for the primary industries sector, into the future, but I haven't specifically requested any works. Are you doing any work on hydrogen?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We are. In fact, I might get Ms Lorimer-Ward just to give you a quick update on the work we are doing on hydrogen at the moment.

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** Thank you. So we have got a number of projects under the Climate Change Research Strategy, which is looking at beyond diesel in a way to say, what are those energy sources beyond that, and hydrogen's definitely part of those projects that we're running out. We run that out primarily through field days and renewable energy conferences and we've actually had a mobile trailer built that actually has hydrogen cells within that and we use that to demonstrate how that technology can be applied on farm and replacing existing machines or applied into existing machines. We've got ongoing research about how do you modify that technology into existing equipment so that people don't necessarily have to buy entirely new machinery. It's what are those adaptations that could be done? We have quite an extensive range of projects that are looking at beyond diesel and looking at what those energy sources can be on farm.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes.

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** So we're in the applied space. We're not building hydrogen technology. It's about how do you apply that technology that's already been built.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I think that is where I was going to go. We might get time this afternoon. I just want to maybe take a bit more time to dwell upon that work on hydrogen. Ms Lorimer-Ward, that's for the farming sector, but what about within the department itself? Are we looking at identifying opportunities for the department itself? Is there a diesel fleet, for instance?

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** We have got a program of work which is looking around renewable energy. We haven't actually commenced anything at the moment which is actually replacing existing machines with hydrogen.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** We might spend a bit more time this afternoon on that.

**The CHAIR:** I might pick up where we left, Minister. Obviously, there were levels of questions, some went all the way down to compliance officers, some could have been answered a lot easier. Specifically in that list of questions I asked, "Did the employee offer an explanation as to where they were fishing or why they were fishing within a sanctuary zone?" The answer you gave back was, "Prior to undertaking a formal record of interview under caution, the employee told the Fisheries officers that they didn't realise it was a sanctuary zone as they usually only fished on the other side of Jervis Bay near Vincentia."

I further asked, "Was the employee in a position to be aware that they were fishing within a sanctuary zone, having regard to signs at boat ramps, other signs within the marine park?" And your answer back was, "There was a Jervis Bay Marine Park zoning plan sign at the boat ramp at the time of the incident where the vessel the employee was on was launched from and there was also yellow sanctuary zone buoys on the water and a land base sign approximately 50 metres west of Red Point." Minister, do you see how the answers for M sort of conflict with the answers to N in terms of the staffer's knowledge of where sanctuary zones are?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** If there were signs and buoys clearly marking the sanctuary zone, I mean, people are people and don't always see everything they should see. I can't explain that, no.

**The CHAIR:** Is it correct, though, to say that giving a misleading statement to compliance officers is a serious offence? More specifically, clause 259, where it says "a person who in connection with a requirement under this part makes any statement, provides any information, produces any document the person knows is false or misleading in a material particular is guilty of an offence with the maximum penalty being 200 penalty units or imprisonment for three months—are you aware of that?"

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm not sure what the question was. But I think if somebody says they weren't aware that it was there because they hadn't seen any signs then you take that on face value.

**The CHAIR:** Of course. Minister, I would like to give you a series of documents to talk you through. The first document is from the Select Committee on Recreational Fishing, which was held in Nowra on 29 April 2010. Once you get it, I will ask you to turn to the third page in the first document, which is on the top, particularly to the second comment by Mr Harnwell, who is the staffer in question, where he says:

I am not particularly talking about Jervis Bay Marine Park because I was involved in that—

Do you see that statement?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I ask you to turn then to page six of that document, which has a page number of "14" at the bottom, and just draw your attention to the conversation between Mr Cohen and Mr Harnwell, particularly Mr Harnwell's comment specifically referring to Jervis Bay Marine Park, where he says:

You could go in there and fish now if you wanted to—illegally. What difference would it make?

Further on, he elaborates, stating he knows plenty of people that have been booked. Minister, you would agree that for the most part witnesses who participate in parliamentary inquiries do so because they have a certain level of knowledge on the subject matter. Would you agree with that, that we invite witnesses because of their level of knowledge and in this case this committee would have invited Mr Harnwell because of his knowledge of marine parks?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** If you turn over the page, still talking about the Jervis Bay Marine Park, Mr Harnwell comments, where he states:

I am not a commercial fisher, I cannot comment on that. My experience from fishing in this area 30 years—

So he has fished in the area for 30 years but doesn't know where the sanctuary zones of the marine park are. The next document is his submission to the inquiry. Just quickly, highlighting at the top of that submission, he says:

... I have been an active recreational fisher in NSW for about 30 years. I was a founding member of the Jervis Bay Marine Park Advisory Committee and have also been a member of the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing—

and the editor of *Fishing World* magazine. It is fair to say that he has some extensive experience about Jervis Bay Marine Park, would you agree?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** The next document is a printout from the Save Jervis Bay website encouraging the fishing public to make submissions, drawing your particular attention to the comment where it says:

This submission has been prepared by local anglers and spearfishers who have an intricate knowledge of the effect these changes will have. It included input from, but not limited to:

Fishing World Magazine.

Who was the editor of *Fishing World* magazine, as highlighted by the previous document? Mr Harnwell.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Mr Harnwell, yes.

**The CHAIR:** The next document, Minister, is the RFA news bulletin from August 2010. I draw your attention to the direct quote by Mr Harnwell, in a description of his experience. Do you see that?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** The next document is a printout from a well-known fishing forum called Fishraider, once again, Minister, just drawing your attention to the comment by the author labelling Mr Harnwell as a "prominent member of the fishing fraternity" as it relates to the Jervis Bay Marine Park. The next document is an online article titled *The Ultimate Holiday Guide to Jervis Bay*. Minister, would you agree that most people wouldn't contemplate writing an article calling it the ultimate guide to something if they weren't pretty confident in their knowledge on that subject matter? Is that a fair statement?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Oh, well, from a tourism perspective or a beach perspective, yes.

**The CHAIR:** For the benefit of people playing at home, who's the author of that article?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Jim Harnwell.

**The CHAIR:** The next document is an article by Mr Harnwell giving extensive comment on the Jervis Bay Marine Park zoning review, talking about shifting different zones in great detail. Would it be fair to say that you would not write an article on the shifting of different zones in a marine park if you weren't pretty confident about where those zones were and where they were being shifted to? Is that a fair statement?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Sure.

**The CHAIR:** The next document is an online publication called *Ireland Fishing Diaries* interviewing Mr Harnwell. He says:

I grew up on the South Coast of NSW and spent a lot of time at a place called Jervis Bay.

The next document is a printout showing a link to a podcast discussing the independent scientific audit of marine parks. You and I have probably done our fair share of interviews. You wouldn't go into an interview without knowing the subject matter of what you are talking about, would you, Minister?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Hopefully not.

**The CHAIR:** No. If you turn over the page, who is the first guest listed on that podcast?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Jim Harnwell.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Harnwell. The final document is simply just an acknowledgement out of a book titled *The Catch: The Story of Fishing in Australia* by Anna Clark. I am drawing your attention to the acknowledgement of the fishing tour of Jervis Bay she was taken on by Mr Harnwell. If I take you back to the original question that I asked on notice in M, where your answer was that he didn't realise he was in a sanctuary zone as he usually only fishes on the other side of Jervis Bay, it is fair to say, based on the documents I presented to you now, that was a misleading statement that he provided to the compliance officers, isn't it? On the balance of probabilities it looks like that was a misleading statement.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** You would need to ask him, clearly.

**The CHAIR:** I'm asking you. Does it pass the pub test to you, on the balance of probabilities?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I am not going to interpret whether he saw signs or didn't see signs on the day. We are talking about an incident that occurred 12 years ago.

**The CHAIR:** What about his track history? If anyone knew about where the sanctuary zones were on Jervis Bay Marine Park, it would have been this bloke, wouldn't it, based on all that experience I have just outlined—noting my time has expired?

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I think it just shows, Chair, that he was aware of the superior fishing inside sanctuary zones and we should all consider why.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It was 12 years ago. I am not quite sure what the—

**The CHAIR:** I think his experience spans beyond 12 years ago. Ms Hurst?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I am going to go back, Minister, to the Game and Feral Animal Control Regulation. I have some more questions for Mr Hansen in the afternoon around what he said. But Mr Hansen did make a really good point, Minister, about the fact that children are currently allowed to hunt on private land. Given that the department decided to err on the side of caution and that there were child protection issues in regards to hunting on public land, do you think that means we should be revising the laws currently on private land as well?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** No.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Why not?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Why?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Mr Hansen just said that there were community concerns around child protection issues with expanding the laws to include on private land—sorry, on public land. I am asking, then, would you then look to revise the laws on private land, given that the same issue would be there?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It's not really the same issue, though. Private land and public land are completely different.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you explain how there is no child protection issue with children hunting with weapons on private land but there is a concern on public land?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It's not just a child protection issue; it's a public safety issue. On private land parents would take the opportunity to do all sorts of activities that you would not do on public land. One of those might be hunting.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Did you actually consult with any child protection organisations when the regulations were put forward?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I didn't personally.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you think that maybe that is something that should have been done?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** No, not really.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Why not?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** This was about hunting as opposed to child protection.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sure, but you can't see that—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** One aspect of it is around making sure that young people are safe. But I don't think there was a specific need—this was around looking at an overall plan, taking public consultation on that plan and then referring back and making some sensible decisions.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But we just heard from Mr Hansen that there was community concern about arming children with weapons. I understand it's not firearms, but there were proposals to arm any child under the age of 12 with a weapon. I imagine it could obviously put children in potentially very dangerous situations with pig dog hunting, for example, which was one of the proposals, with a boar and a dog fighting for their lives. A child could be in a very difficult situation. You don't think that there are child protection concerns that should have been addressed?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** With consultation like this, every single possible group and individual has the ability to make submissions. I'm not sure if there were any from those groups that you are talking about—I don't recall whether that occurred or not—but every single group has the opportunity. If child protection groups thought there was a need to do that, I'm sure they would have made submissions.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But your department wasn't prepared to actually reach out to those organisations to be able to make sure that there were no child protection concerns?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Did we reach out specifically to child protection agencies, do you know?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, we reached out to government agencies to get their thoughts and views. I'd have to take on notice which agencies. Obviously the NSW Police Force was one of those agencies that we did reach out to, to get their views.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. If you could take on notice whether there were any other child protection agencies that were reached out to, that would be appreciated. Mr Hansen just mentioned that there were other Government members that were consulted on this. Was this something that was taken to Cabinet or consulted on broadly within the Liberal-Nationals Government? Or was it something that was quite isolated within the DPI?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I think the department ran the consultation.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's right, and I said across other government agencies.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Other agencies?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I should also say that the Law Society of New South Wales was involved. Again, if there were concerns around legalities or child protection, you would have thought the police and/or the Law Society would have raised those in their roles.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. I want to talk to you about shark nets. On 1 August it was reported by the ABC that you were considering allowing councils greater control to make a decision as to whether they were going to use nets. However, I understand that on 1 September shark nets were put back up around beaches around New South Wales. Can you give me a bit of background on what happened here? Is this the last season? Is it going to be that councils will then make a decision, or is it a backflip on that original consideration? I want to understand what's happened there.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Sure. Certainly there is a very clear message from the Government around protecting people, and that position hasn't changed around shark management. Shark nets—the meshing program—is one of the technologies we use. We have used it for a long time. There has only been one fatality since 1937 at a meshed beach, so it's part of what we do. We have got that comprehensive plan about making sure the community is safe. That goes along with drones. We've got a large drone fleet—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, a lot of the research is actually saying that shark nets don't reduce the number of shark attacks on the beach and that obviously there are, as I'm assuming you were about to say, a whole range of other safety measures that the Government does put in place, including drones, lifeguards. There is a whole range of things—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Listening stations. Smart drum lines.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, there is an enormous number of things. There are criticisms that putting up the nets is actually risking people's safety because it gives them a false sense of security. Why are we still putting these nets up and why has that decision not been given over to councils?



**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I will just take up your first point that it is not proven that shark nets work. I think you'd agree that one fatality since 1937 proves that there is something that works—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But isn't it the same on the non-netted beaches? We are not seeing deaths on non-netted beaches.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** The latest death we saw was on a non-netted beach.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Where was that in New South Wales?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Little Bay.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** When was it, sorry?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Earlier this year.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I've got some of the research here, which I can show you. The actual number of attacks is no different between the different beaches. Do you recognise that research or do you ignore that?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Stats can show whatever you want them to show. We look at the possible interaction between sharks and humans. As much as possible, the idea is to mitigate that risk of an interaction. That's why all of those things—the drones, the smart drum lines, the meshing—play a role. Like everything, more than one solution is the best way to move forward.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But do you not feel that the councils have the ability to make that decision on behalf of each community? Do you feel that the New South Wales Government needs to retain that control over that space?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** What I would suggest is that councils do some meaningful consultation with their communities and look at doing that over the coming summer, as people are going back to the beach, to get the real gauge on what people do want into the future. I don't think any council has done a community survey around this. There have been council imprimaturs given about what they want, but that might be a group of nine or 10 people that is making a decision. I would suggest that councils have a great opportunity this summer to do some meaningful surveys and meaningful consultation on the issue.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Good morning, Minister.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Good morning.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I will start with a question about pounds. During Minister Tuckerman's estimates hearing last week officials stated that the management of animal pounds now sits within Primary Industries. Is that true?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** No. We have a role with the POCTA Act. Pounds and local shelters are through the Minister for Local Government because councils normally run them.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Both Melissa Gibbs, who is the director of policy and sector development from the Office of Local Government, and Ally Dench, who is an executive director at OLG, stated that pounds management now sits within Primary Industries. Are we saying—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Suzanne is here from our animal team. How would you assess that?

**SUZANNE ROBINSON:** Pounds fall under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act; they are not exempt from it. But the running of council pounds is the responsibility of local governments under the Impounding Act.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** It is a little concerning then that the Minister who is responsible for pounds management doesn't know that she is responsible for pounds management.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** She may have been referring to the prevention of cruelty to animals as part of that, which we do administer. I'm not sure.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Fascinating. We will take that back up with her. My colleague the Hon. Emma Hurst spoke with you last estimates about that decision you made to walk back commitments to ban surgical artificial insemination of dogs. You said in the last estimates, "I spoke to a number of vets," when you were asked who you consulted before making that decision. Which vets in particular?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I think there are seven, eight or maybe nine vets that currently do the surgical insemination. One of them is John Newell, I think his name is, who is based at Orana surgeries in Dubbo.

Certainly he is one who I've spoken to. I can't remember the other one. But he is a highly regarded vet who has been working with greyhounds, particularly, for a long, long time.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** You spoke with John Newell, who has made an absolute fortune from surgical artificial insemination of dogs as well as selling frozen semen. When he suggested to you that we don't ban the very practice that he makes all of his money from, did you think there was perhaps a conflict of interest?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** But surgical insemination isn't banned under POCTA in any way, shape or form. It's not an illegal activity.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** No, but the proposal was to ban it. You sort of backflipped on that or walked back on that decision. When we asked you what grounds there were for walking it back, you said it was because you spoke to some vets. You've only told me the name of one vet, who happens to make a fortune out of this particular procedure. I'm saying to you that, after speaking with him, you then decided not to ban. Does that not strike you as being perhaps a conflict of interest?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I think you are drawing a rather large bow. I would suggest that vets make money from all sorts of different procedures that they do regularly. If you are involved in an industry, that would be clearly where you make your money. He is involved with that industry, among others. But the decision around that was essentially giving absolute clarity to something that would have literally replicated what is in the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission's rulings around how they have to conduct operations, and it would have been replicating that exactly.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** The opposition from welfare organisations, including the RSPCA, to not banning this procedure was made incredibly clear in our animal welfare policy inquiry hearings. Did you listen to that evidence and will you be changing your position?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I won't be changing the position, no.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So you will be listening to the profit-makers who actually don't want it banned but also make a huge amount of money off it—and there are seven or eight of them doing it, but there are a bunch of vets who don't do it. Did you speak to any of them? Did you speak to them about alternative ways?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It is a very specialised field. The reason it is a specialised field is that it is specifically designed to make sure you have dogs that are well bred and utilising semen from overseas. That is therefore used in the best possible way to guarantee a good pregnancy for the dog and a healthy litter of pups.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** But we know, from listening to the RSPCA and others, that the outcome for the dog is much worse with surgical artificial insemination than with other methods. Other vets use other methods. You have chosen not to ban a procedure that has a bad outcome for dogs after you spoke to someone whose business is based on this particular procedure. Does that not—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** There are differing views. I would agree, there are differing views.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** But you didn't speak to anyone other than somebody who—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Absolutely I have heard from other people.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So when you walked back this decision after speaking with "a number of vets", who other than John Newell did you speak to and how many of them aren't making money from this procedure?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I don't recall how many I spoke to.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Did you speak to any, Minister?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I have received plenty of emails. I know vets personally who haven't got an issue. There is a range—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So you didn't consult with anybody else?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** There is a range of views on subjects like this.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Did you speak with or consult with anybody else? Did you speak with any other vets who don't perform this procedure before deciding not to ban it?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I don't recall any other vets I specifically spoke to about this.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** No. Do you not see that that really doesn't pass the pub test?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** No, I disagree.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** You have decided, against all the evidence, not to ban a procedure after speaking to one person who makes an absolute killing off this procedure.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Do you think there is a conflict of interest for somebody who is wanting to close down an industry asking questions and suggesting that somebody supporting the industry is doing the wrong thing?

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I ask the questions and you answer the questions, Minister.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Sure.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I think it is interesting, though, that you have deflected in that way from the question because the question was very clear.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I have said that I am very happy with the decision. There would be no reason to change that decision. It is supported completely by the industry. It is supported by a number of vets. Not all vets agree—that's life. That is what happens.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** But you didn't consult with anybody except the one vet who does agree—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I have said it was more than one vet and I have spoken to plenty of other people. I just don't recall specifically talking to them specifically only about that.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** You are under oath. Before you made this decision to not ban the artificial insemination through surgery, which vet did you speak to who did not already do this procedure?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I can't remember specific names. I have told you—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Could you take it on notice?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** —I specifically spoke to John Newell.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Can you take it on notice?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** That is the one I specifically spoke to. That is not going to help me remember who I speak to about specific things like this.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So you didn't take a record? You didn't make a record of who you were speaking to?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I speak to people about all sorts of things all the time. At the local shows—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Even something as important as this?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Absolutely. I speak to people all the time.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I just want to go back to some questioning we started in the first 20 minutes around biosecurity. I have some questions around FMD and lumpy skin and then I want to round out with some final questions around bees. We were talking about foot-and-mouth disease and the program you are going to use—if, heaven forbid, it does happen—and we were talking about the destruction of stock. I am trying to, in my head—if you look at the British experience, there was a large number of stock. As part of this exercise, would we transport stock somewhere to be slaughtered, or are we going to slaughter in situ and then transport the carcasses?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It will depend on where they are, I guess, and that is part of the work that is being done now—is to assess what happens, where are the main transport routes between saleyards and that sort of thing and work out if you would then need to transport animals to a certain other area or whether there are certain points around the State that we could actually do that and do it safely. Scott, do you want to add to that?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, thanks, Minister. We have scenario plans for a whole range of those potential scenarios—everything from a couple of head of livestock on a particular property, which obviously may be able to be dealt with in situ, versus 25,000 head in a feedlot that obviously won't be able to be dealt with in situ and will need a central disposal point. Obviously transporting live animals increases risks of spread if you are moving them, but they are the scenarios that we are working through. All of these plans are being worked out with the EPA to assist us in helping us get preapproval for locations and potential disposal mechanisms. We will also be talking to a number of local councils with regard to potential areas that they can see would make not only suitable for disposal but also are able to be protected and isolated or secured from potential feral animals.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** This is where I was going. If you think this through, there are a number of scenarios that may well eventuate. You were talking about, Minister, some of the considerations would be things like the water table—so whether you incinerate the carcasses or whether you bury the carcasses.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** We certainly don't incinerate them.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** You don't?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Burial would be the preferred method, but you do need to do that in a safe position and making sure that feral animals like pigs, for example, or dogs couldn't then get into them and spread it via taking infected carcasses or bits of them.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Has that body of work been done or is it now being done?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** That is underway now.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** So it is now being done?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We have, at a national level, the AUSVETPLAN, which outlines for us the modes and things to take into account and how we should. The work that we are now doing is taking it down to the granular level of doing the mapping of road transport, of stock movements—you know, every additional week we get to plan allows us to get even more granular in terms of what-ifs and to be able to work through scenarios and be able to put that in place. But we have robust plans in place at the moment to help us address a number of these scenarios.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** As part of this exercise, are we looking at lessons from the varroa mite with apiarists around compensation and the like? Are we looking at those lessons with regard to what would happen if FMD did get into New South Wales?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It is certainly a larger financial consideration, absolutely. Each industry has a deed of agreement with the Government. I am not sure exactly the specifics of where we would be up to right now with the cloven-hoofed industries, but we have talked about the impact of \$80 billion on the economy. That is something that could grow even from there. Compensation-wise, it would be very difficult to have a compensation plan that would meaningfully help people, but that is where the gene bank idea and thinking about preparedness is really key to what would be a disastrous impact, there is no doubt about that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, as a part of that then, are the RAA being involved in any way in these discussions?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, can I just step in before that because, like varroa, the actual cost sharing and what is available for compensation is pre-set, pre-agreed with both industry and all jurisdictions. The part that we are working on—that deals with what happens if you happen to have FMD on your property and you need to destroy your stock. So they are the direct disease-mitigation pieces. For that, we will utilise the RAA in the same way we have with varroa because it is formulaic in terms of stock value and how payments—you know, the number of animals destroyed and the amount paid. We try to make that very much a similar model to what we are doing with varroa in terms of light touch.

The broader piece—and this is a piece that, nationally, is being worked on—is that question about the flow-on impacts to every mainstream town—you know, what does it mean for what kinds of lockouts? Now, the Minister referenced the \$80 billion figure that has been utilised in terms of a simulated medium-sized outbreak for Australia that ABARES has done. That included into those costs \$400 million—so their calculation is that a medium size would cost the country about \$400 million in terms of their direct eradication costs. Under the cost-sharing agreements, industry would fund 20 per cent of that, the Federal Government would fund 40 per cent of that and the remaining 40 per cent would be shared based on a GVP percentage of all States and Territories. That would leave us with a bill between \$32-36 million for that kind of response. But, again, that is only paying for the destruction of livestock. It doesn't take into account that there is then a period of time in which we have no export markets to be able to get back into.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, those other things kick in. Minister, the Rural Assistance Authority is heavily involved in a lot of these programs, whether it be the varroa mite payments, some of the disaster payments and the like. My concern is we have a number of people in different sectors of agriculture that self-assess. I think we may have had this conversation last time. What work does the RAA do to assist oyster growers, apiarists or whoever in the process of applying for these grants rather than having them look at something, become daunted and self-assess?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I guess there is a couple of things that we do. Our messaging always—and you have been there for some of that messaging—is do not self-assess, because people do get things wrong. They are not quite sure of the doors that can be opened by someone who knows where to look. Sean and his team at RAA do an exceptional job when people call up asking, "Where do I go next?" or "How do I do this?" We have also got rural financial councillors who, again, we injected significant funding into this year to give that certainty

around the role that they can play in helping literally bring a farm plan together, including some of the availability of that grant funding. If we use Lismore as an example, there was a whole-of-government approach set up at the university there where you could go and talk agriculture, small business meeting—all of that sort of stuff was all in the one location to actually get the advice you needed.

Because sometimes people do think it all gets very hard, and that's certainly some of the feedback we got when doing some of the catch-ups with the different groups—dairy, beef, cane, nuts. They all start the process and then it becomes difficult, then they are busy, and they are trying to look after animals. It is all very difficult. But the RAA has the expertise to help people. Sometimes people will call and ask for advice, and we can step them through what that looks like. Other times there will be forms that sit there for a while, then there will be a reaching out from Sean or the team to say, "You're very close, but you need to fill this next part out." I'm not sure what the percentage is, Sean, of people who do that. But it's a service we provide.

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** It varies from program to program, I think, the number of people who don't return initially, and that's for various reasons. They may have been drawing down funds from other programs in the first instance. So, yes, as the Minister said, we work closely with all those customers. We have a couple of different teams. We have an administration team, an assessment team and then a payments team. They separately reach out to make sure that the customers understand what their requirements are and how we can help them in any way.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, the department of customer service or whatever it is called now—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Service NSW.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** The Minister for apps is what I called him the other day. Service NSW is also involved in the delivery of some of these programs. Is there an interaction between the RAA and Service NSW to simplify or to make it easier for people to apply for these funds?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** There can be—

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Rather than having to apply twice, if the information is already provided, can't it just be shared?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Sometimes it can be. I might get Sean to talk about how they can actually interact.

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** It is a good question. Thank you, Minister. We have a good relationship with Service NSW particularly to triage customers who may fall between the gaps between a primary producer and a rural business. We try to work through those issues on a case-by-case basis. Ultimately, I think RAA has a specialty in determining who is a primary producer and who isn't, and that is our field of expertise. I would say, with the greatest respect to my colleagues in Service NSW, theirs is broader. They are looking to see who is a citizen of New South Wales. We have a much deeper, longer relationship with our customers, I would say, in that instance.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Service NSW has a concierge service. When you first approach them, you can ask for help to find out where the best door to go through is. A lot of those referrals that we might see might come from Service NSW because people have used them to get their licence or whatever and they know that that is somewhere you can reach out to. They would then refer on to RAA. There is that relationship there. Sometimes you need that concierge help to actually get to the right spot.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, I will just add, one of the big variations is about how much of a role we could play at the front end. For varroa, for example, because we are compensating for destruction and we are supervising destruction, we can actually do a large amount of the paperwork there on the spot for the beekeeper, whereas grants that are then applied to people in flood zones, for example, under the Commonwealth share, we don't have that same—we are not on the ground with them assessing the damage at that point in time. A number of our programs, like the varroa one—the RAA can literally be a light touch at the back end of a process. That involves our field crews out there doing the destruction, actually doing the bulk of the paperwork and the application process, which significantly speeds it up. With the broader remit around flood and fire and emergency and natural disaster declarations, the way in which we have been assisting in speeding that up is purely being able to reach back out and say, "Advise us if anything has changed since we last dealt with you and, if not, we will carry all your eligibilities straight forward."

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, it simplifies the process. After the massive fish kills at Menindee a few years ago with the drought, a lot of work was done to, I guess, save the Murray cod population and then take the Murray cod back out into those waterways. What is happening with the trout cod recovery program?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** All of the fish programs have certain targets for the year. I think each one of them has been actually overachieved in the last 12 months. There has been a record number, certainly, of Murray cod and yellowbelly released back into rivers. I have been lucky enough to be involved in a couple of those. I think it was 1.4 million Murray cod back in the system, which is significant. I don't have the exact trout cod figures. Sean may be able to help us out with those.

**SEAN SLOAN:** Thanks, Minister. Trout cod is listed as an endangered species. It is a species that we have a recovery program in place, and we are conducting restocking activities. We have done some recent work to look at the recovery of that population and it is still sitting in an endangered situation, and that is largely because the breeding population hasn't recovered to a point where it can replenish itself. Our activities of restocking and keeping an area of the river where the last remnant population of this species exists—is closed to fishing for the breeding period. So that species is one of the species that we continue to have to do work on.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** When you say "continue to do work on", what does that work look like, Mr Sloan? As I understand it, things are pretty dire for this particular species.

**SEAN SLOAN:** We have a captive breeding program for trout cod, and that has involved breeding the species in captivity and releasing fingerlings into the river and also having a stretch of the river where the last remnant population of that species exists closed to all fishing for a period of time during the annual spawning period for that species. They are the major activities that we undertake specifically for that species but, in addition, we have a major piece of work underway working with other government agencies like WaterNSW to restore connectivity right across the river because that benefits all native fish populations, including trout cod. And we have other habitat restoration pieces of work underway across the river system as well. There are various broader pieces, but specific to trout cod it is the captive breeding program and the spawn enclosure.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Mr Sloan, what is the survival rate of fingerlings? Do we do that work?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes, we do, and that varies. Obviously, it varies in relation to the success of the annual breeding run that we have, but also with the receiving environment for those fish. Over time those techniques for breeding fish have improved. The survivability is good but, obviously, when you are returning fish into their natural environment, there is going to be—as there is with all fish stocking activities—quite high levels of mortality. To give you the specific figures that have come from our monitoring program, I would have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** You can take it on notice. The reason I ask is I believe we have had a couple of goes at restocking; we've dropped some fingerlings, I think, into the Macquarie River. Do you know what is the survival rate of the fingerlings that went into the Macquarie?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I would have to take that on notice, but we restocked over five million fish in the last financial period right across New South Wales. Most of those were in the freshwater environment but some in the marine and coastal, and some of those were non-native species like rainbow and brown trout. But there's a high proportion of those fish that were native freshwater species. I'll have to take it on notice to get the specifics about Macquarie but I can do that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Okay. I think 2017 was the last evaluation of the trout cod recovery program. Is that correct, Mr Sloan?

**SEAN SLOAN:** We did a recent review. In fact, there was a public community meeting only last month, in August, to look at the outcomes of the latest not just ecological work but also social and economic work that was done to look at the impacts of the work that has been done to protect trout cod. That work has shown that the species is still not in a strong position and, as I mentioned earlier, the stock is not in a position where it can replenish itself naturally. So that's why the restocking program and the spawning spatial closure that we have in place annually is important: to make sure we can continue efforts to recover that stock.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I was down the far south a couple of weeks ago. An angler down there pulled me aside, and I said to him that I would use his line. He referred to the trout cod as the koala of the waterways. How much money have we spent trying to save trout cod, and will we save trout cod?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I'd have to take it on notice to give you the exact figure.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Can we do that, thanks?

**SEAN SLOAN:** We certainly can. You're quite correct that they are one of those species that is quite sensitive to fishing, and that's why the spawn enclosure that we have in place is not just for trout cod but for all species. That's because the catch and release process affects different species in different ways, and trout cod is

one of those species that can suffer mortality after being handled when they are caught, which is why that seasonal spawn enclosure protects them from being handled at all.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Can I ask, then, Mr Sloan, what would be deemed a success for the trout cod recovery program?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The key success measure would be the spawning stock being able to replenish itself—having annual breeding pairs get to a certain threshold level where we don't have to keep intervening in the natural environment to boost that spawning potential. Again, I'd have to take it on notice to give you the specific sort of metrics that we would apply to that, but essentially the key measure that we have for managing any fish stock is the ability of the natural adult population to spawn and replenish stocks naturally.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Minister, I'd urge you to have a look at the trout cod recovery program. It was actually quite fascinating when I was apprised of it. I wasn't aware of just how dire a situation this particular species of fish is in. Minister, I want us to go back to pollinators, if I can. The slow food farmers around Maitland have an issue: Once the bees have been withdrawn, they need pollination. Have you had discussions with the slow food farmers up in that part of the Hunter?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I haven't specifically spoken to them, no. But there are groups around different areas that have got those same concerns around any horticulture that uses pollination that doesn't occur naturally, although it does occur naturally at a small level. Intensive horticulture, for example, absolutely needs and relies on pollination. We're working through a couple of different scenarios as to how that might be possible. With that comes risk. The risks of further outbreaks of varroa are real if we don't get the eradication done properly and also have a risk management strategy in place for the future. So there are some more difficult times ahead but, at the same time, industry is still really supportive of the direction we've taken, and I think that's important. When I talk about industry, I'm talking about the bee industry particularly, which has been through a difficult few months. From the horticultural perspective, I know Scott and the team are working through a few other possibilities, but there's no quick, easy fix on this—that is the problem. Do you want to elaborate on that, Scott?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. We not only need to work out how we deal with the current pollination season but also in those red zones, in the eradication zones, once we remove bees, we need to keep bees out of there for a period of three years to be able to demonstrate and prove freedom. We will have sentinel hives in there acting as a part of our surveillance and evidence proof for freedom. That then poses questions about pollination within that and how much of the native bee population or alternative insects may be able to play a role. There's a lot of work now being fast-tracked into the potential role for other insects to play as pollinators, plus what needs to be done in synthetic breeding for crops to remove the reliance on bees for pollination—self-pollinating. It's fast-tracking a whole lot of work around that, including robotics pollination and so forth for some of the industries. But for some industries, it will rely on how quickly we can get back to a European honey bee population in that area and, alternatively, how much they can utilise the native bee populations for.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Post the almond pollination season, for want of better words, those hives will need to be transported again. What protections are we putting in place around that?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It's again a permit system, and they've had the full compliance check on arrival at the almond. I have caught up with beekeepers down there, and it's a really smoothly running operation. They need to apply to move somewhere else, and the beekeeper I was talking to on the day was heading from there to do some vegetable pollination and then had plans to do canola. But it's all within a permit system. At each point of the way, you've got to do your alcohol washing and be proving that you are still varroa mite free. That will be an ongoing scenario within the blue zone where you do need to be showing that you're remaining varroa mite free. They're using miticide strips and sticky mats. The sticky mats show if anything drops, and they're collected and checked regularly. The miticide strips are there to actually eradicate any mites that might be present. They would be picked up on the mats along with a few other things like hive beetle, which is around at the moment. So there is very strict compliance, it is very well monitored and the teams on the ground have been doing a great job with that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** It's a continuous process?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It is a continuous process.

**The CHAIR:** Picking up where we left off, Minister, you might need to ask Mr Sloan or Mr Hansen this one: In the last 12 years, have there been any changes to the sanctuary zones in Jervis Bay? You made the comment earlier some of Mr Harnwell's experience was beyond 12 years ago. So I'm just wondering, in the last 12 years have there been any changes in the sanctuary zones or any of the zones?

**SEAN SLOAN:** For Jervis Bay, not to my knowledge.

**The CHAIR:** Through you, Minister, going back to when these questions were asked, when you sought these answers from DPI compliance officers, did you just ask those particular questions or did you seek a full briefing, perhaps anticipating that you might need to revisit this issue if further questions were asked? Did you seek a full briefing, Mr Sloan or Mr Hansen, in terms of the whole incident or did you just ask those specific questions?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** With regards to the questions, we just got answers to the questions that we were being asked, and I've had a chance during the 15-minute break to have a look. That question on notice was referred down to compliance officers who filled in and answered the information, which came back up to Mr Sloan, myself and then through to the Minister's office. So we answered the questions that were there in front of us.

**The CHAIR:** Were you or Mr Sloan aware of Mr Harnwell's extensive experience in the Jervis Bay Marine Park when you saw those answers come back?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I've got to say, this is for a penalty infringement notice of a staff member fishing. No, I didn't ask for more at that stage, the same way I wouldn't necessarily ask for more information with regards to a staff member who might be caught speeding on their way home on a road that they drive every single day of the year and answer to the officer, "Sorry, I didn't realise I was speeding."

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate that, but one of the core answers to that question was that he didn't know that he was in the sanctuary zone. I'm asking whether you were aware of his extensive experience in the Jervis Bay Marine Park in fishing in that area. When you saw that answer, did that not raise flags? First of all, were you aware of his experience and, if you were aware of his experience, did that not raise flags that the answer he gave to the compliance officers may have been misleading?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It didn't raise any flags with me. The answer that he gave to the Fisheries officers was followed up by him paying his penalty infringement notice like any member of the public would.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Sloan, did it raise any concerns with you? I know you've only been recently new in the position—a couple of years.

**SEAN SLOAN:** No, it didn't. The individual involved described the incident as a mistake, so it was an unintended mistake.

**The CHAIR:** Did this level of inquiry with these questions pass through the hands of Mr Turnell? I know he has a role in this space. Did it go through his hands?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Any sort of question on notice like this one would go to the relevant directors involved for those activities.

**The CHAIR:** Is he one of the relevant directors?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Peter Turnell is the Director for Fisheries and Aquaculture Management and Jim Harnwell is one of his staff who looks after fish stocking programs for DPI, so he's not involved in marine park management, he's not involved in Fisheries compliance. But the substance of the response to the question on notice was put together by the director for Fisheries compliance, which is where our Fisheries compliance activities occur.

**The CHAIR:** Who was in control of the vessel when it was approached by DPI compliance? Was it Mr Harnwell or someone else?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I would have to check the facts on that. To my knowledge, it wasn't Mr Harnwell, but I'd need to check that.

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps on notice, too, can you tell us what actually happened when DPI approached the vessel? I've had reports to me that the vessel attempted to evade Fisheries compliance, so if you could give us any detail on that—

**SEAN SLOAN:** I can provide some response to that because I have heard the rumour circulating around that, and that caused me to ask questions about that. Fisheries compliance officers involved have reported to me that there was no such suggestion. So I don't think there's any factual basis to that suggestion.

**The CHAIR:** I just wanted to get some clarity on that. I might revisit some of this in the afternoon. Can I just turn to the set prawn draw, Minister? We've raised concerns about this in the past. I think, Mr Sloan, you endeavoured to send a Fisheries officer out to inspect what was going on. Has that occurred and what did the Fisheries officer find in terms of the conduct of the prawn draw?



**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes, it has. At the May prawn draw for the Myall Lakes prawn draw, senior staff from the Fisheries management and the compliance area attended the draw. They reported back that the prawn draw was being conducted in a professional way but there were some questions around specifically whether or not the industry participants that participate in that fishery were the right people to be conducting the prawn draw. So we've referred the matter to our commercial fisheries advisory council. Bear in mind, this prawn draw at Myall Lakes is one of many, and it's the only area where this issue has arisen. All the other prawn draws occur in much the same way, with industry participants doing this in sort of a co-management way. This is the only one where it has arisen.

**The CHAIR:** We'll probably debate the whole co-management thing. It's probably more co-regulation. Minister, do you think it passes the pub test that you have a commercial fisher who in some cases, some draws, holds above 50 per cent of the balls in the draw and, in some cases, when fishermen don't turn up and put their balls in the draw, he holds 90 per cent of the balls in the draw? Do you think it passes the pub test that he's the one drawing the balls out? We're talking about potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of potential income in this lottery. Do you think it passes the pub test?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'll certainly be interested to see what Sean and the team actually come back with when they've conducted that review. I'm sure that review will be thorough, as it obviously needs to be, and I'll wait and see what that review actually points out.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Hurst?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. Minister, I'm going to take you back to shark nets. I wanted to try to get a clear answer from you in regard to the statements that you've made in the media about giving the power to councils. Will that happen at some point or has that idea been scrapped?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** It hasn't been scrapped. It's something that I think is very much in the public arena, and I think it's fair enough to echo what's in the public arena. What I'd said previously was that I think it's an idea that councils, who actually manage the beaches, are involved in having a meaningful discussion and at some point they should be doing some realistic surveys with their communities around what that would look like. Now, as the State Government, we have the role of providing all of the other resources to help that happen in the most appropriate way to keep people safe at the beach.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So do you think that councils will be given the power to decide next season, given that there are councils with very strong views on this?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I really don't know, Ms Hurst. I really don't know.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If a council does go and do a very specific community consultation—or are you waiting for that consultation before you would ever give the power to councils to make that decision?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Look, that would be something that I wouldn't be doing by myself. It would obviously be a Cabinet decision to be looking at anything like that into the future. But I think it would be a meaningful thing for councils to do that work, and that would be something they could do this coming summer. That's the point I'm making. But it would have to be a decision that would be taken by Cabinet before any changes would be made to what is a long-running program and has obviously been a successful program as far as keeping people safe. As part of what we have now, it's a whole suite of things that we're doing at beaches, and I think that's a good thing.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I might send you some research as well, Minister. As I said, the research is saying that they're not working, so I might send you some that of research. As I understand it, the comment that you made before—and it's always an unfortunate incident when things do go wrong on any sort of beach. I don't want to politicise that in any way. But I do understand that the majority of beaches are un-netted, so it becomes quite difficult to look at one-off incidents in any situation, whether it's a netted or un-netted beach. I'll send some of that research through.

I wanted to talk to you about the puppy farming inquiry. I'm not going to you ask you for any responses; obviously you've got some time to look at that report and recommendations. But there was something that came through in that inquiry which was particularly concerning to all of us on the committee, and that was that there were situations where somebody had been convicted of multiple counts of animal cruelty and was still running a puppy farm with over 100 dogs, for example. I know you have the draft animal welfare bill still underway and that's a much bigger reform piece, but issues like this seem to be quite urgent. Is that something that you're looking to take action on in regards to those interstate issues where people have been convicted or banned from having animals in other States and are moving into New South Wales, or situations in New South Wales where people

have multiple animal cruelty offences and they're running these large-scale breeding businesses? Is that something that you're willing to put earlier outside of the animal welfare piece that's a much bigger piece?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm not sure how we would necessarily take it out of what is that larger piece. But, to your point, I think it is concerning and it's something that is on the radar for people to be aware of that. I'm not sure exactly the role that we can do outside of that puppy farming report, which will no doubt inform part of that anyway. But I absolutely take on board what you're saying around the concerns with interstate but also within New South Wales. It is something I'm fully committed to making sure all animals are treated with the respect and dignity they should be treated with, and that certainly forms a part of where we'd be heading in the future.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. I wanted to ask you about the serious vet shortage crisis that we have in New South Wales as well. I know that a lot of the problem that we have is about actually retaining vets in the profession. I wanted to know if the Government or the DPI was doing anything to address the vet shortage and the retention problems that we have and whether you've been having any meetings with vets or vet industries to help tackle this problem that we've got?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** As I alluded to before, I speak to a lot of local vets all the time about a series of things, including a lack of actual vets in regional areas, is my main concern. But I think vet shortages, it's part of everything. We're short of a whole range of workers in regional areas and in metro areas. The thing is that private vets are offering all sorts of incredible incentives to try to attract people to the profession. It's a highly regarded profession. It's a great profession, whether small or large animals. Apart from the roles we have as Government for vets, whether it's an LLS district vet or a DPI vet, there's no specific program I'm aware of—I might refer to Scott—that we actually utilise to try to encourage people to come in. But Scott and/or Steve might have some thoughts on that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I can go back to them in the afternoon. I know one initiative that you have also been quite supportive of, Minister, was the idea of vet trucks, particularly for regional and rural areas. As you said, the shortage there is even more concerning. Is that vet truck something you're still committed to going forward?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes. This is one of the things that, obviously, came out of the experience with the floods, and the Animal Welfare League had a semitrailer up there. We are, in fact, right now in the process of getting all the i's dotted and t's crossed on how that looks into the future. It may not be a truck; it might be several different vehicles that are mobile and can do the work we need to do. One of the things in my area and further west is around a focus on desexing dogs and cats, particularly. That, hopefully, then reduces the impact on local pounds and so it flows down. I think that will play an important role. It's absolutely very much on the agenda, and, hopefully, there will be some news on that in the not too distant future.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is there some funding allocated towards those desexing programs?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Not specifically for that program, but incorporated in the vehicles—whatever they end up being—would be some funding for that. We've certainly done it for the current truck that goes on the roads. It does a lot of work in western New South Wales, where you can take animals free. You can receive the service free. I'm not exactly sure of the funding arrangement for that, but we can clarify that later on.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, about shark nets, are you aware of the joint management agreement that you, or perhaps your predecessor, signed between you and the chief executive of the Office of Environment and Heritage in relation to the shark meshing program?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm aware that there is an agreement there, yes.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Do you know what the objectives of that agreement are?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Basically, to keep beaches safe. I'm not sure of all the details. I haven't read through the agreement, if that's what you're asking.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The objectives of this particular joint management agreement are in relation to threatened species. You're aware of what they are? It's not in relation to keeping people safe on the beaches. The reason it's a joint management agreement with Environment is because it's about threatened species. The joint management agreement, under objectives at 6.1.2, states:

Ensure that Shark Meshing does not jeopardise the survival or conservation status of Threatened Species, Populations or Ecological Communities ...

Are you aware of the latest shark meshing program report and how many animals were caught in those nets?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I have seen it. I can't remember all the figures. But, yes, it's a public report that comes out each year, I understand.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** So out of 376 marine animals, 325 were non-target. Do you know the numbers of threatened species that were caught?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Not off the top of my head, I don't.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Do you know the types of threatened species?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I know there were turtles, for example. There were sharks. I can't think what else.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The report states that there were threatened species, including green turtles and leatherback turtles. In fact, it states that "the trigger point for the objective of '*minimising the impact on non-target species and threatened species*' was tripped" in the 2021-22 report because the shark nets caught many threatened species, including threatened turtles and grey nurse sharks. In fact, it seems to be that the shark meshing program is in breach of the management agreement that you signed with the environment department.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I'm aware that, for example, on the turtle front, there were more turtles that were caught than normal. I think the average per year is about 1.3 turtles that have been caught, and this year it was significantly higher than that. I'm not sure what the reason was for that.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** And 14 grey nurse sharks—a critically endangered species—were caught. Minister, this agreement that you signed with the environment department, the objectives of it are to minimise the impact of shark meshing on marine animals, including threatened species like the grey nurse shark, the leatherback turtle and the green turtle. We've got almost 40 turtles caught. We've got all of those grey nurse sharks. What are you going to do about the fact that you are not meeting the objectives of the joint management agreement? You're basically in breach of that agreement, which was put in place to ensure that the shark meshing program does not impact on threatened species. Look at what it did last year. What are you going to do about the fact that the shark meshing program is killing too many threatened species?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** There are a lot of things that are being done to do absolutely everything we can to minimise impacts on animals.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** But last year was the worst.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** If you can let me finish. We've got new devices that are being trialled on the nets, including pingers and lights to try to detract the attention and keep animals away. There's also, obviously, the regime around clearing the nets. There are investigations around how that could be done more efficiently.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That was all in place last year.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Yes. But last year was a significant impact, you're saying. I'm saying that this year we are already moving to look at what we can do differently, including the mitigating devices on nets. They've been trialling a lot of different ways of trying to make a difference in that space, and we'll continue to do everything we can to minimise the impacts.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, I have just been provided—yesterday—with a review of what's happening in our public native forests in terms of the conversion of some of those areas into plantation forests, or that we're categorising them as plantations. Would it concern you, as the Minister, if we were actually re-categorising—almost by creep and by definition and by, sort of, vagaries of maps and some anecdotal historic notions that we might have put in some seeds 30 years ago—some of those public native forests as plantations? Would that concern you?

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I think you might be alluding to some information that I'm aware of, that certainly one particular person on the North Coast has suggested that this sort of activity happens. All the advice that I've received from Forestry Corporation would say that that is not accurate in any way, shape or form.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, I would like to table a report. You won't have seen this because I only saw this yesterday. It is really quite concerning. That one person, whoever you may be talking about, is not this person. This is quite a significant review of how we may have got a few things wrong over the past couple of decades and how we're categorising forests. What would be really good, Minister, is if you could commit to a proper review of what we are referring to as plantation forest because only last month there was a complaint made about quite a significant area that resulted in DPI and Forestry admitting that there were some pretty significant errors in mapping. Minister, at the moment we work on what is an authorised plantation, an accredited plantation,

a defined forestry areas map, an indicative map—it's a bit all over the shop. It's your portfolio and it's our public forests. There's an enormous concern at the moment that we may be stuffing some things up.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** I am more than happy to take that on board, look at that report and work with DPI and Forestry if there are some concerning things to look at.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** And perhaps get back to me about—

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Sure.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Thank you, Minister.

**The CHAIR:** That takes us to 12.45 p.m. I look to Mr Martin or Mr Barrett.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Here's your chance. Sean, prepare yourself.

**The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT:** Minister, thank you very much for your time and thank you for the busload of officials you have brought along with you. I think you've answered things quite well. As such, I have no further questions.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** He sent me all these questions then doesn't ask them.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Can I have your questions? I've got loads more.

**The CHAIR:** He wants to be the Parliamentary Secretary.

**Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS:** Thanks to the Committee for a really good session. I really appreciate it.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** He wants to be the parl sec.

**The CHAIR:** He wants to be the parl sec.

**The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT:** No, I do not.

**The CHAIR:** He's about the only one who isn't. That concludes our questioning for this morning. We'll reconvene at 2.00 p.m. with the departmental witnesses. Thank you, Minister, for your time.

**(The Minister withdrew.)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to this afternoon's session. I will throw straight to questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I will get Mr Quinlivan to come to the table for a couple of questions. Once those are done, he may go if he wants to. Not to get Mr O'Connell too excited, but I also have a couple of questions for the RAA and then, once I am finished those, he can probably go as well.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** While Daryl is setting up, can I come back to a couple of questions from the morning session, if I can?

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** You can.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** On the question about damage to our properties out of the floods, \$6.3 million worth of damage has been covered by insurance. That covers Grafton, our North Coast properties and also Camden and EMAI with the flooding through there. Some \$3 million of that has already been spent. We have actually been able to do repairs. But, as with most of the State, we are struggling to find contractors, especially up north, to finish some of the construction work that is needed.

Secondly, I need to correct the review into prosecutions that we touched on just before. You probably gathered by my hesitancy in one-word answers, which I'm not used to—we did complete that review back in January this year. We completed that against our standard operating procedures and found that there were no current fines pending or prosecutions that didn't need to continue to be progressed, and so we continued to progress. There have been some prosecutions which we have discontinued since then because of unrelated issues. I will just note that on 31 August the New South Wales Government's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan was published, which gave a commitment that we would review all existing Fisheries prosecutions involving Aboriginal people to ensure that only serious offences are pursued. That process will now be undertaken using that definition of criteria.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** When is that work meant to be finished, Mr Hansen?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I don't have a date for that at the moment.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Mr Quinlivan, your second report that I was engaged in discussion with the Minister about this morning clearly is imminent, based on the Minister's comments.

**DARYL QUINLIVAN:** Yes, we have completed all the consultations and most of the research and we are writing it up at present.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** As you would be aware, we receive correspondence from time to time from people who are impacted upon, particularly by large-scale solar farms now. That seems to be the latest issue. It was wind farms, but now it's solar farms. Did you hold any consultations around Wagga?

**DARYL QUINLIVAN:** We had a specific meeting with a group of landowners and local people who were concerned about a couple of projects there. You mentioned the name of one of them earlier in the day.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Mates Gully.

**DARYL QUINLIVAN:** There were a couple of others, including one that I think is on the outskirts of town—the name escapes me at the moment. I wouldn't say it was a public meeting but it was organised by the local member, who wasn't present, as it turned out. But he had organised for us to meet with a group of people who were concerned about three specific projects in and around Wagga.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I will be cheeky and ask, the views that were conveyed to you in those meetings will be, in some ways, picked up in your report?

**DARYL QUINLIVAN:** I think it would be fair to say that we got pretty strong consistency in all of the messages we got from people that we met with throughout the process. They were also consistent with the submissions that we got, many from the same people but more generally. All of that was quite consistent with the feedback that the planning department and EnergyCo and, in fact, Ministers and so on had had. We did feel that we had a pretty good understanding about those concerns because they were broadly consistent across the board.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Have you had any feedback on your first report recommendations, Mr Quinlivan, with regard to the Government's acceptance or otherwise?

**DARYL QUINLIVAN:** The department has been implementing a number of the recommendations in that report because they are matters that they can implement in their own right and don't require any policy approval from the Government to get on with, so they are doing that. The mapping process is probably the highest profile of those. The more significant issues in that report really go to new ways of handling land use conflict and require new policy and, I think in the most important recommendation in the report, a new mechanism for managing land use conflict in the State.

The Minister is interested in that obviously and, as he explained to you this morning, he sees the broader suite of land use conflict issues also embracing the renewables issues that you were asking about. So it seemed sensible to him and I can understand that he saw a single package dealing with all of those as being a good way to handle that at a Cabinet level. I'm not quite sure. He mentioned the possibility of consideration before the end of the year and that would be good, I think, because land use conflict is a very serious issue

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, it has been around for a while. The process for identifying and declaring State significant agricultural land, for instance—I think in your first report you may have spent a bit of time looking at just how we protect that type of land.

**DARYL QUINLIVAN:** I didn't use the word "protect" and I would be very wary of using words like that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** No, that was my word, just to be clear.

**DARYL QUINLIVAN:** Yes, it was. A lot of people use it, so I can understand it. Actually, the identification and regulation of State significant agricultural land—or any agricultural land, for that matter—is being handled by the department and the Government. They are doing some work on identification and mapping that at present. I'm not really involved in that. I was very wary in preparing that report about recommending any prohibitions on land use change because I think it's too blunt a stick and it also removes rights from landowners that they otherwise legitimately have in the planning system.

I can understand the desire to try and place a higher burden on those wanting to convert high-quality agricultural land to some other land use, but my own view is that that's all it should be—a higher burden of proof that the change is warranted and justified and handled responsibly in the planning system. I don't think flat out prohibitions on land use change are a productive thing to do. Having said that, identifying that land in a more rigorous and careful way so that regulators can impose a higher burden of proof or a higher hurdle on decisions, I think, is a very good thing to do.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Thanks for your time today. I have no more questions for Mr Quinlivan at this stage.

**The CHAIR:** You are free to go, Mr Quinlivan. Enjoy the rest of your afternoon.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I'll move on now to the—

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Sorry, can I ask one question? Did you have a role feeding into the rice vesting review?

**DARYL QUINLIVAN:** Not formally. I did have some conversations with people who were in the department who were undertaking the review, but it wasn't a formal thing.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Is there any reason why you wouldn't, if there was a specific group of agriculturalists that were very keen to have advocacy around their voice in that review? Is there any reason why you might not have been invited to be part of that?

**DARYL QUINLIVAN:** That would have been entirely a matter for the department. As it happened, I was asked to offer some opinions, which I did in an informal way. It wasn't a structural or formal process, no.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That would have been outside of the current agreements we have with Mr Quinlivan with regards to the services he is providing us. We did, however, as he indicated, ask him a lot of questions because of his knowledge and background to help us behind the scenes. But we had a team within the Department of Primary Industries running that program.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Are you aware, Commissioner, of the concern of the Northern Rivers rice growers that are looking for serious advocacy on their part because they have an emerging industry that they want support growing?

**DARYL QUINLIVAN:** Yes, I was aware of that.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Great. Thank you very much.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Thanks, Mr Quinlivan.

**(Mr Daryl Quinlivan withdrew.)**

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Mr O'Connell, this morning we were talking about the RAA's role in essentially assessing and delivering upon a number of disaster programs. I dare say there's a fair bit on in your agency at the moment. I just want a better understanding of your staffing profile. You bring staff on as is required. Do you have a baseline number of staffing and then you bring them on as the grant programs become available?

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** Yes, that's exactly the case. We have core funding from consolidated revenue of about 22 staff.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes.

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** All the additional staff are program-based, so there are various arrangements but, for example, ERC, in response to a particular disaster, would allocate an admin fee, so we would pay for the staff out of that. Those arrangements depend on what the particular program is.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** What are your staffing numbers at this point in time?

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** I could probably tell you, Mr Veitch, it's about 95. As I mentioned in the break, we're probably coming up close to where we were with the—

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** The drought?

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** —the end of the drought and the beginning of the bushfires. So we're pretty much at capacity.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** And your capacity to accommodate those extra staff?

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** It's a good question. The new building in Orange is excellent and there are flexible work arrangements, so I'd have to say probably right now people will be exercising their right to work from home. But tomorrow and Wednesday, that corner of the office will be—I think the DG will confirm—will be probably a very active neighbourhood.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** You've been a chief of staff to a Minister. This is the chance for you to push for extra money, Mr O'Connell. You shouldn't let opportunities move away. Can you just give us a list of the disaster grants that you're actually currently rolling out?

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** I can probably find those.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** You can take that on notice and give it to us.

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** Yes.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** That would be good. What I want to do now is just have a bit of a conversation with you about this assessment process. You would have heard this morning that it doesn't matter whether it's oysters or apiarists, people appear to go in and have a look at the form. I think maybe they're a bit daunted by the process in some cases, not all cases, but they conduct a self-assessment and decide that they're not eligible. Then they'll ring MPs' offices and say, "I didn't get that grant." And you say, "Well, can you send me the email or whatever way you applied?" And they say, "I didn't apply." What education programs are we running to assist people to better understand their eligibility for these grant programs and essentially to encourage people to apply?

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** It's a good question. As the Minister alluded to this morning, Mr Veitch, we work closely with the Rural Financial Counselling Service. I think we are hopeful for a closer relationship with them over the coming period of our funding arrangement with that service. They're obviously a not-for-profit and they're funded from various sources, including the New South Wales Government. The Rural Recovery Support Service, which is another important part, they are funded by the Government, so they're another important part of our referral network. We have a fairly active admin team, too, who very patiently talk to customers on a day-by-day basis. We get something like 800 calls a week to our 1 800 number and they're all requests for information.

I think we have a fairly good network; I think we could always do better. One of the things we've done after the floods, we've looked at the way that we do—at the risk of sounding boffin-ish, but we've done a customer journey mapping process, just trying to work out where customers are, and how they contact government after a natural disaster, so that's quite informative. One of the funding streams that we've been able to access over the last 12 months is the Government's Digital Restart Fund. We've got up to \$4 million to improve that process, particularly after a natural disaster but not solely a natural disaster. I think the focus of DPI at the moment is certainly on our response capacity to all adverse events, not just natural disasters. We really want to make it easier for customers to tell government once. Knowing that we have a different relationship with our customers than a lot of other agencies, we keep their returns up to five or six years on record, so we do have quite a, I would say, sophisticated financial relationship with a lot of our customers.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** People who engage with the RAA, each time they apply they don't have to keep putting the same information into each application, do they—or do they?

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** It depends on the program. Ultimately, we'd want to get to the point where whatever the solution is—I won't go to a solution mode—people would just go to a portal or something of that sort. It depends on what the program is. In the instances of the floods, where someone who'd been through either the bushfires or some of the earlier floods, we had a streamlined assessment process. Mainly that's to do with our arrangements with the Commonwealth that we have to be able to allocate the funding to different buckets. For that reason, they have to go through this process, but the assessment process is much quicker. I think it is fair to say that our customers probably express a little bit of frustration having to go through that process again, but in the scheme of things, it does make it a more efficient process for the back end.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sean, it would be fair to say that the allocation of a customer number allows us to carry over data.

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** Yes.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We try to minimise this, but we have programs that are co-funded by a whole range of various partners and so we inevitably end up needing an additional bit of information here and an additional bit of information there around their eligibility or threshold support criteria. What Mr O'Connell and the team have been able to do is, once you deal with this once, you get that customer number. We can check with you quickly then about, "Has anything changed since you last dealt with us?" Then we can carry all that information and that data forward. Where it gets frustrating for people is if we have different criteria because of different partners involved in programs, that's putting to one side probably the most innovative part of the RAA's business, which is actually Farm Innovation funding, for which we're talking about loans, and we obviously need a completely different set of information from applicants than for grants.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** With regard to loans, this morning I was talking about the commercial fishing business adjustment package from a few years ago, which you are probably very conversant with. The capacity for people to seek a stay of payment or whatever because of circumstance, I think you took that on notice. You were going to—

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** Yes. Thanks to the team in Orange who are watching on, 70 loans were issued at the time, and they were two years interest only and then 10 years to pay the interest and principal. We issued 70 loans to a value of \$2.437 million. As at 31 August, 38 loans remain on our books. The value of those is about \$1.2 million. In my view, this is quite a pleasing result, Mr Veitch, but nine of those are in arrears and, when you say "arrears"—one of those, for example, is less than \$2. That's the system—the computer says arrears. The total value is \$80,000.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Eight zero?

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** Yes, \$80,000. Bearing in mind where we are and these customers have been through COVID and things like that, that's probably a little bit higher than what we would look for across the Farm Innovation Fund portfolio, for example, but in the scheme of things I think that's okay.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** That's pretty good. Mr O'Connell, the other thing is the RAA collects a lot of personal details, which we've just been discussing. What are the cybersecurity protections at the RAA?

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** It's a good question, again. Because we have all those financial details on our files—we're a separate entity within the DPI cluster; a separate company—and therefore others who use, for example, Salesforce, which is our CRM, our front end, they can't see our customer data. There are those sorts of protections in place. We have ongoing cybersecurity training for our staff. I think in the past couple of months the department has done a cyber audit. The secretary might care to comment.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I will talk to the secretary a bit later on about the cybersecurity.

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** I think in terms of RAA, it is obviously an area of high risk, but our systems have been found to be up to standard to date.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Mr Hansen spoke about other partners—the Department of Customer Service, Service NSW. What is the relationship like there and what are the arrangements for protecting people's personal information that may be shared between agencies?

**SEAN O'CONNELL:** It's an interesting question. I was just reflecting on this earlier. I guess the whole thrust of where the Government has been going for the last couple of years has been to protect personal information for reasons of privacy, but since obviously with the advent of these mega natural disasters there is an incentive to also be able to facilitate that exchange of information, too. I think it's probably that the agencies are required to pivot towards that better sharing at the moment. We have informal systems I'd say for shared information. With Service, for example, we'd share through shared folders and things. That is an area that we are focused on.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Any other questions I have for Mr O'Connell I will put on notice. Unless others have questions for him, there is no need for him to stay.

**(Mr Sean O'Connell withdrew.)**

**The CHAIR:** I will ask Mr Sloan to come up, where we left off on the prawn draw issue. You said you had a Fisheries officer witness the May draw. Did he witness any mistakes in process at all? I have had commercial fishermen report to me some really basic mistakes, like leaving people out of the draw, even to the more outrageous of doing a redraw after a lot of the fishermen have left because a mistake has been made. Did he witness any errors in process like that?

**SEAN SLOAN:** They did. There was a senior Fisheries management staff member present as well as a Fisheries compliance officer. They did identify some issues with the way the draw was being run. I don't have the specifics at hand now. But the way forward with that particular draw, which is the one for the Myall Lakes, is that we will work with that group of industry participants to make sure there is a level of independence around how the draw is run. As I mentioned earlier, we have referred the matter in its holistic form to the commercial fisheries advisory council so that we can get their consideration of the broader issues that have been raised. That is under their consideration at present.

**The CHAIR:** You have done the review. One of the issues that has been reported to me is that commercial fishermen are at the beginning of the month before the draw transferring their shares to one fishing business to essentially stack the draw and have the maximum number of balls in the draw and then as soon as the draw has occurred they transfer those balls back, and all those transfers are incurring a zero-dollar fee. This asset, essentially, is being transferred for zero dollars across businesses to stack the draw. Did the commercial fishermen relay that to you?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes, they have and the commercial fisheries advisory council is specifically looking at that issue. The first thing to say about that is when the commercial fishery reforms went through, stamp duty was removed from transfers, and that was a measure designed to improve the economic performance and free up



commercial fishing businesses so they could transfer their entitlements without incurring costs. That was one of the things that was done. The other thing that was done during the commercial fisheries reform was that the shares were linked to the fishing businesses. In fact, we are using those shareholdings now as a basis for making a fairer cost structure for cost recovery of fees from commercial fishers. In essence, if you have more shares in a fishery, you have more access. We are following that through to that means that you should pay a greater share of the fees for that fishery.

**The CHAIR:** We might pick up on that fee structure later.

**SEAN SLOAN:** When it comes to the prawn draw, the reason I was going down that path was just to explain that if you are a fisher in this fishery and you hold more shares, the whole intent of the reform process was that you would have greater access to the fishery. In essence, if you hold more shares you would hold more balls in this prawn draw. That was the intended purpose. The question is really how that trading is occurring and that is something we are going to look more closely at.

**The CHAIR:** Closing the loop on this prawn draw issue for the moment, who in the department actually appoints the commercial fishermen to run the draw, or was that a self-appointed position based on they were the person that put their hand up on the day and said "I'm happy to run it"? Was it appointed by you, or whoever was in your role at the time? How does that work?

**SEAN SLOAN:** There's a process set out in an order that is set up under the Fisheries Act. That was actually set up before my time so I am not aware of the specific details. I would have to take it on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Someone within Fisheries would have appointed each of these commercial fishermen to run the draws? They wouldn't have appointed themselves?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I have to have a close look at how it is set up, but I don't think there is a formal appointment process, I think there is just a process that is set up for the draw.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We might take that on notice and come back to you, Chair, on that.

**The CHAIR:** That is fine. Just picking up questions from Mr Veitch on the commercial fishing reform, obviously the BDO reports have come out and the Minister went to great lengths to explain how commercial fishermen have had a tough time with COVID, drought and bushfires and what have you. But is it not the case that the industry's rate of return and profitability has been pretty poor even before we had COVID and drought and bushfires all in one sitting? I am looking at an AgEconPlus report from 2015 and the figures in terms of profitability are fairly comparable to the figures in the BDO report. Is it fair to say that COVID isn't to blame for the position, or bushfires and drought are not to blame for the position where the commercial industry is in at the moment, it's more that the reform has caused this issue in terms of profitability?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I don't think that's the case. I think, first of all, this first set of data that we have from the BDO, it's actually social and economic data that has been collected. It's the first year that it has been collected in the history of the commercial fishery in New South Wales. The data was collected at a time when we were going through the pandemic off the back of bushfires and with other external market issues, around particularly the export market into China for some of the higher value species. There was a culmination of different issues that were affecting the data that we did collect. That is one issue. The other issue is that it's fair to say there's a degree of hesitancy on the part of commercial fishers to participate in the surveys. It's the first time they have been asked to provide this information on their businesses and the financial structures of their business. I think we will see some improvement in the volume of data that we get and the quality of the data.

The third issue is that the reforms that have occurred, which are fairly recent now, introduce quotas for a range of commercial species. They completely restructured the way that commercial fishing operates in New South Wales. I wouldn't expect that there would be an overnight response from the industry to that restructure. I would expect there to be a number of years before the industry starts to become accustomed to operating in a modern quota trading environment, which is the experience in every other jurisdiction where these types of changes and arrangements have occurred. In summary, I think this report is the first report in now a long line of these reports that we would hope to see improvement over time.

**The CHAIR:** Given the return on investment is 0.6 per cent, I hope we do see an improvement. Ms Hurst?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I might ask Dr Filmer and maybe Ms Suzanne Robinson to come forward. Dr Filmer, I want to ask you about animal use statistics. In the last estimates hearing you told me that the department had implemented a digitalised system so that the statistics would be available a lot quicker than in the past. I'm just wondering when we can expect to see the 2021 animal use statistics published?

**KIM FILMER:** The animal use statistics will be going to ARRП in September. Assuming they get approved at that level, they'll then go up through the normal approval process. I would be hoping that they're up through that process to the Minister and then published before the end of the year.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What is the part that is going to speed up? It is the part after the ARRП that is going to be much faster or is it the reporting to ARRП process is going to be much faster with the digitised system?

**KIM FILMER:** The time frame from when the statistics are submitted, which is at the end of March, through to when they go to ARRП will be shortened. We've got a system now that digitalises that front end. It is not a manual process so it's a lot quicker. That should speed the whole process up.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I also wanted to ask you about the use of cats and dogs in medical research in New South Wales. This was something that was quite a source of confusion in our recent Portfolio Committee No. 2 inquiry. Even though the ARRП statistics show that thousands of dogs and cats are being used for research in New South Wales, it appeared that anybody at that inquiry was unsure where that research was actually occurring. Can you let us know what facilities are currently holding cats and dogs that are being used for experimentation in New South Wales?

**KIM FILMER:** I don't think we can provide that to you.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And why is that?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, I think there is a piece in which a lot of the research conducted on cats and dogs is actually experimental research at private or interventional veterinary facilities and research institutes as opposed to two or three big centres for research, as you might get with other species.

**KIM FILMER:** There are about 2,500 dogs, for example, used each year and that's in the research statistics. The majority of those are privately owned animals.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes. Just to clarify, I'm not asking about the animals that are obviously in homes already. When I look at the statistics, it looks like just under 1,000 dogs and around 500 cats that aren't companion animals already. I was just trying to work out where those animals are and what sort of experiments they are being used in.

**KIM FILMER:** The majority of those are being used for low-impact categories. We collect data—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can we have an idea of what that means?

**KIM FILMER:** We don't collect that exact data. The exact experiments are under the watchful eye of the ethics committees so we don't actually collect that data. What we do collect is information about the impact that whatever is being done to them is having on them. Rather than trying to look at data for who knows what different experiments, they are sort of lumped together based on the degree of impact. That gives you a pretty good idea of whether it is high impact, low impact—and the majority of them are lower impact. Most of those dogs are being probably used for feeding trials and things like that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do we know how many facilities in New South Wales are actually housing and experimenting on the animals within the facility itself? I'm happy for you to take that on notice.

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. Recently quite a few MPs, including myself, received a letter from the new Australian Veterinary Association, which claimed that 100 per cent of cats and dogs that are being held in these facilities are being rehomed each year. But the animal use statistics from the animal research review data suggest that 75 cats were rehomed in 2020 and no dogs were rehomed. Can you explain the discrepancy between the ARRП data and the letter that we received from the Australian Veterinary Association?

**KIM FILMER:** I think the discrepancy comes around what the usage is. The statistics that are collected for research are around animal usage, not the numbers. If an animal is used then it gets picked up in those statistics.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What you mean is that those animals—if you're having no dogs rehomed, essentially that dog is kept and held for further research experiments and recycled through multiple projects going forward rather than rehomed? Is that what you mean?

**KIM FILMER:** If the statistics pick up the rehoming, and there are no animals euthanised because they can't be rehomed that have come through in the statistics, they need to be used. The statistics are based on usage.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, what I'm trying to understand is that the statistics are saying around 1,000 dogs are being held in facilities. The Australian Veterinary Association is saying 100 per cent of the dogs

are rehomed, but the ARRP data says that in 2020 no dogs were rehomed. Is it that those dogs are still being used in research and are just being recycled through further projects, and that's why we had zero dogs rehomed while the Australian Veterinary Association is saying 100 per cent are rehomed? I'm trying to understand what that data is saying.

**KIM FILMER:** I think I'd better take that on notice to get that right for you.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you, that's fine. Some of the feedback that we received from the inquiry was that there needs to be more support for animal ethics committees, particularly in terms of training. We heard that there is a huge variability amongst the animal ethics committees. Some are going above and beyond and then maybe some of the members of others are struggling more to understand how to implement the three Rs. Are you aware of that feedback on the difference between these animal ethics committees? Are we looking at having additional training and support for animal ethics committees into the future?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes. In actual fact, ARRP has put on two training webinars this year and there is a third one planned. The first one was on rehoming. The second one was on getting the statistics correct and making sure that the numbers used are optimal for all experiments.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I want to ask a couple of quick questions to you, Mr Hansen. Is the department aware of Australian Wool Innovation's Wool 2030 Strategy?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Is there a plan to respond to that on behalf of the New South Wales Government?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** In terms of "respond"?

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Responding as to which parts of that the Government will be adopting.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might see if Ms Lorimer-Ward wants to add anything, but at this point in time we have the Department of Primary Industries strategy, which picks up on the areas which we are focused on. Where those areas overlap with the strategies of external industry R&D corporations such as Australian Wool Innovation, then we will look to partner with and co-invest with them. But I don't think that we'll be making a response or submitting anything with regards to their strategy other than looking for what areas of it overlap with our strategic outcomes we're trying to achieve.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I'm particularly interested in pillar one of the strategy, which states:

Growers have the confidence and tools to manage flystrike without mulesing

This Parliament has had a lot of discussions about mulesing, and I understand that the approach of the Government has been a bit complicated. But is the Government working to give growers the confidence and tools to manage flystrike without mulesing?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I would say yes on that front. That is everything from resistance testing that we are doing to ensure that we are aware of what chemicals are coming close to end of life or feasible utilisation because of build-up of resistance; providing alternatives and providing mechanisms for rotation of different chemicals to try to minimise that resistance build-up; and monitoring. We have a number of projects underway. I might see if either Dr Tracey or Ms Lorimer-Ward want to add. One of the things we're finding is that with climate change we're actually not getting the seasonal break that we would normally get with blowflies. We are getting accumulation in the populations rather than having a cold enough winter to cut. We are doing some remodelling of what this looks like and providing advice to the industry with regard to when the season starts to become more prevalent and what's that changing window for them in terms of their management practices. A lot of that work we do then gets translated into outcomes that are delivered on the ground by LLS via their forums, their individual interaction with growers. But I see—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Could I just ask you, though, on the basis of all of that, what is your best guess for when we will have eliminated mulesing?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I wouldn't have an educated best guess on that, I am sorry.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** What is the department working towards?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** At this point in time we are working towards providing the full suite of tools for people to be able to utilise, from integrated pest management through to chemicals, through to genetics and obviously mulesing done in a humane way. So we will keep providing—and the more we can create alternative tools for people, the hope is we will see more people utilising those tools. But I have no indication as to when we have a—we have no stated goal with regard to that.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** But pain relief for mulesing isn't mandatory in New South Wales; is that right?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That is correct.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Has there been any advance towards making that actually mandatory?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That would have been a good question for the morning.

**The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT:** Point of order: I feel like we are getting close to questions about government policy rather than the implementation of that policy. I think the mandating of pain relief would be up to the Government.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** To the point of order: I think I have made it very clear in my questions that I have talking about what the Government plan is, not what the Minister's plan is. To the extent that it does involve a policy decision, Mr Hansen is experienced enough to be able to tell me he can't answer the question.

**The CHAIR:** To rule on the point of order: I agree it is probably getting a bit close, but I do agree with Ms Boyd in saying that Mr Hansen is very experienced in this process now. He knows when he can say it is a point of opinion or it is more for a Minister to make that decision. He has done that in the past, so I am confident he can navigate these questions.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I guess just a final question: Does the department consider that mulesing without pain relief is in compliance with the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** If done within the current remit, then yes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Do you think it meets the current objectives of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** If it is done within the current remit, yes.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Can I just ask about the rice vesting, if that's okay, of whoever might be best to answer that? Can I just find out why the rice vesting actually continued? I get the official reason that we decided to carry it on, or the Minister announced it, but the findings of the actual review are just not consistent with the decision to maintain or renew the rice vesting. For example, the clear findings early in the report are, "There is no conclusive evidence of the net benefits to rice growers," and, "Vesting is restricting the growth and development of domestic supply chains" et cetera. All of the conclusions in terms of the findings seem to be so inconsistent with why the heck we would continue vesting, particularly when there is a group of growers in the Northern Rivers that are trying really hard and have spelt out their case in no uncertain terms that it is choking them to the extent that it is.

**The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT:** Point of order: It is the same issue again. This is a government policy that the department is being asked to comment on.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** To the point of order: Again, I think Mr Hansen is very capable of staying within his remit. I am asking why the findings in a report—why a decision was made when the findings were inconsistent. The department is responsible for carrying that out. I think it is fine to understand the mechanics of how that has happened.

**The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT:** Do I now respond to that as well?

**The CHAIR:** If you would like to respond to that, yes.

**The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT:** The competency of the witness is not the question here. We can't have one standard for competent witnesses and a different standard for incompetent witnesses.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you suggesting some of them are incompetent?

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Why? There's a different standard for incompetent Ministers.

**The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT:** The decision made was a government decision that was made. It is now up to the department to implement that policy.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** They are all wondering up here, "When he says 'incompetent', who is he talking about?"

**REBECCA FOX:** I am not quite sure whether we should stand up or sit down.

**The CHAIR:** Name them.

**The Hon. TAYLOR MARTIN:** Not today obviously.

**The CHAIR:** I do want to rule. I think that was stepping a bit beyond what Ms Boyd did. Unless Mr Hansen can actually advise as to what or how the department informed the Government's decision, and that is helping Ms Higginson a bit, I think it's probably a bit over the line in terms of government opinion versus—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I appreciate that. Our review that was completed was one of the inputs into the discussions of government to arrive at a conclusion.

**The CHAIR:** And the bell has gone.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Back to the point of order—

**The CHAIR:** I have already ruled on that.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** It was our review. This is the thing.

**The CHAIR:** You can try and reword or—

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Can I just ask then—

**The CHAIR:** No, you can't because the bell has gone.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Sorry, I didn't hear the bell.

**The CHAIR:** You can pick it up in the next round.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I am still trying to collect my thoughts after that point of order from Mr Barrett. Just a question about European carp eradication—I am not sure who that is to, but someone here must know. Last time we were here I did ask for an update on where that program is at. I know there has now been a change of Federal Government. What is the status now of the European carp eradication? I think it was the herpes virus that was the virus. What is happening? Are we giving up on that or is it still being worked on?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think the short answer is we are not giving up on it. In terms of a progress update, I will look to see whether it is either Fisheries or invasive species who want to take the lead on this because they are actually working in partnership on that. I might go to Fisheries.

**SEAN SLOAN:** I am happy to take it. Essentially the answer that we gave in March is still where the issue is at. So there is a piece of additional research work, which is currently sitting before the new Federal Government, and essentially they would need to make a decision about whether to go ahead with any sort of program on releasing the herpes virus to control carp. That decision hasn't been made and we haven't as yet been consulted on it, but there is an undertaking that, at both a biosecurity level and a Fisheries level, we will be consulted. That is my understanding about where it's at.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I have a question for Dr Tracey, if I could, through you, Mr Hansen? Your team have got a phenomenal amount of work on at the moment, and that is probably an understatement. How are we looking after the welfare of your staff and the workload?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, there is a lot of work on. I think it has been a real team effort, though, right? You know, in response it is everyone chipping in. There has been a really good input right across DPI and LLS in our emergency response, not only there but also right across government as well, and RFS has been fantastic in terms of what they have stepped up into. I think the key to that is how do we scale up in a big situation where we do need—like FMD, in terms of being able to put all those resources in. So, yes, we have to keep an eye on our staff. It is a busy time for them. I think those scheduled breaks in emergency response are critical to keep that up, and also sharing the load when teams are stretched, and being able to reach out more broadly is important as well. I think those are the key strategies to get us through.

**REBECCA FOX:** Mr Veitch, if I could just jump in there, I think that is a topic of conversation across the whole of government at the moment, from secretary level. Our chief people officers are discussing it regularly. One example that springs to mind is our whole leadership team went through a course with the Centre for Corporate Health recently called "Managing the marathon", which was aimed to address us identifying and helping our staff through that. So a big focus from a secretary level, and certainly for the Public Service Commission and commissioner through the chief people officers. We are very aware of that and we are all living it daily.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, Mr Veitch, could I just use that as an opportunity to give a plug to the RFS, as Dr Tracey flagged. On the varroa response, some 37 per cent of all staff who have been involved since day one are actually RFS. They have been a significant contributor. We couldn't have done it without them, to be honest.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Just going on, when public meetings are being held about the varroa mite, particularly in the Hunter, but in different parts now, do we have counselling services available at those meetings, particularly for the apiarists and recreational apiarists as well?

**JOHN TRACEY:** I think support is available. I am not sure we've got counsellors available at every meeting, but there is a support line that is available for staff. It is a tough time for industry.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes. People are pretty attached to their hives and a lot of them are now discovering that they are going to lose them. So, yes, it is pretty emotional.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I know for a number of the bigger meetings we have not just referred and given numbers, but we have actually had representatives from those organisations in the crowd to be able to be personally approached for conversations. That isn't at every meeting but for the bigger gatherings we have certainly made sure they have been there.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I want to move on to something else, but I again extend my appreciation for everyone who has been involved—there has been a lot on. Mannering Park fish kill, which occurred back in August, what was the role of DPI-Fisheries post that event once it was reported?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The initial response in terms of identifying fish was undertaken by our local Fisheries officers. The full response to that fish kill event was led by the EPA, and so the EPA was responsible for taking water samples et cetera. The Fisheries support for that activity was essentially sample collection, on-water support and that type of thing, and that's normal practice. When there is an event like that, the EPA would lead the response and we would provide the support.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** How does DPI-Fisheries back up data such as documents, reports and emails on your system? Do you back it up to the server or to the cloud? What is the process?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** All documents are kept in our record management system. In terms of back-up, that's centrally backed up by the cluster.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** That's okay. For any other request for information via GIPAA or an SO 52, that information is searchable as per the numerous SO 52s that I may or may not have conducted for DPI, Mr Hansen?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Is Fisheries the same?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's right. They are all part of the same system.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** A GIPAA request from one of my colleagues has been rejected by DPI-Fisheries on the basis that each individual staff member would have to search their computer for documents, which then raises questions about how they back up their data. If this information is searchable, as you just said, Mr Hansen, why would each individual staff member at DPI-Fisheries have to do that? Why would that be the basis for rejecting a GIPAA request?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I will go to the first part first, which is, if they haven't gone and put the data into the online management system yet, then it would still be sitting on desktops and littering C drives across their laptops and as such would need to be individually searched. But I'm not aware of the GIPAA in question. That might give me some context as to what kind of data it was.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** It was to do with the Mannering Park fish kill.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Okay, in which case it could well be that those officers had not had a chance to load it back in yet.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** How long does it take? As part of the operating procedures for the department, is there a time frame for that information to be loaded onto the record management system?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, there is a requirement under the official records requirements in terms of making sure that that information is loaded into our online records system.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Within what time frame?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I would have to take that on notice. I don't know off the top of my head, unless someone else does?

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Essentially, DPI-Fisheries has to follow the Government guidelines around this end of the legislation as it relates to records?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I want to go back to my trout cod questions. I have a couple of issues for you to take on notice, Mr Sloan, if you haven't already. Essentially, how long has this trout cod recovery program been in place?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The species has been listed as endangered for, I think, close to three decades. It's a species that's been under pressure for a long time. In terms of the recovery program, I will have to take that on notice and come back to you with specific information.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** When did it commence? How much has been spent to date on the trout cod recovery program? And really, more specifically, how much has been spent for each of the last two years, if you could, please? Then I want to go back to this issue around the fingerlings. Where have trout cod fingerlings been released in the last couple of years?

**SEAN SLOAN:** To the first question around the money that's been spent, I do have some information that I can provide. The production of fingerlings happens at our Narrandera facility, and it costs approximately \$40,000 per year to produce fingerlings that are then released. We also have a habitat restoration project on the Macquarie River through the NSW Environmental Trust and DPI Habitat Action Grants, which is a project totalling \$288,000. That cost of producing fingerlings is the annual cost. In terms of where the fingerlings are released, I will need to check that to get the exact locations, but there are several locations where fingerlings are released. They are actually not just released into the river systems, but they are released into Talbingo Dam as well, which is for recreational fishing, and in the other locations the species is totally protected.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** The issue with Talbingo Dam, as you would appreciate, Mr Sloan, is it is pretty much enclosed. Because of the nature of that dam, fish can't get out unless they have been caught and are carried out of that dam. Have we done any work on the population in Talbingo Dam to see whether they are surviving in that water?

**SEAN SLOAN:** They are surviving in that water and they are caught by recreational anglers there. The fish that are released there do survive.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** As I understand it, there has been over 300,000 trout cod released in the Macquarie River. I think there have been electrofishing surveys conducted there, but there has been no evidence of an established or re-established population. Is that correct?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The figures that I have, Mr Veitch, are that over the life of the trout cod conservation stocking program, which spans from 1987 to date, 2022, there has been 964,000 trout cod fingerlings that have been restocked, of which 535,000 have been in the last 20 years. On average, about 20,000 fingerlings are released every year. It is a major restocking activity that we undertake. It is one of those conservation-dependent species that requires restocking.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Okay. I guess what I'm getting to here is we are releasing the fingerlings into a range of different places, but the status of this particular fish has not improved, has it? Its status is, would you say, endangered?

**SEAN SLOAN:** It is classified formally as endangered under the fisheries legislation in New South Wales and also federally. There has been some sign of improvement of the population that is restocked in the Murrumbidgee. I think that's one of three locations where we stock the fish. My understanding is the three locations are the Murrumbidgee, the Macquarie and the Murray. The Murrumbidgee is the only location where there has been some signs of stock recovery. It is one of those species that is quite a sensitive species and, when you think about the impact of the recent drought on all of our native fish, we know that that has affected all of our native fish populations. You have a recovery program running for a species like trout cod, and then you have a very severe drought and that obviously sets us back in our recovery plans.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Do we do any work on the failed reintroductions? Do we go back and see why those reintroductions have failed, or are you saying there have been no failed reintroductions of trout cod?

**SEAN SLOAN:** When you say—

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** When we release fingerlings into some of these waterways, are the populations established and growing in numbers? Can we say that?

**SEAN SLOAN:** In the Murrumbidgee they are showing signs of recovery.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Macquarie?

**SEAN SLOAN:** In the Murray and Macquarie the populations are still at a low level, and we wouldn't say they have improved to the point where we can say that there's a self-sustaining population. If you think back to my earlier comments this morning, the real success factor that we are looking for is to have the population of adults recover to a point where they can reproduce naturally and replenish the stocks in a natural environment and also extend the range of the species beyond just those short stretches of river. We'll just continue to do the work that we're doing, which is breeding the fish and restocking. We will continue to protect the breeding population in that really important stretch of the river in the Murray. And then those other, bigger infrastructure improvements like the fish passageway program, which is essentially trying to reconnect the river across the board, will be where we improve the resilience, not just for trout cod but for all of our native fish populations.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Has there been any evaluation on the impact of the trout cod population at Talbingo Dam of the Snowy 2.0 project?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I have to take that on notice, Mr Veitch.

**The CHAIR:** To assist Mr Veitch, when you do take it on notice, I'd be particularly interested in the impact of redfin being introduced, because that is the real risk being expressed by our fishermen—the impact of redfin on trout cod populations.

**SEAN SLOAN:** I'll add that as well.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I'll move back to Mr Hansen. There was an issue—and this wasn't your department; it was planning. They were looking at changing some of these farmstays, pick your own orchards and that sort of stuff earlier in the year. I believe there's been a change. But it did raise a question around land use definition for things such as farm experience type arrangements on farming. Was your department engaged in any way into determining what those definitions would be? I'm also looking at farmgate premises.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might ask Ms Lorimer-Ward to make comment on this.

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** We were consulted very early on in the process. I can't confirm specifically whether it was about definitions but definitely about the intent of facilitating agritourism and trying to manage the planning issues around that. We understand that the next version of that is yet to be released.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Those two definitions that are now being used—farm experience premises and farmgate premises—once were called farmgate activities, for those that are wondering, and farm events. Are we looking at those definitional changes, what they mean and how much information needs to be provided to people to better understand that?

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** We are. My understanding is that they relate specifically to things such as numbers of people there at a particular time, frequency of visitors and number of days, potentially—they are the sorts of things that get picked up by those different definitions. So it relates to the scale of the activity that might occur as part of those definitions.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** When you said the department were engaged early on in this process, can you maybe clarify "early on"?

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** Possibly not any more than we were consulted early in the development of the agritourism guide. We weren't consulted necessarily prior to the most recent release that was out and that there has been significant feedback on regarding what those definitions meant. My understanding is that we weren't consulted prior to that release.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** It certainly created a bit of angst, as Mr Barrett would know, around pick your own orchards.

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** It did.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** They were quite concerned about this definitional change in the proposal, but also some of the activities on farm. Farmstays have come to me to talk about some of this stuff. Is it unusual for planning to go down this exercise without too much consultation with the department? I know you said "early on" but—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think the opportunity is always provided to us to make comments. It's just at what stage in that process we get the opportunity to provide comments into. Then, as we'll see in the draft that went out, the feedback that came back ends up coming back around to us for further consultation and for us to provide feedback into. We have a good working relationship with planning and the officers within it. We work on numerous pieces on a daily basis, including utilising Daryl Quinlivan as the ag commissioner as an opportunity



to bring us together to talk through some of these pieces around land use conflict and to try to ensure that we all understand what objectives are trying to be accomplished.

So for us, sometimes, we get brought in nice and early around what's trying to be achieved and, in this case, as Ms Lorimer-Ward said, trying to make sure that it wasn't unfettered in the number of people who would spend what duration of time, which might end up creating complexities and problems for neighbouring farms. We got involved in conversations early when they went out for draft. We've had a chance to come back to them and also talk to them more about that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** As you would know, Mr Hansen, agritourism is an important plank to a whole heap of economies right across New South Wales, and they were nervous about limiting the number of people per day, for instance, and the like.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, definitely. We've seen a lot of our rural economies really benefit from the enforced domestic tourism boom of the last couple of years, and that has led people to look at opportunities to continue to diversify their business and, in large part, to connect that with the growing interest in provenance that consumers have, to capitalise on it. We think it's fantastic. We just need to make sure it's done sustainably.

**The CHAIR:** Just picking up where we left off with the commercial fishing reforms, it is a concern for me and a concern specifically for the commercial fishermen when they see figures of rate of return of income sitting at negative 13.3 per cent. If you equate that to figures, negative \$3.1 million. That's for the Estuary General Fishery. For those who aren't aware, that's where the large number of our multi-endorsed fishermen do their work. So if the mullet is not running, they can go and do something else. If any fishery was going to be able to survive the impacts of drought, bushfire and COVID or just do better than other fisheries, it would be the estuary general. But you look at the BDO report and the estuary general is doing the worst. Does that concern the department—that what should be the most profitable and resilient part of the fishery is doing the worst?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Traditionally, the more profitable fisheries have been the export fisheries, which are lobster and abalone, and there is some exporting of trawl whiting and prawns.

**The CHAIR:** You agree the estuary general should be more resilient because of the fact that it has the most multi-endorsed fishermen. So it would be able to survive all these things that the Minister was saying impacted the fishery. But it's actually probably doing the worst by a long shot.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The important part is going to be to make sure, when we get the next lot of data—because to get a set of data out of COVID and to think it looks like anything normal in the food business, it doesn't matter whether you're a lettuce producer or an abalone producer, nothing is normal that came out of the COVID period, especially for industries in which there's a higher reliance on food service than there is on retail, which is then driven by restaurant shutdowns, by travel shutdowns and so forth.

**The CHAIR:** I accept that. Going to that second set of data, when is that occurring? Because my understanding is it was supposed to start happening in June, and commercial fishermen are telling me they haven't been called up by BDO again to do the second round of data collection.

**SEAN SLOAN:** The second survey is being conducted at present and the idea is that we just continue that every year. I would also add that it's not just a data point that we're looking for here. We want to see trends in this data. Other jurisdictions have been collecting this data for decades, and so I repeat what I said earlier: I wouldn't expect to see this sort of instant response to the reform decisions that were made, which are fairly recent in the scheme of this fishery in New South Wales. I would expect to be looking for longer-term trends that have been significantly disrupted by not just COVID but floods. One of our most profitable sectors is the oyster sector, but they've been hit really hard for two years in a row now. So there are a number of factors at play here that are out of everybody's hands.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Can I just add to that? One of the things that we can do more of in this space is actually looking at the red tape that can get taken out. If we can't help them a lot with regard to the market and how the markets are playing, what we can do is look at what costs are being imposed by the New South Wales Government, either red tape—and that has been part of the regulatory packages over the past couple of months that you would have seen, trying to increase the efficiency. You would be aware of those conversations.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, sure. Just going to that, one of the other things that commercial fishermen were asked was about whether they trust DPI-Fisheries to make the right decisions for managing commercial fishing in New South Wales. The report says a significant majority of New South Wales fishers do not trust DPI-Fisheries to do that. Obviously that has to be a concern for you, Mr Hansen, and you, Mr Sloan, that fishers don't actually trust you guys to make those right decisions around removing red tape or anything like that. What are you guys doing to improve that trust?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Removing red tape and that kind of stuff—it's not surprising for anyone, I don't think, that an industry which had been sold the promise of a reform 20-something years ago and then saw successive pauses, false starts and mis-starts suddenly has a lack of trust in government offices in terms of making decisions behalf of their sector. That shouldn't surprise anyone.

**The CHAIR:** No. One of those false starts was the fees. Aligning fees with the number of shares that you had—that was supposed to happen at the same time as the reform. Now you've created a situation where the people that have all the equity because they own the majority of the shares can afford to pay the fees. The ones that essentially get screwed over by the reform—changing the fees doesn't help them at all. Well, it helps them very little compared to what it would have done if it was actually implemented when it should have been done.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** And in terms of timing, that's two years later than what it would have ideally been, but the whole reform is 25 years later than what it should have otherwise been. To be honest, even now, it might be late but I'm sure those fishers who now have a lower annual fee that they need to pay would prefer that than us not to do it at all.

**The CHAIR:** Is the department doing any work to attract younger people into the profession? Looking at the data from BDO, it's fair to say it's an aging profession. When you look at the personal income that was given for 2019-20—I note all the concerns, but you're talking about an income of \$43,000. People are struggling to get apprentices to turn up. When you're on decent money, why would a young person get out of bed for \$43,000 a year?

**SEAN SLOAN:** We do have a new training program, which is part of young farmer business coaching and support that is specifically tailored to the fishing industry. That is designed to help young, new entrants to the fishing industry learn the ropes, so to speak. In answer to your question, "Is it concerning to hear that fishers are untrusting?" I think the answer is yes. That's a concern to us, and we are doing things to address that. We're setting up processes with the harvest strategies that we are developing for each individual fishery that involves the fishers, and that gets them engaged with us, designing the decision-making frameworks for how the fishery is then managed into the future.

That's already working in those fisheries where those harvest strategies are being developed. We have a number of processes where, for instance, our scientists are running forums with fishers and stakeholders to present the data that has been collected by fishers and provided to our scientists to do the fish stock assessments. Our scientists are holding forums to present that data back to the fishers, which is designed to engage fishers but also engender trust in the way that those reports are being prepared. I could list a few other things that we're doing, but we are acknowledging that the reform has given rise to those issues and we are trying to address them. To the point of the aging workforce, that's not just an issue in New South Wales; that's Australia-wide.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, it is.

**SEAN SLOAN:** Only a few weeks ago we had a forum with the urchin fishers, and it was actually really interesting to see quite a few young people involved in that industry. So there are some sectors of the industry that are attracting young fishers, and that's one of them. I would expect to see some more of that into the future as we see those types of fisheries develop.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I'm not sure if Dr Filmer or Ms Robinson or Mr Hansen is the best one to answer these questions. I've just got a few questions about exhibited animal licence holding. I'm just wondering what steps somebody would have to go through to actually acquire animals. If a licence holder operating a zoo or a petting zoo wanted to acquire some koalas, for example, would they need to apply with the DPI first? And what does that actual process look like?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes, I can have a go at that one. So the application would go in. DPI would consider "fit and proper person". They'd consider the premises. They would do an evaluation on that basis and then proceed with a process then to approve.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. If the animals were coming from interstate, are there any checks that occur to make sure of where that animal is being sourced? Say, for example, someone with a licence in New South Wales wanted to acquire koalas from Victoria. If the koala was captured illegally from the wild and brought into New South Wales, is there any way of actually tracking that? Or is there any way of actually knowing that that koala wasn't captured from the wild from another State?

**JOHN TRACEY:** My understanding is that that would be part of the process as well, that check.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, just give me a bit of an understanding. How would that actually occur? What's the process that's put in place to make sure that somebody in another State hasn't captured a koala from the wild and sold them to somebody who does have an exhibited licence in New South Wales?

**JOHN TRACEY:** That would be a follow-up with whether or not the animal would have a permit or an approval to—basically, sourcing where that animal has come from would be part of the review in the process.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you just give me a bit more information about that sourcing process, particularly for an animal that's come from interstate?

**JOHN TRACEY:** In the case of a koala, there would be checks with the relevant environment departments around licensing and checks in relation that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So each department within each State has the exact numbers of animals that are currently in exhibited facilities, so they would know if there were additional ones that had been wild captured?

**JOHN TRACEY:** I'm not sure if they've got exact numbers or not.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I'm asking hypothetically, but I have had complaints come to my office that animals have been wild-captured in another State and then brought to exhibited licence holders. I don't know if there's any evidence of it, but what I'm trying to understand is, is that even possible? Or is the system set up to make sure that that can't happen? If somebody was, say, a licensed animal holder in one State and they went and wild-captured an animal and sold them to another licence holder, is that a loophole that could bypass the whole system?

**JOHN TRACEY:** I'm not sure of that.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We might take that on notice.

**JOHN TRACEY:** We can take that on notice.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** If we can get an answer from our compliance teams, who I think might be watching, we will come back around to that, if that's okay.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, please. Thank you. I've also got some questions for Mr Hansen about the poultry standards.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I understand you've been involved in the development of the standards for many years. I've got a very specific question about the standards. Standard 4.4 provides that facilities must provide all breeder ducks with access to water to dip their heads underwater or preen. Standard 4.4 is the only time that the term "breeder ducks" is used in the standard, and the term "breeder duck" itself isn't defined. Are you able to clarify: Are breeder ducks different to broiler meat ducks? Is that the definition of breeder duck, the ducks that are used for breeding for the broiler ducks?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, is the answer I've been told to the right of me. I might throw to Dr Filmer.

**KIM FILMER:** I think you're talking about the mothers and fathers of the others. The breeders are the parents of the ones that are bred.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. I just wanted to clarify. Mr Hansen, I also want to ask you about animals in emergencies. I know the NSW Flood Inquiry made a recommendation that there be a proactive rapid response to managing animal welfare following natural disasters, and that includes collaborative communication with local vets and animal welfare organisations. I've also received feedback from the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League that it can be quite difficult, that they have to wait to be technically deployed by the DPI in an emergency rather than being able to independently go, unless they get a very specific call for animal cruelty. Is that something that is being reviewed within the DPI at this point in time in regard to deploying them in those emergency situations?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. After every one of our emergency responses, which seem to be consistent over the last 10 years—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** —every year when we get to the end we do a post-action review and identify what we need to do to improve for next time. That piece around rapid deployment was actually one of the reasons why we have actively deployed the Animal Welfare League or the RSPCA in most recent events, because we had people on the ground up there and they could be on the ground assisting us. We will continue to refine that triggering. Also we are working with more private vet agencies and associations, such as vets without borders, to arrive at fast deployment options for them as well. Because, as we found with the first of the floods this year, when your own workforce in an area that is prepared and trained is itself trying to save itself and its families, it

becomes very hard to call upon them. Then it becomes very hard to draw on the rest of your staff from across the State because access too becomes very difficult. We are certainly looking at the fast deployment of as many on-ground resources as possible. One of the good examples out of the most recent one was, rather than establishing ourselves, our engagement of Norco to establish a fodder depot straightaway with both the fodder, the staff and the handling facilities that they had up there.

**JOHN TRACEY:** I can add to that, if you'd like?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Maybe in the next round.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Mr Orr, these are probably for you. I asked this of the Minister. I'll get clarification on the record. Has there been any assessment of the likely increase in timber harvesting from private native forestry as it occurs following the remake of the PNF codes?

**STEVE ORR:** In terms of specifics, Mr Field, there hasn't been a "this is what's actually going to happen as a consequence of", if that's the answer to your question.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** But it's one of the drivers, right? You hope for an increase in timber harvesting from private native forestry.

**STEVE ORR:** That's right. There are couple of elements to that, one of which is the new codes, which you'd obviously be very familiar with, and there was a lot of effort which was put in right across government to bring about the new codes. Secondly, as you'd also be aware, within the New South Wales budget there was an allocation of \$28 million towards private native forestry. The majority of that money is going towards extension to provide advice and assistance to landholders in relation to PNF, as well as provision of funding to the NRC in relation to the MER framework. So those things are all in train. What the outcome of that will be is a bit hard to determine, but what we want to create is an environment where landholders have great assurity and good advice.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Is the \$28 million a general allocation within LLS or is there a specific program? Has it got particular outcomes that it's trying to achieve?

**STEVE ORR:** It's a specific program within LLS. It was made as a particular allocation in the budget which has just been handed down, Mr Field.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Are there objectives to it? Are there targets to be met?

**STEVE ORR:** I might ask Mr Tyndall to take you through some of the details of the program.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I guess my point is if you've got extension officers out there spruiking for business for contractors trying to access timber resources—is that what it looks like?

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Field, we certainly have an existing extension function. What the funding did was enhance the function. We're in the process now of setting up the program. If you want I could ask Mr Tyndall to explain.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I may only have six minutes of the whole afternoon, Mr Tyndall. I will certainly put questions on notice with regard to that.

**STEVE ORR:** Sure. I am happy to deal with it in that way.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I appreciate your patience. How are the volumes of timber and the area of land harvested going to be reported publicly?

**STEVE ORR:** As I understand—and, again, Dr Tyndall can provide some information in relation to that—through the public registers which we have in place in terms of the areas. There are now new obligations for people to provide post-harvesting notification or pre-harvesting notification.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** It's not an annual anymore, right, Dr Tyndall? It's a monthly. It's before you intend to harvest and then I think 30 days of harvesting. I've been asking questions for three years about the volumes. Between yourselves and the EPA, no-one has been able to answer those questions.

**STEVE ORR:** Maybe, Mr Field, if Mr Tyndall—

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I'm going to ask this very specific question: Is the MoU between you and the EPA going to be published? How will you report on the volumes of timber harvested from private native forestry?

**STEVE ORR:** In relation to the MOU, yes, it exists.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I know it exists.

**STEVE ORR:** We would be happy to provide you with a copy, Mr Field.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Thank you.

**STEVE ORR:** We are in discussions with the EPA about whether or not it's put on the website. As you can appreciate, it deals with—

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** The MoU put on the website or reporting on the volumes?

**STEVE ORR:** The MoU put on the website, which I think was your question. Naturally, we need to have discussions. It's not just an LLS decision. We need to have discussions with our colleagues in the EPA about that.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Dr Tyndall, how will the volumes and the area of harvesting be reported? Will they be in the Forestry snapshot reports?

**ADAM TYNDALL:** I think the simple answer to that would be yes, Mr Field. I appreciate your interest in this area over a number of budget estimates. I think, as you pointed out, there's been a significant change in how we're doing reporting on private native forestry. We identified that as an area that we needed to improve in the new codes of practice. There's now a requirement 30 days prior to someone harvesting to put in a notification. There's also now a two-step approval process, where we are approving their forest management plans, where previously landholders held on to those and only provided those if they were asked for them. They then report on their volume and their area when they do their completion notifications, so when they've finished their harvesting. Naturally, the codes have only come into effect in May, so the reporting is not up to date just yet.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Have you had any reports yet?

**ADAM TYNDALL:** We've had four completion notifications and I can report that we've had 49 commencement notifications.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** How will the volumes and the area of harvest be reported?

**ADAM TYNDALL:** We would report those on an annual basis on our website.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** Will it be broken down into regions?

**ADAM TYNDALL:** It will certainly be broken down into the code regions, yes.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** One of the concerns raised by the chief scientist in his independent assessment—I appreciate that it is a Cabinet-in-confidence document, inexplicable though that is. It was tabled in estimates the week before last, though. One of the concerns that he raised was the challenges in understanding the regional scale impact of PNF, because individual landholders can make individual decisions about what they do. How are you managing those cumulative risks associated with PNF?

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Field, obviously we can't comment specifically on a report.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** It's convenient, that, isn't it? Science—Cabinet in confidence. I'm not asking for you to comment on that. How are you managing that risk, because I assume you're equally concerned about it?

**ADAM TYNDALL:** I can talk to what's in the new codes. I obviously can't comment on that report. There's a new provision in the new PNF codes that require us to undertake a cumulative assessment, if we think there's a risk at a local scale where harvesting might be occurring at a property that's adjacent to another property, to take into consideration those cumulative impacts. That was a recommendation of the NRC, and we're undertaking that risk assessment when we approve forest management plans.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** What's the trigger for that?

**ADAM TYNDALL:** The trigger for that is a range of triggers in terms of the risk assessment. It relates principally to whether the property has a neighbour who's also intending to harvest at the same time.

**The CHAIR:** We will now break for afternoon tea. We will return at 3.45 p.m.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back. I will now throw to Mr Primrose for questions.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** I will direct my questions to Mr Hansen. Please feel free to send them wherever you wish. They are about forestry. In May the Government announced a \$10 million Hardwood Timber Haulage Subsidy Program to subsidise the freight of logs to flood-affected mills in the north of the State. That's correct, isn't it?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, it is. Sorry, we are just getting the appropriate officer up to the table to help you with that, Mr Primrose.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** That's fine. I presume that's correct because I'm reading it out of your document. How much of the \$10 million transport subsidy—and I think it amounts to \$30 per tonne of timber—has actually been expended, please?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Thanks for the question. We will get back to you on the exact numbers that have been spent but, I think, to date, we have had 10 applications under that program. The average funding spent so far is around \$400,000—approved, sorry.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** So 10 times \$400,000 would be about \$4 million.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** So far. That's the average.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** When is the program due to finish?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** We extended the program; it finishes in September.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Which is this month.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Correct.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** So out of the \$10 million, the applications you received so far average \$400,000. There are 10 of them, so \$4 million has been spent out of the \$10 million.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** So far, yes.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Do you expect a rush of applications?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I'm talking about applications that have been approved. There are other applications being processed or assessed and we are also in discussions with industry about taking up that program as well to find out what some of the issues might be.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** I presume it's late September.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Correct.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Can you just provide us with some general statistics? I'm just curious as to how that's been taken up.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** How many mills so far have actually applied under the program? Is it 10? Is that correct?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** We will try and get that detail to you as well. DPI doesn't actually administer the program; it's managed through Regional Programs in the Department of Regional NSW. But we can still try and get that information for you.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** I was assuming you guys were doing it. You may wish to also, then, refer these questions. Have costings been undertaken to provide the same assistance to areas impacted by bushfires, for example?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Correct.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Yes, they were?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Yes, it was a similar amount of money.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** When did that program operate?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** In terms of the bushfire assistance and transport subsidy?

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Yes.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Straight after the bushfires that program ran. I think it ran for 12 months, but I will get back to you on that.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Please. Thank you. I would appreciate the same sort of statistics. I'm just looking at how successful or otherwise it has been.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Again, it was another one that was run through Regional Programs as part of the department.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** If you could also indicate for both programs which regions have actually benefited from those.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** No problem.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Again, you may wish to refer it, but was the subsidy paid directly to the processor and were they then required to provide evidence of where the logs were freighted from?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** That's right. The subsidy is paid to the processor and they have to provide evidence in terms of where they sourced the logs and where they ultimately are processed.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** I will move to other questions now. In the last round of estimates we asked how much timber Forestry Corporation is actually exporting and you told us that there was about 170,000 tonnes per annum of softwood logs not useable by local mills. India, South Korea and Vietnam were the areas. Can you tell me who assesses that exported logs are not useable by local mills? Is it Forestry Corporation or is it some other agency or body?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That will be a question for Anshul.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I'm happy to take that one. Thank you for your question. Right now, by the way, just to clarify, we are not exporting large numbers at all. Very small numbers of logs are exported because after the major fires, given the shortage of timber, we have now directed that wood from Walcha. It was only up the Walcha area that we were exporting out of. This is softwood timber I'm talking about. We have now redirected that from Walcha to other regions, such as Bathurst and down to Tumut.<sup>1</sup>

To your question about how it gets assessed, the wood is normally produced for the domestic market but where there is no domestic market—and in the Walcha area there used to be a domestic mill. It went out of business many years ago. We tried to encourage another business to take over. When that didn't happen, the trees were growing out and the diameter of the trees was expanding quite a bit and that's when we started the export venture probably about, I think it was, 2014-15. But since the major bushfires, we have changed all of that around.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** How typical was it prior to the bushfires for local sawmillers to reject logs because they were oversized?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** The mills generally have a specification of what sort of wood they receive and each mill is different. But, depending on the processor, they have limiters or limitation on the diameter of the wood. Generally, they would prefer the larger logs because you can actually get more volume out of it and more value recovery. However, if it's too large, then mills obviously cannot handle it.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Am I correct in saying that they are less likely now to reject such logs?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I think it's a fair comment because of the shortage of timber. We have seen our customers really innovate in that space as well, not only from a processing perspective but also willing to take timber from afar as well. We are seeing a lot of that going on.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** This is a straight statistical question—it's more arithmetic, actually—so please take it on notice. How many of the new plantations that Forestry Corporation established in the past 20 years were for hardwood sawlogs and how many of those plantations were for softwood sawlogs and what percentage were for pulpwood exclusively? We are looking at five, 10, 15 and 20 years. Is it possible for you to have a look at that and come back?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Sure. Absolutely. Just to note on that, we don't produce plantations just for the purpose of pulp log. It is mainly or all for sawlog, really.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** The next question is: What is the primary forum for coordinating forestry industry stakeholder feedback to the Government? What would I call that body?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I can probably answer that one. We have two forums: There is a hardwood industry advisory group and there is a softwood industry advisory group.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Could you please take on notice who is on that body?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Yes.

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<sup>1</sup> In [correspondence](#) to the committee received 30 September 2022, Mr Anshul Chaudhary, Chief Executive Officer, Forestry Corporation of NSW, clarified the evidence given.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** I'm not interested in the individuals but who they represent. I would also be interested to know, for instance, if there is any worker representation on those.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I can give you a quick run-through of who the participants are.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Please. If that's possible, that would be great.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** In terms of the hardwood one, Forestry Corporation, Hurford Wholesale, Timber NSW, Notaras, Grants Sawmilling, Boral/Pentarch, NSW Farmers, Australian Forest Contractors Association and the Australian Forest Products Association. For the softwoods, we have Visy, Mangan Haulage, Hyne Timber, Hume Forests, Forestry Corporation, AKD Softwoods, Softwoods Working Group, Australian Forest Products Association and, again, the Australian Forest Contractors Association.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** I have three brief questions relating to skills. What funding is currently available to recognise on-the-job learning in the timber industry?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I would have to take that on notice in terms of the actual funding, but the New South Wales Government recently developed a program called ForestFit, in partnership with the Australian Forest Contractors Association. The program is built around the idea to improve contractor compliance on the job out in the field. There is significant effort going in. It is going to be an industry-led program. It is all about helping them to understand the complex rules around the Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals—IFOAs—and also the private native forestry codes and the plantation requirements.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** If you could please just take on notice the funding issue and maybe also just give us a reference to where we can go and have a look at the details of that.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Absolutely. No worries. If I can just clarify a point there, the information I have now is that there are six applications approved under the hardwood haulage program and another four being assessed at the moment. I will get you the actual amounts on notice.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Thank you. What is the current industry assistance package called for the timber industry?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** From the bushfires or from the—

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Both.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** At the moment the hardwood haulage subsidy program is the one related to the recent floods and the bushfire assistance program is the one that went through recently after the bushfires.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** How much was that? That was also for \$10 million?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** No. There was a range of funding under that program, which also includes some funding of the Forestry Corp to upgrade nurseries and replant the estate after the bushfires, and then there was the softwood haulage program as well.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Could you give us a disaggregated amount? Please take it on notice.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** No problem.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Thank you. Was the money spent at Blue Ridge Hardwoods a part of that package?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** No. It wasn't a part of that, no. That's another one that's been managed through regional programs, so we'd have to get that one on notice too.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Please take that on notice for me. Thank you.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** In fact, I think, Mr Primrose, there was a question taken on notice on Blue Ridge with the Department of Regional NSW in the Deputy Premier's hearing mid last week.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Thank you.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Mr Hansen, probably to you—but, again, if you want to show your halfback five-eighth skills and throw the ball round—as I understand it, incident and emergency staff in other areas of the State Government get standdown days when they're involved in incidents. Is that arrangement available for your biosecurity staff as well?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** There are arrangements that we put in place to make sure that the roster allows people time off at the end of their period in the emergency response. I probably should just say that, actually, our response at the moment has got staff well broader than just biosecurity teams responding. As you can imagine,



our ag teams are very heavily involved in responses around varroa. In fact, the whole business is sort of hands to the wheel for varroa, white spot, Japanese encephalitis, or preparing for FMD or lumpy skin disease. So we do have systems in place to ensure the rotations enable breaks and enable people to sort of refresh and have a break away from the response before they come back in. We do operate under a series of different awards across the cluster and across DPI itself and we obviously have to meet the requirements of all of those awards as well.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Maybe you can explain it to me, then. Are standdown days like personal leave days? Is that what happens—you have to clear some of your own leave to get that? Clearly the RFS would have a different arrangement, but their incident controllers get standdown days. Is that what happens?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might take that on notice and come back with the different awards in terms of what we have to do, if that's okay.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** That would be good. I also want to go to the Rural Resilience Program. Was that run through you, Mr Hansen, or was that Regional NSW, Ms Fox?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No. The Rural Resilience Program was run through us, yes.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** And it no longer exists?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Well, it's been broadened out and rolled. It was a specific program focused on rural resilience after one or two significant events. Those events just kept coming and, as a result, the Government established a resilience agency and, as such, we sort of blended the roles of that resilience program into the broader Resilience NSW program.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** You can see where I'm going here. Just recently there was a recommendation to maybe wind back or remove—what was the phrase they used, Government members?

**The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT:** Streamline.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Streamline Resilience NSW. What does that mean, then, for this particular program? Will there be some funds coming back to your agency, Mr Hansen, to assist? We don't want to lose the program in what is streamlining of Resilience NSW.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I appreciate your efforts. It is one thing that we haven't had a chance to work through yet in terms of what that looks like because we don't actually have the full response from the Government in terms of what that looks like, I don't believe.

**REBECCA FOX:** The process will be run by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and we'll participate in that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** But you'll get to put a bid in to say, "Bring that money back."

**REBECCA FOX:** We never miss an opportunity, Mr Veitch.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I'm just prosecuting a case around making sure we don't lose those funds in this streamlined process for Resilience NSW.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It's—sorry, if I start I'll use up too much of your time. Keep going.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Okay. Thank you. This sort of segues to Local Land Services. They are also involved heavily in a lot of these incidents and events. Mr Orr, your staff all over the State are involved in these things. How are you managing the leave arrangements and downtime for your staff?

**STEVE ORR:** Thanks, Mr Veitch. Like Mr Hansen, we have the same sorts of issues. The general principle—and Mr Kelly may want to correct me if I stray from the point—is five to seven days on and then two days off. What we try to avoid is to ensure that people have two days off and they're not actually having to access their leave arrangements through local arrangements which are put in place between themselves and their managers. So that's what we try and do to ensure that Local Land Services staff, who've been working in emergency situations and going hard at it for five to seven days, then come back and have a decent break. But in doing so, they don't have to actually take their own leave.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Okay. Thank you. Extension services is something I think I explore if not at every estimates, then most estimates. Every time I speak to the dairy industry, the oysters, they say they want their extension services; either they want them back or they want the ones they've got increased in numbers, which would tell me that it's quite valued and a worthwhile part of the work of LLS as it's now structured. Are you looking at expanding the extension services at all?

**STEVE ORR:** Yes. I'll throw to Mr Kelly in a minute because it's his area of oversight, Mr Veitch. But, certainly, we have got an ag extension framework, which LLS has put in place, and a few months ago we decided on three key areas of program focus. One was drought preparedness—the next drought is another day closer, as you would be aware—soil health and livestock management. So we're rolling out programs in relation to those three areas and what we ask regions to do is sort of coalesce around those three key themes and ensure that they're delivering in line with those three key themes. Then, just in relation to the emergency situation and the flood situation, the Early Needs program is also going to bring in extra resources, particularly targeting the dairy industry, to provide support to that particular industry.

Finally, Mr Veitch, one of the things which we announced, or the Minister announced recently—we put in place a graduate program and we're bringing in six new graduates each year into LLS. Two of those will be ag science, which then ties back into the extension function, and two of them will also be vet science, which deals with—I know Ms Hurst had some questions about what are we doing to build capability when it comes to vet science. So we're going to have six new graduates each year into Local Land Services: as I said, two ag science, two vet science and two NRM staff coming in.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Where are they going to be located?

**STEVE ORR:** We've gone out to each one of the regions and we spent a bit of time in terms of what are some of the potential options. Largely, they'll be in the larger centres, but we're happy to negotiate with the successful people as to where they will be located. The strength of Local Land Services, obviously, is the broad reach; we're in sort of 90 locations right across New South Wales. But we want to ensure that there is a good support arrangement for those people when they do come into the system.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** So is it possible, then, to maybe share those positions across regions, if the supports are in place?

**STEVE ORR:** Yes, absolutely. The focus is on building fresh graduates, giving them a good experience, getting them familiar with the way in which government operates and some of the roles which we play, including some of the statutory-based roles, so that, hopefully, at the end of their 12 months in the graduate program we can offer them ongoing employment.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** With regard to travelling stock routes and reserves, in the most recent estimates in March, the Minister stated that there is work being done to provide for First Nations rights in travelling stock reserves. I am just wondering where that work is up to. Is that Mr Orr?

**STEVE ORR:** And I will throw to Mr Kelly in terms of some of the specifics. But certainly, Local Land Services is very proud with the amount of work which we do with Aboriginal communities. And just recently, Mr Veitch, we brought on our Aboriginal trainee program, focusing on bringing in trainees to work on travelling stock reserves. But, Mr Kelly, do you want to comment specifically?

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** We will come back to it next round, Mr Kelly.

**The CHAIR:** Just quickly, Mr Hansen, with the Game and Feral Animal Control Regulation there was an introduction of a fit and proper person test. Are you able to, on notice, provide the guidelines that will be used to determine what a fit and proper person is, given that it is a test that is abused in other areas, like the Firearms Registry? I am just concerned what guidelines will be used to determine what a fit and proper person is.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We can certainly provide that on notice too, Chair. We have it across a number of our Acts that we administer as well.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. I have just seen it, I guess, taken liberty with the registry pinging people because they have a veteran's pension and silly parking fines and stuff like that, that are totally unrelated to the actual Act that they are administering. I just want some guidelines on that. Maybe, Mr Sloan, you might be able to help. What is the total remuneration of DPI-Fisheries in terms of what are the total salaries that are tied to DPI-Fisheries?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I would have to take it on notice, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Sure, I expected you would. From previous orders for papers and GIPAA's we know there are a significant number of employees that receive some sort of funding from the trust account, or some of their salary is equated to projects from the trust account. Perhaps on notice, can you advise how many employees have, I dare say, maybe 70 per cent and above in terms of their salary being paid out of the trust accounts?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Certainly can take that on notice, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Who audits the trust?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The Auditor-General conducts an annual audit of expenditure against the trust. That forms part of the annual DPI audit process.

**The CHAIR:** To my understanding there is also an external—is that the external audit?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Did you say Audit Office or Auditor-General?

**The CHAIR:** Auditor-General, I think he said.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We will get an answer for you on that one and come back.

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps, as you are taking that on notice, can you also advise us whether this concept of on-costs, which I think we have discussed in previous estimates, is included in the audit of the trusts? I think we spoke before about how there are around 48 per cent on-costs being attributed to the trusts. I want to know whether that is also included as part of the audit, because it seems to sit as a separate account, or separate cost centre from my understanding.

**SEAN SLOAN:** We can certainly look into that as well.

**The CHAIR:** Could you provide any details as to what those on-costs are? It is a bit of a broad term. What are things that you would include as on-costs that would be paid from that account? That would be great. That's it for trusts at the moment. Who would I speak to about travelling stock routes and Hudson pear and some concerns some residents have about stock movements through that? Who would be the best person?

**STEVE ORR:** Me initially, Mr Banasiak.

**The CHAIR:** Some residents around the Pilliga area have received a letter from Local Land Services advising them of walking and grazing along a particular stock reserve along Calrose Road. They are a little bit concerned about how this is going to be managed and the impact it is going to have on the spread of Hudson pear, because where this stock is travelling is going to go directly through a hotbed of Hudson pear, then invariably on the way out they will spread it out everywhere else. Have you received any concerns from farmers about—

**STEVE ORR:** On that, Mr Banasiak, we received some information today. I understand that all the Hudson pear on the travelling stock reserve has been treated. So it has all been sprayed, as I understand it. But if it is okay, we might take it on notice and come back to you in terms of some of the details on it. I know earlier, Mr Banasiak, you had some questions regarding the coordinator. We do have a coordinator, an ongoing coordinator called the cactus coordinator in the north-west, who does look after the Hudson pear program and we are in the process of doing a bit of evaluation in terms of its effectiveness, but it is funded through to June 2023.

**The CHAIR:** I think my concerns around that are not necessarily an overall coordinator, but people felt like there needed to be more boots on the ground actually applying the biocontrol and helping farmers apply the chemical.

**STEVE ORR:** On the TSR itself we will come back to you. But my understanding is that the Hudson pear itself has been treated.

**The CHAIR:** Just to assist you, it is in that Come By Chance, Pilliga area. If you need further details I can provide that for you. In the minute I have got left I will go to the La Perouse to Kamay ferry project. Obviously, Fisheries had some concerns about that initially. When did your department first become aware that the project had been approved? Do you have an exact date as to when your department was notified?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I couldn't say exactly when we were notified off the top of my head, so I have to take that on notice. But we are aware that the project has been approved by the planning Minister.

**The CHAIR:** Your department obviously insisted on some certain extra protections. Why did we not insist on some protections for the cauliflower soft coral, which is an endangered species? It can only be found in five places in the world and one of them is pretty much right next to this proposed ferry. There are obviously concerns from people who know about cauliflower soft coral that the sedimentation and turbidity will impact that species. Was Fisheries aware that there was that endangered species there, and if they were aware, why didn't they insist as part of the EIS?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I am aware certainly that we identified concerns about Posidonia, the seagrass, as well as White's seahorse. I have to take on notice the question around cauliflower coral so we can come back to you on that.

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate that. Mr Hansen?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, Chair, as you go off, it is the Audit Office and the Auditor-General who are the independent auditors of the trust.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Dr Tracey, I think you had something to add in our last session about the animals in emergency response with the authorities?

**JOHN TRACEY:** Yes. Thank you. Scott's covered the main point, but to further add a couple of points, in terms of emergency response, the way we worked that's worked really well for us is a structured system of State control centre, local control centre, forward command post deployment. That has worked really well. We are unlikely to move away from that. But what we learnt out of the floods is that there is an opportunity to do things a little bit differently in addition to that deployment via that structure and directly deploy vets into the response, and that's what we did towards the end of the flood response. I think it was good; it was one of the learnings. We are working closely, as the DG said, with Vets Beyond Borders, RSPCA, Animal Welfare League, but also vets unassociated with those organisations, and being able to directly contract them within a scope of works.

I think that structure in emergency management is still really important in terms of a clear understanding of what is required in response. But where we are seeing vets operating outside of that, that see more than us, that may not be using the 1800 number, that don't sort of drive that information back that way, we are now able to contract them directly in response within a scope of works and let them get on with it. I think that is the big change. The other one was a closer learning for us around direct liaison points with Vets Beyond Borders, RSPCA, Animal Welfare League in the response sitting at the table as well. We had some of that, but we wanted to strengthen those two bits. I just wanted to flag those two.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might just add to that, if I can, quickly. Even our most ardent public critics from the first flood response, in their submissions to the inquiry, called out the improved performance in the second flood response, which was only a month later.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, I did hear that too.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That was because we did see where we could streamline and fast-track that in between that time.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Specifically regarding the wait time for the deployment of the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League, there was still a significant wait time in that second response. Is that still going to improve?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We'll continue to fast-track it. But by the time we got to the second one, we had almost contracted every vet from Tenterfield down to Coffs Harbour south to be involved in the response. We'd certainly turned on our capacity to move quickly. Sorry, it is probably an exaggeration about "every vet". I'm not sure whether we had every vet but we had a lot.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You were set up better, yes.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Can I give you an answer to your other question? Our compliance team has told us that, as part of the process of acquiring animals, compliance officers check to ensure the person supplying the animal is permitted to possess the animal in the first place. What they require is to cite evidence from the interstate authority about the legitimacy of the ownership of that animal.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But couldn't somebody still potentially have a licence to have animals? One thing that I hear—and I've heard this from people that are in authorities as well—is that often when people go out to inspect an exhibited animals facility there are suddenly more animals than they were licensed to have and they said, "Sorry, whoops, some of them bred and we ended up with more than we had." If somebody was to have koalas and they have a licence to have koalas but essentially then rescued a koala that was injured and rehabilitated that koala, they could still potentially sell that koala on to another exhibited facility and that animal could somehow get lost in the process. They're not legally allowed to do that but I am wondering how we would track that and make sure that's not happening in the system.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I don't know if we're able to track that but what I do know is that we undertake a verification by sighting the evidence that the person who is transferring a koala actually has a permit to have a koala in the first place.

**SUZANNE ROBINSON:** The other thing is that the rehab of wildlife is a separate licensing system—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, I was going to ask that as well.

**SUZANNE ROBINSON:** —under the Biodiversity Conservation Act.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But could someone have both?

**SUZANNE ROBINSON:** Anyone doing rehab has to be licensed and it's monitored through that agency process.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But could somebody be licensed for both? I'm assuming a lot of places would have both licences.

**SUZANNE ROBINSON:** That's right, but they generally have to keep their rehab animals separate from their exhibited animals.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Okay, thank you. Mr Hansen, I have further questions about the draft Animal Welfare Bill. I wanted to know if the intention was to wait for the draft regulations to be published before it goes any further, and whether those draft legislations will be going to the inquiry anytime soon. Do you have any idea around the time frame?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think the intention is for the Government to provide a response to the inquiry's report on reform. I think it is 15 September. It's not far off.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Very soon.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That Government response will probably pick up on a number of those pieces.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Because I think that was a recommendation. Do you have any further updates about the draft Animal Welfare Bill and how the regulations are going?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Probably none that I should talk about before the Government makes its response on 15 September.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No, that's fine. I want to go back to the new game-hunting regulations that were discussed this morning. I'm wondering when the idea of removing the minimum age of obtaining a hunting licence first came to the Department of Primary Industries, and where that idea came from?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Thanks. I might have to see if Dr Sloan has that.

**SEAN SLOAN:** Thank you. First of all, as we discussed earlier today, it wasn't about firearms use.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No, I'm not asking about firearms. I'm asking about the minimum age of obtaining a hunting licence.

**SEAN SLOAN:** There have been discussions with our Game and Pest Management Advisory Board for some time about how we could facilitate the participation of younger people in the training and education part of hunting. Because anyone who is under 12 years old is not legally allowed to participate in a hunt under the current regulations, the idea came from essentially trying to enable particularly those families that want to bring younger people into the experience of hunting and allow them to be trained properly and educate them. It was a process where the department was working with the Game and Pest Management Advisory Board to bring forward ways that could allow for that training and education to occur.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. I think Ms Higginson now has the call.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Mr Hansen, can I just finish with the *Rice Vesting Review 2021*? I didn't get to finish. I promise I won't foray into Government policy territory. Given the DPI's review report was only one feed-in, and it is fairly inconsistent with Government policy, what are we doing to assist those that remain disadvantaged under the continuation of vesting, such as the Northern Rivers rice growers?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Thanks for the question. I think there are probably a couple of things that we can point to there. The first is that obviously the group of growers we're talking about have been significantly impacted by floods—drones flying over fields to identify hazards for their harvests of recent times has been the sort of thing we've been working with the industry up there on, just assisting them to get back on their feet post-floods. That being said, I think the Government also announced, at the time of its decision to extend vesting, a further review into the lessons that came out. We are in the process of finalising contracting ABARES to undertake that review. We're hoping it might help shine some light on some opportunities and pathways for the northern industry that can then be tied into the recovery and rebuild of the sector up there as well.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Do you think there's some scope for assisting with further research and development into that dryland rice industry going forward?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Definitely, yes.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** It was also such a relief to hear about the improvement in the veterinary response because it was such a big issue at the time of the first flood. I listened to the inquiry about some of those

things. Let's all hope not, but the bureau's current forecast for this upcoming season is that we are looking at a third La Niña with all sorts of factors that are not looking great for the Northern Rivers. If we were to experience something again, are we even more ready now in terms of livestock responses?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The easy part of that answer is we're definitely more ready now. To be honest, the trickier part of that question is that we hadn't imagined the size and scale of incident—and I'm not sure whether we're currently imagining what the next size or scale of incident could be. With the caveat that I don't know what the next size and scale of incident could be, we are definitely more ready. We definitely adapted even from those first floods to the second floods. We've had flood events since then in the Hunter that we've been able to utilise as a further refinement piece. Yes, I'm confident that our systems, our processes and the people are ready.

**STEVE ORR:** And, Ms Higginson, LLS is generally the first on the scene when it comes to these things. One of the strengths of LLS is its very broad network of people. Like what Mr Hansen was saying, we are also heavily involved in the whole post review of the lessons and how we learn from that.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** In particular on that in the Northern Rivers, have you looked at the requirements for the current limited but important TSRs? If the next event is 17 metres, say—the probable maximum flood we're still looking at is 16.5 metres. If we got there, have you as the LLS mapped that landscape and actually said, "Right, this is where your safest place to go would be," particularly in the lower flood plain?

**STEVE ORR:** Perhaps not quite to that extent. Currently there's an issue of cattle being in a difficult position in terms of being stranded. They are using a TSR as a consequence of the flood event and they're using LLS resources, including cattle yards and the like. The TSRs are certainly being utilised, perhaps in ways that weren't initially envisaged. Certainly we've got a pretty open mind about the way in which we can use TSRs in these sorts of events.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Can I go to Forestry and Mr Chaudhary? In May 2022 the office of State records found that you didn't have particular procedures to manage information held and that your staff were not keeping records in a consistent manner. Have you improved that system? Have you addressed that?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Yes. I think you are referring to a particular incident where we thought we didn't have any information, but we actually did. We looked into that and we have improved our processes.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Have you satisfied the office of State records that you have improved?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Yes, we have communicated with them. Correct.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** In relation to the incident that that stemmed from in terms of record-keeping, are you aware that there is some issue with workplace culture in the field of aggression, and is that something that is on your radar of how to address?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** It is very much on our radar, Ms Higginson. Earlier we were talking about making sure that we have a safe and respectful workplace both for our staff and our contractors, and for members of the public. Forestry operation can be a challenging environment, as we know. Generally when an active harvesting operation is happening, we obviously don't want members of the public to come close to harvesting machines because it can be quite dangerous. But members of the public are fully entitled to conduct their protest work. We have no problems with that, but we ask for it to be done in a safe way.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Just to correct you there, I am not talking about protests; I am just talking about people going along with their business, not protesting, and still being subjected to aggressive and actually violent behaviour.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** What we have done in that space, in particular, with that incident that you are referring to, is we have taken our staff through a bit of a training program on how to deal with situations like that with stakeholders to make sure we don't escalate situations and that sort of thing. We are doing something similar again, and we will be extending that to the wider workforce and to our contractor base as well.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Can I ask one final question, please?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** With the hollow-bearing trees and current forestry operations, is that something that you think that you should address and have a look at and make recommendations on about the importance of increasing the number of hollow-bearing trees, given a species that is hollow-dependent keeps getting up-listed? We have just seen one; we are likely to see another one in the next few months.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Ms Higginson, the hollow-bearing trees—in the Coastal IFOA there are a number of prescriptions around how much hollow-bearing trees we should be setting aside per compartment. Post

the major fires we actually made an assessment of the landscape ourselves, and in certain areas we have put in additional environmental protections, which are still in place in some of those areas. They require additional retention trees and those sorts of things. We have actually done some modelling of hollow-bearing trees across our landscape, and we think there are around five million hollow-bearing trees in the harvestable areas up and down the coast, and probably three to four times that in the inland area. We are continuously looking into this, and investing in research as well, trying to get better at it.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Is that modelling available?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Yes, absolutely; we can make that available.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I do believe we were about to hear from Mr Kelly.

**ROB KELLY:** Thank you, and thank you for the question relating to the work we do on travelling stock reserves in relation to Indigenous projects and cultural heritage. It is an area in Local Land Services where we are really proud of the work we do. In our travelling stock reserve plans of management, the 10 regions that have them—noting Greater Sydney doesn't have travelling stock reserves—there are 10 projects identified in each region with a budget allocation of a bit over \$163,000 to undertake projects. Of those, five have been completed, three are in partial completion and two are about to be commenced in that space. To give you an example, and one that is probably close to your region, for the Tumut-Brungle LALC in the Riverina LLS we are allowing access to five TSRs for engagement activities such as cultural burning, native food collection and those sorts of things.

In addition to those projects I have listed, Mr Orr mentioned before, in relation to the Indigenous Ranger Program and the four regions that will participate in that, there is around \$5 million allocated for both employee costs and operating costs, which is really about bringing those trainees on board to seek training in conservation and land management, gain the necessary skills and to then increase employment opportunities. One of the main aims out of that program—through their work on TSRs, amongst other parts in LLS—will be to hopefully provide 50 per cent of those with permanent jobs in Local Land Services, which, at the moment, has lifted our Indigenous participation or employment from around 3 per cent to 6 per cent in the cluster. It is an area we are really proud of and we will continue to work in that space.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Can I also ask, Mr Orr, for the participation rate in the workforce for people with disabilities?

**STEVE ORR:** I think it is 2 per cent for LLS, Mr Veitch. I think—we will just confirm that for you.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Mr Hansen, people with disabilities' participation rate in DPI?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I would have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** We would very much appreciate that.

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Veitch, the 6 per cent participation rate, we are certainly one of the leaders in the public sector in terms of Aboriginal employment.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, that's pretty good. There are a whole range of other questions around retention and things like that, but I will put those on notice. Mr Hansen, as you drive around regional New South Wales the grass is green, it's got a bit of length in it, but stock are dying from malnutrition, which a lot of people don't appreciate. What are we doing at the moment around supporting farmers with nutritional deficiency in their pastures?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That might be one which Mr Kelly and then Ms Lorimer-Ward might want to make a comment on because there have been a number of workshops that have been running on that front that are joint between the two organisations.

**ROB KELLY:** I will go first. Thanks for the question. Yes, it does seem a bit perverse that we've got plenty of feed around but there is malnutrition. We understand the reasons for that are in relation to particularly frosts and drying off and malnutrition in the feed that is there, waterlogged soils—those sorts of things. Particularly our vets have been out on ground doing animal health assessments and then determining whether it is malnutrition or whether it is other animal diseases, and they will provide nutritional advice and feed supplements to get the stock back up to condition. In addition to that, we run a series of—you know, with our ag advisory staff—sessions across the State, whether that be through one-on-one or group sessions, on improved management practices, taking into account how you can better manage for seasonal conditions so that we are building their capacity to not only get through what they are now, in terms of those nutritional deficiencies, but set themselves up for the future so that if similar conditions occur, they are better prepared to cope going forward.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Ms Lorimer-Ward?

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** I wouldn't add too much to that.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** The projections are for another wet period coming up for us, which exacerbates some of these issues. Is there a public awareness arrangement going on with the farming sector around watching their herd, their flock, to make sure that they are aware of the nutritional deficiencies that are currently existing? I mean, a lot of farmers are tuned in to this. The reason I ask is because I was at home on the weekend and one of the guys I went to school with was talking about the fact that he lost a couple of cows.

**ROB KELLY:** Certainly we raise it through our normal communication channels in animal health newsletters and regional Local Land Services newsletters out to staff. We do a lot of media and comms around it. We certainly also highlight it through the workshops what we are doing and we encourage landholders to contact us. One of the other offsetting things that we can do, particularly for a number of landholders in the wetter areas, is allow access to travelling stock reserves. As you can imagine, in pretty good seasonal conditions we don't get a lot of travelling stock on the routes, and they do have a lot of good feed on them, so we will be allowing access to those, whether that is for hazard reduction or to actually offset the fact that they don't have any nutritional feed on their farm.

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** Particularly going into this next period around spring lambing, the risks do multiply in terms of lactating ewes, so a lot of information is now being made available in the context of, "You still need to supplementary feed, even in good years"—understanding those contexts and how to manage that at that time of year. So seasonally relevant information is going out.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We are seeing strong numbers of producers sending feed tests into our labs to get an analysis done to try to work out how to best balance that nutritional requirement against what they are seeing in the paddock.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes. Just buying hay may not be the resolution to the issue.

**ROB KELLY:** No.

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** Also an increase in faecal testing this year with the wetter year around parasites.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Mr Kelly, you were talking about, as part of the exercise, opening up the travelling stock reserves as part of the process. There are a couple of things I want to talk about. One is harrisia up in the northern LLS. It is slowly making its way down from Queensland. I had a chance to inspect some harrisia up there. It's pretty vicious indeed, particularly with the grass long and harrisia low. What are we doing about that on our TSRs?

**ROB KELLY:** Like all responsible land managers, with the regional weeds plans, we prioritise the priority weeds in each of the regions. So they develop the plans and they prioritise which weeds need to be focused on for that region. We then have spent in the last 12 months, for pest and weed control on TSRs, around \$3.5 million, injected into that, and we also apply under the Crown Reserves Improvement Fund for targeted funding. It's a valid point. We put in as much effort as we can with the resources we have available. It's sort of the plug that TSRs are generally underfunded. Most of the operational costs come from travelling stock reserve permit fees. As you can understand, in a season like this we're not generating a huge amount of income off them.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** That's where I'm going. That's my next question.

**ROB KELLY:** We don't generate a huge amount of income off them in years like this. So we look for outsourcing the funding and providing additional programs from elsewhere to redirect resources to it.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Again, as you drive around TSRs, the feed is pretty high, and you just know that once it does stop raining, it's going to dry and become a real fire issue. So how are we addressing the fire risk or the fire potential of our TSRs across New South Wales?

**ROB KELLY:** It is a good question, because it's one thing that we do prioritise quite a lot. We work with the RFS particularly in the high asset protection zones. We work with them to identify those. They provide that information to us. We sit on the local emergency management committees as well when they're doing that planning. There are a number of activities we'll do. Where they are in the very high asset protection zones, we'll put in firebreaks around those on the TSRs. In addition to that, we also offer neighbours two weeks' free grazing to reduce the fuel load but, again, in a year like this there's not a lot of uptake on that because there are additional costs with having to do that. We'll also do, where we can, chemical control and slashing, again limited by the budget. So we prioritise based on the highest asset protection.



**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** The farmers don't need the TSRs in a good season but at the same time you've got to manage those TSRs so that they are available when they are needed—balance that.

**ROB KELLY:** Exactly. And you don't want to manage them in a way, in a good year, such that you don't have feed in a bad year.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** My last round of questions before I pull up stumps, Mr Hansen, relates to irrigated agriculture but mainly on the eastern-flowing rivers, although this may apply elsewhere. There's a real issue around pumps and pump sizes on the eastern-flowing rivers and people now engaging in this discussion because of the draft water sharing plans for a lot of those rivers. People are complaining to me about the fact that for the amount of water they take out each year, they probably don't need a meter anymore. So therefore they may not even take the water, which is okay whilst it's raining. What work is the department doing with pumps around New South Wales and irrigated agriculture as a part of that research around water use and water preservation?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I might throw to Kate Lorimer-Ward to make some comment on this, because there are two aspects to it. The first one is that water use efficiency piece but the second part is around, with the rising energy costs, alternative energy sources for pumps as well. We've got two pieces of work that we've been undertaking in that area.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Could that be hydrogen?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It could well be. But obviously the already tested and tried one that just needs to be rolled out further is solar.

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** If you're interested, particularly in the coast, most of that program is run through our Clean Coastal Catchments program. That's working with specific industries around their irrigated agriculture—largely horticulture—and looking at improving the efficiency of those. We've been working with fisheries around the use of screens on those pumps and at the same time looking at fish screening within those systems. A lot of the work on the Clean Coastal Catchments is also a blend with fertilizer management and how they can be more efficient in the management of those two systems combined because of that interrelation that's there.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** With these eastern flowing rivers, the water quality testing that the oyster growers do, I think they undertake that work on behalf of the NSW Food Authority. I could be wrong about that. I'm happy to be corrected. How much more can be done around water quality? Commercial fishers are no doubt talking to a range of people and recreational fishers about the quality of the water, particularly after floods. The bushfires down south actually had an impact as well that I'm aware of. What are we doing about water quality beyond what the oyster growers are testing?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'm pleased you raised that. It actually is one of the most significant threats identified in the threat and risk assessment for the New South Wales marine estate. It's actually a significant feature of the Marine Estate Management Strategy and the program of works that is being rolled out on that front. I might ask Mr Sloan if he wants to make some additional comments on that and then post that, because one of our delivery agencies for that Marine Estate Management Strategy is LLS as well.

**SEAN SLOAN:** That's correct. As part of the threat and risk assessment, it's actually in the top five risks to the coast and marine environment in New South Wales. When you think about eight million-plus people in New South Wales and nearly 70 per cent of them living on or near the coast, the amount of development in that coastal strip is significant. The pressure, particularly our estuarine systems, which is essentially where all of the nurseries for our fisheries exist, are significant there. All of the work that we do through the marine estate to improve water quality is about improving the habitat. That means we improve the outcomes for fish, which in turn improve the outcomes for industries and communities. Oyster farmers are probably one of the indicator industries for the health of our waterways. Because when we've got poor water quality, they simply can't harvest oysters or they suffer impacts from that.

There's a significant amount of work that is being done through the Marine Estate Strategy to improve water quality right across the marine estate. Picking up on the point about fish screens, they are modern technologies helping irrigators not just reduce the amount of fish and fish larvae that gets sucked up into their irrigation pumps but also helping them to reduce their operating costs because the amount of debris that gets sucked into their irrigation pumps is significantly reduced, which also reduces their energy costs. There's an estimate that we can reduce two million fish being lost to the system through those irrigation pumps by simply installing them in one stretch of river. So the benefits to irrigators, to fishers and to the environment are quite significant.

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** We are going on farm on those coastal areas as part of the Clean Coastal Catchments and doing like a whole-farm irrigation assessment to help people understand not only just the pump but the system that runs around that and how that can be best deployed or where the best upgrades could be. The other aspect to that, as part of the Climate Smart program that we've been running, we actually have put a whole lot of infield sensors into Batemans Bay for oysters. That's part of actually supporting just-in-time decision-making for them. They're sensors that are picking up all sorts of features at live time. That supports that sort of decision-making. That pilot is about helping those industries adjust to changes in climate and water quality is one of those things that's affected by that.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We've got other partners across New South Wales Government that are partners in that Marine Estate Management Strategy. Things like marine litter are a part of that water quality component as well as the diffuse pollution pieces that we've been talking about here.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Are we going to continue having the oyster growers collecting the samples themselves and sending them off in some of these estuaries? Or are we going to move towards a more independent sample collection and assessment?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** As you heard, our objective at some stage in the future would be real-time independent automatic monitoring.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** As per the Clyde?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** Yes, that's at Batemans Bay. We're just piloting that now.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** In the Clyde River, though?

**KATE LORIMER-WARD:** Yes, that's my understanding.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I reckon that'll probably wrap me up, Mr Chair. Just so you know, it's probably my last estimates, so thank you all very much for this term of Parliament and the way you've gone about it. There have been some bumpy days and there have been some smooth days. Thank you very much.

**SEAN SLOAN:** Mr Veitch, I actually had a couple of responses for you, if there's time to come back to you. The first one was in relation to the matter that you raised around a GIPAA for the Mannering Point fish kill. We've checked and we don't have any records of having received such a GIPAA.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** I'll go back to the local member and ask.

**SEAN SLOAN:** The other one was around trout cod. You asked some questions there. The recovery plan for trout cod has been in place since 2006, but we have been stocking trout cod in New South Wales for about 30 years. In relation to the impacts at Talbingo Reservoir, redfin already exists in Talbingo Reservoir, so we don't have any concerns about the implications for trout cod in Talbingo Reservoir. But we do have concerns about the impacts at Tantangara Reservoir, where the redfin does not exist.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** There are no redfin in Tantangara.

**SEAN SLOAN:** The concerns there are, upstream, Macquarie perch impacts and, downstream, stocky galaxias, as well as the trout fishery in Lake Eucumbene. They're the concerns that we're working with Snowy Hydro on.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** Yes, because Tantangara also connects at Providence Portal into Eucumbene.

**SEAN SLOAN:** Correct.

**STEVE ORR:** Sorry, Mr Veitch. Just to confirm, the 2 per cent disability rate within LLS is correct.

**REBECCA FOX:** I've got that figure across the whole department as 2.2 per cent across the whole department for disability. We have a disability inclusion action plan that sits under a strategy, with some goals to improve that over time.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** How does that, across the whole department, reflect over the last five years? Is it a plateaued number? Is it an increasing number?

**REBECCA FOX:** I haven't got that data, but we can come back to you.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** That would be good, thanks.

**REBECCA FOX:** The aim is to improve it by 2025 under our strategy and action plan.

**STEVE ORR:** Within that, Mr Veitch, I know in the department they've put on some recruitment staff who specialise not only in Aboriginal recruitment but also in disability recruitment.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Mr Primrose, I've just got an update on the Hardwood Timber Haulage Subsidy Program. It's \$1.215 million as of last week approved.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I've just got some questions for Mr Hansen around rodeos. I asked a question on notice about whether rodeos in New South Wales are required to report any injuries or deaths to the DPI and the answer was no. If the DPI has no idea how many injuries or deaths are actually occurring at these events, how can we have confidence that the industry is not causing undue harm to animals? What's the oversight system if there's no reporting system?

**KIM FILMER:** The injuries do have to be reported to the Australian Professional Rodeo Association. We've actually recently contacted them and they're actually going to send some of that data through to us.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** They're obviously not a government sort of agency. Is that going to be something ongoing—that the DPI will then have access to these figures—or is this just a one-off request?

**KIM FILMER:** We could certainly track that. It would be interesting to know, yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. Do DPI inspectors ever attend rodeos? Does that ever happen?

**KIM FILMER:** DPI inspectors don't because rodeos come under POCTA, so the enforcement agencies—RSPCA, Animal Welfare League and the police—would attend those.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So it's left entirely to the enforcement agencies?

**KIM FILMER:** They are, yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And how many rodeo and calf-roping events take place in New South Wales each year? Is that information the DPI collects?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, I've got some information on that for you. There were 20 rodeos operating in New South Wales in 2021, but generally there would be more than that. COVID did have impacts on that number. The normal number would be probably up around the 70 number.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And the other one was calf roping, sorry.

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, calf roping.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** All of those had calf roping?

**KIM FILMER:** I don't have that breakdown.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That's not broken down?

**KIM FILMER:** No.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Okay. The code also requires that an official veterinarian should be in attendance continuously for at least two hours before the advertised start time of the rodeo. Does the DPI have any oversight over this or is that something that, again, the enforcement agencies would have to look into?

**KIM FILMER:** That would be something the enforcement agencies would look into.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is it something that the DPI has any kind of reporting system on to make sure that is actually happening?

**KIM FILMER:** We get statistics on the numbers of offences and complaints about rodeos that the enforcement agencies get. But not that specifically, no.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Just to confirm, you said that you will be collecting the data going forward on injuries and deaths and keeping that within the DPI?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, we can.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Great. I've got one last question. Maybe this is for Mr Sloan. Going back to the draft regulations, there was a proposal to remove an exemption that would allow hunters to light a fire and hunt an animal while the animal is actually attempting to flee from the fire and the smoke. It was stated in their proposal that the purpose for that change was to improve animal welfare outcomes. However, the exemption still exists in the final regulations, so that was also a proposal that was dropped. I'm wondering if there is any sort of information from the submissions that were received within the DPI as to why that proposal didn't make it through into the new regulations?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I would have to take that on notice, Ms Hurst, to give you the detail that you've requested.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If you could, thank you very much. My last questions are around the puppy farm task force. I'm wondering if someone can give me a bit of an update on the task force, if it is still ongoing or when that task force will complete?

**KIM FILMER:** The task force has scaled back from four inspectors to two inspectors and that is, at this stage, ongoing. I've not heard that that will be stopping. They are continuing on with two inspectors dedicated to that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will they get more funding to be able to continue on with two inspectors or is that on their own funding, to continue that program?

**KIM FILMER:** They are doing that with their own funding at the moment.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you able to give me any update on the latest statistics from the task force: the number of raids, the number of prosecutions commenced, fines issued, number of dogs removed?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes. I don't think there has been—the number of animals seized is similar to the last time we spoke. It was 141. What was the other one?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So that hasn't changed? When you say it is similar, do you mean it is the same?

**KIM FILMER:** The official figure that I've got is the same. The other question was around the number of PINs, was that correct?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, the number of PINs.

**KIM FILMER:** Since the commencement in August 2020 up until June 2022, we've got 72.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And the number of raids or prosecutions commenced?

**KIM FILMER:** The number of prosecutions, according to the statistics I've got here, is three.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Has that changed since the last update?

**KIM FILMER:** That's the figures that we quoted last time, but there's possibly some other actions at the moment that I can't discuss.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you have the number of raids or inspections? Has that increased?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, I've got the number of inspections. We've got 493 since August 2020.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is that the same as was last reported or has it increased?

**KIM FILMER:** It has increased. They're doing between five and 20 per month, so it has gone up since last time.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What were they doing when they had four inspectors, when they first started?

**KIM FILMER:** In terms of numbers per month?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, if you've got that.

**KIM FILMER:** They range from 12 to 23.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Last week the DPI announced that the New South Wales Government had launched a campaign to help New South Wales consumers when making purchasing decisions in relation to puppies. Can someone tell me more about that program? It seems to be some kind of educational program about being mindful about where you purchase puppies from. Is it just a webpage with information or is it going to be linked to a campaign?

**KIM FILMER:** It is a two-phase program that we've implemented. It is all about education: Getting people that are buying puppies to have better knowledge of that space, people that are selling puppies to have better knowledge of their responsibilities and also making people aware of some of the scams and pitfalls that are out there at the moment. The first phase of that program is all about—it's mainly Facebook- and Gumtree-based. It's advertisements advising people to be aware of their responsibilities, if they're a buyer or a seller, and to watch out for scams. There's a fairly high level of information being put out there at the moment. The Facebook information then links back to the DPI webpage. We've also collaborated with the department of fair trading to

try to get them—and they have boosted their information on puppy scams so that people can look up information there. There's also linking back to information about the dog breeding codes so that people who sell dogs understand that they have responsibilities to abide by the code.

There's also a second phase. We've got some social research that we're undertaking at the moment. Then, depending on what the outcome of that social research phase is, that will also then determine the second phase of this project, which will be more targeted education back to those three areas. So it's all about education rather than legislation at this point in terms of trying to get people to understand their responsibilities and what to look out for.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is there going to be more consultation on that second phase? Is that still in a consultation process, or is that completed?

**KIM FILMER:** We've engaged an external independent group to undertake some social research one-on-one interviews with all different stakeholders right across the spectrum. Once we've got that information back, that will hopefully give us some really good insights into what areas we should target in terms of education. I've got a couple of other stats here too from previous, if you'd like.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, please.

**KIM FILMER:** Dogs in research, there are 20 establishments that have dogs. There are seven that supply dogs that have an animal supply licence. For cats, there are 14 establishments that have cats and there are seven that are suppliers of cats. You need to note that some of them have cats and dogs. So if you add those numbers up, you will get a bigger number than what the reality is.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And you don't have that data as to which have both?

**KIM FILMER:** No, I don't have that. Sorry.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That's all right. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** I will quickly wrap up a few things. My understanding is that the Minister has a proposal to remove dual consent for private native forestry. Are you aware of that proposal? Have you provided any advice to the Minister regarding that?

**STEVE ORR:** It is really a matter for the Minister, Mr Banasiak. It's a policy issue.

**The CHAIR:** I wasn't sure whether you were consulted. That's fine. Can I quickly go back to the trusts? Mr Sloan, who allocates staff to projects funded by the trust? Who within DPI would do that? Mr Turnell has answered questions on the trust before. Would he be the person who would oversee which staff go where?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Not necessarily. Every one of our units within the Fisheries branch has a director. Then, at one level down from there, there are program leaders who are essentially managers of teams. When it comes to who would be assigning staff to individual projects, that would largely fall to managers, which is the next level down. But it could involve senior management—directors—as well.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The process would normally be projects that are being proposed to the trust have an allocation of staff resource, as to these are the staff and the skill sets needed to deliver this project. That's why it would be more ground up in terms of project construction for the trust to consider, as to what resources were being utilised.

**The CHAIR:** Could we go back to the La Perouse ferry, particularly some of the conditions of approval that Fisheries insisted upon. One of them is condition E13, which states:

The Proponent must allow for an additional winter and summer season in which to monitor marine biodiversity within the construction footprint prior to commencement of construction.

Is it your understanding that, given that condition of approval, the project won't actually begin until July 2023, to allow for that monitoring to occur? And are you part of that monitoring?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I couldn't say for sure, Chair. I would have to take that on notice to make sure I give you an accurate answer.

**The CHAIR:** Sure.

**SEAN SLOAN:** But it sounds reasonable to assume that.

**The CHAIR:** Is DPI-Fisheries part of the monitoring?

**SEAN SLOAN:** There is a reference group that has been set up with Transport, with DPI-Fisheries and with some independent scientific capability to look at a range of those matters. So I would expect that the

development will be taking advice from that reference group, which is set up to oversee the implementation of those measures.

**The CHAIR:** Given the serious state of the condition of black rockcod, as a species, why didn't Fisheries insist a little bit more firmly in terms of this project? I'd probably equate them with the saltwater version of the trout cod in terms of their status—and status for a long time. Why did Fisheries not insist a little bit more firmly on this project and further protections? I note there's one condition. But given the level of issues we have with black rockcod, why didn't DPI-Fisheries insist a little bit harder?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I'd have to take advice from my scientific team on the reasons for that, Chair, so I'll take that on notice. But what I could say is that every individual species has its own habitat preferences. Whether or not this particular area is a critical habitat area would've been one of the considerations. So I'll take that on notice and come back to you with some more detail. Just following on from that, your question earlier about cauliflower soft coral—our science team is aware that that species is found sporadically around Botany Bay but generally agreed with the advice from Planning that no significant impacts from the development would be expected to occur on cauliflower soft coral as the records indicate that this species is not present in the area where the direct impacts will occur from dredging.

**The CHAIR:** I have a question more generally around your conditions of approval. Were they based on the original design of the wharf or were they based on the fact that the wharf has since grown by 130 per cent? Originally the wharf was only going to be about 100 metres from shore, but now it is 230 metres from shore, which obviously then further exacerbates the impact on the biodiversity of some of those endangered species. What were the conditions of approval based on? Was it based on the 100-metre wharf or the revised 230-metre wharf?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I would assume it would be the revised because any conditions would have to be based on the actual wharf, but I could take that—

**The CHAIR:** It just seemed to gradually change. If you look at the planning department's and transport department's advice about the project, each time there was a new document, the project grew without any sort of accommodations and adjustments for it. If you could just take on notice as to whether the conditions were based on the final figure, that would be great.

**SEAN SLOAN:** I can take that on notice. The other thing to say, Chair, is that the department recommended a biodiversity offset strategy be developed, which essentially means that whatever impacts occur need to be offset by rehabilitation activities. That is specifically relevant to the Posidonia habitats as well as the White's seahorse that were identified at the outset.

**The CHAIR:** Did it make any recommendations in terms of the loss of the recreational fishing haven or a percentage of it, or was that part of that biodiversity offset?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Yes. The other separate issue that was raised by DPI-Fisheries was the access by the recreational fishers. The understanding I have is that the wharf itself will be accessible to recreational fishers when ferries are not docked, in a similar way to the way that the Sydney Harbour ferry wharves are managed.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Firstly, I thank Ms Tracey for having such a lovely backdrop all day on videoconference and having brought some trees and green into this room. It has been lovely.

**The CHAIR:** No-one has asked her any questions, though.

**JACQUELINE TRACEY:** Thank you.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I just keep drifting into your screen. With the \$30 million, I think, that was announced as a subsidy for forestry—was it for flood relief and, I think, roading? Would that be right? Can I ask about that? How are we spending that and is that something that can be accessed when the spend has happened?

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I think you are referring to the \$60 million for repairing forest roads.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** That's right, sorry. It was \$60 million.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** It's a program that is, again, administered by Regional Programs. We can get you more details on that. Actually, sorry, it's through Forestry Corporation. Anshul can probably provide some more information on that.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I can. Ms Higginson, we have about 60,000 kilometres of roads in our forest network. Flood causes a lot more damage than bushfires, actually, in terms of our road infrastructure. We already had a lot of the roads damaged through the bushfires—an estimated quarter of that, so about 20,000 kilometres of roads—and the floods exacerbated that. What this funding will do is, really, help remediate these roads. We have

already identified the inventory of where these roads are and the extent of the damage. I've gone personally and seen a lot of the bridges being washed away and culverts being washed away, all that sort of thing. We want to engage road builders to basically map out all the work that needs to be done. That's the plan for this financial year—procure all that work and then start remediating and building that. Some of the work has already started, but this big piece of work is probably going to start towards the end of this financial year.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Is that a schedule of works? Is that available, in terms of prioritising which roads are first?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** That's what we are building at the moment. We have the inventory done and we are prioritising it based on a whole range of factors, such as public access, fire management, timber production and all those sorts of things.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Is timber production the highest priority at the moment?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** No, not really. There are roads we are fixing, for example, up at Barrington Tops. I have just approved the roadworks to commence there. That is a highly used forest area for recreation.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** I might add, one of the things we learnt after the bushfires was how important it was for people to get back out into the forest, and also after and during COVID as well. The floods were a really important factor both for people to get back out into the forest and recreate but also for some of the tourism, beekeepers and graziers and others that use those forests. So making sure those roads were safe was critical.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Absolutely. Mr Chaudhary, you mentioned the hollow bearing assessment that you have done. Is that something that you can provide on notice or is that somewhere where I can find it?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Absolutely. We actually did publish this on our website as well and we shared this with EPA. It's an assessment of the impact of those major bushfires on the forest landscape and it talks about augmented conditions.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Can I just ask about dingo or wild dog control? Are we still currently allocating around \$300,000 per year? Is that figure about right? It was reported in the media that somebody from DPI said that that's the annual spend on wild dog control. Is that still accurate?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I don't know where that figure would come from, sorry.

**STEVE ORR:** In terms of wild dog control, per se, I'd suggest the number is significantly higher than that.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I thought so. This was just from an article and I realise it did say that it spends more than \$300,000. Is that figure available for how much we are spending per annum on dingo control?

**STEVE ORR:** I'll just check my notes in terms of the data, which we actually do have. In terms of our baiting programs alone, you might want to comment on this, Rob. Significant effort goes into baiting programs in terms of 1080, both those programs which landholders initiate and do jointly as well as aerial baiting programs. There is significant work which goes into wild dog control as well as many LLS regions have their own wild dog control coordinators, who actually go out and trap wild dogs.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** How is the DPI currently managing the newer science around dogs being dingoes and dogs being dogs, and that there is an importance about them being a native animal and that we might need to recalibrate how we are managing them? Is that something that's happening internally?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We do have a number of projects running that are tracking and trying to continue to learn about behaviours. I don't know whether we've—I'll throw to Dr Tracey in a moment. That hybridisation is actually the greatest threat to dingoes. It's not any of the controls or programs; it's actually that hybridisation and crossbreeding between dingoes and wild dogs that is continuing to be the biggest risk to that native animal. The more we can learn about their behaviours, interactions and where those dogs are coming from is something that we have teams actively researching out in the field. Dr Tracey.

**JOHN TRACEY:** I think you've pretty much covered what we've done. We do have some scientists working on some of that, in terms of the distribution of dingoes and wild dogs. It is a bit of a tricky science in terms of differentiating, because you've got to start more from metrics and what they look like and then try to revert back to genetics. That is a piece of work. The important thing in terms of what we do for wild dog management is focus on large-scale programs of work that do get that coordinated action happening. It's less about numbers and more about coordinated action. Through the regional plans, that's key to both managing the impacts of wild dogs as well as the hybridisation risk.

**STEVE ORR:** In terms of the program itself, each year LLS undertakes two aerial-baiting campaigns—one in autumn and one in spring. In the 2021-22 financial year, LLS wild dog control programs delivered 384,000 aerial baits, which were distributed over nearly 20,000 kilometres of bait lines. Landholder ground baiting comprised about half a million wild dog baits. Mr Kelly, do you want to add anything to that?

**ROB KELLY:** Nothing more to add. Generally, when we do coordinated pest control, it is coordinated. We do have specific targeted programs for wild dogs, from a trapping perspective, where they attack livestock. We will go out and have a specific program for that. Generally, our programs are aimed at all pest species. Particularly aerial-baiting programs, they will target wild dogs, but they'll also target foxes and pigs and things like that as well.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Is there a strategic goal to finish on in terms of where we're heading, what we call management and what we call success each year in terms of monitoring? Is that publicly available?

**STEVE ORR:** There is certainly follow-up monitoring, which we do as part of our programs. We can certainly take that on notice and provide information to you.

**JOHN TRACEY:** If I could just add to that, in terms of strategic outcomes, that's driven around the priority for the plans. It is not about reduced numbers on their own; it's about environmental benefits and increasing quoll numbers. It's about improved production and reduced wild dog impact. They're the key things that are worked through as a fundamental part of what we do for regional planning. That's key for getting all parts of the community involved—public and private stakeholders involved in that coordinated action. That happens, in terms of priority, at the region as well as at the State level. That's driven through the committee structures to get that strategic outcome.

**The CHAIR:** Time has now lapsed. I will just ask whether any of the witnesses have any homework they want to hand in early.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That would be great, Chair. As you know, a lot of people who aren't here have been sitting and working to make sure we've all got the information we need. If we can reduce their workload—

**The CHAIR:** One hundred per cent.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** —I'd much appreciate that. A couple of things: Firstly, our percentage of staff that report being disabled is 2 per cent as well, so the same number as LLS. We currently have 13 estuaries with real-time water-quality testing available already, I'm informed. Our researcher who made that quote to the ABC was talking about the cost of their research project, in terms of the wild dog project, not the costs across the New South Wales Government.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Any others? Mr Orr?

**STEVE ORR:** Just in relation to the Illawarra deer program. Mr Veitch, you asked some questions earlier on. The program and its predecessor, the Northern Illawarra Wild Deer Management Program had been operating since 2011. In this time, over 5,300 feral deer have been removed from the Illawarra Escarpment. For the 2022-23 financial year, the costs for the program are around about \$114,000. In that, there is 45,000 from LLS to assist with a coordinator.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Sloan?

**SEAN SLOAN:** In relation to the Kamay ferry project, DPI-Fisheries staff followed up with the planning department to find out where the approval process was at on 27 July and got confirmation that that project had been approved. In relation to the question about who can approve the members of the prawn draw process, a Fisheries officer can make that determination under delegation, in accordance with clause 351 of the estuary general share management plan and the Prawn Net (Set Pocket) Determination Guidelines. For Myall Lakes, it has to be at least two of four individuals that are commercial fishers in that fishery.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**DAVID McPHERSON:** Just one additional piece of information on the supply chain support grants after the bushfires for softwood. There was \$15 million made available for the salvage of burnt timber. There was 15 for the salvage of timber and 10 for storage.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent. That's it. I will now to hand to the Government.

**The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT:** The only thing for me to add is to once again thank you all for coming. I also thank your staff, particularly those ones who have worked in biosecurity and animal welfare over the last little while—whether they are DPI or LLS staff—and those seconded into those areas as well, which I know has



happened a lot. I know it's been a very tough little period and we thank you all very much for what you've done. I think that is all from me.

**The CHAIR:** Point of order: That is not a valid question. Thank you everyone for your time. It is much appreciated. Suffice to say, any other questions that remain on notice, you will have 21 days to answer them and the Committee secretariat will be in touch. For those who are going home, safe travels home. For those who have to stick around for another couple of days, enjoy the city.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**