REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

FOOD PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY IN NSW

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Monday 21 March 2022

The Committee met at 9:45.

PRESENT

Mr Alex Greenwich (Chair)

Mr Anoulack Chanthivong
Mr Nathaniel Smith

* Please note:
[inaudible] is used when audio words cannot be deciphered
[audio malfunction] is used when words are lost due to a technical malfunction
[disorder] is used when members or witnesses speak over one another.

The CHAIR: Good morning, everybody. Before we start I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of this land. I pay my respects to Elders of the Eora nation past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to any other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are present. My name is Alex Greenwich and I am the Chair of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning. I am here with Mr Anoulack Chanthivong, the member for Macquarie Fields, and Mr Nathaniel Smith, the member for Wollondilly. Ms Felicity Wilson, the other member and Deputy Chair is, unfortunately, unwell and will not be attending today.

This is our first hearing of the Committee's inquiry into food production and supply in New South Wales. We have witnesses taking part via videoconference, and attending in person at Parliament House. The hearing is broadcast on the Parliament's website. I thank everyone for appearing before us today. We appreciate the flexibility of everybody involved, especially those attending via videoconference.

Mr JOHN CAMERON ROBERTSON, Chief Executive Officer, Foodbank NSW & ACT, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

Ms SARAH FLOMERSFELD, New South Wales Operations Lead, OzHarvest, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I apologise for the delay in setting up today. We appreciate your flexibility with that. I invite both of you to make an opening statement. Sarah, would you like to begin?

SARAH FLOMERSFELD: Certainly, and thank you. My name is Sarah Flomersfeld, I am the New South Wales Operations lead for OzHarvest and I am dialling in from OzHarvest's national headquarters here in Alexandria, Sydney, which is on Gadigal land. For those of you who do not know OzHarvest, we were founded 18 years ago by our CEO Ronni Khan, primarily with the idea of food rescue. There are large volumes of surplus food out there, and there are lots of people out there in the community that need food, and we are the connection between those two things. In a couple of weeks we will be celebrating that here in New South Wales, as an organisation, we have delivered 100 million meals across New South Wales, and that is not to mention what we have done nationally, and our IP sharing internationally as well.

In addition to food rescue, we do education in sustainability, behavioural change, and emergency food relief. But what we are here to talk about today are the interconnected issues of food and hunger, which, as you know, is a major driver of climate change. I hope I am not jumping ahead of John here when I say we rely on the Foodbank Hunger Report, which tells us that one in six people across Australia and in New South Wales went without food last year, and over 300,000 children in New South Wales went without food at some point last year, which sits at odds with New South Wales' prosperity, with our international reputation, and also our commitment to the people of New South Wales as well. At the same time, we have a serious food waste issue. Food waste is responsible for 8 to 10 per cent of global greenhouse emissions, which is more than flying, plastic production, and oil extraction combined. We have to be seriously prepared to do something about food waste, and New South Wales has acknowledged this. We have signed on to the Australian target to halve food waste by 2030, but that is in eight years and we have barely skimmed the surface.

To give you an idea of the magnitude of food waste in New South Wales, if you took all of the surplus food that was going to go to landfill in one year, that is enough to feed every person in New South Wales for six months—and I do not mean every vulnerable person, I mean every single person in New South Wales could be fed for six months with food that New South Wales throws in the bin. So it is a major issue, but it is also a major opportunity. Only 0.2 per cent of that food is rescued. So, on the one hand, we have this untapped opportunity for using food waste to become an economic driver for New South Wales. We could create whole new industries around this; it could be the source of job creation and we could be a world leader, something that will only become more important as the international community looks for ways to tackle climate change. But then we also have this imperative to address climate change, and also to address hunger and food insecurity in New South Wales. So it is an imperative, and it is an opportunity, and I would like to tell you more about it, but I will leave it at that for now.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. John, would you like to make any opening remarks?

JOHN ROBERTSON: Just very briefly. Foodbank this year will mark 30 years of operations, commencing as Foodbank Sydney, and obviously moving internationally. I think the key thing for us is obviously we are seeing a significant growth in people living with food insecurity, not just as a result of COVID, but high rents, high utility bills, and all those sorts of things. As Sarah said, that piece around prosperity, for a lot of people it is really difficult to appreciate just how many people are living with food insecurity, and there are those factors

that I have talked about. But just to give you some concept, we are feeding throughout New South Wales and the ACT just under 340,000 people a month, and we are seeing, of the people who reach out for support, just over half of them are going at least one day a week without access to food. I am happy to have those questions thrown at us, because in my time sitting where you are sitting now I think I may have raised those same questions. But I think for Sarah and I, we are seeing those people on a daily basis.

The final point I would make is that there is a tendency to prejudge a lot of those people, that they have made poor choices and those sorts of things. The reality for the large bulk of those people is that life served them up a curve ball and they found themselves in a situation, whether it is a health issue, or people who are working who suddenly the car breaks down and they need the car to go to work so they have got to max out their credit cards, and those sorts of things. So these are issues that are happening every day. At Foodbank we say, "It might not be on your street, but chances are there is someone in your street that is living with food insecurity regardless of where you are."

The CHAIR: Thank you both. I will start with questions on food insecurity, particularly over the past two years. Obviously, in addition to the work that both your organisations do year round, we have had the challenges of the bushfires, the pandemic, the floods, and the impact that that has had on transport supply chains and access. Throughout that time I know that the Government has stepped in and provided some emergency funding. We are obviously in a situation where we are going to continue to probably have rolling crises; that has been a constant now. What could be done better from a government point of view when it comes to procurement, making sure that emergency food relief is scalable and quick and that you are able to get food to people who need it in those instances? I know there have been challenges over the past two years. I am happy for either of you to start. Perhaps Sarah?

SARAH FLOMERSFELD: I will kick off, then. I like to think of food relief as a two-part system. On the one hand, you have got your sprinkler system, which is the day-to-day work of OzHarvest, Foodbank, and others in helping vulnerable people day in, day out, and the charities that they rely on, and we need to keep that going. Without that, more and more people are going to fall into deeper levels of poverty, which is hard to get them out of, and then it becomes a burden on the healthcare system, education, and social safety nets. You need the basics funded on a regular basis—a core level of funding to organisations like OzHarvest and Foodbank—to make sure that people are at least getting by.

But when there is a disaster, you need a firehose, not just a sprinkler system. You need to be able to turn that level of food support up and you need to be able to do it quickly. To their credit, the New South Wales Government did turn that up during COVID. But we know that more disasters will happen, and we need the ability to switch this on quickly. We need a little bit of funding to maintain that firehose, but we also need funding on tap that can be executed, not just the next time that Cabinet has a little bit of spare time to talk about it; it has to be turned on within a week or two of something like a lockdown being announced or a fire occurring. I know that at a federal level, in our international humanitarian space, we have pre-approved funding that is ready-to-go for NGOs as soon as there is a volcanic eruption or a civil war. So having a pre-approved envelope of emergency relief funding is what we already do abroad, but shouldn't we also be doing it at home, now that we know we are more vulnerable to disasters than we ever have been? I will leave it at that and I will give John a chance to speak.

JOHN ROBERTSON: Over that whole period of bushfire, flood, COVID, flood, drought, both of our organisations have learned a lot. We have grown a lot, and changed a lot of what we have done throughout that whole time. We have received significant support from both state and federal governments, particularly the state government during the COVID crisis. We made a decision at Foodbank some time ago that we would always make sure—following on from the bushfires in particular—that we have on standby 5,000 emergency food relief hampers. They are hampers that are about 14 kilograms of food. They will feed a family of four for about a week, so things like pasta, rice, pasta sauce, tuna, Weet-Bix, UHT milk, tea, coffee, and those sorts of things, just to get people over the hurdle.

We have continued to do that, and watched that demand increased quite significantly. We have shipped throughout COVID - I think about 160,000 emergency relief hampers since the lockdown occurred in June last year. We have been doing that with the government, through Resilience NSW. We were delivering hampers through Health when apartment blocks were locked down at a moment's notice, and working through those sorts of things. Both ourselves and OzHarvest have done that in a way where we have done that not solely relying on government funding, but doing that hoping that that would be forthcoming.

Obviously, as Sarah says, that certainty piece would be quite helpful for us, because there is a cost for us in purchasing products to put into those hampers, in storing those hampers, and in making sure they are within code, so that we are not delivering hampers that have been sitting around for 12 months and they are all out of date. Those sorts of things would be quite useful. The other thing is transport costs. We touch on that in our submission from a federal government perspective as well, not just in emergencies, but more generally, in that

transport costs, particularly now we are seeing path-throughs coming with our transport contractors out to regional areas, we have seen our transport costs increase, just with fuel, in the last three months by 10 per cent. All of those things have put pressure on our ability to deliver in those crisis situations, not just on a day-to-day basis.

The CHAIR: I will just follow on by asking about some of the geographical limitations you may have. Are there parts of the state which are particularly hard or challenging to access and what could be done to improve that, from a storage or transport perspective et cetera?

JOHN ROBERTSON: The storage piece is not so difficult. Although, one of the things we are looking at—and certainly it is very early days—is whether or not we do not set up regional hubs for our produce. We ship a lot of produce out of the Riverina. We ship it in and then ship it out. We are looking at whether in fact we do not set up some regional hubs. With Resilience NSW we have been locating some of our emergency hampers through COVID in some of those more remote locations. We have also worked with RFS on that as well. Some of the early hampers that were going out in the floods were hampers that we had previously located in the regions, with the RFS, and those sorts of things. I think the bigger challenge is transport and—regardless of where you might set yourself up—transporting into some of these remote areas.

Again, during COVID we have been working with Aboriginal Affairs and delivering hampers to individual homes across New South Wales. One of our school breakfast programs is in Boggabilla. Transport is always an issue, but we have been working our way through that as best we can. It is obviously something we are looking to continue to improve as best we can; about, do we have one regional centre or two, and what does that look like, and whether we set that up or we approach local government in those areas for storage facilities, and those sorts of things. It is a work in progress. Greater engagement with local government occurred during COVID. I think Sarah would say the same thing, that historically, we have not worked that closely with local government, but during COVID we built relationships that I think will be important for the future of how we distribute.

SARAH FLOMERSFELD: I completely echo everything John said. I would also add in that the cold chain is a big part of this. Transporting ambient produce is just about finding the right truck and filling it up and sending it out. For example, we right now have 6,000 frozen meals that are sitting in Foodbank's warehouse that are going to go up to Lismore to help people on the Northern Rivers. There is no point sending them there, because there is nowhere that we can store them in a large capacity that is chilled. That is indicative of the entire cold chain—it is complicated and it is expensive. Transporting products that are cold, chilled, or frozen is hard. Both the funding to do that, but also having a deeper look at our cold chain and how we can improve that is going to be the key to unlocking this food waste and food rescue opportunity.

JOHN ROBERTSON: This whole notion of access to chilled and frozen transport is one of the things we raised in our submission. It might sound rather mundane, but we get a lot of protein that is donated to us, like chicken, red meat, fish, and those sorts of things. Our ability to distribute that outside the metropolitan area is all but non-existent. Out of money that we have fundraised we are trialling chilled and frozen transport to the Central West region. We are fortunate that in the ACT the Australian Capital Territory government funds our chilled transport into there, so there is an ability to freight protein and other produce that needs to be chilled as it is transported. That is one of the things that limits our ability to get some of that other produce into the regions, particularly protein.

The CHAIR: Before I go to my colleagues, I want to ask you, Sarah, about the OzHarvest market in Waterloo and learnings from that and whether that model could be scalable or used in other parts of the state.

SARAH FLOMERSFELD: Absolutely. Thank you for the question. For those who are not familiar with our market, it is a space that has been provided by Land and Housing, and it is a supermarket that is basically free. We say that it is 'take what you need, and give if you can'. You can make a donation on the way out. It is supplied exclusively through rescued food that has come in, often through large delivery providers, like Marley Spoon and Woolworths online. It comes out of our normal food rescue mix. It is staffed largely by volunteers, but we do have a professional market manager—like a supermarket manager—who is there on site as well.

We serve about 1,400 people a week, operating five days a week. It means that people, particularly in the City of Sydney - but we know that people travel from as far as the Blue Mountains to visit the market - can come and get a bag of groceries that, frankly, were going to go in the bin if we did not rescue them. It can just give them enough to get through their week. It is one of the few places out there that people can go with no questions asked, regardless of their financial circumstances, and without the need to demonstrate need. People end up in tricky circumstances for a range of reasons, as John was saying. This is a very cost-effective way of supplying food to people who need it, and to get them through particularly tricky times, like if they have lost a couple of shifts that week, or something bad has happened to them. As I said, it is volunteer run, with rescue food. It is a wonderful resource for the people of Waterloo and surrounds, and we would love to do it more broadly. You would not scale it up as much as scale it out.

During COVID, we saw that there was a massive need for this kind of service in western Sydney, for example. So there is an opportunity to put a market like that in western Sydney, and you could absolutely do it in regional hubs as well. It just requires some seed funding, some partnerships from government and community, and then a team of dedicated volunteers. But it is something we would love to see scaled.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: Thank you both for coming via Webex today. I see that you are a Greater Western Sydney AFL supporter, Mr Robertson, which is good to see.

JOHN ROBERTSON: First jersey, signed by the full team and the coaching staff.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: Yes. I went to school with Lenny Hayes, the assistant coach. I know him very well. Obviously over the past three years we have had more natural disasters than the seven plagues of Egypt, going back thousands of years ago. What did you find the most challenging? Was it bushfires, floods, or COVID in general? Obviously during COVID we saw a large take-up of people buying non-perishable items from supermarkets and putting stress on your organisations in storing non-perishable foods, such as pasta, rice and other things. What was the most challenging? Was it pandemic lockdowns or getting food and other things out to regional areas during the bushfires and floods, like we have had recently?

JOHN ROBERTSON: I think that they were all very unique and very different. I think the COVID one was much more intense, with supply chain issues. I think, in the same way that we saw a lot of the retailers struggling with supply chain issues, so did we. While about 80 per cent of the food that we distribute is donated, we purchase, and have always purchased, different products and those sorts of things because you just do not have enough if you are relying on donations. At Foodbank we say we have a surprise chain, not a supply chain, unlike the retailers. So that presents its own challenges. I would say, realistically, the lockdowns were the biggest problem because, a lot like OzHarvest, we rely on volunteers—both individual volunteers, but also corporate volunteers—to do a lot of the things we do in our warehouse. That dried up overnight very early in 2020, and we have only just started having corporate volunteers back into our warehouse now. So, during that period of time we had to employ people who, historically, we would never have employed, because we just did not have enough volunteers to keep up.

We had a whole range of challenges in keeping COVID out of our warehouse. We had increased costs associated with cleaning. We had to do deep cleans. We have the people come in three times a week, I would not say to do a deep clean, but to spray and disinfect and the whole thing. We have someone full-time just walking around cleaning all our touch services, and those sorts of things. So, without a doubt, I think COVID has presented probably the most significant challenges. Although I would make the point—and I think this is really important—that post bushfires and post floods, when the media circus moves on, we are there long after they have gone, because we work with charities. We work in New South Wales with about 1,500 charities and schools to deliver food across the state. We will just keep working with those charities on the ground, delivering what is needed, post floods. But I would say the biggest challenge, both from a staffing or volunteering point of view, and a logistics point of view, was clearly, without doubt, COVID.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: I notice in your submission you talk quite a bit about the benefits of the School Breakfast 4 Health Program. In the frame of that question again, which time did you find that the hardest to commit to? Obviously with COVID we had a lot of kids learning from home. I had my two girls learning from home, which was lots of fun, let me tell you. What parts did you find hard? Did you see a greater uptake in regional areas or was it more metropolitan Sydney?

JOHN ROBERTSON: The challenge was, with students not at school, how do you get breakfast to those kids? We had to change and increase the capacity for the schools to ensure those kids were actually getting access to breakfast at home and those sorts of things. So, again, there were the supply chain issues, but we were much more reliant on the schools being connected with their communities, and knowing those families that needed that support. I think a lot of the schools were very good at that. But there is nothing like the kids collectively having breakfast together at the school with the staff and those sorts of things. The challenge was, without doubt, while the kids were not at school, just making sure they were still getting access to a good, healthy breakfast.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: Sarah, you were talking about the wastage of food. I visited a waste plant out at Bringelly. I noticed that one of the things they were looking at was the new technology and incinerating food waste at a certain temperature and from the other end of the conveyor belt comes out fodder for farming. This is something they were looking at very seriously during the drought. Obviously we had a reduction in hay because of the drought here in New South Wales. Has there been any research into things like that from your point of view in trying to turn food wastage into something we can use for fodder?

SARAH FLOMERSFELD: Our number one focus is stopping food waste at the source. Ideally we would not produce excess food, or when it is produced, we would find ways of getting it into feeding other people,

stock, or repurposing it for other industries. Occasionally, we come across technologies like this, but the issue seems to be a broad structural one that will need solutions at a legislative and structural level. Individual technologies are not going to do it by themselves. So we would love to see, for example, a tax incentive that enables farmers—over 20 per cent of food waste happens at the farm—to donate food or logistics companies to transport food, and to be able to claim that back as a tax credit. So we would love to see New South Wales going to the federal government and advocating for that. There are some large structural changes that we can make that will supplement some of those smaller technological innovations that you are talking about.

JOHN ROBERTSON: Can I just jump in on this, sorry, if I am not being too bold. This is one of those challenges with—Sarah talked about the transport. Whilst it is a federal government issue, I think, through COAG and meetings with the Treasurers and those sorts of things, Foodbank Australia has done a significant amount of work with KPMG, and we have been lobbying, probably for the last three or four years, where we would see transport costs from the farm to organisations like ours treated in the same way that tax credits are for research and development. At the moment it is cheaper to dump than donate. I have had conversations with berry farmers—farmers who do blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and those sorts of things—and I can tell you there is a price point, at which once a punnet gets to a particular price, it is not economical for them to harvest, pack, and transport, so they literally just plough it back into the paddock. They are the sorts of things where we actually need to think about how do we make it viable to get good quality produce off the farm and into organisations like ours, if it is not going into the retailers. That is one of the challenges.

The second thing I would say, just on waste, is that at Foodbank we are always interested in looking—because a lot of the produce that we get in bulk has a particular shelf life on it, and some of it is not great. Some people who donate give you a big blue bin, that has all this produce that looks great on top, but as you work your way down through the bin it is not so great at the bottom. We work with farmers, and we do have farmers come and collect with us, but we are also always looking at technology that can convert that produce into, for instance, chook food. I have had a number of conversations with former Deputy Premier Andrew Stoner, who is involved with an organisation that is actually developing converting old produce into chook food and those sorts of things, and the opportunities that would present for us then to go to egg farmers and basically say, "We'll give you this much chook food and you give us this many eggs," and those sorts of things. But I think we are all looking for innovative solutions to tackle that whole issue of waste.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: As a chook farmer myself of four chickens at East Bowral, I can appreciate that. Last but not least, I do not want you to have to name and shame, but who are the biggest offenders in terms of food waste here in New South Wales? You can be broad about it.

SARAH FLOMERSFELD: It is you and me, and everyone at home, actually. So 33 per cent of food waste happens in the home, and each household wastes about $2,000 to $3,000 worth of food every year. We think that the solution to that is some sort of large-scale campaign. I know that is something New South Wales has invested in in the past as well. But the number one way of getting rid of food waste is not at the farm, not at the supermarket, but in our homes, and it is changing the way that people relate to food, and making sure that they think before they purchase, and then use food carefully, before it goes out. The other big one is farms. Over 20 per cent of food waste happens at the farm. Like John, we are trying to work with farmers to get that food off. But they are your two really big sources, and the two big untapped opportunities—consumers and farms.

JOHN ROBERTSON: Yes, I would agree with that. Farmers are not intentionally wasteful with what they produce. It largely comes down to the economics. The major retailers and manufacturers these days are far less wasteful, just because their systems are so well refined. But they are always looking for opportunities to reduce their waste, and that is partly working with organisations like ours as well.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: You would recommend in future planning to have more onsite composting, things like that, where we are trying to be more organic? I am talking purely for myself. I have got chickens, I have got my veggie patches, I have got my water tanks because I have a property big enough to do that. But maybe pushing for more people to try to recycle from home rather than putting it in the bin?

SARAH FLOMERSFELD: Ideally, we would buy less food in the first place; at least less food is going to end up in the bin. Yes, composting systems and other home-based systems for getting rid of that food is one option. But then, whether it is at farms or at a household level, there are a range of different levers that government holds as well that we can pull on, to make sure that food does not just waste away on the vine, that it does not have to be ploughed away, and that the food that does get off the vine gets transported to organisations like ours and like Foodbank. We can tackle this problem in a few different ways, and government has several of the levers.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Good morning, John and Sarah. Thank you for your time. How effective have our preventative campaigns and legislative and policy tools been at trying to minimise waste?

I think there will always be waste, but it is a matter of trying to minimise it. How effective have those campaigns and those tools been, and what actually needs to change to make it more effective?

SARAH FLOMERSFELD: When it comes to the consumer campaigns, I will have to take that one on notice; a colleague of mine knows more than I do on that topic. When it comes to incentives for businesses, and working with businesses to reduce waste, for example, the EPA funded us to work more closely with major supermarket chains and to help teach those supermarket chains how to waste less, but then also give more to us, to make sure that the food that does end up on the back dock is properly handled, so that more of it can go to charity, and less of it can go to the bin. That was a great investment from EPA, and made a big difference in our ability to rescue food and get it to people who are vulnerable. I think it is going to be mixed. It would depend on the end user of those campaigns, but I would love to take that on notice.

JOHN ROBERTSON: I would agree with Sarah on some of those things. They are just ongoing challenges. Part of it is also what we classify as waste and think of as waste. I say to people that a business' waste, for us, is a potential donation of food that we can effectively redistribute. When it is considered as waste it is not treated as it would be if it was thought about as potentially consumable food—healthy food—for people to access. A whole range of initiatives could be undertaken to encourage businesses and people to think that waste is not waste in the sense that, "Well, it is no good, so it goes in the bin." There are opportunities. Whether, in fact, we need to come up with another term—as we did when we started recycling, and everyone thought that was all waste, and then we thought about it in the context of recycling - whether, as a sector we need to come up with a different term, that actually has people thinking differently about what they see as waste.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Obviously there is a huge amount of food wastage, but in trying to deal with it we must get right to the source. Prevention is better than cure. I want to know what role the New South Wales Parliament can play, both through policy and legislative tools, and also general public campaigning, because it is—no pun intended—a real waste to see food binned. A lot of stuff goes into it. There is labour, growing the food, fertilisers. You mentioned earlier, Sarah, the impact of food production on the environment and on climate, only to see that food go to waste. That is such an inefficient production chain that we could certainly improve.

SARAH FLOMERSFELD: If I can respond directly to that, the actions that the New South Wales Parliament can take are, first, recommending ongoing support to food relief organisations to rescue that food. We are helping businesses and we are also getting the food out in the community, so financial support for that would make a massive difference. Secondly, when it comes to working with farmers—as John said, they hate food waste as much as we do—is advocating through National Cabinet, or whatever your intergovernmental forums are at the moment, for some sort of tax incentive. Another is trialling regional food hubs, where we can bring together food in one place, sort it and also redistribute it regionally as well. It is a massive jobs opportunity as well.

Taking a look into the cold chain—doing a deep dive into the cold chain, and finding out what our gaps are, and, could we make it more efficient? There is an industry opportunity there. Finally, that consumer education campaign. With "Slip, Slop, Slap", it happened with mass media, but it also had to happen in the schools, so a joint investment in public campaigns to change the way people think about food waste, but also a deep investment through the curriculum, making sure that change happens at a generational level. I can give you a list of 10 other ways that Parliament could help, but that I will take on notice.

The CHAIR: Sarah, just building on that, your submission talked a lot about barriers to information sharing across the whole chain. What do you see as the appropriate platform for organisations like yourself, Foodbank, primary producers, and government, to be able to do that information sharing to be able to get a rapid response where needed and, obviously, ongoing business-as-usual management?

SARAH FLOMERSFELD: This is an idea that we have been talking about with Foodbank for some time, and the idea is that there is a gap there. If a farm suddenly has a large amount of food that they cannot get rid of, or they cannot pick, or it is uneconomical to donate, they do not really have a way of communicating that to a logistics organisation who might transport it for them, and then to a food relief organisation like Foodbank or OzHarvest that can distribute it. So you have got massive information asymmetry that is happening there, that some sort of portal or platform where that could be uploaded would fix that information asymmetry.

We are talking about a tech solution, really, that would have to be led by industry with government. The tax incentives that I keep banging on about would be a huge part of that, because if a logistics company sees an opportunity come up in the system and thinks, "Well, we're coming up to end of financial year, it is actually really smart business sense for me to pick up those three tonnes of strawberries and transport them to OzHarvest," that is going to be the make or break of the system. So some sort of tech platform would be a world first, and it would enable the various parts of this problem and the solution to communicate with each other.

JOHN ROBERTSON: That goes to the whole point around it is a federal government tax thing, long term. But those are things that you can advocate. In the interim, there could be funding available, which I think would be a great thing. I mean, we support our farmers in a whole range of different ways. In terms of how government thinks about this, this is another way of supporting farmers. You often hear about dairy producers and cattle farmers genuinely feeling affection for those animals; it is the same for the people that grow produce. There is a genuine commitment to wanting to see that get off, get out of the paddock, and off the farm, and actually get consumed.

This is a way for government to actually support those sectors and for state government to support farmers, in a way where it is not just, and I am loath to use the term, but it might be seen by some as just throwing money at farmers. But actually putting money into the agriculture sector, so that it delivers a positive outcome to the wider community, by funding the ability to get it off farm and get it transported to Foodbank, to OzHarvest, to whoever, and it actually gets consumed. People who otherwise would not get access to that sort of quality produce will get access.

The CHAIR: Thank you both for appearing before us today. Unfortunately, at this stage we have to leave it there because of schedule constraints. We may indeed reach out to both of your organisations for a follow-up or further information and potentially a site visit to meet you onsite in some of the places where you do the great work that you do. We may also send you further questions in writing. Your replies will form part of your evidence and be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions we may have?

JOHN ROBERTSON: Of course.

The CHAIR: Thank you both very much for your time. That was extremely useful and a great way to have both of you here to start this inquiry.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Ms ANNABEL JOHNSON, Head of Policy and Advocacy, NSW Farmers Association, affirmed and examined

Ms JENNY BRADLEY, Chair, Innovation and Technology Working Group and Chair, Sheepmeat Committee, NSW Farmers Association, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

Ms JOANNA TREASURE, Cattle Committee Member, NSW Farmers Association, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Sorry, Ms Treasure. Could I ask you to repeat your affirmation? We had a technology issue at our end.

JOANNA TREASURE: Okay. Can you hear me now?

The CHAIR: Yes. That is better. Thank you so much for that. We really appreciate that. Would any or all of you like to make any brief opening remarks?

ANNABEL JOHNSON: Jenny Bradley will make the statement on behalf of the association.

The CHAIR: Great. Ms Bradley, over to you.

JENNY BRADLEY: Yes. I am not sure whether you can see me. I have not got my camera on, so excuse me. Thank you for the opportunity to provide the farmers' perspective to this critical inquiry into the food supply chains. I am a farmer and Chair of the Sheepmeat Committee at NSW Farmers. I derive 100 per cent of my income from my farming business. NSW Farmers is the largest state farming organisation representing the interests of its farmer members in the state. We are Australia's only state-based farming organisation that represents farmers across all agricultural commodities. Agriculture is the heartbeat of regional communities and serves as an economic engine industry in New South Wales, producing more than $17 billion worth of food and fibre every year.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging time for all Australians, but its disruption to global supply chains has brought home a key message: We cannot just take access to locally produced food and fibre for granted. The destabilising impact of the war in Ukraine is serving as another reminder of the need to form, in local production, a resilience to global shocks, and yet in Australia there are several worrying trends that could set us on a path of aggression, when it comes to food security and having more access to quality food—things that Australia has a proud history of providing. Unfortunately, many of these trends are not obvious to the average consumer, or even to decision-makers. One of these trends is the erosion of competition in fresh food supply

chains—an idea that has been tested and confirmed by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in its perishable agricultural goods inquiry in 2020.

We know farmers are in a vulnerable position, and that prices are at the mercy of supply chain power dynamics, but what is being done to ensure they will stay in business and continue to provide the milk, fruit, vegetables, red meat, and chicken that we all love? For some fresh food farmers, continuing to invest in their businesses is untenable. It goes without saying that farmers need land to farm, but there is a real risk that productive agricultural land will be permanently lost or fragmented by the likes of renewable energy infrastructure and urban encroachment. We are not saying agriculture should be prioritised at the expense of these competing land-use interests; we are merely saying give agriculture a seat at the table, and recognise the long-term consequences to food and fibre production if we jeopardise our best and most productive land. There are real considerations that require real analysis.

In progressing to change we urge the New South Wales Government to install an agricultural commission to support the Agriculture Commissioner—a role that should be legislated, to engender ongoing representation for agriculture in the halls of government. There needs to be a stronger interface between landholders and decision-makers when it comes to land use. We are proposing the installation of land-use offices to aid farmers in the renewable energy transition. Ultimately, agriculture needs to be better considered in land-use decisions. This should not be optional when so much of regional Australia's vibrancy is grounded in agriculture. We cannot farm without land. We also cannot farm without workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a halt on the movement of people, and agriculture is among the sectors hardest hit. Without significant efforts to attract more workers to agriculture, local food production will be considerably worse off.

We also need to be fostering the next generation of farmers. With skyrocketing property prices, access has never been harder for those passionate about the sector. We encourage the use of stronger promotional campaigns to attract working holiday makers to farm work, and a network of Help Harvest NSW coordinators, to promote and organise farm work for those interested in the sector, and grants to subsidise the cost of on-farm accommodation for farm workers, given the barriers that many farmers face in providing non-farm accommodation. Farmers need freedom to thrive. The farming sector has historically faced a tangle of red and green tape and the burgeoning influence of environmental, local, and governance factors on private sector investments will present new operating requirements for farmers to meet.

There is growing pressure from retailers for farmers to meet certain ethical standards. But, as price takers, farmers are absorbing considerable risk in adjusting their systems for potentially no additional profit. Social research reveals farming is among the most trusted professions, yet farming production systems have varying levels of community trust. We urge the New South Wales government to invest in a program built on the NSW Farmers Consumer Connection project, to provide a portal for the community to learn about farming practices, and the bigger picture of food production and supply.

We know local food production is important, but what about what happens after the farm gate? Australia has a notoriously low level of local manufacturing and processing, and reinvigorating this would go a long way to retaining value of food and fibre production locally, as well as shoring up food supply, in the event of a global supply chain disruption. We urge the New South Wales government to invest in our food producers, by providing grants to establish small-scale product-specific manufacturing, or processing plants close to growers. Farmers can also [audio malfunction] brand and promote their own product, and targeted upskilling investment could go a long way. Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that farmers are at the coalface of environmental change. We need a plan for overcoming the challenges of a changing climate, and innovation through research and development will be key.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. We really appreciate the detail in the introductory remarks. We will also ask that a copy of that be sent to Committee staff as well to have that to access. Can I start with the concerns raised in your submission about the planning system in New South Wales and your view or suggestions on what could be done in the planning system to protect agricultural land?

ANNABEL JOHNSON: I will kick off. As Jenny said in those introductory remarks, we are not looking for absolute protection of agricultural land. We understand that there are competing interests, and they also need to be recognised. What we do think is not being recognised there is a fragmentation and loss of agricultural land that we know is occurring, and the impact that that is having on our capacity to continue to provide food and fibre to the community. We also know the challenge of climate change is going to make our productive pool smaller. We think there is a real role for the government to come up with a whole-of-government vision. The challenges that we are facing are not short term; they are long term. So we need a whole-of-government vision around what agricultural land is, and the objectives that we are seeking to achieve from that. I should state, our ideas are really an extension of going beyond what the ag commissioner presented in his initial paper released last year.

We also think there needs to be a statutory duty to consider the impact that decisions are having on agricultural land. Again, that does not mean that decisions cannot be made, but it is understanding that, for example, when we decide for urban expansion to occur in some of our growing regional centres, which they are, after the COVID migration that is occurring to our regions, we need to understand what impact that is going to have on agriculture. Renewable energy zones are another large development that is occurring at a rapid pace, and we need to understand what impact that is having on our agricultural businesses. Another key foundation is understanding what we mean by agricultural land, and mapping it. In order to protect agricultural land, we first need to define what it constitutes and map it across the state.

At the moment there is a map out for public consultation that is very much focused on biophysical—the soil type of the land. We think we need to extend that beyond to: Where is some of the critical connecting infrastructure? Where are water resources? What are the opportunities around renewable energy zones that could enable local manufacturing? Importantly, important agricultural land—what are we trying to grow? What might be important agricultural land for wheat might not be appropriate for lemons. Lemon-growing areas also need to be recognised, and also some of those critical areas around, say, Batlow, where you have a real tourism hub that the community relies upon. It is a multi-faceted criteria.

We also need to ground-truth our mapping, so to get out there, and make sure that the maps are accurate about what we are talking about, and also understanding, what are the targets? What are we losing when we are making decisions? With this approach, we are trying to stop land-use conflicts before it occurs. We recognise that it is a different approach, and it is really trying to getting agricultural land considered holistically. At the moment, we recognise agriculture has intersections with the Department of Primary Industries, with the Planning department, with the Environment department. At the moment there are different objectives trying to be achieved by those various departments, and that is really not getting the best holistic solution. That is at a holistic level of what we are trying to achieve.

The CHAIR: Your submission makes a recommendation for an agriculture commission to back up the commissioner. What do you see is the interaction of that commission with the planning system?

ANNABEL JOHNSON: Working through those department interactions, and understanding where we might be able to achieve better outcomes. At the moment it is very much short term, but looking at that long term and, as I said, what does local manufacturing look like? So looking at a few of those opportunities, having a more strategic, long-term lens, and making sure that departments are considering that holistically. This is not just a planning issue; it goes beyond that. It involves the Environment department, and the Department for Primary Industries. We think a legislated ag commissioner can have a real role in the machinery of government, to really drive that long-term strategic look at agricultural land.

The CHAIR: I might now switch to the concerns raised about the erosion in competition amongst fresh food supply chains. Your submission talks about the need for funding for independent and cooperative suppliers to assist in this. Could you take us through how you think we could really tackle that erosion in competition and what needs to be done to facilitate greater competition?

ANNABEL JOHNSON: I will provide some introductory comments. Both Jo and Jenny are actual farmers, so they give an understanding about how that erosion really is impacting their business. It does come to competition law, which we understand is held at the federal level, but there is a need for the state to be driving a harmonisation around competition, and also advocating, at the Commonwealth level, the need for a more holistic understanding about competition.

At the moment, competition law very much focuses on the price that consumers pay in the short term. We think that is a limiting factor that is not only going to reduce our capacity to supply consumers, but also lead to consumers being left short, and vulnerable to price spikes. We believe that we need to look at competition on a more long-term basis, and ensure that consumers have access to food and fibre over a larger—that really comes down to the unconscionable conduct provisions that currently exist at the Commonwealth level, that are not recognising the behaviours that are occurring, and the anti-competitive behaviours that farmers are coming up against. They are not recognising that in the current structure. We think at the Commonwealth level, fundamentally, that needs to be looked at, and the state has a role in sort of advocating for those changes, because the competition policy is held by the Commonwealth and the jurisdictions.

At a more localised level, at the state level, there needs to be a harmonisation of our fair trading practices. We recognise that is difficult, but there are businesses that are trading in Victoria and Queensland. So the more that we can get that harmonised, but then looking at, what does it look like - in terms of cooperatives and business structures? A lot of our farm businesses are smaller businesses. Our membership represent family farms, which are generally small- to medium-sized businesses, and these businesses are needing to contract with large processors and large retailers, which puts them at a competitive disadvantage.

It is also critical that farmers produce perishable goods. They only have a certain time to be able to sell that, which means that their ability to interact with processors and retailers, and get a good price—they only have a very limited negotiating time frame. We believe that by farmers grouping together and looking at how they can form cooperatives and different business structures, we will be able to come together and have a greater bargaining power. Will they be able to have more say further down the supply chain, so in the processing sector? I would love it if you could hear from Jenny and Jo about the impact that it is having on their businesses.

The CHAIR: Yes, please. I appreciate that.

JENNY BRADLEY: I can actually go into the competition when you are a single farmer. I will give an example that is really operational. Processing lamb through a single processor who has been affected by COVID, so his staff has actually declined. Those lambs were contracted at a certain date, so he was actually not purchasing. He had enough lambs around him because his contracts were full, but he did not actually participate in the open saleyard markets. It has really influenced the return on the lambs at the open sales, because his workforce has been decreased, so decreasing competition. But it also affected me directly, in that, because he had an unskilled workforce on the chain, those lambs were contracted at a $9 per kilo dressed weight, and because the trimming was inefficient and ineffective, they trimmed heavier than normal. I lost probably around not quite a kilo per carcass, which is $9 a kilo. Over 600 lambs, that is quite a significant impact on my end return. That is just one short little example that I can give, where processors and the workforce have been affected by COVID and one single player in a marketplace.

The CHAIR: Ms Treasure, is there anything you would like to add there?

JOANNA TREASURE: I have had a very similar experience to Jenny, actually. I think we are all aware that farmers are price takers. I think John Kennedy had a quote, that farmers are the only contributors to our economy who buy everything at retail, sell everything at wholesale, and pay the freight both ways. The problem that we are having is that the cost of food is historically low, as we are all aware, and our inputs are really going up. COVID has really highlighted that issue for us, because the price of lamb is actually quite stagnant at the moment, and yet the rising cost of our breeding ewes is not going down. Going back to that strategic long-term lens, we need to be addressing these issues before we are in a drought. Right now, agriculture is quite reactive as opposed to proactive.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: I thank the three of you for giving evidence to this public hearing. Out of the panel members here, I come from a regional area, being Wollondilly in the Southern Highlands. One of the things that I have been pushing very hard for in the past three years—and in my area we have seen drought, bushfires, floods, COVID, floods again, cyclones; we have had it all—and it should probably be finalised by July this year, is changes to the planning instrument for agritourism. In my region, it makes it very hard for smaller farmers, especially when they are relying on the weather—that is the one thing we cannot control—to be able to make that farm commercially viable.

I do not know whether NSW Farmers put in a submission, but the idea of agritourism is to create passive income, whether that is alleviating times of waiting for DAs for markets on farms or hosting weddings or paddock to plate and other issues like that, and that is the one way we can save farmers, especially on the fringes of Sydney, which we are seeing encroach more and more into my electorate. Being near Badgerys Creek airport, that could be a food bowl not only domestically but internationally. What are your feelings on changes to the planning instrument to allow farmers to diversify and not only produce food and primary industries but also be able to use their farm for other methods to create passive income?

ANNABEL JOHNSON: Diversification is so important for all agricultural businesses. It is a key mechanism to utilise, in terms of building resilience to drought and the various other natural disasters that you have just listed that our businesses have had to endure over the past two to three years. We are very supportive of all of those measures, whether it is value-adding, undertaking more of the processing on farm, or agritourism. What we liked about the proposal that the government put forward was that agritourism was very much a secondary business, with primary production remaining the key focus, which is what our farmers want to undertake. They want primary production to be the key focus and then, what are complementary businesses that they can put on the side? We were supportive of the changes, and we think there is a real opportunity to look at what agritourism offers, and how we are able to utilise it, not just for tourism, but also for on-farm accommodation options, which is another key issue.

As Jenny highlighted, we cannot work unless we have workers. One of the key restraints is that regional communities do not have any spare capacity and accommodation, so what are the options to utilise on-farm accommodation? We have businesses in agriculture where you need a large influx of a large number for harvest time, or shearing, which Jo will be able to comment on as she shears, or you have other businesses like pork businesses, dairy businesses, where they need full-time employees living near or close to their property. We think

there is an opportunity to look at that planning system and say, "How do we get agritourism?" You might have agritourism for 40 weeks of the year, and for the rest you might have it as dedicated accommodation for your on-farm workers. There are ways that we think we can look at in enhancing diversification of farm businesses, but also looking at that critical workforce issue that we have highlighted.

I just want to comment about the Badgerys Creek Western Sydney airport, because that is a key piece of infrastructure, and it is coupled with the upgrades that are occurring to the Great Western Highway, which we see as a real opportunity to open up that Central West food bowl, get that high-quality produce that exists out there, get it across the mountains, and get it airfreighted out to international consumers, who are willing to pay that premium for the high-quality produce that we do produce, which is clean and green. It is incredible produce on a world standard. Jo or Jenny, did you want to make any comments?

JOANNA TREASURE: I just want to say that, although I do shear, I am possibly not knowledgeable enough on that subject to comment, because the nature of shearing in my region does not really involve camping out or staying on farm, and that is not really something that I have had too much to do with.

JENNY BRADLEY: I can give an insight to rural accommodation and shearing teams. The rural accommodation has been in decline for the past, I could say easily, 50 years or 40 years. Recently, because of the rural influx, of people coming out, and shearing teams having to camp out, there is a real shortage of accommodation in country New South Wales. This is probably not agricultural, but even our small local hotel in our small village cannot find accommodation for their managers or their workers within a 50-kilometre radius of that working position. That is similar with shearing accommodation. Farmers have to actually accommodate shearers on farm, and that involves a fair bit of infrastructure, in particular if they have just moved into livestock and sheep. You have to have high-quality accommodation to attract shearers, and there is a shortage of them. So there is actually quite a large hurdle to overcome if you are actually looking at shearing sheep and providing that quality accommodation.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: Obviously, accommodation is a big thing but, obviously, educating children, I think, from the city. I know in my electorate, for instance, I have got Mowbray FarmStay. I have got Farm Club down at Werai, which is just outside my electorate. There is a real need for, I believe, educating our youth and getting them out onto the farm and seeing actually what happens. I think there is very limited—you can watch things on social media and on YouTube and things like that, but actually going out to the farm and seeing what farmers have to deal with, I think, is something that we should be pushing more in our curriculum. I do not know if you want to comment on that.

ANNABEL JOHNSON: I would just make a comment to say that we do run a Kids to Farm program. It is a Commonwealth-funded program that does actually really look at that. What we do has obviously been disrupted by COVID, as we all have. But it is about getting kids onto farm, and seeing not only how food is produced, but instilling in them a passion for what agriculture is, how science based it is, so that they might look at undertaking a career in agriculture in the future. We have highlighted as well that trust aspect with the broader community. There is a lot of interest in, and a lot of misunderstanding about, how food is actually produced. We think that there is an opportunity to make some investment in that space, because our farmers really want to contribute to the understanding of how their food and fibre is produced to the broader community.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: Just another thing on food production, in terms of planning with councils. Are there any other sort of restrictions you would like to see, in terms of regeneration of land and controlling water on properties? Obviously, farmers ideally want water in the ground. Water flowing in the creeks and rivers, as we have seen over the last few weeks, has had impacts on towns and villages downstream. What sort of planning changes or other things would you like to see in terms of harvesting water on farms rather than it flowing to other areas?

ANNABEL JOHNSON: It is a critical issue that needs to be looked at, how we improve our water security and storage. Obviously, we think, in terms of public infrastructure, dams need to be looked at. We are supportive of the government undertaking that approach. But on a private basis, we need to look at the size of dams, especially on the coastal areas, where coastal harvestable rights, they are allowed to capture 10 per cent. No farmer ever captures near that much, because the size of the dams that they can construct is too small. That leaves them vulnerable during issues like bushfires—when there was a lack of water, because there were not any dams. There were instances where the Rural Fire Service needed to take water to fight the fires. It is completely understandable, but it did mean that their livestock got bogged in those dams, because the livestock were looking for water. The RFS does replace that water, but it does not occur immediately—for good reason, that they are fighting the fires.

So we think that, especially in the coastal area, dam sizes and the level of coastal harvestable right needs to be looked at, because we are putting a handbrake on our agricultural productivity, and also the sustainability of

our businesses. We had dairy farmers that almost needed to sell their whole herd because they had run out of water. Dairy cows are not the sort of thing that when the drought breaks, you can go down and pick them up. There is a lack of elasticity in our businesses. Once you have lost those genetics, you have lost them for 30 to 40 years. So we do need to look at what are some of those measures, so that we can make sure that farmers are able to get through the next drought in better shape.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Thank you very much for joining us today. I have three very quick questions. You mentioned trying to improve the value chain from the primary produce to processing and manufacturing. What does that look like? How do we get that industry going?

ANNABEL JOHNSON: I think it is macro and micro. At a macro level it comes back to looking at the land-use planning aspect: Where would it make sense for value adding and processing to be undertaken? How do you get that connection with transportation supply chains, so that we do have supply chains where it is able to be produced out in the regions, manufactured, processed out in the regions, and then into Sydney and off internationally or into our urban communities? So there needs to be better understanding about what are the opportunities at that macro level. At the micro level, it is important to understand that when farm businesses move further up the supply chain they take on more risk, which means that they are going to need additional skills. Rather than just having production skills, which our farmers are fantastic at, they are now going to have to have logistic skills, they are going to need to have marketing skills, all of those to ensure that their business further up the supply chain can be successful. So there needs to be a better look at what can be achieved regionally, and what would make sense in what regions, and then looking at, how do we support our farmers in growing their business to get further up the supply chain and manage those additional risks?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think Ms Bradley might have mentioned it in her introduction, around government grants or government schemes to help establish industry, manufacturing and processing. Would that be under a co-equity basis or more of seed funding for smaller farmers to move up the value chain?

ANNABEL JOHNSON: Our proposal is for seed funding to look at it, because we would just like to get this started. We know that there are opportunities in New South Wales. We produce some of the best produce in Australia, but to date we have not been able to leverage the advantages as much as, say, a state such as Tasmania. How do we move that up? We think seed funding is an opportunity that should be explored.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Given the last two years, we have obviously had a short supply of labour. That is impacting, I think, even on the earlier submissions we had from our friends at OzHarvest and at Foodbank. A lot of food is being wasted. The farming sector is a big player in the food production in trying to limit that waste. How is that impacting on farmers? Can we get workers either locally or internationally? How do we make sure that their working conditions are actually fair and that they are protected from exploitation?

ANNABEL JOHNSON: That is absolutely critical. There has been a critical shortage of workforce. That is right across the agricultural supply chain. It just has not been on farm at harvest time. Also, as Jenny mentioned, it has occurred in the processing sector, which is obviously critical for farmers. If the processing works are not working, then we cannot get our produce off farms. NSW Farmers obviously highly support making sure that there are fair conditions on farm. We support the calling out of any activities that are not in line with required conditions. Obviously, that sits at the federal level. We work with our national partner, the National Farmers' Federation, ensuring that that is being pushed to the federal government.

In terms of the impact that it has had on farm, it has meant reduced profits, essentially. It is not just reduced profits at the end. We have had farmers that have not planted, because they have known that they will not be able to get the crop off, even if they do put it in. It is also a risk around farm safety. When farmers have not been able to get workers, they have undertaken the work themselves. You can understand it, but it does create work safety issues. That is one of our key concerns. There is a short-term issue here. We know that we are going to have a shortage of workers come the next harvest. So we think there is a real opportunity to really map out where are the shortages going to occur, and look at getting some Help Harvest coordinators. If we know there is going to be a shortage, it makes sense to understand where that is, and try to link up supply and demand as much as possible.

We think there is an opportunity. A lot of people have not participated in the agricultural workforce. Moving out to do a cherry harvest that lasts six weeks might not make sense. But if you can get someone to link up six months of work, then that could be an opportunity for someone to explore, as a way to really enhance their profit over that period. We think that is a key thing to be looking at this year. We know that there is going to be a shortage of workers, and in the longer term it is really looking at linking up those skills. As I mentioned, there are many careers in agriculture, both on-farm, and further up the supply chain, but that needs to be far more visible. So we think there is an opportunity, similar to the Women in Trades Strategy, to come up with an agricultural workforce strategy, to demonstrate - what does a career in agriculture look like?

JENNY BRADLEY: If you do not mind, I can just add local and my own—our farming business experiences - around harvest, and a shortage of labour around harvest. Harvest is reliant on hot, dry weather and we work at maximum speed to extract that, to achieve a higher return. This year, a shortage of labour—you do not work as long, because there is not enough labour, and then you have got rain, which affects a wet harvest. So you are actually watching as the rain falls, and you cannot get to that harvest because you have not got enough labour when the weather was fine. So it was critical.

Coming up to sowing at the moment, or planting seed, again it is critical. When it comes to a certain time, we go 24 hours around the clock if we have the labour. If we do not have the labour, we do not go 24 hours around the clock; we do not get as much done, the window expands out, and we know that when you go beyond that window, the return on the harvest is reduced. So, labour is critical to farming at condensed, short periods of time. It does not matter whether it is fruit trees, or harvesting, or planting, as that was alluded to; it is so critical to have that labour input. We do need an upskilling of people to be able to handle—you are handling multimillion-dollar machinery too, so an upskilling program is a way to go. Thanks.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We really appreciate the time you have given us today. We have, unfortunately, run out of time. There is a lot more we would probably like to discuss and learn from you, particularly around waste and what support government could provide to reduce the food waste that is experienced on farms. OzHarvest and Foodbank appeared before us and talked about the role that tax incentives could play. So I guess we would ask that you take a question on notice about support from government in terms of reducing waste. Thank you all very much for appearing before us today and for giving us the policy and advocacy advice, but also the experience on the ground as well. We may, in addition to the question on food waste, want to send you further questions in writing. Your replies would form part of your evidence and may be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

ANNABEL JOHNSON: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you all for appearing before us today. We really appreciate your time and the learnings from today's session.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Dr CATHY SHERRY, Associate Professor, UNSW Law and Justice, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Mr CHRIS McELWAIN, UNSW Law and Justice, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: We will now resume the broadcast. I apologise to our next witnesses for our delay today. Before we start, do either of you have any questions? No? Would either of you like to make a brief introductory remark?

CATHY SHERRY: Sorry, I do now have a question. The Committee members—Alex, I think I can recognise you, but maybe the Committee members could tell us who they are because I really cannot see them.

The CHAIR: Sure thing. With me I have Anoulack Chanthivong, who is the member for Macquarie Fields, and I have Mr Nathaniel Smith, who is the member for Wollondilly. Felicity Wilson, the member for North Shore, is our other Committee member. She, unfortunately, is unwell today, so she is not able to be with us.

CATHY SHERRY: Thank you.

CHRIS McELWAIN: I have a two-minute opening, if we have time.

The CHAIR: Yes, over to you. Perfect.

CHRIS McELWAIN: Firstly, I acknowledge I am coming to you from Wangal land, which is part of the Eora nation, and I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. I also want to commend the Committee, in particular in relation to its second term of reference, because, as far as I am aware—and I am happy to be corrected—this is the first time a parliamentary committee has specifically looked at the issue of food waste in Australia. Many committees have looked at waste, but this is a really big, emerging issue, and there is a lot of win-win-wins to be had in taking strong action to save more food in New South Wales. So that is great. And thank you for inviting me to make a submission.

The key takeaway from my submission—and I apologise; I put all the evidence at the back and the recommendations are at the front to save you time—is that, on current settings in New South Wales for regulation and policy, New South Wales is going to miss its 2030 saving food targets, and its 2030 waste management targets, which just means we are going to continue to waste food, and all the things that are associated with the production of that food: money, chemicals, soil, biodiversity, labour, water. So if we want to do something that gets us closer to the 2030 goals, I have set out 12 recommendations that are stronger, smarter, and faster. They will not be a complete set of solutions that guarantee our success, but they will be much stronger than the current settings that we have got, most particularly in the recently released Waste Strategy from 2021 from the New South Wales EPA. I intend no disrespect to my many former colleagues in the EPA, who I worked with for more than 20 years there.

I just want to say, if we are going to save food, there are really two problems. The first problem is saving food, and the second problem is better managing the food we cannot avoid wasting. My recommendations really target those two aspects of the problem. If we start with the second problem, better managing food, I really recommend having a look at my recommendations four, five, and six, which is bringing forward the requirement for all councils to supply diversion of food waste for businesses and households. We cannot wait until 2030, because that is a guarantee of failure, so we need to bring that goal forward, and ban the material from landfill. That will create jobs right across New South Wales: in the city, regionally, and rurally. And then, associated with that, we need to run the education campaign. So when we teach households how to use those bins, we also need to teach them how to save money by saving food.

Then we need to get better bang for our buck out of DPI, Primary Industries. DPI is the biggest funder of agricultural research in Australia, to the tune of tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars, and yet we do not know how much food we are losing in natural disasters. New South Wales has had a drought, bushfires, flood, a mouse plague, more floods, and COVID. So we are flying blind on food security and, at a time like current events in the world, we need to know more about how much food is getting lost from natural disasters, and that is a simple tweak of the funding arrangements. Finally, we need to get a proper food waste strategy. This is not brand-new; the national government has one, and the Victorians have led the charge, and New South Wales can get to the front of the pack again by getting the New South Wales EPA to write a strong food waste strategy that tackles both problems: saving food and better managing waste food. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Sherry, any introductory remarks from you?

CATHY SHERRY: Just to say, my submission is much more general than Chris's. Chris's has much more specific recommendations, because food waste is his area of expertise. Oddly, my main area of expertise is high-density development, but it has actually led me to that kind of sub-interest in how we manage to have livable green cities, and I also teach a course called Food Law at UNSW. So I do some research in that area, and it has led me to understand, and have done quite a lot of research about, urban agriculture. I have a particular concern about the way we facilitate urban agriculture in cities, but also a concern about unrealistic claims that are made about urban agriculture, and concerns about one of the most profound consequences of urbanisation, and that is the proportion of your population who lives in cities.

One of the most profound consequences is a lack of understanding of most people about how food is produced, which leads to things like food waste that Chris is talking about, but also just really not very good food literacy within the community because, ahistorically, we actually do not have to produce the food we need to eat to survive; we really have no idea how that is done, and, as a result, we do not interact with food systems in a particularly informed way, which affects food security, food waste, a whole lot of other things. As I said, a lot of my experience of that comes from teaching students, and seeing how little even the very well educated public in Australia understands about the production of food.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I might start with you, Dr Sherry, just about urban agriculture. Obviously, Sydney is dense and becoming denser with a number of large parts of Greater Sydney planned for redevelopment. What tools do you feel are needed and have been effective in other densely populated cities to facilitate urban agriculture? What works and what does not?

CATHY SHERRY: Interestingly, Europe has a jump start on us, because they have lived in high-density cities for centuries. Australia, historically, is kind of odd, because our cities developed more or less at the same time we had road and rail and tram transport. If people have to walk to work, you have to live in high-density cities, but if you can transport people out of cities, your cities can spread out. Strangely, because Australian cities developed in the nineteenth century, at the same time that rail and tram transport developed, our cities—with the exception of suburbs like Paddington and Surry Hills, which was the initial development of Sydney—largely developed through sprawl, because it was possible to get people out there. In contrast, European cities developed way before trains and trams and road transport was invented, and so they were high density. And so, throughout the eighteenth century, and particularly the nineteenth century, cities made a real effort to make sure that people—often working-class—had access to land to grow food.

By way of example, tools—Britain has had an Allotments Act. They had an Allotments Act of some form in the late nineteenth century, but really from the early twentieth century. They actually had very—I was going to say strong protection of allotment land. That is not true; a lot of it has been lost to development. But from the turn of the twentieth century, there was an obligation on local councils to provide land if there was a demand from people for land for food growing. In the nineteenth century, it largely came from large landowners, and also glebe land, which is church land—hence why the suburb Glebe is called Glebe. It is actually church-provided land. But from the twentieth century on it was council-provided land, so there is an obligation to provide that land. I would be lying if I said that it is always provided. Waiting lists for allotments in Europe are incredibly long, and in Britain, as a result of an increased interest in food growing. But there is actually a legislative structure there that provides an obligation to provide people with land, which is your basic starting point. If you do not have land, you cannot grow food.

The CHAIR: Within Sydney, where do you see opportunities or potential ways to address this, in a city that has been planned in the past but will need urban agriculture for the future?

CATHY SHERRY: I think there are three things. The first thing is we did not have allotments in Australian cities—allotments being sections of city set aside for people just to grow food. We did not have them, because we have them in our backyards. The Australian residential housing lot was actually set pegged to the size of a British allotment. Many Australians throughout the twentieth century grew quite a lot of food in their own yard. Cities can never be self-sufficient, and people were not self-sufficient, but backyards provided really important supplementary sources of food and, most importantly, made people food literate. They understood how food was produced, whether it was understanding how chickens lay eggs, how fruit grows on trees, how to process food. Backyards are the key thing. It is a really contentious thing with urban consolidation policies. We have seen the radical reduction of the size of housing lots and backyards. Whether we can change that, that is a big conversation.

But, certainly, the idea of ensuring that housing lots have a certain amount of open space left—so not allowing houses to take up the entire or the lion's share of a housing lot—is quite important, so that open space, outdoor space, is mandated as part of individual housing lots. Maybe rethinking some elements of urban consolidation—and I think a lot of people are aware about this; it is a double-edged sword. It is not all good, but maybe there are reasons why we might want people still to live in freestanding houses on decent-sized blocks of land. I think that is one thing: the size of residential housing lots, and recognising the value in garden space, not just to kick a footy, but for people to grow food.

The second thing is building over our peri-urban land. This is, of course, a pressing issue now for New South Wales. There is a reason that land floods. The north-west and south-west growth sectors of Sydney were the agricultural land that was found by the First Fleet. When they got to Sydney Cove and realised they were going to starve to death if they had to farm in The Domain, they went out in search of good soil, and they found it on the riparian land around the Hawkesbury and the Nepean, which of course are actually the same river. That land was set aside for agriculture. That is why it did not have housing on it. But also the reason why it is good agricultural land is because it is flood-prone land, which we have just seen demonstrated, very clearly, in the last few weeks.

We, in the last 10 or so years, have been building on some of our only good soil in the Sydney Basin and that is a real concern. Peri-urban agriculture is never going to feed Sydney—overwhelmingly, our agricultural land is outside Sydney—but having some agricultural production close to cities, that does not need large amounts of oil for transport to get food to cities, is actually really important for food security. So I think we have to, as a pressing concern, rethink the north-west and south-west growth sectors, and the wisdom of turning agricultural land into housing. That is a really hard thing to do. There is enormous pressure from developers, but also the people who own that land—you know, you kind of hit the jackpot when your chicken farm turns into residential housing. So that is a really complex conversation to have, but I think we really need to have it.

Finally, the third thing is the lowest value land in cities. We are not going to not build a high-rise building because we want a veggie plot. It is not going to happen. But the lowest value land in cities is roofs. It is possible to grow food on roof space. Again, it is never going to provide cities with substantial amounts of food, but it can provide meaningful quantities of leafy greens. I think I provided a link in my submission to the rooftop farm at Brooklyn Grange, which is in Brooklyn. It is a commercial leafy greens farm that produces substantial quantities of food. Rooftop land is basically no-value land; it is not used for anything. You look around Sydney rooftops and maybe it has got some plant and equipment on it, but it is basically not used for anything, so it is cheap real estate. There are complexities in growing food of roofs—weight limits and all the rest of it—but it is absolutely possible and we need to make it easier for people to do that.

In a city like New York, one of the incentives—I just finished reading a book about Brooklyn Grange—is government grants. Most cities have enormous problems with stormwater run-off. Anything that actually allows

water to soak into soil and not produce stormwater run-off can be the subject of government grants in New York. So rooftop farms can often get government grants, because they help with the city's stormwater problem. Government grants to help, just because we want green cities—so thinking about commercial buildings in that way. But also—and now I am much more comfortable in my area of true expertise, strata schemes—we need to make it easier for strata schemes to be able to do this. Because rooftop land is common property, you cannot use that without everyone's agreement. People are rightly concerned, not surprisingly in Sydney, about water leakage. It is a major problem in Sydney buildings. There are all sorts of concerns and complexities.

But New South Wales does have this brilliant new provision, an amendment to the Strata Schemes Management Act, that allows you to get green infrastructure changes through with only a 50 per cent vote. Things like gardens could fall within that. But also, rather than just legislative change, the kind of assistance that the City of Sydney provides to strata schemes—instead of making them all reinvent the wheel, actually having a green buildings program, is absolutely fantastic. It is that kind of thing, that assistance, so schemes do not have to reinvent the wheel, so they have got some template for "We want to put a roof garden on. What are the engineering things we need to look at it? What are the kinds of legal things we need to look at to get this through?" Again, it is not going to produce meaningful amounts of food, it is not going to feed people entirely, but it really is significant in terms of increasing people's food literacy.

The CHAIR: Yes, I was going to ask you about that. The purpose of producing food in urban areas also plays a key part in that literacy piece. This is something that both of you raised in your submissions. How far behind are we in terms of food literacy to other global city counterparts? Where do you see the focus of energy needs to be on improving that literacy?

CATHY SHERRY: I think growing food produces food literacy. My students in food law at the moment, at least half of them have failed to have seeds germinate in their food-growing project they have to do, because of the current weather, because it is so cold and so wet. So growing food is a really profound way of producing food literacy. But the second thing I will say is that all kids should be learning to cook all through high school. We need to get away from this idea that somehow making kids do cooking at school is some kind of weird, dated, sexist thing that we make girls do. All schools should have cooking as a compulsory part of their curriculum, because the single most important thing you can do in terms of food literacy, in my view, is know how to cook from scratch from whole ingredients. That is the most important thing, and all kids should be being taught that at high school—not as a kind of play thing you do in primary school, but at high school, as a real subject. Chris?

CHRIS McELWAIN: I support what Cathy said, because the emerging research from Australian experts shows that food literacy in schools is very powerful, and it is a great way to teach children, and they take that with them for the rest of their lives, but that education also filters into the household so it is a nice, roundabout way of teaching parents. It is a core part of my submissions. Back to your original question, Mr Greenwich, and that is how far are we behind on education on food saving? New South Wales was one of the first states in the world to adopt Love Food Hate Waste in 2007, after it was invented in the UK in 2005, but its level of penetration in New South Wales is very low. The surveys show about 4 per cent of people recognise it. That is because of the core difference between what happened in the UK and what happened in Australia, which is set out in my submission. They went high, wide and handsome in the UK on education, and they did it not so much through social media but more targeted work.

The UK is one of the few countries in the world that has been quite successful at getting households to reduce the amount of food they waste. It went up during the global financial crisis a bit, and during COVID, but, generally speaking, they do much, much better. We have the tool in New South Wales; we just need to invest in it. We should tie that to when we roll out the bin system, because people want to do the right thing with bins, and the research shows that after a year of being implemented, whichever council it is, households get better and better. So teach them how to use the bins, and at the same time, teach them how to save money. Do not worry about the environmental effects, because households sometimes care and sometimes do not. The experts are already sitting in the New South Wales EPA. They just need to be able to roll that out with a bigger chunk of the Waste Less, Recycle More program. The money is effectively available.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Cathy, you can probably jump in on this. In terms of the food wastage target, where have we gone wrong and how can we make greater progress? I asked a similar question of our friends from OzHarvest and Foodbank this morning. It is symptomatic of affluenza that, being a developed nation, we throw away a lot of our food. I was guilty of throwing out a loaf of bread this morning. On a much more macro basis, how do we, as a community and a country, reduce food wastage? It has such a bad impact on so many levels. We think about whether, morally, that is fair, but also the energy and all the things that go into food production. We chuck it out because we can afford to, in one sense. How do we minimise that, whether it is through regulatory tools, policy initiatives, community campaigns? I want to get a feel for where you think it has gone wrong for us and how do we improve it?

CHRIS McELWAIN: There are a couple of points. Firstly, do not feel too guilty about throwing out food, because everybody does it. About 30 per cent is unavoidable. So think of bones, avocado seeds, orange peel. That is always going to happen. That is why there are two sides to the problem: saving food first and then dealing with waste. I totally agree with what you have said. The relatively good news is, whilst New South Wales led the pack in the late 2000s on waste, and its Waste Less, Recycle More program has been overwhelmingly good, it has focused largely on the second part of the problem—dealing with the waste. Saving food is hard in every step of the food system, so from farms, to supermarkets, to warehouse distribution, to cold chain, to restaurants and bakeries, cafes, pubs, hospitals, and in our own homes. What that means is there is no silver bullet. You will have to use a real range of tools, which is why there are 12 recommendations in my submission. Some of them are a bit global. I have kind of used an overall step to try to get those solutions all wrapped up.

Let me give you one example. The idea that the New South Wales EPA needs to come up with a food waste strategy really means it has to come forward with solutions in every single sector, because some solutions for households are only going—let me remind you: the 2030 target for saving food is halving the per capita level of waste across Australia. You cannot do that evenly in every bit. Wheat production is generally very efficient in Australia; there is about a 2 per cent loss rate. Getting that down to 1 per cent is damn hard. It is the same for households. The best we can probably hope for is about an 18 per cent to 20 per cent reduction, which is about the British experience. Households are by far the most wasteful sector of any sector in the system. We waste a lot of food in our houses. If we are only getting 20 per cent in households, we are going to have to get much, much better in all the other sectors: supermarkets, businesses, pubs, hospitals. Businesses, pubs and supermarkets have an interest in not wasting food because it is money—the most important driver for them. So we need a whole range of tools.

There is one initiative at the national level, which is the voluntary commitments scheme. It is called the Australian Food Pact. Leading companies can sign up and say, "We're going to commit to achieving these targets and this is how we're going to do it," and they report confidentially to the national regulator, Stop Food Waste Australia. The problem with that, if we just rely on that—and I have set this out in my submission—is the British experience shows it is not enough. They have been doing it for 17 years, and they have hundreds of companies signed up—we in Australia have 10—and after 17 years they still need to double the number of companies to hit the 2030 target. So you are going to need a range of tools right across the food system.

One recommendation that I really strongly commend to New South Wales is a compulsory reporting scheme. New South Wales is proposing that just for supermarkets, but it should be for all medium and large businesses that deal with food, because if you want to manage a problem, you have to measure it. If you are not measuring it, you are not managing it. That is why I have faith in the DPI investment. We have to know how much food is getting lost. How many cattle are getting killed in the floods? That is food. I have relatives who run a cattle farm. Luckily, they did not lose anything recently. But that is their livelihood, and we need to know, for purposes of food security, what impacts those natural disasters are having. So it has to be measured. If you look at my recommendations, they are trying to deal with everything right across the food system: from the time it comes out of the ground, or it is harvested—say it is in fisheries—to the time we throw it in the bin, and then it goes to, at the moment, mostly landfill in New South Wales, which is a travesty. We really need to be turning that wasted food into compost, and sending it back onto the soils that Cathy was talking about earlier.

The CHAIR: I will jump in and ask about that question of measurement. Is that broad and detailed measurement of waste part of Victoria's Path to Half?

CHRIS McELWAIN: Their Path to Half, which is the best document in Australia, focuses purely on saving food. It looks at the first part of the problem. Remember, different parts of Australia have different agricultural interests. The big one in Victoria is dairy, and there is a lot of waste in dairy. So that means there is a lot of opportunity to make money by turning dairy waste into other products. It has, I think, eight key recommendations; they only focus on saving food.

My view is that the NSW EPA can come forward with a food waste strategy that deals with what New South Wales has traditionally been very strong on, which is the second part of the problem, dealing with the waste, but combine it with a strong program for the first part of the problem, which is keeping food in the food system and going into human mouths. That is why one of my recommendations is to have a proper food waste strategy. At the moment, if you look at the two waste strategies that were released last year, and they are mentioned in the New South Wales government submission to this committee, they do not talk about the food-saving goal at all, and they mention Love Food Hate Waste but like, "There's this thing and we're running it." I ask my uni students when they come into class, "Who's heard of Love Food Hate Waste?" Nobody, which is a shame because the people who are working on it work extremely hard, but it needs to be high, wide and handsome.

Going back to the original question, there is no silver bullet. The food waste charities have to be part of the solution. OzHarvest and Foodbank, and to a lesser extent SecondBite, in New South Wales, need to be

supported, and I know the New South Wales government has given them a lot of grants. They have expanded massively in the last 10 years, but remember, they redirect 0.2 per cent. They are doing the most important job, getting food out of our bins and into human mouths, but it is a very small part of what needs to be done. They can be expanded with support from government, but even if they got 10 times bigger, they are still only 2 per cent. We are going to need a solution all the way through. That is why I say DPI needs to go and look at every single sector—melons, blackberries, dairy, wine, fisheries—that is a primary producer. Find out, what are the solutions they need to save more food and make more money?

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: Thank you both for joining us at this public hearing today. It is interesting what you were saying. My electorate is the electorate of Wollondilly so I have the Wollondilly shire and the highlands. We have everything. We have dams, coalmines, dairy, fruit, and wine. You name it, we have it. One of the big issues that I have been pushing over the last few years through the farming communities and other stakeholder groups is the agritourism changes to the planning instrument. That is something that I have been pushing quite hard, as well as some other regional MPs.

We have a lot of smaller farms in our area. We have some big farms but a lot of smaller farms, and it is just not going to be commercially viable to exist. We need to start diversifying, whether they are farm stays, whether they are wedding receptions, whether they get into the food markets, but also with dairy. Christopher, you raise a very good point about the waste of dairy and looking at diversifying to make baby formula, which is a big market overseas, especially in China. We have seen that with people raiding supermarkets with baby formula and things like that.

Have you looked into the changes to the agritourism and the planning instrument? What more can be done from the Government to help farmers diversify? They are relying very much on the weather, and when the weather is not good, you have to have that other passive income coming in to keep the farms afloat because once they are gone, they are gone. We are seeing how urbanisation is encroaching on areas like my electorate. I am trying to find ways to protect that, and it is also very important to be close to the ports, down to Wollongong and the new Badgerys Creek airport. I would just ask for your comments on that.

CHRIS McELWAIN: Cathy, did you want to say something about that?

CATHY SHERRY: Yes. Certainly the experience in Europe is that, in a country like Italy, agritourism is very big. There is a lot more protection of agriculture in Europe than there is in Australia, but protection within cities, and for all reasons you are talking about. Tourism is part of an important culture in the city. There was a big report done on urban agriculture in Europe, maybe eight years ago, that talks about a lot of those things. As you say, those farms need to diversify, and they are able to diversify, because they are close to urban centres. It is within striking distance for people to go and visit there.

I suppose really for me what it comes down to is—and this is why I am passionate about urban agriculture—unless you have stuck your hand in soil, you do not understand it. Unless you have tried to grow food in the sand in Coogee, you probably do not have an appreciation of what it means to have good soil, and that is the reality. We live in a community where most people—bar soil scientists—know nothing about soil, or how it grows food, because they have never tried to grow food in it. It seems to me that if we really did, as a community, understand soil, we would have planning law that simply prohibited that land being converted into anything other than agricultural land. That is hard for people who own that land. I do not know whether Bringelly is in your electorate or whether that is slightly further north.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: That is in the electorate of Camden and going probably—

CATHY SHERRY: So it is one—

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: One up, yes. We have seen a lot of urban development in Camden, and Wilton is next on the list, but that is not exactly prime agricultural land. It is near the Hume Highway.

CATHY SHERRY: But I suppose there are also things like subdivision. There is the problem of people having holiday houses, and subdividing good agricultural land that is no longer viable, because it has become too small. This is really big-picture stuff, but when I look at planning and changes to planning, I often think that what this comes down to is that we really do not recognise the value of soil, and how poor Australia's soil is. We have the poorest soil of any country on earth, and the oldest, most degraded soils. Protecting the good soil that we have is incredibly important, and I am not sure how much that factors in planning decisions, when we allow people to change land from agriculture use to non-agriculture.

But also encouraging people to maintain agriculture use of land while diversifying farm income is incredibly important. But there are all sorts of way, either prohibitions, but also grants and financial incentives for people to keep their working farms going. The reality is, all over the world, farming is massively subsidised, if

you look at the United States and also Europe. We think of farming as being very subsidised in Australia. To be honest, it is not, in comparison to Europe and the US. There is more that we can do for individual farmers, and I think then for the benefit of the whole community. Chris?

CHRIS McELWAIN: I am just going to say, Mr Smith, I think diversification is one of the only ways small- to medium-sized farms are going to survive. I have a recommendation at the end about getting IPART to look into the role of supermarkets in the food system, because they have long had central control. In the past, it was primary production and wholesalers who controlled the food system. Supermarkets are now sitting at the centre of Australian food systems, and dominated by Coles and Woolies. You will see in my submission the food supermarket specifications. We like to go to the supermarket. We want the best bananas; we want the best melons.

Cathy's work directly with students shows students that when things grow, they are not perfect when they come out of the ground. What we are seeing in the supermarket is the best of the best, but that is leading to sometimes up to 40 per cent of a product staying on the farm, so tomatoes, or bananas - too long, too bendy, too short. Many Australians got their first introduction to that in the ABC's *War On Waste*, where they saw all the bananas getting thrown out at the sorting and packing facility on the farms, and just going back on the soil. That is why I have a recommendation that there needs to be an inquiry into the role of supermarkets, not as an attack on supermarkets, but to investigate it.

When other countries have looked at this—Netherlands, for example—there are changes to the contractual arrangements, which have been tried in Australia, but have been largely unsuccessful. There is a whole-of-contract arrangement between the farmer and the supermarket. It is not the farmers' problem to deal with the wonky carrots. The supermarket just buys the lot, and then the supermarket learns to deal with the wonkiness, either by selling them, or turning it into soup or carrot cake or whatever it is. Transferring a little bit of finance and power in the system through regulatory arrangements will also help at least some small- to medium-sized farms. That is why I have put that recommendation in my submission.

The CHAIR: Thank you both for your time this morning, for the detail in both of your submissions, and for the research and the work you have done not only for this inquiry but more broadly. We are having all sorts of time pressures today. We may very well want to send you further questions in writing. Your replies will form part of evidence and will be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

CATHY SHERRY: Yes.

CHRIS McELWAIN: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you both very much for appearing before us.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Ms NAOMI LACEY, President, Community Gardens Australia, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

Ms KYLIE FLAMENT, General Manager, Green Connect, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: We will now resume the broadcast. We now have joining us Ms Naomi Lacey from Community Gardens Australia and Ms Kylie Flament from Green Connect. Both of you are joined here by me—Alex Greenwich, Chair of the Committee—along with Mr Anoulack Chanthivong, who is the member for Macquarie Fields, and Mr Nathaniel Smith, who is the member for Wollondilly. Would either of you like to make an opening remark?

KYLIE FLAMENT: Yes, please.

NAOMI LACEY: Yes.

The CHAIR: We will start with Ms Flament.

KYLIE FLAMENT: Thanks. As you will have read in my submission, Green Connect is a not-for-profit social enterprise that runs a fair food farm in suburban Wollongong. We use permaculture methods and principles, including diversity, diversity, diversity, diversity, and working with nature, not against it. I would love to see this inquiry borrow some of the same principles, to ensure that across the state we can grow food that is good for the people who grow it, and good for the people who eat it, and good for the planet, and to create resilient communities and supply chains. We know that when food is grown locally and organically the people involved in growing it

have better mental health, physical health, and social connections. Food is more nutritious and less is wasted, and land and waterways are repaired and generated.

You probably already know that agriculture is both one of the greatest contributors to climate change, but also holds some of the greatest potential to mitigate it, particularly research to regenerative farming. All our diversifying food production and supply is vital, including supporting small-scale polyculture growers, including in urban settings. I do want to call out one thing that was not in my submission that I have given a lot of thought to. Today our farms and community gardens rely on underpaid, and sometimes unpaid, labour, and we really need to address that. There is a tension between paying farmers fair wages and Australian food that is affordable for everyone. I hope that is helpful. I look forward to answering your questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Ms Lacey, do you have any opening remarks?

NAOMI LACEY: Yes. Thanks. Good morning. I am the President of Community Gardens Australia. We are a not-for-profit, volunteer-run organisation that exists to support and provide resources to network and advocate for community gardening activities. We are pleased to see the New South Wales government engaging in this inquiry, and are grateful for the opportunity to be here today to represent the community gardening sector and the wider urban agriculture community. We know that the number of community gardens in New South Wales has grown significantly in the past 10 years, offering an expansion of local food systems, and as a result they have become a popular representation of local food culture, whilst demonstrating and promoting sustainable food systems, and multiple benefits to the health and wellbeing of the communities they reside in.

We also know that, if properly funded and supported by all levels of government, that community gardens can contribute hugely to the ongoing wellbeing of all people, providing them with access to healthy foods and lifestyles, limiting their impact on planetary systems, and therefore climate change, and connecting them with their neighbours and the wider community. All of this has the potential for far greater impact than current policy is allowing for. We trust that this inquiry will do its due diligence in unearthing the many cost-effective ways that the terms of reference can be addressed, such as some of the recommendations put forward in our submission, and that people are put first, not profit. Our future, not just for those in New South Wales, but for all Australians, needs you to ensure a safe, accessible, and affordable food future for us all. Thanks for inviting me here today.

The CHAIR: Thank you both. My first question comes from my knowledge of the areas in which you are both involved, and that local government plays a key partnership role. In terms of your view of best practice with local government in supporting agriculture and community gardens, what further needs to be done to facilitate this statewide?

KYLIE FLAMENT: Do you want to go first, Naomi?

NAOMI LACEY: Yes. I think local government policy around community gardens is a big one. There are some local government authorities that have got fantastic policies supporting community gardens and other agriculture practice. It makes it really easy for people to get involved, establish new gardens, carry on with the business of existing gardens, and so on. But there is also a vast number of councils that either have no policy at all, or their policy is quite poor. It is something that we are actively looking at working on this year, establishing some recommended policy and guidelines around that for councils that are seeking to implement new policy, and also, we are looking to seek out the ones that do not have good policy, and try and engage with them to change that. So to see something overall coming from the state government, with recommendations to all the local government authorities on better policy and practice with regards to community gardening and urban agriculture would be really, really fabulous to see.

KYLIE FLAMENT: For us, the Green Connect farm is actually on Department of Education land, so it is state policy that applies. I see that as a huge opportunity. Obviously, New South Wales owns a significant amount of land, and could do more with some of the under-utilised land that it has. In terms of local government policies, I echo what Ms Lacey said. We are contacted a lot. I would probably get one person a week contacting me, wanting to set up a Green Connect farm or something like it.

Some of the projects that have gained traction have been held back by planning rules or procedures, or have just lost momentum, as one woman found within our local government area who tried to set up a community garden. After two years she just had to throw in the towel. She had a lot of funding. She got crowdfunded. She had a huge number of volunteers and she eventually said, "I can't keep doing this. I can't keep battling to get this thing off the ground." So I know that planning played a huge role in that, and I see that more and more. Some of the social enterprises who have entered into the farming or food-growing space have shied away from anything that requires council approval. I know that, obviously, state and federal approval is also wrapped up in red tape, and green tape sometimes, so sometimes they go onto private land, because it is just easier to make the change.

The CHAIR: In terms of those planning restrictions, what changes would you like to see? Is it the cumbersome nature of the process, or is it just currently too restrictive?

NAOMI LACEY: Do you want to go, Kylie?

KYLIE FLAMENT: I do not have personal knowledge of that. I have heard that there are lots of hoops to jump through. I have also heard that one neighbour can—you can have 50 people who support it, but one neighbour not support it, and that can throw huge spanners in the works, which is tricky. But that is all second-hand knowledge. Ms Lacey may know more.

NAOMI LACEY: Yes. There are quite a number of stumbling blocks that can be encountered. One that we have been coming across more and more recently is that a lot of councils are requiring community garden groups to become incorporated before they are even able to access the land, whereas what we have seen with really good policy is where councils encourage groups to become established and give them the land to start gardening on. It is not a big deal, if it does not all work out, to go and plant a few rose bushes there or something instead, and put the land back how it was. They are the ones that are encouraging, and getting groups going, and allowing them to start gardening and give them a shot at it. When it works, then they are helping them to become an incorporated association and to stand on their own two feet.

Those gardens have a lot more longevity than ones where, as Kylie said, you have to jump through a whole heap of hoops, including having to incorporate, and the cost that is involved with that as well. Insurance is prohibitive for a small group. You have to fundraise $2,000 to pay for all of your establishment costs, and your insurance before you have even turned a clod of soil. It really puts off a huge number of groups, and they give up in the end. I have seen some councils that are requiring full management plans to be put in place by a small group of people, when all they want to do is go and grow some carrots together at the end of the day. So it can be really tricky on that front.

Inner West and City of Sydney, for example, have excellent community garden policies, that are really supportive of groups that want to establish themselves, and they have a go-to person in the council that the gardens can go to and be supported by at all times. They provide a lot of educational activities, and networking opportunities, and that sort of thing too. To establish a garden through that policy, it is easy. You get a group of people together, you decide this is what you want to do, the council helps you identify land and away you go, pretty much. Then they will help you to incorporate and manage the group, ongoing. To see that type of policy implemented across the board through all local government areas would be just incredible, and really change the game for a lot of people.

The CHAIR: Something that both of you touched on in submissions and that we have heard a lot about today is the critical role that education plays in people understanding where their food comes from and how to save food and reduce waste. What further support do you feel is needed to continue to encourage education about food security, supply chains, growing food and not wasting food? Obviously, that is the work that happens on the ground, but the value of that education is sometimes not appreciated or encouraged. What would you like to see to help further promote education when it comes to food?

NAOMI LACEY: We would love to see our sector really supported by government, in the terms of actual dollar value. We are certainly a network, and there are a number of other social enterprises and so on that would be far more able to provide the education that is needed, and that we get asked for all of the time; if we had the funding to be able to pay the educators to get out there and do the training with people. We do not have that type of funding at the moment. A lot of the education that is going on in community gardens is done by volunteers. Again, there are some very supportive local councils that will pay for educators to come in and run sessions in community gardens that are always open to the wider community, and that is fabulous. But to be able to see that happen a whole lot more across the board would be really wonderful. The funding needs to be there for that.

We get asked all the time. Every year we do our national survey, and every year the vast majority of gardens that respond ask for more education. They want people to be able to come in and run composting workshops, food waste workshops, "how to grow seeds" workshops, "what to grow when" workshops, how they can get the best out of their silverbeet this year, and all of that sort of stuff. It is pretty basic. But when people do not know, you have to educate them on how to do that. We would love to be able to provide that type of education across the board, but that requires a few dollars to be able to do that. So funding is a big one.

KYLIE FLAMENT: For us, we have started doing tours and workshops at the Green Connect Farm. Probably three years ago we took our first group of kids and their families through the farm, and on that very first tour I had a mum sidle up to me while the kids were invited to pull carrots out of the ground, and she said, "My son doesn't eat vegetables. I'm so sorry." As she was saying this to me, her son pulled a carrot out of the ground and ate it, dirt and all. She was gobsmacked. I was cracking up laughing. There is something in touching food,

seeing where it is grown, picking it off the tree, or pulling it out of the ground. I think education is not something that you should blast into people's lounge rooms, or run on social—I mean, yes, do that too, but having spaces where people can come and experience that for themselves and ask, "What happens to the pigs? Do they get turned into meat or not?" and have a conversation about that, and where meat comes from. It is not just a tray in the supermarket.

There is something magical about showing people, in real life, what it looks like, where it comes from, and letting them ask all the tricky questions themselves. We do not have this program where it is a monologue for an hour and a half while we walk around the farm. It is very question-and-answer based. You see the spark in people's eyes, kids and adults alike. Adults often come because they want to show their kids a few vegetables and some chickens, and they end up really engaged and talking about "Where do tomatoes come from in winter? How are they grown?" I think if I were to do anything, it would be on-the-ground education, and using spaces like Green Connect, which is, again, on Department of Education land, available to the public, and we are encouraging schools to come through. That is an incredible resource to connect everyone to where food comes from and where food waste goes.

The CHAIR: In terms of getting access to that Education land, how was that process for you?

KYLIE FLAMENT: There was a very supportive school principal in place when Green Connect launched. There was a small group that had started a community garden, and then that was falling over. We were employing former refugees, so we employed refugees and young people. The general manager at the time—my predecessor—was asking our refugee teams what kind of work they wanted to do most, and gardening and farming came up a lot. She spoke to the principal and said, "Hey, you know that community garden? Could we expand on that?" It is an 11-acre site that was all weeds and rubbish. It had not been touched in 50 years. It has been a big job to clean out all the weeds and rubbish, and to plant market gardens. That was the principal really supporting us to do that.

Since then, we have had some red tape that has made life a little difficult. At the moment, we are talking to the department about what happens after our licence agreement runs out in 2024, for example. They are saying, "Well, we might sell the land. We might put it out for tender. We might start charging you $80,000 a year in rent," and we are going, "Well, this is a really unique site. It has won international awards for sustainable development. Surely it should continue." But there is that tension between an amazing little local project and what the rules say.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for that. I think, as you said, the state government owns a great deal of land and, indeed, unused land where such initiatives could really benefit. Mr Chanthivong.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, thank you, Chair. I think you asked all the questions I was going to ask. Thank you both for your time.

The CHAIR: Excellent. I had a question about the supply chain issues. Ms Flament, you talk about incentives for farmers' markets in your submission as one way to facilitate better access to food. Could you talk to that a bit more and what you would like to see in that space?

KYLIE FLAMENT: Sure. For a farmer, if you are going to sell food, there are a few different options. You can sell directly to the public, and veg box schemes, like we have set up, are a really good way to do that, because you pack what is grown. It is really hard to predict when the broccoli will be ready six months in advance. When you are not a monoculture grower, you cannot presell things. You have to sell what has popped up on the day—or your cherry tomatoes. In terms of polyculture growing and small-scale growing, it is better to be able to sell what you have, and you can either do that as a veg box scheme—but then you are competing with all the guys that are just buying stuff in bulk and spreading it through lots of boxes and delivering those cheaply—or you can go to a farmers' market.

A farmers' market is where you can engage with people who really care about where their food comes from, and who want to ask you questions, and who want to grow what is in season, what is growing right now. They will have a conversation with you about why there are a few bites out of the cabbage leaves. Farmers' markets can be an incredible way to connect with the local community and to reduce that supply chain cost, because it is literally us packing the van, going to a market, putting it out, and selling it directly to the customer. The downside of farmers' markets is that some of them go for hours and hours. You have to do a full harvest, pack the vehicle, transport it, lay it all out for the public, be there for hours and hours, pack it all down, and take it back to the farm. Short farmers' markets work really well for farmers—two, three hours max. It means that you can sell what you have grown. You harvest it all, you put it on display. It is a really short supply chain, and it does not require predictions about what is going to be ready on Wednesday.

The CHAIR: Ms Lacey, your submission talks a lot about Aboriginal communities establishing community gardens and about some of the challenges but also the community benefits, particularly in remote areas. Could I ask you to talk about that?

NAOMI LACEY: Yes. There have been some incredibly successful gardens in our Indigenous communities. I think we noted a number of examples of that in our submission. It is well known now, particularly after the inquiry that happened around the start of the pandemic, that food security and access to fresh, healthy food has been a real challenge for a lot of our remote communities. Community gardens and farms in those remote communities are a huge benefit to the community. It is a really good way for teaching the local community about healthy, fresh food as well, particularly since they do not have great access—particularly in New South Wales and southern states, I should say, compared to the Northern Territory, where I am—they do not have access to a lot of the traditional bush foods anymore, because of the way the land has been changed. So being able to teach those local communities about other fresh, healthy foods through community gardening activities is a real benefit, and being able to have that food available and accessible at all times to the community, and not having to worry about trucks, trains, planes, and automobiles arriving with food that has travelled many miles and comes at quite often very exorbitant prices.

There are a lot of challenges with community gardens in remote areas as well. We have noticed over the years that one of the big ones has been that consistency of management of gardens. People tend to come and go in a lot of the roles in these remote places. That can really have an impact on how those gardens are managed. Again, that is a different layer of education to what we were talking about before, but it is being able to get that education to the people in that community, so that they can then manage those gardens on their own, without the need for outside assistance with coordinators, garden managers, that type of thing, where it can become managed within the community. But at present, a lot of those communities do not have qualified people who know what they are doing when it comes to gardens on that front. That level of education could be provided within the community so that they become self-supporting with their gardens. That would be very empowering for those communities, because when they do get that education and they are able to self-support, those gardens flourish and have huge health benefits for the communities themselves.

The CHAIR: Thank you both very much for your time today. I apologise that we were running a bit late at the beginning. We may want to send you further questions in writing. Your replies will form part of the evidence and may be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

NAOMI LACEY: Definitely.

KYLIE FLAMENT: Yes. I am also happy to take you on a tour of the Green Connect Farm if you would like to come.

The CHAIR: That would be wonderful. We would love to see that. We have not worked out our site visits yet, but that does sound really valuable. It might be useful. One of the challenges that you talked about, Ms Flament, is the issue around the security of the land you are on and being able to keep it protected in that process. If there is any further information you could provide the Committee on how you are able to get access to that land in the first place and the challenges towards making it sustainable for your purposes, to keep on going, that would probably be useful because it is my view that we should be supporting models like yours, not making them harder.

KYLIE FLAMENT: Thank you. Also, if it is of interest to the Committee, I am able to talk to the financials a little bit, because the tricky thing that we have, and community gardens are the same, is that our farm has been going for nine years. It has been held up as an example of how to grow food around the world, but it makes a loss. We make a financial loss every year. That is a tricky thing in farming, as I alluded to in my opening remarks. Farmers are underpaid. We were offered another farm—there was a farm for sale locally—and they wanted it to go to us as a not-for-profit organisation to extend on what we did. I spent a week going through their financials, our farm managers spent a week going through their processes and procedures, and it was a brilliant farm. The managers were being paid about $10.50 an hour at the end of the day.

The CHAIR: Wow.

KYLIE FLAMENT: Because of the hours they put in versus the amount of money they got out. That is not uncommon. That is pretty standard in farming communities. I come from a farming family; you do not count the hours. But as an organisation that pays award wages, we do count the hours and we have to look at that. When addressing the food supply chain, we need to look at all of that because it makes it really hard for another community group or another individual to start growing food.

The CHAIR: In appearing before us today, NSW Farmers also stressed the work health and safety issues of farmers doing that extra work themselves in an unpaid way as well. That is something that has been covered

today. Thank you for raising that. Thank you both very much for appearing before us and for hopefully providing that further information, Ms Flament. The Committee will now take a break.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Ms CLARE HUGHES, Manager, Nutrition Unit, Cancer Council NSW, sworn and examined

Professor KAREN CHARLTON, Member, Food & Environment Interest Group, Dietitians Australia, sworn and examined

Dr KATHY CHAPMAN, NSW & ACT General Manager, Heart Foundation, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Thank you for joining us. Would any of you like to make opening remarks?

KAREN CHARLTON: Yes, we all would like to.

The CHAIR: Please go ahead.

KAREN CHARLTON: I am Karen Charlton. I am an advanced accredited practising dietitian, hence the little badge I am wearing. I am also a Professor of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Wollongong, and a member of the Dietitians Australia Food and Environment Interest Group. Today I am representing Dietitians Australia, which is the peak body of dietetics and nutrition professionals, and represents over 8,000 members.

I would like to begin by acknowledging we are standing on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I would also like to acknowledge that First Nations people have managed food systems for millennia and that we have much to learn when thinking about transforming the current food system.

I would like to applaud the New South Wales Parliament for committing to developing solutions to the issues of food production and food supply across the state. It is fair to say we are facing a nutrition crisis. Unhealthy diets are the preventable leading risk factor for chronic disease. This contributes to 28,000 deaths per year. The way our food is produced, manufactured, distributed, and consumed in Australia is currently contributing not only to poor health but also to climate change. Nationally, our food system is responsible for about 14 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and contributes to unsustainable land management practices.

Dieticians Australia is of the resolute view that, to promote human and planetary health, a food system transformation system is critical. In our submission, we outlined 16 key recommendations. You will be pleased to know that I am only going to bring up three of these right now in my address to you. These are the three that we feel are the most appropriate to discuss. First, we call on the New South Wales Government to support an updated national nutrition strategy. It is 30 years since we have had such a policy document in Australia. Whilst this is a federal policy initiative, like the obesity and the food waste strategies, states have a key role to play in the development and implementation of such a strategy. A national nutrition strategy would encompass all of the issues that have been raised in this inquiry to date.

The second point is that we would like to recommend the New South Wales Government invest in a New South Wales food security council. Food insecurity, as I am sure you know, is when a person is unable to access sufficient, adequate, and nutritious food. What you may not know is that one in six adults in New South Wales experiences food insecurity—that is 16 per cent. Of the food-insecure households, 43 per cent of those report that their children go without food for a whole day. I do not think these are statistics that we can be proud of. In addition, food insecurity disproportionately affects First Nations people. We all know that the pandemic has had a big impact on food insecurity, not only because of the unavailability of foods in the supermarkets, and the disruption to the food supply chain, but also because income to households has been decreased, and many prices of foods have gone up. Now we are dealing with natural disasters on top of the pandemic, so the situation is not good. Investing in a food security council—Tasmania has one; I think that is the only state that does—will allow agile action to help those in need as they need it.

Moving on to my third point, we are going more local as we go. We, as a dieticians' association, believe that one way to improve food production and food supply in New South Wales is through local government action. We know that the New South Wales Public Health Act of 2010 does not require local governments to have a health and wellbeing plan, unlike our friends in Victoria and South Australia and Western Australia. This severely

limits the jurisdiction of local councils to be able to act on any food supply issues. We really would like to call on the New South Wales Government to think about implementing public health and wellbeing plans at local government councils. Can I just tell you, out of 128 local governments in New South Wales, only two have a dedicated food policy. In Victoria it is 11 out of 79 councils. We are not stacking up particularly well. That is all I wanted to put across now. Thank you very much for the opportunity to come and present today. It is very timely because this is the start of Dieticians Week. I am wearing my little badge. Dieticians are committed to improving lives by encouraging change to the food system to make it more sustainable, healthy and equitable. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Chapman.

KATHY CHAPMAN: Heart Foundation really appreciates this opportunity to appear at this parliamentary inquiry. Our mission is to reduce heart disease and improve the heart health and quality of life of all Australians through our work, research, risk reduction, and support and care. Helping the community to eat a heart healthy diet is a key priority for us. We know that poor diet is a leading risk factor for heart disease, because it contributes to high cholesterol and high blood pressure, as well as obesity, and diabetes risk. We are really pleased to be here, focusing on this inquiry. We believe very strongly that addressing food insecurity and improving access to healthy foods—in particular, fruit and vegetables—is an urgent need, and will help to reduce chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer.

Like Dieticians Australia, we made quite a few recommendations, but the three recommendations from our submission that we wanted to lay out as our top priority is, firstly, raising the rate of income support payments. JobSeeker and Youth Allowance need to be raised, to make healthy food and the cost of living more affordable. We know that having the means to afford having a healthy diet—fresh fruits and vegetables are absolutely essential. One of the startling things that has come out of the COVID pandemic has been seeing how financial aid has fundamentally been life-changing for so many people living in poverty. With the introduction of the JobSeeker payment, we have seen that people who have been in those most disadvantaged circumstances have been able to afford the essentials, like being able to buy fresh fruits and vegetables for their family. We would strongly urge the New South Wales government to be advocating for this change to happen at the federal level.

Our submission also touched on the NCOSS cost-of-living report that was published in 2018, which really highlighted so strongly how people on low incomes and living in those most disadvantaged circumstances really feel that impact of food insecurity. We know that about 39 per cent of that study sample had been food-insecure in the past 12 months. That is, they had run out of food and could not afford to buy more. That is really quite high, above the state average. An important thing is that that NCOSS study really showed the interplay of the pillars of food security, so when we think about it in terms of access, availability, and utilisation.

In terms of access, three-quarters of people in that survey mentioned that they would be more likely to eat healthy food if it was cheaper. In terms of availability, about half the survey respondents felt that they would be more likely to eat fruits and vegetables if the range and quality was better where they currently lived. In terms of utilisation, nearly half of respondents mentioned that they would be more likely to eat healthy food if they were confident in cooking healthy meals that are tasty. These findings really reinforce the importance of considering access, availability, and utilisation. Rather than trying to tackle one by themselves, we have really got to think about them as interplaying with each other.

Secondly, our recommendation is that the New South Wales government should undertake regular monitoring of the cost of healthy foods, and the availability and quality of fresh fruits and vegetables in New South Wales. We know that other jurisdictions have done this on a regular or semi-regular basis—Queensland, Northern Territory and WA—while New South Wales really lacks this important data set, which would assist in planning and having programs to address food security. The last Food Basket survey in New South Wales, which was undertaken by Cancer Council NSW—I did happen to work there at the time as well; that is why I am happy to highlight it in Heart Foundation—really highlighted the significant price differences. Of a basket of the same 44 foods that were recorded across a number of locations in the state, there was something like a $200 price difference across the basket. So that is just a huge price variation that people are faced with.

The last recommendation from the Heart Foundation is that New South Wales does not currently have a healthy eating strategy in place. We have had the Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy, which expired in 2018. A lot of the recommendations that we hope will come out of this important inquiry, I think, can be very much addressed by the fact that we really need to have another Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy in place, and a really great way for highlighting what we can do, in terms of having better food labels as well. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Hughes.

CLARE HUGHES: Thank you very much, and thank you to Karen and Kathy for the comments you have already made. The Cancer Council appreciates the opportunity to speak to our submission and the issues raised in our submission today. We are committed to preventing cancer in the New South Wales community. Excess body weight contributes to 13 different types of cancer, including breast, bowel, and endometrial cancer, and is estimated to cause some 5,300 cancer cases in Australia each year. Similarly, poor diet is a cause of approximately 6,700 cancer cases each year in Australia, and insufficient intake of fruits and vegetables, wholegrains and fibre, as well as too much red meat and processed meat, are the biggest contributors.

We are also concerned that in New South Wales in 2020, 19 per cent of children and 57 per cent of adults were classified as overweight or obese, but, alarmingly, only 5 per cent of children and 6 per cent of adults were consuming the recommended intake of vegetables. Some might put this down to simply a failure of personal choice, but the Cancer Council and many in the health community would argue that it is also a failure of the food system to meet the needs of the community.

So while this particular issue is not one that was addressed in the Cancer Council submission, I think it is important to point out and highlight, if you are not aware, the fact that, for the first time in 30 years, Australia's food regulatory system and the Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act is currently under review. The primary objective of the FSANZ Act is the protection of public health and safety, and there is no denying that it has been a success in terms of protecting Australians from food safety risks such as food-borne illness, contaminants, and harmful ingredients. Yet the food regulatory system is also a significant driver of the food supply and, therefore, food consumption. It is a vital component of our response to poor diet and rising rates of obesity and related chronic diseases, yet it has not achieved its full potential in protecting public health.

The Cancer Council is concerned that an assessment of public health impacts has not been part of the process to date, and the review is seemingly favouring the economic drivers of the food system, such as food industry profitability, and international trade. The reasons why I raise this today is because the New South Wales government, through its involvement in this review, has an opportunity to protect the integrity of the food regulatory system, ensuring that public health and safety remain the focus of food regulation, while strengthening its capacity to address public health priorities, such as obesity prevention and chronic disease prevention, in order for the people of New South Wales to have confidence in their food supply.

Earlier this month we saw the release of a National Obesity Strategy, which will serve as a framework for all governments to address the rising rates of obesity and subsequent diet-related chronic diseases. One of the highlights of this strategy is a guiding principle of creating equity, and addressing the wider determinants of health such as income, housing, education, and employment. The strategy highlighted the need for cross-government approaches to address underlying determinants of health, and building healthy environments for all Australians. Some of the recommended strategies for creating supportive, sustainable, and healthy environments include building a healthier food system that favours the production, processing, and distribution of healthy foods and drinks; exploring and implementing the use of economic tools to shift purchases towards healthier foods and drinks; improving nutrition information to help consumers identify healthier options; and reducing children's exposure to unhealthy food and drink marketing promotion and sponsorship. These strategies are consistent with many of the recommendations made in the Cancer Council NSW submission to this inquiry.

The food environment where we live, work, shop, learn, and play significantly influences the foods that we eat, the quality of our diet and, ultimately, our health. So the New South Wales government must address the current obesogenic food environment. We acknowledge that the New South Wales government has implemented some initiatives to improve the food environment through the previous Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy that ended in 2018, but we recommend now that the new Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy, which we understand is nearing completion, is a cross-governmental response that applies an equity lens, and addresses the current limitations of the food system that contribute to an environment that exacerbates poor health, particularly of those who are most disadvantaged.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that the New South Wales government, through its involvement in setting national food policy and food standards, the current review of Australia's regulatory system, and the upcoming release of the New South Wales Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy, in response to the National Obesity Strategy, has an opportunity to show leadership in creating a food system that supports all people to access a healthy, safe, and sustainable food supply, prioritising equity, and addressing the obesogenic environment that contributes to increasing rates of obesity and chronic disease. That concludes my opening remarks, but I am happy to take any questions related to our submission. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Wonderful, thank you. Just to introduce ourselves, I am Alex Greenwich, I am the Chair of this Committee and inquiry. I am here with Mr Nathaniel Smith, the member for Wollondilly, and Mr Anoulack Chanthivong is joining us remotely through Webex. Ms Felicity Wilson, the member for North Shore, is

unfortunately unwell today, so is not with us. Before I get started, because I know people have some potential interruptions, Mr Chanthivong, do you have any questions you would like to address?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, thank you, Chair. Can you hear me clearly?

The CHAIR: Yes, all good.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Thank you very much for your submissions. I wanted to ask about eating habits and food's contribution to some of our public health outcomes. What sort of programs do you think might be worthwhile, particularly to address some of the obesity issues amongst our younger people? For example, obesity rates amongst different sections of our community are much more prevalent than in other communities. For example, I think there is certainly a correlation between the socio-economically disadvantaged and health outcomes, and I am just wondering how we can work with certain communities, in trying to not only change their food habits, but also change the way they see food as part of their cultural norms. I know that in my local electorate, particularly I think of our Pacific community, where it is quite common to it being seen as being wealthy, and social standing is actually [inaudible] probably disproportionate. I just want to know what sort of preventative programs we should be thinking about to address some of the, I suppose, excess consumption of food, both culturally and preventively.

The CHAIR: I am sure all of you probably have something to contribute there.

KATHY CHAPMAN: I think it is probably important to think of, as you say, those more disadvantaged low socio-economic status areas are going to be the areas where we find higher rates of heart disease, as well as in more rural and regional areas, we will find higher rates of heart disease, as well as other chronic conditions. There are also going to be areas where we find that there is less access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and they are going to be more expensive as well. So I do not think it is just a case of, what are some programs that we can do; we have really got to look at it from a policy and environmental settings point of view. So I will go back to my comment about, how do we help people to be able to afford to be buying healthy food?

Over in the Eastern Suburbs and the North Shore where incomes are more available, that is where we see much better eating habits. I also think it is about the promotion of unhealthy foods, and how we see quite a proliferation of the junk food marketing, particularly happening in those sorts of areas of more disadvantage. Clare, from the Cancer Council's point of view, will have a lot of evidence around that. I think we have had great commitment in New South Wales for a lot of school programs where there is great knowledge about healthy eating, really great knowledge—we have Crunch&Sip—where people know we should be eating more fruits and vegetables, but oftentimes people think they are having enough, but really do not realise that extra that they need. We also do not make it easy for parents to be thinking about how they can get it into peoples' lunchboxes. I will stop there.

KAREN CHARLTON: Thanks. You have covered quite a few things I was going to say. But I think it also comes down to my comments about local governments having much more control over planning. What is really obvious to me, now that my son has just started high school, is that all the kids from local schools go to McDonald's after school, because it is just around the corner. If you make it more difficult in terms of planning, that fast food outlets are not very much on the border of schools, and so on, that would be helpful.

But I think starting at a very young age, even in the preschool sector—that has been uncharted territory to this point—encouraging very young children, and giving families the skills, because often it comes down to lack of skills, in terms of being able to prepare foods. Often it is just a skills problem, and there are lots of programs—mostly run by NGOs such as OzHarvest—that try to give cooking advice and budgeting advice to families.

But it is really a life course approach, is it not? I mean, if kids are coming home, saying to their parents, "I've been to Green Connect urban farm today. It was really cool. We saw how tomatoes were grown and we picked some. Why don't we do that on our verandah?", I think it filters down. I think kids do not know where food comes from, and that is where experiential programs are really important, that they have much more of a connection with where food is grown, and then also the whole process it takes to get it to them, which is why coming back to local food systems, I think, is really getting back to a grassroots level. I might just stop there. We could go on all day about this. What a question!

CLARE HUGHES: Yes. You probably have not left much for me to add. But I do think—well, I guess, just reiterating—programs that look at education, focus on education, are really important, but will only do so much. It is needing to have that supportive environment, whether or not that is the local government environment, and what is accessible locally, but also things like the food regulatory system, and how that influences the food supply through permissions that might be given to fortify foods, the claims that can be made on food labels. It all contributes to the food environments, where food choices are made within an environment that, while we might

know that we need to be adding more fruits and vegetables to family diets and lunch boxes and things like that, there are other things that are working against making it easy to do that and affordable to do that as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I might go to Professor Charlton. There was quite a lot upfront in your submission in relation to involving First Nations people in the development of food strategy. In terms of where you see the priorities, what we can learn and the importance of involving First Nations people in this work, could you talk to that?

KAREN CHARLTON: Yes, sure. Thank you. I think the starting place would be the Aboriginal Land Council members, of which there are many. They are very connected with what happens in their particular country. For example, at the University of Wollongong there has been a really effective Blue Futures program, which has worked with the local Aboriginal Land Council to work out how can producers down the South Coast tap into a blue economy, but also culturally, what do waterways mean to people. So I am thinking a much more co-design approach. I am not a First Nations person, so I would not want to say "This is how it should be done", because that would be inappropriate—but certainly encouraging input from local communities.

Because it depends where you are in New South Wales, does it not? I mean, we are water country in Wollongong and the Illawarra and Shoalhaven, but other places are not. So what is done within those local food systems is not going to be one size fits all. There is a little bit of friction between agricultural producers and, possibly, Aboriginal viewpoints. But, certainly, I think working together with agriculture and the land councils and perhaps Indigenous academics and other people—I mean Bruce Pascoe is a very big player in this area, and he has got huge amounts of information. I do not know if you are aware of Bruce Pascoe. He is an author. I do not know what else he is—he grows a lot of food. So there are very, very informed people. I am not one of them, but thank you for noting that. I am glad that came through in our submission.

The CHAIR: All three submissions reference the need, particularly for New South Wales, to have some guiding principles, whether it be through a revised healthy eating strategy or food security council. In terms of, say, the work that is needed to refresh, update, and modernise the 2018 healthy eating strategy and to develop what the framework for a food security council would be, what do you see as the most effective process? We know just from this inquiry that there is already so much information out there. There is a consistency in what people are telling us as well, regarding healthy eating, reducing waste, sharing of information. What do you see as the process that would need to occur to make sure that we effectively and urgently put in place a healthy eating and food security plan?

KATHY CHAPMAN: I think the healthy eating and food security plan has not got to be just led by Health, it has got to be across government, and it has also got to be in partnership with the key NGOs as well. In terms of the healthy eating strategy that we have had, I think it really started very much as a very strong partnership approach, but how do we keep that going throughout the life of the plans? At the moment we have now got the National Preventive Health Strategy, the National Obesity Strategy, which are all great plans on paper, but it is about bringing the cross-organisational groups behind them, as well as the NGO partners. That will be—you know, as you said, you have had a lot of submissions to this one. There are a lot of different groups to involve, but I think we have got to really have that strong steering committee, of working out when is the best time to be engaging with the chronic disease groups, as well as the health professional bodies, versus the Aboriginal groups. I think they are really the first steps, and actually getting going with it as well—2018 is when that last strategy finished. We have had a pandemic in between, but we have got to be looking at, how do we have this healthy eating to be helping us through the pandemic as well.

CLARE HUGHES: I think also, if I can add to that, just taking stock of what we do have in New South Wales that does impact on food choices and the food supply in the broader sense. So I think taking stock of where those present opportunities and where the gaps are in those as well.

KAREN CHARLTON: I might just focus on the food security council, because we put a lot of words against that. I would say not to reinvent the wheel, but to look to others that have gone before—and that is where I would point to Tasmania; they have been pretty big in this space—and sharing of information between the states, as to which role players were involved. In our submission we did suggest social services, NSW Health, urban planning, food relief organisations. Just speaking for my own local area, in the pandemic they were just not coping with providing sufficient food to people in need—even with the JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments. It was quite dire.

OzHarvest was not able to source sufficient food from supermarkets, because of the supply problem. It was a really great example of how our current food system is so fragile, and as soon as one little bit tweaks and collapses the whole thing comes down. That is when a lot of people started growing their own food—a lot of people that had never, ever, tried to grow anything before and it became a little bit of a, "Let's swap, let's get into

our neighbourhood." So there were a few things that came out of the pandemic. So, yes, I would be looking elsewhere for advice on that. Does that answer the question?

The CHAIR: Great. Those sort of food security and supply chain issues that we experienced during the pandemic were some of the key impetuses to be able to establish this inquiry. When it comes to the pandemic, you flagged that people were growing their own food and that is a great way to learn and connect with food, but whether it is in terms of waste or diet were there concerning trends established during the pandemic that we should be aware of?

CLARE HUGHES: Certainly. If you are happy for me to address that?

The CHAIR: Please.

CLARE HUGHES: Yes, and I think we have covered some of that in our submission. It is early days, as far as collecting the data is concerned, and we will not necessarily see the full impacts of those changes in dietary patterns, but there were reports through the—I know the Cancer Institute had undertaken some research and, while I think it was 40 per cent said that their diet had gotten worse or less healthy, I think only 12 per cent said their diet had improved during that time. For some people it may have been an access issue. It might be they did have that opportunity to improve their diet, but more people were reporting that their diet had gone backwards, and they had less access to the healthy foods.

KATHY CHAPMAN: Over the course of the pandemic we saw people embrace being physically active because one of the few things we could do was go for walks. But that has probably declined. I will be very interested in the data that NSW Health has collected, in terms of people's diets over that time. But it is Heart Foundation's experience that people have been eating a lot more, turning to unhealthy foods for comfort, where probably, again, early days had people embracing cooking opportunities. But at the same time, we know there were a handful of people who benefited from that higher JobSeeker and JobKeeper, that helped them buy fruits and vegetables. But how do we make those sorts of positive changes the sustainable ones?

KAREN CHARLTON: If we could just look at things a little bit differently—people are tired of the messages about health, to be honest. Everyone knows that we need to eat lots of fruit and veggies. Everyone knows that we all eat too much, and we are all on the overweight to obese scale. They are old messages. Obviously, this is our bread and butter. This is what we do every day; we try to encourage that behaviour change. But I think what is really obvious is that the rhetoric about climate change, people are maybe more alert to, and somehow the link between food—how it is grown, and what you consume—and climate change is not necessarily made. It is all about mining or industry or fossil fuels.

I went shopping the other day and bought some clothes, and there was a label saying "sustainable clothing" or something like that. There was a website and it said, "This product has been produced"—I think it was Veronika Maine—or "This pays fair wages to staff." So then I thought, "Oh, now I feel much better about buying that expensive outfit." But I think the same could go in terms of food. Having a more local food supply, and less monopoly from the big supermarkets—the two huge ones—would give a much fairer kind of equity lens to the food system. But I do think we need to be tapping into that climate change message. A lot of people do not know that you can do things differently and still produce as much food, if not more.

The CHAIR: Again, throughout all of your submissions and your evidence today we have heard a lot about the need for education at all levels when it comes to producing food. Where do all of you see the priority? There seems to be a series of healthy-eating or food pilot programs rolled out across schools or at different levels of education but no consistent approach from government on educating people about food, healthy eating and waste reduction. What do you see as the best model of education when it comes to this space?

KATHY CHAPMAN: It is about thinking about what you have throughout the life course. Those programs that you have in schools and early childhood are very, very important. It is also really important to get straight to the parents, and to do it in a supportive way, of educating parents so that they are not just feeling judged by what they put in the lunchboxes. There was some media today around that on the ABC. Again, from a heart disease point of view, you often have a very good teachable moment when people find out their cholesterol is high, or their blood pressure is high, or their favourite cricketer has just passed away. We have got to be able to get those education and awareness messages in right through a whole range of age groups as well.

But at the same time that we are doing great education—whether that is in schools, or through programs—we have to make sure that our environment is not promoting those obesogenic messages as well. A lot of the junk-food marketing that we see that proliferates really makes it hard sometimes to get the right messages out about fruits and vegetables. Similarly, if we have clearer things on food labelling that really highlight what is a healthy food over another healthy food, they are going to be the messages that will help. Clare?

CLARE HUGHES: I was just going to reiterate. You mentioned the government programs. We do have the Munch & Move program for preschools and the Live Life Well @ School program. When I say "we", it is the New South Wales Government—our state.

KATHY CHAPMAN: In our great state.

CLARE HUGHES: Yes. We know that those were being reviewed to some extent, so we are looking forward to seeing what comes out in the new Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy. Because it is one thing to have these community programs that are often grant funded, and there is not the ongoing funding. There is an important element of localisation and, of course, local health districts and schools are that connection with the local community as well. But it is having something that all people have access to, all families have access to as well, and programs like the Live Life Well @ School, rather than lots of different pilot programs. We need to be mindful of whether they are not going to be equitable, and they are not going to be sustainable, and they rely on government or philanthropic funding that may be turned off.

We have the experience in Cancer Council. We did have a program that we were running that was about promoting fruits and vegetables to parents of primary school age children, that relied very heavily on a volunteer base to do that. When times get tough and the fundraising environment changes, that is where decisions are made to end those kinds of programs. We would hate for that to be something that happened because we are relying too much on volunteer-led or philanthropically funded programs alone.

KAREN CHARLTON: Getting back to the school environment, can I just add it is very obvious that experiential programs are the ones that impact on the kids. By "experiences" I mean cooking, taste testing in class, going on farm visits, which is what the Americans have done really well actually. They fund lots and lots of schools to go to lots and lots of farms. There is a funded program through, I presume, Education, but we do not seem to do that very well at all in Australia. Whatever programs are in schools need to be experiential. If I could just give an example of school breakfasts. We piloted a program whereby we got donated foods, we connected with a social enterprise company, and provided school breakfasts at a low SES school. There was almost 100 per cent attendance of children on those Fridays that we had the van there. The kids helped to chop up the vegetables and to make whatever it was. They composted what was left over. It was just an amazing opportunity.

So perhaps looking at targeting certain schools for school breakfasts, at least then the kids can come to school, and get something to eat before they start the day. Of course, it is not in all schools that that requirement is there, but it certainly is. We heard last week at a conference that Tasmania, in COVID, pivoted their school canteen to actually produce meals and deliver meals to families in need. I know that we do not do school meals in Australia. It is an English thing, I think. But perhaps look a little bit further than what is there at the moment.

The CHAIR: Mr Smith?

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: I thank the three of you for coming here today for this important hearing. I also have to agree with Professor Charlton. I find it absolutely amazing that whenever a McDonald's is constructed in an area, magically a set of traffic lights or a huge roundabout comes out of the ground like a mushroom. I know this because in my electorate—I have the Wollondilly shire and the Southern Highlands at the other end—there is probably a handful of traffic lights in the Wollondilly shire. One of them is at Picton McDonald's and the other is at the roundabout at Tahmoor McDonald's. You are dead right when you say local governments have a role to play here, and even RMS if they are state roads. It becomes way too accessible to get this sort of junk food and takeaway.

The other thing I want to touch on is in the last few weeks we have had quite a few tragedies: obviously Senator Kitching in Victoria; Rod Marsh, whose funeral was the other day; and the obvious one is Shane Warne. Has the Heart Foundation and Cancer Council seen an increase in awareness, in people contacting the organisations about those deaths? I am a cricket tragic, so it was heartbreaking for me when I saw it.

KATHY CHAPMAN: Me too.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: This was a guy who was only commentating a few months ago, and looked pretty fit and healthy, but there was another side to it. He was having liquid diets and then at Christmas time pasta and bread. All these sort of stories you hear afterwards. It was just amazing and shocking to hear all of that.

KATHY CHAPMAN: We have had probably a doubling of visits on our website since Shane Warne's death. The Heart Foundation has something on our website called a heart age calculator that we encourage people to do, where you are asked a whole lot of questions about your diet, your weight, do you know your blood pressure, and then it calculates how your heart age matches up with your chronological age. We have been getting a lot more people doing that. The Heart Foundation is very much promoting that people over the age of 45 should have a heart health check. In Shane Warne's case, what we have been hearing is he probably was aware that there was

something going on, and instead of choosing to have good, sensible advice, he went with an extreme diet, which has only made things worse there.

Unfortunately, for the Heart Foundation, I think these last couple of weeks have actually been quite good for us. We were able to take advantage of a teachable moment, and people are interested. We will be doing a radio campaign over the next few weeks, encouraging people to have heart health checks, or at least go and do the heart age calculator on our website. In a couple of months' time though, unfortunately those messages will be forgotten, and we will still be sort of plugging them out as best we can. Unfortunately, we have this situation where people are aware of it now, but we have then got to think about how you make those long-term changes. In the case of the people who passed away, they are the ones who are probably in the higher end of the socio-economic status. We know heart disease happens to everybody, but we know that we have even higher rates in those who are less educated, on lower incomes, and who live further away. We have to make sure that we also do our very best for them as well.

CLARE HUGHES: I would probably say, from the Cancer Council perspective, we have a very different experience of that. Most people do not die and have those kinds of episodes and events with a heart disease like that, when it comes to diet-related cancers. I would also add that awareness of diet component, diet being a factor, and weight being a factor, when it comes to cancer risk is much lower. Everyone thinks of protecting themselves from the sun and not smoking. We would really welcome the opportunity to have more people aware of the link between what they eat and their increased cancer risk. I think we have still got a road ahead. In New South Wales we have not had a healthy weight campaign that highlights obesity as one of the risk factors. We know in Western Australia, for example, they have a Live Lighter Program that is funded by the WA government, and delivered by the Cancer Council. It is not just focused on cancer, but that has been effective in raising awareness around the impacts of diet on chronic disease.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: Not trying to go back to cricket too much, but something that has been very successful with cancer is the Jane McGrath Foundation and the Pink Test every year. I think that is a yearly thing that continually reminds people about it. If something was done around that, it could help with heart health and obviously cancers. But the other thing I was going ask also is that, Professor, you were talking a lot about Tasmania today.

KAREN CHARLTON: Sorry?

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: No, it is very interesting what you were saying because one of the things that I have been working quite hard on for the last three years is having changes to the planning instrument for agritourism. Tasmania is probably the biggest agritourism success story in the country, that is, getting people for farm visits. In my electorate we are trying to do that because of the local government with DAs around farm stays and around having farm markets like at Cedar Creek Orchard. We have apple orchards, dairy farms and wineries. We have the lot in my electorate. We have dams as well.

KAREN CHARLTON: We have that in Shoalhaven too.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: Yes. At Wingecarribee we have our own water as well. That is one of the things that we have been developing and that hopefully should be finishing up around about July, which will allow farmers to be commercially viable, because in my area they are much smaller farms than out in central New South Wales. Having those experiences and having school trips with kids learning about where food comes from and what a farmer is, it is not someone you watch on *The Farmer Wants a Wife*. Metropolitan kids should be getting those experiences and touching food, as you were saying, cutting up carrots and things like that. But I am seeing more in regional schools because I am from a regional area. We have more gardens on our school sites and kids are learning how to grow food. We have our veggie patch at home and all that sort of stuff. Are you seeing that more? When I was a kid, we did not see that much at school.

KAREN CHARLTON: Unfortunately, my experience is, that you have to have a champion. I do not know if you have picked up on my accent, but I used to live in South Africa, and we saw this a lot. They just had sand in the yard, and then you would have to get the compost and all of that. Unless you have a champion—and it is normally a dedicated parent who hammers away, gets donations, and goes in on weekends—the thing falls over. It is kind of volunteer led, and it is a little bit like community gardens as well, which we know have lots of benefits, but you have to have these champions. Getting back to the agritourism, that is a real win-win situation because it is bringing in people to bring money into the region, into the state, but then it is also good for the farmers, and it just has knock-on effects. We think about food just as food that we eat, but in these agritourism, agribusiness, small cottage industries, there is a lot of money to be made as well. I think that is a really innovative kind of approach.

KATHY CHAPMAN: Can I just take up that point about parent champions? With school canteens in New South Wales, if you had a healthy canteen, it was usually because the P&C was very for it, and then the New South Wales government had the Healthy Canteen Strategy. We have seen a huge change in the foods that are sold and eaten through canteens. There were lots of barriers, with people being against it because the canteen would not be profitable. But they have been, because it has become a more mandatory thing. I think there are so many opportunities where we can think about giving that nudge to public health nutrition and public health, where we make the healthier choices the easier choices.

KAREN CHARLTON: If you think of junior sports canteens on a Saturday, that is an opportunity. Even vending machines in hospitals. What I would love to see is that any agency or organisation that gets any funding from the state government has to abide by guidelines, in terms of providing healthier food, but also where they are sourcing food from. Why not put the money back into the local producers, and build up from the bottom? That is what I would love. I think we may have put that in our submission.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: I totally agree with that. The vast difference between my girls' canteen at school, which is quite healthy, compared to when I do canteen duty at netball on a Saturdays, it is like walking into Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. There is sugar everywhere. You are right, there is a huge difference. I think the Government has done a good job in getting canteens up to date but volunteer organisations—

KAREN CHARLTON: The school programs have been really effective. That is one thing that I think the government could be proud of. Hopefully it is going to continue in the next—

KATHY CHAPMAN: I sit on the board of the Healthy Kids Association, which is the peak body for canteens, and we are trying to move into sports canteens.

KAREN CHARLTON: Jolly good.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: So the mission is on the way. Soon I will be selling apples and oranges.

CLARE HUGHES: If I can add, that is probably one sort of point I guess to highlight. I think you mentioned the New South Wales government had done, as part of the Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy, the previous one, and had made great inroads within the Health portfolio, when it comes to changing what is available in hospitals, and obviously the schools. It is now time for the opportunity to broaden that out. They have some wins on the board, but they need to be able to work and implement those kinds of things in areas where other portfolios have responsibility.

The CHAIR: Thank you all very much for your time. We may very well have additional questions or from the member for North Shore who was unable to attend today. Would you be comfortable if we sent you those questions? Your answers would then form part of the evidence and be made public.

KAREN CHARLTON: Sure.

CLARE HUGHES: Great, thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you all very much for your time and the really good discussion. Thank you.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Ms JACQUELYN JOHNSON, Strategy and Operations Director, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Thank you for joining us. Before we start, do you have any questions at all?

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: No.

The CHAIR: Would you like to begin with any opening remarks?

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: Yes. The Nature Conservation Council is the peak group for small and other environment and conservation and climate groups in New South Wales. We are working towards nature and communities driving. We are not here today to tell you things that are new or revelatory. We do not have the specific in-house skills or expertise on regenerative or sustainable farming that you will read and hear throughout the inquiry; nor on supply chains, production markets, or pricing, or quality control. We acknowledge that the system is endlessly complicated. I am here to take a step back and just look from the mezzanine at the food production and supply system in New South Wales.

Water is a scarce resource in Australia, and climate modelling indicates that water resources will diminish further. Effective and sustainable management of our water resources is therefore a critical responsibility of the New South Wales government. There is no agriculture on a dead river. If the Murray-Darling Basin system collapses due to over-extraction, the impact will be catastrophic. If we do not do everything in our power to arrest global warming at 1.5 degrees, the impact will be catastrophic. Our hope for this inquiry is simply that the knowledge and evidence that we hold, the trauma that has been witnessed, through the fish kills, the devastating droughts, the Black Summer, and the recent floods—all that illustrate the condition, the power, and the fragility of our river systems—are taken into account by the committee and that the committee's recommendations acknowledge that healthy rivers are the lifeblood of our state.

The security of our food supply is intrinsically linked with the health of our environment, and our mitigation of the worst impacts of climate change. The course that policy needs to take is already well known. We need to return sufficient environmental water to our rivers, and to comply with the sustainable diversion limits established by the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. We need to meter and monitor rivers to ensure compliance with the Water Management Act and its principles. We need to take action to ensure end-of-system and within valley flows, so that ecosystems can survive and thrive. We need to adapt our agricultural industry to sustainable products that provide sustenance to the community. We need to reduce food waste, close coal-fired power stations by 2030 in order to have a chance at limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees, and stop approving new fossil fuel projects for the same reasons. I hope that I can answer some of your questions, and I thank you for the opportunity.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, and thank you for the attention your submission brings to water. I wonder if you might want to talk to some of the planning controls you think that may be needed or how a planning system could assist?

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: If there are specific questions, I am happy to take on notice, but what I can say is that in New South Wales particularly, compliance with the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is a bare minimum. New South Wales, as we heard last week in estimates hearings, is late in delivering 20 water resource plans. Those are meant to describe how sustainable diversion limits are, among other things, going to be achieved. There are sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism projects, some of which will not be delivered by 2024, and 450 or so gigalitres left, to be recovered by efficiency measures. We have an endangered river system and the situation is dire. So, as I said, I think we know the policy directions that we need to take and now is the time to do that.

The CHAIR: Following on from that, the submission states:

> … agricultural pursuits in NSW should be managed in a way that protects the biological and ecological integrity of the state's hydrological systems.

How do we balance the competing demands on water, including from the agricultural sector?

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: If anybody knew the answer to that—

The CHAIR: Yep, sure.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: You would be an enigma.

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: —and I will not try and speak for anyone who has far more expertise than I do, but I think it would be fair to say that we need to listen to experts and science first, and pay heed to what is being said the environment needs in order to survive and thrive, and therefore sustain the entire system.

The CHAIR: And the policy priorities that you would have for the current New South Wales Government around water use, what would you like to see as the key priorities?

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: I think that the key priority for sorting out is floodplain harvesting. Again, any specific questions that I am not able to provide a full answer to here I am happy to take on notice.

The CHAIR: Great.

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: But I think given three disallowances, ongoing challenges between various stakeholders, and regulation that keeps being put forward, we are in a bit of a tricky situation, where people need to be able to sit together and talk openly about what is a reasonable policy answer to floodplain harvesting. First and foremost, floodplain harvesting needs to be regulated in such a way that complies with legal obligations under state and federal laws and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. We need full and clear data that actually provides a full understanding of what water is being taken when, and by whom, so that informed decisions can be made about licensing down the track, and climate models need to be included and up to date in water sharing plans and water resource plans. Until then, any licensing of floodplain harvesting take needs to be interim in nature. I have more in a list here so I can rattle those off, if you would like me to.

The CHAIR: No problem; we also have your submission. One of the key things that has been highlighted throughout people's submissions and throughout this inquiry is just how much food waste New South Wales produces from farms to households. What do you see as important for New South Wales to prioritise tackling this? What would be your recommendations there?

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: My recommendations there would be to—I am aware that you talked to Chris McElwain this morning and went through his submission.

The CHAIR: Yes.

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: I would listen to his recommendations. The NCC supports the submission that he made and anything that he says is well informed, apart from the obvious high level things that the Nature Conservation Council would say, which is food waste is a source of emissions and the way that the system takes back food that is not being eaten and is not being used needs to be done so in a way that it can be put to another use. But, again, I would leave that one to the experts.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: You have talked a lot about flood harvesting and water. As we have seen over the last few weeks, especially in my electorate, we got pretty hammered in Wollondilly and in the Southern Highlands, although not as much as Camden and Hawkesbury, with Lismore and the Northern Rivers area being the worst. I met with a group recently called Regeneration Wingecarribee that is looking at how they redesign farms, in terms of restricting flow into creeks and rivers to regenerate land to capture carbon, and things like that. What sort of laws would you like to see councils and all that do more to cut green tape—I would not call it green tape but allow landowners to use that water more on their property and keep it in the ground rather than flowing into other creeks and rivers, which, unfortunately, during high rainfall causes flooding downstream?

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: Yes. That question is slightly outside of my area of expertise, I am afraid, but I can take any specifics on notice, as I said. But as far as what opportunities there are for farmers and landholders to regenerate and carbon capture on their properties and take opportunities for biodiversity offsetting, for example, as long as those policies are truly a net gain for nature, then we would be truly supportive of farmers to be supported to regenerate their farms.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: Because it leads to better farming, better growth, and more organic food being produced, which is a good thing, and obviously creating more topsoil and a healthier farm. You can have ratings and all that. They have done it around the world. This is something that my area is looking at doing. I was just seeing what your views are on it.

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: Yes. Limited, but—

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: It is limited, it is new, it is different.

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: No, my views are limited. But, yes, there are a lot of exciting new types, or maybe even old types, of farming.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: It is old types of farming. I think in the natural landscape of Australia before European settlement, a lot of those things happened naturally.

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: Yes. It is exciting and interesting. I hope we can find ways to support that.

The CHAIR: Going back to water, could you talk to the priority of transitioning the type of crops for which over-irrigating really dominates?

Obviously New South Wales takes a lot of water for cotton, but then there are other crops that require a lot less water, which we could be raising. Could you talk to the priorities there and advice and thoughts on transitioning?

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: Sure. Again, I will take that question on notice. All I would say is we know that, yes, cotton is one of the largest crops being irrigated in the state. It is not a big employer, and there is increasing automation of that work. Thinking, not just of the water use but also the wellbeing of communities, more food and higher employment would be ideal. There is cotton and kinds of nuts that are very high use, and often for export. It would be good to see local-use food products that are more sustainable, in terms of our water situation, prioritised.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for your time. We have asked you a few questions to take on notice, and we may indeed ask you a few more. If you provide the written answers to that, that will form part of your testimony and also be made public. Are you comfortable with that?

JACQUELYN JOHNSON: Totally, yes.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you so much for your time today and for the submission that was made.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Ms LAUREN FLAHERTY, Strategy Adviser – Social Strategy and Communications, City of Sydney Council, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Before we begin, do you have any questions at all?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: No, I am okay.

The CHAIR: All right. Would you like to start with any introductory statements?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Good afternoon, Mr Chair, Committee members, ladies and gentlemen. I acknowledge the City of Sydney is on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and I pay my respects to Elders past and present. Around the world, governments are turning their attention to their food systems, looking at food security, sustainability, resilience, and climate change, and taking decisive action to futureproof their food supply and distribution systems through planning, policy, and collaboration.

In Australia, a large agricultural producer and exporter of food, the concept of food security, especially people's ability to afford or access food, has not been top of mind for many until recently. How can it be that in the lucky country one in six Australians are going hungry each week? The disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on food insecurity in New South Wales. At the City of Sydney we have seen firsthand the unprecedented demand for food relief from our community, and since March 2020 the City has led local emergency responses, including more than $3.3 million in donations and grant funding, as well as collaboration with more than 60 government, community, and sector partners. Our efforts are focused on people in social housing, people sleeping rough that were relocated to hotels temporarily, as well as international students, asylum seekers, and members of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. However, after a two-year emergency response, we are still seeing ongoing demand for food relief.

What is contributing to this sustained and increasing state of food insecurity? In 2018 the NSW Council of Social Service reported that 30 per cent of people surveyed had been food-insecure in the past 12 months. Typically, these numbers almost double for people in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and this was before anyone had even heard of the term "COVID-19". Attested in many of the submissions, food insecurity has been on the rise in New South Wales for some time, and the pandemic has really just exacerbated the issue of some families putting food on the table. The increase in cost of living, the lack of social and affordable housing, and also the inadequacy of income support payments, such as JobSeeker, to meet daily needs are some of the key causes of food insecurity. Also, the recent devastating floods in New South Wales, and rising fuel prices, have further demonstrated that our food systems are vulnerable to acute shocks, such as extreme weather, and chronic stresses, such as climate change.

The City of Sydney has joined 222 global cities as a signatory to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. We have also been co-funding local research and programs to develop a more inclusive food system, including the food business incubator FoodLab Sydney. Our key recommendation for this committee is to prioritise action, by looking through a food systems lens—that is, considering all aspects of the food production and supply chain, including consumption and waste disposal, as well as the social, environmental, and economic factors that I have mentioned. The voice and involvement of our First Nations people will be critical in any food systems transformation. It will ensure that we work to redress the actions of the past, to close the gap, and to draw on our First Nations people's connections with country.

The government must lead and resource short-term intervention, such as funding for food relief and further emergency preparedness planning. But this is also an opportunity for the government to respond to systemic issues, such as poverty and inequality, and advocate to the federal government to raise the rate of income support. The government can also map risks and vulnerabilities in all aspect of food systems, and identify opportunities to build resilience through decentralising supply chains and bringing food production into cities. On behalf of the City of Sydney, thank you for the opportunity to attend this public hearing. We are optimistic about the potential for New South Wales government leadership, and policy direction and collaboration between all levels of government and the community to develop a sustainable and resilient food system in New South Wales.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Could I start by asking you to take us through the work that the city did during the pandemic to support people who were experiencing food insecurity?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Yes, certainly. The need for food and the issuing of food—people who did not have access to food came to us fairly early through the pandemic, I think, through our community partners. We also established a community hotline. We saw the need quite early on, and obviously, as local government, we have quite close relationships with the community. I believe one of the first actions was a donation to OzHarvest through the Lord Mayor. There have certainly been subsequent donations to OzHarvest and SecondBite, as well as a lot of grant funding, including emergency response grants.

Another key aspect that we have done is leading local collaboration. We have a dedicated person—it is not me, but in our Safe City team, who has coordinated a group of more than 60 not-for-profit and community organisations that really came together to meet those needs during the first lockdown in 2020, and that group has continued on. They have been able to collaborate and meet needs as they can, depending on their capacity. That is some of the key work we have done. We have also worked closely with the Department of Communities and Justice and the Sydney Local Health District in our response.

The CHAIR: I think the pandemic exposed the actual level of food insecurity that people were experiencing. From the proactive work the city did, what are some of the long-term learnings, particularly for government, to support particularly vulnerable groups?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: What we are seeing is that in, I think it was 2018, the City of Sydney actually adopted its social sustainability strategy and action plan called "A City for All". We actually identified food security as an action that we needed to look at in that strategy. The city has taken a long-term view, even before COVID, that food security is kind of one of the next big challenges that is coming to us. I think everyone is now on board with things like climate change, but food security, I think, will be our next hot topic for people and sustainable food systems. As part of that response, we had a knowledge exchange grant with the University of Sydney and TAFE NSW. That was about developing a more inclusive food system. That was the FoodLab program, which was a program where people from different socio-economic backgrounds could be mentored and be trained to launch a food business, so that we have that diversity and inclusion in our food system. It was very much a strength-based approach.

Then there was research going on in the meantime about how around the world there are different modes of looking at food systems, whether it be the grassroots up, like FoodLab—and it was modelled on FoodLab Detroit—or top down, or something in between. FoodLab has been one of our key collaborations. The other thing to mention is the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. So 222 cities have joined this pact. It was launched in 2015 and it is really to foster best practice and collaboration between cities. The City of Melbourne is the only other Australian city that has joined at this time. We are very much focused on the Asia-Pacific region. Cities in Europe and Asia are very well progressed in this space. They have whole departments and offices dedicated to sustainable food systems. I think for us, it is looking at what is needed in the short term, in terms of emergency food relief, because that need is not going away, but also looking at the longer term food system transformation that needs to happen.

The CHAIR: Obviously, the City of Sydney is taking a great deal of initiative when it comes to food security within its local government area, but how could the state or federal government either further enhance the work the city is doing or empower other local government areas to also take the lead?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Yes. I think there are a couple of things here. The first thing I would like to draw on is research by the University of Sydney combined with the University of Wollongong and other partners, and that was looking at local food systems governance, and the role local councils can play in food systems. However, what they identified is that, in New South Wales, only two local governments have food policies, but if you look in Victoria the rates of councils having dedicated food policies are much higher. That is actually because they have state government legislation that encourages them, or perhaps legislates them, to look at things like wellbeing and food security. As a result, you are seeing that mandate come down to local councils in their planning frameworks, and you are seeing the rollout from there. The mandate from the New South Wales government would be really important in planning, perhaps as part of our Integrated Planning and Reporting framework. That would definitely be one thing. I think the other thing is we are leading by example at the City of Sydney, but we are a well-resourced council, I believe, perhaps compared to some other councils, that may not have the resources to do this. I think resources from state government, perhaps coordination—I know Resilience NSW is in this space. I think that is going to be really important as well.

The CHAIR: When people think of the cities, they do not often think of farms or agriculture activity happening in the city. Could you take us through the Sydney City Farm and some of the other urban agriculture plans that the city has either supported or is working to support?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Absolutely. I do love the Sydney City Farm. I was actually involved in the community engagement, and our first ever pop-up farm at Sydney Park, so basically from the master planning

stage. Actually, Sydney City Farm grew from a community vision, and then the community came to the council, and over many years it became a reality. But it is at Sydney Park in St Peters, if you have been there. It is a little bit hard to find—it is tucked away—but once you get there it is amazing. They have actually recently put in an orchard. They have lots of demonstrations about how you can grow crops in the city. They have volunteers who come in, essentially, and do the work for the farm, who can learn about urban agriculture, and also people who just love gardening and may not have their own garden at home.

Unlike a traditional community garden, the produce that is grown at the Sydney City Farm is not taken by the volunteers. It is, at the moment, donated to places like the Asylum Seekers Centre and, I also believe, OzHarvest. Yes, Sydney City Farm is great. They also have an education program that they run. In terms of other initiatives, obviously we have our network of 23 community gardens. We have our new city greening strategy, where we are further looking at opportunities to do this. I think the City of Sydney is going very well, and there are some other amazing examples of urban agriculture, and just how we can produce more food in our cities.

The CHAIR: Could you take us through how the city supports community gardens? Obviously, throughout the LGA there are a number of community gardens, and fairly successful ones too. We have heard of different governance challenges in other parts of the state. If you could take us through the work that the city does with community gardens, that would be appreciated.

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Absolutely. We have a dedicated community gardens coordinator, in our city greening and leisure section, and we also have a *Community Gardens Policy* and guidelines. That is the policy framework. As I mentioned, we have 23 community gardens at the moment. Essentially, the model at the City of Sydney is that those community gardens run as independent entities. They might be supported through some training or some materials through the City of Sydney, or we might help them with some landscaping and production. It is very much that they run themselves. We did some community engagement with those gardens, and other people who were interested a couple of years ago, and the diversity of the gardens was great. For some people it is a social thing, for some people it is for growing food, and for some people it is a place to be that is not their home or their work. I believe we are looking at more community gardens in the future. I think we have a goal of having a community garden within so many minutes' walk of each village in our city.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Thank you very much for coming to our inquiry today. Obviously, the City of Sydney has great programs and great resources. How are you sharing this with some of our more metropolitan or suburban councils? For example, my electorate traverses Liverpool and Campbelltown. I think some of your urban stuff would go very well given we are also experiencing a huge residential development boom out there, which has taken away a lot of the former tomato farms and cucumber farms for houses, and it is pushing them out. I am wondering what sort of leadership the council has taken with other councils to help them also adapt, or at least to consider the ideas about urban farms.

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Thank you. I think the main example of this is the Resilient Sydney network. The City of Sydney host the Resilient Sydney team, and they have produced a Resilient Sydney strategy. That has 33 metropolitan councils, and they are all looking at resilience. Some of them have their own resilience plans. They do often talk about food security in those platforms, and we actually have a great relationship with the Resilient Sydney team. I actually see that there is even more capacity for knowledge sharing in that space.

The CHAIR: One of the ways in which food is provided to vulnerable groups within the City of Sydney and other areas is through mobile food vans. Obviously, there are some regulatory challenges there and some food safety challenges there. What work needs to occur here to ensure that people are being provided with safe, healthy food and that it is done in a strategic way?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Thank you, Mr Chair. Yes, the City of Sydney has about 60 mobile voluntary food services—food vans that operate throughout Sydney, but are often clustered in certain areas—and they do provide free food to people, and that is charitable food. It is great, because it does meet an unmet need, or it helps people make ends meet each week, by knowing that they can access food. We also know that they get some social connection out of that as well. Our concern at the City of Sydney is that this free food is not actually covered by the New South Wales Food Act, so no safety regulations apply to this free food. It is an amazing intent, but unfortunately some of the people preparing the food have not had any food safety or handling training. They may not be aware of refrigeration requirements and things like that.

Unfortunately we have had reports and survey data of people getting sick from this food, which is not what we want. We know that the people accessing this food are often vulnerable people. They may have some health complications, or they might be more susceptible to foodborne illnesses, so we do see it as a problem. We understand that there are some challenges with changing the Food Act to make it cover free food. I have heard that it might affect cake stalls. No-one wants to disrupt the school fete cake stall, but we also want to make sure that people are safe when they are eating this food. At the City, we have actually developed the Mobile Voluntary

Services Policy and Guidelines. That is what we are using to try and work with the providers on, and we are working with the Food Authority as well, which is great. We ran a training session with the Food Authority but, once again, it is whose responsibility should this be, and what regulation should there be, to ensure safety for consumers of this food.

The CHAIR: So the city is filling in the gap through a voluntary code, but without further policy changes the enforceability of that is a challenge. Is that right?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Yes, that is correct.

The CHAIR: In terms of being able to produce more food in urban areas, what planning or policy changes do you think need to be a priority for government?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: I am just trying to draw on my strategic planning knowledge here. But I am possibly not the best person to ask. I might need to take this on notice. I know we have just talked about—it might be best to take it on notice.

The CHAIR: It would be great to get from the city some planning or policy advice on what could be done to either remove red tape to facilitate the greater production of food or to positively encourage that as well. Obviously, waste is one of the big responsibilities of local government, and food waste is a great deal of waste. Could you take us through the work that the city does to reduce food waste and any recommendations you may then have further for government.

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Yes. Certainly. We do see food waste as a high proportion of residential waste. I know other people have attested to that today. Between 34 to 42 per cent of bin waste is food, unfortunately. One of the key things we do in local government, and at the City of Sydney is, obviously, waste education and waste avoidance education. We have been doing that through some of the New South Wales government programs. Love Food Hate Waste, I think, and Love Food Sydney are two of the programs that come to mind. I think the education piece is really important. I think there is also a funding imperative there, so that councils can continue to do this work.

The other things we have mentioned in our submission include one of the waste treatment alternatives to landfill. One of the examples mentioned to me was the Goterra facility at Barangaroo, where they actually use black soldier fly larvae to convert food waste into high-value, low-impact protein and fertiliser in just 12 days. That is happening at Barangaroo, with all their food waste. I think it happens in shipping containers. I think that is just one example of what other technologies are out there around food waste. The other thing we have mentioned is just what levers do we have, such as legislation, to work with supermarkets to avoid food waste, and maybe look at relaxing the specifications for sale. In France, they have actually gone so far as to ban supermarkets from sending food waste to landfill. So that is something to consider—and, obviously, just ongoing funding of food relief organisations such as OzHarvest, Foodbank, and SecondBite—just so we stop that food going to landfill, and so that we can also meet that emergency food relief need as well.

The CHAIR: In terms of that emergency food relief that you spoke about at the beginning, obviously there is an ongoing need, an ongoing demand for that. But I think I am right in saying that sometimes from the state government the approach has been an on-demand approach to funding. What would be a more sustainable way of dealing with OzHarvest and Foodbank and SecondBite and other providers of relief funding, just to make sure that they can have an emergency plan in place, ready to go before the emergency happens, not some days after?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: I think that is a very valid point. We have, obviously, learned so many lessons over the past two years. I am aware that, collectively, people have learned so much over the past two years, and have had to constantly adapt and refine their programs. Of course, what we thought was an initial three-month emergency response has actually gone on for two years. I think we do need to be prepared for when the next thing happens. I think Resilience NSW will probably play a key role in that. I know that City of Sydney, and probably other local governments, also have those relationships with the community. So they would want to be involved. I guess another suggestion is engaging with those stakeholders and others in a collaborative process to understand how things are going to work for them, what issues they have had, what role the state government could play, what role the local government could play, and how best to resource that. I think you are right. We need those protocols in place so that we are ready to go when this happens next.

The CHAIR: Finally, if I could just ask about how we can better collaborate, engage and learn from First Nations people. We have heard that consistently throughout people's submissions to this inquiry. Could you maybe give some examples of how the city has worked in this space or further ways in which the city would recommend that we do learn from but also support First Nations people when it comes to food security?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Yes. Absolutely. I consulted with the Indigenous Leadership and Engagement team at the City of Sydney when we wrote this submission. One of the key things that they mentioned to me was around the notion of truth-telling, and the fact that it is actually traumatic rationing of Aboriginal people in New South Wales on missions that has led to many of the poor health and nutrition outcomes that we are seeing in Aboriginal people today. So we probably need to start by telling that story. Prior to that, we need to acknowledge that Aboriginal people successfully and sustainably produced food on these lands for thousands of years. I think there are some really key points to know. In our local COVID response, we did work closely with Aboriginal community controlled organisations. We did have to continually refine and adapt things where that was not working. Another example I would like to call on is that we saw a community organisation called First Nations Response—basically, a couple of volunteers from the Aboriginal community that saw unmet need and just, basically, mobilised, and started distributing food, hampers, meals, especially to Elders, or people that were in isolation and could not access food.

The key recommendation is to work with the Aboriginal communities and with Aboriginal community controlled organisations. They just need to be equal partners. We need to learn from them. We need to design the solutions and be prepared to be flexible. In our submission, we just mentioned a lot of examples of Indigenous food organisations, whether it be in IndigiGrow, or Yerrabingin, or Black Duck Foods in Victoria, Lillipad Cafe in Glebe. There is so many I could mention. There is another, Bush to Bowl. But there is great examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations doing this work. So we could easily just partner with these people and draw on their experience as we move forward with solutions.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before us, Ms Flaherty. We may very well have additional questions for you. I did ask that question on notice about planning controls or policy settings from the State Government around food production in urban areas. In providing us those responses, that would then form part of your evidence and be made public. Are you comfortable with that?

LAUREN FLAHERTY: Yes. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you very much for your time today and for the great work the City of Sydney is doing in this space.

(The witness withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 15:26.