

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 8 - CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wednesday 28 February 2024

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND DIGITAL GOVERNMENT, EMERGENCY SERVICES, YOUTH JUSTICE

The Committee met at 9:15.

CORRECTED

MEMBERS

The Hon. Emma Hurst (Chair)
Ms Abigail Boyd
Dr Amanda Cohn (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Wes Fang
Ms Sue Higginson
The Hon. Aileen MacDonald
The Hon. Cameron Murphy
The Hon. Bob Nanva
The Hon. Peter Primrose
The Hon. Natalie Ward

PRESENT

The Hon. Jihad Dib, *Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Youth Justice*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

The CHAIR: Welcome to the first hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service for the additional round of the inquiry into budget estimates 2023-24. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Emma Hurst. I am Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Jihad Dib and accompanying officials to this hearing.

Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Customer Service and Digital Government, Emergency Services, and Youth Justice. I ask everyone in the room to please put their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures. Welcome and thank you for giving your time to give evidence today. Minister Dib, 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 PAUL O'REILLY, Executive Director of Youth Justice, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, affirmed and examined

Mr SIMON DRAPER, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority, on former affirmation

Mr GRAEME HEAD, Secretary, NSW Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Commissioner CARLENE YORK, APM, Commissioner, NSW State Emergency Service, on former oath

Commissioner JEREMY FEWTRELL, Commissioner, Fire and Rescue NSW, on former oath

Commissioner ROB ROGERS, AFSM, Commissioner, NSW Rural Fire Service, on former oath

Ms SARAH CRUICKSHANK, Deputy Secretary, Customer Delivery and Transformation, NSW Department of Customer Service, on former affirmation

Ms LAURA CHRISTIE, Deputy Secretary, Digital.NSW, NSW Department of Customer Service, on former affirmation

Mr GREG WELLS, Chief Executive Officer, Service NSW, NSW Department of Customer Service, on former oath

Ms SIMONE CZECH, Deputy Secretary, Child Protection and Permanency, District and Youth Justice Services, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, on former affirmation

Ms MANDY YOUNG, Chief Operating Officer, NSW Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Ms JOANNA QUILTY, Head of Preparedness and Recovery, NSW Reconstruction Authority, affirmed and examined

Ms AMANDA LECK, Head of Adaptation, Mitigation and Reconstruction, NSW Reconstruction Authority, affirmed and examined

Mr MATT CONROW, Chief Financial and Operating Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority, on former oath

Ms CANDICE NEILSON, Acting Executive Director, Youth Justice, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, on former affirmation

Ms SIMONE WALKER, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. until 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 15 minutes allocated to Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you, Chair. Welcome, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thanks. It's nice to be back here.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm sure it is. Minister, I note you haven't got your budget papers with you at the table, so I've got some here if you need to look them up. I'm sure you know already that the 2022-23 budget for Fire and Rescue NSW was about \$862 million, but the actual spend was just over \$1 billion dollars, at \$1.004 billion. The Labor budget in 2023-24 was only \$996 million. So there was nearly a \$9 million cut to the budget from the actual spend the year previous. Minister, do you agree that Labor's budget cuts for Fire and Rescue NSW were \$9 million below the previous spend?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, I'm just writing that down. Thanks, Mr Fang. Even before I start, if I can, I just want to acknowledge that today is the second anniversary of the floods in the Northern Rivers. We've all seen that. We've all seen the devastation, and I'm really proud of the work that has been done across all members of Parliament from all parties to ensure that we can help that community stand up once again. There has been a lot of work. The work is not yet done. It will continue. We've seen the Resilient Lands Program that was announced, I think, a couple of weeks ago. But a special acknowledgement to all the local MPs there, who have worked incredibly hard, and also the local mayors and councils but especially to the people. Whenever you go through parts of Lismore, you see that heart that just seems to survive all the way through. I just wanted to acknowledge that, being such—

The Hon. WES FANG: And that's great acknowledgement, Minister. I was going to put some questions to you about that later, but I'm glad that you acknowledge that today is the second anniversary.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thanks, and I will take those questions. What you talked about was the budget, particularly around Fire and Rescue NSW, and you talked about the budget and then the actuals. What you will actually see is that the budget allocation from the most recent budget was actually an increase on the previous budget. In that sense—

The Hon. WES FANG: But it was a cut from the actual spend, Minister. That's the point.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I will get to that in a sec. The actual spends, Mr Fang, when you consider—there were some mitigating circumstances that came up in 2022, particularly around what I just talked about—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I probably will address these in later questions. I just wanted to address, first, that the budget that you allocated for Fire and Rescue NSW was \$9 million below what the actual spend was the previous year. Do you acknowledge that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The budget that we provided was actually an increase on the budget that was provided the year before. Now, what you're talking about—the actual spend—part of that was because of some one-off payments that came up, as I was about to say, particularly around some issues around the floods and so forth, where a number of Fire and Rescue personnel went up. They—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I will probably address some of those points a little bit later, but you will agree that that is without any inflation or wage rises being taken into consideration—into the figure that was budgeted.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, I'm not really sure where you're getting at. This Government increased the budget of Fire and Rescue to what had been committed the year before that.

The Hon. WES FANG: But it was below, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Actually, increased it quite—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, do you agree that it was below—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang—

The Hon. WES FANG: Do you agree?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, increased it quite substantially—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I don't understand why you won't acknowledge—

Mr JIHAD DIB: —compared to what was allocated last time. The actuals—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister—

Mr JIHAD DIB: As you would know, with many of the budgets, the actuals—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I don't understand why you won't acknowledge that the budgeted figure was below the actual spend in the previous financial year. Can you at least acknowledge that one fact?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I will acknowledge that this Government actually committed a 15.5 per cent increase—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I will move on.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —to the budget on the year before.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, do you agree that the failure to budget for the actual spend in Fire and Rescue NSW has resulted in maintenance fleet issues?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't agree with what you say there, Mr Fang. I've just spent five minutes talking to you about the fact that this Government increased the budget by 15.5 per cent on what was given the year before. The overspend—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, while you're talking, I'm just going to ask the secretariat that I table these. There are 10 copies here. I will keep one, and I will ask that they distribute them to the Committee members and one to you, Minister. Minister, continue, please.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, I will just wait for that to come around.

The Hon. WES FANG: Please, go ahead.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is it related to what's being tabled at the moment?

The Hon. WES FANG: It's going to relate to my next question. I think you were saying that there has been no impact on the maintenance of the fleet. Was that, effectively, what you were saying?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, Fire and Rescue NSW runs a massive fleet. Obviously, there are going to be maintenance issues. I think anybody in their right mind would recognise that—that there are always going to be maintenance issues. The budget has increased by 15½ per cent. Now, that's because there were overspends the year before. So will there be maintenance? Of course there's going to be maintenance.

The Hon. WES FANG: I will ask that the Minister first get a copy, please, so that I can put the questions to him. Minister, you will see here a number of photographs that I have compiled. You will see the top photo has a Fire and Rescue NSW truck, with its brake-light system cable-tied to the truck. Minister, do you understand that you're using cable ties for maintenance on your fire trucks? Are you putting lives at risk?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, seriously, you'd ask the question "Are we putting lives at risk?" I think Fire and Rescue—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, it's a very serious question. Are you putting lives at risk by using cable ties to have maintenance done on your trucks?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, Fire and Rescue personnel do an incredible amount to keep the community safe. They do an enormous amount—

The Hon. WES FANG: We're not disputing that, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on a second, you're—

The Hon. WES FANG: We're discussing whether your Government has funded Fire and Rescue NSW enough so that they can at least keep their trucks maintained. Minister, you're using cable ties to keep your trucks held together.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, what you've presented to me here is one photo of a cable tie on one of our many appliances. There is a plan with Fire and Rescue. It's about a fleet replacement plan, and in that the prioritisation will be obviously for those that are in most need. Mr Fang, there's a—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, are we going to see Labor—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on a second. Can you let me answer the question?

The Hon. WES FANG: —giving Fire and Rescue NSW duct tape and cable ties to keep their trucks together because you're not funding them properly?

Mr JIHAD DIB: What you've seen is Labor actually increase the budget by 15½ per cent to the tune of \$133 million compared to—

The Hon. WES FANG: What we've seen is Labor funding it—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. WES FANG: —\$9 million below the actual spend the year prior.

The CHAIR: Mr Fang, there has been a point of order.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Compared to—

The CHAIR: Minister, sorry, I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Chair, it would assist with the conduct of this hearing if we could operate it as a question and answer session. It is not courteous to the witness to continuously interject.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'd like some answers and I might do that.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. That was getting a little bit too much back and forth and speaking over the top of each other. Would the Minister like to answer the question?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr Fang, what you're doing is highlighting one thing from 726 appliances across the State. I have said that there is a plan that Fire and Rescue have worked on and are developing in terms of replacement. I would also say that there will be new appliances coming on this year. The premise of your question—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, there are photos here—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, if I could just finish off. The premise of your question is, quite frankly, offensive. To say that lives have been put at risk is offensive when you don't realise—

The Hon. WES FANG: I'll tell you what's offensive, Minister. What is offensive is that you don't fund Fire and Rescue enough so that the people of New South Wales can have fire trucks that aren't held together with cable ties.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order—

The Hon. WES FANG: That's offensive.

The CHAIR: Order! There has been a point of order.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: I am reluctant to do this, but you just made a ruling about an issue saying that the Minister, as a matter of courtesy as a witness, ought to be given time to respond and then we have the same situation again with the honourable member asking a question and, without even waiting a reasonable time for an answer, talking over the Minister and making statements.

The CHAIR: I do uphold the point of order. If the Hon. Wes Fang wants to redirect the question, he can do so in a courteous way.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, Madam Chair, if I could—where is this appliance stationed at?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, we ask the questions.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I just want to ask where is the appliance stationed at?

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I'm going to move on because I've got plenty of questions.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The reason I said that is because again you've tried to seek a gotcha moment.

The Hon. WES FANG: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: But if you were genuinely serious what you would have done is actually come to see us.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, you're the one that said you—

Mr JIHAD DIB: You're looking for a gotcha moment.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr JIHAD DIB: You can't even tell me where that is.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, you are the one that's not funding Fire and Rescue NSW properly.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. WES FANG: You're the one that should be ashamed here.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr JIHAD DIB: A \$133 million increase.

The Hon. WES FANG: You should be ashamed, Minister.

The CHAIR: Please stop. There has been a point of order. I don't have a voice to be constantly yelling over the top of everyone, so I will not allow that to happen again. The Hon. Natalie Ward had a point of order.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I believe the way that estimates work is that Committee members ask questions of the Minister and I ask that he refrain from asking Committee members questions when it is his portfolio. I think the Hon. Wes Fang is trying to ask serious questions about this and I ask that we move on because time is very limited.

The CHAIR: Yes, thank you.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: To the point of order—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're just wasting time.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: It is perfectly in order, if a member asks a question—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're not the Chair.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: —that the Minister is able to clarify so they can actually answer it correctly.

The CHAIR: Yes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: It's also inappropriate for a member to ask a question and then seek to answer it at the same time. That is the responsibility of the Minister.

The CHAIR: It was fine for the Minister to ask a question, but it is also fine for the Opposition to then move on because it is their time to ask questions, so I partially uphold the point of order.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, what I will say—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Madam Chair, if I could just add, the point was if it's not a question, my point was—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, no, before you do that—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I've got the call, not you.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. WES FANG: This is budget estimates.

The CHAIR: Minister, what was your position?

Mr JIHAD DIB: My point was going to be if it's not going to be a question, the point I was simply making is that, again, in trying to seek a gotcha moment, he hasn't done his homework—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Point of order: This is not how this works.

Mr JIHAD DIB: He can't actually tell me where it is. It's just a matter of trying to find it.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, Minister—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I ask that we stop the clock.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If you—

The CHAIR: Minister, stop.

The Hon. WES FANG: The point is you're the Minister, you should know where this is, Minister. You should know where your trucks are being held together with cable ties.

The CHAIR: Order! You're now wasting your own time. Minister, if you wanted to seek further information, perhaps you can speak to the Opposition in regard to the locations after this. If the Opposition has some more genuine questions, they've only got nine minutes left. But perhaps we move on.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, how many Fire and Rescue NSW trucks are currently in operation?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There are 726 appliances that we do have—Fire and Rescue trucks, and there is a variety of trucks across the State. They're positioned all over the State. We also have—

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm going to redirect. How many of those are over 20 years of age?

Mr JIHAD DIB: When you include the service replacement vehicles, so what they're called—the SEVs. I might just seek a bit of clarification but I think there might be about 25 or 26. I can get a clarification for that if you like.

The Hon. WES FANG: How many RFS trucks—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I will add to that—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I'm going to redirect because I've got plenty of questions and you've wasted a lot of my time. How many RFS trucks do you have currently in operation?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Again, I just want to make sure so I don't give you the wrong figure. But would the commissioner—I believe it's about 4,000 appliances across the board.

ROB ROGERS: The RFS fleet is a total of 6,393 vehicles.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There you go.

ROB ROGERS: That's of all types, not just fire trucks.

Mr JIHAD DIB: They're not just fire trucks. They're all the appliances.

The Hon. WES FANG: How many of those are over 20 years old?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll have to take that on notice. If you like, I'll come back to you later with the answer.

The Hon. WES FANG: That would be great, if you wouldn't mind. Last estimates we learned that RFS fuel cards have been maxed out. Minister, have any additional RFS fuel cards been declined?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Not that I'm aware of. I believe that the commissioner at that time then also responded to it and said that it's a one-off and it's very much a rarity and it was an issue to do with a fuel card that was issued by the council. There are also other fuel cards and they rectified the situation pretty much straightaway.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, are you sure of that answer?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I just said to you, "Not that I'm aware of."

The Hon. WES FANG: Is it the case then that you haven't been made aware that additional fuel cards have been declined and RFS volunteers have been required to pay for fuel out of their own pockets?

Mr JIHAD DIB: If that is the case, then we will look to continue to rectify that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Shouldn't you have been notified of this, Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, you're not notified of every single thing that occurs. There's also a management team—

The Hon. WES FANG: This is pretty major, isn't it, Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, I'll you what's really major: some of the bushfires that our—

The Hon. WES FANG: Given that I raised it at estimates last time—

Mr JIHAD DIB: —Fire and Rescue and RFS people have dealt with.

The Hon. WES FANG: —wouldn't you be acutely aware of issues around fuel cards?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I answer the question, please?

The Hon. WES FANG: Sure. You said you were aware.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I said to you, "I'm not aware. I haven't been made aware of any others." But what I will say is that any of those issues—there was some communication that went out to say to escalate them fairly quickly so they can be rectified. Now, if there is a situation on occasion where somebody does need to pay for fuel, they're very quickly reimbursed, but we do have a number of fuel cards that are available.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, is it the case that volunteers should be having to pay for fuel because you haven't organised fuel cards to be sorted out?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I reject that we haven't organised fuel cards. Mr Fang, the fuel cards also—

The Hon. WES FANG: Isn't it the case that Labor has not supported the RFS?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The fuel cards also were provided by local government, so this is a local government fuel card that you're talking about—

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you passing the buck, Minister? You are the emergency services Minister. You are responsible for ensuring that RFS New South Wales and the RFS fleet are operational and ready. That's your responsibility, Minister. Are you absolving yourself of that responsibility?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Good try, Mr Fang, but—

The Hon. WES FANG: No, I'm not trying anything, Minister. You are the Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, we have seen the incredible response from RFS, particularly when we had the bushfires early on in this bushfire season.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yet they're not supported by you and their fuel cards don't always work.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Quite frankly, I think that's quite offensive.

The CHAIR: There has been a point of order.

The Hon. WES FANG: Again with the offensive.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: I'm reluctant to take this point again, but we seem to be devolving back into the situation where a question is asked, only a few words are uttered by the Minister and then a statement is coming in over the top of it, not even another question. The honourable member ought to be called to order and allow the Minister sufficient time to answer questions.

The CHAIR: I would also remind the member that we have Hansard as well who are trying to actually record all of this while two people are talking.

The Hon. WES FANG: I apologise to Hansard in advance.

The CHAIR: No, not in advance because it finishes now. So you apologise for the previous behaviour and now it changes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes, Chair, I feel admonished by you. But I am holding this Minister to account, who has now twice said he finds it offensive that we are putting to him questions about the lack of support that RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW are getting from the Labor Government. Why is it offensive, Minister? Why is raising that you're not supporting our volunteers and our firefighters somehow offensive to you?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Part of the reason it's offensive is that you're actually—

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm holding you to account for being a Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You're actually grandstanding. You're not—

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm not grandstanding.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —giving me an opportunity to answer the question. If you give me an opportunity to answer the question, I will answer the question. The fuel cards are distributed by local government and that's been a longstanding practice—

The Hon. WES FANG: You're absolving yourself of the issue.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That has been a longstanding practice. It is a very, very rare occasion that volunteers—

The Hon. WES FANG: So do we go blame the local governments now?

Mr JIHAD DIB: —would be paying out of pocket for fuel costs. Mr Fang, I've given you the answer. I've said to you that I was not aware of anything else—

The Hon. WES FANG: So it's not your fault?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm sorry, once again—

The Hon. WES FANG: Not your fault. Nothing to see here.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Once again, Mr Fang, you've put something out there but you've actually given no fact. You said, "Are you aware? Has this happened?" Have you got any evidence of that? Have you presented any evidence to the Committee? Have you actually taken it to the RFS, which I suggested last time—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You don't ask the questions.

The Hon. WES FANG: We have questions. We'll put questions later.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Okay, I'll answer it in a different way. I would assume that if you were genuinely sincere about finding a resolution to this, what you would do is as soon as you came across that and your shadow Minister came across that, you would notify the RFS rather than holding onto it—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, you have said in estimates that you're supporting these firefighters—

Mr JIHAD DIB: —and bringing it into this Committee and talking about it—

The Hon. WES FANG: —and yet it seems that now, at a second estimates the fuel card issue is still coming up.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —without any suggestion of a resolution.

The Hon. WES FANG: The fuel issue is still coming up.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Again, so I'm not going to direct a question to you, but I would say—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I'm asking the questions here—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: My assumption would be—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister, there has been a point of order taken.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Chair, paragraph 19 of the procedural fairness resolution—

The Hon. WES FANG: He's a big boy. He can look after himself.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: —requires courtesy to be extended to the witness. Beyond that, the Minister can stand on his own two feet. I do feel incredibly sorry for Hansard right now. It is just completely indecipherable. I can't make out what is happening.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. The Hon. Wes Fang will continue to get points of order if that continues. If you have some questions, I suggest that you put them and that you courteously redirect the Minister after giving him a chance to respond.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you. Minister, do you categorically deny that RFS volunteers have not been able to refuel because the cards aren't working?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll await the detail and the evidence of that.

The Hon. WES FANG: You haven't been provided any advice—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll await the detail and the evidence of it. I invite you to present either the RFS or myself with that evidence so that it can be rectified. I am pretty clear—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I'm going to redirect now.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm pretty clear that we'd like to find a resolution to this. This is not about playing petty politics here.

The Hon. WES FANG: It's still continuing, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: This Government has invested \$100 million in a refurbishment of new tankers. There's been a massive investment.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yet you can't even get the fuel cards right.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Provide us with the evidence and the detail and we'll follow that up.

The Hon. WES FANG: I will, Minister—offline. It was a member of Parliament that actually had the issue.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Provide me with that evidence.

The Hon. WES FANG: I will. I will come back to you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I challenge you to do that.

The Hon. WES FANG: But it was a member of Parliament that had to pay for the fuel because the fuel card wasn't working.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Well as you know, Mr Fang—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I will address it later. But I can assure you that it was an actual issue.

Mr JIHAD DIB: As you know, Mr Fang, my door is always open.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on a sec.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm going to redirect.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I'm answering that question. Sorry, I'm answering that question. As you and people in this Parliament know, my door is always open.

The Hon. WES FANG: I know.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And I'm always into finding resolutions to things.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, you're a good bloke, which is why I'm really disappointed—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you very much for that confidence.

The Hon. WES FANG: That's why I'm really disappointed that this issue has come up again.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you very much for that confidence.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister, a point of order has been taken.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Chair, I'm reluctant to do this yet again but we're back in a situation where we've got the honourable member just talking over the Minister while he's attempting to provide a very good answer to the important question that he was asked.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: To the point of order: The Minister is talking over the member as well. I ask that they both stop and just get on with it. There is a minute left.

The CHAIR: I agree that both people are talking. Minister, if you are redirected and you do feel like some of that question has been put forward, I ask that you do follow a redirection as well.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I've only got a few seconds left.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, I was answering the question, Madam Chair.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, I'm redirecting now.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I was answering the question.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, if the State Government—

Mr JIHAD DIB: You haven't given me a chance to answer the question, Mr Fang.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm now redirecting because I've only got 20 seconds left.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Because you actually won't give me a chance to answer the question—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, if the State Government—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're wasting time, Minister.

The Hon. WES FANG: If the State Government controls the deployment of the firefighting assets, why doesn't it control the fuel that also goes in them?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's an issue there, as you know, that when you're in government, there is a vesting issue there with local governments. I would then go back to that last—

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you denying that—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm actually really disappointed that the member of Parliament wouldn't come to me—

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you denying that this is an issue?

Mr JIHAD DIB: —to try and find a resolution to this. That's where I would be really concerned, that somebody—

The Hon. WES FANG: Well, I think that you gave a commitment—

Mr JIHAD DIB: And then you've sat on it—

The Hon. WES FANG: You gave a commitment last estimates that this wouldn't be an issue, Minister, yet here we are again—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang—

The Hon. WES FANG: —with it being an issue.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, this could have been addressed quickly but you sat on it and waited till estimates to make it political. You should actually be embarrassed.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, Minister, you should have addressed it previously.

The CHAIR: Order! We are now moving to crossbench time. I will start with Ms Sue Higginson.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Good morning, Minister. Could I just turn to your responsibility and ask you some questions in your capacity as Minister for Youth Justice. Do you believe, Minister, that young people would be safer in all of their interactions with the police if general duties officers didn't carry firearms?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's really an issue for the police Minister. My role—particularly in the youth justice system and as the youth justice Minister—is to work with young people to try to find the best outcomes for them post their interactions with police and post their interactions with the courts. Those issues are bigger than something for me to talk about.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is it not before their interactions? I think the approach, Minister, is perhaps—preventing young people being in the system is really where a lot of focus should be.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Higginson, it's something that I'm a big believer in—the issue of diversion and the issue of early intervention. There's a lot of really good work that's going on between a number of Ministers.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, the question about firearms—and I'm honestly not trying to do anything untoward here. You are the Minister for Youth Justice. We are trying our hardest as a State—and it's clear—to do better for young people. At the moment, firearms and the appropriateness of police carrying firearms is in the focus of many people. As Minister for Youth Justice, do you think honestly—and this is a question to ask you of your own opinion; this is not about government policy. We know the policy right now for police carrying firearms. Do you think it would be beneficial for young people when they are interacting with police that their interactions don't involve firearms?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Higginson, I'm not trying to obfuscate here but it really is a question, particularly around the issues of firearms and police, for the police Minister. What I am working incredibly hard on—and I know there's a lot of people who would support me on this—is having more positive interactions, of course, between young people and the police, and having ways that we can work together across Government.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That's precisely where this question is going. It's a simple question. Do you think it's beneficial for young people that police carry weapons? General duties police—so all I'm talking about is when police are interacting with young people who are at-risk young people.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I really can't offer an opinion on something like that that really sits within the police Minister's—I can't do that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You are the Minister to advocate for moving out of the intractable position that some young people find themselves in interacting with police, and how we can move that along to do better for young people. That's all.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And I stand on my record on advocacy for young people and also the incredible commitment to young people and trying to get the change in the life's projection. A lot of that is with the early intervention.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So, Minister, if the police officers that are mostly dealing with youth came to you and said, "We'd love it if we didn't have firearms. We think it's really not helpful"—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Higginson, my first response for them would be that's really an issue that you need to take up with the police Minister. I can't be making a call on police and what they carry when I'm not the police Minister. But what I can say is I am really pleased to see an increase—a lot of work is happening across the board, particularly in terms of relationships between young people and the police, particularly interactions. I've seen that through the youth officers.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you think good relationships with young people and other people normally involve firearms?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think, again, we're getting to the point about what it is that police officers carry. I can't really make that call about what it is in terms of the way that police officers are—what it is that they carry on their person.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: How do we keep young people from committing crimes? At the moment we've apparently got country mayors from all around New South Wales saying that youth crime is on the significant rise. What are you doing, or how do we do it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's a number of things that we're currently working on—and I'm happy to read through some of those—particularly around some of the regional areas. It really sits around that principle of trying to offer the best opportunities for young people. The other thing, and I hope that you would agree with me, is that this involves a whole-of-government, wraparound service approach. Tragically and sadly, many of these young people who find themselves in trouble within the justice system also have a lot of other complications in their life: some of that being some trauma from early on; some of it might be abuse of substance—either them or their carers; a lack of a place of going somewhere safe. In that sense, that's where—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: On that, Minister, can I redirect you? What successes have you seen since March last year when you took over? What are those successes in those wraparounds that you are aware of, that you are focused on and that you are saying, "Hey, this is a great news story; we need to pick this up and roll it further?"

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Higginson, I've seen so many successes. I really am a glass-half-full person.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I am a glass overflowing, so let's go.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've been able to visit a number of Youth Justice centres, and the shadow Minister has also been with me on a couple. I have seen some incredible programs. Only a few weeks ago when we visited one centre I met a young person who was in a unit where he is transitioning to complete his sentence. He was telling me the story about how, through the help of the officers of the Youth Justice centre and all the support with DCJ and Youth Justice, he is actually going to be going into university and making that change. That, to me, was so incredibly inspiring because he shared that story and he acknowledged what he had done. In terms of what we do with the young people in the Youth Justice centre, that's one bit. But the other one too that I'd really like to talk about that I visited was in Wagga. I think it was called Wollundry Dreaming.

The Hon. WES FANG: I don't know; I wasn't invited.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You're not the shadow Minister, but next time I go there I'll let you know.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thanks, Minister.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: This is my time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: They do a bail program, a short-term remand program. It was excellent because they were working with people, particularly as an alternative to being on remand, working with them, teaching culture, teaching history, but also making sure they do basic things like get into school, get them dressed and get them all ready. I've been working with the ACCOs across the board, and I can list a number. The Bail and Accommodation Support Service, the Casework Support Program—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is it mainly First Nations young people that you are seeing?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In those programs, but there is also a program I know that runs out of Cobham Youth Justice Centre called the brotherhood program. That was a really good program and I'm hoping to join them, I think, in a couple of weeks.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do all these young people have access to tablets now?

Mr JIHAD DIB: They have access to tablets when they want to communicate with their families and so forth. The department is, at the moment, scoping a potential rollout of tablets. I know that that has been—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I feel like that has been going on for a long time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We are actually now scoping that. That's a really good thing. It's not quite as simple, as you'd appreciate, as just giving every young person at tablet. We have to have the infrastructure around it and also go through some safety things. But we are actually in that process now of scoping how we would do that. That is about going there. The other really good program I want to talk to you about, if I can, was the Try a Trade program. That's about helping young people. We work with Youth Justice and partner agencies to come into the Youth Justice centres to try to help the young person into pre-apprenticeship training to get their skills up and get a trade. There have now been a number of examples of what we do.

The one clear thing for me, the one takeaway, and it is something that is close to my heart—and I appreciate the work that Youth Justice does—is about doing things a little bit differently. It is about collaborating more with community partners and collaborating more in terms of place-based possible solutions as well, because that's what we really need to focus on. We can't determine how they get to us, but what we can determine in Youth Justice is how we help them to hopefully never come back. I know when I said to one young kid, "I hope to never see you again," he wasn't sure how to take it, but I said, "I mean that in the nicest possible way." That's what we do.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you still very frustrated with the Attorney General that we haven't moved to raise the age yet?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know the Attorney General is working on that. It is something that he is leading. He is working across that with the—is it called—SCAG, the national body, and doing work on that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes, the Attorneys-General.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But he is leading the work on that. There are a number of people who will make contributions.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you still advocating that we really do need to be raising the age?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm advocating for young people to be able to give them the best opportunity in life. In terms of alongside the raising the age issue, we also need to consider the other issues that I have talked about, which are things like what is that early intervention, what are those wraparound supports and how do we make sure that, for example, Health, Education and Community Services—all of those—work together.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: With the correction centres, though, it is still fair to say that, given the stats—that is, 81 per cent of young people re-convict and the recidivism rates are still really high and within that 10-year period et cetera—the correction centres are still not working?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The correction centres are working in terms of trying to make the changes. The other stat that is obviously the big one with that is the number of young people who come in on remand for different periods of time. A large proportion are on remand for 24 to 48 hours.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you still working hard to divert them from remand?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Absolutely, and there's some work that's going on there. One of the other things that I can say is that something that I'm really proud of, of the team, is the work around youth conferencing, for example. With youth conferencing—and maybe Paul might correct me—I think it was about 64 per cent of people.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is that happening all across the State, the youth conferencing?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Paul, is that the youth conferencing?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, that's in the Young Offenders Act. It's available everywhere.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And that's really fantastic. We're looking at what we can do that's different, that's better, that actually makes those changes.

The CHAIR: Minister, it was revealed last week that there is a law firm investigating allegations of historical child sex abuse at Riverina juvenile justice centre. This comes after the ABC exposé in February last year regarding historical sexual assault at Reiby Youth Justice Centre. Are you actively cooperating with those investigations into historical child sex abuse at New South Wales juvenile justice centres?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, absolutely. If you will allow me, just to reiterate—this one I just want to get right, because it's in a note. Obviously, it's a really difficult situation there. Youth Justice takes all the allegations of misconduct seriously and refers all matters to the DCJ Conduct and Professional Standards Unit. Where appropriate, matters are also referred to the NSW Police Force, the Office of the Children's Guardian and/or the Independent Commission Against Corruption. We have multiple safeguards in place to prevent and respond to employee misconduct and implemented a suite of reforms aimed at keeping young people safe. All Youth Justice employees require a current Working with Children Check and a police check, and there are really strict protocols that govern direct supervision of and contact with young people. I suppose that was that part.

To answer the other question, of course this is really a horrific thing to hear. We will work with the person. We will refer it where we need to. Of course, if it involves other law enforcement agencies or investigative agencies, every assistance that we can provide, we will. I don't know if there's any more that you want added, if the executive director wants to add any more or whether there's any more that you might seek. Does that answer your question?

The CHAIR: Yes, it certainly answers my first question. I was just going to ask as well if you're conducting your own inquiry or looking into this further within your own department into current and historical sexual allegations within Youth Justice centres to understand how these shocking crimes were actually able to occur in the first place.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, we do, and we are. That's part of the reason also that we've made some changes and, where possible, looked at how could these things have occurred, how could these acts or the allegations have occurred. We also look at whether some of our processes need to change. I talked about not only the Working

with Children Check but also the criminal check, and making sure that there's really strong accountability. We're looking at continuous improvement in everything that we do. This is a horrific thing. Really, it's hard enough for a young person to be in a Youth Justice centre. That's not an additional thing. We can look at the processes that we can have in a place. That's why even supervision, for example, plays a really key role.

One of the things that I really do want to give a shout-out to Mr O'Reilly and his team is there's that willingness to actually look inward and say, "We can do things better." This is one, certainly, that we say, "This was a problem. These are historical. What have we done since that time to ensure that these things do not happen again? What are the safeguards that we need to put in place? How do we also make sure that, when it comes to reporting—because we know reporting is a really difficult thing—we not only encourage people to report but also make sure that they're supported to report and all those claims are investigated?" That's why we then refer it, in the first instance, to DCJ and then follow on from there.

The CHAIR: Are there any new measures that have been put into place within New South Wales Youth Justice to ensure that sexual abuse and assault against detainees cannot occur?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Look, there might be some specific measures. If I can ask Mr O'Reilly to answer that, if that's all right.

PAUL O'REILLY: Certainly. I have reported on that in this place previously, but very happy to go through it again.

The CHAIR: Sorry, I meant any new.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, absolutely. We have finished the implementation of body scanners, which is a really important change. Partially clothed body searches are still lawful within the regulation, but even when they're executed in line with the regulation, they are still traumatic for people. From the day I walked into Youth Justice in 2019, I started working on replacing those searchers with X-ray scanners. It has taken some time. They're now implemented. That eliminates the need for partially clothed body searches in almost every case. It means that in the last year, 98½ per cent of all searches have been done through the scanner, instead of through partially clothed body searches. Sometimes a young person will prefer a body search. That's really important for a whole heap of reasons—one, so that our system is not currently traumatising children who are often already traumatised but also, for a large proportion of those historic abuse claims, the allegations stem from the search process. So there's an overwhelming risk there that should've been managed better in previous years and is being managed more effectively now.

We've also changed staff ratios, particularly in high-risk areas. We are regularly reviewing our CCTV coverage to pick up any gaps and changing the CCTV performance—improving that. We are regularly inviting in new groups to come and provide additional oversight. As you would be aware, in the regulation there is oversight through the inspector, through the Ombudsman and the Children's Guardian. They're the three official oversight bodies. We also invite the Advocate for Children and Young People. We invite ALS, we invite Legal Aid, and we invite people and organisations with lived experience in detention to check our systems and work with our kids. There really is no substitute for lived experience in terms of understanding the experience of people that we are responsible for caring for. All of those measures, in addition to the checks and screening, improve safety.

The last thing I will talk about in this context is the use of force, which is an essential part of our model but dramatically reduced, thankfully, following our reforms in the last four years. We now have a committee which scrutinises every single incident of use of force: reviews the footage, reviews the notes and interviews people. Any hint of either accidents or poor practice or misconduct is quickly referred to the appropriate place for rectification. We are putting in extra resources to support the investigation process when people are faced with allegations of misconduct to make sure that it is as quick as possible, but it is not always quick. It is complicated. We are constantly reminding young people, staff and advocates of the importance of reporting concerns to police. Again, royal commissions in the past have found that one of the failings of institutions in previous years has been the failure to go to police when acts that would appear to be criminal have occurred, or are alleged to have occurred. So the police have a critical role to play, but they can only play it if they've been brought in. We have a good process for reporting to police and supporting people with that reporting to police so they don't feel alone, and making sure that a young person has access to their lawyer during that process as well.

The CHAIR: It sounds like you've been doing some good work, Mr O'Reilly, so thank you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You can see why I'm so impressed by them and the work they do. Genuinely, every part of the organisation is about trying to look at that continuous improvement and about how we can change, and speaking about that trajectory of young people. We can change their circumstances. If we can do that, maybe we can create a better opportunity for them that otherwise they'd never have. But it only happens when, as I said

before, there's a holistic approach of people who are passionate about also advocating where they need to advocate and supporting.

The CHAIR: Minister, at the last budget estimates I asked you about whether the Government will be commencing a long-overdue review of the New South Wales Young Offenders Act. You said it was being considered by the Government and you'd hope to have an update for me by next estimates, which is today. Do you have an update and is this review underway?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is still being considered by Government. The Young Offenders Act review is underway. There are a number of things—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister, can you explain what the delay is on this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There are a number of different things that come into play here. Part of it is the intersection as well with other things that are going on at the moment that we're dealing with, really complex issues. The availability of adequate support services as well, in terms of some of the suggestions that might come up—can we actually meet those suggestions? The Attorney General is leading the development response on that and Youth Justice is contributing to it.

The CHAIR: But the review itself is underway? Has that started?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm pretty sure it's underway. The Attorney General is the one who's leading on that one and Youth Justice and others are making—

The CHAIR: Have you met with the Attorney General about the progress?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I meet with the Attorney General on a number of occasions, a number of things.

The CHAIR: Have you raised the progress of this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: My views on this are known to him.

The CHAIR: Not your views, but have you spoken to him about the progress of the review that's underway?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I have, and my understanding is that the Government is considering their response. So it's being considered. The response is being considered. As I said, it's a little bit complex in terms of some of the resourcing and some of the adequacy in terms of making sure that community safety is entirely appropriate as well.

The CHAIR: Will there be a public consultation process as part of the review, are you aware?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I would assume so but, again, because the Attorney General is the one who is leading on it, it really is a question that's probably better directed to him in that he can give that specific. It's not about just putting it out there and saying, "There won't be any more detail," but it wouldn't be right of me to commit the Attorney General to something that he is leading from where I sit.

The CHAIR: What are the key issues that you anticipate will be focused on in the review?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The key issues are about what we can do to better support young people and how we can better support them navigate some really difficult years and their intersection not only with law and order but also the justice system, and how we can actually get them on the right track. I daresay there would be a strong focus on community as well. The other one, too, that we shouldn't forget is that we've also got to keep in mind community safety. We've got to make sure that the balance is right. You've got community safety and we've also got to make sure that we work with young people to ensure that we can set them on that right direction together.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, welcome.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hi, how are you?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Good. Good to see you. You always love estimates.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You do or I do?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We all do—all in.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think my mum is watching today.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Hi, mum. Minister, have you fixed the Hazards Near Me app?

Mr JIHAD DIB: You're talking about the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Hazards Near Me app. Is it fixed?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. What you're talking about there is that there was an unintended consequence when we did an update. I think it had an impact on people with vision issues. As soon as we became aware of that, RFS worked with customer service and the issue was resolved. I'll apologise that that actually happened, but it was an unintended consequence of the upgrade that was required. It's been resolved.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I welcome that acknowledgement and that you've fixed it, but you would also acknowledge, would you not, that it was broken for several months? Given the importance of an app like this, why did it take so long to resolve the issue?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm sorry, Ms Ward. I stand corrected, but I think it was when the upgrade happened and when we became aware of it we got onto it straightaway. I think it might have only been a matter of a couple of weeks or a few weeks. But from the moment that we became aware of it—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You might want to check that and come back to us. Nonetheless we're interested in why, with such an important app, that might have taken so long and whether it was a result of the upgrade or whether it was previously part of the structure of the app.

Mr JIHAD DIB: As soon as it came to my attention, I fixed that. Just to let you know, from that point on, we've actually then built a stronger relationship with a number of representative bodies to make sure that they can also help us in terms of guiding us on things that would make our apps even more accessible. So if there's anything that's good, it's actually that we did that. And then RFS hosted a round table—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll redirect. Thank you, Minister. You've acknowledged that New South Wales has been the leading jurisdiction when it comes to digital government, thanks largely to the work of the former Government and Minister Victor Dominello. You recently held a round table to refresh the State digital strategy. Perhaps you should have invited Victor to that. When will the strategy be refreshed and when will it be made public?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In the first instance here, I have acknowledged former Minister Dominello on a number of occasions. He is one of the very decent people that I've had the pleasure of working with. Ministers shouldn't go in and just trample on predecessors, but there is a difference between what Minister Dominello did and the things that I do. I'm very strongly focused on inclusion, on accessibility, on making sure that everybody has access to the digital tools that we have. The digital round table that you're talking about is a refresh in terms of looking at the priorities of this Government. Some of those priorities are around addressing the issue of housing—how we can use a digital solution for that—essential workers, looking also in terms of environment, cybersecurity, inclusion and accessibility.

That is where we wanted to take the digital strategy and say, "Hey, it's due for a refresh. It's been a few years since we've had one." The digital world stops for nobody. It continuously changes so we need to continuously move with it. We invited a range of different stakeholders and we'll be reporting back to them, because one of the things that I made really clear to the agency was I don't want to have a round table or a stakeholder engagement and then just sort of leave it. We're getting back to them soon. They are part of helping us better have a digital strategy—and it will be made public, of course.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: On that, my question was—and I welcome that. This Government is known for a number of reviews, so we might add that to the list. But my question is, when will the strategy be refreshed and when will it be made public?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's being refreshed. The review—I'll call it an "update". This is updating a policy—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm going to redirect you, Minister. I think I have allowed you sufficient time on the first answer. Do you have a time or do you not on when that will be made public?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's going to be finalised this year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: This year?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: This quarter, next quarter?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Well, this year. We're still in that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: December?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We just had the round table.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. When?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're going back to report to those people, as I promised them we would. Then what we're going to be doing is taking on any suggestions. I would imagine that it could be sometime in the second half of the year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Your expectation is sometime this year, second half?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Not expectation—it will happen this year. It's a commitment that it will happen. You're asking me about the specific time; I can't give you that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you don't have a specific time? As Minister, you've said "later this year". You've already said that; you've answered that previously, that it will be later this year. You still don't have any further clarity on which quarter that might be? You've not directed your department to come back by a certain time?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're virtually in quarter two now. We had the round table, say, three or four weeks ago. We're due to go back. I would imagine that it's going to be in the second half of the year. It will happen in the second half of the year; specifically when, no. But we're waiting to hear what we come back with, with the consultation. That's important. Let's consult properly and get it right, rather than just trying to rush to a particular deadline—other than to say to you it will happen this year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Lots of consulting, lots of reviews. Did you discuss what improvements we might expect to see with the Service NSW app?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Improvements with the Service NSW app in relation to the digital strategy or just in general?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In the round table when you refreshed it, did you discuss what improvements we might expect to see with the Service NSW app?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The way that it was conducted—and I think we had about maybe 40 people and a lot of industry, community groups, government agencies and non-government agencies. Each of them were broken up in different ways about what we could do. The improvements that we were talking about across the board was, how do we better engage with the community as a whole? Obviously accessibility was a key pillar for that. There is a focus group that works on that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, I'm going to redirect you. You've spoken about who was there and who you consulted with. That's great, but that's not my question. The question is about the improvements we might want to see for the investment of this time. The review, talking to lots of people and consulting—that's all great, but what are the improvements we might expect to see to the Service NSW app in general?

Mr JIHAD DIB: You might have a bit of a laugh at the fact that we're consulting, but it's actually really important to consult with people. We want to take all people's views.

The Hon. WES FANG: It's also important to do something.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not laughing; I'm redirecting.

Mr JIHAD DIB: This specifically is about the digital strategy—where we move forward, where we invest our money, what are the best things that we can do, what is it that the community needs? It's not a focus group on the Service app; it's about the digital strategy and what's our road map and what's our path forward. If I give you one example only of that, when we talk about cybersecurity, where we were on cybersecurity two years ago to where we are now is so different. Where we were with AI two years ago was so different to where we are now—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Minister. I'm going to redirect. I've asked two very specific questions, neither of which have resulted in any form of clarity or answer, with respect. It seems that we can't understand when we might receive the strategy and we can't understand what improvements we might like to see. We've talked about who has been consulted. I will move on. Does the strategy have a standalone artificial—

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I could just add, I'm advised quarter three for the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Quarter three? That's great, thank you. Does the New South Wales Government have a standalone artificial intelligence strategy?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We do. I've got to say, it's the lead one in the nation. We recently—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's good. Have you read it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, I have. I actually read it all by myself.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You read it all by yourself! For homework.

Mr JIHAD DIB: All by myself. When I read it the first time I thought, "Hey, we need to update this." We've actually just recently updated it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Minister. Are you aware that the Auditor-General in New South Wales will be undertaking a review into the management of AI by the New South Wales Government?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know that the Auditor-General undertakes a lot of reviews at different times.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you aware of this one specifically?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might have to take that one on notice, whether it's come across my desk or not.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. I can tell you the answer is yes. The New South Wales Auditor-General explains that AI will "free up frontline staff and allow for the cutting of costs". Do you agree with that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I believe that AI can do a lot of things and I think part of that is also understanding how we can best harness the use of AI. If it means that we can free up people from doing a task, like a data entry task, and people can then do higher order tasks, then I think that's a good thing. I also think that what we need within the framework that we have—which we've articulated and now it's being used as an example for the whole nation—is how do we use AI ethically, how do we use AI to benefit the community, how do we use AI to ensure that this actually enhances the way that we're running. We have an ethics policy, we've got an assurance framework.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's very helpful. I'll go to the specifics, though. You agree that it will free up frontline staff. Do you agree that it will allow for the cutting of costs?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That is not the intention of it. People might use the AI. What this framework is about is saying: What are the ethical principles that we should be using in terms of guidance around the way that we use AI? I think using it as a way of saying this is about cutting costs is not the reason for the framework. The reason for the framework is because AI is ever evolving and we need to make sure that we have a good, strong, ethical framework around that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure, but you would accept that the Auditor-General is well placed to make comments and assessments about these things. The Auditor-General has said that AI will free up frontline staff, which you've agreed with, and will allow for the cutting of costs, for example, automating work. That's obvious, isn't it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: If automating work makes life a little bit easier and ensures that people can be performing other duties, then I think that's right. I think the other one, too, is to actually wait and see what the Auditor-General finally comes up with. I'm sure that we'll respond to it. But if you're insinuating—and I know that you're not—that this is about cutting jobs, it's not. This is about making sure that we have a solid framework and, indeed, New South Wales is nation-leading when it comes to this.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, you just said that it could free up staff from jobs to go and do other jobs. That surely is a reduction in jobs, isn't it? That's obvious. You said that yourself.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, they can do more complex tasks. I can give you a really good example. If I go to my other hat, for example, and think about some of the emergency services, particularly after a natural disaster, if we have people enter data that can be somehow entered, it would enable somebody who can—rather than just taking a call for the data—spend time trying to find the solution for that person, try to direct them to the right places using that information. When we talk about some of the tasks that AI could be helpful in, it's that. It doesn't mean that a person loses their job. It means that they can have more time to do the complex things, the human-centred things; those things that are really important.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What plans have been developed to cut costs using AI?

Mr JIHAD DIB: None.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No plans at all?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No cost cutting?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, that's not the purpose of the AI framework.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We're going to invest money in artificial intelligence but not achieve any cost reduction for doing so?

Mr JIHAD DIB: If we don't get on to accepting that artificial intelligence is really out there, then we're not only one step behind the pace, we're a long way behind. We need to be ahead of that. If I think about generative AI—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, we accept that AI is coming, we accept that it will work, we accept it is there. That is not my question, though. What plans have been developed to cut costs using that? You were saying the Government is planning to invest in AI and that it could automate some tasks and reduce some jobs from frontline tasks. What are we going to see for that? What cost cutting will we see?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's actually not cost cutting at all. This is about government doing services better, being able to assist the community better, the people better. That's what we want.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, it's obvious, isn't it? I'm going to get back to that point. Just to be clear, if a job is not required, if someone is not required to do data entry, then that job is gone, is it not? AI is coming to take over that job. That job no longer exists. That's obvious.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're allocating resources elsewhere, so the person who would have been doing the data entry can now do something at a higher level.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Certainly, but that job for the data entry is now gone, is it not?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The job for the data entry then can be supported with AI.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's right; AI can do it.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But that doesn't mean—I'm sorry, I'm not really sure where—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: AI is doing the job; the job no longer exists, the job is cut.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But that then means we can do more complex jobs, which we may not be able to do otherwise. That's the really good thing there. This will help us.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Does Labor accept that AI will change the composition of the New South Wales Government workforce?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I really think you're speaking in hypotheticals here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, I'm not at all.

Mr JIHAD DIB: AI will complement the work that is being done and we're taking a really proactive approach to say—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It will change the composition, will it not? That's obvious.

Mr JIHAD DIB: In terms of the work that's being done, you mean?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It will change the composition of the workforce.

Mr JIHAD DIB: AI will have a role in all workforces. We are not seeing it just in government; we are seeing it in the whole of society. It will change industry. The public service is going to be no different.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, this is your strategy; this is your Government. It's your department; it's your strategy. You're telling me that it won't fundamentally cut any costs and it won't change the constitution of the workforce. Is that what you are seriously saying to this Committee?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We are not approaching this from a cost-cutting measure; we are approaching this from a way of saying, "How do we improve the services that we deliver?" How do we improve the capacity of the services and the complexity of the services? How do we actually use the AI, for example, doing those little tasks that I was talking about—the lower level tasks—so that we can free somebody up to do the really important tasks?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which changes the composition of the workforce. Surely that is an obvious conclusion to draw. We are all for improvements and efficiencies, but surely you accept that if a job is replaced by AI, that job no longer exists for a worker, which means that there is a fundamental change to the composition of the workforce. That's correct, isn't it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There will be, as you are saying, changes in the way that certain jobs are done, but your inference is that people are going to be losing their jobs. My statement is that this will actually free up people to do other, more complex jobs.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Tomato, tomato. You fundamentally disagree with the Auditor-General's proposition before she has even written the report. Is that correct?

Mr JIHAD DIB: You are the one here who is talking about the Auditor-General's report before it has been written. I said that I would read the report.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Extraordinary.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't know how that's extraordinary. I think it's not extraordinary to say that I want to wait to read the Auditor-General's report.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll move on. Are you aware that artificial intelligence currently is being used by New South Wales government agencies in the management of critical infrastructure like dams and emergency services capabilities?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know that we are using artificial intelligence within that framework and in a practical way. One of the examples too, and one of our focuses, was to see how we could also potentially use it in terms of assisting government in terms of the amount of paperwork—it's not necessarily paperwork because it's not really paperwork given that it's digital, but it's effectively like that. An incident-driven artificial intelligence system that provides situational awareness to the RFS, for example, is one that we use—Athena. We use Athena to basically use all of the information that we have—all of the historical information—to be able to better predict where fires might be heading, which actually allows us to better direct resources. That's what I mean by being able to direct resources.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You might provide further information on notice of those details. That's great.

Mr JIHAD DIB: On Athena?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, on the groups that are used for emergency services.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure, I can—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will move on. I have four minutes left, so please stop interrupting me. I'll ask the questions.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Stop interrupting my answers. I'm sorry.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Artificial Intelligence Ethics Policy—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, I missed the first bit.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Because you keep talking.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You keep interrupting.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In the Artificial Intelligence Ethics Policy of the Government—why isn't safety included as a standalone principle in that ethics policy?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think safety is inherently a part of it. It's part of the whole—it's within the whole system. The fact that we have an ethics policy says that the ethics policy is about making sure that we can have things that are safe and things that are ethically done.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But why is it not included then if it's a fundamental part of it? Why is it not included? Are we supposed to imply safety?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We give a framework that is all about safety. Wasn't this policy originally developed under your Government?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I ask the questions, Minister. You are the Minister. It is your department. You have been here for a year. I am asking about it. Your best form of defence is attack. I suggest that you answer the question. This is safety in the AI Ethics Policy. Why isn't safety included as a standalone principle in your own ethics policy?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Safety is part of it and I've just spent the better part of the last 10 minutes talking to you about the AI ethics framework. We are looking at working to refresh the policy, as we keep doing.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you think it should be included?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, I'm happy to have a look at that. Certainly, if I go back to the claims that I made earlier, everything is about continuous improvements. If there are things that we can do better, then we are happy to look at how we can do them better. The policy will continuously be refreshed. That's the nature of digital.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You said that, but will you push for that safety to be included as a standalone?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I will have a look into it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Service NSW app—have the usage numbers of the highly regarded Service NSW app increased or decreased over the past 12 months?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Has the use of the app—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Service NSW app of the Government—has usage increased or decreased over the past 12 months?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I take that one on notice? I couldn't give you a specific answer on that one.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure. Can you list any improvements that have been made to the app since you've been Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Just recently we've had the Working with Children Check, which is, again, the first one in Australia. That's a really great thing because we are using that as part of our journey towards digital, verifiable credentials.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I believe that started under Minister Dominello, in fact, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Look, if you're going to sit here—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What improvements have you made?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Well, we finished it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll ask the department.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We actually—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll redirect to the department. Under your Government, what improvements have been made to the app?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Ward, if I could just answer that. We finished the app. We've put it onto the other thing. There are also other things that we have included. I'm happy to take any of those on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can anyone assist? Can anyone who's responsible for the app talk about the improvements that have been made under this Government?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can come back to you with that, if you like.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And not what was previously commenced under the Liberal Government.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What's interesting is you—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll redirect.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —you just had a go at me for talking about work that the previous Government had done and now you're actually complementing what your Government had done.

The CHAIR: Minister—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I have 30 seconds left, Minister. I'm going redirect you.

The CHAIR: Minister—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know but, Madam Chair, let's be a bit fair and balanced here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, what new improvements have you asked for?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Well the Working with Children Check, I'm very excited about.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It wasn't your work. Minister, I'll redirect you. It's best that you answer the question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There are things—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is best you answer, Minister. Under your time, as Minister—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can you let me answer the question, please?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am trying to ask the question. Stop talking over me.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm trying to answer the question but you keep interrupting me. I'm happy to take—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Because that's how it works: I ask the questions. I'll ask it again.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Madam Chair—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What improvement have you asked for—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: I think it's appropriate, again, as a matter of courtesy, that the Minister, when he is asked a question, be allowed to answer it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Well, the Minister keeps talking over me. I have tried to ask the question three times.

The CHAIR: Before we move on to crossbench time, because time has expired, this has happened continuously this morning, and it's not just the members here, it's also the Minister.

The Hon. WES FANG: Hear, hear!

The CHAIR: Order! Please refrain from speaking over the top of each other. Minister, you can provide an answer, but if you are being redirected from that answer, please cease speaking and listen to the member redirecting that question and then provide your answer.

The Hon. WES FANG: No more sugar.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good morning, Minister, and to all of the officials here today.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Good morning, Ms Boyd.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If we could turn to some Auditor-General reports that have been written.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on a sec. It might be a different folder.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Let's start with the internal controls and governance report from the Auditor-General last year. One of the issues the Auditor-General raised was in relation to the cyber preparedness of government agencies, and she was quite scathing in saying that nearly all New South Wales government agencies are not prepared adequately. I'm also looking at the Auditor-General's report into cybersecurity in New South Wales from the beginning of last year, before you took government. Cyber Security NSW is responsible for conducting audits of agency self-assessments. When the Auditor-General was talking about this, there had been no auditing done by Cyber Security. What has been done in the last year? Has it got better?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, it has. We've taken that as a really important focus and a good learning and a way to be able to fix some things that needed repair. It seems to be a little bit of a common theme that we've had to do. The Cyber Security NSW has revised their policy. It was released in February '24, so just recently, and with relevant entities reporting as well. We're developing a cybersecurity strategy to guide that. If I could just say on cybersecurity and Cyber Security NSW, the Labor Government has ensured there's some funding there. There was bit of a cliff that they were facing beforehand that our predecessors seem to have forgotten about. They talked up a big game. They were effectively writing cheques with their mouths that their budget couldn't cash and couldn't deliver.

The Hon. WES FANG: Did you practise that one?

Mr JIHAD DIB: But what we had there, Ms Boyd, is with Cyber Security NSW developing this, the focus from government—in our digital strategy there is a strong focus on that. In the Digital Restart Fund cybersecurity is a focus. Cyber Security NSW is working with all of the agencies, with that reset in particular. The round table that I was talking about a little bit earlier particularly also had a focus on cybersecurity. It's in everybody's interest to ensure that we've got really good cyber hygiene, that we've got really good cyber strength and that we support one another. Cyber Security NSW is not only working with the government agencies but is also working with non-government agencies and supporting businesses. The ID support team is also then working through communities. They did a bit of a travelling show I think about the middle of last year. It may have been

in Wagga that I joined them, but they do the travelling show. When we've had some cyber issues—in other words, a breach or an attack—they've been there supporting people as well, supporting the company.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Can I just ask you how many audits of agencies—so how many audits of the agency's self-assessments on cyber preparedness—has Cyber Security NSW done in the last year?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I take that one on notice? I will answer it, but I'll also then give you a correct answer further if I'm not sure. I know that Cyber Security NSW has been working with all the agencies in terms of, where there is effectively an audit, where they're at—where their potential weak spots are, and how we can improve it. And also looking at how do we make sure that everybody, as well, has got an equal level of at least high protection. That's a really key point for us.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Does Cyber Security NSW track cybersecurity incidents across the whole of government?

Mr JIHAD DIB: They do. All agencies have to report. There's mandatory reporting not only of government but also mandatory reporting, in general, of breaches so that we can also keep an eye on what's happening around the whole place and what support we could provide.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Does it track those numbers of security incidents over time? Is that something that you're able to give to us so we can look at how things are progressing?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In terms of the tracking, or in terms of the number of cyber incidents?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If they're tracking those numbers of incidences. One of the issues that the Auditor-General identified is that a lot of agencies just simply weren't even reporting those incidents. Obviously, that was before your time. I'm curious, now, if that sort of oversight is being done. Presumably there is a register somewhere of those incidents.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are we able to see at least numbers over time or tracking over time?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure, Ms Boyd. There is that reporting, and I'm happy to take that one on notice. I'm confident that we'll be able to give you—off the top of my head, though, I can't. But I'm more than happy to provide you with information.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Perhaps you could also take on notice—there were, I think, four major recommendations from the Auditor-General in that February 2023 report. If you could provide us with a progress statement against those.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, an update on those four recommendations?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, where we are at.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm more than happy to.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is that recurrent funding that they now have?

Mr JIHAD DIB: They're funded until 2025, and then we'll go through the budget estimates—not budget estimates but the budgetary process. I will also make this point: They were actually facing a financial cliff, and it was a priority of this Government to make sure that we funded them and that we funded them well.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, good. We want that to continue. I understand that there's an—I don't know if it's an agency or a department; no-one's been able to tell me. It's called accessible New South Wales. It sits under Customer Service, and it has been leading progress to ensure that we meet the target of Easy Read by 2025. I understand that agency is only funded until 30 June of this year. Are you aware of that work, and are you working to extend that funding?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm aware that we work with Accessibility NSW. I thank them for the work that they do. We'll go through future planning, the future budget process. Again, that idea that I talked about in terms of accessibility is one of the things that we're very keen on. We have embedded it deeply into our digital strategy, deeply into the DRF applications that can be made. We're looking at making all government documents accessible and Easy Read. That's something that we'll continue working through, and we'll continue working with Accessibility NSW.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: My understanding is they're called accessible New South Wales. Is it an agency? What is it within the department?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might ask for a little bit of clarification on that. If I can ask Ms Christie to give the exact—so that we know exactly where they fit. Ms Christie, would that be all right? Chief information officer.

LAURA CHRISTIE: Accessibility NSW is a business unit in Digital NSW.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Okay, so it's called Accessibility NSW?

LAURA CHRISTIE: It is.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What is the progress of that commitment to make all government documents relevant to people with intellectual disability Easy Read by the end of next year? Can anyone tell me?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes, I'm happy to tell you. Accessibility NSW is supporting the Department of Communities and Justice on delivering this commitment. We have developed the style guide for Easy Read in conjunction with the Council for Intellectual Disability and in conjunction with people with intellectual disabilities. That style guide is part of the accessibility toolkit to support agencies to put these documents in Easy Read.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are we on track to meet the deadline of 2025?

LAURA CHRISTIE: DCJ owns that election commitment and can talk about overall tracking, but we've supported that style guide—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I will come back and ask them.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I just also add, obviously, we're working in tandem with DCJ because there's a response to the royal commission into disability. We'll work really closely with them. If I could just add one little thing, Ms Boyd, that I forgot about cybersecurity—some of the great community stuff we're doing. We launched a password protector test that we did. That was quite good. Only last week we also have started launching some additional work into various languages and did some interviews in other languages to make sure that communities are aware of the risk of phishing. We're only as strong as our weakest link. We need to make sure that, while government agencies have got lots of protection, people also understand the "Hi Mum" text message is not real. They never start with "Hi Mum".

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I get a lot of those. It's not how my children address me. I also understand that you met with disability advocates at the end of last year in relation to the Park'nPay app. It's great to see that, even though it's past when the decision was made to scrap it, at least now we are consulting with people with disability.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Boyd, it's still operational.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I was going to ask you what is happening with it.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's still operational, Ms Boyd. It was good to meet with the advocacy groups and also to have another look at it. I don't know if you saw but there was an Auditor-General's report that came out that was pretty damning. Rather than go in and start blaming what previous people had done, it's going, "How can we fix it?" We're working through that at the moment. I've asked the department to explore a range of options for us. We're going through that process and they're presenting me with some different options.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Will you be adopting all of those six recommendations from the Auditor-General?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, and I believe that we'll have them completed by—I think we've agreed to adopt them in, I think, June. By June we think it'll be done. We saw that as a really good opportunity for us to have a look at the practices again and improve upon the practices. Again, I'll stipulate this was an issue that occurred well before my time as the Minister and we'll just make sure that we don't make those same things. We'll change the way that we do that process.

The CHAIR: Minister, I want to ask some questions about the *Wildlife in Emergencies Sub Plan* that the Government published last month. Are you aware that the largest responders to wildlife rescues and disasters in New South Wales, including WIRES, were not consulted about this plan or given any opportunity to provide feedback before it was finalised?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm not aware of that but I'll find out for you if that is the case.

The CHAIR: Does it concern you, if that is correct?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I always like to think that we should consult with as many people as we can to try to get things done better. I'll find out a few more details about that particular sub plan and get back to you to see who was consulted and whether there was a way that we could change it—again, more than happy to be able to improve it if we can. I might get back to you, if that's okay.

The CHAIR: Can you also find out if there'll be any public briefings for the wildlife rescue and rehabilitation sector on the new wildlife sub plan to actually explain how it will operate to improve wildlife emergency responses in New South Wales?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I will and I'd be surprised if we didn't have some sort of a public briefing or maybe an information session. I'm more than happy to give you an update on that. Even a work-together at how we might even proceed with that one—more than happy to. With that, though, even though it's the emergency sub plan, it also falls under Minister Sharpe.

The CHAIR: I understand that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We'll work with Minister Sharpe's office and yourself and anybody who wants to. We're pretty happy to work with everyone.

The CHAIR: Obviously this is information that my office has received from organisations such as WIRES—that they weren't actually included in any consultation or part of the development of the plan, which seems quite alarming. I also previously asked you in a question on notice if you would support having a wildlife representative on the State Emergency Management Committee. In your answer you indicated that it wasn't needed as the sector was represented by the EPA. On notice can you please advise who that representative is and what role they have within the EPA?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure.

The CHAIR: Again, are you aware if this representative has consulted the wildlife sector about their needs and concerns?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Madam Chair, I'll take that—because the first one is on notice, I don't know the person off the top of my head. I don't know what they've done, but we can include that if you like within the context of the answer. Would you like that? We'll include those into the one answer if you like. But certainly we'd be interested to know.

The CHAIR: Organisations that we have spoken to, again, such as WIRES, say that they don't even know who the representative is. I'm just wondering how that person can represent the needs of the wildlife sector if the EPA is not actually consulting or engaging with the sector about their needs.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I would be concerned about it, but the EPA also falls under Minister Sharpe, and she would be able to talk about the EPA specifically. I'm happy to take those other questions on notice, in terms of the committee and advocate for whatever. I'm happy to seek further information for you. But, also, the EPA specifically does fall under Minister Sharpe.

The CHAIR: I understand that, but obviously the wildlife sub plan is made under the State Emergency Management Plan, which you are responsible for.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Of course, yes.

The CHAIR: In an answer to a question on notice, you told me that the environment sector is actually represented by the EPA. Again, we're still talking about this management plan that falls under your portfolio, but it sounds like the wildlife sector has actually been cut out of the process.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let me seek a bit of further information about that. I'm happy to provide you with an answer. I'm happy to also facilitate something with Ms Sharpe. You're right, the plan falls under my portfolio, but there are people who are recommended to that. But let me find out more info rather than give you the wrong information inadvertently.

The CHAIR: Another specific issue of concern for the sector is that the wildlife sub plan, while it claims to be an all-hazards approach, specifically leaves out heat stress events, which are increasingly affecting wildlife, particularly threatened species like flying foxes. Do you know why heat stress was actually left out of the plan?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I don't. I can say that I know that heat is part of our other sub plans, but I don't actually know that one specifically, and I'm sorry.

The CHAIR: States like Victoria have specific plans to address extreme heat stress, and it's not omitted from a wildlife sub plan equivalent like it is here. I don't know if it's part of the fact that there wasn't consultation with the wildlife sector around that plan. Do you agree that there needs to then be, perhaps, a review of that sub plan and to include wildlife organisations into that review so that we can make sure that the sub plan actually works for wildlife rescue organisations, given they're the main ones on the ground dealing with emergencies?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The EPA is responsible for that, but if we can look at improving it, then I'd certainly be asking for where we can have improvements and have more consultation, and work out where things can be made better. It would be hard for me and wrong for me to commit to something that I don't have a specific responsibility—I've got a responsibility for it, being as part of the larger plan, but I'm more than happy to support and to advocate, I suppose, towards Minister Sharpe. The truth is that part of the sub plan there rests, really, with her. Whether it's an opportunity—

The CHAIR: So you're saying that the sub plan falls under you, but that particular section suddenly falls under her, without it being at least a combined effort?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There will be the combined effort in the sense of the one big plan, and there are different—think about it as sections within the plan.

The CHAIR: And you're the primary Minister responsible for the overall plan?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, I am. Obviously these are things that I'm just becoming aware of now. We took that one on notice last time. There has been some additional information there. I can't commit to a review of another Minister, but what I can commit to is saying that I'll find out more details.

The CHAIR: So a review of the wildlife section of the plan that falls under your portfolio would be the responsibility of the environment Minister only?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's their responsibility, but I'm sure I will also have a fair say in it, given that it's part of the larger plan, which is across the whole State. I'm happy to talk to Minister Sharpe.

The CHAIR: Can I ask you to speak with the Minister about the sections and the concerns?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure. If there are specific concerns—we've got the concerns that you've noted, and we'll find out about those. I give you my word that I'll raise them with her.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. At last estimates, you also expressed an interest in expanding and reforming youth services. You said you'd go to every single Expenditure Review Committee and push as hard as you can for your portfolios. Are you able to point to any new Youth Justice services that the New South Wales Government has sought to invest in or roll out since the last estimates hearing?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. I do, of course, go in there and fight as hard as I can—I'd better tell everyone here—for all the portfolios.

The Hon. WES FANG: Except for Fire and Rescue NSW.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's also obviously Youth Justice there; you can talk about some of those things. One of the things that I've been working hard on is that issue—and I raised it earlier with Ms Higginson—what we can do around the diversion space. Obviously what we discuss in ERC can't be revealed, but partly it is an issue of making sure that we've got the funding to be able to maintain the services and expand the services we provide. One of the things that we did have—and excuse me if I get it a little bit wrong—with ACCOs is we developed some of the partnerships with ACCOs—Aboriginal controlled corporations—to work within that Youth Justice space. I think we've onboarded nine new ACCOs, if I'm not mistaken. We have also done some work around, as I said, the short-term remand work. Obviously there's still more that we're doing. But the ACCOs was really significant, especially about making sure that we can focus, as I said last time, on the place-based, community-led—a different approach to things, while at the same time not losing sight of the fact that community safety has got to be a critical point and, alongside that, has to also be an opportunity to try and get young people onto the right track.

The CHAIR: Can we anticipate new Youth Justice programs being funded in the upcoming budget?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I would hope—

The CHAIR: You'd hope so, or we are?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm certainly going to be trying, but obviously it will go through budget process. But I've pretty much made my intentions clear in terms of things that I believe could be quite good. If we can find ways and we can do it, then we can. The other one, too, that I've just remembered—I'm sitting here alongside my commissioners—is that some of the new stuff we're looking at is how could, potentially, our emergency services also work with young people in trying to maybe help them get on the right track? It may be giving them a diversionary strategy, it may be getting them involved in community. And it is the same with DCS. But I think there is a lot to be said for a young person who maybe is looking for a place to belong and does that in a really negative way instead finding themselves doing good for the community, feeling like they have a sense of

belonging. We're looking outside the box. It's something that I'm really proud of my three commissioners here for taking on board, without a doubt, as well as other commissioners who are not here today.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, we were talking about the Service NSW app. You're going to come back to us with what new improvements you've asked for during your time. You agreed that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I said I would, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Not the completion of previous work underway, just to be clear.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Ward, I said earlier that I've acknowledged the work of my—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We have 59 seconds. I am going to move on.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've acknowledged the work of my predecessor, but I also didn't take the cheap shot when it came to the audit report.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, the time is precious. Just allow me—

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —to ask the question that the community wants asked of you. Has the headcount of Service NSW frontline staff remained the same?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I will take that on notice. I believe it has. Obviously the frontline staff is a really key—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, that's okay, we've got 30 seconds. I'll hand to my colleague.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, as the Minister for Youth Justice, will you support a regional crime inquiry with a focus on youth? I know the police Minister described it as a "talkfest". Would you similarly describe it, or would you seriously consider supporting a regional crime inquiry?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think that issue was canvassed quite extensively with the police Minister. I've made it pretty clear that I support things that look at what we can do to try and support young people—

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you suggesting that the police Minister described it as a "talkfest"?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, Madam Chair—

The CHAIR: You can answer the question now because the bell has gone and Committee members don't have the opportunity to ask any more questions.

Mr JIHAD DIB: As I said, it's been canvassed extensively. The police Minister has obviously made her response. I support—

The Hon. WES FANG: Calling it a "talkfest".

Mr JIHAD DIB: —young people in ways that we've just outlined today in the past hour and a half, and I think that's what we should continue to do. We do regular engagement. We've highlighted the engagement that we do, particularly with communities, with young people, with government and with non-government agencies. I think that's the really positive approach that I would like to take.

The Hon. WES FANG: That's not an answer to the question, Minister.

The CHAIR: We now move to Government questions.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Thank you, Chair. Because of the Minister's excellent answers we've got no further questions.

The Hon. WES FANG: What answers? He's argued with us more than he's answered.

The CHAIR: In that case, we will now break for a short morning tea. We will be back at quarter past eleven.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We are live, just to let members know. Is there someone from the secretariat who could try to locate the Minister, please—or somebody from the Government? Thank you.

The Hon. WES FANG: Oh, welcome, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's nice to be back.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We have started. We are live already. I will throw directly to the Opposition.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, I will try to keep my questions short if you can keep your answers short.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure. Thank you.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Have you visited Moree since becoming Minister for Youth Justice?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I haven't, but the Premier was there I think on Friday.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, he was.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I haven't, no.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Did he, when he went to Moree last week, invite you to join him on that visit?

Mr JIHAD DIB: On that day we released the State Disaster Mitigation Plan, so he went up there with the Executive Director of Youth Justice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You have spoken to him since then?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I have, yes, and I understand it was a really good trip. He spent a fair bit of time, I think, with the member there, Mr Marshall, and with the mayor, and had a really great trip.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Just to clarify, I know you said you had other activities, but were you invited to go with him?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I was informed that he was going to be going, and I couldn't make it. We had the State Disaster Mitigation Plan that we'd planned to release well before that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: From that visit, the Mayor of Moree Plains Shire said that there are over 54 service providers in the Moree area to assist the community and families. Are you aware if Youth Justice is collaborating with those services?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, I am. The Moree area and Youth Justice Community Office developed a program called U-Turn. That is in partnership with the local police youth liaison officer. The program was developed in response to the increase in stolen cars across the region. It's a half-day program that provides young people with information and videos about the dangers of driving dangerously, particularly stolen cars. The Moree office also refers young people to a local organisation and driver licensing program called Bamara to help young people obtain their licences.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you have a view whether there is a service overlap, or does Youth Justice have a strategy to ensure that there is best practice and best value for the programs that you have just mentioned in the Moree area?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Youth Justice has a range of programs, and I have just outlined a few. Obviously, it is continuously being looked at. It also involves other partners, including the local police and other government agencies but also partner agencies. We continuously look to how we can do things better. My intention is to go to Moree—I've made a commitment to go up to that Northern Tablelands area—for a number of different reasons, and I will get up there. But I am confident that they're doing all they can to address the issues that are confronting the community at the moment and looking at what ways we can get things done better.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When the Premier was there it is noted in the media that he said, "We need to do more." What are your top priorities to do more?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Obviously I wasn't there with him, so I didn't hear what he said, but my priority to do more starts with the first point: We need to stop young people getting themselves into these positions. Certainly, if they do come into contact with the justice system, how do we try to correct them and get them onto the right path? How do we build the services around them? I said a bit earlier that not only are we talking about diversion but also, and I know that you appreciate this, the importance of the wraparound services—so incredibly important—looking at where the gaps are, and rather than just using one simple punitive measure, actually say, "What is it that we need to do to try to help this young person and how do we support them?" again not in any way understating the importance of community safety and community involvement.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've got to say, my top priority would be around that. I suppose everything then feeds off that, doesn't it?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I can confirm that you hold the portfolios of Customer Service, Digital Government and Emergency Services as well as Youth Justice.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I do.

The Hon. WES FANG: Not sure how.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Would it be fair to say that since you were sworn in you have dedicated a lot of your time to the other two portfolios? Just going on your media and disclosures, it seems that you spend less time in the youth justice field.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't know that I would necessarily agree with that. I have a passion for youth justice, as you know. You have been with me on two occasions at centres.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, I have, and thank you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But you would also know that we try to avoid posting things. We are dealing with young people. If we do post anything, their faces are blurred. In terms of the meetings that I have, I am regularly meeting with Youth Justice. A lot of this work is done behind the scenes. For example, I did stuff with Youth Off The Streets separately to the visit that we went to. I give everything that I can to all of my portfolios, and I certainly keep myself not only busy but deeply, deeply engaged.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You are saying that because of the sensitivities, that's why there is not as much media?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. I wouldn't use that as an opportunity in the media. In terms of what you declare on your diary disclosures, you don't disclose when you are meeting with the department or with the department agencies. But I'm confident that I have visited numerous centres and numerous events. I don't post anything on my social media. If I did, it would be continuous posting. I don't think people need to constantly see that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On the media side of things, Minister, with Emergency Services, since our last budget estimates up until, say, 24 February, you have 25 media releases and 15 for Digital Government and Customer Service, but nothing for Youth Justice.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can see how that might look like there is not much happening there, but let's also remember that since our last budget estimates we went through a really terrible storm season.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I get that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We also had fires. If I'm not mistaken, I think the day that we had our last budget estimates, the RFS fire commissioner had to leave because there were fires. I think we ended up having in the vicinity of 9,000 fires. I don't think it's appropriate to put out press releases when you are going to a Youth Justice centre. One of the really lovely pieces that we managed to get one of the papers to pick up was that beautiful thing where they did the TEDx talk.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, and about "making my nan proud".

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. You were there for that. That's why I'm not going to—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: There is good news that you could be putting out there.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I did and I certainly do. In my office sits, for example—I have two pieces in my office. One is a skin that some youth detainees sent me from when I was there in Dubbo, when I visited Orana, and then another is a print that takes pride of place in my boardroom as a reminder. I tell the stories every time.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's alright. You can tell me another time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think I've done two or three questions in Parliament on it as well.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll move on to remand. As of December last year the youth detention population—and I'm sure it has changed since then—was 174. Of those 174, 45 had been sentenced, but 129 were held on remand. Why are so many young people being held in custody, waiting for their day in court?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think it comes to an issue of remand, and it is a decision that has been made obviously by the courts. That is something for the Attorney General. As I said a bit earlier on, we don't dictate the circumstances to which they come into contact with us, and we do the best that we can. Obviously remand is an issue. That's why there was that project—I think it was one of the pilot projects—out at Wagga, which is short-term remand. We are trying to do different things. Because the other issue too is, when they come into remand for a short period of time, by the time it takes us to process them, it's very hard to move them on. But it really is something that falls within the Attorney General. But Mr O'Reilly—more than happy to answer questions.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I can ask Mr O'Reilly later, and I will. But, surely, with a whole-of-government approach, you would have something to add. But I'll move on. Ms Higginson mentioned the age of criminal responsibility. I just note from your diary disclosure you met on 15 November with the Attorney General and the Minister for Youth and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, where you said the purpose of the meeting was to discuss raising the age. What was the outcome of that meeting?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It was a discussion. I'm not going to necessarily share the outcome, but obviously you've seen, with the people that were there and what the topic was, that it was a discussion. I think there was a group that we met with at different times as part of the CAPO process. That's also come up as one of the issues. But we did have that meeting. I said earlier—and I stand by my answer—that obviously there are discussions that happen between Ministers where we get to give a perspective. But the discussions obviously have been taking place and it sits at the moment—sorry, it's being led by the Attorney General. That's basically where my involvement comes into play.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Going off the children in custody statistics, you do have some good news there in that the population has decreased by 21.1 per cent. But what is alarming is the number of Aboriginal—both female and male—detainees has gone up.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's almost that double-edged sword, isn't it? You want to acknowledge the fact that there's been that reduction in numbers, but then of course we've also got responsibilities in terms of trying to reduce the numbers of Indigenous people coming into contact with the justice system. That's why we're doing some of those other projects, like that bail project. That's why we signed those agreements with the different ACCOs, the Aboriginal corporations. That's why we're doing more place-based where we possibly can, trying to bring in more community-led responses.

I think we're trying to do as much as we possibly can to address some of those issues. I think what's key here is, where possible, looking a little bit outside the box. It's great that we can say the numbers have dropped, but it is a concern. Obviously that's a focus of ours, given the Closing the Gap commitments that we've made. We keep working on that. Only, I think, two weeks ago there was a CAPO meeting, which is the peak organisations, and we talked about this, and I said, "Whatever suggestions that you can make"—it's a clear focus for everybody to get involved in.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I know this is mainly the Attorney General's portfolio, but the Youth Koori Court could be a measure in reducing the number of Indigenous children because, as we know, 61.5 per cent of young people in custody are Indigenous, and this is as at December. You've agreed that it's disproportionately high. What steps are you taking to reduce this figure? You've said the programs that you've done but, with the success of the Youth Koori Court, which the Coalition Government established in addressing the over-representation, have you advocated to the Attorney General that he expand the Youth Koori Court to other locations outside of—I know we've got Surry Hills and Dubbo, but other areas can't access that service.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know the Attorney General looks at these things closely and we do have a number of discussions with that principle of trying to see what things work and how we can resolve things in a different way. He's very keen. He's very interested. But I'll always advocate for young people, where possible, to try to have the most positive interaction with the justice system. I've visited the Koori Court. I visited also—this is a while back, but I also visited the Broadmeadows court to see the work that they do, that idea of the wraparound services. The Koori Court had a really good thing. We provide services to the Koori Court, but really it is the Attorney General who is responsible for the Koori Court. I'm happy to keep raising it with him.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'm aware of that. On another issue, I know it's not in your portfolio, but were you aware that at the moment in Kings Cross Police Station there isn't an Aboriginal liaison officer?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I'm not aware of that. As you said, it's not in my portfolio.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Not in your area. But Youth Justice conferencing is, and that could be another measure. Have you conducted any audit to gauge the effectiveness of the Youth Justice conference program? I know it is successful, but is it used throughout New South Wales?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Youth conferencing has worked really well, and I alluded to it in one of my earlier answers. I think it was about 60-something per cent of young people who had been involved in youth conferencing didn't then reoffend within 12 months. Youth conferencing is a really good way of trying to say, how can we still take a young person to accept responsibility for their actions but also form a restorative justice with the victim of it, and also the local police and any other local stakeholders and community representatives, to try and find, again, what I talk about as that place-based solution, the place-based initiative? That comes from us having a review of it. Also, the number of plans that have been agreed to and the positive outcomes I think is up in the 90 per cent

range. That, to me, is a really great success. We'll continue working on that, because that fits really tightly and really well with the things that I know that everyone on this Committee would agree with.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Safety action meetings are mandated and go a long way to combating domestic and family violence, yet youth action meetings aren't mandated. They could be a way of identifying children at risk of either reoffending, at harm—a multitude. Would you commit to mandating youth action meetings or advocating that these meetings—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'd certainly advocate for them. I can't commit to mandating them. But it's a good suggestion and I'm happy to take it on notice. Again, everything that I have said—and I know they are things that you also believe in—is about looking at what we can do better, what we can do differently and what we can do to support not only young people but also the community. That's the responsibility that we all have. If these youth action groups are going well, how can we expand them and how do we have a positive outcome to them? Also, how do we link that then to the possibility of diversion? Earlier I touched on one of the diversion points with the emergency services. To me, that's thinking outside the box.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I also wanted to thank you for inviting me to join you at some of the Youth Justice centres. I welcome them. I hope that you will continue to invite me.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I could just add to that, thank you, Ms MacDonald. Seriously, what we do in that space is above the politics and it's important that we work together. I think it's a really important thing for young people and for the agencies to see, that everybody in government and across the Parliament has a responsibility to try and help young people where they can.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm above politics.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Don't worry, Wes, I'll make sure—

The CHAIR: Order! We're now moving onto crossbench time. Dr Amanda Cohn.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Good morning, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Good morning, Dr Cohn.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Coming back to your Emergency Services portfolio, I'm sure many people were really concerned by recent reporting about the inaccessibility of 000 for some people who are deaf or hard of hearing. I understand that the National Relay Service offers SMS, Skype and other services in an emergency, but only during business hours. Do you think that that's adequate?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can follow that up. I did recently write to some of the big players in telecommunications to say we need to have some conversations around accessibility. That was based on when Optus might have gone down and people couldn't use 000. I was a bit concerned about that. It's really important when that does the work with the Public Safety Network and the work that we're doing in terms of the communication rollout and the connectivity, but I'm happy to look at that. To be honest with you, I wasn't aware of that one so I would rather have more of a discussion around it. But I have already reached out to telecommunications carriers in terms of looking at what they can do to help us, especially if somebody has got a carrier and that particular carrier goes down, how can a network still enable?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Just coming back to, specifically, accessibility. I understand that there's \$3.2 million of funding for Emergency Services products that provide community members and emergency services access to timely, accurate and actionable hazard warnings. I'm assuming these are things like the Hazards Near Me app.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Maybe one part of it.

Dr AMANDA COHN: How are accessibility needs factored into the design of those products?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Dr Cohn, I said before and I apologise that one of the recent upgrades resulted in making it a bit more difficult for people with vision disabilities. As a subsequence, we worked with Guide Dogs, I think it was Vision Australia, and the Royal Blind Society to rectify that. We've also made sure that we've established good lines of communication so that they're always a part of it. I also said beforehand that we recently held a digital strategy round table. At the heart of that was accessibility and what we need to do in terms of making sure that it's all accessible. One of the things that I've said about anything to do around that digital space is it's all good and well to have the greatest and the best apps, but unless everybody can use them, and everybody is included and can access it, then I don't think we're doing the best job that's available. So that's been an overlay that we've put in. I have added that into the DRF.

Fundamentally, we've built an even stronger relationship and made sure that we're getting it to be tested by people who would need to use it the most beforehand to see if there's anything we can do to improve our accessibility, particularly in the Emergency Services space. I'm really conscious about that. If I could just add, at that particular time, there was a concern that people might not be able to get on to the Hazards Near Me app, so additional work has happened to say how else could we inform community or people that are affected. That's you how we worked with some of those advocacy groups to say if we got to a situation and this hadn't been rectified, what could we do?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Are you familiar with the work of Emergency Leaders for Climate Action?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've met a group around—I meet lots of people. Sometimes I can be at an event and someone says—

Dr AMANDA COHN: No, that's all right. I'll help jog your memory. This is a group that includes dozens of former senior Australian fire and emergency services chiefs, and they're doing work at a national level.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I remember a former commissioner, Mr Mullins. So that's who it is, yes. I'm familiar with Mr Mullins, and I've had conversations with Mr Mullins.

Dr AMANDA COHN: They have released a report entitled, *Powder Keg: Australia Primed to Burn*, which demonstrates that climate-informed emergency preparedness is critical, particularly for New South Wales. That group has warned that New South Wales is "dangerously unprepared for the impacts of accelerating climate change". How are our current emergency preparedness strategies in New South Wales integrating climate predictions?

Mr JIHAD DIB: One thing I could point to here is the State Disaster Mitigation Plan that I referred to earlier that Minister Scully and myself launched last Friday about looking at a holistic approach to what we do in terms of disasters, from what we can do mitigation wise, what we can do preparation wise and what we do post. That's one key really element that's going to shape local plans, how we also then seek funding and work with the Commonwealth, and how we plan for the future to ensure that we're minimising any of the risks that we're mitigating. In addition to that, the RFS has a really important role to play. A lot of that is about hazard reduction where possible. You would have heard me last year talk about the fact that we had less hazard reduction due to the conditions the year before. There's a number of different strategies and every opportunity that was available—because the weather conditions were favourable, and it was quite good—really made an enormous difference. So we did that. There's other hazard reduction strategies, if I can refer to the commissioner, as well. There's mechanical, there's cultural burns. If you're happy for the commissioner to add a bit more—

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'll have questions for the commissioner later on, and I'm happy to talk about that. Minister, I'm hoping you can be more specific. I'm really pleased to hear that a holistic approach has been taken to disaster resilience. I'm interested, more specifically, about some of the quite catastrophic new normals that we're seeing in terms of climate and weather patterns. How is that being taken into account, things like infrastructure resilience, public health advisories? Specifically, how is climate change being taken into account?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The sad thing is what you say, "the new normal". It's actually sad that there's a new normal. We've gone from drought to fires to floods to fires to a storm. The climate is changing and we need to adapt to that, if not reverse the damage to climate. The State Disaster Mitigation Plan really does a lot of that work in terms of: How do we build better? How do we build more appropriately? Where is it that we build? That goes in conjunction with the work that the Reconstruction Authority had also put together about: Where are the most appropriate places to, effectively, set up a community? What are the materials that we should be using to build? How do we work with nature rather than against nature? So there's that acceptance that climate is having a massive impact and that climate change has an impact on natural disasters. There's a commitment to then, rather than just poke into the dark, actually have a really good, dedicated, specific answer.

This State Disaster Mitigation Plan—and I've referred to it now a couple of times—is the first time in Australia that any government has developed something like this, that specifically addresses those issues. Even in relation to heat—if I could touch on it, because I know we've spoken about heat before—following the last estimates and then a subsequent meeting, that's been referred to the SEOCON, the State Emergency Operations Controller, to have a look at what we are doing in terms of the heat, in terms of how we do build that into the plan update and how we work with Health. Also, I'm pleased to say, when we did the Get Ready website, heat was a really important part of that as well. So trying to get that information out to communities and an acknowledgement that heat is kind of like a little bit of that silent natural disaster. We see the floods and we see the fires, but we're affected by the heat but we don't think of it in that context.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Following the devastating Duck Creek bushfires that burned through most of December, what work is being done to address the potential fire hazards from methane and leaks associated with coal seam gas in the Pilliga State forest?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might ask the commissioner for that one. Those Pilliga fires I remember went for a long time, and we visited there, but the commissioner might be better placed to answer that question.

ROB ROGERS: Thanks for that question. When we had fires in those areas, they were shut down from operation. They didn't cause any difficulty. The operator had a very quick response to that and closed them down. So I don't think there was an issue—certainly we didn't have an issue with them. It wasn't anything that was brought to my attention, just the fact that they were closed down whilst we had fires in the vicinity.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Moving forward, are there any measures being taken to assess or to mitigate the cumulative impact of multiple projects being proposed in that region?

ROB ROGERS: I'm not aware of what other things are being considered, but what I have in our discussions, when these things are being planned—they've got some pretty good systems in place to ensure that they don't contribute to either starting fires or being impacted by fire and magnifying the problems being faced. Given they have separated areas, they have quite a robust shutdown procedure. So I haven't heard of anything different being considered for it.

Dr AMANDA COHN: The 2020 Bushfire Inquiry recommended a cultural fire management unit. Has there been any progress on implementing that recommendation?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I understand there have been more cultural fires and just recently there was an announcement as well—I think it might've been with National Parks—doing some cultural burns and working with the community. If I could come back really quickly to your answer on 000. I'm advised that the National Emergency Communications Working Group continues to work with the emergency call person—aka Telstra—on the accessibility issues. The initial call to 000 is answered by Telstra and not the combat agency. So there's continuing work on that. And, as I said to you a bit earlier, I've written to them and we will keep following that up. But they're part of that working group.

The CHAIR: I've got some questions for Commissioner Fewtrell and Commissioner Rogers, but I'll have some follow-up questions, based on what I hear, for you, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure.

The CHAIR: That's why I wanted to bring it up in this morning's session.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure.

The CHAIR: I have a number of quite specific questions about the 2019-2020 bushfires. Some of these are quite detailed, so I totally understand if you need to take some of them on notice. The NSW Bushfire Inquiry reported that there were 43 section 44 declarations made in the 2019-2020 bushfires. I'm wondering what the final operation costs were for each of those section 44 declarations.

ROB ROGERS: Sorry, what were you asking?

The CHAIR: Sorry?

ROB ROGERS: Sorry, I missed the question.

The CHAIR: The question was: The New South Wales bushfire inquiry reported that there were 43 section 44 declarations made in the 2019 and 2020 bushfires. I'm wondering what the final operation costs were for each of these section 44 declarations.

ROB ROGERS: I don't have that, but I could get that.

The CHAIR: Can you take that one on notice for me?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, absolutely.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, operational costs?

The CHAIR: Correct. This one is probably another one on notice: What were the total operational costs for the NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and any other government entity involved in fire operations relating to each of these fires? I actually have a list here, which I will ask to be handed up. Essentially it's a long list of back-burning escapes and incidents as well. If I could ask for that to be taken on notice as well.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, we will take that one on notice for both agencies.

The CHAIR: The other one is: What was the total cost of fire retardant drops during the 2019-20 season? If you're able to break that down into the cost for retardant per load, the hourly operational cost for each aircraft type and the total number of retardant drops for each aircraft type.

ROB ROGERS: I'm sure you would understand I wouldn't have that on hand. I wish I did.

The CHAIR: Yes, exactly, but I just need you to take it on notice, if that is okay.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can't believe you don't know that.

ROB ROGERS: We will try our best.

The CHAIR: Are you happy to take than on notice?

ROB ROGERS: Absolutely.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, you should know that.

The CHAIR: Has the RFS performance during the 2019-20 bushfire season been independently assessed to provide a strategic cost-benefit analysis to show what worked and didn't work and how taxpayer funding was being spent?

ROB ROGERS: I guess that's what—part of the inquiry into those fires was part of that, about what worked and what didn't worked and what we needed to do better.

The CHAIR: Sorry, are you talking about the coronial inquiry?

ROB ROGERS: No, I'm talking about the Government-sponsored inquiry, which was Dave Owens and Professor Mary O'Kane. That came out with a number of recommendations. Obviously the agency, as well as some other agencies—but, by and large, a lot of that was directed towards the RFS about areas where we need to do better and improve on. That very much has formed the body of work for the agency since that time to where we are now. A lot of that was about detection of fires, early response and then community warnings. Then there have been a number of coronial inquiries into those fires that are still ongoing. We're expecting those to be finished this calendar year. That will obviously give us then another body of work, assuming there are a number of recommendations from that. That's very much how we've been shaped as an organisation in response to fire events—continuously learning. I think there's been a lot of work done since those fires.

The CHAIR: A lot of that was looking at the costing and where the money was being spent and where that could potentially shift to have a better outcome.

ROB ROGERS: I'm not sure whether where it can shift. I think the whole idea was about what we did, what worked and where we needed to do better. That was part of submissions to government on measures that we could do. For example, we put on more fire behaviour analysts to ensure that we could map fires better and we've done more robust upgrade of our websites so that we can get more warnings out to people. The Fires Near Me app, before it transitioned to the Hazards Near Me app, had added functionality to try to make sure that it gets that information out to people. That's also in recognition that community expectations—rightly so—have changed in that time as well. The community wants more information and they want it quicker. That's very much what we've been trying to do.

The CHAIR: Commissioner, I'm assuming that you're aware of the Busbys Flat fire in 2019? It was a fire that commenced in October as a result of back-burning that got out of control.

ROB ROGERS: Which fire, sorry?

The CHAIR: The Busbys Flat fire. I might ask for this to be handed over to you as well just so that you're aware of what I'm talking about.

ROB ROGERS: I know the name but I can't remember the fire. What area was that in, sorry?

The CHAIR: I might just hand you this so then you have some more information in front of you. Do you know if there has been an investigation into that fire, regarding the response and management issues, regarding back-burning escapes?

ROB ROGERS: There has been a number of fires that have been looked at—certainly the Gaspers Mountain fire, the fire at Conjola. I will have to check if this one was subject to a separate—where we've done an internal look and said, "What worked? What didn't?" Indeed, the coroner has looked at any of those fires of concern. That has certainly been something being looked at. I would have to come back to you on that, as to whether that—

The CHAIR: Yes, if you could take that one on notice and provide any information around that, if there was an investigation as well, that would be really useful.

ROB ROGERS: Certainly. As a routine, there's always a fire investigation that's done into those—

The CHAIR: Yes, of course.

ROB ROGERS: —that talks about how it started and the like.

The CHAIR: Yes. I'm looking at more the response and management regarding—and whether there was an assessment about what worked and what didn't.

ROB ROGERS: The other thing that would contain a lot of the information that you're looking for would be the report into the section 44 that the incident controller does, and that's required to be done on each fire that we have at that level. That will probably have—

The CHAIR: More information.

ROB ROGERS: —some of the information that you're seeking.

The CHAIR: Minister, given the economic, health, environmental and property impacts caused by fire management decisions, can I ask what work you're specifically doing in this space and whether you've met with the environment Minister and other relevant Ministers to evaluate and shape the management practices?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think the management practice, particularly—and one of the things that Ministers need to recognise is that we've got people who are the operational experts in here. The management of fires and reduction is, really, within the purview of the agency. We will more than happily work together when we need to. I think you talked about health at one point. Did you—

The CHAIR: Obviously, fires—obviously, you're a Minister with the emergency response, but then it's also going to affect the portfolios of health. It's also going to affect the portfolios of environment. I guess what I'm trying to understand is this: Is there a whole-of-government approach amongst the Ministers to make sure that there is oversight on this? Because, obviously, we could end up with a situation where the departments are quite disjointed in doing their own work, but when they're working in separation, it's great to have the Ministers making sure there's a whole-of-government approach.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We do have a whole-of-government approach, and I meet quite regularly with Minister Sharpe. We've discussed bushfire recommendations, progress on them, what we could do. I have met with the health Minister. We've had a bit of a conversation, particularly around—and it happened after the last estimates—the issue of smoke as a result of hazard reduction or bushfires themselves. We have got a Cabinet that really works well together and a number of Ministers who will inform me.

The CHAIR: Are there any specific meetings to deal with this, or is it more when something comes up that you'll meet with those Ministers about it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: A bit of a combination of both. So I will meet specifically—if I meet with another Minister, for example, this might be one of the topics that we discuss. Well, I can't say I meet specifically—

The CHAIR: But there's no formal process of saying, "Every now and then, we have a specific meeting for any relevant portfolios to deal with bushfire emergencies"?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, but the Premier's department does a lot of the work around this. Mr Draper is here, and he could talk about it, from the Premier's department. They then have that overarching view and overarching way of connecting everybody together. So we will meet. But they are also the coordinators of the emergency services and help us out by ensuring that where particular connections need to be made, they can see it. The good thing about having that is when you've got something, effectively, of a bird's-eye view or a helicopter view, you can see where people are, where there are potential gaps. As much as we try not to, as Ministers, get caught up only in our own portfolios, there are sometimes some things that we don't see in that formal sense. So the Premier's department does a fair bit of work there. I don't know whether you want to ask later of Mr Draper or not. I will come back to you later also about the wildlife thing, if we get a chance.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Minister. You mentioned and acknowledged that Indigenous numbers have, sadly, gone up in Youth Justice.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, I just missed that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You acknowledge that, sadly, Indigenous numbers have gone up in Youth Justice. Have you asked why or sought a briefing about that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, I have. I meet with Youth Justice—I think it's about once every four weeks that I actually have a formalised meeting with them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And you've specifically asked why those numbers have gone up?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We discuss a lot of things in that, and that would be one of them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Have you specifically asked why those numbers have gone up and sought a briefing on the reason why?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That would be something that I would ask for from the police. But what we've got is a percentage that have gone up, not necessarily the numbers. I think that's a really key point.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Tomato, tomato.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Well, not really. The numbers have actually gone down. The proportion has increased, which I've acknowledged is a worry.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, you have.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I talk about what we can do to make it better.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will you undertake to seek those reasons and obtain a brief about why, sadly, that seems to have increased?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll continue to work with the police, particularly the police youth wing. We've met with them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You mentioned CAPO. What does CAPO stand for?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The council of—

SIMON DRAPER: The coalition.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The coalition of peak Aboriginal organisations.

The Hon. WES FANG: Well answered, Mr Draper.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What does CAPO stand for?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I know. I just wanted to know if do, as you'd mentioned it. You mentioned SEAC as well.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I didn't mention SEAC. I mentioned SEOCON.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That stands for?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The State emergency controller.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you very much.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you. Can I buy a vowel?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No. Terrific. All good. I asked about digital procurement. Some concerns have been raised by business and community groups, particularly small business, about the burden placed on them and the procurement methods of providing digital services to the Government. Are you aware of this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm aware that there are some issues but, as I said earlier when we were talking about the Auditor-General's report that came about from the Park'nPay, we want to make sure that we get our procurement right. There's also a procurement Minister, as you know, in Minister Houssos.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, but I'm asking you, Minister—I'm going to redirect—are you aware of the concerns raised by small business about the methods for providing digital services to government and the challenges they're facing?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm aware that there are some concerns, and we'll work through those. But, on the same token, I also want to make sure that we've good, robust systems to ensure that we don't get into a situation like we found under the previous Government with the Park'nPay procurement issues.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's talk about Park'nPay. Minister, your Government decided to axe the Park'nPay app. Why wasn't it funded in this year's budget and have you put in a bid to have it funded?

Mr JIHAD DIB: As I said a little bit earlier, it wasn't axed. It's still operational at the moment. I've asked the department to work with a range of different stakeholders and come to me with a range of proposals around the Park'nPay app.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you know how much it costs to run per year?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think it was about, off the top of my head, \$600,000 a year or so. Yes, about 600.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think it might be 460, but I'm happy for to you allocate 600 toward it.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I think it was—it's in the 600 to 800 mark, we're talking about.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If the app is not there and it's been axed, have you considered—

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's running. It's actually still running.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Have you considered the impact on cost of living if it is not funded? The funding was cut in the last budget. It wasn't funded. Have you considered the impact on cost of living of that not being funded?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We inherited this system that had not been funded. We've kept it running. We are looking at different options. The premise itself—I'm not really sure about the cost of living in that context. Can you just—I know I'm not allowed to ask questions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You don't know how the Park'nPay app relates to cost of living? Are you seriously telling this Committee that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm trying to get the premise of your question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Park'nPay app assists with cost of living. Are you not aware of how it does that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, but I'm trying to understand the premise of your question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. I'll explain. This is the only app that doesn't charge a levy to the motorist. The savings, tabled in Parliament in 2021, show savings of 20 per cent off the normal parking cost if you use the app instead of a physical parking meter. That's how it assists with cost of living: it's a 20 per cent saving. There's a good approval rating for it. Will you commit to putting in a budget bid to ensure that continues?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've committed to continue the work that I have started with the department, where I've asked them to come with a range of options and to also discuss this with different stakeholders, including advocacy groups, about the ways that maybe potentially we can move forward, and we'll do that. If there's a way that we can make the Park'nPay app better—if we can make it succeed—we'll continue looking at that. That's my commitment: Let's have a look at what we're doing.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's helpful, thank you. Speaking of cost of living and the FuelCheck app, when did Treasury first communicate to your department that they were looking at no longer funding FuelCheck?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Treasury's never communicated that to me at all. I raised that in the last estimates when I was asked a question about FuelCheck.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you haven't been made aware that Treasury are looking into cancelling this app? You're not aware of that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've said that as far as I'm concerned, the app will run. It will continue.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is there funding for it to continue running?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's going to continue running. I've given you that commitment.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, that's great. Do you know what it costs to run FuelCheck?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Off the top of my head—let me just make sure I give you the correct answer, but I think—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You can take that on notice. Also in terms of cost of living, with FuelCheck the average saving is \$800 a year and the cost to run the application per customer is about 3¢. Do you agree that it makes sense from a cost-of-living perspective that it would be a priority?

Mr JIHAD DIB: FuelCheck?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's what I said, we're not—I'm not sure where you're going with this. We're not looking to discontinue FuelCheck. It costs about \$1½ million a year, I've just been advised. I've made it clear that I support the app. I don't disagree with you about it being a good app and I know it's well used.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We're in furious agreement. Thank you, Minister, that's terrific.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Great! That'd be the first time today.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, and also about your mum; that was good, too. Are you familiar with the NSW Data Analytics Centre?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You'd be aware that the centre houses the New South Wales insights hub?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you explain what the hub does?

Mr JIHAD DIB: They look at insights into the community in time. For want of a better phrase, they have a survey that is continuously seeking people's thoughts and views about things that are really important to them and about some feedback. It also looks at how messaging is being used. To give you an example: government messaging. I asked them, particularly when I was very concerned about the impending bushfire season, whether people were picking up that we needed to do some work around bushfires. I thought that was really important. They perform functions to support all government agencies in terms of getting a better understanding and a feel of what's going on and how we could do it. It's got about 15,000 datasets that they use and it's about being transparent.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's helpful. You're not proposing to discontinue the New South Wales insights hub, are you?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We'll continue working with what we have. I've spoken about the importance of the insights hub and the value that it brings. We'll keep looking at all of the services that we offer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What does that mean? If you've spoken positively about it, surely you'd be supportive and oppose discontinuing it? That's right, isn't it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll come back to that first one about what it means. I know you'll say that we're looking at blaming others, but the fact of the matter is that we inherited some financial difficulties. We're not looking at removing programs; we're looking at how we can make programs more sustainable.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you proposing to discontinue the New South Wales insights hub?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You will continue it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've just said that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's your commitment to this Committee?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're looking at ways to make things more sustainable. We're having a functional review at the moment that's looking at all of the areas around Service, around DCS.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is this subject to that review? Is it under review?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Everything is being reviewed.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not asking you about everything, Minister, with respect. I'm asking about your portfolio and I'm specifically asking about the New South Wales insights hub. Are you committing to continue that or are you aware, in your evidence to this Committee today, that that may be discontinued?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Every aspect of the DCS operation is being looked at. Part of that is because of the financial position we inherited.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you're not committed to it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're looking at how we can make sustainable moves forward and still maintain the best services that we can. I don't think it's unheard of that we'd be looking at functional reviews. It's happening across agencies.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Be assured, I'm aware there are many, many reviews going on by this Government—over 30.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know, but it's because the previous Government left us such a mess.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll move on. Why hasn't Data.NSW issued a press release or public update since June 2023?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, what was that?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why hasn't Data.NSW issued a press release or public update since June 2023?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm going to take that on notice.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I want to turn to the number of volunteers that we have. Could you provide for us an accurate figure of volunteers of the New South Wales RFS?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can tell you there are I think about 71,000 people who are on the RFS as being volunteers—members of the RFS, I should say, sorry.

The Hon. WES FANG: How many are active? Do you know?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I stand to be corrected, but it could be about 56,000. Maybe the commissioner—

ROB ROGERS: It's of the order of 50,000.

Mr JIHAD DIB: They have been active most recently. It's quite substantial. There are over 50,000 people willing to volunteer for the RFS.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes. We're a little confused because we've seen reported on *Sky News* that there are 56,579 operational, but the previous budget estimates indicated that there were around 45,000. We're at a loss as to how there's a differential in the numbers.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The latest number that I've got is, you know, the 56,000 number.

The Hon. WES FANG: The 45,000 from last budget estimates was misleading us, was it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't think it was misleading. I think I might have said "about" and "around".

The Hon. WES FANG: "Around" is somewhere, plus or minus, what—11,000? Is that how we operate in this Government?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, is your problem that we've actually got people who are volunteering? Is that what your problem is?

The Hon. WES FANG: No, my problem is that when we're asking serious questions in estimates, Minister, you're not providing suitable answers. An answer of 45,000, plus or minus 11,000, is a huge differential. You'd almost call it misleading the Committee.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, I give answers in the best way that I can. I said to you I thought it was about that.

The Hon. WES FANG: You have to do better, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you for the advice. If the commissioner can just clean it up, and then I want to come back to you on something.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes, I'm sure he will.

ROB ROGERS: Both figures are correct.

The Hon. WES FANG: How?

ROB ROGERS: I'll explain it. Of the 70,000-odd, there are 56,000 or so that are deemed operational people. Of those, 45,000 to 46,000 are firefighters, so there are operational people that aren't firefighters. That's why there are three different figures.

The Hon. WES FANG: Okay. Why weren't we provided all those figures in the previous estimates?

ROB ROGERS: I can only presume it was about the question that was asked. I can't recall exactly what the question was.

The Hon. WES FANG: Fulsome answers at estimates are appropriate, and I note that Government members are laughing at this—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I'm laughing at you, Wes.

The Hon. WES FANG: —but, ultimately, this is not a laughing matter. The figures that are provided in estimates are serious.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, the commissioner has just given you the reason why it was in the forties and then in the fifties. He's actually explained it to you.

The Hon. WES FANG: I appreciate that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: None of the figure was—

The Hon. WES FANG: But that disclosure should have been provided in previous estimates.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But the figure that I gave you wasn't incorrect. This is now, you might say, a more nuanced—

The Hon. WES FANG: It's figures with qualifications, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Okay, so you've got the answers now. Mr Fang, I said that I'd come back to you as well about the things that you presented me a little bit earlier.

The Hon. WES FANG: And we can do that in government time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, but I said—

The Hon. WES FANG: You get 15 minutes at the end to do that. I've only got limited time and I've got plenty of questions.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister, we might do that at the end, just before we go to government time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Okay, sure.

The CHAIR: We will give you an opportunity.

The Hon. WES FANG: Turning to hazard reduction burns, Minister, to date this financial year, what proportion of the total hazard reduction burn target has the RFS completed?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think this financial year, I can tell you the percentage—not the percentage, but the number. It was about 500,000—was it?

ROB ROGERS: The target?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The target maybe, but completed.

ROB ROGERS: We've done 60,000 hectares.

The Hon. WES FANG: And what was the target?

ROB ROGERS: I think it was 320,000.

The Hon. WES FANG: Does it concern you that you're quite far behind your target?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure, and let me give you the fulsome answer that you so desire. The fulsome answer is the fact that every year the targets that are not met just keep getting added onto, so why it is like 300,000 is because of the things that weren't done the year before, and the year before and so forth. We know, and I was pretty upfront and frank about it at the outset, we didn't get to do the hazard reduction that we wanted to, particularly under the previous Government—and I don't blame them. The conditions were not right. If you recall, 2022 was one of the wettest years we've had, certainly in recent times that I can think of, and there weren't as many opportunities to undertake the hazard reduction in whatever form it was. I didn't hide from that fact.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, that's fine. I am going to redirect now because, while I appreciate the answer, ultimately less than a fifth of the target has been completed this year. What do you say to the people of New South Wales—that you haven't completed the work to keep them safe?

Mr JIHAD DIB: As Minister, I would say that in the time that I've been Minister, there has been an incredible focus on hazard reduction. But, unlike you, I will not play cheap politics, because I won't talk about what happened under the previous Government.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I take great offence to that, because what I'm doing here—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I won't talk about what happened previously.

The Hon. WES FANG: —is holding you to account for the targets that you set and your Government sets.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, I've explained to you the way that these—

The Hon. WES FANG: One-fifth, Minister.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order: We're just descending again into this situation where the witness, the Minister, is being treated discourteously in that a question is being asked and, before he can get three or four seconds into an answer, a statement is coming over the top of it, attempting to verbal the Minister.

The Hon. WES FANG: Don't mislead us, Cameron. He's not answering.

The CHAIR: Order! We are moving into that.

The Hon. WES FANG: There were no answers.

The CHAIR: Order! I just ask Mr Wes Fang to pull back a little bit.

The Hon. WES FANG: I understand, Chair. I apologise.

The CHAIR: You've got four minutes left if you want to use it.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm just frustrated by the lack of answers from the Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Madam Chair, can I answer that question, please? I just want to say that we're cleaning up the mess. I've just said that it's a cumulative effect. You talk about one-fifth. We're cleaning up the mess that you left behind. But I've also said that we were not able to undertake hazard reductions in the years preceding that because we had some of the wettest seasons in history. Since becoming Minister—

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm going to redirect, apologies, because you just keep deflecting and you're not actually answering the question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But that's not a deflection; it's actually a wholesome answer. You said you wanted a wholesome answer.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, you are deflecting. Minister, I want to turn to the Government's housing plan. Earlier this month *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported the FBEU will use the Government's push for high-density housing in wage negotiations. Were conversations had with Fire and Rescue NSW ahead of the housing plan being finalised?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The article that you refer to is not one that—I've paid attention to it, but the answer to the question is no.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, are you concerned that the Government's new housing plan will put too much pressure on the State's Fire and Rescue services, resources and maintenance?

Mr JIHAD DIB: This housing plan is all about actually ensuring that people can have homes to live in. We know that housing has been in incredible short supply for a long period of time—successive governments. This is actually the first time that a government has said, "We need to address this issue. We need to make sure that we deal with the issue." Now, what will happen, of course, is with that comes the social infrastructure.

The Hon. WES FANG: I accept all that. I'm going to redirect now, because I want to know: Do you hold concerns that community safety is at risk in the event of an emergency because of these high-density suburbs and you haven't consulted with the appropriate services that are tasked to fix it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, what's happened at the moment is there is a plan. It hasn't actually moved forward.

The Hon. WES FANG: No consultation, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Fire and Rescue NSW and other emergency services also play a role. We're talking about fixing up—

The Hon. WES FANG: It would have been decent to at least ask them.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —something that had been neglected.

The Hon. WES FANG: You could ask them. I think they're calling out to be consulted with.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Fire and Rescue NSW does work across all the agencies. They've also got the appliances that are required and we'll continue with—

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I'm going to redirect now because I'm not getting the answers from you that you should be providing.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, with respect, every time I answer a question—

The Hon. WES FANG: Well, there are no answers, Minister. They're just words. They're not answers.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think you're not getting the answer that you want, but you are getting the answer.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I want to turn to pod villages now. Can you please provide an update on how many people are currently living in pod villages?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In pod villages? I can get a specific number for you, but I'll say, too, that there are some pod villages up in the Northern Rivers area—

The Hon. WES FANG: We are well aware.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —and we still have some people in pods in the Central West, and they're on pods primarily on their own properties while their properties are being repaired.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, how many people are currently being housed out of their home town or region in pod villages?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can—

The Hon. WES FANG: Take it on notice?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Actually, sorry, I can give you an answer right now. There are 546 housing pods across 11 villages with a capacity of 1,800-odd people.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, is the emergency housing provided free of charge?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Are you talking about the housing pods emergency housing?

The Hon. WES FANG: The pods, yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is. I visited one in, I think, Coraki.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm sure we can hear about that a little bit later.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Well, I've got—

The Hon. WES FANG: I've got 40 seconds left, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But I just want to tell you about my trip to Coraki, where the community was—

The Hon. WES FANG: I know, and I want to hear about it a bit later.

Mr JIHAD DIB: They were really appreciative.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I want to redirect because I want to confirm whether your residents living in the pods are going to be soon charged rent.

Mr JIHAD DIB: When I visited the community out at—

The Hon. WES FANG: So when you said it was free—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Well, you asked me, "Are they free?" I said it's covered free of charge.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you now going to consider charging them rent?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, when I visited the community—

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you going to charge these people in vulnerable situations rent?

Mr JIHAD DIB: When I visited the community of Coraki—

The Hon. WES FANG: Just answer the question. Yes or no?

Mr JIHAD DIB: —one of the things they were really appreciative of was how we—

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes or no?

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order—

The Hon. WES FANG: Why won't you answer the question, Minister?

The CHAIR: There has been a point of order taken.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: My point of order, Chair—

The Hon. WES FANG: Obfuscating. He doesn't want to answer.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: The time has expired, but yet again the Minister was asked a question and he can barely get an answer out before the Hon. Wes Fang talks over him with a statement rather than another question.

The Hon. WES FANG: You're misleading us again. There were no answers.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's not relevant. He's not answering. He's talking about a visit.

The CHAIR: We're now moving on to crossbench time anyway. If the Hon. Wes Fang wants to put the question on notice, he may.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We'd like an answer.

The Hon. WES FANG: I did get it out before the bell.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are they going to pay rent?

The Hon. WES FANG: I would like to know whether they are going to pay rent or not. Are you going to force these people to pay rent?

The CHAIR: You can answer the question briefly, Minister.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Which one? There were about 10 questions after the bell.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are they going to pay rent?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There were a number of questions there.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are they going to pay rent?

The Hon. WES FANG: Are they going to have to pay rent?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's really simple.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We will get back to you with that one.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You just won't answer if they will pay rent.

The Hon. WES FANG: You're taking it on notice? You don't even know. You don't know if you're going to charge these vulnerable people in pod villages rent.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Oh Wes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister!

The CHAIR: Order! We're now going on to crossbench time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Wow.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, where's the heart in this Government?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Wes, have you been down my way?

The Hon. WES FANG: No heart!

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, I ask you to direct your attention to Dr Amanda Cohn now, please.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I don't say anything during your time, Wes. Please don't say anything during mine.

The Hon. WES FANG: Apologies.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Minister, what role do you see for neighbourhood and community centres in disaster response?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Incredibly important. We saw one really good one that was established—again, if I talk about Lismore—up in Lismore which really just sprang up. The role they play is so crucial. That's where the Reconstruction Authority has been working in terms of developing better relationships with local community centres. We have the State plans coming down to the local plans. The local plan also includes how we work with local communities. Again, this idea of place based—I think local communities, local people and local community centres have an insight that no-one outside it can have and no government agency can have. We work with them. I suppose that was a longwinded way of saying I think they have a really important role to play.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm pleased to hear about their inclusion in the planning, but let's talk about funding. I understand the Social Sector Transformation Fund has funded some really excellent projects like the Women's Cottage and the Eden Community Access Centre for about 18 months. Are there any plans for longer term funding like this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't know that specifically. Did you say Eden—as in, in the south?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't know about that one specifically, but we have also made a commitment in terms of funding agreements. We look at five-year funding agreements to be able to better support community centres, to give them a bit of surety and things like that. But I'm sorry, Dr Cohn, I don't know of that one specifically. I don't know the group.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Those two community centres were just examples, but I was particularly talking about the Social Sector Transformation Fund, which you're welcome to take on notice.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If that's okay.

Dr AMANDA COHN: NCOSS has written a report entitled *Aftershock: Addressing the Economic and Social Costs of the Pandemic and Natural Disasters*, which called for sustainably-funded, place-based services, which you just outlined the importance of. Have you met with NCOSS to discuss those recommendations?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've met with NCOSS, but I don't know that we actually discussed it. It might have been before the report. I have met with NCOSS. I have a lot of time for the work they do and I highly respect the work they do. I agree with them: We're seeing a society that is being fractured in so many ways by different things. We need to understand that they sit at the heart of social services about keeping communities together. We see incredible, inspiring efforts by communities, particularly after a disaster. We just need to make sure that we keep supporting them wherever we can. They're preaching to the converted with me. I think there's a really important role to play.

That's why the Reconstruction Authority and the plans we have—in terms of the mitigation plans and in terms of the action plans—all have the community sector at the heart of it. We've learnt, as a government, from things that have happened in the past—I won't say "with the previous Government"—and where we can improve them. We saw that the responses have been better, particularly last year, if I use Bega as an example, when there were some bushfires there. The learnings that we had from what we could have done better from Lismore and the Central West, we applied. In that, the community sector plays a really important role. They're embedded into the work that we're going to be doing and that we continue to do.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Have you met with the Local Community Services Association, on the same note?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't think I have, but if I have I will take that on notice. There are so many meetings that I have, but I don't recall that one and I don't want to mislead you.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Flood inquiry recommendation 24 was to prioritise funding for community groups that are currently providing social and mental health support to their local communities. How has that been implemented so far?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's been some money that's been put in, specifically around mental health. I know that the commissioner of the SES could also add into that, because we used some of the mental health support in terms of across the agencies but also in terms of with the community. We recognise the incredible impact that those disasters had at the time, but also the long-term ramifications. I know that there is a place up in Wardell. They offer a whole heap of community support. A lot of that is that mental health support. Some of it could almost

be—obviously, there's the formalised bit, but sometimes it's just—like, for example, I think they do a pizza night on a Friday. I promise I'm not going to come, but I haven't quite got up there on a Friday night. That contributes to mental health but also to wellbeing of communities. So those things are being progressed. Also, the Minister for Mental Health is well aware of that as well.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I think you're talking about Wardell CORE—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

Dr AMANDA COHN: —who gave evidence to the Portfolio Committee No. 2 mental health inquiry this year. What I'm particularly interested in is if you're looking at longer term funding for those mental health components, recognising that there is a disaster response piece but that's also part of disaster resilience and that's also part of preparing for the next one. Are you looking at longer term funding for those organisations rather than just those one-offs after a disaster?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It fits into two different areas. There's the community sector but then also if I can talk about with the Reconstruction Authority, specifically our plans are, for the first time ever, to have a really good view of what we can do to plan for the future, and within that sits really closely also the community sector. I'm not sure. I can ask Jo. Do you want to add anything more specific about the community sector?

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's all right. I might come back to the department witnesses this afternoon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You want to ask later. But it does sit at the heart of it, and that's that planning to ensure that we allocate funding where we can and also that we think about things in the most practical ways, based on the learnings that we've had.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm moving to a different topic because I'm very short on time. Are the 600 new professional firefighters that the Premier committed to pre-election in addition to Fire and Rescue's normal annual intake of new firefighters?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. I'm pleased to say that I think there's a class of 20 that's either just about to start—I met some the other day and wasn't sure if they were in, but there's a class of 20 that's just about to start as well. So they are 600 additional firefighters.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Fantastic. What's the current training capacity of the Emergency Services Academy?

Mr JIHAD DIB: They're out at Orchard Hills. I've been out there. They train. The specifics of the capacity for that might be an operational thing that the commissioner would be better across. But, obviously, we run training sessions there. I think it's a 16-week program. Would you mind if I handed over to the commissioner?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Yes, sure. Just before you go to the commissioner, what I'm specifically getting at here is does the academy have sufficient resources to meet its regular intake as well as the demand of the additional 600?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We've addressed that by making sure—we've actually now increased the number of trainers, and we did that as part of the award agreements. The last award agreement—I think that was signed off in October—was specifically about making sure that we've got enough people who can go to different training categories so that we can be sure that they're there. It's part of that thing that we've had to address in terms of delivering our commitment. We said that would be our commitment and we had to address the issue of making sure we had enough trainers.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: In relation to that, it's a 14-week program for our new permanent firefighter recruits. Education and training, who manage the Emergency Services Academy, have had a real focus in the last couple of months of reworking the program and looking at the most efficient way to do it, specifically with the purpose of ensuring that we can deliver the volume of firefighters that are needed to deliver on the 600 additional firefighters. Previously we were running courses that maybe were covering 100 firefighters a year, maybe 120. We're ramping that up to be able to do at least 200, and we're looking at further improvements to the system again to get the volume required.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Following up on Mr Fang's earlier questions, I'm interested in how the RFS defines an active volunteer within the total number of registered volunteers on the books.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I stand to be corrected, but there are a number of volunteers who volunteer and do different things. For example, they might be the person who goes and opens up. They're part of the RFS for their whole life and they don't want to let it go. An active volunteer I'm assuming is one that can go out to the fireground themselves and will be more active in their participation.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Sorry, can I just be more specific? I know there are plenty of volunteers who do activities other than firefighting. I answered radios during the Black Summer bushfires and I'm not a firefighter.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you for that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm interested in when you're considered active versus inactive in terms of training being up-to-date, the last time someone turned out to a fire et cetera. I think some of the confusion around these numbers is this definition of what is an active volunteer in any capacity.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And some of those are also then dependent on the brigade, as well. There are different brigades that have training at certain times. It might be a situation where some people just turn up specifically for the fire. I know of people who are farmers, for example, who go, "Look, I've got my fire training. I turn up whenever I can. But if there's a fire happening, I'll specifically go." But they can't do that. But the RFS is pretty clear to me that they rely on the information from the local brigades. Local brigades are different, depending on where they are.

Dr AMANDA COHN: There's no statewide definition of what it means that someone's "active"?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't think there's a statewide specific definition.

ROB ROGERS: No. As the Minister said, we look at people who are trained and the brigade each year reviews their membership: Are people still active? Are they no longer active? If they haven't turned up, they might write and request they be removed from the brigade register, in which case they get written to. It's very much a brigade decision. As the Minister said, there are different activity levels for brigades. If you're not there every week in some capacity, they frown on it, whereas, as the Minister said, in farming brigades it's just not like that. It's very hard to have a one-size-fits-all for the whole State.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I could just add to that—and again, I thank the volunteers who go out there—we saw during the last bushfires between October and December that there wasn't a situation where we didn't have enough. Firefighters would turn up. Volunteers would turn up from all over to make sure that they lent support. We're confident that we've got the RFS volunteers there. I'd like any emergency services Minister to say, "We'd love to have more people join our volunteer services." It's a great opportunity. But I don't want the community to feel that those numbers and that explanation mean that in any situation we can't cover bases if we need to.

The CHAIR: Minister, I'll just jump back quickly to bushfires to finish my questions there. Do you believe that communities, particularly those in rural areas, are feeling fully supported in the response to bushfires?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I hope they do. We certainly do as much as we possibly can. In some of the communities before this impending season came, we held information sessions in community halls. We had the Get Ready Weekend. We also had, we will call it, an open weekend or open house across all of the brigades.

The CHAIR: What about response sessions? Are there sessions being conducted after a fire has occurred?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, I understand that there are sessions. They're not just organised by the RFS alone; that's where the whole of government comes in. I will use Bega as the example. After the Bega fires occurred, the RFS were doing the firefighting at the same time DCJ and the Reconstruction Authority were doing their bit in terms of setting up the evacuation centres. DCS had already set up emergency supports in terms of—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister, what does this have to do with after the fact?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I will tell you, because then—

The CHAIR: Yes, if we could jump to that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: —obviously, after that it goes full circle. They make sure that everyone is okay and see if there's any additional support that they require.

The CHAIR: What else are you doing to make sure that these rural communities are feeling engaged in the whole process and that they're part of that response and recovery?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's where the Reconstruction Authority really plays that key role, particularly if the community has been affected by fire, in terms of making sure that we're communicating with people. For example, Service NSW makes contact, as they did with members of the community. We have a roving service team—I think we have four of them—that goes out and visits communities. Of course, the RFS then makes sure that if any homes were in danger or need to do some mopping up, they go and support them. Whilst we haven't needed it—

The CHAIR: What about long term?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, I was going to say that whilst we didn't need it in this particular one, thank goodness, if there's a time that the community needs to come together then we'll organise for community to come together, for want of a better phrase, to heal. Unfortunately we saw that with one of the tragic deaths, where the community came together—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister, just to redirect you again to those long-term strategies to engage the communities.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Again, it's part of the plans that we have. That's the EMPLAN. The EMPLAN that we have is the emergency management plan that we just released, as well; it's an update on the previous one. It's actually allowed money this year to make sure that emergency services are working together and working with communities. We're developing effectively—it's like, literally, "Here's the manual, take it out and follow these steps." Because what we've found over the years is there's been some great work but no-one's actually ever developed something that's just consistent all the way through that can just quickly kick into gear. So it is part of our plan to keep working with communities but pre, during and post. That's where, also, the State Disaster Mitigation Plan has a really important role to play.

The CHAIR: I'm just going to move on to the Working with Children Check system. I know that, obviously, there were recent changes, which you mentioned before, where applicants are now able to renew their applications online rather than in person with physical documents. Can I just confirm that the online system will still be checking whether applicants have criminal convictions of animal cruelty?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It will still do the same things. The only difference with this one is that it's going to be using biometrics to save you having to go in, but we haven't changed at all.

The CHAIR: Everything else is exactly the same?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The CHAIR: I know my office has had some difficulty in the past trying to determine if certain individuals working with children actually have a valid Working with Children Check. I know, obviously, you can look up the system if you have the actual Working with Children Check number. If you don't have that number but there are concerns, has any consideration been given to a system where members of the public can look up someone's name and see if they have a valid Working with Children Check?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Not that I'm specifically aware of. Also, the Office of the Children's Guardian have the ownership of the Working with Children Check. This, for us, is that verifiable credential; it's that first step that we're doing. But not that I'm specifically aware of.

The CHAIR: So that's not being considered as part of the online platform?

Mr JIHAD DIB: With the online platform, we're not making any changes to—all the usual checks in place are remaining the same. The online platform was about being able to make it easier for people to obtain a Working with Children Check. Everything that used to be under the paper version—sorry, the other version, which you can still get, is also available. Nothing has been watered down, so to speak.

The CHAIR: In March 2023, \$15.6 million in funding was provided for the digital renovation of the NSW Pet Registry, which was a joint project between the Office of Local Government and the Department of Customer Service and digital government. I understand that the work is being led by local government, and I can ask that Minister next week. But do you have any update on where this is up to or the first phase of this work?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's going well. As you know, we did the pilot. You're right, the work is being led by the Office of Local Government. We in DCS support them and helped build the platform, but they own it. The latest I've heard is it's progressing really well. Hopefully we'll have a bit more to be able to say on that. The pilot runs, and it's been running well. We're very confident that we're going to be able to get there.

The CHAIR: When you say you hope that you'll have more to say on that soon, have you got a date in mind as to when something might launch?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't want to steal anyone's thunder. That may be one for the Minister for Local Government. He would be most upset if I said something.

The CHAIR: Fair enough.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Especially if it's good news.

The Hon. WES FANG: It won't be.

The CHAIR: In October 2023 it was announced that the Suspect Target Management Program would be discontinued for young people in New South Wales, with the New South Wales police announcing it would develop a replacement program that will improve outcomes for young people. I know policing matters don't fall under your portfolio, but given the serious negative effect of that program on young people and their interactions with the youth justice system, I just wondered if you had been briefed on the replacement program and if you had any updates.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Youth Justice is engaging with police. I have to say at the outset, I'm really glad to see that there's a new program being developed. Youth Justice will play an important role in that. We need to make systems better where we possibly can. We'll provide our expertise as Youth Justice. But, yes, there are those changes that are coming. We haven't been excluded from contributions.

The CHAIR: So your department has been involved in the creation of that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: My department has been involved, yes. They're making a contribution. I'm conscious of the time now but, if I could respectfully ask, maybe in the afternoon Mr O'Reilly might want to add something to it—I've just given him some homework for lunchtime—so that we address it. But Youth Justice will contribute wherever we're asked to.

The CHAIR: I know Ms Higginson has asked some questions earlier today about the music and tablets and computers in Youth Justice centres. Do you know when there'll be any kind of formal feedback process on this, or evaluation?

Mr JIHAD DIB: As I said before to Ms Higginson, we're doing the scoping work at the moment. The scoping work is about what's feasible, how it would work, potentially what the impact will be. We're hoping to get that done by June this year—by the end of June. That's the scoping work that's taking place. We want to do it right. As I said—

The CHAIR: So that's the scoping. That's the prior work. That's the only part of the time line that you've got at this point?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Because that's then going to, at least, give us an idea of where we can go the next steps from. But the fact that we're doing scoping work highlights that we're pretty interested and keen on getting some things done. What we need to know, though, is what the impacts are that it will have. If it was as easy as just giving every young person an iPad, we would do that straightaway, but it's not that easy. Let's wait for that body of work to come through, which will then be able to formulate where we go. The fact that we're doing it is a positive example of the work that we want to do into the future.

The CHAIR: I know that Raise the Age has already been discussed this morning as well. Have you had further meetings with the Attorney General about this? If so, can you tell us what progress there has been on that since the last budget estimates?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I have met with the Attorney General. As I alluded to, I met the Attorney General and with other Ministers. There have been a number of different meetings that I've attended. He does lead the work on it. I've said that we're happy to contribute, as Youth Justice, wherever possible—I, as the Minister, but also just as a person with a little bit of context and understanding, particularly of young people, given some of the work that I've done before I came into Parliament. Raising the age of criminal responsibility is one element of the whole issue that we need to resolve around youth, and a great deal of that also then links up with what are we doing to try to ensure that—the ideal world doesn't see young people engage with the criminal justice system, because they've got every opportunity there for them. Raising the Age is one part of many pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. I've made it very clear that I'm very happy to get involved wherever I can and offer any suggestions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, I just wanted to come back to artificial intelligence, just to be clear about your evidence today. Is the Committee to understand that you don't have any plans to create cost efficiencies from the use of artificial intelligence in the Government?

Mr JIHAD DIB: What I said—if I've misunderstood the question, the inference, I felt, was that the artificial intelligence was about getting people to lose their job.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's not the inference. I am just asking, to be absolutely clear on your evidence—not what you're inferring from me and not what I've said—do you have any plans to create cost efficiencies from AI?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Not that I'm aware of, no.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No cost efficiencies?

Mr JIHAD DIB: As I said before, this is not about looking at cost efficiencies. It's looking at how we can do things better.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just to be clear, can you confirm or provide further information to this Committee about whether you actually think AI will dramatically change the New South Wales public service in the coming years? And if you don't, why not?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Well, no, I think it will. Of course, it's going to make changes, but it's also going to complement the work that we do. We're not replacing public servants with big computers. If the computers and the AI generative materials—as they've seen outside of government—will make a difference, then, of course, they're going to complement the work that we're going to do. To say there's not going to be any change would be incorrect, but to say that there's going to be—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I wanted to give you the chance to clarify, because it will make a dramatic change to the workforce, won't it? That's obvious. It's not a trick question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's going to make a change to the way we do our work, everywhere.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, and a change to the workforce. We talked about individual roles may change.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Maybe individual roles, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So those roles will change. It will bring about a dramatic change to the workforce. That's clear, isn't it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: And you'd like to think that those changes will be ones that allow people more time to do the complex things that people—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, I'd like to understand your evidence to this Committee, Minister. I'd like to understand whether you agree because the terms of reference from the Auditor-General—I'd like to be clear about whether you agree with those, that it will make dramatic changes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Auditor-General has put out their terms of reference. The Auditor-General will also then go through their processes and we'll read their report.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you disagree with the terms of reference?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I acknowledge that there are going to be some pretty big changes as a result of AI. That's why we developed our framework—updated it, so that we can work with this rather than just pretend it's not coming. It's coming.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you agree or not agree with the terms of reference from the Auditor-General?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Auditor-General has put up terms of reference and they will do the work that they need to do.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, but I'm asking you as a Minister with your department: Do you agree or disagree with them? It's a very simple proposition. There is no trick to it.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If the Auditor-General feels that they're the terms of reference that they want to pursue, then that's their—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you agree that the New South Wales Government will free up the workforce for critical and frontline tasks, cut costs and enable delivery of better, more targeted services? Do you agree or disagree with that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I agree that it will enable better and more targeted services, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will you accept that there will be job losses if artificial intelligence makes those roles redundant?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We discussed this recently at—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes or no?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We discussed this recently in a meeting at a national level, actually, about the fact it creates a whole heap of new jobs.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, I have very limited time. I'm going to ask you: yes or no? Do you agree that, if those jobs are redundant, there are job losses?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I agree that there will actually be new jobs that are created through AI.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's not answering the question. Will AI make those jobs redundant? Of course the answer is yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It could, but it also creates other jobs. That is what I'm really keen on.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's not my question. Will it make those jobs redundant?

Mr JIHAD DIB: But you're asking me a hypothetical—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You said that earlier.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —and I'm giving you an answer to say that, of course, some jobs may be redundant—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, you're fudging.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —and there will be other jobs that will be created.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: My colleague has a question.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I just want to ask—

Mr JIHAD DIB: You've got 30 seconds, Wes.

The Hon. WES FANG: I've got 10 seconds now. Minister, the Labor Party committed to an upgraded natural disaster warning system before the election. Can you provide us an update as to how you've delivered that promised system?

Mr JIHAD DIB: An updated warning system?

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes, the natural disaster warning system.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The natural disaster warning system—for example, the Hazards Near Me app—and the changes that have been made, only a month ago we added onto it—I think it was storms and floods. We added storms to it as an update in terms of giving people advanced warning of what might be coming their way.

The Hon. WES FANG: That's it? No gauges? No physical—

The CHAIR: Order! There are no further questions. The remaining time goes to Dr Amanda Cohn.

Dr AMANDA COHN: There is growing recognition of Aboriginal knowledge and expertise in fire management. I think that's really clearly demonstrated by the increased demand for cultural burning in the private market, such as in south-east New South Wales. I understand that practitioners like the Firesticks Alliance have criticised the lack of government support and some red tape to broader uptake. What are you doing to better enable implementation of Aboriginal knowledge in fire preparedness and management?

Mr JIHAD DIB: RFS have got within the work that they're doing a recognition of the importance of cultural burns and cultural work. I know that across government there was just recently—I think it was through National Parks—some cultural burns being undertaken as well. We'll continue working with them through the RFS, through different government agencies. Here are people who have got thousands and thousands of years of knowledge that would benefit. It's also a different way of conducting burns. It would be a balancing act between whether we do hazard reduction in the way that we know it or hazard reduction in the way that's been traditionally done. It's like a slower, lower burn that could work in different things. The RFS is part of that working group. They're actually part of that working group.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Those cultural burns—I just need to understand—are they currently regulated in exactly the same way as hazard reduction burns or are you looking at a different framework there?

ROB ROGERS: They are. They're subject to the same regulatory requirements. Often what we've done is have brigades go and stand by there just to support them but to enable them to occur. One of the things we are looking at in working with the cultural management group but also the Aboriginal members that we've now got in the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee—I think it's three on there. We're working with them about how we develop an environmental code that can streamline some of the environmental things. Cultural burning is very different to hazard reduction burning, but they're unfortunately captured in the same group, so we're looking at trying to nuance the support for those groups to enable them to carry out cultural fire management activity. It's a live issue for us.

The CHAIR: Minister, before I go to Government questions, was there anything that you wanted to put on record? I think there were some questions taken on notice that you wanted to address now.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, there were a couple of questions. One was the question about the rent that Mr Fang asked me.

The Hon. WES FANG: Heartless rent, yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The heartless rent. Mr Fang, I might remind you that this was suggested by the Vevers report that was actually commissioned by the previous Government, of which you were a part.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you implementing it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The community leaders forum—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Paul Vevers is still there.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Members, this is just for the Minister to answer. It is not a question and answer session. If the Minister has questions that he wants to answer on notice, he can put them to the whole Committee, but it is not a further question and answer session.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you, Madam Chair. The community leaders forums in the Northern Rivers and the Central West have been asked to provide feedback on the future of pod villages. Charging rent has been something considered in these forums and the Government continues to engage meaningfully with that feedback. The original idea came from the previous Government. We're working with the local community leaders forum to engage with them—

The Hon. WES FANG: It's a lot of words, but I don't see an answer—yes or no?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The other one, if I can add, was the wildlife one. I am advised that the EPA undertook listening tours around the State with wildlife carer groups prior to developing a sub-plan. When the State emergency management centre endorsed the plan in December, it also requested that a review be undertaken within 12 months to confirm that the plan is fit for purpose, which kind of goes to the point that I made a bit earlier: If we can make it better, we will. The feedback that you have added will certainly be included in that.

The CHAIR: Could I ask you to take on notice when they did the listening tours and spoke to different wildlife groups? Could I get a list of the wildlife groups they met with?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure. I think the key point there is that it will be reviewed with a view to improve things. If I can come back to another question around Cyber Security—was it about the recommendations? It might have been from Ms Boyd, I think. But that's okay, I know that you're super keen, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: She asks very good questions. I'm sure it was.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It was about the four recommendations. So Cyber Security has accepted all recommendations outlined in the Audit Office of New South Wales report: an approach that provides reasonable assurance that New South Wales government agencies are assessing and reporting their compliance with the NSW Cyber Security Policy; that Cyber Security NSW has a detailed, complete and accessible catalogue of services available to agencies and councils; and a comprehensive engagement strategy and plan for the local government sector. Cyber Security has now completed all four of the recommendations. This includes developing an assurance methodology to support New South Wales government agencies to consistently assess and report their compliance with the New South Wales Government and Cyber Security. The agency does not have an auditing function and will thereby introduce the assurance methodologies of the NSW Cyber Security Policy. Cyber Security NSW leads collaboration and coordination with its State, Territory and Commonwealth counterparts, such as the Australian Signals Directorate and the Australian Cyber Security Centre. I think that responds to the questions that I said I will get back to people with some information. There's also one that I do want to address, which was the issue around fire trucks. My learned colleague, Mr Fang—

The Hon. WES FANG: Not that learned, but, you know—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know, but—

The Hon. WES FANG: Let's go with humble.

Mr JIHAD DIB: He presented this to me and obviously I sought some information in the break. Unfortunately, Mr Fang couldn't give me any particular details, but what you can see there is that that looks like a temporary solution, so I've got this: From the moment a Fire and Rescue NSW vehicle enters service until the

end of its operational life it is subject to a preventative maintenance program. That maintenance program, incorporating around 726 vehicles, has not experienced any cuts to its budget in the 2023-24 financial year. The program has not been compromised financially.

Regarding the photo Mr Fang circulated of the temporary repair to a tail-light, no such incident has been reported to Fire and Rescue NSW. It appears that this may have been a temporary measure applied in the field. This is not an ongoing repair situation. The truck may have reversed into something and needed to get back to base for a permanent repair. You also shared a photo of Revesby Fire Station. I can advise that the Revesby Fire Station has a new aerial pumper in service; that may be an old photo. You presented a photo to us of something that hasn't actually come to Fire and Rescue and you presented a photo of a station that has now actually got a brand new fire truck.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, I presented a picture of your fire trucks being held together with cable ties—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, I—

The CHAIR: Order! Are there questions from the Government?

The Hon. WES FANG: You just admitted to it! You admitted your trucks are being held together with cable ties.

The CHAIR: The Hon. Cameron Murphy has the call.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to ask questions without the horrible interruptions from the Hon. Wes Fang. I've really just got one question for the Minister: What is the Government doing to enhance interoperability in our emergency management arrangements?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you very much, Mr Murphy, for that question. I really appreciate being asked a question by you and I'm glad you participated.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: He thought of it all by himself. It's his burning issue.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might have a note for this one. Interoperability has got to lie at the heart of what we do and is one of the key focuses of this Government. It's certainly something I've spoken about a lot since becoming Minister. Beside me are three commissioners who work really closely together, supported also by other commissioners, including Marine Rescue and the VRA, and other emergency service volunteers such as Surf Life Saving NSW. All the emergency services working together in an interoperable way is really quite good. If I may be so presumptuous, Dr Cohn talked about answering phones. I've been on a call desk. I know Dr Cohn as a volunteer with the SES. That's interoperability. If one of our partner groups needs something, that's actually a really fair-minded approach to things, and I think most people would say that's a really good way.

Earlier I did mention the EMPLAN, the State emergency plan. It's all about interoperability and making sure that we have good things that we can do. I'm really pleased to say that we have our emergency services ready for when disaster strikes. A while ago I joined the NSW State Emergency Services Commissioner out at Penrith, where they were doing some training for flood rescue across different agencies. We had a lot of fun there—I probably had a bit too much fun—but there was a really important thing there about sharing the different experiences and expertise and doing some cross-training together. What I've made really clear is that is, for me, an absolute priority: trying to get everyone to work together so that when a disaster hits, we've got people who can do what needs to be done. There are no silos, no bans and no "you wear this uniform"; it's about what we need to do, because the truth is that people just want help. Let's make sure that we train everybody as best as we can.

I'm also really pleased to announce that there's a \$250,000 program for the emergency management and exercise training program. It's all good to say that but we do need to provide training opportunities. It's going to fund 14 exercises over the next six months and allow our emergency services to test our emergency management arrangements across a range of realistic scenarios. I think about the one that we did before the bushfire season, where we had a two-day operation. It had everybody in it and actually used real data from previous fires. It was an excellent way of ensuring that people were prepared. This bushfire season people go, "There wasn't"—we had over 9,000 fires, grass and bush, over this past year. We were blessed with a little bit of rain just before Christmas.

The exercise is going to include urban search and rescue, flood rescue, dam failure and management of mass casualty incidents. It's going to be led by all of the agencies. The agencies working together will be Fire and Rescue NSW; the SES; Marine Rescue; the Police Force; Environment Protection Agency; and South Western Sydney Local Health District as well, Dr Cohn. We're talking about some of those heat issues as well as, of course, the RFS. We've done this and we've funded it because of the consultation process. I would hope that if one thing was very clear during my answers, it's all about trying to be consultative and collaborative and actually working as a team. When it comes to things like disaster management, it's got to be a team sport. We can't afford for

everyone to go and do their own thing. You can give the most inspiring speech that you want but unless people are well trained, well prepared and well led, that doesn't help us out.

I'm really proud of the work that all of my emergency services do. I'm proud of the work that the whole committee in emergency management does. I'm also exceptionally proud of the volunteers who give up their time, often volunteering across a number of different agencies just to be there for the community. These are regular, run-of-the-mill people who just want to give their bit. I want to make sure I acknowledge those volunteers. I also want to acknowledge and pay my condolences to the four people we lost during these past six months. They were fire people. They were members of the RFS and members of Fire and Rescue NSW. These are people who literally gave their lives for the community. It's an important point that, when we get into the argy-bargy of politics, we always remember that it's about people who are genuinely looking after communities.

I conclude in the same way I did last time. I thank everybody who contributes to my portfolios, all the people who help out: the team beside me and the many who we don't know, who prepared folders and who make sure they get things done. I'm blessed with the portfolios I have because they're about people. Everything that we do—whether it's in DCS, Emergency Services or Youth Justice—is always about the people. To my team—the many thousands of people who contribute to this—I say thank you for the work that you do. I'm really proud to be your Minister. Thank you so much to the Committee.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Thanks, Minister. Keep up the good work. I have no further questions.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What, no other questions?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Chair, I thank the Minister on behalf of the Opposition. Thank you for your attendance today and for assisting us with the information you provided—and to your team, who works very hard on this. Minister, if it's possible, can I ask you to pass on the phone number of your hairdresser to the Hon. Bob Nanva and maybe do a budget bid for some money to back it in? That would be amazing for all of us in the upper House.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's a funny story there. I did tell my barber—he said he's not a hairdresser; he calls himself a barber—that I've got a problem with him. I used to go to him when I had long, flowing locks, but since he's been cutting my hair I've gradually been losing more and more of it. Mr Nanva, I will take you to Punchbowl with me. It's a good place.

The CHAIR: That's where the long, flowing locks have gone! They are with the Hon. Bob Nanva.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I dream of having locks like that once again.

The CHAIR: Minister, thank you for attending this morning. You won't be returning in the afternoon. However, the Committee will be back with everybody else. We will now break for a short lunch. We will return at 2.00 p.m.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the afternoon session for budget estimates. Before I throw to the Opposition for questions, I believe Commissioner Rogers has an answer to a question on notice to put on record.

ROB ROGERS: Thanks, Madam Chair. In relation to the Hon. Wes Fang and his question about fuel cards, I can advise that the other fuel card issue was in Kempsey on 14 October 2023, which was before the last estimates hearing. We were not aware about this issue until we made inquiries. Our area commands weren't aware either. We've gone out to them all and made sure that those things have been taken into play and we know what is going on with them. The fact is that the card is council's card, but obviously the concern for us is to make sure that our brigades have the way to get to fires and do all those things. The volunteers involved paid for the fuel and were reimbursed four days later. We have a backup system, but for some reason that didn't work—as in, there is an extra corporate card. I've asked for some inquiries into what else we can do to ensure that there is no repeat of that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you very much for that detail, Commissioner. Obviously the member wasn't seeking to politicise it, which is why they didn't raise it at the time, but I do believe it took two months to get the reimbursements, so that's probably why it wasn't raised.

ROB ROGERS: I'll check on that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Commissioner Fewtrell, how many times has Fire and Rescue been called out to the new Coffs Harbour council building since it was completed?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I don't have that information to hand, so I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you aware if they are all false alarms? Are you able to take that on notice as well?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I do have some stats for the Coffs Harbour LGA. So that is more generally, obviously, than just the Coffs council building. There were 176 automatic fire alarms in the Coffs council area in 2023 and 171 of those were false alarms and there were five actual fires reported by those.

The Hon. WES FANG: Does Fire and Rescue NSW charge the council when there is a call out? What is the cost and does that occur if it is a false alarm as well?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: There is a tiered approach to that. We do apply that to all property occupiers or owners. The charge for attendance at an automatic fire alarm, if there is no fire or no exonerating reason for it to go off—say water had leaked through in a bad massive storm—we wouldn't be billing for that. But where there is just a fault in the system or people have burnt toast or done whatever, it is \$1,600. They get basically one free one in the first 60 days. So if there is an activation in a building and there are no others in 60 days, there is no charge. If there is a follow-up in the first 24 hours, so additional alarms, which is what happens quite frequently when there is a problem with a system, to give the occupant or the building manager time to get an appropriate service technician to come and rectify it, there is no follow-up charging in the first 24 hours either for any subsequent calls.

The Hon. WES FANG: But after that there is a \$1,600 fee?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes. I'll give a bit of background on that one. The rationale is there to provide a sufficient incentive for building occupiers, managers to maintain their systems appropriately. Where we have well-maintained buildings, you tend to have a very low level of automatic false alarm activations. So it's enough of an incentive for them without being too onerous.

The Hon. WES FANG: Understood. I'll pass over to my colleagues now and I'll come back with some further questions later.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: My question is to Mr Paul O'Reilly. It was in terms of closing the gap and youth detention. I just wondered with the New South Wales Government *2022-2024 NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap*, are you still working on that one or do you have a new plan?

PAUL O'REILLY: We're working with ALS, who is the CAPO rep responsible for justice partnership, on new strategies and continuing existing strategies to reduce overrepresentation towards target 11. Target 11 has been performing well at various times and poorly at various times.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can you just say what target 11 is?

PAUL O'REILLY: Target 11 is to reduce the number of juveniles in detention—Aboriginal people, young people, in detention. The justice partnership with ALS is about trying to make sure that everything in the youth justice system is geared towards responding effectively to Aboriginal children to reduce the chance of reoffending which would lead to them coming back into detention. The other part of that work is to prevent them coming in through work to support the provision of bail and prevent remand.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That was a special bail support and advocacy program that you're doing?

PAUL O'REILLY: That's one example of the work that we do together, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I see there it says that the accountable Minister and agency is the Attorney General and the Department of Communities and Justice. Is Youth Justice supposed to be in that cluster of departments?

PAUL O'REILLY: Originally, when that plan was developed, it was a different Government and the Minister for Youth Justice was part of a cluster.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It was under that cluster?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. And a lot of the work that impacts young people in our system occurs across the whole justice system so the portfolio of the Attorney General is always relevant.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: One of the other actions was enhanced community-led court diversion programs by establishing circles of support. Where are we up to with that? It said by 2023. Obviously we have a new Government.

PAUL O'REILLY: My team commissions a number of diversion programs, and the Minister this morning talked about the transfer of some of those programs to Aboriginal-led organisations, ACCOs. That is a critical component of this strategy, to divert Aboriginal people from the justice system. The community has told us, and I completely accept and agree, that Aboriginal people are generally best placed to lead those services for their community; they absolutely are. In terms of changing behaviour for young people and supporting them to not offend, a statutory agency like mine is often the least likely to be effective for a whole range of historic reasons. We have the Youth on Track program, which has been running since 2013. There are seven sites. We recommissioned that contract recently, following a funding extension. Across a number of those sites we replaced the provider with an ACCO. Now ACCOs are running most of those sites across the State.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Would that be happening in the New England, north-west area?

PAUL O'REILLY: No, the New England area is run by Centacare and the Riverina is run by Mission, but all of the other locations around the State are run by ACCOs.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You just recontracted, did you say?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: And they are for how long?

PAUL O'REILLY: Eighteen months.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Also, we heard about the Youth Offenders Act being reviewed. Here we see it's by 2024. Do you have any input into—

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. The Youth Offenders Act is administered by three Ministers: the Attorney General, the police Minister and the Minister for Youth Justice. The Act has been designed that way to divert young people. We have an input and a role and responsibility for part of the Act. Our part of the Act, and Minister Dib's part of the Act, is around Youth Justice conferencing. But the major part of the Act in relation to diversion, cautions and warnings and referrals to conferencing is with police. Because it's a multi-Minister Justice-based legislation, the review is being led by the Attorney General, and the next steps, as the Minister said this morning, to get it through the process need to be led by that portfolio.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You don't have a time line for that, though, do you?

PAUL O'REILLY: I don't, no. It's a decision for the Government.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: For the Government, yes. Okay.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thanks, everybody, for attending this afternoon. I may jump around a little bit, so forgive me. I might start with you, Mr O'Reilly, given you're there. Can I just pull up on one of those questions about the ACCOs stepping up into that space; that's great. What evaluation will be undertaken following that change?

PAUL O'REILLY: Youth on Track was by evaluated previously by BOCSAR, and so the next evaluation will be by BOCSAR again. One of the things that we have already done and we will continue to do with this new round is we work closely with Aboriginal communities around the design of the new implementation. Some aspects of the service model have changed to suit those communities. Similarly, the evaluation will need to be negotiated and designed with the community in mind and the community voices, but it absolutely must be evaluated and will be evaluated with the level of rigour that BOCSAR brings to all of its work. The measurement of effect size, in terms of measuring the effectiveness of criminal diversion programs, is always really difficult to pin down. It always has been, so there's always a lot of focus on making sure the evaluation is set up for success at the beginning. These early contract stages are where we start to get that right.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand that, and I understand the necessity to involve communities; I am very supportive of that. But there's also the necessity for independence in the evaluation. Is BOCSAR fulfilling that role of the independent evaluator?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I turn to the Working with Children Check? You, in your evidence earlier, spoke about it being managed more effectively. What did you mean by that and how?

PAUL O'REILLY: Did I?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: I don't recall that. Was that perhaps in response to the question about what we're doing to safeguard young people in custody?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I thought it was in relation to working with children, but why don't you answer both?

PAUL O'REILLY: Okay. I do remember the discussion about the Working with Children Check for the digital changes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: On digital, yes. I thought it was in relation to that, but that's okay. You can speak to—

PAUL O'REILLY: No, I don't manage the digital side of things. It's not our department.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In relation to the earlier aspect why don't you speak to that? I am just interested in how you say it has been managed more effectively and what's being undertaken.

PAUL O'REILLY: I don't have any comment on how it's being managed effectively through the digital process. Working with Children Checks is a critical part of our safeguards and has been since 2013. All of our staff are put through that process in recruitment and then they have to renew that every five years. We have processes for checking to make sure that that occurs.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure, but that doesn't, with respect, address the "managing more effectively". I am interested in why you had that emphasis. What steps have been taken to do that more effectively? It's a critical part of the step; it's not just ticking a box. It's obviously something that's critically important. I am just wondering—

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. I am not being argumentative, I promise.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, no, neither am I. It's not a trick—

PAUL O'REILLY: In my earlier answer, I don't remember focusing on the Working with Children Check.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure. Well, in relation to the youth aspect—youth in detention.

PAUL O'REILLY: Again, it's a critical part our system. People don't work in our system unless they have a Working with Children Check. It's a basic requirement for all of our staff and people who come in and run programs for us. It's what we rely on to check people's safety to work with kids and their criminal history, and it always has been since it was implemented.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might give you some time to think about your thoughts on how you say that's being managed more effectively in that space. It's not a trick question. I am just trying to understand what improvements, if any, have been made to that program. Can I just turn to—

PAUL O'REILLY: We don't control that program, by the way. It's the Children's Guardian who run that program.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That may be so, but I am interested in what improvements you were prompted to address when you raised that issue. Can I turn to a digital question—so I think it's a Service NSW-type question—about the AED Register. Who might be responsible for that?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Hello.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Hello. Thank you, Ms Christie. I was interested in the AED Register. It was obviously set up under the previous Government and a lifesaving program. Can you tell us what it costs to run that program annually?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I might have to come back to you on the specific cost of the AED Register—apologies.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No problem. Can I perhaps suggest that it might be around \$85,000 a year? Have there been any discussions about closing that platform?

LAURA CHRISTIE: There have been no decisions or indications about closing that platform. I can give you that number, if you just give me one moment.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just for the benefit of Hansard, that's the automated external defibrillator program. I think it is 85. But, in the meantime, given that 3,800 people, I'm informed, suffer a cardiac arrest each

year, 90 per cent of which can't be revived, it's obviously a critical program. Having an assessment of it and an ability to understand the maintenance of it is important. Can I ask if the department or the Minister's office have indicated whether that will continue to be funded?

LAURA CHRISTIE: We've had no discussions about ongoing funding of the AED Register.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I understand whether that is something you might raise, given the critical importance of it?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes. It's currently funded, as I understand it. So, yes, we will.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I understand if there have been meetings with advocates for the AED program, in particular Greg Page, the former Wiggle, an AED advocate whose life was saved by such a program—or that defibrillator, at least?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I'm not aware of any meetings with AED advocates myself.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I would be interested in whether that will continue to be funded. Can I coming back to Park'nPay? Are you also dealing with that, Ms Christie?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you very much. Can I ask what engagement has been held with councils, mayors, around that program?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes, sure. There was a round table that was held with councils and also the disability community—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will get to that.

LAURA CHRISTIE: —earlier this year, and there have been ongoing discussions with councils, who are users of Park'nPay on a regular basis.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's the outcome of those? Round tables are lovely and lots of discussions are lovely, but what is the outcome of the round table and what are the next steps?

LAURA CHRISTIE: We are preparing options for the Government's consideration on the future of Park'nPay, and the positions from councils and the disability community are informing those options.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's the time line for preparing those options and putting them to the Minister?

LAURA CHRISTIE: They are imminent. Those options are under consideration, so, yes, they will be with the Minister shortly.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In this quarter?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Before the second half of the year is over, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Given the budgetary process—budget bids—I would've thought that's a necessity. You mentioned the Physical Disability Council—so engagement has been undertaken with the council or with advocates?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes. I can get you a list of those attendees to the round table, if you would like. I can take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is that just the one round table or is that ongoing?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I couldn't talk to all of our engagements with various advocates and councils, but I could take that on notice and give you a sense of that, if that would be helpful.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. That would be helpful. It's obviously imperative to seek their views in the lead-up to a decision about whether to continue this program. Can I ask about the situation with parking sensors and the way in which they help someone with a disability, in the two minutes I have left? Can you perhaps take on notice how many parking sensors have been installed across Sydney? I'm sure that's something that's important. But also, how many are in disability parking places?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Will do.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand disability advocates have lost access to this data. Is that correct?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I would have to take that on notice. I'm not aware of that.

The Hon. WES FANG: I have some questions about Eugowra's flood recovery. I just wanted to address the fact that Eugowra locals have spent their second Christmas now without homes. The community consultation on the \$40 million housing program has only recently commenced. They're wondering what the timeline is. Can you provide some detail as to when people are going to be able to move back into homes?

SIMON DRAPER: I might call on my colleagues to help answer this, but that program—first of all, I would say that I understand the community leaders are very happy with where that is at. That is my understanding from talking to them. Part of that program is not so much about paying for people to move into homes; it may involve accelerating buybacks of homes that are at risk. In that sense it's not necessarily about fixing existing homes. If you want more detail on the exact timing, I should probably get Joanna.

The Hon. WES FANG: I have plenty of questions on the issue, so Joanna might be best to come to the table to provide a little bit more detail. I will start at the top. Obviously the community consultation is happening at the moment. When do you expect the findings might be released? Are they going to be released? What is the time frame around the completion of that project?

JOANNA QUILTY: We have kickstarted the year with the first meeting of the Central West community leaders forum, which is oversighting and guiding the \$100 million package that the New South Wales Government and the Federal Government have announced—a recovery and resilience package for these four local government areas that were so heavily impacted by the flooding events of late 2022. We have taken lessons—very much—from the Northern Rivers' experience, which tells us that it's very important to have those community leaders involved in the design of the program right from the word go, as well as having our partner agencies—Transport for NSW and Regional NSW—at the table from the word go as well, and to also really factor in community consultations. That's particularly important when it comes to the housing component—the \$40 million housing program that is a key part of this overall package.

That community consultation is very much about a listening exercise for our flood modelling experts and for our council engineers, as well as for the RA's own staff, to understand what the experience of community members was, what they are wanting to see and to really factor that into the design of this housing program, which is going to be very important to so many people. But also, it is a \$40 million program, so there will be limitations, and it's really important to manage community expectations in relation to that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes, but the question was around timelines.

JOANNA QUILTY: The time frame will be informed by the information that we're in the process of gathering, and we will then take that to the next community leaders forum and we will start working with them on an actual program of delivery. It's very much an iterative process and it is very much working in lock step with the community leaders—the mayors and the general managers of the councils—and taking into account community feedback.

The CHAIR: If you have further follow-up questions there will be plenty more time.

The Hon. WES FANG: I will ask when we return if there is actually a timeline.

The CHAIR: I might start with Mr O'Reilly. In the last session, the Minister suggested that you might have more to say on the replacement program for the Suspect Target Management Plan and your involvement in that and where you think it's going.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, only a little bit of information. It is a police-led program. They will design it and they will consult us on the process. That's where we're up to.

The CHAIR: You haven't been consulted on it yet?

PAUL O'REILLY: No, but they're very early on, apparently. When they're ready to, they will consult us and, I assume, other agencies as well.

The CHAIR: I noticed the website confirms that Youth Justice NSW has given funding to various NGOs. I wonder if you are able to provide any information around the services that are being funded and how many are funded within the last financial year.

PAUL O'REILLY: I can, absolutely. We fund a number, and I'll give you a list. We fund a program called A Place to Go, which is a service set up to try to prevent remand. There are two parts to that program. The Nepean Police Command works with young people that they pick up, and a team of social workers and other groups, to try to build bail plans that are going to be successful so they don't need to go into remand to support a police decision to grant bail. That includes connection with family and school et cetera. The other side of the

A Place To Go Program is a supported accommodation site run by an NGO and that is a really specialist-supported accommodation site. A lot of youth supported accommodation is not set up to deal with young offenders and they will be risk assessed out, but this one was designed specifically with that level of risk in mind. We have specialist people who run a model called a sanctuary model, which is designed to deal with risky behaviour, and they have access to Justice Health psychiatrists et cetera. That is one program, and that has been running for some years and has been evaluated.

We have the Bail and Accommodation Support Service, which used to be called the Bail Assistance Line. That provides support to people who are in the hands of police following an arrest and need accommodation. As police are making the bail decisions, they will contact our Bail and Accommodation Support Service and see if there are any options to accommodate the young person to support a bail decision. Sometimes the police will also just seek advice around accommodation options for kids, so that is a service that we run. The Broadmeadow Children's Court program is similar to A Place to Go, although it doesn't have an accommodation component. That is in Broadmeadow in the Hunter and that is an integrated case management model that works around the Children's Court in that town. It includes health assessments, education assessments, connection with school and connection with elders. Again, it is about bringing services around the young person to inform the best possible court decision for them.

The Casework Support Program we have been running for many years. It is a really important program and it provides welfare services for kids who are under community supervision. We have about 190 caseworkers who do community supervision. They are specialist caseworkers who focus on criminogenic intervention. That is what we want them to be doing. The other service is NGOs that do the other case work, which might be getting in to appointments, getting their driver's licence, getting their ID, getting bank accounts, connecting with family. My caseworkers focus on the criminogenic intervention to try and stop offending, so it is like dividing the casework into two different kinds of work. We have different NGOs in different parts of the State running that, and that is a critical part of our system. Some time ago Juvenile Justice decided to fund that to make sure that kids would have guaranteed access to that more welfare casework side of the business.

We have a domestic and family violence family therapy program that we run in some locations. A lot of the young people in our system—in fact a very large number of kids in our system—are both victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence. That requires a very specific kind of intervention, particularly for kids at that age. In addition to the in-house therapy that our therapists do, we also fund services to do some of that. We fund two rural rehabs for adolescents for alcohol and drug abuse. They are set up exclusively for our clients. It can be difficult to get access to rehabilitation in the regions, so we have funded one in Dubbo and one in Coffs Harbour for some years and we have a careful assessment prioritisation process to make sure the right kids are going in there. They might be engaging in that treatment after they are released, but they don't need to have been in detention, they just need to be a Youth Justice client.

We have the Safe Aboriginal Youth Program, which is often described as a night patrol program. That is in a few locations around the State. It is not a large program. We would seek to expand it at some point. That is about funding Aboriginal organisations to have a transport service to try to help young people get home or get somewhere safe and not be in places that are not safe, particularly in regional communities. We do have a small mentoring program at Frank Baxter that we fund an NGO to run and they provide really good individualised mentoring services for kids who are in Frank Baxter youth detention centre. That is a successful program and has been running for some time. We also have the Youth on Track program, which I described earlier, which is probably our most complex NGO-funded service for criminogenic intervention. They use similar cognitive behavioural therapy tools that our staff used to work with young people.

The CHAIR: I'm happy for you to take this on notice, but I was just wondering how much funding each one of those programs has received?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I can tell you that, absolutely. A Place to Go is \$2.91 million a year; the bail service is \$3.15 million a year; the Broadmeadows Children's Court is \$370,000 a year; the Casework Support Program is \$5.2 million; the DFV program is \$1.5 million; the rehabs—two rehabs—are \$3.7 million for the two; the Safe Aboriginal Youth Patrol program is \$1.1 million; the mentoring program is \$0.19 million; the Short-Term Remand Project, which I inadvertently skipped over but shall explain in a moment, is \$3.28 million; and Youth on Track is \$6.8 million. The Short-Term Remand Project is in Wagga and in Mascot police commands, and that's where we have a very carefully designed model, again, to support police with their bail decisions. One of the drivers behind bail decisions is, is there a suitable support plan to give the bail decision-maker confidence that the person will not offend?

In Wagga and Mascot we have this Short-Term Remand Project, which is a combination of accommodation, casework, intervention and working with community. The Minister referred to the Elders group

in Wagga this morning. That's part of that Short-Term Remand Project. It's different in each location. The police do a great job in those two programs because they have been willing to look at their bail processes and work with us to try to identify ways to improve it. That is a bit of a proof of concept, if you like, and if that is successful in the long term we would then consider with the rest of the system and talk to government about the potential for expansion. The early signs are encouraging. Already in Wagga, where we have a detention centre, we have seen a big reduction in remand numbers in that centre as a direct result of that program because the system comes together to support the bail process, but it needs to be organised, designed and funded to do that. That's what those two programs are trying to do.

The CHAIR: You predicted my next question, which was will the Short-Term Remand Project in Wagga Wagga be expanding?

PAUL O'REILLY: We would like to see it expand, but it's early days.

The CHAIR: Is it anticipated, do you know, if the amount of funding will actually increase in the next financial year, or are you looking at funding new NGOs going forward?

PAUL O'REILLY: Funding is a decision for government and ERC, obviously, not for me. But we believe in these programs and we evaluate them and support them.

The CHAIR: Are you proposing that further NGOs are funded, or is that outside of your—

PAUL O'REILLY: It's a decision for government really, not for me.

The CHAIR: I have some questions around emergency services, so I'll put these questions to the variety of commissioners we have. Thank you for your time today. At the last estimates the Minister mentioned that 700 firefighters will be trained in wildlife first aid. I would just like to ask a little bit more about this. I'm wondering if that training, to your knowledge, is optional or mandatory for firefighters?

ROB ROGERS: It was an optional thing for RFS firefighters. We gave the option for them to do it. I'm not sure if I have the numbers. Let me just check if I have the numbers.

The CHAIR: Of how many people took it up?

ROB ROGERS: Yes.

The CHAIR: That would be great.

ROB ROGERS: I'm not sure if I have the numbers on how many did it or whether I have the actual—

The CHAIR: While you are looking for that, as well, it would be interesting to know if you know who actually conducted the training. Was it someone external that was employed in for it?

ROB ROGERS: It was a wildlife first response course developed by the Department of Planning and Environment and the Taronga Conservation Society Australia. It aims to improve the coordination and capability for wildlife response and, particularly for our firefighters who are on the scene, they can maybe assess and provide better information for people like WIRES so that they can do that. The other thing that was done is there was some bushfire awareness training given to WIRES people themselves so that there was more confidence in allowing them into firegrounds earlier, so that they could look after animals earlier rather than waiting for the whole thing to be out, because obviously it's a bit time critical for them to be able to get their job done.

The CHAIR: If you could take on notice how many firefighters did take up that training, that would be useful.

ROB ROGERS: Yes, I will.

The CHAIR: I am wondering as well if there are any records of the number of yearly firefighter interactions with injured wildlife. Is that something that is recorded or kept?

ROB ROGERS: I will check. I don't think it is, to be honest, but I will check for you. If they've called for, say, WIRES to attend, then that probably would be recorded. But if they did it themselves, they knew WIRES—sometimes there are those connections locally that they might do it. It might not be a complete answer, but I'll see what I can find for you.

The CHAIR: If you could find out and then, whatever you do find out, if you're also able to provide those statistics based on the parameters of that as well, that would be great.

ROB ROGERS: Certainly.

The CHAIR: I assume, obviously, that there is a limit to the training or that at some point animals will need veterinary treatment. Are you aware of any collaborations between the RFS and wildlife veterinary services at all?

ROB ROGERS: Apart from what I just mentioned, it was certainly something that was quite a focus during the inquiry and was something where we've met several times with environmental representatives about the management of injured animals. It is something where we've got procedures in place now. I think that getting better awareness within the agency about those things was something critical for us, but I think it's probably fair to say that that shouldn't be just, "Tick. Job done". I think we need to continue to work towards providing a fulsome service to not only looking after people but obviously the environment and the flora and fauna.

The CHAIR: Where an animal is taken to a veterinary service, is it the veterinary service then that takes on that cost, or does the RFS assist with the cost of that? Do you know what that arrangement would be?

ROB ROGERS: No. It's normally not something—again, I'll just confirm that what I'm saying to you is correct, but my understanding is most of the time we do this with WIRES and then WIRES takes care of it from then on. That has certainly been our experience.

The CHAIR: Commissioner York, obviously this was in regard specifically to firefighting. I'm wondering if there has been anything similar for emergency training outside of fire in regard to wildlife care for floods or anything else.

CARLENE YORK: Not that I'm aware of. I know we do have experts in large animal rescue, which would bring in to some wildlife but certainly more directed at cattle, sheep, horses, things like that. Coincidentally, I'm meeting with the head of RSPCA in a couple of weeks to talk about how we can improve our communication. They do get called out through DPI as part of the emergency management structure. But they also want to talk about some of their close local relationships. We just want to make sure that it's streamlined and we're not duplicating. There are things in the wings, but we don't have the training like bushfire does.

The CHAIR: I also have a couple of questions about the new Marine Rescue NSW. Would that be to you, Commissioner York?

CARLENE YORK: No. They're a separate agency.

The CHAIR: Is there anybody else here that would be able to answer that?

ROB ROGERS: They're a non-government agency so they wouldn't be here.

The CHAIR: Maybe that would only be to the Minister.

ROB ROGERS: If you put it on notice, then I'm sure the Minister—

The CHAIR: I can put it on notice to the Minister directly. I just wanted to ask, around the recent fires, in a media statement regarding the fires in Cessnock and also Narrabri in late 2023, the Government said that freight subsidies for primary producers to help transport animals and food would be provided. Is that run in isolation by the DPI only, or is that something that other agencies have information on as well?

ROB ROGERS: I certainly don't have any. I don't know whether that's the Reconstruction Authority—

JOANNA QUILTY: I can say that those freight subsidies are available under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements that are in place with the Commonwealth and State governments. They are activated when a natural disaster declaration is made, as happened with that Cessnock fire. The freight subsidy provisions are category A provisions, which means they are stood up once that natural disaster declaration is made. They are administered not by the Reconstruction Authority but by another agency, and I am not sure if we have information—are you wanting to know the quantum of the subsidies?

The CHAIR: I was actually just wondering whether it was done by the DPI in isolation or whether other agencies had involvement in that as well.

JOANNA QUILTY: It is certainly under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

The CHAIR: I might put those questions on notice, if that's easier. I also have some questions around digital government in regard to AI. I'm not sure if Ms Christie might be the best one to answer it. I was just wondering what extent AI is currently used within the departments and if it's something that the Office of Digital Government is monitoring and auditing to identify any efficiencies but also any problems or pitfalls that may arise?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes, absolutely. AI is used extensively in the New South Wales Government in various New South Wales agencies. The role of Digital NSW is to look after the assurance framework that we

have for AI—the Department of Customer Service developed that. In 2019 we developed an AI strategy, an AI ethics policy, and an AI ethical assurance framework. That has been recently updated with the developments around generative AI. We are calling that the "assurance framework 2.0". We administer that in Digital NSW. We are also embedding that in the overall ICT assurance work that we do. Digital NSW assures every single ICT project over \$5 million and every project that's funded by the DRF. We're in the process of embedding that AI assurance framework within that ICT assurance framework to make sure—to your point—that we are understanding all the use cases of AI across the sector.

The CHAIR: Could I just also get an understanding of the key protections that are in place within the department to mitigate the privacy and security risks that have been highlighted around AI?

LAURA CHRISTIE: The privacy and security risks on the use of AI are the responsibility of the agencies who use AI in their day-to-day work. That responsibility lies with the departments themselves. We support them in understanding what those risks are through the AI assurance framework. We also issue guidelines for CIOs and other leaders of agencies, like chief operating officers, to understand how they can protect themselves and their people in using generative AI. We have released generative AI guidelines to help agencies use generative AI safely; cybersecurity AI guidelines as well to support safe—the privacy.

The CHAIR: Have there been any conditions that have been brought to your office to date or is there anything that has been flagged specifically?

LAURA CHRISTIE: My team has recently taken on responsibility for the AI assurance framework. Absolutely, the purpose of the AI assurance framework is to help agencies navigate these risks. So I am sure that, yes, risks would have been raised with the department more generally and worked through with the AI assurance team—sorry, board, which we have, who are experts in AI, who help people work through those risks.

The CHAIR: You mentioned that you provide a support system. Can you detail some of the ways that you are working to support those agencies?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I think I have outlined a couple of the guidance that we have issued for people—so basic prompt guidance, "This is how you use AI." As I said, cybersecurity guidelines, how you use generative AI—so the big, large language models like ChatGPT and LLaMA—and how you use that safely in a government environment. That's some examples, as well as administering the AI assurance framework more generally and embedding that into how we assure all ICT projects.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Sorry, did you have something else to say?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I just wanted to add—take those questions that I took on notice for Ms Ward. The AED register—you were right. It's 87,000 per year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm sorry, could you say that again?

LAURA CHRISTIE: It's 87,000 per year. To your question about whether it's an ongoing budget, that's currently—given that the majority of those costs are platform costs that Government Technology Platforms administers, there's no specific line item for the AED register, but it's covered in our other platform costs.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might come back in our time to follow up on that.

The CHAIR: We'll now go to Opposition questions.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm just going to return back to the Eugowra flood recovery issues that I was discussing earlier. I was trying to find out around the community consultation when it might be completed. It seemed to me as if it's an open-ended process. Would that be a fair description, Mr Draper?

SIMON DRAPER: I will jump in with Ms Quilty in a moment. I will say it may be true to say that the timetable in the process is going to be directed by those community leaders. That, I think, is now—we've very much established that is good practice. We made, I think, honestly, a mistake in the Northern Rivers by declaring some artificial time lines for implementing the Resilient Homes Program. That, I think, was the root cause of some errors in the Northern Rivers and created a lot of anxiety in the community. I think we're now advancing quite well in that program in a number of respects, not just in the raw figures but in the way that it's being implemented. But perhaps most importantly, the leadership of the Community Leaders Forum, which we've established there with the seven mayors and, I think, four members of Parliament, is a fundamental change in the way those programs are run. We are repeating that process in the Central West. That's a slightly long way of answering a question but, yes, there's a timetable for it. Everybody involved has a sense of urgency and wanting to expedite the process, but they also know that's a very disruptive process and that we have to work at the pace the community wants to work at. With that, I don't know if Ms Quilty wants to add anything.

JOANNA QUILTY: Just to say that community engagement and consultation will be an ongoing part of the program. It wasn't a one-off exercise, the consultations that we undertook last week. We very much need to go at the community's pace and keep them very involved in the program, seeking their input but also providing them with information and updates as the program rolls out.

The Hon. WES FANG: I accept what both of you have said, but I think certainly some of the feedback to us is that people are wanting some concrete decisions and understanding of when they might be able to move back into residences. When can residents expect to—

SIMON DRAPER: I should say, though, Mr Fang, that a lot of people have moved back into residences. We've had pods on properties and reconstruction of homes. Many people have moved back.

The Hon. WES FANG: What we're talking, though, is those displaced residents who aren't back in a residence permanently. In that respect, when can we expect construction or buybacks to commence in Eugowra?

JOANNA QUILTY: We want to be able to provide that certainty and give people a time frame, but we need to get the design of the program right, and that's what we're going through the process with the Community Leaders Forum to do. Once we have that design right then we will start to put in place a time frame and to be able to give people those time lines.

The Hon. WES FANG: You've sort of answered the next—

SIMON DRAPER: Sorry, just to add. I think, as I said earlier, it's important to understand that part of that program is not necessarily about getting people back into the same homes. There have been programs to financially support people to rebuild and to repair their homes and provide them with temporary accommodation while they did that. That's that part of the program. What the community out there was asking for last year was support in rebuilding community assets, road resilience, potentially supporting acceleration of buybacks, which is what that part of the program is about that you were referring to.

The Hon. WES FANG: The next question I had was whether there was an anticipated time line, but it doesn't seem like that's anywhere that the community can have any certainty in.

SIMON DRAPER: Maybe as a guide, the events that happened in Eugowra were about nine months after the Northern Rivers. The Northern Rivers program has really started to hit its straps in the last, I would say, four months, five months. That gives you a sense of how long it can take to work through those things and get community agreement. Like I said, I think we've established this process in a much better way than we did in the Northern Rivers because we've got the community leaders involved from the very beginning. I don't think we should pretend—

The Hon. WES FANG: Will that speed up or slow down the process, do you think?

SIMON DRAPER: I think it potentially helps it move along more quickly. It helps decision-making be made more confidently. But I don't think we should create an expectation that these types of recoveries happen quickly. That's been one of the big lessons the Reconstruction Authority has taken from the Northern Rivers: Trying to force this to happen more quickly than the community is ready for is one of the fundamental errors you can make.

The Hon. WES FANG: I appreciate that, but I guess if I'm going to extrapolate the logic that you've just provided, the Eugowra events, as you said, happened around nine months after the Northern Rivers. You said that in the last five months or so the Northern Rivers reconstruction effort has hit its straps, to use your term.

SIMON DRAPER: The buyback program, yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: That would mean that we would be looking at the hitting of the straps, shall we say, in Eugowra in about four months time. Would that be a reasonable time frame?

SIMON DRAPER: I'm not going to—having warned about—

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm just extrapolating the data you provided.

SIMON DRAPER: Sure. You can extrapolate, but I think we've got to be led by the mayors, the MPs and the other community leaders out there.

The Hon. WES FANG: How confident are you that the \$40 million allocated will be adequate to complete the program?

SIMON DRAPER: I think we're pretty confident because the scale in the—that was built on the information that we had available from the Central West. These things are somewhat driven by—you establish an amount of money, you prioritise, you work through those at the highest priority first and then you see where you

end up at. Some \$40 million for the number of homes that we're taking about in the Central West is a pretty reasonable estimate but we will work through the program. There is a lot of work being done to establish how broad a scope that program should be and we'll have to reassess—

The Hon. WES FANG: Is it limited by funds, do you think?

SIMON DRAPER: Ultimately, everything is limited by funds.

The Hon. WES FANG: I appreciate that—and the longer the consultation and the longer the process goes, the more funds are eaten up in the process and not the actual production.

SIMON DRAPER: No, that's not happening. That's not the case. The funds there are there for that purpose. None of those funds are being expended while the community has a say.

The Hon. WES FANG: But inflation continues to increase. The cost of building continues to increase. The cost of labour continues to increase. Materials are harder to find—

SIMON DRAPER: As I've said to you, this is not—you may be mistaken about the purpose of the program. The purpose of the program is not all about rebuilding. Part of it is about buying back homes.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, I appreciate that, but it's a mix. That's where, I guess, there's an allocated amount of funds but there's no time line. There are people who are still outside of their homes. Mr Draper, how confident are you that the residents of Eugowra who are still displaced are going to be in their homes or a permanent residence that they can call home by next Christmas?

SIMON DRAPER: Once again, Mr Fang, I think you've misunderstood the purpose of that program. This program is in large part oriented towards buying back homes that are at risk. It's not all focused around rebuilding homes for people that are displaced—

The Hon. WES FANG: But until those houses are bought—

SIMON DRAPER: For the large part, the people who have been displaced or had their homes damaged have already received that support.

The Hon. WES FANG: But for those people that are waiting for that buyback or that assistance so that they can actually make plans for their future, they want to know when they're going to have a concrete answer. At the moment, from what I'm hearing, there are a lot of great programs that are underway, but for the residents of Eugowra and the people that want to know that they'll have a permanent home, the time line seems to be exponentially off in the distance.

SIMON DRAPER: I think we've covered this. We've talked about it quite a lot in the last 10 minutes or so.

The Hon. WES FANG: I appreciate that.

SIMON DRAPER: The timetable of the program is going to be driven by the community leaders who have advocated for those residents very strongly. We've got teams out there who work every day with those residents, who well and truly understood the needs. We are working with those community leaders to push it along as quickly as we can.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm going to ask my last question before I hand over to one of my colleagues. It's sort of a tangential link, but a question I'm desperate to ask you, Mr Draper. Obviously, today part of covering the estimates process—and there have been a number of media articles in relation to the questions I've asked the Minister. Not that I'd know, because our media summaries haven't been delivered, so tangentially I'm linking it to the estimates process here. When are we going to get our media summaries back?

SIMON DRAPER: We did get that question. I think it was at the end of the Premier's—another committee.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes, and it wasn't answered then either.

SIMON DRAPER: Well, I think a pretty good answer was provided. I think we'd offered time to get more information on notice, but the background is that the contract that provided the service of parliamentarians was never linked to the contract that we had in place for government.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yet they disappeared at the same time.

SIMON DRAPER: Yes, that's right. So when the service providers changed over, the previous service provider who had been providing that service—not under our contract, but they stopped providing it to

parliamentarians, as I understand it. Anyway, we've agreed to on notice provide more information about that and provide support. I understand the needs. I think it was raised by the Hon. Sarah Mitchell the other day.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes.

SIMON DRAPER: We've offered to provide some more information and support that process as much as we can.

The Hon. WES FANG: Can we just get our media summaries back? You're probably getting them. As parliamentarians, we need them, and it's now been three months. That's not an answer. I noted the nodding. I will indicate that you nodded, for Hansard.

SIMON DRAPER: The answer was that we will take it on notice. We've already agreed to do that, having discussed it with another committee.

The Hon. WES FANG: That's 21 days, so that will be four months since we've had media summaries. You're also heading up the Premier's department, and the Premier's department is getting their media summaries but we're not. Anyway, I'll leave that there and hand over.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might follow up on that, Mr Draper, if I may. It would be, I think, imperative that we do have media summaries. It's always been the case in this Parliament that all MPs have had those made available.

SIMON DRAPER: But they—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If I can finish, the media summaries at the moment are bereft. It would be very helpful if that could be implemented as soon as possible.

SIMON DRAPER: We've undertaken to have a look at it.

The Hon. WES FANG: You've just got to press "forward".

SIMON DRAPER: But, to be clear, the service that we have contracted for is to provide a media service to the Government, not to Parliament.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes, but you should have contracted it for us as well.

SIMON DRAPER: Well, no. The Premier's department is not a service provider for the Parliament. There's a parliamentary services organisation. That organisation is there to provide services to parliamentarians, and quite rightly. But let's not get the two confused. We understand the need. So if there's something that Parliament needs to do to support the members of the LC or the LA, then absolutely we'll work with them to receive it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Mr Draper. That's helpful. I think it is the case, though, that that has been in place for a long time, certainly under the previous Government. Why it seems to have changed overnight is a mystery to all of us. The media is something that everyone in this building is interested in. I would've thought that's something that would be bipartisan, but I'll leave it there. Can I turn to—and apologies, I don't know who the subject matter expert is—artificial intelligence? Perhaps through you, Mr Secretary, you might direct that.

GRAEME HEAD: Yes, or you can have Ms Christie back at the table.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Head and Ms Christie, turning back to AI and the Auditor General's report, could you update me on what preparation has been done for the Auditor General's report?

GRAEME HEAD: Is this the report you were referring to this morning?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Auditor General's review into AI, yes.

GRAEME HEAD: The prospective review?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. What preparation work is being done?

GRAEME HEAD: I did have a query about that because you read from terms of reference this morning, which, as I understand it—well, the language used in the discussion this morning is somewhat different from my understanding of what's described.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That may be so, but the question from me, Mr Head, is: What preparation is being done by the department into the Auditor General's review into AI?

GRAEME HEAD: The audit is on the forward program, as I understand it. It's described on the Audit Office's website. When the audit itself is initiated, the Audit Office would communicate formally with department heads and agency heads to discuss the scope of the audit and how they're expecting the agencies that they choose to involve in that process. I checked quickly at lunchtime. I am not aware that we have received any such correspondence at this stage, but I will take it on notice to ensure that we give you an accurate response.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, but it would be fair to assume that you would be part of that audit, as the Department of Customer Service. I would have thought that you can't make the assumption that you won't be.

GRAEME HEAD: No, I would never make the assumption that I won't be, but I would also not make the assumption automatically that the Auditor-General will—I mean, obviously, we have a policy role, but we have not been communicated with by the Auditor-General at this stage.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No steps have been taken by the department? It's not a trick question.

GRAEME HEAD: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No steps have been taken by the Department of Customer Service and Digital Government to prepare for or, in any way, do any work towards the Auditor-General's review into AI?

GRAEME HEAD: No, I don't think that's a fair characterisation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Tell me how it is then.

GRAEME HEAD: Ms Christie has been outlining an array of work that the department is doing in this space, all of which, based on what is described on the Audit Office's website, will be relevant if or when that audit commences. It is standard practice with a performance audit that the Audit Office initiates the contact with agencies with the detailed scope of their work—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand the process, thank you—hence my question. There has been a lot of talk about AI, a lot about what the department is doing and Ms Christie is very capably doing. It wasn't a trick question about what you're doing to prepare for an audit that you're on notice is coming up and is highly likely to involve this department. Ms Christie, can you add anything to that?

LAURA CHRISTIE: As the secretary has outlined, I too haven't been formally notified of this audit, but we will obviously, if we're within the terms of reference, absolutely cooperate and provide whatever the Auditor-General needs in this space.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Does the department share the view of the Minister that artificial intelligence will not be used to identify cost-cutting opportunities as set out in the terms of reference of the Auditor-General?

GRAEME HEAD: We haven't seen terms of reference for the audit at this stage, so I can't really comment on the terms of reference for the audits since they have not been provided to me. But I expect that, when the Audit Office formally notifies us, they will provide terms of reference and the department would comment on those things that are proper matters for the department to comment on as part of that process. The description on the Audit Office website doesn't have that particular construction in it as far as I can tell but, as I've said, we have not received terms of reference, as I understand it, or the audit hasn't been officially initiated with us at this stage.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Given that we've talked about that—we're very clear that you haven't received the terms of reference so we don't need to go there again—can I ask this: Do you have a view, as secretary of the department, about AI and its potential, or the opportunities for cost cutting in your department?

GRAEME HEAD: As was discussed this morning, AI is going to be transformative. It's already ubiquitous. I am old enough to have lived through a number of technological revolutions and there are often views at the early stages of those processes about impacts that turn out to be somewhat different through the lived experience, but I think that everybody expects that AI will be a significant disruptive development and that it will provide very valuable additional functionality for a whole range of programs. It will have impacts on things such as workforce capability and design, but it's not really for me to speculate at the front end of an audit that hasn't commenced.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Head, I'm going to redirect you, so just park the audit. I'm asking whether you, as secretary of the department, have the view, given the role of your department and your obvious understanding about AI, about the opportunities for cost cutting within your department.

GRAEME HEAD: I don't think I've really got anything to add to what I've already said. Obviously new technologies, whenever they're considered, are considered in terms of improving business processes, the efficiency

of those processes, which can relieve people from work and allow them to be redeployed to other more complex work. I mean I think that that has been the history of technological development.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's not a trick question. It is obvious that if there are efficiencies to be made, they may cut costs and they may lead to efficiencies in terms of the budget or cost cutting as a result, isn't it?

GRAEME HEAD: Yes, I've just said that with technological development there are often improvements in efficiency as well as effectiveness. It will depend on the different use cases for AI.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Indeed, this is evidenced by other global jurisdictions and other experiences in other jurisdictions where AI has dramatically changed the workforce and the make-up of departments such as yours. That's correct, isn't it?

GRAEME HEAD: I haven't done a jurisdictional comparison in the 12 weeks that I've been in the job, so I can't really—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not asking you if you've done a jurisdictional comparison; I'm asking of your general knowledge, as a secretary holding your role, if you're aware that AI has had some dramatic impacts on other workforces. It's not something that's grey, is it?

GRAEME HEAD: No, but as a general proposition I see all of the information that's—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you think that it won't? Let me try it the other way. Do you think it will have no impact whatsoever? Starting from no impact through to some dramatic impact, somewhere in the middle there is going to be impact to the workforce, isn't there?

GRAEME HEAD: I think when I started the answer I said it's a major disruptive development and it will have impacts on workforce design and workforce capability. I have indicated that efficiency and effectiveness will be captured in all of that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll come back to it, but I'm interested in your planning for that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm going to come back to Commissioner Rogers. Last estimates I was advised of fire trail upgrade and maintenance work that was conducted over the 2022-23 period, including the investment figures by the State Government and National Parks and Wildlife Service as well as where trails were upgraded. Can I get an update on where that's up to for 2023-24?

ROB ROGERS: There is a fair bit of info on fire trails. Is it okay if I give you that on notice?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Absolutely.

ROB ROGERS: I can read through a fair bit of stuff, but there is—

Dr AMANDA COHN: No, that's all right. If you've got it to—

ROB ROGERS: I do. There are quite a number of trails that there is work on in different areas and different money being spent. If you're happy, I'll give you that on notice.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I have a couple of specific questions. I understand that there is a statewide strategic perspective to prioritising that work, but what consultation do you do with local stakeholders as well?

ROB ROGERS: The strategic nature of the fire trail program is the ones that are classified as strategic are done from the local area. That's the local bushfire management committee that has the fire agencies, has local government, farming reps, it has NCC—it has all the key reps in the local area—and the councils. They work out what trails are strategic and which ones are more tactical. Our priority obviously on the work is on those ones that are strategic and can be used either to contain fires or access areas that have a really high likelihood for lightning ignitions. That's the nature of that. There is a lot of consultation locally. Indeed, the decisions are made locally and then they are conveyed to us.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I just had one particular example to try to understand this better. I've heard that because of a landslide near Bellingen, the shortcut fire trail has been rendered inaccessible to emergency services. The local community sees that as crucial for both flood and fire access to the nearby valley, which only has one road in and out otherwise. The local council has costed that at less than \$10,000 to fix, which really seems astonishingly cheap for this level of work, but I understand it hasn't been done yet. What specific support can be offered when there are these really very localised, short-term priorities while that broader strategy is being rolled out?

ROB ROGERS: Again, it really depends on what the classification of the fire trail is that you're talking about. I would have to look into the particular one, what it is classified as and have we had any request for funding for it. But, in theory, if it's not a deemed strategic fire trail by the local bushfire management committee, then it's not to say that it wouldn't get funding, but it's more unlikely for us to give funding, because our priority has to be to those trails that people deem are really important for that local area. Now, how they do the consultation locally, I would have to look at the particular one. I'm not trying to be evasive.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Are you able to take that specific one on notice as well as that broader list?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, absolutely. I just don't know the details of that one, I'm sorry.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Moving onto back-burns, which my colleague the Hon. Emma Hurst raised this morning, my understanding is that the University of Wollongong was commissioned to carry out research into back-burning as recommended by the 2020 bushfire inquiry. The latest progress report states:

The NSW Bushfire and Natural Hazards Research Centre ... is conducting an evaluation of backburning and firebreak operations to build guidance for assessing risks associated with future backburns.

Will that research be utilised to inform the revision of the operational protocols that were released in 2021?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, of course. Whenever there is new research carried out and new guidance that becomes useful, then of course we would look at it. I think it's important to contextualise back-burning operations. Indeed, even in the coronial inquiries that are still underway, it was actually even accepted by expert witnesses of the court—not just RFS—that back-burning was a critical method in containing fires. Of the more than a thousand back-burns that were done in that 2019-20 fire season, less than 4 per cent of them escaped. In saying that, it's not an exact science. I mean, you're introducing fire at not necessarily the ideal time, but it's a balancing act between what the fire could do and what you're trying to prevent it from doing.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Absolutely. My specific question is just about this research that I understand has been funded and is underway. I appreciate your comment that it will be taken into account. Is there a time line for a revision of those operational protocols to be able to take into account that new research?

ROB ROGERS: Let me just see if I've got something in my notes about back-burns. No, I don't have specific on that research. I'll have to take that on notice if I can please.

Dr AMANDA COHN: While you're taking that on notice, I expect this one will be as well, which is how much funding was put towards the University of Wollongong research and how much is now going towards that further research by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Research Centre.

ROB ROGERS: I will take that on notice, because I'm not sure that that's RFS funding versus more general government funding. I'll have to just check that out for you.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I understand that Fire and Rescue NSW uses establishment numbers that are designed to ensure that stations are adequately staffed. Does the current number of active firefighters match the establishment numbers?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: No, there is some discrepancy. In some places it goes over and in some places it goes under. In some of our retained stations we'll have establishment numbers but not have a full crew in place because of challenges we've had around recruitment. That remains an ongoing focus for us—to fill those. We're more than happy to fill all the places we've got available. Then in other locations we will have some extras, particularly in relation to our permanent firefighters. It gives us somewhat of a buffer to ensure that, as people exit the organisation, we're avoiding being caught short and there's not a long lead time before people can be brought back in to replace those that have left.

Dr AMANDA COHN: When you look at it overall across the State, my understanding is there is a current shortfall of active firefighters, hence the recruitment that we were talking about this morning. Would I be right in understanding that we're below establishment numbers, on average?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Certainly for our retained firefighters, we're in the vicinity of about over 500 short of what the establishment is. Then, for our permanent firefighters, we've got an establishment for 2022-23 of 3,472. We've got a headcount of 3,605.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I think we discussed at the previous estimates the overtime bill being over budget. Is the shortfall of active firefighters contributing to that?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, in part.

Dr AMANDA COHN: How are you addressing it?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: As I said, from a retained firefighter shortage perspective, there is a big body of work going on with recruitment for particularly retained in regional areas—a range of activities to attract but also to retain the people—and then, from a permanent perspective, there's a range of measures being implemented with much closer managerial oversight and scrutiny around attendance, trying to increase the availability and attendance of permanent staff. Focused on reducing inappropriate use of leave, an attendance management policy is being applied, as well as looking at our staffing distribution. We've been increasing the number of specialist qualifications and promotional ranks that were trained up, so we've increased the throughput, particularly for our station officers, to reduce shortages at that rank, which was a key rank, increasing over time.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I have one last question, which is about the asbestos mulch crisis. I understand that the hazmat capabilities of Fire and Rescue are very relevant to some of that work. When were you contacted by the environment Minister or the EPA to assist?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: At the point of the taskforce that was being established, we were contacted in the initial phases of that and were part of the initial taskforce meetings.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Given I've got another 10 minutes, I'll come back to Commissioner Rogers. I understand that some researchers have raised concerns about availability of data relating to aerial bushfire suppression in terms of being able to inform their research and evaluating that and making recommendations moving forward. Is anything being done to improve record keeping, or even if you can explain what kind of data is collected?

ROB ROGERS: This is about the effectiveness of aerial firefighting?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Yes, aerial suppression.

ROB ROGERS: Very much it's tracked, because we track the aircraft, but it keeps where we make drops and how much we drop on fires and at what time. I'm not sure what other data is needed. Certainly it's an active area, though. Indeed, the national body is coordinating a project to evaluate the effectiveness of aerial firefighting, so there is work going on. There has been work done previously. I'm not quite sure what specific data is being requested, if we haven't provided it.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I can be more specific, if that helps. The Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre is recommending that fire management agencies should create an evaluation database that summarises objectives, outcomes, the number and type of aircraft, drops, type and litres, and ancillary observations such as weather, resources available et cetera. It sounds from your answer that that information exists or that it's kept in your databases. Is the issue, therefore, about the availability of that data for independent research?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, and it wouldn't be in one particular system. There are probably about three or four different systems that data would be in because you've got the strategies that are being employed, which are kept in a system, and the deployment of the actual aircraft and the tracking of that aircraft in a different system. I think we would be able to make data available. I think we just need to understand exactly what's needed. Are you suggesting they've asked us for data and we haven't given it?

Dr AMANDA COHN: I can't speak to whether they had contacted you directly or not, but they were recommending that these databases existed and be either made public or made available on request for research purposes.

ROB ROGERS: If I can get some more detail of what they are looking for, I'm happy to try and give you an answer on that on notice.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Thanks very much. I understand there was a review initiated in 2021 into some complaints by RFS volunteers and staff of bullying and harassment. Could you provide an update on that review?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, certainly. Following that—and I won't go over all of the details, which I did previously, of the concerns—I certainly became concerned about the fact that we were having some people that had the view that they weren't being looked after, and in some of the incidents that I became aware of I don't believe people were treated fairly. In particular, some victims of sexual harassment. That obviously causes a level of concern, particularly where you've got female members who might be in a smaller number in brigades. We've got to put in place measures to ensure that we support them as best we can.

We've done a complete review into that system. Indeed, we've got a lady, Dr Joy Townsend, who helped the military with some of these same issues. She's a brigade member who's been involved in this, putting it together and talking to our members. We've now got a new system ready to go. It'll launch in May this year. We've just had a little bit of time needed to train up our staff to make sure that they're ready to support this, but it basically

will provide phone support for people. If they want to lodge a complaint, it'll give them advice—independent advice of RFS—that they can ring up and get some advice, making sure we give them support throughout the process.

I think something like our discipline and grievance system was developed more than 20 years ago and it shows. That's why I think we have to update it. This year we will be launching this new system that I believe will be a lot better for people and a lot fairer for everybody that are involved. Also, part of the problem is about the delay and how long it's taken to get some of these things resolved. We want to try and put some time frames on it and make sure that we're keeping in touch with everyone. When people don't hear something about those sort of things, they start to think there's nothing happening. I accept we need to do better in that regard.

Dr AMANDA COHN: It's good to hear that there is some progress being made there.

ROB ROGERS: Yes, absolutely.

Dr AMANDA COHN: What are your plans in monitoring and evaluation moving forward?

ROB ROGERS: Part of this is also about, I guess, databases—keeping data on what happens and the time frames. As we do with almost all programs, once we've rolled them out then after, say, 12 months, we will go back and do a bit of a review. Part of that review will be talking to people who've needed to use that service to find out how they found it and whether we were meeting the objectives that we wanted to do. We will absolutely go back and re-look at that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Coming back to Fire and Rescue—sorry, I should have put these in a better order—I understand that Fire and Rescue invested in several Dodge Ram vehicles following the 2022 flood inquiry. Are those vehicles being used?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Those vehicles are still in the process of commissioning. That's all on track in terms of our delivery—of meeting what we said we would meet with the flood inquiry and funding that came from that. They're in the process of configuring the vehicles, working out the stowage arrangements and then the construction and installation of those. Once they're completed then they'll be in service—before the end of the financial year, from my understanding.

Dr AMANDA COHN: For a new type of vehicle being introduced in the fleet like that, what kind of consultation actually happens with the end users?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: A lot of that work has all been done by the people who are the end users of that, the flood rescue technicians. They've played a key role in shaping and guiding the design, the configuration and the type of vehicle they need. The previous vehicles we were using were way too small for them. They're in those vehicles for, sometimes, the best part of 24 hours when they're in the middle of flood rescue operations. To have the space but also to have a slightly larger vehicle to be able to navigate some of the conditions they have to deal with on the road was what they were seeking. In addition to that, obviously there's the normal sort of health and safety type overviews and assessments, but it was very much driven by the feedback from our flood rescue technicians.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I think I'm coming back to RFS now. Last month was the third anniversary of the C-130 Hercules crash that resulted in the deaths of three US crew members who were assisting in aerial firefighting in the Snowy Mountains. Bowdie McBeth, the widow of the pilot, said on social media that she's been blocked on social media. It wasn't clear whether that was referring to the RFS; I'm just giving you context for why I'm asking. Have you been in contact?

ROB ROGERS: I haven't seen them since they were here. Certainly when they were here I had involvement. I don't know who's blocked them. It certainly wouldn't be us. We will remain ready to support them however we can. There's no concern with the families. They still keep in very close contact with our local brigade down there, who was the first on scene brigade. I know from my time visiting that brigade down there, they keep in close contact with most of the families. My understanding is that that relationship is still there, and there's certainly no problem from us. That matter is still subject to the coroner at the moment, but I'd expect over the next couple of months that there will be a finding on that also.

The Hon. WES FANG: It would've been the fourth anniversary, wouldn't it?

Dr AMANDA COHN: With increasing bushfire risks surrounding the communities of Mount Gilead and west Appin, are there going to be additional resources allocated to that area? That question is to both commissioners.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: That's one of those areas in the growth parts of Greater Sydney. Fire and Rescue and RFS are working very closely across all of those. We've got a particular area of focus with the aerotropolis,

but it's not too far down the road to get to that Gilead-Appin area. We're continually reviewing the fire district boundaries and our teams are working closer than ever to look at what those transitional triggers are, getting ahead of the game. What we will be doing in some of those areas is identifying agreed variation zones. This all forms work as part of the subcommittee sitting under the Fire Services Joint Standing Committee, particularly the one that looks at fire district boundaries. There's a whole formal process about gazetting those boundaries and going to the Executive Council and getting appropriate endorsements all the way through for that. But, as much as possible, that work is done at the local level. Our local commanders will meet with the RFS local commanders, look at what development is going to occur, the time line on that, and at an appropriate time agree that a certain level of development would warrant a different type of service delivery.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I just have a quick follow-up. When those boundaries change, I'm specifically interested in that relationship between resourcing. Does that then mean resources become automatically allocated or is that a separate process?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Part of our future planning is we're identifying these areas in advance. Our senior planner works closely with his colleagues and counterparts from the department of planning, understanding where the development is going. So we're putting that out on our future developments for new stations. Then our responsibility is to sequence it to be ready around the time that the identified transition is likely to occur.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Mr O'Reilly, again, if I can focus on Youth Justice conferencing. How many conference administrators are there in New South Wales?

PAUL O'REILLY: I'd have to get back to you on that exact number. We have them all over the place.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do they try and correlate that with the number of officers—so one per area?

PAUL O'REILLY: They recruit periodically based on the demand and the forecast demand. The demand is driven by two things: police command referring young people and courts referring young people. One of the things that our staff do is work closely with police commands—who often experience staff turnover—to educate them on the purpose of the conferences and encourage referrals, and the court. In each area there's normally a senior person responsible for coordinating the conference and their job is also to manage the demand and the forecasting, and then it flows to the recruitment. So you would have multiple conveners connected to each office.

The CHAIR: The Committee will now break for afternoon tea for 15 minutes. We'll be back at 3.45 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We will start with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll just follow on, with the focus on Youth Justice conferencing. You said some areas don't have them at the moment because it would depend on whether they have—

PAUL O'REILLY: No, they do have them, but the numbers vary, depending on the level of referrals.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: And they're referred from either the police or the magistrate?

PAUL O'REILLY: The Children's Court, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can you provide a break-up with rural and regional Youth Justice conferencing, whether they successfully use the program?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. Do you want me to tell you where the areas are?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, please.

PAUL O'REILLY: Sure. There are 17 areas. In the metro we have Sydney, which is based in Surry Hills but covers quite a large eastern Sydney footprint; Ashfield; Parramatta; Blacktown; Penrith; and Campbelltown. They're the offices that have a zone, if you like, for managing all Youth Justice matters. That might be court work or it might be supervision, and it certainly is conferencing. Those teams in the city have the job of making sure they've got a good supply of conveners who are trained and supported to do that work. Then the case workers in those offices do the case work to facilitate the administrative process, I guess, of the conference, and it's the convener who does the facilitation around the group.

In the non-metro areas, we have Wollongong, Nowra, Queanbeyan, and a very small office in Bega. We have Wagga, and then we have Dubbo, Orange and Bathurst, and Bourke and Broken Hill. Then on the north side we have Gosford, Newcastle and Maitland, and then we go up through New England, Armidale and Tamworth,

up to Moree. Then we have Kempsey, Coffs Harbour, Lismore and Tweed Heads. Each of those teams do that work.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do they report how many conferences—because there's the referral process to start with.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Then there's the actual conferences. Just because they're referred, it doesn't mean a conference takes place, does it?

PAUL O'REILLY: That's absolutely correct, yes. I've just got something here to share with you on that, I believe, somewhere. Just bear with me. We have 843 of the—with each conference, there's an outcome plan that's negotiated between the convenor, the young person, the victim of crime and police and anyone else who's there. They negotiate an outcome plan, and at the end of the outcome plan we know if it has been successful or not. There were 843 out of the 849 outcomes plans last year that were agreed on and approved, and 91 per cent of them were completed.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Following on from, say, a Youth Justice conference where you've had a participant, do you then follow to see the rates of recidivism or reoffending?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we do.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can you give me a breakdown on that?

PAUL O'REILLY: Absolutely. Youth Justice conferencing is one of our three main statutory interventions. The reoffending rates vary for each of those three, and it's probably the one with the most effective—or the lowest reoffending rate. But it's important to note that the types of offences that are eligible for Youth Justice conferencing are different to the types of offences that end up with a sentence to custody. I will just get you my comprehensive—so with Youth Justice conferencing in a twelve—and reoffending is measured over a 12-month period. The most recent figures we have, the measurement starts in June 2022—so Youth Justice conferencing in the period up to June 2022. Out of that period, 64.6 per cent of people who did a youth conference in that period, 64.6 had no more contact with the justice system following year so far, whereas for other interventions, it's not quite—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Not quite as high as that.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But then you said that the offences that are eligible for referral aren't as high as some—

PAUL O'REILLY: Broadly speaking, yes, they are different kinds of offences.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In the regions, has an audit taken place of the different areas to see which areas are utilising—

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, absolutely. I can dig that out for you now or through the course of the hearing, absolutely. We have an information management system where all our data goes, and the referrals, the completions and the outcomes are all recorded in there. They are mapped to each location.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is that publicly available?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, versions of it is, once it's completed and cleansed and corrected. Absolutely, that should be public information. Again, the volumes differ depending on what's happened in the area. It's driven by the level of offending and then the level of referrals—those two factors.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The young people who are participating in Youth Justice, are they getting younger or is the cohort remaining the same? I'm just thinking, if the success is, say, 60 per cent and we are getting them at the lower end of the offence scale, then perhaps we could be utilising it more in the regions.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I agree. We absolutely need to be using Youth Justice conferencing more. We believe it's a really effective tool. Other jurisdictions use restorative justice. Restorative justice is effective with young people. It's not just used here; it's used in detention centres when there has been a conflict. It's a really effective way of intervening with young people and it's a great opportunity to teach things like regulation and empathy. We agree, and that's why part of the role description or the responsibility of the local manager is to work with police inspectors and youth liaison officers to drive up those referrals—and the courts as well. So they do. They send the referrals in, but it's always a process of meeting the new staff and promoting it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is that a barrier? Even though the police and the magistrate possibly refer, it's because they have not had contact with the local office if there is a change of staff? What would be the barrier of not referring?

PAUL O'REILLY: I don't know if barrier is the word. Police have committed to the process and they have participated in it, and so has the court. I wouldn't describe it as a barrier; I would just say that part of the normal business of doing casework anywhere, but particularly in the regions, is impacted by changes of staff. I can't speak for the police, but when they have changes of key people there is a whole range of things for them to get across, and this is one of those things. Our job is to be proactive, go and introduce ourselves to the new people and promote the practice, explain it and do workshops to educate people. That's our role to do that. There may be times when we are really good at that, there may be times when we are not so good at that, but that's our job. The police then respond with referrals.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In the regions, say if I picked Moree—because the Premier has been out to Moree—are they utilising Youth Justice conferencing?

PAUL O'REILLY: They are, yes. To give you a snapshot of our business in Moree, we had about 40 statutory clients in Moree this week—around about now. We have 25 on supervision orders and about 15 who are doing Youth Justice conferencing at the moment.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If someone is participating in the Youth Justice conference, is there support for the family or care providers for the participant?

PAUL O'REILLY: Of course, yes. There absolutely is. It's more effective if the protective factors or positive people in their life are there. Police usually attend, and we always try to include the victim of crime. They need to be supported as well in the process.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, definitely.

PAUL O'REILLY: It depends on the offence. We might include support from the fire brigade, for example, if the offence related to that kind of arson-related offence. It depends on the situation but, yes, the young person needs to have the right people at the table to get the point across, to support the outcome plan and to make them feel secure.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Outcome plans can be simple, can't they, as well as being quite complex?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, it depends on the case. It also depends on the young person's abilities. Many of our young people struggle with education—haven't connected well with education, so they struggle with literacy. Many of them have cognitive difficulties, developmental difficulties, disability. So all that needs to be taken into account and adjustments need to be made. The outcome plan has to be tailored to that person's capacity in order for it to be effective.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In the metro areas would you say there's a stand-out area that utilises Youth Justice conferencing well?

PAUL O'REILLY: I think they all use it well. All of my managers will be listening to this and reading the transcript; I think they do a great job. They all have that challenge of needing to be proactive amongst everyone's busy work lives, but the metro teams are really effective. For example, Campbelltown has a high load of Youth Justice conferencing. They're very busy with that side of the business. That's one example. The Ashfield team also is very busy in managing Youth Justice conferencing. But all of our metro managers and regional managers are very committed to it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I just say, Mr O'Reilly, to you, all your teams and all the managers, thank you for the extremely important work that you do. It is not easy work and it's vitally important. You must know that we're very grateful for it, and for all the teams and everyone in your group doing it.

PAUL O'REILLY: Thank you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I just follow up on a couple of those things. You just noted that not every referral results in a conference. Can you just talk to and elaborate a bit more on the reasons for that? Is it just a personnel issue or are there other surrounding reasons why it doesn't happen every time?

PAUL O'REILLY: Some examples that I'm aware of: sometimes all of the parties may not agree or they may change their mind, or there may be another offence in between the referral and the date. They're the kind of things that would drive a referral to not convert to a conference in the outcome plan.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I mean no offence by this, but you would expect me to ask it. Is it because of a lack of convenors or coordinators? Is it a lack of resources in any way?

PAUL O'REILLY: No offence taken. No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm on your team.

PAUL O'REILLY: I mean, there are times when recruitment can be challenging, and it's also really important that we hire appropriate convenors. So in an area with a lot of Aboriginal clients, we want Aboriginal convenors. We've done some work with some Aboriginal communities to try to work out what is the experience of an Aboriginal convenor like. If some of them have left, why have they left? What could we do to improve the process that supports? Sometimes the administrative component of it can be onerous; how could we help with that? We do those sort of things, and there are times when the numbers are not as high as we would like for convenors. I'm not aware of a situation where that has prevented a conference happening, but it does put pressure and stress on the workforce if we have low numbers. Like any big workforce, that pipeline of staffing issue is sometimes a challenge in some places. But we make sure it doesn't prevent the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you for your work in that. As a former Minister for women's safety I'm aware of the workforce challenges. It is very well intended, but getting people and recruiting people is an issue anywhere.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, and it's difficult work if you live in the community as well. There are a lot of things we need to do to continually examine our practice and work out if we can get better at supporting convenors.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So a Dixer—I'm going to dish it up anyway—would additional funding assist?

PAUL O'REILLY: I don't think that's an area of funding pressure, to be honest. Sometimes it's just about getting better at understanding what it would take for people to feel supported and stay.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's a very diplomatic answer but recruitment, advertising support—obviously resources for those would assist in some sense.

PAUL O'REILLY: That's my position, though. I think that it's an area where we need to make sure we're supporting people and making it attractive. Especially in the regions, we're often competing with other employers as well.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will just turn back to the Service NSW app, whoever is dealing with that. Mr Wells, the Minister was unable to articulate this morning any improvements to the Service NSW app that were new. Does the department have a work plan for the app?

GREG WELLS: Yes, we do. There is a pretty well developed road map for the service app and account—they're interchangeable and one. We did sit down with the Minister and have agreed that is at a road map. We update and brief him regularly on those developments and everything that is being developed. As you allude to, it's a really important channel for us. I think it was 140-odd million transactions last year through those channels for us, so it is a really significant channel. There has been a great deal that's been added in the last year. We've talked about the Working with Children Check being integrated into the process, which is allowing customers to do a full online renewal of that check and that process, which has been a big improvement, and a lot of other digital ID and verifiable credential changes. There's been a lot in terms of profile management. There's been new licences added. There's been integration of the next toll relief scheme, a lot in accessibility and security. I could list these if you like, but there's been quite a deal of enhancements to the personal app. There's also been a business app that's been upgraded in a big way for business customers as well.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might deal with both of those. As a former roads Minister—I'm a former lots of things; a has been, a nobody—I'm interested in the toll relief and the administration of the toll program, which is very helpful. Can you elaborate on where that is at?

GREG WELLS: There is an existing toll program, a toll relief second program, which was to a threshold of 40 per cent of cost. Above that you were reimbursed. The next scheme, we've started to capture the data from 1 January. From April this year you'll be able to claim anything above a \$60 cap. That is being integrated into the process at the moment.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So the former scheme was if you spent over \$375, you get up to \$750 back. That was under our Government. The next one that is coming under this Government is 1 January, which is coming into place now. Are you confident of the ability to manage those claims and transact each of those?

GREG WELLS: Yes, we are. As you'd know, there are two providers. We have to source E-Toll data and Transurban data for Linkt, but we're in the final stages of getting those datasets, combining those to be ready for—well, they are ready. It's just being ready for customers to be able to claim that data from April this year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you share any further new improvements in that work plan other than completing what was—aside from the toll, you mentioned the business aspects. That would be helpful.

GREG WELLS: I think it's important—and the Minister was talking about this also—that the products that we have are constantly enhanced. That's the approach we take to digital development. We have products and there are a range of those products. We continue to enhance those. I've mentioned a bunch of enhancements already, but we've also added odometer checks. We've added in-app payment experiences for getting your driving record, for example. We have added conversational AI to the account and the app to help customers navigate to things they need to find. We've also started to integrate some of the Tell Your Story Once and grants as service capabilities from our learnings from the disaster process into the account and app as well, so those have happened as well.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In terms of that, there was consideration at one stage—particularly in the Tell Your Story Once space, in relation to women's safety—for the ability to upload documents and identity, given the challenges around proving identity if you have to flee in circumstances where you're not able to gather your papers let alone anything else. Is that progressing?

GREG WELLS: I'll take that on notice and check specifically on that example, but that sort of model that we're taking with Tell Your Story Once that has been proven in disaster is one we would like to apply to a lot of scenarios. It is more of that holistic care for a customer. I'll come back on notice as to the status of exactly—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you could come back to us on that, that would be very helpful, if there are any steps and what they are and what the time line might be for those. That would be very helpful for a lot of women out there and for providers and supporters who have to deal with that issue on a daily basis.

GREG WELLS: Understood, yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Earlier I put some questions to the Minister about the flood warning system that Labor promised in the lead-up to the last election. The Minister indicated there was work around the Hazards Near Me app. I keep going to say Fires Near Me but it has been rebranded, rebadged. I am wondering what other initiatives were delivered—if there were any further details you might be able to provide. In particular, there was work around things like road and flood level gauges that previous inquiries into some disasters indicated was a priority. Has that work occurred? Is anybody able to provide some details around that?

CARLENE YORK: I might start with the Hazards Near Me app and what we have done there. The New South Wales SES was the first State to cover all floods, storms and tsunamis, having that timely information going out to the communities. At the same time, we partnered with Customer Service to improve our systems and platforms within SES. This meant that a lot of the information that we had to get out to the community, now through Hazards Near Me, would take anything up to one to two hours for our staff to cut, paste and redo, and we can do it now in roughly 10 to 15 minutes. We get multiple more accurate and timely information out to the community as a result of those three systems that we have.

In relation to the gauge system, we have a research project with one of the universities—I will try and remember which one it is—on a sensor project to get scientists to see how we can do better impacts on the river system and get better information. The gauge system isn't our responsibility, but we work with local councils which have a responsibility. State Government has some responsibility and the Bureau of Meteorology has some responsibility as well. I know that was a recommendation out of the flood review, so that's one that I think the Premier's department is looking at.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm looking at you, Mr Draper.

CARLENE YORK: Sorry, Mr Draper. But we're certainly involved in those because it is really important, as our floods and our inquiries have shown, that we get as much accurate information to say what's coming downstream into those communities, outside flash floods. Obviously with the more riverine flooding we are able to forecast a bit more, but flash floods create significant differences in that ability.

The Hon. WES FANG: I know my time has expired. I am just going to foreshadow a question so I don't forget it and because you might be able to prepare an answer whilst the crossbench members have their time. I note the digital footprint that the Hazards Near Me app covers, but when signals are down, electricity is down, power is down—everything is down—it is those physical indicators that provide the real-time visual cue to people, and that is what we're asking about here. I will ask Mr Draper when we come back.

CARLENE YORK: I could probably add a couple of bits, seeing that you've broadened the question as well.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm interested in recommendation 6 of the flood inquiry. I'm not sure if this question will be for Commissioner York or for the Reconstruction Authority. That was a recommendation for an Indigenous first responders program. Has there been any work done to progress that?

CARLENE YORK: I will just have to check my papers, sorry. Recommendation 6 I have noted as a community first responders program, which might have taken that into account as well. We have made significant progress on the SES spontaneous volunteering program and developed all hazards educational resources that we've placed out to communities as well. We have been working a lot on liaising with communities, getting feedback and putting accurate information out to them in relation to how they can be spontaneous volunteers, what the risks are when they come in, because there is an issue with the safety element as well—

Dr AMANDA COHN: I have seen some of that work on spontaneous volunteers, which is great.

CARLENE YORK: I think you know a lot about it.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I am specifically interested in any work with local Aboriginal communities in flood-affected regions or how that program is interacting—

CARLENE YORK: I know our community capability groups do work with local Aboriginal communities out there, so if I can take that on notice I will be able to give you some more accurate information, but we're certainly reaching out to those communities because of the different risks that they have where they are located.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I have one last question before I pass to my colleague, Ms Higginson. This is for Fire and Rescue. There was some earlier discussion about growth areas outside of Western Sydney and you spoke in broad terms about the planning that is done to deal with growth. I was interested specifically with the aerotropolis at Western Sydney. I understand there is no station there now and you've spoken in broad terms about that planning. Will there be enough resources to service that area by the proposed 2026 opening of the aerotropolis?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, that's certainly our intention in the conversations we've had with government to enable that. We're in the process of identifying suitable locations at the moment.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I think these are possibly for Mr O'Reilly. I'm really apologetic if I'm going to ask things that may have been asked and I've missed. I think I've been trying to gauge what's been asked throughout the sessions. Do you have a view, from young people's engagement with police, on the data and the stats around— if I was to ask you how many young people that come into the corrections system have been involved in a police incident that has involved a firearm—the discharge or use of a firearm—would you have any idea of that?

PAUL O'REILLY: No, it hasn't come up. I'm not aware of discussions about that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: For me to understand that, it would have to come from the police to understand the use of a firearm with a young person that comes—

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, because they're there during the interaction. We are involved later.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: When the young person comes into the corrections system, would that not be something that is recorded as data and how that came about?

PAUL O'REILLY: Whether the police were armed?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: They are usually armed.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: They are always armed, but whether or not the weapon was drawn or used, or the extent to which that young person has faced a weapon.

PAUL O'REILLY: No, I can talk a little bit about—we do have a really important but rarely used process where if the young person is delivered to us by police and the young person has a concern or a complaint about the way they were treated, we have a complaints process that we would utilise, or if the admissions staff in my team have a concern about the interaction, there is a complaints process, a reporting process, that they can utilise.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is that data collected? Is it used? Is it something that is then fed—

PAUL O'REILLY: It's reported to me when it occurs, as the head of Youth Justice, but I can only remember two incidents, so it's rare.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It might be that that's the complaint, but the experience itself may have just been a bad experience. They are in custody and—

PAUL O'REILLY: They may not discuss that with us. But it's probably important to note that the point where a person comes into detention, particularly a very young person, they are pretty guarded about saying anything—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Anything, yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: They are feeling a bit of fear and trauma, so they are unlikely to be particularly vocal about many things really.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That's very, very helpful. Earlier on I think there was a conversation about the tablets in the system.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I can talk about that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I would love to get an update on where that's up to, if you haven't already given that on record.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, sure. As the Minister described, there is a process of scoping. One of the things the Minister tried to articulate was that it's complex. One of the reasons why it's complex is that the buildings that we have in our centres are very old buildings. They're quite austere buildings. They have really poor phone and wi-fi reception—really bad. We can muddle through for family contacts on iPads or we can transport young people to a different part of the centre to do family iPad video calls—we can do that. But the benefit of the proposition of a proper iPad program is that the young person can use that in their room. They can have private conversations and they can access education and appropriate entertainment. That's the benefit.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You are saying that the actual physical building is a real barrier.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's part of it. What it does is it adds to the complexity and the cost. We need to invest significantly in IT infrastructure to make that work, and retrofit that to old buildings. If we were building a new centre, we would be factoring it into the new build. That's what happens in new centres now in other jurisdictions, but we are not doing that. We have old centres. That means it's complex to understand. It's not repeatable, because every centre is different. We have to scope it separately in each of our six centres. The infrastructure complexities are different in each centre as well. That's the first part of it—it's all of that.

Buying the iPads is not difficult; it's all of that stuff. We have to work with our telecommunications provider to integrate that into our other telecommunications infrastructure. We have hard-wired phones in every unit—two of those—for the kids to use. Kids have as much access to the phones as they need. We would need to work with that provider to integrate whatever this is into that system. We couldn't just willy-nilly do something alongside that, because it would compromise that other system. That's the first side. The second side of it is the security side. Sometimes when this proposition is put forward, it's put forward on the basis of evidence from the adult corrections system.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I was going to say, how come we're facing these difficulties in the youth centres? From what I understand, we've overcome quite a few of these issues in the adult system.

PAUL O'REILLY: As I was saying, each facility has its own infrastructure challenges. They're not cookie-cutter; they're all different. You have to take the challenge on each time. But the other reason why we have to take a different approach to the adult system is that children are impulsive and children make decisions that they shouldn't make. To give kids access to the internet is really risky, and it needs a different set of safeguards to the set of safeguards that you might need.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: How close do you think we are to being able to roll out a best-placed, tailored program?

PAUL O'REILLY: As one of my colleagues said earlier, it's not good to give time lines if you're not sure. I don't want to mislead the Committee with that. The scoping has to tell us that. The scoping looks at the complexity of the infrastructure, and then we would go to other jurisdictions and see how they have managed the security risks around children using iPads. The kind of risks that I'm talking about are accessing inappropriate material online—illegal material, potentially—but there's a more acute risk, which is contacting victims of crime, contacting witnesses, breaching AVOs, intimidating people.

I'm not suggesting that young people in our system wake up every day and say, "Who am I going to intimidate?" But it is a feature of people with criminogenic disorders—that can happen. We have a whole system of regulation around our phone system that allows us to monitor calls, pick up on those problems and deal with

them and intervene. We would need to think about how we would have a similar intel process sitting across the iPads to make sure that it is safe and people are protected. We have a really strong obligation to protect the victims of crime and witnesses in criminal matters. Particularly when so many kids are on remand with ongoing matters, we have to make sure we don't allow inappropriate contact with witnesses. That has to be scoped, and then we have to find some funding. We're currently searching for a funding—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I just interrupt? At the moment, are you scoping for a same tablet access system for kids on remand as you are for kids in custody?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there not a significant difference?

PAUL O'REILLY: They're all in the same—they're all in custody.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes, but those that are on remand—so there's no distinction?

PAUL O'REILLY: There are some distinctions.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Because I would have thought, for criminal justice and the aims of punishment and rehabilitation, they're fundamentally different.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, but they are different in that perspective. For example, we don't do criminogenic intervention for somebody who's not found guilty of the index offence. We don't do that. But we do do other intervention with those kids, if they consent.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: No, I'm just talking about the tablet access at this point. Have you considered and what is the result of consideration for the young people that are serving time and we need to get them better and make them well, recognising that those in remand are a very different category?

PAUL O'REILLY: I think I understand your question. The programs available to the tablet might be different for those two groups, or they might not be.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But access, you say, is the same.

PAUL O'REILLY: The infrastructure issues are the same; the security issues are the same.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm just coming back to the timing. I do appreciate it's unwise to commit to timing, but I just feel like this is going on and on and on. I'm just curious if you are considering ways of trying to streamline—not cut corners but trying to get to an outcome? Are we talking about even the scoping won't be done by the end of this year or month?

PAUL O'REILLY: No, the scoping will be done by the end. It will, yes. It is taking a long time, because this has been suggested for a long time. It's partly about the complexity; it's partly about priority. My big IT reform priority has been the body scanners.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I was just going to get to that.

PAUL O'REILLY: That has been an equally complex infrastructure project, which is now completed and operating. That is now done.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It sounds positive.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's incredibly important. That is now completed. Now we shift our focus to this next—we had to update our intelligence system as well. We have other IT end-of-life challenges we're trying to address. We have a particular bandwidth and budget. As well as running the day-to-day looking after young people, we have to regulate those IT reform priorities within that bandwidth—and there is a priority for those. The tablets are really important to us. We absolutely agree with the benefits, but we're managing within that bandwidth, within those priorities. We'll do it as quick as we can. As soon as we have the scoping finished—and in parallel, we're searching for funding sources—I'm just as keen as everybody to implement it.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you guaranteed that you will have the resources available to you under the budget to implement, or is that not currently available at this point?

PAUL O'REILLY: The scoping will tell us what the cost is. We don't know the cost yet. We can't put a budget bid forward until we know what the cost is. We want to get to the end of the scoping and, as soon as possible, get access to some funding to do that. That's our plan.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Given your depth of experience since 2019 and doing all of this, do you think that would in a practical sense mean that we wouldn't see funding over the next budget period—over the next

12 months—because we would miss that? Is it your experience that you would need to have that request in for funding now?

PAUL O'REILLY: Not necessarily, for a few reasons. One, there could be some other projects that we could tap into. We could start small. We wouldn't need to do it all at once. There is a range of ways we could potentially fast-track it. Again, I would be reckless to commit to a time frame at this stage, but I repeat my commitment to it and the Government's commitment to it. We are very serious about it and a lot of our staff are excited about it.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: As I'm sure some of the young people are.

PAUL O'REILLY: Potentially.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there the use of the body-worn cam and is that happening across the centre?

PAUL O'REILLY: No.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What's the status of that at the moment?

PAUL O'REILLY: That's been another complex IT reform that we've implemented within that bandwidth recently, in the last couple years. The body-worn camera is used by our incident response teams, not by all staff. In previous budget estimates hearings in the last few years I've had similar conversations and tried to explain that the evidence base for the impact of body-worn cameras in custody is heavily weighted towards the adult system. There's very little evidence of it being positive for children. We've tried our best to find an evidence base and we found some in other parts of Australia, looking at very young adult offenders.

We've found that with young adult offenders, the presence of the body-worn camera in many situations would trigger more violence. With older offenders, it tended to calm people. That was a bit of a clue as to why we should be careful, but we did want to try implementing them because we wanted to improve accountability around use of force, particularly for the response teams. We went to Victoria, who have started using them in their response teams. We found some useful evidence that showed it was supportive, provided there was adequate training for those response teams. We've deployed it in our two high-security centres, Frank Baxter and Cobham, for the response teams only. They use those cameras whenever they are responding to an incident. Obviously the data is all recorded and used in investigations later.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You may need to take this on notice, although typically you actually may know this: How many use-of-force incidents in the past 12 months?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I do have that information.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes, I thought you would.

The Hon. WES FANG: It doesn't surprise me that he's got it.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's a really important issue.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It is, and the numbers really matter. How many use-of-force incidents last year were on those body cams?

PAUL O'REILLY: Sorry, I don't have that. I can tell you how many use-of-force incidents we've had. We've had 1,025 in the previous financial year, which is down from—it's gone down every year. In 2018-19, before I commenced, there were 2,127, so they're down by 52 per cent. Use of force happens in all of our six centres. Every incident is reviewed by an expert committee.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I know that you review and you look at them, but how many of those investigations found any misconduct on the part of the centre staff?

PAUL O'REILLY: They do pick up issues. There are two ways for issues—actually, there are a few ways for issues to be referred for misconduct. The young person might complain, another staff member who witnesses misconduct might report it, or the management team in the centre whose job it is to review every use of force anyway will pick it up and refer it to the conduct committee. Then on top of that, as an extra safeguard, the committee reviews all of them again. Out of that they will convene the committee, review all of the footage and they will either find areas where practice could be improved but does not appear to amount to misconduct or areas where it may well amount to misconduct and those are referred to the process. I get a report every month. Every month there might be one or two matters that are referred to the misconduct committee; some months there are none. That then goes through a—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Sorry, can you remind me who is on the misconduct committee?

PAUL O'REILLY: It's convened by our security and intelligence team manager. On that committee we have a mix of people. We have practitioners from the centres; we have Aboriginal staff; and we have just commenced a process of bringing some independent, external partners into the group as well. It's generally a range of people who understand the regulation around use of force, who understand the operations of centre and who understand the impact of trauma. It's a mix of those professional people. We rotate them through every few months because of the vicarious trauma arising from spending hours looking at footage.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: The results of those, who is responsible for determining whether the staff member requires—what outcome is required, whether it is re-training or who determines what response?

PAUL O'REILLY: The manager of security and intelligence who convenes that writes the reports and refers them immediately back to the centre manager. The centre manager's role is to then make sure that there's training direction. The training is organised as quickly as possible. If it's a misconduct concern, it goes to the misconduct team, which is a separate DCJ team. They will then convene a meeting of the misconduct committee—not the use-of-force committee—who will then give me some recommendations which might include suspension of the person while it's being investigated or—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have there been suspensions in the last 12 months?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we do suspend people. It's no prediction of the outcome, but it's a safeguard. If there is enough information in the allegation that suggests that there could be a risk—a risk assessment process, and then we might suspend them. If it's possible or appropriate, we might put them into a role that has no contact with children for a while, depending on the allegation. Quite often we will suspend somebody while they're being investigated.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: The detainee risk management plans to behaviour assistance pathways—there was the migration. What outcomes have we seen so far from that?

PAUL O'REILLY: It's early days but that was an important change as well. The detainee risk management plans were criticised by a number of people for being too focused on, I guess, containment. Even though the detainee management plan policy had a real focus on applying input into the plans, I think there was some evidence that that could have been better. We worked with our Aboriginal practice officers to design a new model, which is the pathway program, and it's been implemented, I think, since about November. It's early days yet.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: E-conveyancing, Mr Head. I understand the Government has mandated dates for completion in e-conveyancing. What are the consequences for companies like PEXA and Sympli if the dates are not met, and will the dates be enforced?

GRAEME HEAD: There's a range of discussions happening with stakeholders at the moment including both of the ELNO, PEXA and Sympli, around the implementation process. I should say that—I'm not sure if we have the registrar here with us today but, as the New South Wales member on ARNECC, the registrar would be able to give you more specific questions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will do the questions if I can just get the answers.

GRAEME HEAD: Give you more specific answers, I'm sorry.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's this time of day, I understand.

GRAEME HEAD: There is a process. I've met with both of the ELNOs and also with other stakeholders including the Australian Banking Association. As you would expect with a complex reform like this, there are concerns about time frames and whether or not those time frames can be met. ARNECC itself has published those time frames. ARNECC regulates the system that's been put into place. My understanding is that we're working through the issues that are being raised by stakeholders in that process.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it on track for those dates, to the best of your knowledge?

GRAEME HEAD: As far as I understand at this point.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you take on notice and ask perhaps the registrar what the consequences are if they're not met?

GRAEME HEAD: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm hoping they are and it won't be an issue—as we all are—but if they're not, specifically will those dates be enforced? That would be helpful. Does New South Wales intend on placing interim milestones in the program to ensure the December 2025 dates are on track?

GRAEME HEAD: I'd have to take that on notice, I'm sorry, because the program rollout is governed by the arrangements that were put in place by all of the governments who participated. ARNECC plays the key role in that. On any question of detail around the rollout of this, I'll need to take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which is why I'm asking about New South Wales' intention for milestones in the event that it's not. That would be helpful. New South Wales has an enforcement regime that it has yet to use. If necessary take it on notice, but do you or the Registrar General intend on using the legislation to hold the participants to account on that, particularly PEXA?

GRAEME HEAD: Again, I would need to take that on notice in respect of the general approach that ARNECC is taking to these matters.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm going to talk about something that I don't profess to be a subject expert in.

The Hon. WES FANG: You're a subject matter expert on everything, Natalie.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: A little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing.

The CHAIR: That's going to everyone now.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why don't I sound convincing?

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm serious.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In December 2023 the New South Wales Government released the connectivity index, which gives a statewide view of connectivity across New South Wales. We can see there are huge disparities in the—I can see somebody smiling. If anyone needs to be coming forward while I'm asking this. Thank you, Ms Christie.

The Hon. WES FANG: Usually it's dread.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We can see there are huge disparities between the CBD, Western Sydney, and regional and rural areas. For example, I'm reliably informed that Randwick has a connectivity ranking of 83 out of 100—100 being the best—and Canterbury Bankstown has a rating of 48. Can we understand some of the initiatives that are being undertaken to close that connectivity gap?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I'll just clarify why Digital.NSW and the NSW Telco Authority developed that connectivity index. The NSW Telco Authority runs the Public Safety Network that the ESOs rely upon for communication.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: For Hansard, you might elaborate on ESOs, just so we're making sure—

LAURA CHRISTIE: Sorry. Emergency service organisations. No acronyms—apologies.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All good.

LAURA CHRISTIE: With the information that the NSW Telco Authority has from connectivity in relation to the PSN, the Public Safety Network, they have used that information to pull together the Digital Connectivity Index, along with some data that they receive from telcos as well as the Commonwealth. We don't have policy responsibility for connectivity per se, but we use the insights that we have to put that information together and put that on the public register through the Digital Connectivity Index.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It seems that there is a gap, though—and I'm not asking you to talk policy—but given that, is there any move or preparation to try and feed in solutions to that or is it really we're just aware of it and that's the way it is?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes. A lot of it is about having clarity on where there are gaps, because there is no obligation on the telcos to make those connectivity issues known. So, in this sense, information is powerful. That is part of the strategy behind the Digital Connectivity Index.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you need to, take it on notice: what steps, if any, might the Government be considering taking? It might be a question for the Minister.

LAURA CHRISTIE: Sure. I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The digital identity reforms, can you provide an update to the Committee on the progress of those?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes, I can. Digital identity—we're currently working in collaboration. Digital.NSW is working on the policy and legislative elements of digital identity in verifiable credentials in conjunction with

Service NSW, who have administered a number of trials. We've talked about the Working with Children Check online renewal and a number of other trials that they've been developing that they've delivered over the past year, or 18 months or so. There are a number that are in train as well. We're working with the Commonwealth. They have recently released some legislation on digital identity. We are working closely with the Commonwealth on that. Yes, we are progressing with digital identity and verifiable credentials in New South Wales. They are really being led by the pilots that Service NSW is rolling out.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: On those pilots, just to get a feel for timing—obviously I don't want to lock in anything—what are the end dates for those and then the review dates after that? What are the next steps once they're done?

LAURA CHRISTIE: We're currently working on a pilot for a digital first aid certificate. I don't have the exact time line for that, because it's still under development, but I'm happy to take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, please. Any other pilots?

LAURA CHRISTIE: The other pilot that we're working on is digital identity as a verifiable credential, so effectively holding a digital identity in the Service NSW wallet. Perhaps Mr Wells might have the answer to those time frames, but I think they're still under development.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It would be helpful if you were able to assist the Committee with information on the timing of that. I think Mr Wells mentioned earlier about particularly women's safety and how that could be very useful. If we could understand where they're at and the progress of that digital identity, that could be very useful in many areas. In terms of that digital identity specifically, when do you feel those credentials might be available to the broader public?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Again, the method of delivery is to trial these. We have the Working with Children Check digital renewal and we are trialling the first aid certificate, which is imminent. We're aiming for before the end of this half of the financial year. However, similar to my colleagues, there are a lot of things that we need to get right to make sure that we have the confidence of the community about this. We don't want to lock in any specific date for that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But the trial is due to end, what, this year?

LAURA CHRISTIE: The first aid certificate trial hasn't kicked off yet. We're aiming to get it out into the public as soon as possible. Could I just clarify some of your earlier questions that I took on notice? Is that appropriate?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We can do that at the end, I think, if necessary.

LAURA CHRISTIE: Sure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might just keep on this.

LAURA CHRISTIE: Sure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just on conveyancing—sorry, back to conveyancing again, Mr Head. In relation to—this is a random one—the preparation of contracts for sale of a house or duplex with a swimming pool, presently it requires two certificates. One is a compliance or noncompliance certificate from a private certifier at the council level, and a registration certificate from the New South Wales government level. In Victoria this is one certificate. Is there any move to consider lessening regulation and making it easier to do conveyancing in New South Wales by combining those, as Victoria has done?

GRAEME HEAD: I can't comment on the specifics of that, but I can take it on notice. As a general proposition, this entire exercise has been about simplifying and making these processes easier. But, as I indicated before, as to the specifics of any element of eConveyancing, they're really matters that I'll need to discuss with the registrar and take on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I probably should have phrased it that way. Given that the intent is to reduce red tape, will that be a consideration? If you could take that on notice, that would be great, thank you. In relation to the RSA, or the responsible service of alcohol certificate, is that within your bailiwick or someone else in Service—and the competency card?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I might be able to help.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm just wanting to understand why the two of those are standalone, understanding that in other areas there is one. This is getting to better regulation, I suppose, and less red tape and

duplication, which is, after all, one of the benefits of Service. It seems that you have to go and get the RSA certificate and then take that to Service and apply for a competency card. Is there a reason for the duplication? Is there any opportunity to reduce that duplication?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Sorry, that's not a question for me. It might be a question for the Minister for liquor and gaming because of the process that sits under that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Potentially, but given that the RSA runs through Service—

GRAEME HEAD: We can look into that for you. We don't have the answer at hand, I'm sorry.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. Concerned citizens await.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Draper, you will recall, I'm sure, with great enthusiasm that I foreshadowed a question to you around the physical gauges and the work that the Premier in his election commitment—that the Premier's department has done to help deliver those for the good people of the Northern Rivers and the Eugowra area. Do you want to provide some enlightening thoughts?

SIMON DRAPER: Yes, I've just got a little bit of information since you asked that question. Probably the primary initiative is that the Commonwealth has allocated \$236 million to the BOM and the BOM has a program to take ownership and upgrade those gauges over quite a long period—progressively over 10 years—and cover 50 per cent of the maintenance costs. They're mainly local government managed gauges. Then our new department, the Department of Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, is working with the BOM and the SES to help them roll out that program and improve generally flood evacuation information in those LGAs.

The Hon. WES FANG: Time frame? I think you said 10 years.

SIMON DRAPER: Ten years is the program that the Commonwealth has set out. That's obviously prioritised around the areas that are most exposed to those severe floods.

The Hon. WES FANG: I know we got into questions of what letters were written to different Federal departments last time. We won't go back there. But obviously the Premier would be seeking that the New South Wales areas that were impacted by considerable amounts of flooding are going to be prioritised and acted on first?

SIMON DRAPER: Yes, I mean, there is a degree of involvement because the Premier's department plays a coordination role but, as I mentioned, the new department of DCCEEW, for want of a better abbreviation—

The Hon. WES FANG: I hate the acronym but, yes, okay.

SIMON DRAPER: —are working with the BOM on that.

The Hon. WES FANG: I have some questions on the NSW Reconstruction Authority. Mr Draper, it'll be you again.

SIMON DRAPER: I've got some other friends with me as well who can help answer.

The Hon. WES FANG: I know, but let's just start with you. The vacancies on the board—do you know if they've been filled?

SIMON DRAPER: Yes, the board has been filled and it has met.

The Hon. WES FANG: How many times have they met since the last estimates period?

SIMON DRAPER: They've met once. They've had one inaugural meeting.

The Hon. WES FANG: Does the board provide advice to you and the Minister? How is it able to do that if that is its role when it has only met once in the last three months?

SIMON DRAPER: Yes, that is the role of the board. It is an advisory board to advise the Minister and the chief executive of the authority. It started that process because it is being stood up. But in the meantime, there were, I think, four members appointed about a year ago. In the interim, while we haven't had formal board meetings, we have had engagements with some of those members who were appointed at that time and sought input from them on various matters.

The Hon. WES FANG: Wouldn't that be better done by way of a board meeting?

SIMON DRAPER: Yes, I think it is better done by way of a board meeting and that is what has started to happen.

The Hon. WES FANG: When will the next one occur, do you know?

SIMON DRAPER: I'll just check with my colleagues.

The Hon. WES FANG: It looks like they're madly typing. They can probably come back to you while I ask you the next question. Given they've had one meeting—I'm tempering my expectations. What have they provided by way of guidance? Given that they are going to be meeting soon with a date to be provided shortly, what do you expect would be a reasonable outcome from that next meeting that they can provide guidance to you and the Minister on around the work that you should be focusing on?

SIMON DRAPER: Because of the timing of the first board meeting, the things that we focused on—apart from familiarisation with the standing up of the authority itself, so the structure of the organisation and the various roles that we've established there—we had the State Disaster Mitigation Plan, which had been completed at that point, and also the updated State Recovery Plan. We provided that and had a discussion. Those documents had all but been finalised at that point, so to be fair to the board they were coming in towards the end. They were largely happy with that but there are ongoing iterations of those documents. The other thing that I think there'll be a fair bit of input on is that matter we were discussing earlier: How do you engage the community around things like the disaster adaptation plans, which happen at a regional and an LGA level?

The Hon. WES FANG: Have they provided any priorities around community infrastructure yet?

SIMON DRAPER: We haven't provided them with anything to respond to on that yet, no, so they haven't provided any specific advice on that.

The Hon. WES FANG: So the things that the community are most worried about, which is, I guess, the provision of the infrastructure, hasn't been really addressed yet at all?

SIMON DRAPER: I'm not sure if we'll be asking the board to provide advice on specific items of infrastructure.

The Hon. WES FANG: Prioritising.

SIMON DRAPER: Those priorities are often set more at a council level.

The Hon. WES FANG: All right, interesting. Ms Walker, how are you? Welcome to the table.

SIMONE WALKER: I'm very well, thank you. Lovely to be here late in the day.

The Hon. WES FANG: Is it? It's late in the afternoon; you were probably just thinking you're about to go have a—

SIMONE WALKER: And I'm going to say something relatively short and sweet, which is that 9 April is the next scheduled, and we have them scheduled for the whole year.

The Hon. WES FANG: That was the best answer we've heard all day, if everyone else could take note of that. In relation to the Reconstruction Authority, could you provide any advice as to what work has been done in preparation for drought support and recovery and bushfire recovery, given that we're expecting a level of drought that perhaps didn't occur this year but certainly there should have been preparedness in the lead-up to that, given the predictions from the BOM? The next part of that is that when you've got really dry conditions, the bushfire risk obviously increases as well. Has any work been done around those two things?

SIMON DRAPER: Yes, and of course not just for recovery but the response. Commissioner Rogers can talk about this a little bit more. But I agree with you: In the lead-up to the summer, based on the forecast we had available, the expectation was hot and dry conditions. Our primary, immediate concern and that of the Rural Fire Service was really around fires and then drought, which has a slower onset but nonetheless can come quite quickly. As you know, things didn't pan out quite that way over the summer period. Nonetheless, we have done a lot of work. Our work in the lead-up to the summer—this is on more the recovery side—had been around making sure that the State Recovery Plan and our resources on the ground were prepared for that. We had a number of reviews with all of the agencies that are involved in that recovery process, checking their readiness for that eventuality. We had people ready. We had the resources ready and had the plans ready. We haven't had to activate them to the degree that we expected—which we were grateful for—but there was a readiness plan that had been put in place for that.

The Hon. WES FANG: I've got one more question and I think I've got eight seconds, so I'm going to try and sneak it in. I know that probably some other people have got some answers they want to provide to the questions I asked earlier, so I'm going to start quickly. In relation to where you've got community engagement activities for Fire and Rescue—for example, where you might have a fire truck that's at a community event that's not necessarily engaged in an emergency-type scenario—but when an emergency does occur, how do you provision that? How do you prioritise the work to make sure that you've got not only the community support there but also the emergency isn't forgotten? Has that ever happened? For example, if you have something at a community event, does it mean that there's potentially incidents that are missed?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: We wouldn't miss an incident. As a general rule, the priority is always given to emergency response. It would depend on the scale and the nature of the community engagement event as to how we manage that. For a lower level, smaller scale type event, that would normally be managed by the local crew from the local fire station. All those sorts of arrangements are always made on the caveat that we've got it booked in and we'll be there on the proviso we don't get a call beforehand. Then sometimes—it used to happen a lot when I was a station officer and a firefighter—you'd go to a school visit. You'd be part way through the session with children and then you'd have to say, "We'll come back."

The Hon. WES FANG: Kick them off.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: So there's a lot of coordinating work to come back and finish off. If it's more of a larger scale or an event of greater significance, we would often have additional support from our community engagement unit or other specialist sections. They would either then be able to stay and continue while the operational response is dealt with by the fire engine and the crew, or we may make them not available for emergency response if the conditions are such that there are no other significant operational demands and that station can be covered by other available adjoining stations.

The Hon. WES FANG: Excellent. And you're sure that—

The CHAIR: Sorry, it has moved on to crossbench time now.

The Hon. WES FANG: Okay. I just tried.

The CHAIR: There might be a couple of minutes at the end. It was well worth a try, but it is definitely Ms Sue Higginson's turn.

The Hon. WES FANG: I thought I was being so smooth.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Apologies if we've already covered this, and I'm back on youth justice now. I notice Mr Tidball has entered as well. I wanted to know—as I said, if you have done it—have you got the current numbers of young people per six centres?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. You mean today's numbers?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I do. They're on my desktop, which is just opening now. But yes, I do. I can give you the overall numbers before I pull out the centre by centre.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Fantastic. Thank you.

PAUL O'REILLY: There are 228 young people in detention today.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And of those under 16?

PAUL O'REILLY: There are 12 under 16. Sorry, under 14. Let me just check under 16.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Sorry, under 14 there were 12, did you say?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. Under 16, we have 77.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Great. What's the age of the youngest person at the moment?

PAUL O'REILLY: The age of the youngest is 12.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And the breakdown of each centre at the moment?

PAUL O'REILLY: Sure. I'll be right with you. The first centre is Acmena in Grafton. There are 30 young people in Acmena. There are 61 young people at the Frank Baxter centre on the Central Coast. There are 71 people at Cobham in Western Sydney. There are 10 people in Orana at Dubbo. There are 37 people in Reiby in Campbelltown and there are 16 in the Riverina centre in Wagga.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I think it's the Stand As One mentor program that was at Frank Baxter. Is that still going?

PAUL O'REILLY: Stand As One?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm pretty sure that's what it was called.

PAUL O'REILLY: We do have a funded mentoring program at Frank Baxter, which I listed earlier, which is run by the Shine for Kids organisation that we fund to do that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I was told about one called Stand As One, and it was at Frank Baxter, and that it saw three of the 16 participants that were released from custody go on to reoffend in that next 12 months. I'm trying to think of where I get the information from now, but even though the sample number was small, there was evidence suggesting that it was a very good program. Do you think it's a similar program to the one you're referring to?

PAUL O'REILLY: I'll need to check that. It could just be referred to as something different, but I'll check.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If you wouldn't mind.

PAUL O'REILLY: Of course.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I think the constituents' comments were, "Are we expanding that?" It sounded like it was a successful program. We're always looking for new programs and we don't necessarily follow the ones that may have had successes. The mentor program that you were referring to earlier, is that something at Frank Baxter or is that across all the centres?

PAUL O'REILLY: It's at Frank Baxter.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are there other mentor programs across all of the centres?

PAUL O'REILLY: There are informal ones. In all of our centres we have relationships with community, and particularly Aboriginal Elders who work with young people in the centres, and various NGOs who come in and do programs in the centres and offer mentoring relationships with young people. It happens less formally in the sense that we don't fund them directly, but they do partner with our centres and work with young people.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are we getting evidence of what is working better? Are we monitoring that and tracking it?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we're absolutely trying to do that. Where we fund a program ourselves, we actually do that. They're not all at the stage of complete evaluation yet, but if we fund something, we need to evaluate it.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What is the breakdown in terms of your funded programs versus the less formal ones that you're aware of?

PAUL O'REILLY: The Frank Baxter SHINE mentor is the only mentor program that we commission or fund to an external. The rest are informal.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: How long has that one been going at Frank Baxter?

PAUL O'REILLY: Some years. I haven't got the exact number of years, but some years.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What is the regularity? What are the sort of mechanisms that are in that program?

PAUL O'REILLY: There's a person from the organisation who works in the centre—there's an office in the centre—and works with the caseworkers to identify and meet and work with young people to match them with mentors. They arrange meetings and work through a program which focuses on the goals of the young person. But probably SHINE would be the best people to describe their work. I wouldn't want to speak for them. They're a very good organisation, a very well-known organisation.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are the participants assessed on highest risk? How does your assessment process work to suggest who would be eligible for a program?

PAUL O'REILLY: Each case plan for everybody in our system has to be individualised around the young person. For some people, that is something they would like to do, and for some people, it's not something they would like to do. If it is something they would like to do and they're in that centre, I expect there would be an approach to see if it's possible to do it or if they're a good fit. But it's individualised.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I know we talked about this last time, but is the music program something that is linked to the tablets and therefore not currently accessible, or is there a music program that is happening?

PAUL O'REILLY: The schools, which are run by the Department of Education, in all the six centres do music programs at various times. In addition to that, during our school holiday programs, the centre managers bring in various one-off programs to support the holidays. A lot of those programs are music programs. They might be learning to play instruments or they might be about recording or they might be about mixing music, but they vary. But each of the centres does that in the school holiday programs.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What about just accessing music—to be able to listen to music and all of that? What is the access to—

PAUL O'REILLY: It depends on the routine and the young person, I suppose. They have access to television every day, and entertainment. Then there would be other programs where they can access music through the centre or through the school in the centre.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That's what I mean. They can access a TV, but is there access to music?

PAUL O'REILLY: There can be at times, yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Okay.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's important to be really clear: It's not a home-like environment.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I know.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's really not. It's a very structured environment, which is focused on trying to balance access to those sort of, I guess, amenities with maintaining good order in a high-risk environment. That's all done within the infrastructure that we have. That puts limitations on all of those things.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Isn't there some really good evidence that access to music, and music, is a really constructive thing for somebody's wellbeing?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I would agree. We are really keen to get those tablets in. We are really keen for all those reasons. I accept that evidence, absolutely, and we want to get them in as soon as we can.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Without harping on too long and too much about the tablets, I just—

The Hon. WES FANG: No!

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Well, the evidence is so overwhelming. With the physical and the structural barriers to the accessibility—and I get the security issues too—how are we going to overcome that? Are we just going to be sitting here at the next budgets and we're going to say, "The walls are still too thick"? What do we do about those?

PAUL O'REILLY: We have to work with the suppliers, the market, the organisations who do that kind of work—and there are lots of them out there, telecom companies—to come to us with proposals.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Surely all these six centres don't have the same connectivity capacities?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, they do.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do they?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: They're all the same issue?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. Well, none of them were built in the last two decades. They're old centres.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you not looking at wi-fi? Is it hardwired?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. In a place like that, wi-fi requires infrastructure also in order for it to work.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But you are looking at that, or that's what is being scoped?

PAUL O'REILLY: All of that is being scoped, yes, absolutely. Again, as I said before, if we were building this from scratch it would be hardwired into all of the walls and infrastructure.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes, of course.

PAUL O'REILLY: When you are retrofitting you need to consider that option—you need to consider all sorts of options, and I don't want to pre-empt them or the time lines again; it's just not helpful.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: In terms of the six facilities, is there any view that any of these facilities are physically coming to the end of their fit-for-purpose life? Is that audit done? Is an assessment done?

PAUL O'REILLY: We assess them all the time, like any asset holder I guess, and the assessment focuses on what are the maintenance needs going forward and what are the security needs going forward. In the last probably four years we've focused heavily on improving security to reduce the likelihood of an incident escalating to a major incident and that has been a good investment because we have seen very few major incidents in the last few years compared to what it was like before. That has been the focus.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is that on all six, or some more than others?

PAUL O'REILLY: All six had some, but we probably did more at Frank Baxter and Cobham than the others. They are very old and very different. They are all functional and safe, they are clean and well managed, and I don't think it's accurate to say they're at end of life, but they are old and they make reforms like this challenging. We are just working through the challenges as best we can to implement the reform as quickly as possible.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do any of the facilities currently have gardens and garden programs?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: All of them?

PAUL O'REILLY: They all have gardens. To give you some examples, there is a horticulture program at Frank Baxter—quite a sophisticated one. It's connected to an accredited qualification for young people. The other centres have had that at various times over the years, but they all have gardens and there are opportunities for young people to do work programs in those gardens, learn how to use equipment, get coaching, training and all of that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are those young people, as part of those education programs, accessing computer systems to be able to undertake those studies and those qualifications?

PAUL O'REILLY: School provides that, yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is that happening in a specific room location or various—

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. Each centre has classrooms that are managed in partnership with the school, and the access to things like computers is carefully supervised by teachers, and sometimes by our staff as well, depending on the risk. The learning computers are generally in the classrooms.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: With the remand cohort, are all six facilities hosting remand of young people?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: At the moment, are those remand young people able to access the school?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So there is no distinction—once they're in, they are looked after in the same way?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. When young people are admitted, there is a health screen and, at some point, as soon as practical, there is an education screen by the school, which will assess what level of education—again, teaching is customised to the individual. Classes are limited to six. We have people learning very basic literacy right up to people doing university qualifications. There is a big range, often in the same cohort, but it's not true to say that every kid in custody gets to go to school because some people are in for a very short time and it is just not possible or practical or necessary. If a young person can achieve bail, then our job is to get them out as quickly as possible.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What is the cohort of remand? What are the remand numbers?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, 77 per cent of the kids in detention today are on remand.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That is even higher than the last figure, isn't it?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That remand figure is growing, clearly. Do you know the main reason or main conditions for the denial of bail?

PAUL O'REILLY: Coming into remand and the duration of remand is not something that we can control. We have no say or control over that. It's not our function. It's difficult for me, or inappropriate for me, to comment on the decision-making around bail or the reasons why bail is refused. I can't really comment on that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If somebody is going to make bail, surely you would be making an assessment on why they would make bail. Therefore you would understand the reasons that they were refused bail.

PAUL O'REILLY: No, our role in the bail application process in custody is to make sure the young person has private access to their lawyer as quickly as possible. We have really close connections with the Aboriginal Legal Service and Legal Aid, and we make sure that they can get access to private consultation as

quickly as possible. I meet with Legal Aid and ALS regularly, and I test with them—are they getting access, do we need to make any improvements, are there any gaps where they have difficulty getting access to their clients? If that's the case, we address it. Access to lawyers is critically important when somebody is on remand and wants to apply for bail. That's the first priority. The details of the application, the prospects of the application is not a matter for us. It's a matter for the young person and their lawyer to work through.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Out of the 228 young people, how many identify as First Nations people?

PAUL O'REILLY: One hundred and thirty five, which is 59 per cent.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Out of the 77 per cent that are on remand, how many are First Nations?

PAUL O'REILLY: One hundred and eight.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: On remand?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, 108 Aboriginal people on remand.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are most of those in Frank Baxter—the remand First Nations cohort?

PAUL O'REILLY: No, they're distributed all over the State. The centres do have different diversity in terms of racial background and cultural background. Our regional centres are mostly Aboriginal young people. Our metro centres are more mixed.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What's the Clarence one called?

PAUL O'REILLY: Acmena.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What is the number of First Nations at Acmena, out of the 30?

PAUL O'REILLY: I'll just have a look for you now.

SIMONE CZECH: Twenty-six out of 30. That was for Acmena.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Going back to the use-of-force incidents across all the centres, do any of those, on review, result in criminal charges against the officers?

PAUL O'REILLY: Historically they have. The process is the young person is examined by the medical team. There's a medical team in every centre full-time. They are supported to make the report to police. Sometimes our staff will report it to police if there is any suggestion of an assault and the police will attend the centre and take statements and make a judgement about whether they press charges or not. There have been matters where police have taken interest and considered charges or pressed charges. In that case we suspend our investigation so that we don't contaminate the police investigation and we wait until we get clearance from police before we do our own investigation.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have there been any allegations of a sexual assault nature across any of the centres over the past 12 months?

PAUL O'REILLY: Sexual assault—there have been allegations of sexual harassment between staff and there has been certainly allegations of behaviour that resembles grooming behaviour in the centre and that has gone through the misconduct process. I am not aware of sexual assault allegations against staff on young people, but I will double-check that because I was away from the system for a while doing another role, so I'll check that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: At the moment, what is your priority? I know that your job obviously is to administer the system as is. But what would you say at the moment is your priority reform area for the system at the moment, for the system that you're managing?

PAUL O'REILLY: It is improving service delivery to Aboriginal clients—is the number one priority.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you working with all of the relevant services and the wraparounds et cetera within government? Are you part of Closing the Gap?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you think, at this point, you have what you need to be doing the—or are there more needs to be able to implement the things that you can see in order to meet those Close the Gap targets in your work area?

PAUL O'REILLY: I can comment on the work that was within my mandate—or our Youth Justice mandate.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: Within that mandate the things we need and the priorities relate to having services that we can work alongside to help prevent. That's why we have, as I said earlier, transferred some of our funded services to ACCOs to try to improve that. So that is happening. There are more and more ACCOs emerging all the time, so we will continue to work with those. Also, working not directly in a contracting relationship but in partnership with Aboriginal organisations that are interested in youth justice and want to collaborate. That is one important thing that we need, that we have and that we do. The other critical thing is about having the right workforce. There's a big focus on supporting Aboriginal staff to be effective in their roles. Partly it's about recruitment and retention, but it's also about the way we operate—start having the authority to work the way they need to work in terms of cultural practice and supporting that, and addressing experiences of racism. They're the priorities for the workforce to try to improve conditions for people who work in this area. Aboriginal staff are usually best placed to work with Aboriginal young people. Increasing the number of Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal leaders in the organisation is a critically important part of the work that we're doing. Our focus in terms of workforce strategy is in that area.

The CHAIR: We now have about three minutes left. Just before I go to the Hon. Aileen MacDonald, I forgot to welcome Mr Tidball when he came in. Thank you for joining us.

Mr MICHAEL TIDBALL, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, on former oath

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Mr O'Reilly, I will just follow up on Ms Higginson's questions. I didn't catch the number that you said were on remand.

PAUL O'REILLY: Currently on remand 175.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can you give a breakup between the gender—male and female?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. There are 228 people in detention and 20 of those are female.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What clinical support is there available for young people who are entering custody with alcohol and/or drug misuse issues?

PAUL O'REILLY: There is significant clinical support. As I said before, each centre has a medical team which is administered by Justice Health NSW. They are, absolutely, the experts in all of that. They assess everybody when they come in. They have access to specialists from outside the centre, and they bring those specialists in as required. They make sure that the young person is supported. If there are any escalations in their medical condition related to drug and alcohol detox, they will make sure that they get support and they will make sure they get to hospital if they need to. My staff will escort kids to hospital sometimes if that's necessary or an ambulance will be called if needed. That's, I guess, the triage and the acute response.

The process of induction and onboarding a young person into a centre is complex. There's a whole range of things that have to be assessed, including interviews by our psychology team, our caseworkers, again, the medical team, Aboriginal practice officers for Aboriginal kids and education. In the course of all those interviews, risk factors are picked up, case plans are developed. That's where drug and alcohol treatment fits in. We have some drug and alcohol treatment programs in our range of interventions which we can apply. Again, it's got to be individualised; it has to be suited to the person. They may already be participating in a treatment program when they come to us, so we would probably seek to continue that somehow. It is a really good, thorough assessment. Making sure that the response is individualised and making sure that the young person has access to those clinicians, that is the approach.

The CHAIR: We have one minute, Ms Sue Higginson, if you have one more question.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I was just going to put on record, Chair, that Mr Fang needs to know that the entire rural community of New South Wales is held together by zip ties at some point.

The Hon. WES FANG: I agree. I don't think Fire and Rescue NSW should be.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Not necessarily.

The CHAIR: Does the Government have any questions?

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: No questions from the Government, thanks, Chair.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mercy rule.

GRAEME HEAD: Chair, am I able to respond to a couple of the questions that we took on notice from Ms Boyd before?

The CHAIR: Yes, absolutely.

GRAEME HEAD: In relation to accessible parking sensors, 1,380 across 11 councils as of 24 February. Ms Christie is now also able to provide a list of the attendees of the Park'nPay round table. If you're happy, Chair, we can provide those to the secretariat.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Chair, I have a question to close out Mr Fang's question about the Coffs Harbour council facility. Just to clarify, I think we were talking about their new building, the Yarrila cultural and civic centre.

The Hon. WES FANG: Correct.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: In the last 12 months we've had 12 calls there for automatic fire alarms. Four of those have been through February, so there has obviously been a spike recently. The information from the crews is that the inclement weather seems to have played a part in some of that recent activity, but also they were questioning the suitability of a particular type of optical detector that they had there. The thing I didn't mention previously was that we also have a specialist team or group of people working in our community safety section that is designed to help reduce false alarms. They will work with premises owners or facility managers to look at the nature of the activations they are having and see if there is something that can be suggested to change the design and the configuration of systems—whether it's moving the location of detectors or changing to a different type of detectors and considering the way they use them.

Quite often in new buildings, the building was designed in a certain way but it ends up being used slightly differently, or there are things in the normal usage pattern that weren't fully considered. That can have an impact on a building and the activation of false alarms. That False Alarm Reduction Unit can assist with that.

The Hon. WES FANG: That is really good to know. Thank you very much for that information.

ROB ROGERS: Madam Chair, to your question about wildlife training, I have that updated figure. It is 1,278 RFS members who have now completed the training, and that will continue being offered to people, both staff and volunteers.

The CHAIR: Was there anything else that had been taken on notice?

CARLENE YORK: I will, seeing as we have been along the table, basically. In relation to the sensor project, that's with UTS, and it's looking at the use of 5G technology, which, I am instructed, can still work when there are connectivity problems.

The Hon. WES FANG: And if you've had your shots, apparently.

CARLENE YORK: The other issue that you raised was about warnings out to the community. We don't just use Hazards Near Me. We do the radio, TV, doorknocking and all the other more standard types of communication out to the community if there are connectivity problems for the community.

The Hon. WES FANG: Well done. Thank you so much for that detailed response.

The CHAIR: Thank you all for being here all day. I know it's a very long day. Thank you for your time and also thank you for your answers. The Committee secretariat will be in touch in the near future regarding any questions taken on notice or any supplementary questions. Thank you again.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.