REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

FOOD PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY IN NSW

At Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Monday 9 May 2022

The Committee met at 10:30.

PRESENT

Mr Alex Greenwich (Chair)

Mr Adam Marshall

Ms Robyn Preston (Deputy Chair)

PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Mr Anoulack Chanthivong

Mrs Tanya Davies

* 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 would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are 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 other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are present. My name is Alex Greenwich. I am the chair of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning. Mr Adam Marshall, the member for Northern Tablelands, and Ms Robyn Preston, the member for Hawkesbury, are with me here in person and Mr Anoulack Chanthivong, the member for Macquarie Fields, and Mrs Tanya Davies, the member for Mulgoa, are joining us via videoconference.

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

Mr MICHAEL TOBY, Corporate Affairs Manager, Costa Group, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Mr Toby, do you have any questions about the hearing process?

MICHAEL TOBY: No, I do not, Chair.

The CHAIR: Do you want to make a short opening statement before we begin with questions?

MICHAEL TOBY: I don't. I am happy to go into questions.

The CHAIR: I will begin and then rotate around my colleagues here. Would you start by taking the Committee through the development and implementation of your sustainable commercial farming frameworks? What benefits have you seen?

MICHAEL TOBY: Obviously, being a commercial business, we felt it was appropriate to insert the word "commercial" in "sustainable commercial farming". I think, at its heart, from a farming perspective, there has been very much an approach based on dealing with climate change; also ensuring that we become more efficient in our use of natural resources, such as water; also being more aware and conscious of biodiversity and ensuring that on our farms; also the way in which we apply nutritional inputs—that we are not having an adverse effect, or we are minimising adverse effects on the environment and surrounds. Also, a key focus is basically being able to develop and utilise existing and new technology to improve the efficiency in the way we farm, so to get a better yield, to do it with better efficiency in the way we use things such as water, and to also, where possible, protect and engage in protective cropping, so we can mitigate the adverse impacts of things such as extreme weather events, whether they've been caused by climate change.

The CHAIR: In your submission in relation to cropping, you state that it is important that these protective cropping structures are appropriately recognised at the state level. Could you talk a bit further about that and how that recognition process should occur?

MICHAEL TOBY: My understanding of the planning laws has been that they have recognised more traditional forms of agriculture, such as agriculture that occurs within the soil. Much of our cropping that we undertake in New South Wales is done out of the soil. For example, we have tomato glasshouses in the town of Guyra, where the product is grown in substrate. So nothing is actually grown in the soil. And at Corindi, just up from Coffs Harbour, the majority of our berry plantings—blueberries, raspberries—are also undertaken in substrate. They are obviously undertaken under protective structures which, with respect to berries, are not necessarily permanent. The glasshouses are, of course, more permanent. But I guess the point we make is that the planning scheme needs to keep pace, and needs to recognise developments and advances in forms of agriculture, in particular, intensive plant horticulture. So I guess that is the point we make: that the planning scheme needs to recognise that these are quite legitimate forms of agriculture, and should be treated as such.

The CHAIR: By "recognise", do you mean with that protected in planning laws or regulations? Is that right?

MICHAEL TOBY: It should—well, anything that is being undertaken within sort of a primary industry zone, it should be treated the same as any other form of agriculture.

The CHAIR: I have some more questions but I might pass to my colleagues.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Mr Toby, I refer to page 3 of your submission and follow on from your conversation there, looking at the problem of approval of developments which retrospectively impose

unreasonable conditions on the agricultural enterprise. Specifically, you might have problems where you have got rural meets further development beside it, and the flow-on effect that has with new growth and you are right beside that as a rural farmer and those impositions. Can you talk a little bit more about that and how we, from the planning perspective, can manage that better?

MICHAEL TOBY: I think there probably needs to be recognition given to putting in place appropriate buffer zones. I know that in Coffs Harbour, Corindi, where there has been quite rapid development of the blueberry industry, there has been unfortunate circumstances where you have had residential dwellings and even, in some cases, a school, established right next to an existing farm. That has obviously created some issues. So I think there needs to be greater recognition given to the interests of both parties, because with respect to residential development, I think that is probably something that is quite legitimate in a regional area, and it is not necessarily something you want to discourage, but there needs to be an appropriate balance achieved between the two, so they can happily co-exist.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: I will just follow up on that, if I may. Where you have got rural meets schools, for example, is it perhaps considerable to have a buffer of smaller acreage lots around that new growth area that would buffer the rural work and activities?

MICHAEL TOBY: So you mean smaller acreage lots of agriculture?

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: No. If it was that the development did not encroach directly on the rural landscape, that there was a buffer of, say, one-acre properties that could surround the further intense growth, as a protective measure for the rural.

MICHAEL TOBY: Yes, sure, potentially that could be a way to do it.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: Just following on from the comments around potential ways of supporting your industry and balancing the needs with other sectors such as residential or government services, you support a statutory mechanism to protect agricultural land in planning and development processes, as you indicated at pages 3 and 4. What mechanism or process would you suggest to this Committee that we could put forward? What do you think it would accomplish? Understanding that there are often competing issues, could you perhaps suggest some sort of hierarchy or prioritisation on how could the government evaluate the often conflicting needs?

MICHAEL TOBY: You need to have the state government setting those parameters, and in control of it, to avoid any inconsistencies with the local council government. In our submission I refer to the right to farm legislation. It is something that needs to be enshrined in state planning law to ensure that there are no inconsistencies between what that law may be looking to achieve, and what local council may be wishing to do.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: Thanks for your time, Michael. Good to see you again.

MICHAEL TOBY: Good to see you, Adam.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: You mentioned a tomato farm at Guyra. Obviously, Guyra is probably not typical in that the zoning there, I think, might have been RU1, large-scale agriculture. In trying to find a solution—I was reading through your submission, and I think you have hit on a point that is important for this committee's deliberations. At the moment, under the standard LEP instrument, there are a number of agricultural activities and ancillary activities to agriculture, which are considered exempt development—that is, you do not need a development consent to cultivate a paddock; you do not need a development consent to graze cattle; you do not need development consent for cattle yards, for shearing sheds, for machinery sheds, for all sorts of chemical sheds, because they are all considered to be ancillary to agricultural production.

If the standard LEP instrument were expanded to include intensive food production activities, such as those performed by the Costa Group—but there could be others—that do not involve, as you said, in-ground agriculture, would that potentially be a way to resolve the issue that you have in your submission? You are simply allowing intensive food production activities, as you said in your answer to one of my colleague's questions, to be considered as routine agricultural activity; therefore, exempt development, essentially, that you do not require consent to construct the physical infrastructure and operate those glasshouses. Do you have a view on that?

MICHAEL TOBY: Yes, I would agree. To offer an example, as I said before, we use protective tunnels to protect our berry crops. To my knowledge, local council is seeking to require a development agreement to put in place and use those tunnels, which are effectively temporary structures. I guess that comes back to my point about planning laws needing to keep pace with developments in modern agriculture. I would argue that is effectively—it is the definition of the things that you just referenced before. I think that would be reasonable.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: I just feel that is a more elegant way of resolving that issue. Then it means that council would not be able to impose a development application process because the standard instrument precludes that and says that it is exempt development.

The CHAIR: Mr Toby, your submission also goes into detail about export opportunities but also current barriers that are faced towards achieving those export opportunities. You give examples of blueberry and avocado. I was hoping you could talk about that a bit more, where the opportunities are, what barriers currently exist and suggestions on how they should be removed.

MICHAEL TOBY: If the opportunities that exist are to [inaudible] countries are Japan and China. In the blueberry industry, in particular, of which 80 to 90 per cent occurs in New South Wales, we think that there are opportunities to export blueberries grown in New South Wales to those countries. Unfortunately, there are non-tariff barriers in place, which prohibits blueberries being exported to those countries. There are no protocols for fruit fly treatment, and the same is the case with avocados grown along the eastern seaboard. It is not possible to export them to Japan for the same reason—there isn't any fruit fly treatment protocol as yet. If you are growing avocados in Western Australia, you can export them to Japan.

The CHAIR: In terms of the issue of food waste, could you take us through how Costa Group addresses that and the waste you currently deal with, and if you see any regulatory changes that would help reduce the amount of waste?

MICHAEL TOBY: I will start with product waste. So the product that we predominately sell to retailers, some of that is packaged, and needs to be packaged for good reason, not only with respect to the security and safety of the product, but also to ensure shelf life and longevity. We need to be very careful about somehow trying to move away from some fresh produce being packaged, because you will potentially create a bigger problem, and that is food waste on landfill where you will have [inaudible] more emissions than from using packaging. I think caution needs to be exercised when thinking about that. By the same token, we as a company are very conscious of the need to, obviously, use more sustainable packaging. In some of our product lines, we are moving to cardboard bases, such as with a number of our tomato varieties and table grapes. That is work that we will continue to do. But until we find the technology where we can replace something like rPET packaging, which is recycled packaging—that is packaging we need to use for our berry products, for the reasons that I just outlined before—then that is something we will continue to use.

The CHAIR: In your submission and in the questioning today we have obviously touched on issues to deal with planning, waste, export. From Costa's point of view, is there a best practice in Australia in terms of a government touchpoint for food policy and do you have any recommendations there? For example, later on this afternoon we have representatives from six different government departments appearing before the Committee, as the issue of food is not owned by one single department. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations as to how food policy is best addressed by a government?

MICHAEL TOBY: I obviously speak from the perspective of fresh produce, and some might say I have a vested interest in saying this, but I do not, and Costa probably does not think enough is done to promote the role that fresh, nutritious produce plays in things such as preventative health, and preventing things such as chronic disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes. I know that governments, at various levels, promote healthy eating campaigns, but the benefits of that, I think—not only in terms of saving the health system money, but the other benefits would be reflected, in people being healthier in general, and being able to make a more productive contribution to society—would warrant some emphasis from government.

I also think, if you are talking about making food perhaps more affordable, then ensuring that we have in place an effective planning scheme, which has appropriate checks and balances, but does not unnecessarily increase the capital cost of being able to grow fresh produce and supply that to people at a reasonable price is also very important. And I come back to my comments about packaging, because I know a lot of people talk about the prominence of online retail shopping, but the fact is that only a very small percentage are buying fresh produce online. Most people are still going to the supermarket or grocers once or twice a week to buy their fresh produce, and it is really important that they are able to access that, and that it is coming, if necessary, in a form of packaging that allows them to get value for money from that produce, and to make sure that they can take it home, they can appropriately store it, and use it in their daily and nightly meals.

The CHAIR: I have a final question about whether Costa has identified any opportunities or barriers towards urban agricultural practices—hydroponics, aquaponics et cetera. We have seen international cities around the world embrace that. Is that something that Costa has looked into or has any recommendations or thoughts?

MICHAEL TOBY: I think the main thing that prohibits that is simply the cost of real estate. In theory, the way we grow blueberries, you could literally go and do it in a car park, because you are not relying on the soil.

But, yes, I think the greatest barrier to that is simply the cost of real estate. It is cheaper to do these things in a regional setting.

The CHAIR: Committee members, are there any further questions for Mr Toby?

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: I have one. In relation to the glasshouses in Guyra that you talked about, can you expand a little bit more on the biomass as fuel in place of liquid natural gas?

MICHAEL TOBY: Yes. Well, this is something we would be very keen to do, and have had very preliminary discussions with Armidale Regional Council, where we think we could run a trial and use food organics and garden organic waste that is collected from kerbside collections. That is something we would like to trial. So it is certainly something we intend on pursuing.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Have you had conversations with council at all in relation to that?

MICHAEL TOBY: Yes, as I mentioned, very preliminary conversations.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Good. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Toby, thank you for taking the time today to appear before us. We may send you some further questions in writing. Your replies will form part of your evidence and may be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

MICHAEL TOBY: I would, Chair, yes.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you very much for your time and for the time taken to put in your submission. We really appreciate it.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Ms BERBEL FRANSE, Coordinator, Food Fairness Illawarra, affirmed and examined

Associate Professor BELINDA GIBBONS, Deputy Associate Dean Education, School of Business, Faculty of Business and Law, University of Wollongong, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: We will now hear from two witnesses from Food Fairness Illawarra. Before we start, do you have any questions about the hearing process at all?

BELINDA GIBBONS: No.

BERBEL FRANSE: Not right at this moment.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Would you like to make an opening statement?

BERBEL FRANSE: Yes, I would like to make an opening statement, but I would like to give Belinda the opportunity to make an acknowledgement to country.

BELINDA GIBBONS: Thank you. We acknowledge the Dharawal people as the traditional owners of the beautiful land on which we gather today, paying our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first agriculturalists, and continue to inspire through their ecological land management. We acknowledge the devastating impact of colonisation on the land. At Fair Food Illawarra, we commit ourselves to always remembering the knowledge, practices and ways forever embedded in the traditional custodianship of country. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Before your introductory statement, for your benefit I note that two members of the Committee are appearing via Webex. As they join us with Webex, just make sure you are talking into the microphone so they can hear.

BERBEL FRANSE: Thank you. First of all, thanks. We are very pleased to see the New South Wales government engaging in this inquiry and are grateful for the opportunity to be here today. I am Berbel Franse. I am a health promotion officer at Healthy Cities Illawarra, but today I am representing Food Fairness Illawarra, which is a community coalition that has, since 2005, worked to make healthy and sustainable food available and affordable for everyone in the Illawarra. Food Fairness is guided by representatives from six guiding organisations, including the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, the University of Wollongong, Healthy Cities Illawarra as well as the three local councils, which are Wollongong, Shellharbour, and Kiama. In addition,

we also have a wider network of over 1,000 individuals, community organisations, not-for-profit organisations, NGOs, and charities that are all recognising the need to collaborate between community, industry, and government to unlock fairer food solutions.

Over the last 16 years we have seen many wins that demonstrate that a shared purpose, resources, and expertise can provide meaningful, place-based community outcomes that are more effective, efficient, and sustainable than could be achieved by any of the stakeholders working alone. To give you some examples, our low-cost and free meals directory provides our community an overview of the different community services that we have out in the community when in crisis. We really saw this as an incredible, useful resource, particularly during the COVID pandemic, when we actually decided to update that resource on a fortnightly basis, to make sure that our community had the best information at hand.

Also, we successfully advocated for OzHarvest to expand into the Illawarra—initially five days a week with one van, extending to two vans for five days a week—which is fantastic to make sure that our community organisations can utilise rescued food to service their clientele. We also developed our online Fair Food Field Guide to provide our community with different pathways for them to participate in a fairer food system, because we all play a role. Last but not least, this year we launched a Wollongong Online Farmers Market as a way to work together with our local producers to connect them to our community members in an efficient and convenient way, and also to ensure that a big portion of our revenue is kept in our region, rather than flowing outwards.

However, we spend a lot of time talking to our councils and convincing them of the importance that food has for our community, as well as for our future. It is also really important that it is not just food waste or food relief, but a more holistic view. Therefore, we urge for the development of a statewide integrated and comprehensive food system and food security plan that sets objectives and targets at a state level, and which empowers local government and communities to set local objectives and targets on priority food system issues, and then work towards their achievement. This plan should be implemented and overseen by a new whole-of-government food systems committee, and sustained funding must be available for local governments and non-government organisations to develop place-based solutions that will improve access to healthy and affordable food availability. Such a development would allow us to actually work together towards making healthy and sustainable food available for all. Thanks again for this opportunity.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I will start with some questions. Specifically with reference to the Illawarra, could you take us through what food security looks like in the Illawarra, what you learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic and where you have seen demand?

BERBEL FRANSE: Food insecurity was an issue well and truly before the pandemic, but I guess the pandemic has definitely shown the vulnerabilities within our community. The Illawarra actually has 7.2 per cent food insecurity, which is slightly above the state average. When it comes to food insecurity, there are so many angles that it is impacting our community. We definitely saw a lot of our vulnerable community being hit first within the COVID pandemic—to really have access—because they did not have sufficient food at home, to be able to lock down with little notice for a week. However, one of the things that we really identified as a community coalition is that we have an existing network. We have been working to get it for over 17 years now. That existing network really enables us to rapidly respond to the COVID pandemic, and other crises that we have seen of late.

That resulted in—for example, during one of the lockdowns, within two weeks, we were able to open additional food hubs for our community to access food, and we were not able to do this by ourselves. That is why I really want to state that it is by working together that we can do so much more. We worked really closely with the guys from OzHarvest, who had additional hampers, but we also utilised buildings from some of our community centres. We were able to utilise volunteers from different community organisations, as well as even the logistical insight from one of our other community organisations that does a lot of delivery. It is only by working together that we were able to achieve what we did, but at the same time the rapid response that we were able to do was due to the trusted relationships and networks that were already existing well and truly before the crisis hit.

The CHAIR: In terms of those OzHarvest food vans, are they still active and operating?

BERBEL FRANSE: Yes.

The CHAIR: Have you identified that there is actually a need for more? Can you talk about the benefits of the work that they did?

BERBEL FRANSE: OzHarvest plays a really big role in the food relief space. They obviously are rescuing food from a lot of the major supermarkets. It is fantastic not seeing that go into landfill. I know that within the Illawarra there is a little bit of a challenge at the moment, to get enough rescued food to satisfy the demand within our community. But you would have noticed in my submission that, while food relief is a really important short-term solution for people in crisis, I do not believe it is the whole solution. It should be addressed

with other programs that empower our community to find themselves out of the situation where they need to call up on food relief, if that makes sense. But OzHarvest does play a beautiful and important role within our community.

The CHAIR: In your submission you talk about the need for that wider food plan to be co-designed with people who have experience with insecurity. Could you talk to how you would see that process work?

BERBEL FRANSE: How I see it work is actually working directly with community organisations, that already work with these communities. Similarly, we do not directly work with the community, but we work with communities that, day to day, see these community members, that have a good understanding of what those communities go through. But I do believe that, in an ideal world, you would have a reference body that has experienced food insecurity in their life, in whatever stage of their life, because it is not until you have experienced it that you can really know what that looks like. I think the barriers that we experience as well, like food insecurity is something that not many people are proud of; it is something that is quite hidden.

That is why I call for better data collection on that, because I do believe that, even while we are having 7.2 per cent of food insecurity—which, by itself, is already devastating to have, in a country where there is more than enough food for everyone—I do think that number is understated, and I think we need to be better at measuring that, as well as getting a better insight from those community members coming from different walks of life. It is someone who, all of a sudden, can't pay their mortgage, or it is someone who may not know how to cook and utilise the food that they can buy, and know that Maccas every afternoon or every evening still means that they are food insecure. There are so many different aspects to food insecurity that I think it would be really interesting to pull a reference group together in regards to that.

The CHAIR: By a reference group, your submission and other submissions have talked about the need for a food security council.

BERBEL FRANSE: Yes.

The CHAIR: Would that be the work of that council? Is there another jurisdiction that has done this and has done this well and how would you see them operate?

BERBEL FRANSE: First question, I do believe that a food security council—I am looking at our region, and I can really clearly see the benefit of having an intersectional network operating within our region, and how much more effective we can provide community solutions in our region. I can definitely see the opportunity for that, at a state-based level, because I do believe that when it comes to the food system, as well as food insecurity, it is such a complex, interconnected space. My perspective does not provide the full picture, neither does yours. I do believe that it is really powerful to bring all the different perspectives into the one room. I do believe that the perspective of multiple people who have experienced food insecurity would be really beneficial in that space. How that is done? I don't know, sorry.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Thank you, Chair. Ladies, welcome. I am reading through your submission, page 4.8. I have a couple of questions but I will start with this and allow other members to ask questions and come back. Consideration of workforce challenges and skills development, also looking at including urban agriculture and affordable prices for young people wanting to enter farming, how would you suggest that be achieved?

BERBEL FRANSE: Big question. I think what we are actually seeing, just to give a little example of one of the producers that I deal with, working as part of the Wollongong Online Farmers Market, is that we have got two amazing farmers. They are young, excited, interested in growing sustainable food for our community. We in the Illawarra only have three or four fresh food producers, so there would be a real benefit to having them operate. They have started, I guess, farming. They have engaged someone with land, and have started farming on that land. That is fantastic because that land previously was underutilised.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: They can lease that land and work that land?

BERBEL FRANSE: They have leased that, yes. However, there are challenges with that, when you lease someone's land, when you are growing crops that take more than six months to come to fruition. You can imagine that there are some hurdles to get through, in leasing land, and what does that look like, and when do you start paying rent, or is that even a thing. Our farmers are ageing, it is an absolute ageing workforce. There are not enough farmers, or there are not enough people interested in farming the food that we consume. I do see the opportunity for incubated programs, whether it is utilising underutilised land that might be council owned or might be state owned that we can utilise as training platforms to foster their skills, show them how it is done, and then possibly link them up with bigger landholders that can potentially provide them with the opportunity to produce on their land.

BELINDA GIBBONS: I think even education is so important. I don't believe our curriculum covers enough about our soil and our land and what agriculture is or regen agriculture.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: You must come to Hawksbury. We are opening a centre of excellence in agriculture.

BELINDA GIBBONS: Exactly.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: And we have our selective school that started last year in year 7, and it is a food bowl.

BELINDA GIBBONS: Exactly. We have these hubs of amazing knowledge, and I feel why is that not wider spread across our State.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Maybe that is something that they look at. It is really successful. I have got—

BELINDA GIBBONS: Why aren't we talking about the soil in kindergarten? We are out playing in it, so let's understand what that means. It kind of just starts really young, I think. You are right, we have these beautiful places where our kids, if they are interested in farming, will go there to study, but they have got to go. It is just not necessarily a common language that we have yet.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: It is in its infancy. Maybe it is something that you look at going forward and see if that could be reproduced somewhere else.

BELINDA GIBBONS: We just don't have a lot of time for it to be in its infancy.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: I have more questions but I am happy for other members to ask theirs.

The CHAIR: We will come back to you, then.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: Welcome, ladies. Can you hear me okay?

BELINDA GIBBONS: Yes.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: I have a couple of questions that flow on from each other. Is it true that you said your organisation has been operating for 17 years?

BERBEL FRANSE: Yes. I was not completely involved, only for the last seven years.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: I wanted to know if you could give the Committee an overview as to how you are seeing food insecurity change over that time and are there any specific cohorts that are increasing in their insecurity or perhaps conversely decreasing in their food insecurity, and what do you think could be contributing to that?

BERBEL FRANSE: Thanks for the question, Tanya. We definitely have seen some wins. I think when it comes down to food insecurities, as I mentioned before, not having really sufficient data on food insecurity, it is sometimes quite hard to quantify what is happening, as well as even to identify the exact communities that we are seeing. I think we have possibly seen that statewide. Our international students were definitely significantly impacted during COVID. But I don't think that we should just be looking at a crisis situation like that. I could not give you a precise answer, I'm sorry.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: Okay.

BELINDA GIBBONS: I have been involved with FFI and the university has been involved with FFI for a few years now. The beauty of it is that there are many sectors that come together for these discussions. Over the past few years, depending on the crisis that we are dealing with is the topic of conversation at the time. It may be a conversation about domestic violence, and then there may be a focus on women and the hubs. And just seeing the different audiences that come through the different hubs around the Illawarra over the past few years, our understanding of food insecurity is growing.

You are right, Berbel; it is really hard to say, "Have we seen it decreasing?" I think our understanding of it is expanding, and therefore it is possibly quite disturbing to think about what it does mean, and how many of us are food insecure. If we are thinking about the children who are going to McDonald's after school, because that is cheaper than necessarily cooking something, then they have food, but that is not necessarily good food or right food. Our definition is really important as well. Sorry if that does not answer your question either, Tanya, but it is such a changing feast. There are definitely increasing numbers of people going to our food relief centres, and numerous reports of not having enough food to meet those so many days a week.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: Perhaps you could take this on notice, but it would be really helpful for the Committee to understand a matrix or a structure of how we go about measuring food insecurity, how do we gather

the data? If you give your input into that, and whether that needs to be elevated at a national level because I am sure what you are seeing in the Illawarra is not unique to the Illawarra. Do we need to have discussions with other states and territories and the federal government as well? Perhaps you may want to take that on notice and put some thought behind how we could go about measuring it more accurately.

BERBEL FRANSE: I know that, in Tasmania, they have done some quite interesting work around measuring food insecurity. I am not aware of the exact details, but it could be something that definitely can be looked at for this inquiry.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: I know a number of mainstream media are beginning to report the impact the war in Ukraine is having on Ukraine's as well as Russia's standard ability to export their base products for carbohydrate products such as wheat et cetera. I think Ukraine usually exports around 40 per cent of wheat products to the globe and that has been severely impacted. Given that we are a global village and we do a lot of exporting and importing et cetera, I would love to get your opinion as to whether Australia as a nation should consider some sort of national food bank, some sort of national repository of basic food essentials to offset any potential significant decrease in essential imports that will eventually lead to the ability for the average person to go to the shops and buy a loaf of bread or pick up a packet of pasta. I would like your thoughts on whether the Federal Government should be looking at that type of national food bank or emergency food store and perhaps what that could entail.

BELINDA GIBBONS: That is a massive question, isn't it? I am just thinking, we do not have enough food to go into the hubs at the moment. What are your thoughts?

BERBEL FRANSE: My opinion would be, rather than investing in a big food bank, that we invest in our local food production, and ensure that we find resilience within those systems, that we will diversify, we will invest in urban agriculture, as well as our food bowls, to ensure that if we will not be able to import, we actually as a nation are able to satisfy, because I think the recent disruptions have really shown the vulnerabilities of our food system. Our global food supply chain is responsible for some significant environmental impacts that we are seeing today. If we really are committed to combating climate change and making a difference, then it is about investing in our local food communities, rather than looking at our export or import capacities. But that obviously is my opinion.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: Thanks very much for your submission and your time here today. I have a series of questions. We as a State have never produced more food than we do at the moment. We have never exported more food than we do at the moment. We export much more food than we need in terms of domestic consumption. Yet your evidence to the Committee is that food insecurity is on the rise. Therefore, my first question is, what is and where is the market failure? If we are producing much more than we need but there is still food insecurity and it is rising, what is and where is the market failure?

BERBEL FRANSE: Where we are looking at food security, we often look at the four dimensions that define food security, which are the availability of food, access to food, the use and utilisation of food, and the stability. Stability is the underlying dimension, and it was obviously really impacted during the COVID crisis, or the floods, the fires, the droughts—whatever is being thrown at us of late. When we are looking at food insecurity, it has been impacted in so many ways, whether it is education and not knowing what to do or how to prepare yourself a really good meal. That is why my submission also incorporates empowering our community, whether it is through cooking lessons, or increasing food literacy from a young age. It is about really empowering our community.

This is a slight aside, but Uber Eats is overtaking the world. No-one actually jumps in their kitchen to make food. That loss of knowledge that our grandmas and our parents have is getting lost, so it is about, how do we get it back? Why do we allow big corporations to decide what we put in our bodies, in particular, when the obesity rates show that that may not actually be beneficial for our health, and later on, our community, or the hospital bill. I am getting a little bit lost in the question I am answering, but it is about what is the market failure. I think it is a hard one, but it is a really complex one. I guess one of the really interesting things that we actually saw during one of the lockdowns, when the Newstart Allowance increased, was that we saw a slight decrease in the uptake of food relief. So we can directly see a link there, between the income of our more vulnerable community or lower income community, and the relation directly to food insecurity. But I do not believe that is the only group of people who are food insecure. I hope that answers your question.

BELINDA GIBBONS: You are right, we are producing way more than what we need but it is where that food is going. We can see by the amount of waste. Australia has the highest waste consumption of all OECD countries. It is certain parts or certain areas within our populations that are food secure, that is where the wastage occurs, but there are massive parts of our community that are not—

BERBEL FRANSE: Benefiting from it.

BELINDA GIBBONS: Yes.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: That is essentially what I am trying to get to. Why is that the case?

BELINDA GIBBONS: It is the access.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: When you say "access", what do you mean? Do you mean it is too expensive or that they do not have supermarkets where they can get stuff? I come from a part of the world that is out in the bush, with heaps of food, but I am just trying to get to what it is about. Is it about price or is it other factors?

BERBEL FRANSE: It is about price; price definitely plays a factor. But I actually would not want to say—I think it is not so much about reducing the price of food. Our supermarkets are showing us that some of the food is presented to us at a price that the farmer cannot survive, so I am not suggesting that we make food cheaper, by any means. Price is definitely one of the factors, but I also think access from a mobility point of view—the elderly community. We are seeing fast food giants like McDonald's target communities like low socio-economic communities, creating food swamps, where unhealthy food is more readily available and a lot easier to access than fresh veggies. In addition, if you are not having the skills to turn fresh veggies on a really limited budget into a delicious, nutritious meal for, say, a week then you are quite challenged, and then Macca's seems like a pretty easy solution. So there are lots of reasons why people are food insecure. It is quite complex, but that is also why we have got a whole inquiry into it. It is not something that we solve alone.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Just picking up on what you said about quantities of food, I notice at point 9 that you disagree that development of exports should be a focus for New South Wales. I am just trying to grapple with Mr Marshall's comments in relation to the quantity and the availability of food and yet you not wanting to encourage the export of food, when we have an excess of it, rather than it going to waste.

BERBEL FRANSE: I do not think it should be a focus for us as a state, but I understand that it is inevitable. But I do think that it is important to think about a transition to where we are first thinking about the food security of our state because I think that is your role—would be my guess. I do not think it should be the focus. The first focus should be our community. But I also see that there is an economic driver to export, and I do think it probably is inevitable. But within that, I do think that we should think about a transition: Is our export market sustainable for the future that is coming, with increasing transport costs—things like that—or should we be looking at what that looks like if we were to invest it in our community?

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Do you have evidence that, going forward, it would be too expensive to export food—the costs would outweigh the benefits? Do you have that statistic?

BERBEL FRANSE: No.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: It is just a belief?

BERBEL FRANSE: Yes, correct.

The CHAIR: I really appreciate your contribution. One of the points you make in your submission is that we should have state planning legislation to address councils' lack of power to approve or refuse food outlet types based on the healthiness of the food sold. You talked about food swamps. In consultation with those councils that you work with in Illawarra, Kiama and Shoalhaven, is this a particular concern that those councils have—to be able to have that planning power?

BERBEL FRANSE: Yes, we actually recently saw Wollongong Council being taken to court by McDonald's. It was fantastic to see Wollongong Council stand up for our community, and the health of our community. But it was devastating to see McDonald's win, and to actually have another McDonald's in our community, in a village-type community that was supposed to be village-type, where you could pick up your groceries. When you are on the highway, the next McDonald's is within a four kilometre radius, so there was not really a need for it. There probably was a bit more need for a supermarket with fresh food. To see a development come through like that is a really sad development. But that is obviously my perspective, from a food security point of view, not from a financial or an economic point of view.

BELINDA GIBBONS: I guess the beauty of the coalition is that it works really closely with the local councils around our area. I think that is very precious, and I do not know if that is common around Australia or within New South Wales—to be able to have those discussions and to bring them all together and to get our thoughts on that.

The CHAIR: Thank you both very much for appearing before us today. We may send you some further questions in writing. Your replies will form part of your evidence and may be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

BERBEL FRANSE: Yes.

BELINDA GIBBONS: Sure.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you so much for your time today and for the submissions you have made.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Ms SIMONE SHERRIFF, Research Officer, SEARCH Program, Research Assets Division, Sax Institute, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

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

SIMONE SHERRIFF: No, that is fine.

The CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

SIMONE SHERRIFF: Yes. I thought maybe I would just introduce myself a little bit more. I am Simone Sherriff and I am a Wotjobaluk woman. My family are from the Wimmera region in Victoria, and I am currently based in Wagga Wagga, Wiradjuri country. I work, as I said, for the Sax Institute, which is an independent not-for-profit organisation that helps decision-makers find and make the best use of research to solve real-world health and social problems. Since 2003 the Sax Institute has worked in partnership with the New South Wales Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council and a number of Aboriginal Medical Services in New South Wales to collect evidence on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families in New South Wales. Through that evidence and through those partnerships, we identified food insecurity as being the third most significant factor impacting the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children in non-remote areas in New South Wales. In response to these findings and high rates of food insecurity among Aboriginal people, we therefore went and collected more in-depth information, by speaking with local Aboriginal people one on one and in group workshops. That is some of the information that we have put into the inquiry.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you very much. In the research that you discuss in your submission, it focuses on the experiences of non-remote Aboriginal communities. Have you noticed any commonalities between the experiences of remote and non-remote communities and any thoughts on how that can be addressed?

SIMONE SHERRIFF: I think the purpose of our research was not exactly to explore the differences between remote and non-remote. We just purely wanted to find out the experiences of food insecurity that families were having in non-remote areas. There definitely would be some similarities, I suppose, around income being a big problem for people—not being able to have enough income. If you are on a low income, a large portion of your money that you get each week goes to buy food for the family. I think that would be similar across the two.

In remote areas it is quite a different scene, in the sense that there might only be one shop in the local area where people are able to get their food from, whereas, in the communities that we spoke with—one was in Sydney, in the Campbelltown area, and the other one was in Wagga Wagga, which is a large regional area. Even though those areas are seen as places that have a lot of different shops—there is a variety, compared to what remote places would have—we did find that suburbs where a lot of Aboriginal families were living did not actually have very many shops available. In the suburbs in the Campbelltown area where a lot of the Aboriginal families were living, there was only one small IGA supermarket, and all the other food shops had closed down in the area. So I suppose that even though they are in an urban area, having not many shops available to them was still a really big issue.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Specifically during the heart of the lockdowns, or the COVID-19 pandemic generally, were additional difficulties faced by non-remote communities? Did that just expose greater underlying problems that were already there?

SIMONE SHERRIFF: Yes. I definitely think that, during the lockdowns, it made it much harder for people, but I did see a lot of the community coming together to be able to provide food and support for vulnerable people in the communities. I think it was difficult, in the sense that already it is really hard for people to have access to enough food. They have to be able to have transport to be able to get to the food places. That was a thing that people spoke about a lot. A lot of Aboriginal people do not have access to a car to be able to get to the shops,

either from not being able to afford the registration of the vehicle, or the petrol. Then they have to rely on public transport. Then, during COVID, a lot of people were a bit scared to take public transport, I think, to be able to get to the shops. Then people did not have enough money to be able to pay for the delivery of food to their houses. So the community came together in a lot of ways, and tried to get fruit and vegetable and food boxes, and to deliver out to the community members that were unable to have their own transport, to be able to get to the shops and get food. Sorry, I hope that answered it.

The CHAIR: Yes, absolutely.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Welcome to the inquiry. You have raised interesting points that those that are not in regional and remote areas do not experience—that is, that lack of ability to carry groceries to your home if it is a long way out and not getting public transport availability as well. What is the promotion in those regional areas for locals to produce their own crops, to grow them themselves? How is that being promoted, if it is?

SIMONE SHERRIFF: I think people that we spoke to spoke, as you mentioned, about transport being a big issue. I think, sometimes when we spoke to local councils and things like that, they thought the public transport was quite adequate in their local area. But when you speak to families who are having to catch that public transport—it is a bit difficult to have to lug your six kids onto the bus, to then go to the supermarket. Then you have to walk a kilometre home with your groceries, and all your kids. I think that is really difficult.

We did speak to people about what kind of initiatives were going on in their local area around food, planting food crops, or fruit and vegetable gardens, and things like that. There was a number of initiatives, but they were very small scale. Some of the Aboriginal Medical Services had their own fruit and vegetable gardens the community could come and be part of, and collect fruit and vegetables from. Then, in some of the local suburbs, there was small—but they are all very small scale, not enough to produce enough for the whole community. You can come and take a few bits and pieces as you need. But nothing was really done. I think it is difficult. People spoke about food. Sometimes people had wanted to have initiatives around this, but a space that you could plant or have these special gardens and things, or who was going to oversee them—that was sometimes a problem, the accountability, who is going to look after it, and start it up.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Thank you, Simone, for coming in today. I note you made some mentions of Campbelltown, which is where I live and also part of my electorate, as well. I wanted to ask whether there were differences between the food challenges of, say, metropolitan Indigenous communities and more rural and regional communities and whether you needed different strategies to address any specific characteristics based on geography.

SIMONE SHERRIFF: Obviously, the two communities—the one in Campbelltown was quite an urban area, and then the one that was more like a large regional area. We did see quite a lot of similarities across the two communities, in terms of the barriers and issues that local families were facing around food insecurity. I think the difference may be that, in the Campbelltown area, there were quite a few more services, in terms of food relief and food pantry options available, than there were in the regional areas. In terms of different charities, such as OzHarvest or different things like that, they are doing a lot more work, I suppose, in urban areas, than they are in the regional areas. When we spoke to them, one of the reasons for that was that they run on volunteers—so just being able to get enough volunteers in the regional area, and also to be able to have organisations to be able to take the food distributed out to the community.

But we did definitely find a lot of similarities. When we spoke with people, a lot of families spoke about how they had faced racism and stigma when accessing certain services around food relief or charities. People were quite afraid that if they were to turn up to these services and say they could not afford, or did not have enough food, for their family until their next pay cycle—some people were quite terrified to actually go there and get support, because they were worried their children were going to be removed, given the history in Australia. Sometimes when they were to access these services, they felt a bit judged. Then they also found it difficult sometimes to get to the shops, they felt, because of racism as well, being able to get on public transport and buses. Sometimes people felt like they experienced racism on there, so they were hesitant to catch public transport. In some of the suburbs, people spoke about having to sometimes rely on taxis to be able to get to the shop with their families to get food. But in some of the suburbs the taxis will no longer go to that area, because it has got a bad name, or whatever. So they are not able to get that service. They have to either walk to another suburb and call a taxi there, or wait.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Thank you for that, Simone. I suppose, in the long run, the food challenge of our Indigenous communities is more than just about accessing food. There seem to be other policy areas involved: employment, self-management and transport. All those other social management policies must be addressed as well. What are some of your thoughts as to maybe some immediate strategies we can make in the policy setting so that the food challenges do not reoccur? If it has happened or there are economic side effects,

how do we make it a much more sustainable path for our Indigenous communities to address some of the food challenges? In my mind, it is not a single quality area problem. I think it is a whole suite of issues, as I analyse it.

SIMONE SHERRIFF: It is very complex, and it needs a multi-component approach, as opposed to any solutions. I think we keep seeing money being put in at the end, where it is all around food relief, and people are already at the point where they are struggling and cannot get by. I think more needs to be done, as you said, around really multi components. I think we need to be able to address people not having enough income to even be able to afford to buy healthy food for their families. So definitely income, education, and transport need to be addressed. It is a very difficult question, very complex. Yes, I think currently not much—when I spoke to the local government areas, like health promotion, departments and things seem to be quite interested in doing something around food security, but then it is always at such a small level that they do something around food relief. If you were to improve transport alone, that is not enough. I think definitely there needs to be more. I do not know, it is very hard to answer.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That is fine. It is never a single policy solution. It is all interconnected—your geography is connected to your employment, economics, education. All these things actually matter. We do not have to resolve the world's poverty in the one go, but I am just wondering what immediate, perhaps, much more simplified things we could do to go towards the step of trying to make it more sustainable.

SIMONE SHERRIFF: I know in the Campbelltown area, when we spoke to families, they were talking about how in their local suburb there used to be a number of shops available to be able to get food and things like that. They have all been closed down now and there is only the one—I think it is an IGA or something like that. When they go there, a lot of the fresh produce is kind of off, or really super expensive. They felt like there was a lack of commitment from local council into their local area, and they were feeling that was quite disheartening, because they could see other suburbs in the areas around them are getting Woolworths and Coles and ALDIs and other shops like that, and they felt like their community was missing out on proper shops, to be able to get all their groceries. The same thing in the Wagga area, in the communities where people were living, and they just felt like there was a lack of commitment from council into making sure there are adequate shops and produce available in their area.

On the other hand, there is also the lack of healthy, affordable food available, and then you just see more and more of these fast food places popping up. People spoke about how they can now ring a corner shop and get $2 worth of hot chips delivered for free, so the kids are constantly ringing up and doing that, and more and more unhealthy fast food places are popping up. When we spoke to local council in one of the areas, I think there were six McDonald's in this one town, but not a very big population. There are no policies around the number of fast food places that can open. The responsibility of—you are surrounding people with these unhealthy food options. People have a lot of stress and other things going on in their lives, so it kind of pushes them, and drives them towards making those unhealthy food choices, if you are just surrounding people with those options.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: Thank you very much, Ms Sherriff, for your time and your submission. Listening to you talk about the practical implications of Indigenous communities that live some distance from town, have you or are you aware of any organisations that have begun working with Indigenous communities to create community gardens or community orchards, that subsistence farming, and actually helping those communities themselves begin to grow their own foods? Can you give any feedback on that?

SIMONE SHERRIFF: I do not know of any specific organisations that have been doing that, but I know that the Aboriginal Medical Service—for example, the Tharawal one at Campbelltown, they have taken their own initiative, and they have quite a large bit of space there, where they have set up their own community garden that has fruit, vegetables, herbs, and different things there. They have also set up another initiative that is called the Good Tucker program. They have spoken to families about the barrier around transport, and being able to get to shops, and the affordability of fresh produce, so they decided to set up a partnership with one of the local fruit and veg suppliers. I think they get discounted fruit and vegetable in bulk, and they take it back to their Aboriginal Medical Service, and they have volunteers that come and package it all up in different boxes for families. Families have to go through a health program when they get their health check and everything, and they pay a small contribution for the box, and then they got some donations. They have a refrigerated truck, and they drop the box out to the families in the program.

I cannot remember—I think I met around 80 families each week who are in this program, I think, where they get this fruit and vegetable box delivered out to their house, along with recipes and ideas. But no-one has really spoken about any partnerships. I know there is definitely interest in it. People spoke about how they would love to be able to have a produce garden for their community, where they can grow things. It was definitely a

thing that was brought up a lot, but I think no-one really knew how to go about it or how you get funding for that kind of thing. So they were just small things that the Aboriginal Medical Services were doing themselves.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: I think something like that could certainly tick off a couple of issues in terms of obviously the fresh food but also beginning to educate the young children around the importance of fresh food and how to actually practically achieve your own fruit and vegetables, herbs et cetera. I certainly know of the availability of men's sheds to help build garden beds and all that sort of stuff. There is probably a wonderful pilot project that you could run and actually test it with local councils et cetera. If you are able to provide any more information around that type of solution that is needed at the coalface, I certainly would appreciate receiving that. Perhaps just one more: Have you had any feedback on the food security tool for Aboriginal communities that you have developed?

SIMONE SHERRIFF: Do you mean the one that we adapted for the Good Food plan? We have not received feedback from anyone that has used it as yet, but it was something that we developed. The communities that we were speaking with really liked the project that we were doing in partnership with them, and exploring food insecurity, and how we can go about addressing it, I suppose. They wanted something that was going to be able to be used by other communities as well. They felt like, "We've done all this great work and collected all this great information. We know that there is a problem for a lot of Aboriginal communities across Australia." They wanted a tool that could be used by other communities as a starting point for wanting to look at discussions, or who you speak with about food security, and what kind of questions to start those discussions. But we have not as yet received any feedback from anyone that has used it.

The CHAIR: I have one final question, Ms Sherriff. A number of submissions have made comment that New South Wales needs to have a standalone food strategy. Other submissions have recommended a food security council. Do you have any view on that from the research that you have conducted and particularly implications on or involvement of Aboriginal communities in that?

SIMONE SHERRIFF: I think that would be a wonderful thing to do. As part of our project, we set up local advisory groups, I suppose, and that was quite good. I think there is a lot of interest from different groups in communities, but there is just no-one to drive it or lead it, I suppose, so any small issues sometimes dwindle off. I think something like that would be really great. I think it would be so important to have proper representation from Aboriginal communities on those kinds of committees. I think that would be good, yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for your time this afternoon. We really appreciate the time you have taken and the submission that was made. We may send you some further questions in writing. Your replies will form part of your evidence and may be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

SIMONE SHERRIFF: Yes, that would be fine.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you very much. We really appreciate your time this afternoon.

(The witness withdrew.)

Mr YIANNI MENTIS, Executive Manager, Environment and Climate Change, Northern Beaches Council, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for joining us. Before we start, do you have any questions about the hearing process?

YIANNI MENTIS: I do not. I have previously attended, Mr Chair, and so I am familiar with the process.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Would you like to make an opening statement?

YIANNI MENTIS: I am happy to make a very short one, Mr Chair. You already have our contribution that we have provided. Can I apologise for not being able to attend previous dates. Unfortunately, we were very busy with storms and such, as you probably can appreciate. First of all, Mr Chair, Committee members, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which the northern beaches lay and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Northern Beaches Council covers quite a large area, as you are probably aware—more than 250 kilometres squared, much of which is bushland. A significant component, obviously, is residential and peri-urban. We only have around about 12 square kilometres of rural lands and, therefore, a fairly minimal area to actually grow food. There is also 2.53 kilometres squared of industrial lands. We range, basically, from Manly

to Palm Beach, and inland to Forestville and Terrey Hills. A large component of it, as I said, is bushland—home to almost a quarter of a million people.

So, quite obviously, the greatest proportion of our food is imported and, therefore, for us, supply chain is a very important matter, as are planning matters that might relate to how we could potentially better use the rural lands that we have, and also the industrial lands that we are currently responsible for. We are in in the midst—as are many councils in New South Wales at the moment—of developing a new LEP and DCP. Therefore, we are hopeful and will be relying, ultimately, on the Department of Planning to provide us with some guidance on where we are going with that. We will be suggesting to them a number of potential means to allow more food production to occur in the Northern Beaches area. That is it. I am happy to end it there.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We obviously learnt a lot about food insecurity and supply chains during COVID and particularly as a result of the lockdowns different communities experienced. Obviously the northern beaches experienced a fairly strict lockdown. What were the learnings throughout that process about food security, supply chains and the need that was found in the northern beaches?

YIANNI MENTIS: We were affected, like all other parts of the community, by people within the community who did not have access to food, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic, but during the pandemic, more appeared. With our community partners—and, in particular, our Community and Belonging directorate was very proactive in this space—we tried to provide as much support as we possibly could, particularly to not-for-profits and charities in the local area. We worked very closely with them, and also with local food producers and food suppliers—in particular, a relationship that we had with Harris Farm Markets, but also with OzHarvest, and other such organisations—to supply charities where we could.

We had, in numerous locations around the LGA, community centres that closed down and, as a result, we opened one of those community centres as a distribution point for fresh food from local producers and from local suppliers. We worked very closely with organisations like Meals on Wheels and others to expand what they were offering, and also expanded the Meals on Wheels process, from where we were normally delivering, to group homes and other such locations, which certainly did appear to be particularly affected by the pandemic.

We are continuing to do that. One of the lessons that we learnt there—I mean, not that we did not know it already—that volunteers are absolutely crucial, and very important. Like they did for many other things, volunteers came out of the woodwork during the pandemic, and that was very encouraging in our LGA, as it might have been elsewhere. As a result of that, there are now 300 volunteers providing support to organisations—in particular, Meals on Wheels. We supported the introduction of an organisation—by the way, this Community and Belonging is not my space. I am the Environment and Climate Change executive manager, but I have been briefed by my colleagues, so I am doing my best to translate what they have provided.

The CHAIR: We appreciate it.

YIANNI MENTIS: We assisted the introduction of an organisation called One Meal in the Northern Beaches, particularly during the pandemic. We helped to set that up and now it is operating, and thriving, and still providing the support that it did over the last two years.

The CHAIR: Would you say that those situations that you dealt with exposed a need and that need still exists?

YIANNI MENTIS: I think that the pandemic has exposed many needs, Mr Chair, as you can appreciate, not only in the space of food security but, generally, I think it identified some significant gaps in the manner in which supply chains operate. Those things still do exist, yes. They are improving as the economy recovers. However, I do believe that there are certainly many lessons that we learned during the pandemic on, in particular, how to rally the support of the local community to direct us towards a more resilient local government. We are, obviously, very keen on trying to deliver a resilient community, as evidenced through the whole resilience program that we are going through at the moment.

The CHAIR: Moving on to the future, you mentioned in your opening remarks about the LEP. You obviously recommend in your submission that the New South Wales Government facilitates innovative urban commercial-scale agriculture. Could you tell us more about that, the benefits of it and what Northern Beaches Council would like to see there?

YIANNI MENTIS: I can say that we are already leading somewhat by example. We have an approved vertical farm that is operating in an industrial area at Belrose. That is currently approved under the existing legislation and LEP. Currently, the department allows for industrial zones—it notes that horticulture and aquaculture are not mandated permissible uses in those spaces. We would be very keen to see that change. As part

of our LEP, and our local strategic planning statement that we prepared in the lead-up to the LEP, we are very keen to see that change, and we will be presenting to the department some options for allowing for more of that.

As I said in the intro, we have got a total of 15 to 16 square kilometres of space that we could probably use better with a more appropriate planning regime in place. For example, the idea of vertical farming in industrial zones for horticulture is happening, but probably not at the fastest pace that it could. Certainly, we could not expect to feed one-quarter of a million people with vertical farms in our industrial zones, but we could certainly contribute. They could be prosperous businesses. They are arguably industry, and, therefore, we would be looking to ask the department to consider them as part of our industrial zoning.

Regarding rural zones, they do currently allow for aquaculture, so we would be continuing to promote that, where appropriate development is already occurring. From another point of view, from a planning perspective, there is opportunity for us—this is not quite a planning issue—to support a reduction in the red tape for farmers markets, for example. A number of farmers markets operate in our local government area already. They obviously have more difficulty operating on private land than they do on public land. There could be some opportunities to, again, through the Department of Planning but also through our LEP and DCP process, allow for that to continue to occur and to increase, more [inaudible] on private land where it is possible—noting, of course, that insurance is an issue with that. From a public perspective, we are certainly promoting farmers markets where we can, but we would like to see them proliferate where that is possible.

The CHAIR: Thank you—

YIANNI MENTIS: They are generally something—sorry, I was going to say they are generally something that tend to use local produce, so we would want to be trying to promote that as much as we can.

The CHAIR: I will now hand over to the Deputy Chair.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Thank you, Chair. Mr Mentis, welcome this afternoon. In relation to waste, that is a big expense for councils. What percentage of waste is attributed to Northern Beaches Council's budget, can you tell me?

YIANNI MENTIS: That is a tough question. I suspect it would be about one-tenth, from my understanding, but I cannot confirm that. I will have to get back to you with the correct number.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Where is your local waste disposal area?

YIANNI MENTIS: We do dispose of waste at our local site, which is Kimbriki, but it also goes to other sites offsite from Kimbriki.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: What is the life expectancy of that site?

YIANNI MENTIS: Kimbriki, I understand, is 20 to 30 years but, again, I am not a waste guy. I would have to come back to you with the correct answer.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: That is alright. You are supporting government funding councils to establish and run food organics collection systems as well.

YIANNI MENTIS: Correct.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: That would be separate from that. How do you see that progressing and growing? What is the model you are looking at for that?

YIANNI MENTIS: We are in the midst of preparing a fairly comprehensive waste strategy. Obviously, one of the most major considerations within that is the treatment of organics, and the separation of organics, as per the Government's mandate to do that by 2030. We are in the midst of finalising a report into different options for the separation of waste. That is going to become a fairly important component of the waste strategy. That report, essentially, will look at all the different options that are available, with an intention to try to support more FOGO, or food and garden waste, specifically organic waste. Obviously, the strategy will include a lot of communicating with the people of the Northern Beaches to try to reduce their food waste as much as possible.

We have already got a fairly comprehensive suite of resources on our website for reducing food waste, and very regularly we do workshops and sessions with the community on that. Further to that, where we can, we are providing people in the community with opportunities to recycle their food waste where they can. For example, I understand there is a $90 voucher that we provide towards worm farms, compost bins, and training at our Kimbriki site. The strategy itself, which is due out in the next three to six months, we will obviously be taking that to council. But it is comprehensively intending to address food organics, in particular, but also every part of the waste stream.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Given that council is in the process of that and putting it forward to council to either adopt or not, do you think there is any support going forward for a holistic approach to the way local government councils—not just individual councils—handle waste? Should there be a broader approach where councils can get together and agree on a holistic approach to how they deal with waste?

YIANNI MENTIS: You mean us working with other councils—

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: As a local government strategy, full stop, with all the councils, rather than the merits of individual councils creating their own waste vision, their own waste strategy?

YIANNI MENTIS: I think we are creating our waste strategy in the premise of the state government's framework. Our intention is to make sure that we meet the targets that the state government has provided. In terms of working with other local councils, we work with our local neighbours; in particular, Mosman Council is the partner in Kimbriki. We do, on occasion, work, obviously, with our other local government colleagues on the northern side of the harbour, in particular through NSROC. There already are mechanisms to allow for the collaborative; I think you are talking about it at a far bigger level. But I do not see why that would not be an appropriate direction to go in, so long as it meets the requirements of the state government.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Mr Marshall?

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: Thank you, Chair, and thank you Mr Mentis for your time today. I take you to page five of Northern Beaches Council's submission. There is a remark in response to point six of the terms of reference. It states:

> More work could be done to support consumers, business and events to eat and cater for, less meat.

I am interested in what council means by that and why it takes that particular view.

YIANNI MENTIS: I think that was a general statement that relates to the fact that it is well known that meat production, and provision of meat, delivers greenhouse gas emissions. I think that was essentially a statement in regards to that, rather than necessarily specifically in relation to the Northern Beaches and how we might be able to deal with it. Having said that, supporting a healthier lifestyle is something that everyone is doing, so I do not see that is inconsistent with what we have mentioned there.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: So it is not a case of Northern Beaches Council having a view that we should be eating less meat, it is a view about what the government should be doing more to facilitate that? I am just confused as to what is the intent of that, and it is repeated a few times through the submission. There was a suggestion in here that the government should be providing subsidies as well, to facilitate that. Is that in relation to your vertical farming, or are you talking more broadly across the state?

YIANNI MENTIS: No. I think that statement was a general statement, rather than a specific one, in relation to the way that the Northern Beaches is going to be dealing with the eating of meat in our area.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: Thank you, sir, for your time today. You recommend in your submission on page 7 that Indigenous foods are developed and cultivated with local Aboriginal input and then corresponding economic benefit. How could we expand on that in practical terms within our communities?

YIANNI MENTIS: I think that there is an opportunity obviously to provide support to the local Aboriginal community where we can, and particularly to the local Aboriginal businesses, Indigenous businesses, where they are present on the Northern Beaches, and where we have the opportunity to provide those opportunities, we should try as best we can to do so. We host the Aboriginal Heritage Office here on the Northern Beaches, so we do collaborate with the local Indigenous community on that front.

I think the intent of that statement relates specifically to an understanding that there is particular community interest in what is called bush tucker, but generally, in the provision of food production from native species in particular, and the fact that that is less impactful, in some instances, on the environment. I think that there is certainly an understanding across the scientific community, but also culturally, that supporting the proliferation of that would be a sensible way to go. That is what that statement was essentially made about. It relates specifically to the fact that developing that in our local area would be good for our community, we believe.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: You mentioned a few times in that response the word "support—"support to the local Aboriginal community" et cetera. Can you expand further on what that support may look like, or has council not gone to that level of detail or consultation yet?

YIANNI MENTIS: Not yet. However, we are in the process of finalising a RAP, a Reconciliation Action Plan, as far as I understand, and that is wrapped into the development of our planning framework, but also

our cultural framework. I think that there is, first of all, a very big opportunity for us—just like with any council—to acknowledge and understand the involvement of the local Indigenous community. I think that there is certainly opportunity for us—where we can—to provide support, for example, as we do to the general community for community gardens, and there is no reason why we would not be able to do the same, where that is possible, to provide support for Indigenous food growth.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Mentis, for your time on behalf of Northern Beaches Council. We may send you some further questions in writing. Your replies would form part of your evidence and be made public. Would you be happy to provide a written reply to any further questions?

YIANNI MENTIS: Very happy to do so.

The CHAIR: The hearing will now take a break and return at 2.00 p.m.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Dr SARINA KILHAM, Lecturer in Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology, Charles Sturt University, affirmed and examined

Dr BELINDA REEVE, Senior Lecturer, University of Sydney Law School, and Co-founder, Food Governance Node, Charles Perkins Centre, affirmed and examined

Dr AMY CARRAD, Researcher, urban farm volunteer and fair food advocate, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. Thank you very much for joining us. Welcome to the afternoon session of our hearing. Would any or all of you like to make some brief introductory remarks?

SARINA KILHAM: I am Dr Sarina Kilham. I am appearing today on behalf of Charles Sturt University, where I predominantly teach agricultural science and agricultural business management students. I would like to emphasise today that we are talking about more than food security. In particular, as a rural sociologist, I would like to emphasise that, when we talk about food systems, we need to remember that food has cultural, social, and political meanings for all of us. It has meanings that form key parts of our identity, and the social groups that we sit within. I had been reading the transcripts before we came in, and I had seen there was lots of mention of food security. I wanted to emphasise that there is a difference between food security and food systems, and that there are actually multiple food systems, not one. When I use the plural if there are questions about that, it is on purpose.

BELINDA REEVE: My name is Dr Belinda Reeve and I am a senior lecturer at the University of Sydney Law School. I am very grateful for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today. I am appearing on behalf of a group of researchers who are leading an Australian Research Council-funded study on the role of local governments and communities in creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system. Dr Carrad is one of the researchers involved in that project, along with Dr Karen Charlton, also at the University of Wollongong, and Dr Nick Rose at the William Angliss Institute in Victoria. As part of the local government project, we mapped all local government policies in New South Wales and Victoria that are concerned with creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system. We found that local governments undertake a wide range of activities that contribute to creating a more healthy and sustainable food system, including many that are directly relevant to the terms of inquiry for this Committee.

There are multiple local government programs on issues like improving food security, reducing food waste, preserving productive agricultural land and water, and managing the impacts of climate change. I would like to encourage the Committee not to underestimate the role of local governments in this space. As part of our project, we have also found that, while local governments are doing a huge amount, they could do so much more with state government supports. That includes amendments to key pieces of legislation, like legislation on urban planning and public health, as well as dedicated sources of funding, and comprehensive food and nutrition policy at the state level. As well as leading this research project, I also wanted to mention that I am one of the co-founders of the Food Governance Node at the University of Sydney's Charles Perkins Centre. This is basically a research network for researchers across Australia who are interested in the role of law and regulation in creating a healthy and sustainable food system. I am very happy to speak to the submission that the node made to this inquiry as well.

The CHAIR: Dr Carrad, any opening remarks from you?

AMY CARRAD: Yes, I think I will, just to clarify the different roles and hats that I do have. It might be of use. As Belinda as just described, I am one of the researchers that has been working with her and the team for the past almost three years now on that research project. But outside of that, I am an on-the-ground, involved member of my community in the local food system. I volunteer at a local urban farm, Green Connect. I know that you heard from Kylie; I think it was in the first session of the hearing last month. I am also a member of the coordinating committee for Food Fairness Illawarra, and you heard from Berbel and Belinda Gibbons earlier today. The research project really unites my involvement with the research with that on-the-ground, local level action, and my answers may reflect that. But as you said, I will clarify when I am speaking on behalf of the research project and when I am speaking from that experience of being on the interface between community action and local government.

The CHAIR: I will start with a question that is open to all of you. All of your submissions talk about the need for a food system and/or food security plan or framework with a new governance structure. Within New South Wales, it does not seem that food is the responsibility of any one government department, and there does not seem to be any food plan or food strategy. Could you talk to what you see as the priorities and how you would like to see a framework established? I will then ask some subsequent questions about data collection.

BELINDA REEVE: Certainly, I am happy to speak to that first. You are very right in saying that there is no one central body within the state government that is responsible for food, and that responsibility for different aspects of food production, supply, retail, and consumption are kind of dispersed throughout different departments. In the submissions that I was responsible for, along with many other submissions, we called for a comprehensive food and nutrition plan or policy that would join together all the different work that different government departments are doing in this space.

Obviously, one priority would be improving food security in New South Wales through a comprehensive approach, that considers not just the food supply itself, but also what we refer to as the social determinants of health—people's access to affordable housing, to appropriate education, and to measures that address the cost of living as well. But as Sarina has mentioned, it is important to situate the food supply within a broader view of the food system. We are looking for a policy that would also consider areas such as agriculture, and bring those into the mix as well.

As we have mentioned in the submission that I have made on behalf of the ARC project and the Food Governance Node, there should be a focus on healthy eating. Food security is more than just the availability of a total number of calories; it is about the availability of healthy, nutritious food. We see scope for a policy, as well, that encourages and facilities healthy eating by residents, not just access to calories per se. That could include measures such as adopting food procurement policies within state government entities, and extending policies that have already been adopted by NSW Health, for example. We would like to see that kind of policy or plan supported by some kind of new government infrastructure. Some of the recommendations that we have made include a dedicated food security council, bringing together representatives of different service providers and different government agencies. There could also be the capacity for some kind of central food and nutrition unit within government as well.

The CHAIR: Before I ask the others to comment on that as well, what would you see as the appropriate membership and focus of that food security council in terms of the way in which they interact with government policy?

BELINDA REEVE: In terms of membership, obviously you would want to see key government departments, such as housing; and also service providers and non-government organisations that are involved in the space; and also people with lived experience of food insecurity, and particularly groups that are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, such as representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

The CHAIR: Dr Kilham, would you like to add anything there?

SARINA KILHAM: Yes. In the recommendations that I put forward, I really emphasised that, rather than a food security council, we should be looking to the New South Wales government to appoint a food systems scientific advisory group or council. This is because of, as you have pointed out, the intersection between multiple different areas that impact on food systems. We really need to think about what is happening at the production end of it, which is farmers and our agricultural policy, all the way up to access at a household level.

I would be cautious about focusing only on the food security side of it, as opposed to a food systems side, because you could have food security through, for example, a charitable model, but that is actually not a long-term, sustainable vision for ensuring equitable food access for all New South Wales residents. On a food systems advisory group, I think that there should be civil society, academic, Indigenous, and community representatives. That would be looking at working across what we call the value chain—so, right from producers and farmers, to

making sure that policy also links in with land use, and what type of land, particularly peri-urban land, is available for farming and food production, right through to the end of access in our urban areas.

At the moment we have a very funnel-in type of model in New South Wales, which is where food is produced in rural areas and it is funnelled into the urban areas. In having that committee, we cannot forget about food access and sustainability in our major rural and regional areas. There is a bit of a lovely myth or romanticisation that, if you live in a rural or regional town, you therefore have access to better food, and that is not actually true, because of the way that our major food production comes to our big urban centres.

The CHAIR: Dr Carrad, is there anything you would like to add on this point?

AMY CARRAD: Yes, thank you. In terms of a committee, and what Belinda and Sarina have described, it is not necessarily completely about creating anything new. As Belinda alluded to, there are government departments that already touch on food, in various ways, and food systems. It is really about drawing together the work that they are already doing, so that it is coordinated; everyone is talking to everyone else, and knows what each other is doing. Of course, our research focused on local government. But we have examples of how local government could be doing work on food systems, but some internal departments were doing that, very independently of other relevant departments. You might have environment departments that have no idea what their community development departments were doing. As I said, our research focused on local government. But I am sure that at a state and national level, as well, that happens to some degree. It is really about uniting those different departments, and making sure that they are all coordinating.

The council then having someone overseeing that is really just about bringing that conversation together, and ensuring that we are working together—and then just examples of how that also needs to coordinate with local government and all those departments in terms of making sure that policies, frameworks, and legislation do not completely oppose each other either. Our local governments indicated that there are often times when things like food safety outcomes were really at odds with health objectives. The classic example we kept hearing was about the sausage sizzles, which was in Victoria, but it is an example of how different levels of government are impacted by what is happening at a state level, and that they are not able to act in the best interests of their communities' health because of these different frameworks. Just bringing all that into a coordinated approach is what I would hope would be one of the primary outcomes of such a committee or council.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you. One of the other points you make in your submission, Dr Carrad, is about the need for a more comprehensive approach to research in this area. What work would you like to see as a priority for New South Wales Government when it comes to the research of food systems in the State?

AMY CARRAD: Everything and anything, I think. Without, perhaps, this lack of focus or awareness within governments about who is actually responsible for food, we have not really had the funding, and ongoing, sustained funding to have the information and the data that we need to make the best decisions. A lot of the relevant data is very outdated. Examples are that the national nutrition data does not allow us to pinpoint what is happening at a more local level, whether that be state, or informing priorities within more local levels, such as LGAs. It is outdated, and it does not allow that specificity—so a really comprehensive research agenda, to not only look at location, but also all of those aspects of the food systems that Sarina was talking about, in that broader sense, looking at the production and all the way through, economy, waste, community food intake, and that sort of thing.

The CHAIR: Thank you. My next question is about the issue of food swamps. How would you, for the benefit of the Committee and those watching the inquiry, define "food swamp"? What is needed within the planning framework to address the concerns there? Then I will go on from there.

BELINDA REEVE: Certainly. "Food swamp" is a metaphor that is used to describe geographical areas where there is a high concentration of fast-food outlets and other unhealthy takeaway food outlets, and a relatively low density of supermarkets and other stores selling fresh food. One issue at the moment is that what we might call a food swamp tends to be located in areas on the fringes of cities, and actually also in regional areas, going to what Sarina talked about before, in terms of people in regional areas not necessarily having access to healthy food in the way that we might assume.

In terms of addressing food swamps, another issue at the moment is that we currently do not have urban planning schemes that enable local governments, who undertake most of the day-to-day planning functions in this state, and other Australian states—they do not have the powers to actually regulate the density and location of fast-food restaurants. In conducting our research, on the Australian Research Council-funded study, a number of local governments said that they would like those powers; they would like to be able to use urban planning schemes and tools, like development control plans and local environment plans, to control where fast-food outlets were opening, because they were concerned about the health of residents, and the food that residents were able to

access. But, at the moment, they simply do not have the ability to refuse planning consent to fast-food restaurants on health grounds. Really, what that would take would be amendments to state-level planning instruments, things like the environmental and planning legislation, and also to state environmental planning policies, and other state-level planning instruments. Those instruments would need to be amended in order for local governments to develop local planning instruments that enable them to regulate the density and location of fast-food outlets.

The CHAIR: Dr Kilham, anything you would add there?

SARINA KILHAM: Yes. I would actually like to talk to the concept of food deserts, which is also a metaphor, but it is looking at areas that do not have easily accessible access to food or food supermarkets. In my submission, I have noted a report there from 2020, which identifies three towns in remote New South Wales that do not have any commercial supermarkets at all. But I do not think you even need to go to that level of extremity to look at the idea of food deserts. If people do not have access to a car, how do they get food home, if you are living in a larger regional Australian town? It is very car dependent. There is very little public transport. It might be infrequent. It might be far for you to get to the supermarket. In your home, you have got to have a working refrigerator and stable power and stable accommodation.

We have large suburbs in regional towns in New South Wales that do not have a walkable access to food. If you do not have walkable access to a supermarket, what do you do? You rely on a fast-food outlet, because at least that food is going to be hot, and you can probably get there much quicker than you can get to a supermarket. In understanding the idea of food swamps, you also have to understand the idea of food deserts. To your earlier question about research, I think it would be very interesting to do some mapping of urban areas and look at, how many food deserts do we actually have in New South Wales, where people are not within a 15-minute walk of being able to buy fresh food?

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Carrad, is there anything that you would add about the planning controls around food swamps and also any comments you might have following on from Dr Kilham's remarks about food deserts?

AMY CARRAD: Yes. I will expand quite briefly on what Belinda spoke about. Through our research, we are also aware that local governments—"fearful" might not be the right word, but I will use it for now—are fearful of opposing development applications from, particularly, fast-food giants such as McDonald's, because of the knowledge that it would go to appeal, and that would involve a lengthy and very costly process that they really cannot afford. Without that written into their development control plans and local environment plans, as Belinda mentioned, they really are powerless. It seems very wrong that we are in a position where our local governments, who are there to act in the best interests of our communities, are unable to do so, because they are under-resourced and that Big Food has that influence and that power there.

As Belinda said, providing something at the state level that allows local governments to write into their planning document that they are able to act in the health and wellbeing interests of their communities when they are approving and negotiating development applications would potentially be very useful, because we have so much evidence around access to healthy and unhealthy foods, particularly fast-food outlets. That would enable local governments to oppose development applications on those grounds of health and wellbeing.

Can I also just jump back to the question about research, because something that Sarina did mention reminded me of this. Along the production side, and urban agriculture particularly, and looking at how we can increase our localised food production, one of the problems and one of the things that deserves a lot more research is mapping potentially agricultural land, whether that be urban, or more regionally. Again, I believe, this is a responsibility that is left to local government. Again, they are under-resourced to do so, lacking expertise in terms of mapping that land. We really need to be looking at that, I feel, quite soon, so that we are not letting it go over to irreversible development, whether that be for residential or industry.

A Victorian example that is quite positive and, I think, would be translatable to New South Wales, is Cardinia Shire Council. They have an overlay in their planning scheme that relates to the fertile soil, just using that even as one metric of where development should and should not happen, and what should be protected, and really prioritising keeping those fertile soil areas available for food production, whereas, at the moment, it is not easy to have that land identified. If a community group that wants to establish a community garden approaches their local council, it is not an easy process to have that potentially suitable site identified. Again, I think that is something that, at a higher level, can be supported, at a state level, in terms of mapping viable food production land and preserving that.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Thank you very much, doctors, for coming in today. It is easy. I can say "doctors" because you are all doctors. I am really intrigued about this conversation we are having about empowering councils to change the legislation so that they can govern and manage the number of fast-food outlets

in a cluster, for example. Will you demonstrate to me how many councils there would be that would want to participate in that sort of legislation?

BELINDA REEVE: I could answer that question first. We have not comprehensively mapped that, or asked, say, all local governments in New South Wales, so I cannot give you a definitive answer to that question. But we did case studies, where we did focus groups with three local governments in New South Wales, and three in Victoria, and all of them mentioned that as an issue. I would say I probably heard from at least three or four other local governments in New South Wales that this is an issue for them that they would like to be able to do something about. But as I said, it is not something that we have asked all local governments about in New South Wales, so it is hard to get a precise number that I can give to you at this point.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: That is the reason why I am asking this. I do not think you can assume, with your comments, that all of local government want to push this. I have had 12 years on The Hills Shire Council and as a deputy mayor as well. This has never been an issue for The Hills Shire Council. To actually have that as a recommendation without the data to back up that 90 per cent of councils want this—I would be very uncomfortable in putting that in as a recommendation, so I would like that on the record, if I could. I am worried that local government would regulate the number of outlets in an area that is zoned for that facility and be given that power. I am really uncomfortable with that conversation. I hear what you are saying but I do not think there is data before me to back up that that should be something we should be actively seeking a change in in the planning laws because there are not enough councils that have come to me in my time as a councillor for 12½ years—and I went to all the local government conferences and I met with many, many councils. How many have we got now? One hundred and twenty-five or something. We cut them down—

AMY CARRAD: One hundred and twenty-eight.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: One hundred and twenty-eight, is it?

AMY CARRAD: Yes.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Thank you. I would suggest you do more research before you make that recommendation because I do not know if it would be totally supported. I just want to put that on the record. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Does anyone want to make a response?

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: I would love your comments, please, absolutely.

AMY CARRAD: Yes, I appreciate that comment. As Belinda said, we did do an audit of local government policies for all of the councils in New South Wales and Victoria. That data does not capture the issue that we are speaking about right now. Our case studies did go into that but, obviously, given the time constraints in conducting case studies, we selected those local governments that had joined together food policy, and we spoke to those three in each state. I agree that there is probably more data that is needed on that. I guess the thought that came to mind when you were speaking was, around that combination of socio-demographics of particular local government areas, and the occurrence of food swamps, as we were referring to them. I do not have the numbers to hand, but there has been research that has indicated that particularly lower socio-demographic and socio-economic areas are more prone to having fast-food outlets in them, leading to this food swamp phenomenon.

I am sure that some of the LGAs, in specifically areas of Sydney that are a higher socio-economic area in that zone, that just is not as prone to having food swamps occurring in it. So that would lead to that the lack of conversation in some of those more wealthy LGAs around food swamps, and that desire to potentially limit fast-food outlets. I think that is something that really should be given consideration if this does get further investigated, before being made a decision about in looking at that socio-economic factor and the occurrence of food swamps. It could well be that some of the lower socio-economic LGAs are more interested in this topic, because of the abundance of fast-food outlets and the negative effect that that has on their community members, who predominantly will have lower incomes and face greater disadvantage already.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Just following up—and thank you for your comments there Dr Carrad—on the opportunity to educate those communities on better eating habits and healthy foods as well, is that something that more effort could be put into rather than just a big-stick approach with council stopping clusters of these unhealthy outlets being built?

AMY CARRAD: Undoubtedly, it is all part of a comprehensive approach but it ends up at what we in public health would call a victim-blaming approach, where all the emphasis is placed on the individual to take the entire responsibility for their life. There is increasing evidence that the absolute proliferation of unhealthy food every day, in marketing, on TV everywhere, has a really important influence on people's food decisions. It has become the norm. This is now a personal comment. I am quite proud and I love the fact that I grew up in a

household—I am probably on the cusp of that, as a relatively younger person - that I grew up every day seeing my mum prepare dinner for us.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Absolutely. We never ate fast food. I am in the same category as you, for sure.

AMY CARRAD: Eating that is something I rarely do. Even if I want to do it, I do not. Like, that is not who I am. I cook food because that is what I saw my mum do. But, as I said, I am on the cusp of that generation, but that is not what happens any more. I came from a very economically normal background, where we were able to afford food, and we probably—I ate chocolate and stuff when I was a kid, and all that - but it was not what I saw around me, whereas now if I go anywhere, that is all I see. I see advertising for junk food. I see physical junk food outlets. It is a lot harder for people. So coming back to your question, yes, there are some really positive examples of particularly community-based, say, peer-to-peer education-type programs, but there are also a lot of constraints that people face to accessing those. A lot of them happen during the day, or again, in places that people might not be able to get to while juggling kids. So how do you start that education process when people are already facing barriers? It should not necessarily be up to people to make that step. It should not be something that happens because we are humans and we need to thrive on nourishing food and that should be the norm, not McDonald's everywhere.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Would any of the other doctors like to comment?

BELINDA REEVE: I will just add to what Amy was saying. The recommendation that we make in our submission about amending the planning legislation is based not just on what local governments have said to us, but also on public health research showing that areas where there is a high density of fast-food restaurants are associated with poorer dietary health, whereas areas that have a higher density of fresh food outlets are associated with better dietary health. So we are also basing that recommendation on that body of research as well, as what some local governments have told us.

SARINA KILHAM: Thank you for that comment. I think your observations about local governments not talking about this comes to the crux of the issue in New South Wales, which is: Who is responsible for food and our food policy? We do not have a history, as in some European nations, of local governments or municipalities being responsible for food markets or food planning or food provision. In many other countries in the world, this is a municipality—what we call "local government"—responsibility. We do not have that history in Australia. I think what we are finding now in New South Wales is that we have had this very siloed approach. We have the health research, and we have a charitable food sector, and we have agriculture, and we have people interested in the socio-economic aspects of food. Yet I think, particularly, what brought it to light, in COVID, was everyone is responsible and no-one is responsible at the same time.

So what do you do when you have a situation like that, in that all the different, siloed parts are not coordinating and talking to each other? I thought it was fantastic that this inquiry was going ahead, because we are starting to have clear information now that there does need to be something bigger than leaving the siloed departments or sectors to deal with this on their own. That food is a cross-sectorial issue, and if local governments are not thinking about food as their responsibility, perhaps this is a wider conversation to be had, about, where is the responsibility for ensuring good food? I would say, beyond just the fast food aspect of it, but in terms of supermarket planning, community garden planning, and numbers of other types of food outlets, like fresh food provision, there does need to be something bigger at the moment that brings a coordinated approach to food supply and access at that very local level.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: Thank you very much to the three witnesses. In that same vein, before I get to my other questions, in terms of changing the planning system to allow consent authorities to consider the health of the food to the community of a particular applicant, have you given some thought as to how you actually do that within the planning system, keeping in mind it is a very black-and-white system because it needs to be because it is such a highly litigated area of law? How do you insert that in the planning system, or—and this is probably getting to my second point—is there actually a different way to achieve the same outcome without trying to insert a subjective assessment of the health of whatever products are being served in that premises? I would just be interested in whether you have taken your thought beyond a thought to actually what it would look like in a regulatory or legislative sense.

BELINDA REEVE: Certainly, if I could answer that question first. One important change would actually be including health as an explicit objective in the planning legislation. That is something that has been mentioned before when the Act has been amended. Certainly, you can interpret some objectives of the Act as involving health, but actually having an explicit mention of "health" or even, indeed, "food systems", I think, would be very helpful. That would then mean that it is a factor that local governments could consider, when they are considering whether or not to grant approval to a development application. I believe as well, at the moment,

that a model development control plan is being developed. That might be another opportunity as well, to create clauses or terms on things like zoning, or standards for the fast-food industry. That is another opportunity as well.

In terms of a system of regulation that is not targeting the health of products sold, another way that you could potentially do it, rather than restricting density, is perhaps restricting the amenity of fast-food restaurants—having provisions in an LEP or a DCP saying that they cannot have playgrounds, for example. That is just one example off the top of my head. So it is possible. I think what I would encourage the Committee to consider is that the issue is not simply one of fast-food restaurants. It is about the inclusion of health and food systems in planning legislation and state planning instruments, and amending those instruments, so that health and food systems can be considered more broadly, and the planning schemes used to promote healthy and sustainable food systems.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: Any other thoughts?

AMY CARRAD: Yes, I will add that a couple of months ago there was the Food Futures Conference, hosted by the Public Health Association of Australia, and there was a presentation given by a researcher at that conference that speaks to a possible answer to your question. I will not go into too much detail about it here, but I have managed to find a research paper that they have published on that. It is called the *Food Outlets Dietary Risk (FODR) assessment tool*, which assesses the public health nutrition risks of community food environments. You are right; it is a complex question to assess a food outlet, because you might have a corner store that may provide foods that we would recommend people eat, but it may also predominantly stock chocolate and lollies. Arguably, our main supermarkets do much the same at the moment. Their work goes some way to being able to assess that, and kind of draw out those nuances between stores that may seem like they would sell good healthy foods but actually, when you walk inside, have a dominance of unhealthy foods. If that is something that is of interest, I am sure I can send it to you after this.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: No, thank you. I guess the purpose of the question was to get to exactly that point—that in and of itself, a fast-food restaurant, or a fish and chip shop is not unhealthy in and of itself; it is how many times people go there, and what they eat off the menu there, versus actually the mere presence of it in and of itself. I know exactly what you are trying to achieve. What I am suggesting from a practical point of view is there may well be a better way to achieve the same outcome in the planning system. I guess that is our challenge when we get some further witnesses to drill down into that. But I am sure, as you said, there is a way. Density limits, we used to do it in local government by introducing DCPs around car parking requirements for fast-food outlets just to make it commercially unviable so they never lodged an application in the first place.

If you actually have smart councils, you can use the existing planning system to do whatever you want. You do not necessarily need to change the law. You just need to be a bit creative. I suspect some planners are less adventurous than others in local councils. I think all three of you made the same point, and I think it is very well made. If I might move on, Dr Carrad, towards the end of your submission you suggest that the New South Wales Government should consider changing political donation laws to add food manufacturers to the list of prohibited donors. I had never heard that concept advanced before. So I would just be interested if you might expand upon that. What do you consider to be a food manufacturer and not a food manufacturer, and why do you think the Government should consider prohibiting them?

AMY CARRAD: I probably do not have too much more to say on this, but I guess it goes to, again, what we would term "big food", so those producers that really create a lot of ultra-processed foods. Again, we have increasing evidence that ultra-processed foods are no good, but these are the companies that have a lot of power around the world, not just in Australia or New South Wales, and a lot of money, and being able to afford the things that other producers cannot. Sorry, I am a bit rambling. I do not really have much more than that on that.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: No, it was just interesting that you actually said "food manufacturers". Now I presume you used the term "manufacturers" as distinct from food "producers"? Or do you see them as one and the same?

AMY CARRAD: Yes, what you have just said. There is probably a difference. Producers I would normally kind of group as farmers or something, but manufacturers is really getting to that idea of big food and consolidated companies. Yes.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: Got you. Thank you very much for that. Dr Kilham, if I can take you to your submission, I will just quote a section on page 2 of 3. You submitted to the Committee:

> A social science examination of how that food—

that is, the food that we produce in New South Wales—

> is distributed, purchased, accessed and used within households shows that there already existed very real barriers that keep individuals and families from having sufficient food.

That was in the context that we produce stacks of food and we export 70-odd per cent of what we actually produce. Could you elaborate on what some of those barriers are? We clearly have a bit of a market failure because, to keep it very simple, we produce much more food in this state and in this country than we could ever consume with the population that we have but there are clearly parts of the population that still cannot access or have difficulty in accessing that food. So I am interested in drilling down more into that aspect and, if there is a market failure, what could potentially be done to intervene in the free market to try and remove some of those barriers.

SARINA KILHAM: Yes. Thank you for this question. I think this comes back to the point that food is socially, culturally, and economically embedded, and our access to it is, therefore, dependent on all of those factors. Earlier I gave an example of, if you lived in a slightly more isolated suburb in a large regional town. If you have access to a car, if you have regular income, if you have a stable household, and stable income to pay your bills, then that is fine, you probably usually have pretty good food access, because you are able to drive to a supermarket, you can store that food, you can cook, it because you have got your gas bill paid. But if any of those factors start to fall down—and this is what we saw coming out a lot for people who are dependent on social security payments during COVID, that for the first time, many people were actually able to afford proper food. That might have been because they could afford a little bit more petrol to drive to a supermarket to get the type of food that they wanted. It might have been because they were not having to make decisions between, "Do I pay the rent or put fuel in the car, or do I buy something a little bit more nutritious to eat?"

So, understanding that it is not just about having the food there or, as was mentioned earlier, having a calorific approach to food. I mean, we could all fill up our calories by eating two-minute noodles, right? But it is not actually going to nourish you socially. It is not going to be a long-term solution, and what we have seen in the past two years is this massive ramp-up in the charitable food sector. It is all over the media how much food charities are in demand, but that is a real bandaid solution. That is not ensuring ongoing supply for all households and all people to food. And so, I guess my primary recommendation, about that we need a food systems council or group, is because there is no one answer to this. You have to look at housing, you have to look at welfare payments, you have to look at planning aspects, you have to be able to work with farming groups, because there is not a magic button you can push that is going to solve a food access problem. The interlinking of the different dimensions is so integrated that you need to be able to take action on various fronts to ensure food security.

I think that is applicable, even in big cities, and even in well-off suburbs in big cities. Because no-one in, say, the City of Sydney local government area—if we had a petrol crisis in this country, and were unable to truck in food, there would be a very hungry local government area, because even with the proliferation of community gardens in that area, it is not enough to feed the population. So I think we are really at a point in New South Wales, and possibly in other states, where we need to say food is an integrated issue and, therefore, we need to have an integrated approach to ensuring consistent food supply, both in times of calm and wellbeing, but particularly in times of crisis. Do we have a food supply crisis plan for New South Wales?

And you will see earlier in my submission that I actually say, from a social science point of view, the food hoarding that went on in the early parts of the first COVID wave and lockdown was very understandable, because we had just come out of a summer of bushfires where we had the media telling residents across New South Wales, "There are whole towns cut off from food, where people can't eat, and there is no plan to get food to those people." So people already had this thought, and if people had seen that on the media, and had lived experience of food insecurity themselves—I mean, if that was me, I would have gone out and food-hoarded as well. I am sorry, I might have got a bit off track there.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: No, thank you very much.

The CHAIR: As we have already gone over time and because—your point that there is not an integrated approach—we have a number of government agencies appearing before us next, we will need to wrap it up now. Thank you for appearing before us today. We may, indeed, send you some further questions in writing. Those questions may also come from the two members who were not able to attend—Mrs Davies, the member for Mulgoa, and Mr Anoulack Chanthivong, the member for Macquarie Fields. 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?

SARINA KILHAM: Of course.

BELINDA REEVE: Yes.

AMY CARRAD: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you all very much. We really appreciate your time this afternoon.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

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

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

Dr LISA SZABO, Director Food Safety and CEO, NSW Food Authority, affirmed and examined

Ms PHILIPPA WELMAN, Director, Partnerships, Department of Communities and Justice, affirmed and examined

Mr GAVIN PEEK, Director, Partnerships, Department of Communities and Justice, affirmed and examined

Ms AMANDA KANE, Organics Manager, Circular Economy Programs, Engagement, Education and Programs Division, NSW Environment Protection Authority, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Ms KYLIE BELL, Managing Director, Trade and Investment, Investment NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Ms KATE WILSON, Executive Director, Climate Change and Sustainability, Office of Energy and Climate Change, NSW Treasury cluster, affirmed and examined

Mr DAVID COLLINS, Executive Director, Training Services, NSW Department of Education, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Before we resume, I ask witnesses whether anyone has any questions? If not, we will proceed. I note that those joining us by Webex will not be able to see the end of the table where Dr Szabo, Ms Welman and Mr Peek are seated. I flag that your colleagues will not be able to see you because of the limitations we have. Thank you all for joining us. As there is a large number of you, we will probably skip the offer of introductory remarks and go directly to questions. However, as a hybrid model of both those things, we have heard from witnesses today and at our previous two hearings about the lack of an integrated approach to food security policy and food systems policy within New South Wales. Could we go through the different departments and discuss the ownership of food security or food systems policy and the work done across government towards collaboration? I am happy to start with the Department of Primary Industries.

SCOTT HANSEN: We might start on farm if that is okay, Chair?

The CHAIR: Perfect.

SCOTT HANSEN: For the NSW Department of Primary Industries, we bring together a number of strategies. We start with the food production at an agricultural base, but before we even get to that agricultural base, we turn our attention to sustainable resource use. Ultimately, the state's farmers go about turning natural resources into a food product, a fibre product, or a timber product. Our strategic plans are focused around the sustainable use of resources and a productive landscape. It then turns to how we deal with threats to the opportunities that are provided out of that, primarily through both biosecurity, which is one of the big threats—disease, plants, pests, and weeds—to food security; and also then moving to the areas of climate change, and the impacts of climate change on our food production systems. We integrate all of those into R&D projects, extension activities, and programs that enable our farmers to be able to make the best use of the natural resources and produce the food required.

As you would have seen, and no doubt heard in submissions by previous groups, it has led to record amounts of production over the last couple of years, courtesy of good weather and good events, but also good management by our farmers, and good technologies available to them. Primary Industries' focus is in that space, and then we work alongside—part of the Department of Primary Industries is the NSW Food Authority, and I might ask Dr Szabo to make comment, but we then move to a food safety strategy, to ensure the safety of that food in its delivery. I might get it back after Dr Szabo because we then tie in with Ms Bell, who is online, in terms of market development and trade development activities. Then we can hand over from there. Lisa?

LISA SZABO: As Mr Hansen said, the NSW Food Authority works to ensure that food produced, manufactured, and sold in New South Wales is safe and suitable at every step in production, from paddock through to plate. In fact, the Food Authority is quite unique, in that it is the only agency set up in any jurisdiction that

serves that purpose. It is a central point of impact, being within the Department of Primary Industries, where our stakeholders can come not only for food safety matters, but also for biosecurity matters. Overall, we also participate in a national system, when it relates to food regulation. It is actually a bi-national system, because New Zealand is involved with that as well. That operates through a ministerial forum called the Food Ministers' Meeting.

Food Ministers have set for the food regulatory system three broad areas of focus. One is to reduce foodborne illness; two is to ensure that, where possible, the food regulatory system can support initiatives that address broader public health issues, such as looking to reduce the rates of obesity, and the overweight in our society; and the third priority is that we have an agile system. As I am sure you have heard already from many of the witnesses to this inquiry, there have been disruptions to that system. We need to be agile, in terms of how we can support businesses to continue the supply of food to the community.

The CHAIR: Ms Bell, would you like to continue from your standpoint at the Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade?

KYLIE BELL: From our point of view, we work closely with the team at, in particular, Department of Primary Industries. Our focus is on the international aspects of the New South Wales food and beverage industry, particularly working with businesses from the state to invest in new manufacturing, but also giving them the means to be able to find opportunities overseas. I will say that COVID has certainly disrupted the supply chains for both the Australian and domestic food and beverage industry, but also globally. Many of the issues we are experiencing here are not unique to New South Wales or Australia. Typically, New South Wales has been a significant exporter of agricultural goods, and food and beverage products, but that did decline last year. I would say that is partly due to COVID and issues around supply chains, in particular freight, but it is also because one of our most significant markets has been China. I am sure the inquiry would be aware that there have been ongoing political issues with our food exports and other matters with the Chinese government.

My team provides a range of services and assistance and programs to support the sector. In particular, we have a Jobs Plus Program, a $250 million incentive program that enables businesses within New South Wales to apply for support with incentives, including payroll tax relief, if they are setting up a new business that creates more than 25 jobs. That has been very successful, and quite a few of the applicants for that have been in the industry. We also provide a range of grants and international promotion opportunities to support the food and beverage sector. It is one of our—I don't know if the word is most popular, but certainly when we look at our exports, and the range of businesses from the state that are growing internationally, food and beverage is one of our core strengths. Last year we worked with many businesses from the industry to help them identify international opportunities. I might stop there, unless there are questions.

The CHAIR: No, that is great, thank you. We appreciate that. We might move to Ms Welman or Mr Peek from DCJ.

PHILIPPA WELMAN: The role of the Department of Communities and Justice has been managing the NSW Food Program since 2013. The NSW Food Program partners with large food relief providers, such as OzHarvest and Foodbank, to ensure that disadvantaged children, individuals, and families in New South Wales have access to food when needed. The program initially contributed to the costs of transport and haulage for the movement of food across New South Wales—so fuel costs and haulage costs—and the funding of approximately $700,000 to Foodbank and St Vincent de Paul Food Barn. However, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NSW Food Program was expanded to support the purchase of food, staffing costs, and operational costs necessary to overcome some of the supply chain issues, and also to meet the increased community need and demand.

With our support, large food relief providers have provided free and low-cost meals to hundreds of community organisations across New South Wales. They have distributed this to their local community through activities like hamper programs, food markets, and community kitchens. Those food relief providers, primarily Foodbank and OzHarvest, which I believe the Committee has heard from in an earlier hearing, have also partnered with other government agencies to deliver a range of targeted programs, including food boxes for COVID-19-positive people in quarantine or isolation, cooked meals for homeless people in temporary accommodation, hamper programs for international students, and food and hygiene hampers for Aboriginal communities.

We have worked very closely with other government agencies, including Resilience NSW, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, NSW Health, and Service NSW to ensure that individuals and community organisations received the support that they needed. As you may be aware, New South Wales has several different government programs that support food security activities, with no single agency having that lead responsibility. We have been working closely across departments to support that, particularly at the onset of and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving forward, the funding for the NSW Food Program will continue to the end of June 2023. We will continue

to focus on providing funding for the transport and haulage costs to ensure that food can get to communities where needed.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We will now go to Ms Kane from the Department of Planning and the interaction that your office has with food systems policy.

AMANDA KANE: It is the EPA, actually—the Environment Protection Authority. Our work is around the disposal end of food waste, and it is around the diversion of food waste from landfill. Food donation is valuable, and one of the most beneficial outcomes that we can get for food waste that ends up in landfill. About a million tonnes a year from New South Wales goes there. Our program has been focusing on supporting the sector to increase capacity to handle more food, through grants for infrastructure, predominantly for things like vans, and fridges and freezers to enable them to collect, store, and redistribute more food. We have been running that program since 2013. Then in 2017, we undertook a review, where we recognised that that was valuable, and it was supporting the capacity of the sector to handle more food, but there were also gaps, in terms of connecting with potential donors, and networking, and opportunities that could be tapped into.

We have also run a food donation education grant program since 2017, which has been supporting that element of delivery for the food donation for food relief sector. Those programs have delivered $6 million to 60 projects that are diverting about 11,000 tonnes of surplus valuable food to redistribution now. Under the new Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy there is a new commitment requiring supermarkets to report on food donation from 2025, and $4 million has been allocated. We are currently working on that new program now to deliver on that, which is likely to include continuing support for the sector for infrastructure.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I think that leaves us with Ms Wilson and then Mr Collins.

KATE WILSON: I am from the Office of Energy and Climate Change in Treasury. We look after information and policies and frameworks for climate change, as it affects really all business of government. I will start with the information. I am really speaking on behalf of my colleagues who are in the Science, Economics and Insights division, actually still in Planning and Environment, because we have been moved to Treasury since the beginning of April. They deliver very comprehensive climate modelling information, down to a regional scale, so currently 10-kilometre grids across New South Wales, because New South Wales is such a large place, that actually gives that fine detailed climate projections currently available up to 2070. They are now working on updated models that will model back from 1950 through to 2100. That gives—and at a finer resolution as well—I think, a four-kilometre grid. That gives the basic information, and models many different parameters, not just heat, but rainfall that impacts on soils—many things that are important.

My colleagues in Primary Industries will then go on and look at the direct impacts on production systems. That is one aspect. We again work closely with Primary Industries on climate mitigation. Agriculture is about 9 per cent of New South Wales' emissions at present, about 70 per cent of which is from methane emissions from livestock. We launched the Primary Industries Productivity and Abatement Program, I think in February this year, which is a program to address emissions from agriculture. But you will notice that in the title it is Primary Industries Productivity', so the emphasis is on doing that without negatively—in fact, hopefully impacting positively—on productivity. That will entail both some altered farming systems, but also new products in forms of carbon sequestration, and new opportunities as well. Again, we partner closely on that.

Then the third area, I think, to highlight, is we are now working on a New South Wales adaptation strategy. The Minister for Energy announced that as part of a Net Zero Plan implementation update last September. That will fill quite a big gap in the policy landscape. New South Wales has a number of programs on mitigation, but currently there is no comprehensive adaptation strategy. We are working to fill that and, again, that will be extremely important, because adaptation is clearly a very important issue for food production. We will again be setting the frameworks and the approaches, and then working with all the different departments across government, but very much with Primary Industries.

The CHAIR: Mr Collins?

DAVID COLLINS: Thank you, Chair. David Collins from Training Services NSW, in the Department of Education. We are the part of government that funds or subsidises training. We fund public and private community providers to deliver training that relates to industry skill needs and community skill needs in this area. In this area, we subsidise around 63 qualifications across the agriculture, horticulture, and food production area. Those are qualifications that have been developed by industries nationally to relate to skill needs, and that employers in New South Wales are determining are the ones that are most appropriate for them.

We also within that do work closely with various sectors to target available funds to meet particular needs. For example, following a lead from the Department of Primary Industries, we have set up an ag skills strategy with the plant-based agriculture sector. That has been running for several years now. That is targeting

key needs within that industry in terms of production, and technology, business, and safety. Within this strategy, what we are doing is actually working closely to draw out of available qualifications the key skills that are needed to deal with emerging needs, emerging technology, changing work practices, for example. For example, on the technology side, a lot of the training that has been supported has been to do with a digital focus, in enhancing technology, and also activities like the application of drone technology.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Collins. My next question probably best sits with the representatives from the Department of Communities and Justice. Obviously, as you outlined, the New South Wales government provided significant food relief funding and food relief support, including to people who are in social housing properties. Am I correct in saying that DCJ also has done a food security review? Just wondering where that is up to.

PHILIPPA WELMAN: Thank you for the question. Yes. We have done the food security review. Last year we led a review of the New South Wales government food relief arrangements. The review discusses the increased demand for food relief during COVID, as well as the important role that effective coordination at a place-based level plays, and that assets and infrastructure have, in the effective delivery of food relief across New South Wales. These findings are informing the work that DCJ are doing, looking at our food relief activities. The report at this stage has not been widely distributed, as we are still doing a few final drafting requirements and updates. But it is certainly informing the work that we are doing in food relief going forward.

The CHAIR: What is the process from here on for that review? Is it expected to be released publicly? What sort of time line?

PHILIPPA WELMAN: There is not an expectation that it would be released publicly. We are still working on how widely that will be distributed. It should be before the end of this financial year, to inform some of our activities going into the next year.

The CHAIR: Thank you. As you had mentioned, we had heard from OzHarvest and Foodbank. They, in both of their submissions and appearing before us, called for the need for stand-by funding on tap, similar to what we, say, internationally have. Should a Pacific Island neighbour be in trouble, we are able to provide them food relief immediately. Both of them said that we need to make sure that we have scalable food relief strategies in place and that we need to make sure we have a flexible or agile approach to procurement processes, to facilitate that for when it is needed. Is that part of the food security review? What have the learnings been from the crises where you have had to support vulnerable people?

PHILIPPA WELMAN: I might ask my colleague Mr Peek to answer that one. He actually led the procurement and contracting of those emergency relief arrangements.

GAVIN PEEK: Yes. In terms of working with OzHarvest and Foodbank, certainly that kind of on-tap approach that you have talked about has been something that was a feature of the COVID crisis. During that time, I think, in this financial year alone, we provided over $35 million, $35½ million, to support their food relief activities, which also, as you know from those organisations, has wider food security implications. That was something that worked really well during those times of high demand.

We are currently still in conversation with OzHarvest and Foodbank around what the funding arrangements will look like for next year. We have in place our food transport grant, particularly for Foodbank, for next year. John and Sarah spoke about that, and how important transport is at the moment. That is where we are at, in terms of considering the funding options for next year and how we will approach that. The review, in general terms, was quite wide-reaching, in terms of going into our arrangements in government. It did touch on some procurement options within that, and talked about the success of our procurement approach previously, which was around funding those larger providers, who then were able to provide the stock that was needed for those NGOs to deliver that food relief throughout New South Wales—I have a stat here—which was highly successful at the time. So far this financial year, for instance, we have distributed 16 million kilograms of food, which adds up to the equivalent of 30.8 million meals.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Welcome, everyone. Thank you for being here. I am looking at page 6 of the submission. In relation to talking about opportunities for export, you say:

> Most of the output of Australian-based food and grocery manufacturers is for the domestic market. However, international trade is growing and becoming increasingly important to the sector in Australia. This is seen as a way to diversify risk from supplying a concentrated domestic supermarket sector, and to take advantage of growth opportunities overseas.

I would invite your comment. Some of the witnesses have felt that export is not the way to go; in fact, we should just focus on food supplies within our country and New South Wales, in particular. I would invite you to comment on what you have in the report here versus the thoughts of other witnesses, please.

SCOTT HANSEN: I might start and then see if others want to join in. The reality is that Australia is a dedicated exporter. We produce far more food than what is required and able to be consumed by the domestic market. Now, again, I fall into the trap of generalising. We have an abundance of some commodities, and, as such, we need to find the highest-priced market available, because that highest-priced market will make sure that there is economic growth for those producers and supply chains, which in turn creates stable jobs, which creates dollars back into communities, which helps alleviate a whole lot of other concerns or issues. For some our commodities, however, either the perishability of them, or the nature of the commodity—they need to be consumed as close to production as possible. And so, for a number of our commodities, they are definitely domestic-based commodities.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: And some examples of that?

SCOTT HANSEN: A number of the fresh foods. But even with that, we are coming up with innovative ways for technologies to increase shelf life, which in turn increases the range in which they can be transported before they start to go off, before they perish, or before they become less valuable, nutritionally and financially, for those who are using them. It would be fair to say that our industries rely on the most competition possible for their products. It is far better for our primary industries to be able to attract buyers representing billions of consumers than to be dealing with buyers for people representing 20 million consumers, so we will always seek to obtain the maximum amount of market access possible. Now, our domestic consumers have such a distinct advantage, with regards to the logistics of the supply chain. One part of our island nature is the benefit we get from protection from the spread of diseases and so forth, and we have seen that play out over the last couple of years. But the flipside to that is, we are a long way away from the rest of that global consumption base, and so freight costs, especially in this day and age, and transport costs are significant, which is something that the domestic market does not have the same base of costs, and should provide it with opportunities over and above our export markets.

Whilst we would all love to make sure that first and foremost the provenance of our New South Wales products is recognised by New South Wales consumers, and they act accordingly, we also want to make sure we keep as many options open for the consumption base—so the consumers, the purchasers of our products— because we have used food and our food exports as a partnership builder with so many overseas countries over the years. Quite often in many overseas markets their first engagement with Australia is through our fresh produce and products that build relationships.

KYLIE BELL: Just to give you some statistics, last year we exported 5.4 billion in agricultural products and 2.1 billion in what I call processed food, so food and beverage manufactured goods. That would be things like wine, fruit juice, that have that value add. At the same time we actually imported $6.5 billion worth of food and beverages. I think what that demonstrates is certainly the market will buy and trade. We want to export things that we are good at making, and competitive at making, that have utilised produce that is grown here. At the same time there are food and beverages and products that we are going to have to import, because we may not have access to the raw material, or we may not be able to do it as effectively, as perhaps, others in the region.

I think just saying that we would produce everything, consume everything, and not trade, probably does not reflect the reality of being able to consume what we need from a variety of sources. Of course, yes, through exporting, we do diversify our risk, but it also means that we are able to import things that we might not be able to produce and have available to us as well. I just don't know that I articulated that well, but we do need to trade in order to put all the food and beverages on our plate that we require.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: Thanks, everyone, for being here today. I must say I was very pleased to see biosecurity rank so highly in this government submission. It is first up. I assume from the submission that it is the view of the New South Wales Government that biosecurity is the biggest threat to domestic food security in New South Wales? Is that right? I know there are many threats but biosecurity would have to be the major one, would it not?

SCOTT HANSEN: As you highlight, there are many significant threats to the future of food security. None, however, can literally turn off food supply for a type of commodity or a type of product literally overnight as with the outbreak of a disease. As such, it is the one that has the most significant shock to a supply chain, and to food security, due to how quickly it can take hold. It also, perversely, depending on what it is, could also be—the flipside to that is we continue to produce enough food to feed large portions of overseas markets, and if we lose access to those overseas markets, it means that we could, in the event of a biosecurity disease outbreak, find ourselves limited in the amount of overseas exports that we can do and markets we can supply, which would put all of that food back into the domestic market.

That is a scenario that is seen not as equally but still disastrous for the industry, for two reasons. The first one is that you are back to that oversupply on a domestic market, which leads to price crashes, which leads to people leaving that industry or sector, which leads to future ongoing reduction in supply of that product. Secondly,

it damages Australia's reputation overseas. We are a producer of high-quality products that we sell around the globe, whether they be raw, or whether they be processed or manufactured. Part of that reputation comes with our clean, green image of disease-free, biosecurity-protected badging. Every time we have an outbreak, we put that at risk, which again puts those markets at risk.

We have seen a significant increase in the biosecurity threat to the state and to the country over recent years, in effect, in part due to completely disrupted shipping and export and import channels. In fact, we have had quite significant detections of global pests that destroy, for example, stored grain. They have not come through typical channels. They have actually come through cardboard in packaged goods for children's equipment, through shipping containers coming from non-usual trade routes, because of the disruption to global shipping. So, you know, COVID has put in place a whole series of new risk profiles and threats that we need to stay on top of. As you have called out, there are few immediate impacts that can instantaneously shut down our food production systems as what biosecurity can.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: Thank you very much for that answer, Mr Hansen. Given that, could you just explain for the Committee's benefit the responsibilities of State versus Federal governments for maintaining good biosecurity? As you said in an earlier answer to the Deputy Chair's question, taking advantage of our island status and our distance from markets also keeps us a reasonable distance from a lot of these biosecurity threats. What is the responsibility or the overlap of, say, the New South Wales Government versus the Commonwealth Government in terms of keeping those things out of the country and once they are here, trying to contain them or eliminate them from the food supply chain.

SCOTT HANSEN: We always refer to biosecurity as a shared responsibility, because everyone has a particular role to play, starting with the federal government, who has first and primary accountability for protection of our national borders, in terms of limiting the opportunities for incursions of foreign disease or pests into Australia. They do that through their inspection and quarantine procedures at airports and ports et cetera. They also maintain vigilance, especially at the moment, around our northern borders, between ourselves and areas like Indonesia, which in the last week alone has had detections of foot-and-mouth disease, which obviously is of concern. So the federal government has that responsibility about protection, with regards to imports and the protection of the border.

However, even on that front, there is a large amount of reliance on travelling passengers and companies who are bringing goods in to be good corporate citizens, in terms of declarations at airports about what they are doing, where they have been, what they have done, and so forth, to help our quarantine system keep on top of where the risk profiles lie. Once we get into a situation where there are detections within a state, it is the state's job to keep surveillance for disease and pests at a state level, once a disease is detected. It is true to say biosecurity is one of those areas in which we operate with little regard to overall state borders, because it is a national response. There is no point us not worrying about an outbreak or something in Brisbane, because we know sooner or later it will get across the border and become a New South Wales problem. So, we work collaboratively to try to, in the first instance, contain, and then work out, if possible, how to eradicate and, if not, how to manage going forward.

In amongst all that, our farmers, our restaurants, and our business owners all have a key job to play in surveillance themselves, in notifying us of anything that looks strange, unusual, or peculiar, and allowing us to investigate with them. In fact, we have had a couple of really good cases in recent years, the yellow crazy ant in Lismore being one of them, where it was actually the community that were our first-line notifiers of an incursion of an exotic ant into their community, and helped us get on to that really quickly.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: From a biosecurity perspective, it is easier and cheaper to keep the things out, rather than to let them in, and then try to contain them or eliminate them. Is there a concern from the New South Wales government, with the extra incursions we have been seeing, that, it is an indication that there is something that has changed, or that there is an issue with the federal government's responsibilities, in terms of their inspection regimes? What I am trying to get to is, in accordance with your submission, and what you have just given in an answer, probably the last few years have been some of the busiest in terms of new incursions. They have to enter the country from somewhere. Is what is happening is that the shared responsibility is not so much a shared responsibility any more from the Commonwealth's perspective? Who is potentially dropping the ball here?

Ms ROBYN PRESTON: Do they really want to answer that?

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: I think Mr Hansen would like to answer that.

SCOTT HANSEN: We have the benefit of CSIRO. It has just completed a report for the federal government, which has highlighted the fact that biosecurity risks are tripling. Our business as usual, if we were to

try to continue to address it the way we have been up to now, we will at some stage fail, because the risks are running a lot faster than current processes will enable us to keep up. What that does mean, we have seen significant announcements by the federal government in the last six months, around new technologies to enable detections. We ourselves have learnt significantly from working alongside Health during COVID, in terms of technologies for early detections. So think about eDNA use, and sampling around sewerage, to pick up when something might be—in advance of positive cases being notified in communities. There are a lot of lessons for us, in terms of new technologies, that will enable us to keep on top of surveillance, and then ensure that we are ready to respond when we can. The Commonwealth is using a number of those technologies as well.

What is driving the risk? Just think about how many people are purchasing items online and having stuff shipped in—that volume of traffic alone. We did have a relief during that period during which foot traffic from incoming passengers was down, so the federal government was able to turn its attention to packages and containers to try to keep on top of that. Biosecurity is obviously front and centre. One of the outcomes from biosecurity that is mitigating that risk or changing that risk for us is actually changing climatic conditions. Many of you would be aware of the Japanese encephalitis outbreak that we had been dealing with earlier this year, and we continue to deal with it at the moment. That has come down from South-East Asia, carried by storm fronts and events that have actually brought mosquitos a distance that we previously thought that they would not be able to be brought, and enabled it to spread widely across the eastern side of Australia, due to extreme climatic events, and we are going to continue to see those.

We are going to continue to see changing risks. Kate is leading a team that is working on vulnerability assessments. At the moment we have finished 28 of our food commodities and industries, and those vulnerability assessments are looking at the detailed work that our colleagues are producing, in terms of what is happening down a 10-kilometre grid, in terms of changes in climatic conditions, but we are overlaying against that what we know about the physiology of the animal or the plant and its production systems, and working out, what does that mean? We are doing that also for our biosecurity risks. The combination of changing climatic conditions and the increase in risks of biosecurity is going to make the job of keeping this state protected extremely difficult over these next couple of years.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: I have had a look at the CSIRO report and what you have said that our borders as a nation are becoming a little bit more porous because the risk is outpacing the resourcing that can be applied and the technology. Is it the evidence today that basically we need to be prepared, as I am sure other States would be, to significantly ramp up our efforts in terms of resourcing research technology as all governments? As you said, it is a shared responsibility, Otherwise, it is inevitable that if we do not we will eventually get swamped, overwhelmed; there will be something that will come that will significantly harm our food security.

SCOTT HANSEN: In the face of increasing risks, we are going to need to respond accordingly.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: To change tack slightly, Ms Wilson, you said in answer to the Chair's question that the food production sector, I think, or agricultural sector, was responsible for 9 per cent of the State's emissions.

KATE WILSON: Approximately, yes.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: Would you also agree that of all the sectors in New South Wales, the food production sector is probably one of the only ones that actually has the opportunity to be not just carbon neutral but carbon negative once you factor in carbon sequestration and really business as usual of what is happening at the moment?

KATE WILSON: It is certainly the sector that offers the greatest opportunities for removing carbon from the atmosphere. It still has a lot of emissions to balance off with. For the whole sector, it is still challenging. But, yes, it does have that opportunity.

SCOTT HANSEN: The livestock sector has been the one that has demonstrated a 57 per cent reduction in emissions since 2005. There is a lot of work that is going on in that extensive livestock area to try to make sure that the industry's own goal of carbon neutrality is achieved. You would have seen that not only does the industry have that goal but a number of their supply chain partners—

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: They do.

SCOTT HANSEN: —and retailers have set themselves those targets as well. We are lucky that we have a world-class industry that uses a lot of land that would otherwise be unavailable for production of food, but because of the grazing sector in New South Wales, and in other parts of the country, we are able to convert that vegetable matter into animal protein, to keep a nutrition supply, and a food production supply. They take very seriously how do they do that efficiently and effectively, to be able to continue to do that while continuing to

remove emissions, and actually not just remove emissions, but sequester more carbon into those production systems.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: If some of the witnesses who have appeared before this inquiry get their way, there will be no red meat production in New South Wales anyway so we will not have to worry about methane emissions, at least from animals. Essentially, we have taken a lot of evidence in terms of this issue of food insecurity. Obviously, as we have heard, and everyone knows, we produce more than enough food than a population of eight million people in this State could ever consume. We export a lot of it. We are big food wasters. But we still have an issue where food insecurity, or people not having access to good food and nutrition, is on the rise. There is clearly a market failure or something that is happening that is not ensuring that the food that we are producing for domestic consumption is being more evenly distributed or more available.

I invite anyone who has a view to comment on this, and that really was not touched on in the Government submission. It is a free market and food producers are business people who are going to sell their product to the highest buyer for the most value. What steps can we take to make sure that that food that we produce is distributed better and people have more access to it so that we do not see increasing demand on some of those food programs to help people and that people can access good quality food at a good price?

The CHAIR: Dr Szabo, would you have anything in that regard or would anyone else like to comment about the key market interventions that could be required to deal with food insecurity?

LISA SZABO: I do not have an answer to your question directly. What we do in the space of food regulation is try to inform people as to how they can make a choice about a healthier food. An example of that was New South Wales was the first state to introduce menu labelling at fast-food outlets, and that was simply so that at the point of purchase a consumer could see how many kilojoules were in the product, and compare it to the average daily intake of an adult. That was a really successful program, and it is still successful. When we did an evaluation of it, we actually saw a reduction of the amount of kilojoules consumed by 15 per cent, and our colleagues in NSW Health were particularly impressed with that. It really demonstrated to me that, when you do couple the appropriate information in a form that consumers can understand, it can be effective.

The CHAIR: Mr Peek, given your role in this space during the pandemic, what were the interventions that were so critical in improving people's access to safe and affordable food, and which of those interventions could be sustainable and developed into the long run?

GAVIN PEEK: Yes, in terms of the pointy end of the food relief space—so when it does get to that crisis point, I guess—certainly we know that the issue of transport is a big one. Getting those ranges of products, chilled foods, and other fresh foods, out to remote communities and other non-metro areas was a big issue. One of the issues we also faced, particularly during Delta, more so than any, is, when you do have lockdowns, how do you get food relief from—or to people- who cannot go to a central point, where someone is stuck at home, particularly in regional communities, how do they actually get food relief there? And I guess that can be extended to food in general, like, your supermarkets, particularly in those regional areas—how do people get access to those, when it is not so easy to do online shopping et cetera?

A few things that we found worked well—and I do not know if we would describe them as sustainable in some areas, but certainly we found we had the better outcomes where government collaborations worked well. So we would talk, particularly using the emergency services type model, combined with the other work of the social sector, and various other government agencies, all of a sudden, banding together for such an urgent need. We found that that collaboration certainly worked well. We also know that effective coordination at a play-space level assists in food relief. So we have government agencies working with local NGOs, working with their supermarkets, and all those networks. It really does help to get food relief and, I guess, that model could extend further. And sustainability-wise, in terms of, particularly, food relief, assets within the community, and infrastructure to actually receive food, store food, be able to pass that on, cost-effectively, was something that makes a big difference.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you. Unfortunately, that wraps up the time we have allocated. We will likely have questions which we will need to send through to you. I would like to thank you all for appearing before us today. We may 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? Yes? Thank you all very much for your time.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 15:53.