

# PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4 - REGIONAL NSW

Wednesday 25 October 2023

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

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

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The Committee met at 9:15.

### MEMBERS

The Hon. Mark Banasiak (Chair)  
Ms Abigail Boyd  
The Hon. Greg Donnelly  
The Hon. Wes Fang  
The Hon. Sam Farraway  
Ms Sue Higginson  
The Hon. Emma Hurst (Deputy Chair)  
The Hon. Stephen Lawrence  
The Hon. Cameron Murphy  
The Hon. Bronnie Taylor

### MEMBERS VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Ms Cate Faehrmann

### PRESENT

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

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

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

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



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**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the first hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW inquiry into budget estimates 2023-24. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Mark Banasiak. I am Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Tara Moriarty and accompanying officials to this hearing.

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

To the witnesses, I welcome and thank you for making the time to give evidence. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister Moriarty, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. For all other witnesses, could you please state your name, position, title and swear either an oath or an affirmation.

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**Mr JAMES BOLTON**, Deputy Secretary, Regional Precincts Group, affirmed and examined

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

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

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

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

**Mr JONATHAN WHEATON**, Acting Deputy Secretary, Regional Development and Programs, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

**The CHAIR:** Given that the other witnesses are appearing later, we will swear them in when they arrive. The Committee has resolved to have questions from the Opposition then the crossbench until the end of a session, and then there will be opportunity for the Government to ask 15 minutes of questions if they so choose. We now start with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you, Minister, for being here today and a very big thankyou to all of the amazing department staff with you. Minister, Minister Car yesterday in evidence confirmed that she discussed with you Bungendore school. Is that correct? Yes or no.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We've had discussions—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So you have had discussions—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order: The Minister was answering the question and was cut off by the honourable member. The Minister is entitled to answer the question asked without being cut off.

**The CHAIR:** The Minister is entitled to answer the question. The member is also entitled to redirect if needs be. I ask her to give a bit of a pause before deciding if she needs to redirect. It was very quick. But if you need to do so, just maybe do so politely.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you, Chair. I would always endeavour to be polite. It was just a yes or no question. Minister Car said it in evidence.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I will get back to where I was, Chair. The answer is that I believe we've had discussions. I don't know that we've had discussions since we've been in government because it's not within my remit as the Minister for Agriculture, but I certainly live close to that community, so I would have had discussions, probably, with the local member and the shadow Minister.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** As Minister for Regional New South Wales, are you familiar with the proposed Bungendore school?

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

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Do you have a relationship with anyone who is or has previously worked for CMAX Advisory or its associated entities?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not sure.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Do you know the Taubenschlags?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It doesn't sound familiar.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Tara and Christian—you don't know them?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't believe so. Sorry, what's the surname?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Taubenschlag.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't believe so.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So you haven't heard of CMAX Advisory, CMAX Communications or Tara and Christian Taubenschlag?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm aware of CMAX—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: I'm obviously not sure exactly where this is going, but given that it seems to be linked to questions about the Bungendore school, I would question the relevance of it to the budget estimates.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point of order—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** I'm not finished, thanks. I would question the relevance of it to the estimates for the budget for the Minister's portfolios.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** To the point of order: As the Minister for Regional NSW, that encompasses and is across lots of discussions across lots of different portfolio areas, and I think schools are one of the most significant investments in any regional community. The Deputy Premier and education Minister in estimates yesterday confirmed that she'd had conversations with Minister Moriarty and conversations when she was a duty MLC for that area as well, so I think it is important that it is very much a budgetary question about that school and that investment. I think it is in order.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Further to the point of order: The Department of Regional NSW is not a geographical thing. This is budget estimates. The fact that there's a school in regional New South Wales does not make any question about that school relevant to the budget for this department, if this indeed is what it goes to, which seems a bit unclear.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point—

**The CHAIR:** I don't know whether you want to keep wasting time.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, I don't, but the Minister then changed her answer.

**The CHAIR:** I'm conscious that we just wasted three minutes. I am conscious of what Mr Lawrence is saying. I will be listening very carefully to see where this heads. I do note the comments from Mr Farraway as well in terms of schools in regions. I do agree it's a bit of a tenuous link but let's see where you go with this question. I will be listening very carefully as to the link to the portfolio.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I just noticed at the end, before the point of order was taken, that you changed to say that you actually do know about CMAX and CMAX associates and the Taubenschlags.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, that's a different question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, Minister. Respectfully, I asked you originally did you know or have you heard of CMAX Advisory or CMAX Communications. You said no.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, I said—that's not correct.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I then asked you—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** That is not correct. That is not what I said.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Do you know or are you aware of them, Minister?

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Please don't shout at me.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I'm not shouting at you.

**The CHAIR:** I think he was shouting at me, Mrs Taylor.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I'm making it very clear I've got a point of order.

**The CHAIR:** What's the point of order?

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** The point of order is talking over the witness.

**The CHAIR:** Let's allow a bit of a breath between each other, particularly for Hansard. I don't mind a bit of banter going back and forwards but at least give Hansard a chance to pick up who's saying what. Mrs Taylor, I suggest you just put the question back to the Minister.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister Moriarty, have you heard of CMAX Advisory, CMAX Communications, or Christian or Tara Taubenschlag?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm aware of an organisation called CMAX. I don't know if I have met with them. You'd have to check my disclosures for that. I'm aware they exist. I don't know the other name that you have put to me. I don't believe that I know them.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Have they lobbied you about Bungendore school?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't believe so, because the name doesn't sound familiar to me.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Did you know that a significant Labor donor has the potential to make almost \$8 million in profit if the selected school site was overturned?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: It's now become clear, I would suggest, that these questions are not relevant to estimates for this portfolio. This is an attempt to mount a political attack that relates fairly and squarely to the Department of Education, it would seem.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point of order: This is budget estimates. The Bungendore school has been in the budget papers and the Minister for Education specifically referenced yesterday that she had discussed that with Minister Moriarty. It is directly relevant and I've been literally a few minutes but I've been constantly interrupted. Let me run my questions and if there's nothing to hide, then we move on.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Further to the point of order: It certainly is budget estimates, but it's budget estimates for a particular series of portfolios that do not include education.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Last time we looked, schools are in regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Certainly geographically, but I would suggest that that's a different thing to estimates for a particular portfolio, Chair.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** There's wide latitude in budget estimates.

**The CHAIR:** There is generally wide latitude in budget estimates. We don't necessarily always focus on the budget, but we focus within the portfolio that the Minister is responsible for. I appreciate what the member is trying to ask and its importance.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It is serious.

**The CHAIR:** But I'm struggling to see a strong connection to the broad portfolio, so I would ask whether you can bring it back to her role as the Minister for Regional New South Wales and that involvement.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, you've now said to budget estimates that you are aware of CMAX and CMAX Advisory. You also are aware of the issue that that advisory and the Taubenschlags are set to gain an enormous amount of money.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, I did not say that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, you said you knew them, right? You said you can't recall—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, I didn't; I said the absolute opposite of that. I don't know them; I don't believe I know them. The name does not sound familiar to me. I don't believe I know them.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** When you ran an SO 52 in the Chamber about Bungendore school, had you discussed that with CMAX Advisory or the Taubenschlags?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** I'll hear the point of order.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Was that before or after they made a donation to the Labor Party?

**The CHAIR:** A point of order has been taken.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Just to clarify, is this an SO 52 in this term of government or the previous term of government? I infer it's the previous term. If it's the previous term then, again, it is completely irrelevant.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I would say that falls outside the actions of the Minister, given that she was not the Minister at the time.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** To the point of order: The Deputy Premier referenced in her answers yesterday that she had had discussions with the then duty MLC for Monaro, Tara Moriarty. We are fleshing out answers that were given in the Education estimates hearing but are relevant to the Regional NSW portfolio as it intersects and crosses over with every other portfolio, whether it's Education, Transport or policing. That is the nature of that portfolio. It is a very wide-ranging portfolio, and that is why we're fleshing out those questions.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** To the point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You guys really don't want this, do you? If there's nothing to hide then let it flow.

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**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** It is absolutely clear from that response that those questions would have been better directed to the relevant Minister in the Education portfolio.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Which they were.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Clearly, they have nothing to do with this portfolio area.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But her answers have allowed additional and supplementary questions due to the nature of the Deputy Premier's answers yesterday, Mr Murphy.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** To the point of order: I absolutely appreciate all the concerns being raised. But our role here in budget estimates, as the upper House, is about the transparency and accountability of Ministers within their portfolios as well as across Cabinet affairs and all of government. That's what we're here for. Wide latitude is absolutely fundamental to our function as upper House members.

**The CHAIR:** I acknowledge everyone's contributions. I reiterate my points that we have wide latitude in questions. Extremely wide latitude was given in estimates yesterday with the Deputy Premier, but I ask the honourable member to try to relate the questions back to the Minister's role as Minister for Regional New South Wales and not reference too much what she may have done as an MLC in a previous Parliament, because she's not being held to account for that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you, Chair. This is a very serious issue and I will continue with that. As the Minister for Regional New South Wales, have you ever communicated over text or email with someone who works or has previously worked for CMAX Advisory or its associated entities?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know who works for CMAX Advisory or any of its associated entities. I'm aware that it exists because it sounds familiar to me. I don't know who works for it.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Would you take that on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know who works for it. That's the answer.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Can you do your due diligence and check to see whether you actually have?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know who works for it. That's the answer.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But you know of CMAX Advisory.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It sounds familiar to me as an organisation. That's the answer I've given; it's the answer I'll continue to give.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Do you think maybe as a Minister—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order: Question asked, question answered.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I ask a supplementary question. You've been around a long time, Mr Donnelly. You know how this works.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** The Minister answered the question at least three times.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** What a protection racket.

**The CHAIR:** I note the comments from the Hon. Greg Donnelly—the same comments he gave yesterday. I uphold those, but members can also ask clarifying questions. If they want to waste their time asking the same questions over and over again in different ways, that is totally up to them.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But stop interrupting.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, will you take that on notice? As a Minister of the Crown, maybe do your due diligence and come back to the Committee at a later stage.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, I don't know who works for that organisation.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So you won't provide those to the Committee, Minister? Is that what you're saying?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know who works for that organisation. What are you asking me to provide? I don't know who works for that organisation.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But you said you're aware of the organisation.



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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Because it sounds familiar to me.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And you've had no contact with Christian or Tara Taubenschlag over anything to do with Bungendore school?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** They are not names that sound familiar to me.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** They're either familiar to you and you know them or they're not. They made a significant donation to your party two weeks after you lodged an SO 52. I would remind you that you are under oath. Are you saying that you do not know either of those two people and you do not know CMAX Advisory or its entities?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: That is probably the tenth time that those two or three questions have been put. It has been put in a repetitive way with the voice raised. I would suggest that it is discourteous and repetitive.

**The CHAIR:** It is repetitive. The voice was raised. I wouldn't say it was at a level where I would have to intervene, but I would ask the member to mind the tone. If she wants to continue asking those questions, perhaps try asking them in different ways. They are being ruled as repetitive.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Did anyone lobby you about Bungendore school?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** In opposition, as you would be aware, it was a hot topic in the community of Bungendore. I was the Labor representative in opposition; I guess that is what you would describe an MLC as. I am aware that it was a topic of conversation in the community. I've had discussions with people across the community about the school, certainly in opposition. I don't believe I've had conversations with people since being in government because it's just not within my portfolio. There is now a Labor member of Parliament who I'm sure is across those details. But I've had conversations with people about the school in the community, yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Did you discuss the review of Bungendore school with Minister Whan?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know if we had discussions about it in government. I don't believe so.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So you don't know whether you know CMAX Advisory, you don't know whether you know the Taubenschlags and you don't know whether you discussed Bungendore school with Minister Whan.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's not within my portfolio responsibilities, Ms Taylor.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But you sit in Cabinet, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** But we don't discuss individual schools at that level.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister Moriarty, when you lodged an SO 52 for information on a school site, two weeks later a substantial donation was made for the first time ever to the State Labor Party. The same organisation has donated in excess of \$200,000 to the Federal Labor Party. What do you say about that? Is that a strange coincidence?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know anything about it.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: This seems to entirely relate to things that occurred in the previous term of government. I appreciate, Chair, that you've made some comments inviting the honourable member to return to things that are relevant to the estimates of this portfolio. This seems to be a flouting of that ruling, because how on earth is it relevant to the budget of the Department of Regional NSW, the Department of Agriculture or any of the statutory corporations? I suggest it's completely irrelevant.

**The CHAIR:** I encourage the member to very quickly bring it back to how this may or may not have influenced the actions of the Minister now that she is the Minister.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sure. Thank you very much, Chair. I will put that in a package. An SO 52 was lodged, and two weeks later the Labor Party got a donation. CMAX Advisory is run by the Taubenschlags; you can or cannot remember whether you know them or are aware of them. You've also said that you won't provide this Committee with any text messages or emails that you may have had in contact with them.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, I didn't.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** You refused to take it on notice.

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know them.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You refused to take it on notice.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't believe I've had conversations with them. If you want to put stuff to me in a package, then make it accurate.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It is accurate. The thing is you're not answering the question. These are very serious issues, of which, Minister, you appear to be right at the centre. They're very serious issues. I have asked you respectfully multiple times about that—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —and you are jumping around everywhere—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not right at the centre—

**The CHAIR:** I'll hear the point of order.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —because there's something to hide, isn't there?

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** With respect, I'm not at the centre of anything to do with a school.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You've got something to hide.

**The CHAIR:** I'll hear the point of order, which probably wasn't heard over the shouting back and forth.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** There doesn't seem to be a question. Rather, it seems to be grandstanding and lecturing, I would suggest. The honourable member should ask questions. That's her job.

**The CHAIR:** They should. I appreciate that you're trying to put a package or a case together, but I would encourage the member to actually put that package together quickly and finish that package with a question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** What was the catalyst for requesting documents relating to the location of Bungendore school?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** As I said earlier, in a previous answer, it was a very hot topic of discussion in the Bungendore community. Bungendore is a very small community. As you would be aware, a topic of discussion in a small community is something that people are aware of. People across that community, from all sides of that debate, raised issues with me. As the duty MLC at that time, I sought documents about that issue to be able to assist the community with the questions that they had. It's as simple as that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Of the people that you just spoke about—that spoke to you and lobbied you to do an SO 52 on Bungendore school—were either of those people Christian or Tara Taubenschlag, or anyone from CMAX Advisory or CMAX Communications? You are under oath.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So all of the people that lobbied you were community groups?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It was probably the number one topic in the community of Bungendore, and probably still is.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm well aware of that, Minister. I think it's going to continue to be after this.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sure. I don't know where you're going with this.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I know where I'm going.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not involved in decisions—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I just want you to answer the questions, Minister, honestly.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You can ask as many questions as you want. I'm happy to answer them.

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**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** It's simply the statement—the backhand—about honestly answering the question. The honourable member has been around the block a few times. She knows that that's completely inappropriate.

**The CHAIR:** Let's be mindful of argument in questions. I did rule on that yesterday. Obviously, the member wasn't here, but let's be mindful of incorporating argument into our questions.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, is there anything preventing you from answering these questions today?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have answered the questions.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** No, you haven't, because you're unclear on certain elements, which I understand. You have the opportunity to take it on notice or not, but that's up to you. That's at your discretion. As a separate question to these questions, is there anything preventing you today from answering these questions?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have answered the questions.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** What questions? If the honourable member is going to make that suggestion, the honourable member needs, I would suggest, to say what questions he's referring to. Otherwise it becomes an impossible question.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Just about all of them, I think.

**The CHAIR:** I would agree with that. I would stipulate that you should indicate which questions you feel she has been reluctant to answer.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Are you prevented from answering any questions today regarding knowledge of CMAX or regarding your discussions with community groups, with the Taubenschlags or with some of your ministerial or parliamentary colleagues?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No. I have answered the questions.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Good morning, Minister. You and I have talked a fair bit about the national standards for poultry. We've talked specifically in relation to the use of battery cages. I want to put battery cages to the side for the moment and talk about the rest of the standards. Aside from battery cages, is the position still that the rest of the standards won't become enshrined into laws or regulations?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We support the standards. These are standards that have been determined through a national process, and New South Wales has supported the standards, along with every other State—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, Minister, when you say "support", obviously supporting or endorsing standards won't make them legally enforceable. I'm wondering, with the rest of the standards, is there going to be an effort from the Government to turn those standards into either laws or regulations in New South Wales?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** At this stage, we're committed to the standards and to ensuring that they are implemented in New South Wales.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** As regulations?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Not at this stage. I'm working with industry to implement the standards as required, in a timely manner. I'm working with industry to make sure that we can get to the point that we need to in relation to these national standards, because that's what we've committed to, whilst also being mindful of impacts on business, supply, costs and all of those other issues.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** There's quite a few very serious standards that have come from this national standards process, which, if it's not legally enforceable in New South Wales but is legally enforceable in other States, could end up being quite problematic. To give you an example, in the turkey farming industry, turkeys are hand masturbated. The new national standard at least requires that "turkey toms must not be overstimulated during semen collection". That's an actual quote. If we're not putting in new national standards as legislation or regulations, that means that still remains legal in New South Wales. I'm wondering why the Government has made the decision to keep that legal in New South Wales when it would be illegal in the other States and Territories.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not sure that's the case. I'm not across the specifics of how the turkey industry operates to that level.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have you read the poultry standards, Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes. At this stage, my answer is the same. We're committed to the implementation of the standards over a period of time.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** How do we implement a standard like that? There are many other standards. If you've read the report, then you would be aware, of course, around duck farming and the fact that ducks are semiaquatic animals, but they're only provided nipple drinkers. That's their only water source. Again, the national standard process has recommended that States implement new regulation or legislation to ensure that there are other sources of water so that ducks can at least wash their eyes so they don't go blind. Why wouldn't we make sure that was a new law in New South Wales?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We'll work through the best way to implement this. We're committed to these standards. There is a period of time to work with industry to make sure that we're getting the process right so that the standards can be met whilst also not causing issues, as I referred to earlier. Whether we—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry to interrupt you, but have you met with anyone within the duck industry or the turkey industry about these specific standards that have been recommended to implement in New South Wales? How has that shaped your decision to reject making them legally enforceable in New South Wales?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I wouldn't accept the last part of the question. It's just a question of the timing and what we're doing at this stage.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, which part of the question are you rejecting? That it won't be legally enforceable?

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

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So they will be legally enforceable?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Have I met with people from the industry? Yes. I have engaged with people from the turkey industry about the work that they may need to do in relation to being able to comply with the standards. I will check if I've met with anyone specifically in relation to the duck industry, but turkeys, yes, I have.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Going back, you said that you reject the part of the question that they won't be legally enforceable. How will they be legally enforceable if they're not regulations or legislation?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We're supportive of the standards, and we're working through what it will mean to ensure that they're implemented here in New South Wales. I am working with industry. I have met with you, your party and other organisations from the welfare perspective a number of times. I want to engage with everybody involved in this to make sure that we're getting the process right.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can I just clarify with you how it will be legally enforceable if it's not a regulation or legislation?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** These are things that we will deal with over time. For the moment, we're committed to the standards. I am engaging with people from across the industry and I am engaging with people from across animal welfare, including yourself.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So are you saying that, at one point, they may become regulations or legislation, and that's how it will be legally enforceable? Because, obviously, the Government committing to something doesn't mean it's a law. A law only becomes a law when it's actually written into legislation or into a regulation. If these standards aren't put into any regulation or legislation, then they wouldn't be legally enforceable, and that was the reason for my question. You rejected that it wouldn't be legally enforceable. I'm just trying to understand why it would be legally enforceable. Are they going to be brought in later as regulations?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We've had discussions about this, and I want to continue discussions with your organisation and other animal welfare groups. I also want to continue the discussions with industry to make sure that we're getting this right over a period of time so that there aren't implications. I wouldn't rule anything in or out in terms of making sure that we get to having the national standards in place in New South Wales.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You mentioned that you've met with animal protection organisations. Did you meet with any animal protection organisations prior to attending the Agriculture Ministers' Meeting in July?

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I will have to check the timing of this, but I've certainly met with a number of animal welfare organisations over the six months that I've been Minister. So I've probably engaged before that meeting, but I would have to check the specific timing.

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

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

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** My understanding is that you hadn't met with any animal protection organisations prior to that meeting. How did you then develop the decision on behalf of what New South Wales would do, when you hadn't met with any animal welfare representatives?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** New South Wales is committed to the standards. These are things that were in place before—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you explain what "commitment to the standards" means if they are never actually going to be enshrined into legislation or regulation, because, if it is just a commitment from the Government but it will never actually become legally enforceable, there is no way for the charities to ever oversee it or make sure any industries are actually following through on it. How do you actually expect this to work in practice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, I do expect it to work in practice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** How?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It is a conversation I'm having with industry and have had with industry. We have committed to the standards being implemented in New South Wales. What I'm doing is working through that in a careful, considered way with industry and with all of the interested parties. I would also say that the supermarkets and other major industries are moving in relation to this, as an issue, in terms of stocking free-range eggs in the supermarkets, I think, in 2025. I've actually written to them in the last little while to get confirmation from them that they are still committed to that. Things are moving in this space at the same time that I am working with industry to make sure the standards are implemented, and it is important that I do it in a careful, considered way.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I note the latest budget didn't include any ongoing funding promises for the enforcement bodies that actually uphold the legislation under your portfolio—the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. If funding is pulled by Labor, how will the enforcement bodies under POCTAA be able to actually uphold animal cruelty legislation?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We are working through that now. We have made a number of commitments in relation to animal welfare, and there are reviews that we're doing in terms of how these bodies are funded and how these issues are monitored. I'm working through those issues now. I will have more to say about it soon, and the budget will be determined based on the decisions we make in terms of how that will work.

**The CHAIR:** I might just turn to answers given to my questions in the House last week around emergency fodder for fire-affected farmers. You gave out a number that people could call to get assistance. I passed that on to some of the affected farmers, and they were told that all they could be given was a three-day allocation of fodder. Would you think that it's acceptable, in terms of the impacts that they are suffering from, that they only have three days worth of fodder being allocated from your departments?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** That's in relation to a particular emergency and that service is available to people in certain circumstances. You would be aware that other announcements have been made since then. Some of these communities have been declared by the Federal Government in combination with the State Government so that they can apply for further assistance, and the rule of this assistance authority will be available to provide assistance that is needed.

**The CHAIR:** Do you think a three-day allocation is acceptable in terms of a response from your department?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's not the only response. It's a response. It's one part of it, but there are other things in place where we will provide support where it is needed to people who have been affected. In relation to your questions, it was in relation to bushfire, particularly around Kempsey. That's likely to be a broader issue across the State over the summer, unfortunately, and it will expand in terms of people who are experiencing drier conditions. That is one part of the assistance, but there is other assistance available.

**The CHAIR:** Would it surprise you to hear that a private citizen holidaying in Greenland can organise more fodder allocation than your department? Because one of my party branch members, after me giving him that

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number and hearing that he would only get a three-day allocation, organised it himself and was able to organise weeks worth of fodder allocation for those affected farmers. So does it concern you that a private citizen holidaying in Greenland can, seemingly, organise more assistance than your department?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not aware of the individual circumstances of the person that you raise. I'm happy to hear—

**The CHAIR:** Prima facie, does that concern you?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I accept what you're putting to me. I'm just not aware of the broader circumstances involved. There is more assistance available when people need it. If you want more detail, I'm happy to hand over to Mr Hansen, who can perhaps provide it, but we do want to make sure that people are given the support that they need in emergency situations, which is what we're talking about here.

**The CHAIR:** We might pick up with Mr Hansen later; I've just got more questions for you. I will just go to your announcement for the \$13 million feral pig management program. I'm just wondering whether you, perhaps on notice, can provide some more details in terms of a detailed breakdown of how that \$13 million is being expended and how much has already been expended thus far. I note that the four dot points include providing advice, supplying baits and traps, assisting with coordinating baiting programs and becoming involved with other control techniques such as trapping programs. I note there's no mention of aerial shooting of pigs. I'm just wondering whether that's also one of the other control techniques that will be included as part of that \$13 million funding.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The answer is yes, and that work is—

**The CHAIR:** Which part of the question?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Aerial shooting—it is underway. Let me see what I can find for you now. Otherwise, I will take the breakdown—

**The CHAIR:** I'm happy for you to take it on notice. If you can provide it for the afternoon session, that would be great.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes. I'm happy to provide details. I'll see what I can do in relation to the timing of that. I understand—and people will correct me about the details of this—there was an operation conducted on Friday where over 500 of these pests were dealt with in one day, from an aerial perspective. So it is part of the program, but I'm happy to give you the specifics so that you can dig into that a little more.

**The CHAIR:** Last week we also touched on the sale price of livestock being at a record low. In one of your answers, to either my question or Mr Farraway's question, you commented that it's because of a glut or an oversupply in the market. Are you aware that the stock being sold is roughly the same amount as last year and that the glut is probably not at the saleyards but at the processing yards? Are you aware of that, or have you been provided advice to that effect?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, I'm being provided advice on this. I have acknowledged and I do acknowledge the drop in prices—it's roughly around 40 per cent—and that drop has been occurring since the start of this year. Part of the reasoning for that is that people are preparing for drier seasons—the dry season that's coming, I should say—and looking to sell at roughly the same time, and that has an impact on pricing.

**The CHAIR:** But there's no significant increase in sales from previous years at the same time, so I am concerned as to where this narrative of an oversupply in the market is coming from and where that blockage is occurring.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sure. Perhaps the details I will hand over to Mr Hansen.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Hansen looks like he wants to answer.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Thank you, Chair. Cattle supply, if we can start there, is significantly higher this year than what it was last year—28 per cent higher, in fact.

**The CHAIR:** What about sheep? Do you have figures for sheep?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I do, but let me just finish the story on cattle because that has been in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales drying conditions and there has been a record build-up of the cattle herd in the last three years because of good seasonal conditions. That's seen that turn off. At the same time, can I just say processing throughput is actually above last year's as well.

**The CHAIR:** So when processors are claiming that there's a backlog or a blockage, are they being accurate if you're saying that processing is at an increased rate?

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**SCOTT HANSEN:** They are at an increased rate.

**The CHAIR:** I think your word was "higher".

**SCOTT HANSEN:** They are higher; they're just not 28 per cent higher, which is what the throughput of sales is, which is where that backlog gets created. With regard to lambs and sheep meat supply, we have seen again Queensland and northern New South Wales have increased the supply of lambs and sheep into the markets. I don't have the numbers immediately to hand on processing.

**The CHAIR:** That's fine. I might move on to the funding announcement that you made, Minister, along the lines where you committed \$2.2 million to review supply chains, address food security issues and be a voice for farmers. For the first part of that, will that review of supply chains include an examination of the practices and tactics of collusion that is happening at saleyards? I've witnessed firsthand the buyers now not even doing proper bids and using hand signals to actually drive down the sale prices. I know the ACCC have gone there and obviously the buyers are on their best behaviour when ACCC are there, but will this review of supply chains actually look at the tactics of collusion and driving down sale prices?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm happy to have a look at that. That's not something that has been put to me, but I accept that you're putting that now. I'm happy to look into that and get further details, and it can either be added to that process or can be something that I have a look at. That sounds like something I will take very seriously.

**The CHAIR:** Can you elaborate as to what you mean by "be a voice for farmers" in terms of that \$2.2 million package?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It is a commitment to look at these. This sounds like a specific issue that I will need to look at, but it is about having a look at supply chain issues. These are things that get raised with me—and were raised with us before being in government—by farmers. They want to get a better understanding and to have me be an advocate for them to understand what happens in terms of their product on farm and the cost that they might get for it, and what happens in between, that being at the end of the supermarket aisle and what people pay for it. I am happy to look at those issues and work with farmers to make sure that they're getting the best deal that they can.

**The CHAIR:** As part of looking at the supply chain, will you be looking at the process of abattoirs being reviewed, specifically how they calculate the weight and the fact that they actually remove a lot of the components of the animal which they still use to make money from, but the farmer never sees the benefit of, like all the offal, the intestines? They essentially make a profit off that and the farmer never sees the benefit. Are you going to look at how we can maybe develop a fairer process in the processing of our products for farmers?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm happy to consider any of the relevant issues in terms of that commitment that fit within that supply chain remit, but it's a standing invitation. If there are particular issues that are affecting farmers and their ability to get a good deal, then I'm happy to have those issues raised with me and work with them on how we can deal with that.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you, Minister, and all the agency staff here today. I have just one or two very quick follow-up questions from the first session from my colleague Bronnie Taylor. Have you ever, Minister, either prior to being the Minister for Regional New South Wales or as the Minister now, made it clear to community groups, the media, Parliament, advisory councils or lobbyists what your preferred view is of where Bungendore school should be located?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't have a preferred view about the school. I'm not involved in the process of determining the details for the school. As a person who—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Do you have a view yourself? As a Queanbeyan local, do you have a personal view, or have you ever made that view public?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** I will hear the of point order; I'm pretty sure I know what it is.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** It is firstly in relation to the fact that this is canvassing views the Minister might have expressed prior to being a Minister about a matter that's not in her portfolio. If the Opposition wants to advance what seem to be conspiracy theories, the House is sitting again in a few weeks.

**The CHAIR:** I suggest to the member that if he's going to make some sort of comparison to what she may have said as an MLC and what she is saying now, I would get to it reasonably quickly.

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I will bring it right in. Minister, do you have a view on where the Bungendore school should be located?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, that's a matter for—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Asked and answered. In relation to the question before the last one, the Minister said, "No, I don't have a view."

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** To the point of order: I asked about in the past, has the Minister publicly put views or tabled in media, in Parliament. I specifically asked what is her view.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** And she said, "I don't have a view."

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It's yes or no, so I can move on. I'm happy to move on once the Minister—

**The CHAIR:** Yes, she has answered that question.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** To confirm, that is yes or no, Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's not my responsibility to have a view on where things should be placed.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Yes, but your personal view as a Queanbeyan local.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Experts, I'm sure, in Education and other parts of government have made considered decisions about appropriate locations. My view is that Bungendore is entitled to a school, and they should get a school.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** And no view on where it should be located?

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It's all right, I'll move on.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** It is bordering on badgering the Minister.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, why don't you support the Stronger Country Communities Fund and why have you allowed the Treasurer to cut this hugely successful program in the recent budget?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Because we have a better way of doing things, and we put a better way of dealing with public money in regional New South Wales to the community during the election campaign and they voted for us. They elected us into government. We have plans to spend money in the regions in a way that is of most benefit and to be spent where and when it is needed. There are a number of ways that we will be doing that. We have a significant budget in Regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So I suppose, Minister, from that answer, what was the concern with the Stronger Country Communities Fund?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There were a number of inquiries into grant funding from your lot through this Parliament.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Yes, but as the Minister for Regional New South Wales, what was your concern with that fund?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I followed the grants inquiries that were conducted by this Parliament and plenty of concerns were raised into how decisions were made by your Government and we considered that it was appropriate to be doing things in a different, better, more accountable way, and that's the proposition that we put to the people of New South Wales and they elected us.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Did you have concerns over how that funding was rolled out previously?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** What I'm doing is rolling out funding in the way that we said this Labor Government would do for regional New South Wales. We said we would invest in better services across regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, was there a concern? As the Minister for Regional New South Wales in developing this, did you believe that that fund perhaps only benefited Coalition electorates? Was that your concern, or did you have a concern with that?



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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** My view about this was that money could be spent in a better way across regional New South Wales, more fairly spent based on need, and we made a number of commitments to the community that we would invest in services that are severely lacking across the regions and have been for many, many, many years. We gave a commitment that we would invest in education and health. We're building schools. As per your previous questions, we're investing in health across regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I've got limited time so I'll continue to move on. You've spoken several times in the House and in this Parliament about pork-barrelling. Do you believe the Stronger Country Communities Fund was a form of pork-barrelling from the former Coalition Government?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We have a better way of spending money across regional New South Wales, and that's exactly what I will be doing as Minister for Regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I will move on, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** One example of that—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I've got limited time, Minister, so I'm going to move on to the next question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —will be reviewing the Regional Development Act and a new trust that I'm about to start consultation on to engage with communities across the regions about how they think we should spend money.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** We're going to move on because I've got limited time. I will keep the questions flowing, Minister. The police Minister and member for Swansea, Yasmin Catley, stated in a media release:

The Stronger Country Communities Fund has made a significant contribution towards improving regional communities, including the area that I have the pleasure of representing.

Do you agree with and support the police Minister's statement? I will table that media release and I might pass one to the Minister so she has a reference.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: I think the witness should be given the date of that, perhaps, just to familiarise herself.

**The CHAIR:** I was just looking for a date on that, but I'm assuming the member will get to that point. Has the Minister been provided with a copy?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It's coming.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** What I will say, in general terms, is that I'm sure any member of Parliament is happy when money is allocated to their local community. Certainly a lot of National Party MPs visit me looking for funding out of our Government to support their communities because they didn't get any out of their lot when they were in government. I'm sure the comments were made in relation to funding being provided. As I've said in my previous answers, we have a better way of providing funding and resources to regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I suppose, Minister, to follow up, your parliamentary colleague the police Minister and member for Swansea said, "The Stronger Country Communities Fund has made a significant—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order: I've just got a copy of this. I have two points, Chair. First of all, it appears to be I don't think a complete but a partially complete media release, if I can read this correctly, from Yasmin Catley in her capacity as the Labor member for Swansea. That's the only capacity as I see it in this media release. Secondly, it's undated.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It's available on her parliamentary website.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Well, I don't know where you got this from, Sam.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It's public information.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Mr Donnelly, I just ask that you better articulate what exactly the point of order is. I understand you're questioning the veracity of the document or the quality of the document, but I'm sure the Minister is able to do that in her own capacity.

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**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I think it goes to the question of the clarity of the question. This is a line of questioning, as I understand, that the member is looking to prosecute and he has started to do so. But there has been no explanation about where this has come from—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I am happy to explain that, Mr Donnelly.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** —and its status in terms of date.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It's available on yasmincatley.com.au.

**The CHAIR:** Let me rule on the point of order, please. In your questioning, can you please include an explanation as to the source of the material.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** For the record, Chair, I have actually tabled two additional documents for the Minister that the Committee staff have given to the Minister. There are two more coming, and I'm happy to reference the date and sources for the next ones to keep the questions flowing, Mr Donnelly. Minister, again, I quote minister Catley:

The Stronger Country Communities Fund has made a significant contribution towards improving regional communities, including the area that I have the pleasure of representing.

Do you agree with your colleague Minister Catley?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I will refer to my previous answer: MPs are always happy when money is spent in their community. All of the commitments that were made previously will be honoured by this Government. We just have a better way of spending money across regional New South Wales going forward, and that's exactly what we will do.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** "A better way"—okay. I will move on. Minister, last December—and the December Christmas newsletter for Jenny Aitchison, MP, is where I'm quoting from, and I have tabled a copy of this—the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads and member for Maitland, Jenny Aitchison, claimed in her December newsletter that she had delivered more than \$5.54 million from the Stronger Country Communities Fund for her Maitland electorate. Do you believe that this is a form of pork-barrelling for the seat of Maitland?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I think, as per my previous answer, MPs celebrate when money is spent in their electorates. I'm sure her community celebrates any investment. As I said, we'll honour any of the commitments that have been made before. We've just got a better way of spending money. I don't have an issue with MPs celebrating.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So you believe that your own colleagues so far are celebrating these investments in their electorates, which, I might add, were Labor electorates in the last Parliament? Are you saying that your colleagues are wrong and there is a better way to deliver money from the Stronger Country Communities Fund?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I think there's a better way of spending taxpayer money in regional New South Wales to make sure that people across regional New South Wales get the services and investment that they're entitled to. That is something that we took to the election and that is something I will be delivering on.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So you're maintaining that the Stronger Country Communities Fund did not deliver in the best way possible for the people of regional New South Wales?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I think Labor will do it better.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** In what way?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've just outlined one example.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Moving on, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We are redoing the Regional Development Act and I'm out—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Yes, moving on, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I need to answer the question. You've asked me a question.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I've got limited time.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You've just asked me a question.

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**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** The Minister was asked a very clear question as to how she would do it better, or how Labor would do it better. The answer was nowhere near begun, let alone completed, and Mr Farraway thinks he can interrupt. It's out of order. The Minister should be allowed to complete her answers, or at least some modicum of an answer.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I have limited time, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** The Minister is allowed to complete her answers, but the member is also allowed to redirect. I do accept the fact that she was very early on in her answer, but if the member wants to redirect quickly—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I will redirect, Chair. That's fine.

**The CHAIR:** —that's on him because then he doesn't get the benefit of the answer. I would ask the member, if he has to redirect, to be polite in doing so.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Redirecting, Minister, but we'll keep on the same theme. The Parliamentary Secretary for Disaster Recovery and member for Lismore, Janelle Saffin, issued a media release on 6 February this year—I have tabled a copy, and that's directly from the member's website—and it states:

LISMORE MP Janelle Saffin has welcomed confirmation of Electorate-wide success in the Stronger Country Communities Fund Round 5.

The media release goes on and quotes Ms Saffin:

Sharing in a total of almost \$6 million in SCCF Round 5 grants is great news for our local communities in all four Local Government Areas and a timely injection of money into our local economies.

Some recipients have contacted me to tell me of their success and they are absolutely thrilled.

My question, Minister, is do you seriously maintain that this was not an effective way of delivering community grants to regional New South Wales, including Labor-held seats, and that it is a form of pork-barrelling when your own Labor Party lower House members have supported the rollout of this and celebrated it publicly?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm pleased that they've received funding for programs in their local electorates. I'm pleased that the community of Lismore received funding. They're well and truly entitled to it, given everything they've been through. They're also well and truly entitled to because they're a great community that deserves investment from government. It's appropriate that the local member celebrates investment in her community. We'll continue with that.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** What do you say as the Minister responsible for grants for regional New South Wales when you have your own party colleagues and ministerial colleagues in lower House seats celebrating and acknowledging that it was a successful program, that it worked, and you've allowed the Treasurer to cut it from the budget?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** They're celebrating that there is money coming into their communities, as they should, for Lismore and Maitland and—I've forgotten the one that you put to me earlier. But they're all entitled to receive investment from the Government. I'm glad they've received it. They're certainly entitled to celebrate that across the community. But I don't begrudge them receiving investment from the Government. We've got a better way of doing it going forward.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, why have you allowed the Treasurer to cut such a successful community grants program that not only benefited every single local government area—so this isn't an electorate program; this was actually based on LGAs. Every single LGA under that program got its fair share of funding. Why did you allow the Treasurer to cut such a successful community grants program that has benefited such a hard-hit, flood-impacted community like Lismore?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't accept the premise of your question. That is not what we have done. We put a better way of investing in regional New South Wales to the people of New South Wales, and they elected us to form a government to deliver on that commitment. That includes investing in better services which have been severely significantly lacking in investment from the previous Government. We're investing in better health care. We've got a record spend in regional roads.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, if I can redirect. In your new proposal under your programs announced, or yet to be announced in the budget, does every single local government area in regional New South Wales get a set allocation of funding from a community grants program?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There is a program for electorates that we did take to the election, which is administered in another part of the Government, that every single electorate in the State of New South Wales gets an amount of money allocated to it.

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Is that that \$400,000 local allocations grant? So, Minister, that program for regional New South Wales, it only allocates \$400,000 per electorate. Is that correct?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There's many, many programs—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** No, specifically that one in your understanding.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —that also build and enhance on that. That is just one, and I have outlined a few others that are within my remit. We are—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'll just take you back to your answer around that \$400,000. I just want to have that confirmed just for my understanding.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Point of order: I've let this run for a couple of questions to see whether it would come back to this Minister's portfolio area.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** You need to let me ask it.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** The questions clearly relate to the Local Small Commitments Allocation—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Which the Minister raised.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** —which is the responsibility of a different Minister, and they ought to be ruled out of order—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'm trying to make a comparison here, Chair. The Minister raised it.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** —unless they come back to this Minister's responsibility, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** They should be related to the Minister's responsibilities. I note the interjection there from Mr Farraway that he's trying to make a comparison. I ask that he would make that comparison reasonably succinctly so we can get to the point.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Yes, absolutely. Minister, do you believe that every local government area should have a set allocation of a grants program, like the Stronger Country Communities Fund?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I think the people of regional New South Wales deserved better, and they deserve proper investment in services spent in a way that is more accountable and available—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, I'm asking specifically about allocations of community grants.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —to communities where and when they need it.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, we have limited time. I specifically would like to ask about how grants are allocated.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We made significant commitments to the people of New South Wales to allocate taxpayer money in a much better and more equitable way, and that's exactly what we are doing.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, I would like to know—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** That is exactly what I am doing as the Minister for Regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** —do your new programs allocate funding based on local government area or do they base them on electorate?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** They base it on where money is needed.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay. Are you saying that some local government areas across regional New South Wales could possibly see zero funding under the Minns Labor Government, if it's not allocated per LGA?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Money will be spent in regional New South Wales based on where and when it is needed by communities across regional New South Wales. That is the appropriate way to spend taxpayer money and that's exactly what we will do.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay. Minister, moving on, would you generally accept that the staff in your department—and I acknowledge they're here today and I have a huge amount of respect for them—do a great job in delivering for the people of rural and regional New South Wales?

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I do.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Excellent. A big part of the department's work would be clearly communicating information relating to your grants programs, especially to regional and remote communities. Would you say that's a fair statement?

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

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Would you accept that that work that the Department of Regional NSW, or DPI, undertakes would be more of a challenge in communicating that in the bush and in the regions, whether it's coastal or inland, than it would be in the city, given media markets and the tyranny of distance?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I think it's important to communicate the message of government and what is available to communities wherever they are, and I'm certainly keen to ensure that happens across regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, do you stand by your statements to the media—and I would table *The Daily Telegraph* article here—that the staffing levels in the Department of Regional NSW and the Office of the Cross-Border Commissioner are absurd?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** As you would expect for a new government, it's appropriate to have a look at where resources are allocated and to make sure that they're allocated in the appropriate way where they are needed.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So do you still maintain, Minister, that—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm answering the question. You need to let me answer the question.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Do you still maintain that those staffing levels are absurd? You've been in the role obviously seven months now. A new government—I accept that—but do you still maintain seven months in that the staffing levels within the Department of Regional NSW and the Office of the Cross-Border Commissioner are absurd?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's appropriate that we have a look at how resources are allocated—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'll take that as a yes.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and it's important that we ensure that departments across the board are allocating resources in line with the new Government's, with our Government's, priorities.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It's fair to say that that's a yes if that's the case. You're still not happy, you still think they're absurd, and you're wanting to review the staffing levels within your own agency and department.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm reviewing across the board to make sure that money and resources and staff are allocated in line with the priorities of our Government. We have told the community what we are going to do—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I take it you stand by your word.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and I need to make sure that the department is doing what we told the community we will do.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you, Minister. You've answered that question. Clearly, you haven't changed your mind since that article and you do maintain that they're absurd.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Guys, if you're going to keep taking absurd points of order, we'll just call the Minister back for supplementary hearings. If you want to keep wasting our time, go right ahead, but the Minister's got plenty of questions to answer.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Good morning, Wes. Share the love, Wes.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Stop wasting our time.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: It's unclear what Mr Fang is doing.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Stop wasting our time.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** He should stop screaming.

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**The Hon. WES FANG:** The Minister needs to be accountable for her actions.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** I would ask that he be called to order. He's just arrived. If he's not called to order, he'll continue in the same way he behaved yesterday. He should be called to order, I would suggest.

**The CHAIR:** I'll just acknowledge the fact that the comments about wasting time also add to the point of wasting time, but I do have to listen to points of order, unfortunately, even if they are frivolous. I still need to listen to them.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** My point of order is about verballing the Minister. The Minister has provided an answer. The member tries to then commit the Minister to a position that was in his question.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It's her own position, Mr Donnelly. Good one. If you're going to run a protection racket, you've got to do it properly, all right? You've got to do it properly.

**The CHAIR:** No. I want to hear the point of order in silence.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** You might not like the answer, but you can't verbal witnesses, including the Minister, and that's what you're trying to do.

**The CHAIR:** Before I go to the crossbench members, I would just ask members to keep the sarcastic comments and quips and other little funny things at the end of questions and responses to a minimum. I now call Ms Higginson.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, good morning. Minister, you are aware we're in a climate crisis and that protecting the public native forest estate would see 1.8 million tonnes of carbon savings per year. That's 76 million tonnes by 2050, that would see around \$2.7 billion worth of climate benefit, and that's based on the price of \$35 a tonne, which is the current price. I note that Transport for NSW has priced carbon per tonne at \$63 per tonne in 2021. We're looking at around \$5 billion worth of carbon saving. What are you doing right now to end logging the public forest estate and, in particular, expand the plantation estate?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We're committed to—and I am, as the Minister, committed to—a sustainable forestry industry into the future. I want to be really clear about that.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Can I just pick you up on that?

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

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Thanks for that answer. If we're talking about a sustainable forest industry, can you please explain, Minister, how right now your forestry operations in Braemar and Myrtle are in court and on hold for illegality; Cherry Tree is in court and on hold for illegality; Newry State Forest is in court and on hold for illegality; there's the stop work order that has now been extended to 75 days in Tallaganda State Forest because of illegality—and I'm talking illegality based on unsustainable logging practices; Clouds Creek State Forest is currently on hold and not being logged because of allegations of illegality and investigation; Bulga State Forest is on hold while further investigations are undertaken around being able to comply with sustainability principles of ecological sustainable management; and Oakes State Forest is currently not being logged because of allegations of illegality in relation to logging preparation. How can you possibly sit here and say you're committed to sustainable forestry if that's what your forest estate looks like at the moment?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am committed to a sustainable forestry industry into the future. You've raised a number of issues in relation to a number of forests. I would say that the activity across the board hasn't stopped because of the proposition that you've put. It has stopped as a precaution, and we've got Mr Chaudhary who can give some specific details about particular activities in those individual forests that you name. But we take a precautionary view when there is legal action taken. For the moment, while that's occurring, harvesting is conducted elsewhere. I don't accept that these decisions have been finalised, but we were trying to work through these issues in a careful, considered way. I'm committed to a sustainable industry.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, how can you possibly say that there is a sustainable industry when you know that it has been a loss-making industry for over a decade now? We saw \$28 million in losses in the hardwood sector. We know we're making great gains in the softwood sector. If you could go to the first question, what are you doing and where's the budgetary allocation for expanding the plantation estate right now? Is there an acquisition program happening?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There are a few parts to that question. I would say that this is not a loss-making industry. There are costs available—

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** But, Minister, that's what the books say.

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**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** I'll hear the point of order.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** The Minister had just started to answer that question and, in fact, it was three questions in one. I think the Minister should be able to answer at least one of the questions before she is interrupted.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** To the point of order: I am making the allegation that the answer is incorrect. I've provided that evidence—\$28 million in loss. How can you then say it's not a loss-making industry?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** The Minister had started to answer that precise question.

**The CHAIR:** The Minister is entitled to dispute the validity of the question, if she so wishes. If that's what she's doing, I think we should be allowed to hear it. Then, Ms Higginson, you can counter that dispute. Minister, you have the call.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Thank you, Chair. The answer isn't as simple as that. Forestry is, of course, responsible for managing forests, and there are costs involved in managing forests. There are also a range of issues that have occurred in forests, including fires that have occurred over the last couple of years. I'm happy to get specific information for you from Mr Chaudhary, who is here now, and I will hand over to him.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I can add to that, Mr Chair, if that's okay. In native forest, Ms Higginson, Forestry Corporation, as you know, looks after about 1.8 million hectares.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I do know that.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** We manage that for a whole variety of reasons, including fire management, public access into the forest for recreation and tourism, as well as producing timber. We harvest somewhere around 1 per cent to 2 per cent of the forest in any given year, which means about 98 per cent to 99 per cent of the cost is utilised—

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I understand. Can I please interrupt, Mr Chaudhary? I apologise. I know it's so rude. But the practice in budgets, if it's okay, is that I will get some time with you later this afternoon. The questions at this point, because we have such a limited time with you, Minister—I understand what your effort is here to suggest that we can take the native forest logging losses that we experience across the public forest estate and offset them with the gains we make through the other parts of the forest we manage. I don't think the public finds that acceptable, Minister. I believe, and I think there is clear evidence, that there is an enormous case put to you that you need to be more fiscally responsible and, right now, not—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Is this a question or a lecture?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: There is too much argument in what, at this point, is unclear—

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Can I finish? I understand your—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** If I could make my point of order, then those opposite can respond. There is too much argument in what I assume is a question but is not even a question yet, and it's unfair. It's a questioning process, not speech-making.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I'll go lighter, Chair, if that helps.

**The CHAIR:** Unless you want to add to the point of order, it's not necessarily about going lighter, Ms Higginson. It's about the fact that we have a practice of not having argument in questions in the House. That extends to questions in committees. So if we can keep argument to a minimum in our questions, that would be great. That's something I have ruled on across the board, for all members.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, it is costing New South Wales taxpayers to log the hardwood forest estate. Those costs are getting higher each year. In forestry's own financial reports, they say that the prognosis of loss is not going to get much better in the short, medium or long term. The health of the forest estate is diminishing. The Natural Resources Commission's own report tabled in December last year says that. What are you doing to end native forest logging and to expand the plantation estate, which is what we need, in terms of our vision?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Again, there's a whole lot of things that have been put to me in that question, so I need to try to remember the early bit and work through them. Timber harvesting is not loss-making. Taxpayers have asked Forestry Corp to manage the entire estate, and that does cost money. We need these forests to be managed. There are a whole range of other opportunities inside our forests that we are also looking at, some

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of which have been outlined, and I'm sure you're aware of all of them. We're not putting an end to this industry. We have made a commitment to expand our plantation estate, and that is certainly an essential thing to do, to manage some of the issues that you are rightly concerned about.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Can you elaborate on what you're actually doing to do that, Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We've made a commitment to do that, but you would be aware that that takes time. We'll work through the best way for this Government to do that going forward, and I will continue to have that conversation with the community and you and other people who are interested in what that looks like. But we're not ending—

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Thank you, Minister. In the last minute, can I ask you about the broadscale threatened species assessments that are taking place? It is a legal responsibility on Forestry Corporation to undertake these broadscale surveys during harvest operations. On a brief analysis of the results of those surveys, it's unbelievable that Forestry Corporation is not finding threatened species when they go about these surveys. At the moment, you've got greater gliders being found in the south by citizen science and Forestry Corporation not recording the den trees. We've got stop-work orders. What are you going to do to improve the records and the assessments around threatened species? Will you commit to independent, ecological assessments before logging operations, immediately?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I expect these assessments to be done appropriately and in accordance with the requirements. I've got no information or advice that tells me that that's not the case, but I do expect these things to be done in the appropriate way.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, I put it to you that they're not being done well. The return on species is unbelievable, and that was just on a very scant analysis of the BioNet records. It's quite alarming. Minister, we need to do better on threatened species management in forests.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I expect these things to be done in the appropriate way.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, the Government made several election promises in regard to animal welfare changes. The entire legislation around animal protection is under review. We have codes like the rodeo code that's now 33 years overdue for a review. With that in mind, while we were determining which witnesses would come to this budget estimates hearing, I was advised by your office that the position of director of animal welfare had been abolished. Was this a decision by you, Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't believe that's true. I believe there's a new person in the role. Mr Hansen might give us the details.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think what you're referring to is the fact that we still have the Chief Animal Welfare Officer, and she'll be here this afternoon. You were asking about the director—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I was given advice directly from your office, Minister, that the position—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** They have probably been sacked, along with everyone else in regional.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: I am just concerned about Mrs Taylor interjecting. It was sotto voce but clearly designed to have some impact on the questioning.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's fine.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** She should respect who is questioning.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Don't waste Emma's time. Let's just keep going. That's ridiculous.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** May I continue?

**The CHAIR:** You may continue.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** So, sorry, you're talking about the director of Animal Welfare Reform?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No, the position of director of animal welfare. It was originally Suzanne Robinson.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's right. Ms Robinson went on long service leave last year.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, I understand that.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Her responsibilities have been picked up by a number of staff across the business. Those staff are continuing to drive the animal welfare reform.



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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Has someone else been hired into the position of director of animal welfare?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is someone going to be hired into that position?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The animal welfare reforms are being driven by a larger team than just one individual person now—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, is the position of director of animal welfare going to be refilled?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, it no longer exists.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So that position itself has actually been abolished?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, the answer is that there's a team of people who are doing it and further to your earlier question, we've committed to review how these things—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, Minister, I didn't ask a question about the review. The only questions I have asked—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You did.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No, I talked about the workload that would be on the department and now I'm talking about the fact that the director of animal welfare role has been abolished, which Mr Hansen has confirmed no longer exists. Minister, given the amount of workload, is now the right time to reduce the number of staff in the animal welfare department at the Department of Primary Industries?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I will go back to the answer that's been given, which is there is a team of people working on this, which is appropriate.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I understand that, but that's the team that already existed. Has there been any new recruitments or new roles created, or has the work of one person, which is a director role, been redistributed amongst people who are already very busy? I direct that to the Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, the proposition that you have put—that the roles have been given to people who were already busy—I don't know that that's the situation. I don't deal with—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So you don't think the other staff in the animal welfare department are busy?

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

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** My question is you don't believe that the other staff in the animal welfare department are busy?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm sure they are.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So then I reiterate my question: Given they're very busy with what, I assume, sounds like a very large workload and given we're reviewing the entire legislation, is now the right time to reduce the staff within the DPI that are working in animal welfare?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know that they've been reduced. The specifics of that I will hand over to Mr Hansen because—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Well, one role has been abolished.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not involved in the internal workings of staffing arrangements inside of the department.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So, Minister, you had no input into the decision to remove that role whatsoever?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not involved in the internal workings of staffing arrangements in the department. That wouldn't be appropriate.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So you weren't informed that this role would be abolished within your department and not refilled?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not involved in the internal workings. No. The answer is that there are a range of people doing this work. I'm satisfied with that. I haven't had any issues brought to my attention in relation to this.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You're satisfied that there are less staff?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** If you want the specific details for how things work inside the department, I will ask Mr Hansen to provide that detail.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I will go to Mr Hansen this afternoon. I am sure we can talk about it further. So you're confident, Minister, given the enormous workload that is going to be coming forward, that you're comfortable that that is going to be a reduced department and that one role has been—we confirmed that one role, a director role, has been abolished. We've also confirmed that it won't be replaced, so that sounds like there will be one less staff member. You're comfortable with that, Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The details of how staffing arrangements are made inside of the department are not for me to interfere with. I will ask Mr Hansen to provide the details of the specific answer to the question that you have asked.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you have any concerns, Minister, about the fact that that has been reduced or that the role has—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Can we just answer the question that was put.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I will go back to Mr Hansen this afternoon. My question to you, Minister—because we do have limited time with you—is are you concerned, as the Minister in charge of animal welfare that's about to lead a review into the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, that that role has been abolished?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Okay. Minister, I want to ask you about Garie Beach and why shark nets have been deployed there, given it's closed for the 2023-24 season and is inaccessible to the public?.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The details of the logistics of that I will ask Mr Hansen to deal with. My broad understanding is that the way that the program is rolled out—the way that the nets are put in—mean that it's done as a system across the entire geographical area. It's not a question of separating out some beaches or others. However, I'm not involved in the specifics of how they're rolled out. I will seek an answer be provided by Mr Hansen to your question.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I apologise, I keep doing this to you, Mr Hansen, but I will get back to you this afternoon. Minister, I just want to ask about your role in the process and evidence. I'm aware that there were emails and different organisations emailing you, particularly about Garie Beach, and asking that no shark net be deployed there, given it's inaccessible to the public. What evidence did you use or rely on? Obviously the call on whether or not shark nets are deployed does come down to you. What evidence did you rely on to make the call to include a shark net in that beach, given it is inaccessible and closed?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I didn't make decisions for shark nets on individual beaches. That's not within the remit—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So you didn't give any consideration to the fact that—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've given consideration to the shark net program across the board. And you're right, I have received a lot of correspondence about it, as I would expect as I receive a lot of correspondence about every issue in this portfolio. I consider the views of the community, as we did in relation to this particular issue. The reason that we determined that it was appropriate to maintain the program for this summer is that we are trialling new technologies on beaches to warn swimmers and the community about sharks, and to protect the community when they swim on our beaches.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, I'm just wondering how, when you talk about protecting community, can—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** When we considered—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, Minister, interrupt you.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am answering a question that you've asked.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I know, and I am grabbing onto one part of what you're talking about there within that answer. You talked about protecting the community. I'm wondering how that related to your decision to put a shark net into a beach that is inaccessible and is closed. You said that people had emailed you about that issue.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, no. People have emailed me about shark nets.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I mean, surely you can't make these decisions in a vacuum?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm talking broadly. I don't make decisions on individual nets on individual beaches, which is the answer I've given.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But surely this issue was raised with your office. Can I ask why it wasn't considered?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The issue of shark nets has been raised with me from every possible perspective.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Just to clarify, Minister, I'm only talking about the shark net at Garie Beach rather than any broad decision. You did say you weren't involved in any decisions in regards to individual beaches, but obviously people in the community would have emailed you specifically about Garie Beach and that would have been across your desk. I am wondering why that wasn't given consideration by you within this decision?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** What I've said is that I've received correspondence broadly in relation to shark nets from every perspective. I am aware of the issues raised on that particular beach. I don't make determinations based on individual arrangements—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So you have no power within your role as Minister to talk to the Department of Primary Industries about not putting a shark net on a beach where it would be completely inappropriate to do so?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, I'll come back to where I was at the start of this line of questioning. My understanding is that this is a program that rolls out across a geographical area, but I am happy to deal with the specifics of your question by getting the department to respond to your particular question.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** My question, though, is more about your role in that decision.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, that's what I'm trying to get an answer for you about.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You don't know what your role is in the position of a decision?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I mean, that's not what I've said.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** My question to you, Minister, is about your role.

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

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I'm trying to understand whether you have the power, as the Minister, to consider one beach—Garie Beach—which is closed and clearly inaccessible to the public. That issue has been raised to your office and you've said that you've made a decision more broadly on shark nets, but I'm wondering why you hadn't considered Garie Beach or had talked to the Department of Primary Industries about Garie Beach—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have and I'm trying to answer that part of your question if you'd like to hear the answer, that's what I'm giving you.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I'd like to hear your answer, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't make individual decisions about the material that goes on individual beaches. Inquiries in relation to this particular issue were made. The information, as I understand it, is that the program is rolled out across a geographical area. The details in relation to your specific question should be directed to Mr Hansen in relation to the actual logistics for that particular beach. That's the answer. Those are the discussions we've had. My answer is not going to change.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are we going to see alternatives to shark nets before 2024?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We're trialling a whole range of technologies over the summer, just as we did last summer, including SMART drumlines and drones. There is a range of technology being trialled; I hope that those trials are successful. We certainly want to move to using other technologies well into the future, in the closest possible future that we can. My responsibility is to make sure that we're comfortable that that technology is working as effectively as it needs to to keep people safe when they go to the beach over the summer. The decision will be made on whether we're satisfied that the technology will provide that safety to people when they swim, and any decisions about expanding that or using it instead will be made based on the information that we gather as we continue with the trials.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And please on the South Coast, because the sharks will find me.

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**The CHAIR:** We now go to questions from the Government. I note Mr Murphy has leant forward, indicating he is poised to strike.

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** We have no questions.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** The answers have been so comprehensive.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Excellent answers from the Minister.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for extending everyone's morning tea. We will come back at 11.15 a.m.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back after that short break. We will now return to questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, did you instruct your office to make requests regarding the employment of the Assistant Cross-Border Commissioner on 3 and 4 August?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Do you want me to repeat that question?

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

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Because we have evidence about it. Did you instruct your office to make requests regarding the employment of the Assistant Cross-Border Commissioner on 3 and 4 August?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Did I specifically make requests?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Did you request a brief, which we have—your office?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Information about the Cross-Border Commissioner, full stop, after articles appeared about it. I've said on record that I've been having a look at the commission.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, my question was really very straightforward. Did you instruct your office to make requests regarding the employment of the Assistant Cross-Border Commissioner on 3 and 4 August. You just said no.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** But that's a different question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Did you ask for a brief?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's not a different question; you have to tell the truth.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Stop bullying.

**The CHAIR:** I'll hear the point of order.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** I suggest this is harassment and discourtesy because that is not the question that was asked. The question that was asked was whether the Minister did something. The Minister explained that, and then it was put to her in this aggressive, badgering way that she has been inaccurate, but she hasn't. Questions should be asked clearly.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point of order: My question is here in black and white. Don't verbal me. I said, "Did you instruct your office to make requests ...?" That was my question; I read it.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** The first question, which I understood was being referred to, was not that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** We'll go back to *Hansard*. That was the first question.

**The CHAIR:** We don't have the benefit of going back to *Hansard* very quickly.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Don't tell me I've done something I haven't. I object to that.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Speak through the Chair, perhaps.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I will speak to who I want.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** I'm sure you will do what you want, but speak through the Chair.

**The CHAIR:** I suggest the member put the question again.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Okay, let's see if we get a different answer. Did you instruct your office to make requests regarding the appointment—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order: The sarcasm of "a different answer"—I mean, the individual—

**The CHAIR:** I do not uphold the point of order. I asked the member to ask the question again. She is now doing that. I didn't hear any sarcasm in terms of "a different answer".

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Did you instruct your office to make requests regarding the employment of the Assistant Cross-Border Commissioner on 3 and 4 August?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've answered that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** "No" was your answer. Okay. Did you provide the brief that you did request—which your office had and which I have in my possession after we had the inquiry, which was information—to any other Minister's office or the Premier's office?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have not provided a brief to another Minister, I don't believe. Full stop.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, did your office provide the brief that was requested by your office on the Assistant Cross-Border Commissioner to the Premier's Office or any other Ministers' offices?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You don't know. Would you like to take that on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You're not going to take that on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've just answered that. I don't know if the brief was provided.

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

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know if it was provided.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, will you please provide the Committee with the evidence of whether your office provided the brief that your office requested on the employment of the Cross-Border Commissioner to any other Ministers or the Premier's office?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not aware if a brief was provided from my office. I'm not aware of it.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, we have been provided the brief that was requested by your office after the committee hearing that we had. I'm not sure, respectfully, how you could not be aware of that. Now I am saying that the brief that is in existence—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't dispute—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —that was requested from your office, which we have evidence of, please can you provide the Committee with the information? That is, did you provide that brief that was requested to the Premier's office or any other Minister's office? If you don't know, as you said, will you please take that on notice and provide the Committee with that advice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** With respect, you've just asked me the same question in a different way, but it's the same question you asked before: Did I provide a brief to another office? I did not.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Did your office provide the brief that exists on the employment of the Cross-Border Commissioner to any other Minister?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: It has been asked and answered.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** If you don't know, will you take that on notice and provide the Committee with the answer?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The Committee seems to have the answer, based on what you've just put to me.

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**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: This is now the third time that question has been asked.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** There are two questions there.

**The CHAIR:** Members are allowed to ask the same question in different ways over and over again, if they wish to. I don't see it as badgering at this point. I would probably suggest, if we do have a copy of this briefing, perhaps it should be tabled and then the Minister can be asked to answer further questions on it. But I'm not telling the honourable member how to proceed.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you, Mr Chair. I do have the brief because it was given to us after the committee inquiry into this. I'm now asking: Did the Minister or her office—so any of the staff in her office—provide the brief that exists, which you said didn't exist—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I didn't say that at all.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Then will you provide that information to the Committee?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** What information?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sorry, the question is very simple. I've asked you—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Oh, come on, Stephen.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** This has gone beyond the limits of courtesy.

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

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** We're getting multiple propositions; we're getting expressions of disagreement.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** You obviously haven't done estimates before, Mr Lawrence.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** If the honourable member could just ask, question by question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point of order—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** There is a way to do this, and it preserves her time.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I've asked the Minister a question to provide information as to whether the brief was circulated by any member of her staff or herself to the Premier's office or another Minister's office. I've asked her respectfully to take it on notice and provide it to the Committee.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Discourteous expressions of scepticism are what we're getting. It's a waste of time.

**The CHAIR:** I've been hearing the escalating frustration from the member. I unfortunately can't compel the Minister to answer in a particular way. You have put the question as to whether she will table it. If you want to put that to her again then you can, but I think she has answered the question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Will you table whether or not your office provided the Premier's office or another Minister's office with the brief on the Cross-Border Commissioner?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Will I table that? I don't know how I would table that. I don't know. In general terms, communication happens between offices on a very regular basis.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I understand that, and that's why I asked you the question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't personally track what communication is happening, what information is being shared, because we have to work across government on different issues, as you would expect. I don't personally track it.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** If we're to move on, Minister, I'll ask a supplementary question to my colleague's question. Did the Premier's office or any of your ministerial colleagues' offices, including the environment Minister's office, request a copy of that brief?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Can you take that on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —for the same reason as the answer I just gave.

**UNCORRECTED**

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Can you take that on notice?

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Can you take that on notice, Minister?

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order: You can't have two members badgering the Minister at once. I mean, fair crack of the whip.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** All I'm asking is that you take it on notice. You seem reluctant to do so. That's the standard procedure.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There's no reluctance. I'm answering the question, and I'm giving the context that these communications and conversations happen multiple times a day.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, please answer the question. Will you go back—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** Order! We will not have people yelling across the room or talking over the top of each other. Purely from a Hansard point of view, it's just not going to fly. Just like yesterday, we'll have question and answer, question and answer. I appreciate that you're probably not getting the answers that you want in terms of whether the Minister will take it on notice. Unfortunately, we can't direct the Minister to answer a question in a particular way.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Standing Order 229 (2) states that evidence must be directly related to the question, on page 79 of the standing orders.

**The CHAIR:** Are you disputing my ruling?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** No, I'm saying that's what we're saying. The Minister's answers are not being relevant.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'll just move on, Minister. You can just answer yes or no, if that's alright. I have asked you on numerous occasions if this brief that you requested was provided to other ministerial offices. I completely respect and understand that you don't track things; you're very busy. But what I've asked is: Did anyone in your office send it forward? It's a simple check. Will you provide that to the Committee, if there is evidence that the brief was forwarded to a Minister or the Premier's office? It's a yes or no.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Communications happen across offices on—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I understand that.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —various topics all the time—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: She's entitled to answer.

**The CHAIR:** I know what the point of order is going to be. I'll let the Minister finish her answer. I know you're not happy with the answer in the way it's coming out.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's just yes or no. Will you provide that or not?

**The CHAIR:** We can't direct the Minister to say yes or no, unfortunately.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Communication happens, as you would expect, across government all the time. I am, of course, aware of the sensitivities in this matter because it is before another inquiry in this Parliament. I'm looking forward to seeing what that inquiry comes up with. I don't want to interfere in any processes. I don't track briefs and communications, as I've said.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You sent it on, but you won't provide the Committee with the answer. This is appalling.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, that's not what I said.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'll move on. Were you asked to provide a comment—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Can you stop interrupting me?

**The CHAIR:** I'll hear the point of order.

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**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** You can't verbal the Minister at the end of her answer and then think you can move on and get away with it. That's just not acceptable. That's not the way committees—

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

**The CHAIR:** Let me rule. I have already ruled on the fact that we shouldn't be making quips and sarcastic comments at the end of questions, despite how frustrating the answer to those questions may be for the asker. I accept that you were redirecting. You can do that in a way that's a bit more polite.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** This is budget estimates; you are supposed to answer the questions.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have answered.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: It's discourteous the way that Mrs Taylor continues to attack the witness not through a question but through commentary and sarcasm.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You're all attacking me with your constant points of order.

**The CHAIR:** I have just ruled that you shouldn't be making those quips, and then you made another quip, Mrs Taylor. I am trying to be fair here.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** These three blokes are just firing things at me.

**The CHAIR:** Can we just get to the next question? I'm conscious of your time.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Were you asked to provide a comment to the media prior to the story running in *The Daily Telegraph* on 3 August?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You'll have to tell me what story you're referring to. I provide comments—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's the constant line of questioning about the employment of the Cross-Border Assistant Commissioner.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm genuinely not trying to be cute about this, but I provide comments on a regular basis. You'll need to be specific.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It was on 3 August and it was in relation to the employment of the Cross-Border Assistant Commissioner, of which your office requested a brief be generated, which was provided to us in the Committee. My question is again, for your reference, were you asked to provide a comment to the media prior to the story running in *The Daily Telegraph* on 3 August?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** And I've asked for some clarification on what you're referring to.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And I've told you—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm not trying to be cute about it.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —it's about the employment of the Cross-Border Assistant Commissioner.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** From my recollection, there's probably more than one story that's run about it.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** My date was specific.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'd like to be able to answer your question with the appropriate information, so I'm just asking for some more specifics.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I can't be more specific than the date. It's 3 August. That was in my initial—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know what I said on any particular day—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Would you like to take that on notice?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —of the year.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Would you like to take—



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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** If you want to put a proposition to me, then I will answer it. But I don't know what I did on 22 September; I don't know what I did on 27 March. You'll have to—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** You probably don't know what you did yesterday.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —put something to me.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: I want to particularly take a point of order in relation to Mr Fang's interjection, which was, "You probably don't know what you did yesterday." It was a complete insult. It was completely gratuitous.

**The CHAIR:** It wasn't helpful, Mr Fang. I suggest you refrain from making those comments.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, will you take that on notice or not?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm asking genuinely for some specifics.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** My question again—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** If I can help with this—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** This is very straightforward—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —with perhaps a general answer, because I don't know specifically what you're referring—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** If you'd just answer, I'd really appreciate it.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** If a quote from me appeared in an article, it's likely that I provided the quote.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** My question was: Were you asked to provide a comment to the media prior to the story running? That's a "yes"?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** If a quote was run of me saying something in a newspaper, it's likely that I've given that quote.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Have you requested information on any other public service officials in your department, like you did on the Cross-Border Assistant Commissioner?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I simply don't accept the premise of that question. I have already answered that I did not seek specific information about the person to which you're referring.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** You're misleading estimates, Minister.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You did.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: Was that a question or just an insult?

**The CHAIR:** I don't think it is a question; I think it's a statement. If you want to reframe it as a question, that's fine, but it's not a question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** We have from the Committee, which you would know and your staff at the back will know, by the looks on their faces—we have the brief that was requested—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** —from your office.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** It is not—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** This is ridiculous.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** —in order for the honourable member to reflect on staff and the expressions on their faces. It's worse than a verbal.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm happy to withdraw that.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** She should leave the staff out of it.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I just want to move on.

**The CHAIR:** She has withdrawn the comment.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** What is the status of the Cross-Border Commissioner and Cross-Border Assistant Commissioner at the moment?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** As in the office or—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And the positions. Are they there? Are they working? Is the office functioning? Are they in attendance?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Is the office—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There's about six questions in that.

**The CHAIR:** I'm hearing the point of order.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** There was four questions asked at that point—four consecutive questions. We know how questioning and answering is done. You can't try to steamroll four questions at the Minister and get away with it. That's not the way this operates.

**The CHAIR:** The Minister is quite capable of answering multiple questions at a time. I refer to the Mookhey technique, where he would bombard you with 15 questions in one paragraph. The Minister should step out her answers in line with those questions.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll have to remember the questions in order.

**The CHAIR:** She can repeat it if you'd like.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I can repeat it.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Is the Cross-Border Commission function working inside of the department? I believe so. I have not had any issues raised with me in terms of the function of the part of the department that deals with cross-border issues. Nothing has been brought to my attention that that function is not functioning, for want of a better way of putting it. I'm happy to ask Ms Fox if there's any issues. Nothing has been raised with me. In terms of individual people working inside of the department, that is a matter for the department.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'll ask Ms Fox—if that's all right, Minister—in the afternoon session because we have them. It's really interesting because you say that, yet you requested a brief on one of your employees. That's twice now where you've said that you don't deal with the internal workings of your department, but you just completely contradicted yourself.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** That's not true.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Upon your appointment—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** What you've just said is not true.

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

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order: It's the same old serial offender. She's verballing the Minister at the end—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You look ridiculous, boys. You really do.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Donnelly. I know what you're—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I object to being called a "boy". I ask you to withdraw that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm very happy to withdraw.

**The CHAIR:** I'm conscious of the time. Can we not verbal the Minister? Repeat the question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Upon your appointment as a Minister, were you provided with a charter from the Premier?

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

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Have you been given priorities by the Premier?

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

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** What are your top five priorities for the department over the course of this term of government?

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** My priorities are making sure that regional New South Wales gets its fair share of funding that we committed that we would deliver. Further to what I was giving evidence about this morning, we took a proposition to the people of New South Wales about investing in regional New South Wales in a better way. We were elected as a government off the back of that, I would argue. It is part of my responsibility to make sure that we are properly investing in regional New South Wales in the way that we said we would. That includes—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Point of order: My question was quite specific. What are your top five priorities? If you'd like to take that on notice, I'm really happy. I have got limited time.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm answering the question. It's making sure that we're investing—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I need to move on. Do you know what your top five priorities are, or can you take that on notice?

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

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** To the point of order: There is no point of order. The Minister is answering the question. You cannot compel the Minister to answer in a particular way. It's discourteous to interrupt.

**The CHAIR:** That's right. But the member can actually redirect or cease to hear the answer and move on to another question, if she so wishes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, are you classified as a senior Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know how that classification is determined, so I doubt it, on that basis.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It is determined. You don't know. Are you a standing member of the Expenditure Review Committee as the lead Minister for the Department of Regional NSW?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Am I on the Expenditure Review Committee? No.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Can you guarantee that, despite the obvious budget cuts to capital expenditure, the Department of Regional NSW will remain as a standalone agency over this term of government?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There's a couple of questions in that. I don't accept the premise that you've put to me in relation to cuts. That's not what has occurred. The Department of Regional NSW does exist as a standalone organisation, and that's—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** My question was for the term of government.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There's no plans to change it.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Is the Department of Regional NSW still considered a central agency?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know the definition that you're putting to me.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You don't know. That's fine. I'll move on.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Do you agree that the department—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** You're just wasting time, Greg.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** The Minister answers, and then she comes back by saying she doesn't know. That's just trying to have the final say. That's not the way—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** The Minister said she didn't know.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** She said she didn't know, and Bronnie just repeated it. Greg, come on! Seriously!

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Can I move on to my next question, Chair?

**The CHAIR:** The Minister admitted that she didn't know. The member just reiterated that point. Can we move on to the next question, Ms Taylor?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** What are your primary responsibilities as the Minister for Western New South Wales, and who in the department supports those responsibilities?

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There is a section in the department that supports my role in Western New South Wales. I have engaged with them quite a bit, because Western New South Wales deserves as much attention as it can get from this Government, and I'm certainly determined to make sure that is the case. My priorities for Western New South Wales are an enhanced and more acute version of the broader priorities that I have for regional New South Wales, which is to make sure that we are delivering the services that are required across that region, which needs it, probably, more than any other in New South Wales.

**The CHAIR:** I will go to Ms Boyd and then to Ms Faehrmann.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Good morning, Minister. I will ask a few quick questions and then I will hand over to my colleague. Labor made an election commitment to replace the outdated POCTA legislation and introduce a new animal welfare framework in New South Wales. When is that happening?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We did make a commitment to do that. I have begun work on that. I have begun consultation around what it should look like. I'm conscious that there has been a lot of consultation over a long period of time. Obviously, as a new Minister, I need to consult and seek the views on how I will deliver on that commitment. That process has started. I will have more to say in the public domain soon.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** What is the scheduled delivery date for that project?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't have a particular timetable, but the work has begun.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Labor made an election commitment that it would introduce legislation to ban puppy farms in New South Wales. When is that going to happen?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It will be happening in this term of government.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Labor also made an election commitment to create a new independent office of animal welfare. As you know, The Greens have put forward a bill to do just that. Is that something that you were also working on?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** That was a commitment that we made to the people of New South Wales, and I will be responsible for delivering on that. I have started the work on considerations for what that might look like and how it would be dealt with. Again, I will have more to say about it soon.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Why were animal welfare organisations told not to make submissions for the September budget?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know if people were or were not told to make submissions. I didn't tell people not to make submissions.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Why was no money allocated for animal welfare organisations in the September budget?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Because the work has begun on what we committed to doing, which is some of the things that you just mentioned—the independent office for animal welfare and the review of the Act. We're doing the work around that now. Once that work is done, we'll go through the budget process to ensure that there's a budget for the future of what that looks like. There is money allocated. There has been money allocated to animal welfare organisations over the course of the last year, and somebody—probably Mr Hansen—will correct me, but I think \$20 million went to the RSPCA recently. I might have that figure wrong, but I will just check.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I will come back to that.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sure. So they have been provided with funds, but, as we work through what the new bodies will look like, that's when we'll deal with the funding.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Given that the election commitments are in a process of being finalised by the end of this term of Parliament, are you saying that there will be no new money for animal welfare organisations until the end of this term of Parliament, or will we see it in the next year?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm working through the process of that now, and, as we determine what these things will look like, I will go through the internal budget processes, as people would expect. That will be a consideration for the next round of budgets and, I'm sure, questions at the next round of estimates.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Do you think that, as agriculture Minister, you're able to adequately prioritise the welfare of animals in this State?

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

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**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** How much of your total attention and hours would be spent on animal welfare versus agriculture in an average week?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Off the top of my head, I really couldn't give you a breakdown. I don't necessarily categorise individual things inside of this portfolio on that basis, because it is such a broad remit. But it absolutely is a priority. It was a priority commitment for us as a government, and it does get my proper attention.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Would you endorse the creation of a separate Minister for animal welfare, given the importance the community places on this issue?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's not something that we're considering at this point in time.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I will hand over to my colleague for the remaining time.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Good morning, Minister. Are you aware that the former Coalition Government, when Barry O'Farrell was Premier, downgraded the Environment portfolio, which included moving marine parks to the primary industries department. When will you be handing marine parks back to the environment department?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There are a couple of parts to that question. Am I aware of what Barry O'Farrell did when he was Premier? No. I'm sorry; that is a little too far away in my rear-view mirror, and I wasn't in Parliament at that time. I accept that there were movements made. I don't accept that it was a downgrading. They are within my remit, and that's where they will be.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** In her second reading speech to the Act that did this at the time, the then agriculture Minister, Katrina Hodgkinson, said that this change was all about overturning Labor's politically motivated marine parks. Do you support Labor's approach to marine parks, or do you support the Coalition's approach to marine parks?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I support Labor's approach to marine parks. I'm responsible for them and I look forward to dealing with them appropriately.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Yes, it happened under Barry O'Farrell, but you and I have met about this, Minister. I've spoken to you about it. You're well aware that, under the Coalition Government, marine parks were moved to the Department of Primary Industries. You're aware of that?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, actually, we have met about this and what we've discussed is, for want of a better way of putting it, your views. I'm sure they are on behalf of others, but you have expressed views to me about where you think it should fit within government. I accept that that's your view. I respect that there are different views across different sectors of the community about where certain things should fit and where responsibility should fit. You have put that to me, but they are within my remit and I'm comfortable with that.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The question is, though, that you're aware that this is what the Coalition did to, basically, get control of marine parks. They called Labor's approach "politically motivated" and they moved marine parks into the DPI. That's a fact. It's not my view. It's a fact. Correct?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No. You've put a couple of things to me there, including something that is not a fact; it's an opinion. I'm not engaging on whether it was politically motivated or—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What was the opinion, Minister? Which bit was my opinion, in that question?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You've put to me that people, 10 years ago, expressed a view about political motivations for decisions that were made. I was not in the Parliament 10 years ago. I don't know what the political motivations were for decisions. I respect that you have a view about it. I don't know what the political motivations were at that time.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Thank you, Minister. In the first question that I asked you, I said where the quote "politically motivated" had come from. It came from The Nationals agriculture Minister at the time, Katrina Hodgkinson, who said that the whole change to marine parks at that time was to get rid of the politically motivated approach by Labor on marine parks. That is not my view. It was the agriculture Minister's view. So do you support National Party agriculture Minister Katrina Hodgkinson's way of dealing with marine parks, or do you support Labor's approach?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** With respect, I'm not disputing that that was something that was said probably 10 years ago. Again, with respect, Katrina Hodgkinson was the Minister, I think, about 10 years ago. I can't speak to people's views, at that time, about political motivation. I understand that there are views about this. We are a Labor Government. We don't see the world in the same way that the Coalition does. I won't treat

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this portfolio in the same way that a National Party Minister would. I say that without opinion. We're of different political persuasions. What I will say is that there is joint responsibility and joint work done between me and the Minister for the Environment, as there are in a number of areas of my portfolio, for very good reason. We don't operate as silos inside of our government, and I work closely with the Minister for the Environment on issues that cross over—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Thanks, Minister. I have very limited time, so I'm going to interrupt. Labor brought to the election a policy of restoring sanctuary zones in marine parks, yet we've heard nothing. Speaking of politically motivated, that was a politically motivated decision by the former Government at the time to essentially declare an amnesty over fishing in sanctuary zones. When are you going to restore those sanctuary zones, the politically motivated decision by the previous Government?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm working through all of the parts of this portfolio, including commitments that were made over time, and I'll have more to say about these things going forward.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, you're aware that this was simply a political decision that was to instruct fisheries compliance officers to not enforce the law, so with the stroke of a pen, and given that was an election promise, you could just restore those sanctuary zones and instruct fisheries compliance officers to enact the law. Why isn't that a simple thing for you to do?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm working through this and every other area that I'm responsible for in a careful, considered way. This is part of that process that I am undertaking as Minister. These things need to be considered properly and carefully, not with the stroke of a pen.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What is it that you are considering? What are you considering in this area about basically restoring the law when it comes to sanctuary zones?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't accept the proposition that you're putting to me in terms of restoring. There are provisions in place now—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Why don't you accept the proposition about restoring? What is there about that proposition when they were sanctuary zones? The previous Government basically said to fisheries officers, "Oh, don't enforce the law."

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know what—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What is it about the word "restoring" that you're so objecting to?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Respectfully, you're putting a lot of propositions to me about what the previous Government did and what motivations were and what people's views of those—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** They are the facts, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Okay. Is there a question?

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** They're the facts.

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

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** They're not propositions. I'm just stating to you the facts that happened under the previous Government.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Okay, and now this is the Government that is in place and is considering—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** And not doing anything, not doing a single thing when it comes to marine conservation.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll wait for you to ask a question and then I'm happy to engage.

**The CHAIR:** Is there a question, in the last 10 seconds?

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Yes. When will you restore sanctuary zones, because that was a Labor Party commitment? When can we expect to see that in the next three and a bit years?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't have a specific timetable.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Are you going to do it?

**The CHAIR:** That was the bell. Thank you, Minister. I might turn quickly to cultural fishing. Last Parliament there was a report that was supported by your party which made a finding that the process in terms of

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getting this problem sorted was too slow. When will we see associated regulation and locally driven community management plans with regard to cultural fishing?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** That's a good question and this is certainly an important issue. We're working through all of the relevant information, and I would like to get to a point where we can have local plans in place across local communities. That's certainly the preferred option. There are some that are quite successful in some parts of the State and I think—well, I don't think, there is room to develop more of those across the State, and there are other parts where conversations are continuing. We will be dealing with the regulation about this soon, but I'm consulting and making sure that we're engaging with everybody that needs to be engaged with in this space, as you would expect.

**The CHAIR:** With all due respect, there's probably been about 13 years of consultation with the community. Do you have a work schedule or a time line set out for when the regulation will be drafted and when the community plans will be established?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Very soon.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, are you aware of the 2022 Ernst and Young report on forestry operations, particularly the socioeconomic status of the hardwood timber industry?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I may have been briefed on it. You're welcome to put questions to me on it.

**The CHAIR:** It was funded by the Commonwealth and obviously also funded by the NSW DPI. Perhaps on notice can you come back to me with what your department and what your Government's position is on that report?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm happy to come back with details on the report that you've put to me. I'm happy to deal with any other questions but, yes, that's fine, I'm happy to take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** I also draw your attention to a large report. Are you aware of the StollzNow social licence to operate?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, I am.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Chaudhary is nodding; I'm sure he's read all 252 pages. I'll narrow your reading, Minister, to the qualitative and quantitative findings. I'm wondering whether you could, perhaps on notice, come back with what your Government's position is on those qualitative and quantitative findings in that report. Is that possible?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Yes, I'm happy to do that. The survey results were quite interesting, and I think what they demonstrate is that there's certainly an appetite for a discussion around this space in the public domain and the social licence in this space, and it's absolutely part of what I want to do broadly in terms of my responsibilities in that space.

**The CHAIR:** There was an article put out by Michael West Media. Accepting that it was full of hyperbole and emotive language, it speaks of a disagreement between the EPA and Forestry Corporation around the science of forestry. I'm just wondering is there an actual conflict in your various departments on the science of forestry, first and foremost?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** On the science of forestry, look, I'm working closely with the Minister for the Environment, who has the responsibility for the EPA. We want to make sure that we're working closely together so that this is not an either/or proposition. We want—I certainly want—a sustainable forestry industry well into the future and we need to manage the environmental aspects of that at the same time. We're working closely together in this part of my portfolio, as we are in others, because it's important that we manage both of those things.

**The CHAIR:** Is there a conflict between what Forestry Corporation says in terms of science and what the Natural Resources Commission says, or are they in agreement and is the disagreement between the EPA and everyone else?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I can't answer questions on behalf of the EPA.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Chaudhary, do you agree with the Natural Resources Commission science on forestry and disagree with the EPA?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I think there are different views on forestry science and people are entitled to their views. I don't know how much more to add to that.

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**The CHAIR:** What are your views on the EPA's views?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** We are working quite closely with the EPA on a whole range of things there, including measures that we can provide into the forest to protect environmental values and those sorts of things. There are no specific views that I'm across that are, you know, contrary to what we are saying.

**The CHAIR:** Sure. Minister, there has been a lot of talk in the media around psychosocial risks and work health and safety. What work has your department done on the impact of aggressive and violent protesters in forestry and how contractors are supposed to manage those psychosocial risks?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's a great question, and it's something that I certainly take seriously as the Minister. I've met with a number of people who work in this sector, and with you, about this, but certainly with people who work in this sector. They are under enormous pressure. They are highly skilled, fantastic workers who deserve to be treated properly in their workplace. I'm very concerned about the level and style of some activities that occur in relation to protests in some parts of the forestry estate.

Of course, people have the right to protest and raise issues about this or any other area, but I am concerned, and people who work in this sector have raised with me their concerns about people hiding in camouflage gear inside of their trucks or underneath their truck tyres, hiding in machinery, hiding in camouflage gear in long grass. When people are operating significantly sized heavy machinery, that is not a way for people to convey a message. I am concerned about the impacts that it has on people's mental health.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, given your concern, and accepting that your Government's not willing to support the bill that I've put up, what steps are you putting in place as a government to mitigate those risks and minimise those risks, particularly around psychosocial hazards, but also obviously the physical hazards as well?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** People are entitled to be safe at work. That is a rule across all of government.

**The CHAIR:** That is a nice, broad motherhood statement, but what concrete action, what positive action are we going to do to curb this behaviour?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We're undertaking work on a Forestry road map, which will factor in part of specific support that needs to be in place for people who are working in this area. They are entitled to be safe at work. Forestry is also currently paying for security for people to get in and out of their workplaces and for police to assist them to get in and out of their work places. That's practical support that is in place that shouldn't have to be in place, but it is in place.

**The CHAIR:** Do we have a time line for that Forestry road map?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't have a time line to give you today, but soon.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, who is in charge and running the Office of the Cross-Border Commissioner as of today?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** That is a question to the department. I don't deal with who's—there is no Cross-Border Commissioner in place, but the question that you put to me as to who is running it today—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So you don't know if the Cross-Border Commissioner is actually running his own office as of today?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I assume he is.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** You assume he is, but you don't actually definitively know that—is that fair to say?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, he's the Cross-Border Commissioner, so I assume he is.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** We'll come back to that maybe with Ms Fox in the afternoon session. I want to return, Minister, to the 9 August *Daily Telegraph* article that I tabled earlier, where you are quoted in that article as saying that the staffing levels within the Department of Regional NSW and the Office of the Cross-Border Commissioner are absurd. Part of that article talks about comms staff, and it's quoted as saying that they're just backroom staff. Do you believe it is the case that that is effectively not a good use of public funds?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We took a package to the people of New South Wales that we would spend money in a better way, and that includes making sure that money is spent on the ground, assisting, providing services—



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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Well, if I could redirect that question specifically around communications staff within your agency, do you think they're needed and do you think it's a good use of public funds?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** That's a different question.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** That's why I've redirected it.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Of course there is a need for people inside of departments to communicate the work that is occurring and to communicate the work of government more broadly. In a budget where there are not unlimited resources, it's important that we make sure—and I certainly as Minister want to ensure—that every cent is spent providing services directly to the people of New South Wales rather than back-of-house administrative staff.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Following your answer, Minister, with regard to referring to comms staff as backroom staff, which that article does, which you're quoted in, do you consider what kind of effect those types of comments would have on the morale, mental health and wellbeing of the staff in Mr Hansen's agency and Ms Fox's agency—coming from their Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I think the staff who work in Regional NSW, DPI, LLS, Forestry and all of the sectors that I'm responsible for are fantastic. I will praise them right now on the public record.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So why would you make those comments, Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I think they do a genuinely terrific job. I think everyone sitting at the table with me now does a fantastic job.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'd agree with that but, Minister, why would you make those comments if that's the case?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The comments that I made were in relation to making sure that, in a difficult budget situation, where there aren't unlimited resources, the resources we have are being spent delivering services directly to the community.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Do you still maintain, Minister, that comms staff within your agency are backroom staff?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't have an opinion either way on what their description is.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But you did in that article, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** My answer remains the same: We need to make sure that, with—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So they're still backroom staff?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —the limited resources in this budget, which we inherited from your Government, we are spending money where it needs to be spent, and that is delivering services—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So do you stand by your comments made in that article, Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I stand by what I'm saying right now, which is that in a finite budget situation, which we have to fix—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But do you stand by your comments in that article, Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —because we inherited a mess from you lot, that we have to make sure that money is spent. This is not the Barilaro ATM anymore.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Just to confirm, Minister do you still maintain your comments in *The Daily Telegraph* article?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Money has to be spent in consideration of the priorities of the Government, of which I am a member. That means delivering services to people in regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Redirecting now, based on your answer, Minister—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** If that means that resources have to be moved around in order to make sure that services are properly delivered where they are needed—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'm trying to redirect the question. I've got the answer.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —then that is what we will do.

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**The CHAIR:** Order! The member is trying to redirect, Minister.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, did you personally give those comments in *The Daily Telegraph* article on 9 August or did your media adviser or a representative from your office?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Can you take that on notice for me?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No. I will give you the answer that I've given before, which is—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** No, that is all right. I will move on, Minister. I will redirect.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —if there are quotes from me—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, I am going to redirect and move on because you won't take it on notice.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You don't want to hear the answers and they don't suit your narrative.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, have you received a report from the department explaining the size of the office of the secretary?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Have I received a report?

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Yes, you asked and commissioned for a report to be done on the size of the office of the Secretary of Regional NSW, Ms Rebecca Fox.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I did, and the size of the office has been reduced because, in line with the answers that I've been giving, we need to—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** How many has it been reduced by, Minister? Have you got any numbers on hand?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I do, but I'm not going to give them off the top of my head because it is better that I be accurate. Ms Fox can potentially give that detail.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I can pursue that with Ms Fox in the afternoon. Will you be terminating any additional staff as a result of the findings of that report and, as you described, those absurd staffing levels?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We are making sure that the resources that we have—and they are reduced because of the budget that your Government blew—are being managed in an appropriate way to make sure that the services that we committed to delivering to the people of regional New South Wales are being delivered.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, if that is the case, I am going to redirect, based on your answer. Minister, in your view, what do you think are reasonable staffing levels for the office of the Secretary of the Department of Regional NSW?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't determine the staffing levels for the office.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But you have a view that—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** That is a question for the secretary of the department and I—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But you've just contradicted yourself, possibly, Minister, where you've commissioned a report on the size of the staffing levels in the secretary's office and then you've just said that you don't determine that. So you've obviously—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't determine it, but I'm allowed to have a look at it and I've got to make sure that that money is being spent—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But you've clearly made decisions and instructed the agency to reduce staffing levels in the office of the Secretary of the Department of Regional NSW.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** What is my clear instruction is that we are spending money in regional New South Wales in line with the priorities of this Government, and they are the priorities that we took to the people of New South Wales. So resources have to be used in a way that is in line with the things that we told the community we would do.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Based on that answer, if the Department of Regional NSW staffing levels are to be realigned based on the priorities, wouldn't it be fair to say that if you were reducing staffing levels

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in your own agency, you have less priorities to deliver for the people of regional New South Wales—because how can you possibly deliver those priorities with less resources and staff to do it?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We are delivering the priorities of this Government, and I've answered many questions about that today.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, the former State Government made a commitment when the Department of Regional NSW was established, and that is that it would be as a majority agency with decentralised jobs. There was a commitment made of 400 jobs across regional New South Wales, and they were in Coffs Harbour, Armidale, Dubbo and Queanbeyan. As the Minister for Regional New South Wales, can you commit to this Committee today and to the people of regional New South Wales that there will be zero job cuts and losses as part of those 400 jobs in regional New South Wales?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There are staff movements across departments. Just because there is a number in one year, it doesn't mean there's the same number in another year. It depends on the work that is occurring across any department. A significant number of the people who work in the Department of Regional NSW—76 per cent, in fact—work in regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Based on that then, Minister, and in order to keep it simple, I'll redirect the question. Can you commit that there will be no job losses for the Department of Regional NSW where those jobs are based in regional New South Wales—make it collectively, rather than separately?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Seventy-six per cent of the staff in the department currently—I'll check that that's the most accurate figure, but it's roughly about that percentage of the department—are based in regional New South Wales. That's completely appropriate for a department that is for regional New South Wales. I have repeatedly said, and I'll continue to say, the resources that we have and that I have within my remit need to be spent in an appropriate way to deliver the things that we said—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay. Yes, that was a previous answer and I accept that as part of your answer. Minister, again, can you commit to the people and the communities in regional New South Wales that they will see no job losses as part of the positions that are based in regional New South Wales?

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Point of order: I'm reluctant to take a point of order but—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Why start now?

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** —it's about courtesy and respect for the witness, and also allowing the witness to answer the question that's been asked and answered. Then, as soon as the Minister starts answering the second question, again statements are put to her that are not questions. It's not courteous, it's not respectful and it's not allowing the witness, the Minister, to answer.

**The CHAIR:** I was listening intently for anything other than questions. I didn't hear statements. I did hear the same question re-put multiple times, which is still in order. If you're going to do so, just do so quietly.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you, Mr Chair. Minister, how many executive level positions within the Department of Regional NSW are planning to be cut?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We gave a commitment that we would make changes in relation to that across the board, across all of government.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay. But specifically, Minister, in your agency, within your department, the Department of Regional NSW, how many executive level positions are looking to be cut?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll take the specific details of that on notice, but we took a commitment to the election that we would reduce across the board, across all of government, the number of senior executives across all of government because the numbers blew out across all of government under your Government—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, based on your answer—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and it goes to my ongoing and previous answer, which is that we need to make sure that resources are allocated where they are needed—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you, Minister. I suppose I'll redirect the question.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —across regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** You have confirmed that there will be cuts to executive level positions within the agency. You just don't have a number yet. Is that correct?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It was an election commitment that we would reduce the numbers.

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** That's what I'm confirming here. You are now the Minister for Regional New South Wales. I want to confirm—you have confirmed as evidence today for the Committee that there will be cuts at the executive level within the department, but it is not resolved as yet just exactly how many of those positions are to be cut.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I didn't say that at all. You asked me for the details and I said I would take it on notice, and I'm taking it on notice.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We made a commitment—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you, Minister, if you're going to take that on notice I will move on.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —to reduce those numbers across the board. You've asked for numbers and I've taken that question on notice.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, with regard to the Department of Primary Industries—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm just being clear because you've just said something that's completely untrue about what I said.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Well, you're going to take it on notice. That's fine. I'm happy to move on and keep it flowing because we've got limited time. Minister, with regards to the Department of Primary Industries, with their head office based in Orange—a fantastic part of the State, I might add—can you confirm to the people of the Central West that there will be no job losses within the Department of Primary Industries in Orange?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The Department of Primary Industries does have a fantastic operation running out of Orange and that's where it will remain. That certainly is a better fit-out than the material you've got over most of those towns for whatever election campaign you're running, but I support the operation running out of Orange and we're maintaining that.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Moving on, with the Department of Primary Industries, who do a fantastic job based out in Orange there—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** They do.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** —will you extend DPI's travel budget to ensure that they can continue to deliver on their statutory duties including biosecurity, plantation management as well as research?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No issues have been raised with me in relation to any part of the department not being able to carry out its functions.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** But it can carry out its functions. It does carry out its functions very well—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Is the department—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and I'm happy to praise them on the record.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'll redirect the question based on your answer, Minister. Is the Department of Primary Industries under any cuts to its travel budget?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We are looking at how resources across government and across the department can be spent in a more efficient way, given the budget circumstance we inherited from your Government.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Does the department have less funding in your first budget as the Minister for Regional New South Wales compared to the previous financial year for DPI's travel budget?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't determine the individual make-up of the travel budget of the department. I'm happy to hand over —

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'll explore it later this afternoon with Mr Hansen, but are you aware, as the Minister for Agriculture in this State, that DPI's travel budget could be slashed?

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** DPI does a fantastic job and I expect they'll continue to do that fantastic job within the resources that they have. I look forward to continuing to see the fantastic research and development work that they do. I look forward to seeing the fantastic biosecurity work that they do. They do a terrific job in every part of the State and there is no reason for that to be interrupted.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** And, again, are you able to commit—which is one of the great decentralisation success stories of the State of New South Wales—that the DPI in Orange and its functions will see no job losses under your reign as the Minister for Regional New South Wales and the Minister for Agriculture?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I support the department to be able to fulfil its operations.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The budget is what it is and we have to make sure that resources are spent in a way—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** "The budget is what it is."

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Because of your Government. We have inherited a significant budget black hole because your Government failed to get it under control.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, I'd like to move—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: I've let the last six interjections from Mrs Taylor go. She's now raising her volume. She's done it for the sixth time. I'd ask that she be called to order. It's discourteous.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Heaven forbid that estimates is slightly robust.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** And it's a breach of the procedural fairness resolution. It's a question of degree and decorum.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** No, seriously, you've no idea.

**The CHAIR:** I just remind the member that she wasn't asking a question. I know she was excited by the answer, but could we at least try to have a natural order of things.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'll keep it moving. Minister, I'd like to ask a question with regards to your portfolio of Western New South Wales. It's very fair to say that the Legislative Assembly seats of Barwon and Murray represent the majority of what could be defined as Western New South Wales. Can you tell me how many local government areas are in the seat of Barwon and how many are in the seat of Murray?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I can. Give me one second and I'll tell you.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** The answers are 10 for Murray and 13 for Barwon, Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Thanks.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'll move on because I've got limited time. I've got to keep moving and I really want to talk about drought.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** That was a real gotcha question, Sam.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Well, she didn't have the answer so, yes, it was.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** All right.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Moving on. Minister, with regard to drought, how much of New South Wales is currently considered to be in some form of drought across New South Wales?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The last statistic I have is 3 per cent but, if that's changed, I'm happy to get more details from Mr Hansen.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** What I'd like to focus on, Minister, is obviously our State is seeing drier conditions.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It is.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** There are different parts of the State that are in different conditions. I will table for the Committee the combined drought indicator off the Department of Primary Industries website. How much of New South Wales is currently in some form of drought?

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, drier conditions and drought, they're different propositions.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** She doesn't know.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, I do. I'm answering the question. Just chill.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** If she's answering the question, I'll—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** This aside is just discourteous: "She doesn't know." I mean, really!

**The Hon. WES FANG:** No, really, your interjections are ridiculous.

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate that, but then the Minister—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** It's in breach of the procedural fairness resolution. She should be given courtesy.

**The CHAIR:** I agree, but the Minister is capable of handling herself, which she just did just then.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** It's as bad as they carry on in the House.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, you have the call.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Thank you. Three per cent is currently in drought, 28 per cent is drought affected, 0.02 per cent—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Mr Chair—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Excuse me, I'm answering the question and I haven't finished.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I would like to raise a point with the Chair. I accept—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** And 0.2 per cent is categorised as intense drought.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I accept your answer, Minister. Just for the record, it's 44.4 per cent collectively. For the record I would like the Committee to note that the Minister read those figures off the graph that I've just tabled with the Minister.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, I'm not just pulling them out of the sky—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** No. You just read them off the graph I just tabled, so that's fine.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —and you don't add these up as a total because there are different categories of dry conditions.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Specifically, I'm going to redirect the question around drought support.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You clearly have no understanding of how this works.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** With regard to drought support, Minister, at what percentage of the State being drought impacted will you be rolling out additional support measures for our farmers and drought-impacted regional communities?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We have significant measures in place to support communities that are experiencing drier conditions. We have things that are available right now, and I would encourage people who are experiencing these things to reach out. The Rural Financial Counselling Service is available.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, just to follow up on the question—because I accept your answer. You do have measures in place at the moment. My question is specifically around at what point does New South Wales need to be in—intense drought or overall drought impacted—for you to roll out additional support measures to what is already in place?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We won't be making decisions based on that sort of overall view. We want to work with people based on where this requirement is needed, just as we're doing now. We're in the first stage, unfortunately, where things are getting drier. There are services available for people, and I would encourage them to reach out as early as possible. I will make the point that, when I've engaged with farmers in this role, and as people are preparing for drought conditions, the number one thing that gets raised with me, in terms of preparing and in terms of resources that are needed, is mental health support and the need for more mental health support. It gets raised with me every single time I engage with farmers who are concerned about drying conditions.

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, just trying to drill down on support mechanisms—and these are very genuine questions. You have put before the Committee in evidence that you're not going to look at let's call it a holistic, statewide, drought impacted number. Are you saying that at no point in the State being, let's say, in intense drought, possibly in months to come, do you have a point or a trigger where you roll out statewide additional support for farmers and drought-impacted communities?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** What I'm saying is that these things are being considered based on where they are needed, just as they are for every other decision that we make. There is, for example, a need for more mental health support at the moment, and there will be, ongoing. It is the number one thing that gets raised with me.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I accept that. It's something you've spoken about in the House. I'd like to redirect the question specifically.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** And I will give you an example of a decision that has been made now, in terms of allocating resources that need to be moved around based on where they are needed. You just don't want to hear the answers. I don't know why you bother asking questions.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** On 11 September you visited Orange—again, a great part of the State. I have tabled *The Central Western Daily* with the secretariat. You would know this one. The article is titled "NSW Minister for Agriculture Tara Moriarty ducks drought questions while in Orange". During this visit and this article, which I'm sure you're familiar with, you're quoted as saying, "Farmers know that things get dry", and that they are drying up and farmers need to have a plan to deal with drought.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** They do.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Given that you are the Minister responsible for drought policy in New South Wales, is this the best that you and your Government can offer? It is essentially telling farmers they know that it gets dry and to have a plan.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We're at the early stages of the drying conditions, and we're working closely with farmers about the support that is needed. There is support available right now. We're repurposing the Farm Innovation Fund to be the drought infrastructure fund, and there's well over \$100 million available in that for people to apply for. I do want people to reach out—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Minister, how much is in the Farm Innovation Fund? Do you know how much is in there as of today?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Over \$100 million.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** That could be \$200 million, \$300 million or \$101 million. How much is in that fund as of today?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've just answered the question.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But can you be more specific, Minister? Because over \$100 million—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We're repurposing that to be a drought infrastructure fund so that we can be really clear with farmers about what support is available for them to properly be able to prepare their infrastructure.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'm trying to ask these questions on behalf of farming and regional communities—

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

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** I am going to take a point of order because there's too much talking over the top of each other. I respect that the Minister is trying to give a fulsome answer, but the honourable member has redirected and asked for a more specific figure of above \$100 million and as to whether you have some more clarity.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It's so vague, Minister. I just don't know. Is that \$200 million, \$250 million or \$101 million? How much is in that fund as of today?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's not that it's vague. It's that there are amounts that people might not have called down on, which means that there is more money available. Specifically, as of this moment in time today, I will take it on notice, but there is that amount of money available for people to apply for to affix their drought infrastructure preparedness—

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you for taking that on notice. I appreciate it. Just to redirect about the Farm Innovation Fund, how many farmers have accessed support through that program as of today?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Let me get you the details for that. I might have to take the actual numbers on notice.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** That's okay. Following on with another supplementary question regarding the Farm Innovation Fund—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It is 3,200.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you, Minister. Will you commit, as the Minister for Agriculture, to top up the Farm Innovation Fund once the whatever it is—over \$100 million—is expended?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** This is stage one. This is part one of—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But, Minister, that's exactly the basis of my question. El Niño had been declared on the same day you made cuts to the RAA and the budget was handed down.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We didn't do that.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** The drought is coming. It's upon us. We need to know, are you organised?

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

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Are you ready with the ERC and with your Cabinet colleagues to get some more funding? Because drought is just around the corner, if not already upon us.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There is money available in what we are repurposing as the drought infrastructure fund to make it clear that it is money available for people to prepare for the drying conditions. We're in the early stages of this but we are working with people to deliver money where it's needed. I have asked for money to be repurposed from Regional NSW because there were some wellbeing surveys conducted by the previous Government over the last five or seven years, or thereabouts, every year, to study the wellbeing of people in regional New South Wales. It cost \$2 million. Nobody ever saw the results. They were never published. Anyone living in regional New South Wales could tell you what they were feeling across regional New South Wales. We're no longer doing those surveys that went nowhere, and that money will now be spent on direct mental health support for farmers, because they are telling me that that is the number one thing that they need support for as they prepare for the upcoming drought.

We're moving additional resources around to make sure that they are spent exactly where they are needed. As I have said repeatedly, farmers tell me the number one thing they need right now is mental health preparedness and mental health support. We are repurposing money that was wasted by the previous Government on surveys that were never published—\$2 million over that period of time, which is now going to be spent on direct mental health support for people who are experiencing these circumstances.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, when you made the decision to put shark nets back in across New South Wales beaches, a post was put up across your social media channels of a cartoon with a shark killing and eating a Greens member. Were you the one who personally posted this across your social media channels?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** If it's on my social media channels, then I'm responsible for it. It was a cartoon.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes. Do you believe that, as the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister responsible for animal welfare, that was an appropriate post to be putting up, after such a serious decision?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's a cartoon.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I understand it's a cartoon. There are a lot of animal welfare organisations that were very offended by that post because it gave the impression that you were disregarding the animal welfare impacts of that decision. Adam Crouch was also very vocal about how offended he was and how offended his community were, who have been campaigning about shark nets in their area. Are you aware that this was highly offensive to these groups?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm aware that people feel strongly about shark nets on every side of the argument, because I think I've heard from everyone across New South Wales about their different perspectives on this issue. I take all of it really seriously. I understand that there are really strongly held views from an animal welfare perspective and people who don't support the nets. I do take seriously there are very strongly held views,



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and I respect those views. I also take seriously that there are strong views—and it is my view—that people are entitled to enjoy the beach safely. We're working through these issues.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, this has nothing to do with people enjoying the beach. What I'm asking about is, if you take these matters seriously and you respect people's points of view—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I do.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Why are you then putting up a post that makes a joke out of it?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I take the views of everybody who has views on this seriously. I really do respect the strongly held views of people who are really passionate about animal welfare and who are also really passionate about animal welfare.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, you also took this post down. It's no longer up. Why did the post get removed?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Did you remove the post?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't know that it was removed or not removed. I think it was in a story and they only last for a certain period of time. But the details, I don't know.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Given that there are several communities that were very vocal about how offended they were by this, are you open to apologising to these communities that found it very offensive?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I've got to say I'm not across the detail of that. If you're putting that view to me, then I accept that that's the case. I respect people's views, particularly the strongly held views from the animal welfare sector. They're strongly held. I respect that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So you're not willing to apologise for this post and the fact that it was quite offensive? It was in the media. Your office was asked for comment.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Okay.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** There were various posts tagging you, with different groups talking about how offended they were.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's not that I don't believe you. I don't really do social media as much as I probably should in terms of an engagement tool. I accept that what you're saying is true. I accept people have really strongly held views about this and I respect it.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Given that, are you willing to apologise?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am not apologising for a cartoon.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order: I understand the question was a matter—and I haven't seen the cartoon—with respect to The Greens party. Now, I understand that the person pursuing the line of questioning is a representative from Animal Justice Party, not The Greens party.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I am not talking about anything to do with The Greens.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Well, that's what you said.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I am talking about different members of the community who were offended by that cartoon. I am not talking about The Greens party.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** There is no point of order.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** This is not a point of order.

**The CHAIR:** I will hear the point of order.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** I would have thought that The Greens party, if they had a concern, would have raised this. They had the opportunity.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Chair, this is not a point of order.

**The CHAIR:** That's not a valid point of order. I respect that the member has asked this question multiple times in very similar ways, and the Minister has answered. You can keep asking the same question, if you'd like.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes. I've just got one more question, Minister: Are you willing to apologise?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I am not apologising for a cartoon that appeared in the public domain.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's a no.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That's a no. Frozen artificial insemination was a contentious issue in the last term of Parliament. Can you tell us what work your office is doing in this space and where you're up to on the issue?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm sorry, I don't know what was raised in the previous Parliament so you might want to let me know specifically what you're referring to.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** The State Development Committee did an inquiry on the proposed animal welfare bill. Did you read the report on that bill?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have read the report.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** One of the major aspects that came up during that report was frozen surgical artificial insemination. Are you not across what that is?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm across what it is. I am not sure what you're asking me.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Obviously if you know the background—the background was that it was originally proposed by the National Party to outlaw that. The ABA has been talking about outlawing it. I want to know, from you, where we're up to—within your department—on the issue.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Sure. I'll find out exactly where that's up to and I will take it on notice and come back to you.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. Minister, I also want to ask about shade for farmed animals. There was discussion around a funding package for farmers to be able to get money for shade on their properties and that was supported by New South Wales farmers. Did you advocate for any funding in this space?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It is certainly an important issue that needs to be dealt with more broadly in terms of how land is dealt with—land use and making sure that there are trees as opposed to just covers. These are things I am factoring in broadly in terms of decisions that I'm considering.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** The question was about a funding package for farmers to be able to—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There's not something specific that I can speak to now that will provide funding for farmers to put shade up, no.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I am just saying that that was obviously proposed and there were discussions around it before the last budget.

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

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I'm wondering, was that something that you advocated for on behalf of farmers, or is it something that you're pushing for within your department as well?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's not something that I took through this particular specific budget process because we were focused on managing what we inherited from the past. I understand the issue and the need for protection. I also want to work with farmers about what the most practical solution is. I'm happy to continue work on that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** You'd be aware of the longstanding concerns about the inherent conflict of interest within the Agriculture portfolio and the difficulties for both the Minister and the DPI to manage competing interests of animal protection and animal agribusiness. How do you intend to manage this conflict in your work as Minister?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I think it is manageable. We are managing it. These are things that need to be dealt with across the board. I expect in agriculture—full stop—that people are considering animal welfare, as they are required to do in the businesses that they conduct. We said that we would look at these issues more broadly as an election commitment and, as I've outlined earlier, I have started work on how that will look going forward. I'm happy to continue discussions with you and with others about that as we begin the process of delivering on that commitment.

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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Your first ministerial diary disclosure shows that you met with NSW Farmers six times, while you didn't meet with any animal welfare organisations at all. I can understand why Ms Boyd was asking questions around that disparity. Obviously when we're talking about this conflict, it does appear that one aspect of your portfolio is given a lot more time than the other. Do you consider that an appropriate balance, that there were six meetings with industry and none with animal welfare organisations?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I have met with animal welfare organisations. I met with the RSPCA—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, your first ministerial diary that came forward, which I can provide if you need it, showed six meetings with NSW Farmers and none with animal welfare.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It also included, in the early days, an event that I did where a whole bunch of stakeholders came together and were able to engage with me. That included the RSPCA. That was very early on. I have met—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, obviously an event with a variety of organisations is not the same as actually having a meeting with organisations, particularly when you're making major decisions around shark nets and the national standards process. With these big decisions, no animal welfare organisations were met with prior, with a specific meeting, other than briefly seeing somebody at an event.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** But I have met with animal welfare organisations. I will continue to meet with animal welfare organisations. It's an important part of the role.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, if you've met with them, why isn't it in your ministerial diary? If you've met with them in the first—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** The RSPCA will be in my diary. I'll have to check the details, but I've disclosed meetings as I need to.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** As I said, Minister, you have met with them but you didn't meet with them— in your first ministerial diary.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** So the question you are putting to me is, "Was it a long enough meeting"? I have met with them.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, the first ministerial diary disclosure of yours has six meetings with the NSW Farmers' Association—

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

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** —and no meetings with animal welfare, including no meetings with the RSPCA.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Well, I'd check the details of that. I do meet with animal welfare organisations. I've met with a number of them, including with you, and I'm happy to continue—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, that was only in the last few weeks.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —engaging with animal welfare organisations, as is appropriate, as is necessary, certainly from my perspective, but also when people want to raise issues with me, my door is as open as possible in the times that I have. I certainly do meet with NSW Farmers very regularly, as anyone would expect, because they're a major stakeholder in this area, but I'm committed to meeting with any animal welfare organisation that wants to meet.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Did you meet with any of these organisations prior to making those major decisions, outside of seeing them at an event?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'll have to check the dates and specifics of when things took place. But remember you have asked me, as an example, about shark nets as part of this question. I heard a lot of views about shark nets from animal welfare organisations. I respect those views. The decision was made—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Did you meet with those organisations before you made the decision?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, but you have to—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** After?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm trying to finish the answer. The point is I heard from a lot of them and I heard from a lot of people with opinions about the nets, and I respect those opinions. The decision was made based on the available evidence that I had before me from the trials of new technology, which was only trialled

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for one summer. We're rolling out those things again this summer. I am absolutely open to feedback and opinions from everybody who wants to provide them. Ultimately, decisions will be made based on evidence in general terms.

**The CHAIR:** Just picking up on the questions from Mr Faraway, you mentioned in your response to the questions on drought that this is stage one. That implies that there is a plan and there are further stages down the track. Will you table the department's plan to respond to drought? My party has been calling for many years to have a structured response to drought. Will you table that plan for the Committee?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** What I can talk to is what support and assistance is available right now. When I say stage one, that's in terms of what's available to people now, as we are in the early stages of these dry conditions. We as a government will have more to say about that as conditions change.

**The CHAIR:** So you don't have stage two, stage three, stage four or however many stages? You don't have that worked out as yet?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We'll have more to say about what's required, because of course there are things that need to be considered based on what's required on farms and then broader considerations for what's required across communities when things do dry. The Government will have more to say about this at the right time.

**The CHAIR:** I turn to another topic. Minister, your Government committed to doing an audit of the Recreational Fishing Trusts. You have put out a draft scope of that audit, and you received feedback from the Recreational Fishing Alliance on those terms. How have you taken that feedback and changed or made modifications to the terms of reference?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You're correct in the proposition that you've have just put to me: We did commit to reviewing the Recreational Fishing Trusts. That was a significant election commitment in this space, and I have sought the views of a number of stakeholders in relation to the terms of reference that we proposed. It was welcome feedback. I want to engage with people in the sector about how they see it working going forward and what they might like to see us having a look at. That has been considered, and the final piece will be released and the details of the audit will be in the public domain very soon.

**The CHAIR:** One specific point of feedback that's been put to you and me consistently is that the audit has to be done independently, so can you tell us which external company will be completing that audit?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There are very strong views about it being done independently. We're committed to it being done independently. I can't give you that information right now, today, but I will be able to do that soon. I know there are strong views on that, and I've certainly taken that on board.

**The CHAIR:** So you can't tell me because there's a tender process that will be taking place?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We're working through the next stages of this, but I'll have more to say about it soon.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I might go to the issue of the white spot prawn situation. In previous meetings that we've had, you stated that the department was looking at alternative uses for small green prawns to supplement the income of affected trawlers. Is there any update as to where we're at with those alternative uses?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Can I first of all just say I certainly feel for and work with the prawn farmers who were caught up in this issue of white spot. I know it's been incredibly difficult for those individual farms that were affected but also the broader industry across that community, which is why it was important that we did provide a package of support—the \$21 million package. In terms of any specific update on where we're at with that, I don't have one to give to you today. Mr Hansen may.

**The CHAIR:** I'm happy to pursue it with Mr Sloan this afternoon, if he might have further details.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, we can go into further details this afternoon. But that research project that we're doing in conjunction with Clarence co-op and in conjunction with the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation looking for those alternative uses—that's underway and going at the moment. But we can come back to that later this afternoon, if you wish.

**The CHAIR:** You gave a commitment during the election to create a statutory authority for recreational fishing. I note that there is \$4.9 million in the budget to support a sustainable fisheries estate, including establishing peak bodies for commercial and recreational fishing sectors, but you also mention a statutory authority. I wanted to get some clarity as to what that funding is for, given that there is a big difference between a peak body and a statutory authority. I know there's some work being done on the commercial peak body.

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**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There is.

**The CHAIR:** I'm just concerned that you want to establish a peak body when there already is one in existence. Are you still committed to a statutory authority?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We're committed to delivering what we said we would deliver. There is work underway in this area. There will be more to say about it, and I want to continue to work with the sector.

**The CHAIR:** So what is the Government's concern with the existing peak body for recreational fishing in New South Wales, that being the Recreational Fishing Alliance?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I'm working with them. I think I've met with them a number of times.

**The CHAIR:** So why is there funding to establish a peak body that already exists?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** There's funding to deliver the commitments that we made about peak bodies—I think, from memory, particularly in relation to professional and commercial fishing. I'll continue to work with the recreational body.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Hansen, do you accept that the Recreational Fishing Alliance is the peak body in New South Wales for rec fishing?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I think the order of delivery against those election commitments starts with the audit of the trust, out of which will come then what recommendations around governance and input are required from both peak bodies and governance arrangements, in terms of whether it's a statutory authority or in terms of vehicles required for the governance around that trust. Everything hinges off the back of the work that's being proposed around the audit of the trust, and out of that will then come those two additional pieces of work around the peak body and around the piece of what governance requirements need to be put in place. That total amount of funding you've got there is for the total package piece, given the fact that what comes out of the audit of the trust might dictate a heavier lean one way than another way in terms of governance arrangements, peak bodies et cetera.

**The CHAIR:** So if the audit of the trust finds in a certain way, we might not go towards a statutory authority; we might just go towards peak bodies. Is that what you're saying, Mr Hansen?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'd say what comes out of that audit of the trust will be then placed in front of the Minister, and the Minister will review that against the election commitments that have been made in terms of how best to deliver against those.

**The CHAIR:** I might pick up on that later. Minister, you made an \$80 million commitment around fire ants. Could you provide a breakdown, perhaps on notice, of what that \$80 million includes and who is charged with expending it?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I can—\$95 million, in fact.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, \$95 million. That's even more.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I also welcome the fact that the Federal Government came up with some more much-needed funds over the weekend to assist with this. What I can do is take on notice the breakdown, but it is funding things such as awareness. We're making sure that the community knows what to look out for and what they can and can't transport across the border. I understand letterbox drops have been done, and there is signage up around the border communities. We have detection operations in place, and we're working closely with police on that. They've run some operations checking materials that come across the border. But the specifics and the actual breakdown I'll take on notice and provide.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Could I just add one piece to that? The vast majority of that \$95 million—in fact, just about all of it—is actually our contribution to the national response that is led by Queensland. That national response plan, which we can provide you details of, highlights the collective work that gets done. We then pay our share of those costs, the same as every other State and Territory jurisdiction.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have any level of control as to how that \$95 million is spent? I'm assuming you would have—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. The same way as on any of these emergency responses, there's national management groups and technical advisory groups. In fact, there's a standing governance group around red imported fire ants which helps oversight the investment strategies and the programs and activities.

**The CHAIR:** In the last two minutes—and perhaps this will be on notice as well—the good neighbour program, which is aimed at tackling weeds and pest infestations between neighbouring public and private lands,

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how much money is going towards that program? If you could give a breakdown as to where it's going, that would be great.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Ten million dollars is for that program. I'm happy to take on notice the specific—

**The CHAIR:** As to, you know, is it all going to LLS? Is it going to some councils?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I see.

**The CHAIR:** Is it going to national parks? What is the breakdown of—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** You would be aware that last week I introduced a bill for another commitment, which was the implementation of a biosecurity commissioner. The biosecurity commissioner, when they are appointed, will assist us with determining how that works.

**The CHAIR:** Unless Ms Hurst has other questions—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I might quickly throw one in.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** We're at time.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, earlier this year I asked you a question in the House about the rodeo code, and you commented that it was extraordinary that it hadn't been reviewed in 33 years and that you would get an explanation as to why that review had not occurred in that period. What time line is there in regard to a review now? When can we expect to see something for public consultation?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I don't have current plans to review things in this space. I do recall you asked me about the period of time where it hadn't been reviewed. I will have to take on notice the details of what that was. I apologise; I can't remember. I know this is something you're paying attention to.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If you could take that on notice—

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

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Even though it's 33 years overdue, it's not something you're looking to do in your term?

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** It's not something I am looking at today but, where there are issues that need to be dealt with in that space, I will look at them.

**The CHAIR:** I'm just looking for Government questions, if they have any.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** No questions from the Government.

**The CHAIR:** Is there any other further business?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'd like to table a document, Chair. This document is the request from the office of the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Western New South Wales, for a brief on the Assistant Cross-Border Commissioner. It also has answers from the last inquiry that we held, answering that it was requested by the office of the Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, and Minister for Western New South Wales. I would say that the Minister has misled the Committee today on that.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No. What I said was that I didn't know and you—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Point of order—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —already did, so why did you waste time asking me the questions?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** I wonder if we could be spared the commentary.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Because you denied it. You lied.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** I didn't, actually. You should withdraw that.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You denied it.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's on *Hansard*.

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**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** No, not true. You cannot do this—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** You can raise your points of order.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** —at the end of an estimates hearing.

**The CHAIR:** The time for questions and answers is done. I accept that we'll make a decision as to whether that document is published or how it's treated as a tabled document. We'll do that at the end of the session. I thank the Minister for her appearance thus far. We look forward to hearing from the other witnesses after this. We'll now break.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY:** Thank you very much. I appreciate it. Thanks, everybody, for your time. I really appreciate everyone's hard work, particularly all of the department officials, who do amazing work.

**The CHAIR:** We'll now break for lunch. I think Mr Faraway wants to raise an issue, but we'll do that once the room is cleared. We'll go into a quick deliberative, so we'll need people to leave the room.

**(The Minister withdrew.)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

**Mr SEAN SLOAN**, Deputy Director General, Department of Primary Industries Fishing, affirmed and examined

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

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

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

**Mr ROB KELLY**, Executive Director, Local Land Services Regional Delivery, affirmed and examined

**Mr LIAM HOGG**, Acting Executive Director, Policy, Local Land Services Policy, affirmed and examined

**Mr DREW VARNUM**, Executive Director, NSW Public Works, affirmed and examined

**Mr DANIEL BROWN**, Executive Director, Soil Conservation Service, affirmed and examined

**The CHAIR:** I welcome everyone back to this afternoon's session. We will go straight to questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I think mine will be directed to Ms Fox. I want to talk about the Regional Job Creation Fund. The \$100 million round three was announced, opened and closed for applications before the recent election. How many businesses applied for funding from the New South Wales Regional Job Creation Fund in round three?

**REBECCA FOX:** I can get that information for you. I have also got Mr Wheaton—who is eating croissants in France, I think—who might be able to help me. I have got that information.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Why on earth are you here, Mr Wheaton, when you can be outside enjoying France?

**REBECCA FOX:** I think it's 3.00 a.m., so he's doing a good job.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Poor Jonno. Well done to you. I'm happy for you to take—

**REBECCA FOX:** I've got it here. Round three, the total funding of that program was \$100 million. Sorry, I don't have that broken down for round three, unless you do, Jonno.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's fine.

**REBECCA FOX:** We'll take it on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I just wanted to know how many businesses applied for the funding for round three.

**REBECCA FOX:** No problem. I can take that on notice.

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**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** How many businesses were deemed unsuccessful for funding under the Regional Job Creation Fund round three?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I can confirm that there were 264 expressions of interest submitted to round three.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Okay, great. Do you know how many were deemed unsuccessful, Mr Wheaton?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** The round three was discontinued, so all of those applicants were notified that that program wasn't continuing. So they weren't successful or unsuccessful, but they weren't progressed under round three.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To be clear, are we saying that we had a round that was opened, the money was there for the Regional Job Creation Fund, you had 264 expressions of interest and the fund is just gone?

**REBECCA FOX:** Some of those may not have been assessed as consistent with the guidelines. But, yes, that was the number of expressions of interest.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Surely, with over 264 applications for the Regional Job Creation Fund, a process was gone through. It was announced, it was opened and it was closed, and now you're saying that the Government cancelled the fund.

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

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Wow! Okay. I'm sorry, but I'm genuinely staggered at that. Can you please tell me—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: That is complete commentary.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sorry, I actually just expressed myself.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** It's discourteous to a public servant.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point of order—

**The CHAIR:** I accept the point on commentary. I don't know whether it extends to being discourteous, to express dismay at something. I suggest the member asks the next question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I ask that the member withdraw that. I was not being discourteous to the public servant and nor would I be.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** I do not intend to withdraw it, because the member is trying to inveigle the public servant into the rhetorical commentary. It is not a question; it is just gratuitous commentary.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Shocking. Anyway, I will move on. How dare you.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** You're shocking.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you for clarifying. I actually had a lot of questions in relation to that. Can I just please make sure that the unsuccessful applicants—I don't know if you would really even call them that—have they been notified that the fund has now ceased and been cancelled?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'm sure that's right. Jono?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Yes. The 264 affected EOI applicants were notified that the program was discontinued on 22 September.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Could we be provided with the names of the businesses, because, usually, you used to put that up on the website—what was there, how many you'd had and how many people had applied. Would we be able to have that information, please—of those 264 people that applied for a fund that now no longer exists?

**REBECCA FOX:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I will move on to the SAP—the \$4.2 billion Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund. Under the former Government, 100 per cent of Snowy Hydro funds were to go into transformative infrastructure for regional New South Wales. Is this no longer the case?

**REBECCA FOX:** The new Government has redirected some of that money that was originally put towards some former projects, and it's been put into regional roads. I can give you the breakdown of where that



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money has been allocated—effectively, to election commitments—\$242 million to regional roads, \$222 million to new and upgraded high schools, \$64 million to helicopter ambulance bases, \$16 million to aged-care and healthcare facilities and \$28.5 million to the Great Koala National Park.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you very much for the numbers, but was it the legislation that said that it was to be for transformative infrastructure for regional New South Wales? A few of those things look like business as usual to me, because I believe a regional roads fund is not transformative infrastructure or BAU. I'm very happy for that to be my personal opinion, but I would just like to ask the question. That is meant to be for transformative, and that would be business as usual funding.

**REBECCA FOX:** The Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund is set out in legislation. It has quite a clear governance and process by which projects are determined to be eligible for that fund. The way that legislation is written at the moment, the Deputy Premier and Premier nominate projects to the Treasurer, and the Treasurer would accept that. So that decision will be made on whether or not it fits the guidelines or the legislation through that process. It's not something that the department comments on.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Understood. Would you be in a position to explain why the decision was made to reduce funding for the Snowy SAP from \$391 million to \$196 million?

**REBECCA FOX:** I can explain the process that we went through in there. There was an infrastructure review run by Ken Kanofski, and that review looked at all projects over \$50 million. So the Snowy Mountains Special Activation Precinct was put through that process. We gave some input into that and, as a result of the outcomes of that review and the comprehensive expenditure review, the decision was made to reduce the funding in the initial stages. The special activation precincts are 40-year programs. As you know, they're long-term master plans with long tails; they don't happen overnight. So the initial funding was reduced through that process.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You referred to the expenditure review—whatever it was called—that the Government looked at. Could you please explain how the reduction in funding will impact the delivery time line and where those funds that were deducted from the Snowy SAP will be going and where are they reallocated to?

**REBECCA FOX:** They have been reallocated to the election commitments that I just went through in my last answer. In terms of what will be delivered, the team is working, at the moment, through a prioritisation process to work out where the funding should be spent in consultation with the community and particularly with the local council. I've got Mr Bolton, who runs that program, here. If you would like any more detail, we can go through that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm happy for Mr Bolton to step in; we've known each other a long time. I just want to clarify—and please correct me if I'm wrong; I genuinely mean that. When we say it's been redirected to the current projects like regional roads and, say, in the Monaro, to business as usual health facilities, basically, we've taken money out of that Snowy SAP transformative project and now we're putting it into the projects that you specified in your previous answer, which, I would say, are not new—I completely respect that—but are business as usual projects.

**REBECCA FOX:** I think those questions are best directed to Treasury. We input into that process, but we can only input to the extent of the projects that we're responsible for. I think those questions are probably better directed to the Treasury team, on how those funds are going to be reallocated.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm obviously particularly interested in the Snowy one, because I've had so many local people that are just so disappointed with all of the work that's been done about that massive cut to the Snowy program, so thank you very much for your answers. May I please ask how much funding had been allocated for the Williamstown and Narrabri SAPs and where that funding is being redirected to? You probably did answer, so maybe just the first question about how much funding has been allocated for the Williamstown and Narrabri SAPs?

**REBECCA FOX:** We had very little funding allocated to those two special activation precincts. Williamstown and Narrabri were both still in development. We hadn't finalised business cases and the Government hadn't made an investment decision. We had what I will call small amounts of money—they are still not small; they are in the millions of dollars—working on the setting up of the master plans and doing the technical work for those special activation precincts, but we hadn't actually got to an investment decision. So there was not very much money allocated out of the Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund towards those projects at this point in time.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That was an enormous amount of work that you had done—and I know, because it was my community and I know how excited everybody was. That funding is not there any more, so are we just going to do a more budgeted version of that work now?

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**REBECCA FOX:** Do you mean on Snowy?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I mean on all of them, where it's been cut.

**REBECCA FOX:** Three of them haven't been cut at all. They are Moree, Parkes—there was some additional money put towards Parkes—and Wagga.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Parkes is really completed, isn't it?

**REBECCA FOX:** Almost completed, yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That is amazing.

**REBECCA FOX:** The work that we have done on the Snowy SAP is not at all wasted. The master plans, the delivery plans—all of that work sits there. It's a 40-year plan and it will all be valuable. It just means that we don't have quite as much money up-front on the initial infrastructure. But, James, I don't know whether you would like to add anything to that?

**JAMES BOLTON:** No, that is definitely an accurate reflection. The only other comment would be around Williamstown. There was an early commitment of approximately \$25 million for early works and \$19 million of that was returned to the shelf and allocated to either the provision or some of those earlier election commitments that were mentioned.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** This may not be an appropriate question, so I am very happy for it to be ruled out of order because it will obviously be for the Minister when she comes back, but I mean—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Are you inviting an objection?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm always polite, and yes, Greg, whatever. I went to a function the other night in Cooma and I could hardly get past the door with people talking to me about how disappointed they are about the cut in this funding to the Snowy SAP because it meant so much to all of us and had been such a long process. Are you getting questions about that locally to your people, that they are disappointed, or would you prefer not to answer that? I completely respect if—

**REBECCA FOX:** I think we can answer that. We have a community advisory group that's been running for a long time in the Snowies. I think there is another meeting—

**JAMES BOLTON:** There's a meeting tomorrow night.

**REBECCA FOX:** Tomorrow night, so we'll get some different views then. I think it's fair to say that that special activation precinct was always slightly controversial. It was certainly well regarded and welcomed by some parts of the community—certainly the business community in Jindabyne. It was doing some work in the Kosciuszko National Park which was much more controversial, and councils changed in Cooma as well. So I think there'll be some people who are disappointed. There'll be some people who don't want Jindabyne to change at all; they like the way that it is. And there's still a lot of work happening. There's still close to \$200 million that is going to be spent pretty quickly in that location, and it will make a big difference to Jindabyne.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's interesting you say that because I certainly haven't had anyone say that to me. But I do understand; there are always people that don't want change. This was a really exciting project for this area that's now been slashed, so we're pretty disappointed. Can we now talk about the Working Regions Fund, and I'm not sure who to direct this to, Ms Fox, so I'll just keep directing to you and you can palm off. Who will be eligible to apply for the funding?

**REBECCA FOX:** That program is a new program and I'm not sure that it's been allocated to a particular department at this point in time, so I don't think we have any information on what that will look like. I think that question is probably best directed to the Treasury team.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** We've announced a \$250 million Working Regions Fund. I get really confused with all the names because we have so many funding things. We've abolished the Regional Job Creation Fund, and I have so many comments here from members when they were in Opposition, who are now in government, that just loved the fund. But we haven't got that anymore, and now we have no detail around the Working Regions Fund.

**REBECCA FOX:** I don't think it's been—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Wouldn't that be held by Regional NSW? You are the gurus of the regions and you have runs on the board for all the amazing projects and things that you've run. How could it not be with Regional?

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**REBECCA FOX:** It may come to Regional; it just hasn't been worked out at this point in time. But the Treasury team may have more information.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Do you have any time line? I mean I've just never heard of this—announcing a \$250 million Working Regions Fund with no detail and no-one in charge of it. Sorry, I don't understand.

**REBECCA FOX:** I think it sits with Treasury, but I'll take that on notice and I'll come back to you.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sorry, I just don't understand how, if it's "working regions", it sits with Treasury and doesn't sit with Regional NSW.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: That's inviting an expression of an opinion on a policy matter, I suggest.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** They're taking everything away from Regional NSW.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** It is asking a public servant's opinion about which part of government it should be situated within. It is out of order.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, it's not for the member to ask for public servants to provide commentary on policy decisions, so I encourage the member to either rephrase or ask another question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's fine. Sorry, Mr Chair. I tend to say out loud what's in my head sometimes, which doesn't serve me well all the time.

**The CHAIR:** It happens to the best of us.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you, yes. My husband says, "One sentence too much, Bron", but usually I am on the money, so good luck, Mr Lawrence. Regional Events Acceleration Fund—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** This is quite entertaining.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I note there will be no future—

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Is this across the table or to the witnesses?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sorry, can you shoosh now, please? I note there will be no future rounds of the Regional Events Acceleration Fund. Is this correct?

**REBECCA FOX:** That's correct; it's been discontinued.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** This again may not be an appropriate answer, Ms Fox, and I'm very happy for you to say that you're not going to answer it, but how do we plan on attracting and funding such events in the regions as we have in the past when we don't have a Regional Events Acceleration Fund?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Fair enough, I accept that.

**The CHAIR:** You are accepting the point of order?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, I accept that he's going to say that I shouldn't ask Ms Fox that.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** I was going to say that.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Mr Hansen, I've got a couple of questions. We heard this morning questions I had for the Minister around travel budget and I want to explore that a little bit more. I have heard of concerns that possibly your travel budget has been cut. Do you have more money set aside for your team, whether it is in research, statutory reviews or biosecurity measures? Do you have more in your budget for travel or the same amount this year versus the previous financial year?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, we have a cut. As you'd be aware, there's a whole cross-government cut. We are doing our share on that piece. I would just say that none of our compliance, regulatory, R&D or stakeholder engagement teams are forced to cut their travel as part of their jobs. We go for the low-hanging fruit, which actually gives us a couple of benefits—the low-hanging fruit being rather than someone driving four hours to go to a two-hour internal meeting, if it can be done online, if it can be done virtually, we do that. That's already generated a million dollars of savings, year to date, and it will probably generate us between four and five million dollars in savings that we can redeploy back into other activities.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Obviously you will find savings from within because that is what you're being forced to do with the Government's decision. But I would go one step further: Is DPI able to participate in

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some of the community engagement that requires travel—for instance, attending Australian National Field Days or attending AgQuip, or attending forums and conferences? Do you envisage that there will have to be cuts to the engagement of the department due to ensuring that the priority for any travel, as you've just given in evidence, needs to be for compliance?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, it's not just compliance. As I said, with the research and development teams, it's a priority for them to travel out and check on research trials and so forth. It's a priority for our stakeholder engagement, and you will have seen the teams present and active at AgQuip or at Henty, or on Thursday and Friday this week at the Australian National Field Days at Borenore. But, as I said, this gives us dual benefits. We're asking the staff across DPI, because they're pretty smart people, to work out where they can create some efficiencies in travel.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** For the record, Mr Hansen, are you able to advise how much of your travel budget has been cut in this financial year?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We've set ourselves a travel budget this year of just over eight million, and our travel expenses last year were just over 12. That being said, that's the budget that we're working to. I can't predict how many fire responses we're going to have to go to. I can't predict how many biosecurity responses we're going to have to go to, and we're not going to be silly about that expenditure to provide the services that are required. But I will tell you the change in behaviour around making people think about the amount of time they're on the road—I mean the members here are all from regional locations or travel in regional locations. The amount of roadkill, the amount of risks at the moment around travelling—if I can reduce some staff time on the road for internal meetings that we can replicate or we can do virtually instead, it's a good outcome for us.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I wish you all the best.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** We like seeing you out in the regions, Mr Hansen.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I live there.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Mr Hansen, I promised that I would get back to you in regard to some of the topics we talked about this morning. If we could start on the decision on Garie Beach, to include shark nets specifically on that beach?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. Can I get Sean Sloan, the head of Fisheries, to come up to the table?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, of course, thank you.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** As the Minister alluded to this morning, it's one beach in a series of beaches that are serviced by a contractor. While the road is closed off, as you'd be aware, as part of that coastal track to get down to Garie Beach we still have people walking down, we still have people going down there for surfing purposes and for swimming.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you know how many? My understanding is it's about a 1½-hour track, it's quite difficult terrain to actually get access to it and the beach is actually technically closed. Was there any research done into how many people were actually making that trek down to the beach because it sounds quite extreme to be able to access it?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** As you'd be aware, it is one of the first beaches you come to when you're doing that southern coastal track. We know there is regular track traffic down through there. I will get Sean to bring up the statistics at the moment. It is one of the beaches that actually catches a high percentage of target sharks—bull sharks, tiger sharks and white sharks. None of these nets work in isolation. They are, in effect, if you like, a series of barriers that operate along the region. The sharks don't hang out at just one beach in particular but are constantly moving. So it is an effective part of the network of nets.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, just to ask a technical question, I assume what you're saying is that you want it as a whole barrier, but technically they're not actually attached to each other in any way.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** They're all rolled out separately on each beach.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's right. It is a series of individual nets along those beaches that have been a time-tested series of beaches with nets on them. That beach in particular I think actually has the highest percentage of target sharks caught.

**SEAN SLOAN:** That's right. Over the last 30 years Garie Beach has had the highest catch of bull sharks and tiger sharks and the fourth highest catch of white sharks. So that region obviously has Garie Beach in it and

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there are nets set and smart drum lines set at other beaches in that region as well. But the whole network—when you think about the mobility of these shark species, particularly tiger sharks and white sharks, they move up and down the coast, so not one individual location. They work together as a network. So it's not just one beach that is on its own, in that sense. But it's also true that the advice we have is that surfers are still going to that beach. They walk in and—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sorry, can I just knuckle down on that information. What sort of data was collected and how was that information obtained? My understanding is that it would be very difficult for a swimmer to access it but, certainly, a 1½-hour, difficult-terrain trek with a surfboard would be virtually impossible. I'm wondering where you got that data from and also what the data is as to how many people were accessing it once it was closed and not accessible anymore?

**SEAN SLOAN:** It's anecdotal. Our shark team is very connected with the surfing community and we have a strong relationship with Surfing NSW and other organisations. It's anecdotal information that comes to us through various sources and the advice is that people are still accessing the beach.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Mr Hansen, I might go back to you in regards to the changes within the Department of Primary Industries, particularly around the position of director of animal welfare. Could I get a bit more detail as to why that particular position no longer exists and whether that means the overall number of staff in that animal welfare department is down one person?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. The short answer is there is no change to the staffing number. In terms of that particular role—and shout-out to Suze Robinson, who will be watching these estimates. Suze fulfilled a really important task over the last couple of years of helping to drive the animal welfare reform project—the consultation, the drafting of bills and so forth. We used the opportunity last year with Suze taking a break to actually redistribute and bring a broader suite of staff from across the broader business and our policy teams, our strategy teams, our legislative Cabinet teams, into the animal welfare space. So we no longer have a singular person driving that piece, but we have teams driving the animal welfare reform.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have those teams that are driving the animal welfare reform crossed over into other areas as well? Will they also be working on biosecurity and other things?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** They could well be, yes. We will be looking to utilise their relationships with stakeholders, their relationship also in terms of parliamentary process and the work they're doing on drafting legislation. Say for an independent biosecurity commissioner, these are the kind of teams that we've also got working to progress the reforms. We still have access obviously to Ms Robinson. She is still within our team; she has just been deployed to Government election commitments that she's now picking up and driving as discrete projects.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are they in relation to animal welfare at all or are they completely separate again?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Completely separate again. That's the ability of using someone with a broad background like Ms Robinson has: to be able to swing her from one project to another project, whilst at the same time, as I said, not diminishing the resourcing we have in the animal welfare space or the animal welfare reform space.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** How many full-time roles are there for anybody who then works specifically in animal welfare?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Fourteen.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What was that last year?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Fourteen.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** How has that remained the same with that one position? What was the new position that was created that made sure that the number still remains the same?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I will get the title of it wrong, but I will come back to you to before the end of this session.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That would be fantastic. If staff are now balancing a whole range of different portfolios rather than specialising in one, how will that be balanced to make sure—or is that something that's guided by the Minister as to what the Government's priorities would be, and people would switch between things? Is that how it would work?

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**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, that's a reasonable description of day in, day out stuff for us. But as you would expect, and as you heard the Minister articulate this morning, the animal welfare reform and a series of election commitments around animal welfare are Government priorities. They are election commitments that the Minister has committed to and prioritised the delivery of.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I'm not sure if this is a question for yourself or Ms Filmer, but I note that there is currently a recruitment process underway to appoint new members for the Animal Welfare Advisory Council. In respect of the existing council, are you able to advise how many times they have met in the past three years?

**KIM FILMER:** Maybe.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The answer is yes.

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, I think we can. There were five meetings in 2021, there was one meeting in 2022 and we have not had any meetings in 2023.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are there minutes for these meetings? If so, is it possible to make those available to the Committee?

**KIM FILMER:** There are certainly minutes for the meetings, but I don't think they are readily distributed, so I don't know the answer to that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Could you seek advice on whether or not that could be tabled with the Committee?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, we will take that on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** In May I asked the Minister a question in the House about *cestrum nocturnum*, which was still being allowed to be sold in New South Wales. This particular weed led to the tragic deaths of two horses, Joey and Midnight, who accidentally consumed the plant. I understand these plants are being sold in nurseries throughout New South Wales. The Minister advised at the time that she has requested that the department investigate options for and the feasibility of banning the sale of *cestrum nocturnum*. I understand there are different versions of *cestrum* that are banned, but I'm interested in *cestrum nocturnum*. Can I get an update on this investigation and any advice on action that has been taken?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** You can. Give me a minute to get an update on that and I will come back to you in the next round if we can.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, that's fine. I've also got some questions about the varroa mite response. Is fipronil baiting continuing under the new management strategy, or has the use of fipronil itself ceased?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, I'm not aware of any further fipronil baiting, and we have swung those teams that were previously doing the fipronil baiting in the wild European honey beehives—they're now doing surveillance and monitoring for detections of varroa in those areas, in amongst those wild hives.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Thank you. Can I ask whoever is the appropriate person about the broad area habitat searches that are undertaken? Is that you, Mr Chaudhary?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** In native forestry? Is that what you're referring to?

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Yes.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** It's probably me—native sites, yes.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Thank you. I'm quite gravely concerned. We looked at 13 operations. They are Doubleduke, Gibberagee, Forest Land, Orara East, Tambar, Wild Cattle Creek, Styx River, Ballengarra, Burrawan, Bulls Ground, Bachelor State Forest and we looked at all of those to kind of assess, just as a random, in terms of operations that have either been completed or about to be completed. So it was 13 operations covering five and a half thousand hectares of public native forest and looking at the BioNet records to see how the Forestry Corporation is complying with its broad area habitat search obligations. The results were pretty alarming, really. There was very little and next to no records of the species that are required to be searched for as a result of those habitat searches. It strongly suggests that we're either not doing them well or we're not doing them at all. Is there something you can help us in understanding what's going on there?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I can probably talk a bit broadly about the way we undertake the searches. In Forestry Corporation, we've got highly trained and skilled ecologists and technicians in the field that undertake these searches and surveys in accordance with the environmental rules set that we've got in New South Wales. So when I say that I refer to the coastal integrated forest operations approval—CIFOA—that regulation or rules set

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requires you to undertake a whole range of searches, and broad area habitat searches is one of those searches. I'm sure you're aware the IFOA is based on a landscape basis, which basically means that it provides protection to a whole range of native animals and native plants on a landscape basis as opposed to individual species. In some cases there are prescriptions for certain types of species, but generally it's broad scale. Our harvest plans are drawn up in accordance with the coastal IFOA and they're regulated by the EPA. So there are a whole range of surveys, Ms Higginson, but if there's any specific forest—I know you talked about 13 areas—I could take them away and have a look at them specifically and come back to you.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** That would be great. Let's look at Tallaganda, for example. Does it concern you—obviously it's very concerning to everyone—but what we found there is Forestry Corporation didn't have any greater gliders, or very few and no den trees, and then EPA did a stop-work order and now we know there's 89 greater gliders, or probably more by now, and 20 den trees. I would suggest, and perhaps you would too, that it's not just Tallaganda and it's not unique to Tallaganda. I'm really concerned that you're not actually finding and recording and reporting the threatened species as you're required to do so. We know that the harvest plans are developed on the ecological assessments undertaken anywhere between two, three, five years previous, so the broad area searches are the safety net. But just that random audit of 13 operations has revealed pretty much no findings. Does that concern you that maybe your very well-trained ecologists aren't actually finding what they're looking for?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** You've referenced Tallaganda. Maybe I can just provide some information on that. Tallaganda State Forest is about 24,000 hectares of State forest and there's also about 21,000 hectares of national park in there. About 50 per cent or more than 50 per cent are set aside for permanent conservation. We harvest about 1 per cent of that in any given year. As I mentioned earlier, our operations are performed in accordance with the coastal IFOA, our harvest plans, so that requires those searches that I was talking about. The IFOA was remade in 2018, which takes a precautionary approach and provides habitat protection for greater gliders as well as a whole range of other native animals. In doing so, the IFOA requires us to set aside particular types of trees for retention, so hollow-bearing trees, which can very well be den trees. We have identified and set aside more than 5,000 trees in Tallaganda alone.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** But are you saying, though, that that therefore means that you are then entitled or enabled to fell den trees, if they are greater glider? Is that what you're trying to say?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** No, I'm not saying that at all.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Because of these things you do, it doesn't matter, therefore, if they're missed, and we do fell greater glider den trees.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** No. I guess what I'm saying is that the prescriptions that there are in the IFOA are designed to provide protection to these greater gliders.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** But what's happening is, Mr Chaudhary, with the greatest respect, we're missing them and that's why you've currently got several forestry operations across the State that are currently on hold, whether it's through voluntary, with court actions. I think I mentioned earlier we're talking quite a few. We've got Cherry Tree, Braemar, Myrtle, Newry, Tallaganda—I understand perhaps Clouds and Bulga are voluntary—and Oakes on hold. This is on the strong suggestion and evidence case that perhaps we haven't done the right thing and we shouldn't be logging because we haven't done the right thing. What are we doing wrong? Why are we actually missing some of these most important threatened species habitat in the State?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** With respect to the voluntary standdowns in the multiple forests you have mentioned, there have been applications for injunctions in those areas and for a variety of reasons, not specifically on threatened species. It could be questioning harvest plans. Those applications are before the court at the moment, so it probably won't be appropriate for me to comment on the individual cases. We have decided to make voluntary standdowns in almost all of those applications to—

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** It would be pretty unreasonable to just go ahead and ignore the claim being made in the litigation, wouldn't it? I mean, these voluntary are in lieu of injunctions. That's how it happens.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** We want to make sure that we give the court the appropriate time to look at the merits of the case and so we've done that by undertaking the voluntary standdown, and so those hearings are in process as we speak. With Tallaganda, going back to Tallaganda, we understand the EPA has raised some concerns about identification of den trees.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Do you think those concerns can be replicated in State forests where there are likely—and highly likely—to be greater gliders, like what we've just seen in Bulga State Forest where Forest Corporation didn't identify any and the community's now found over 20 greater gliders, or over 100, I think?

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**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** As I said, our harvest plans are drawn up in accordance with the rules of the IFOA.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Why are we failing? Why are we not picking up threatened species but the community is? Why is our Forestry Corporation, a State-owned corporation that belongs to the people of New South Wales ultimately, failing us when it comes to our species that are literally facing extinction?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** With respect to greater gliders, we undertook Transect spotlight surveys, where staff walked I think over 40 kilometres.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Are you doing that in the north, or just Tallaganda?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Just let me finish that—in Tallaganda, particularly. We were able to identify 400 greater gliders that were present in both. That's part of our biodiversity monitoring program, both in burnt and unburnt forest, and harvested and unharvested forest. So it gives us that evidence, if you like, that our coastal IFOA and the prescriptions in there are working.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Why did we not do that before the logging operation and before the stop work—

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** We did.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Well, why was the stop-work order initiated?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** The stop-work order was initiated—that's a question, really, for the EPA—but they had concerns about identification of den trees. So I'm talking about—

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** How can you find animals and not den trees when now we've found 20 den trees?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** This is a complex area, Ms Higginson, because the den trees, as I understand it—and I'm not a forestry ecologist—greater gliders are nocturnal animals.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** They are.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** They can be seen at night.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I've seen plenty of them, and den trees.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** There's a definition of a den tree, which is the glider has to be seen entering or exiting the hollow of the tree.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** That's right.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** So not sitting on the branch. It has to be seen going in and out of the tree.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** That's right.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** We're working with the EPA to understand what methodologies they are planning.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** My time is about to run out. How much does it cost to have a crew stand down for a day?

**The CHAIR:** Too much.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Is the figure around \$7,000 a day?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** It varies. It could be \$7,000 or it could be \$10,000, depending on where we are operating.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** So we're looking at over \$1 million on the Tallaganda at the moment—two crews standing down for 75 days. We're looking at over \$1 million.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** No, that's not true. It's not \$1 million, because we are trying to utilise those crews elsewhere, to move them around to reduce the cost.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** To plant trees?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** We are planting trees as well, yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I would like to direct my question back to Mr Hansen. I wanted to pick up where we left off around the DPI travel budget. It is concerning to hear that it has been slashed by a third—a



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\$4 million cut. Do you have concerns that you will not be able to meet the demand, possibly with the drought that is upon us, which by all accounts could get quite bad or worse over the coming months; varroa mite; and always the possible risk of lumpy skin disease which we've seen in the last 12 months, which could turn up in our State? What are you going to do if all of these challenges present themselves pretty quickly and you've had your travel budget slashed by a third?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** If any one of those, let alone each and every one of those, eventuates, we just respond, firstly, by making sure that we're fulfilling our regulatory duties and then delivering against what the community and government expect us to do in that space. Budgets are budgets. As I said, we've indicated to staff that our preference in this is for them to make the decisions about how they reduce the cost of travel over the course of the year. We're already seeing benefit out of that, without a decrease in the level of service or the level of fulfilment of our obligations. If any one of those things occur, our first thing is to respond.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Do you feel as if that could possibly create a reputational damage to an organisation and institution as part of government that has a very good reputation, if you are unable to deliver that sort of service to the agriculture sector?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We will always make sure that—

**The CHAIR:** I hear a point of order. I know, Mr Hansen, you were about to answer it.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** I accept that there's a bit of a line here, but I think that is seeking an opinion of Government policy.

**The CHAIR:** Given, Mr Hansen, you were answering it, I'm assuming you're skilled enough to answer it where you don't give that opinion. Are you comfortable in doing so?

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** He has been around a while. He knows what he's doing.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** All I was going to say is, we will always make sure that we fulfil our obligations and our duties. It's the kind of optional decision-making that we're trying to ensure staff make the choice on. For example, instead of having four vehicles come down from Orange for these estimates, all four people hopped in one car to come down.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** What if they don't like each other?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Whether they like each other or not—but it's those kinds of decisions that we can make.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Understood. Thank you, Mr Hansen. Moving on to staffing levels, what was the total staff employed by the Department of Primary Industries in 2022, and how many have you got employed as of today?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Current FTE are 2,078. The numbers for the last year, 2022: FTEs were 1,872.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It has actually gone up?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. As you'd be aware, we surge staff based on the responses we have. At the start of the last financial year we didn't know we were going to have a varroa response. We surged staff to bring people in to help us with that response at that point in time. We have staff going off the books at the moment, because a number of the fire and flood emergency response programs co-funded with the Commonwealth Government have come to their end point, and so the short-term contracted staff in helping the delivery of those come off. But, as I said, 2,078 this year.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** How many are employed in Orange at the DPI headquarters?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Our numbers tell us 400. I say "our numbers" because we have staff in Bathurst who are down on paper as being in Bathurst, but they'll come and work out of the Orange office. We've got people in Cowra et cetera. But on paper it has been steady at 400.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Specifically in the RAA, how many people were employed last year and how many people are employed this year? Are they all based out of Orange?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The vast majority of RAA staff are in Orange, and they're the staff that we've been scaling up and scaling back.

**REBECCA FOX:** I think it's valid. We scale up and down depending on the programs and the funding that we've got. That's a standard way of running a business that's got a budget of more than \$3 billion.

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Things change—disasters, flooding, drought, fires.

**REBECCA FOX:** We need different skills at different times. Public Works is a good example of that.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Ninety-one staff are on a casual or fixed-term contract basis, and we have our 26 permanent staff members in the RAA in ongoing roles.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** That's this year, is it?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** How many were there last year?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'd have to take that on notice. I'm sure it will come to me before we—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** You can come back a bit later on. That's fine. I want to move to the Farm Innovation Fund. I questioned the Minister this morning on how much was left in the fund. Her answer was over \$100 million. It wasn't very specific. Are you able to advise, as close as possible to today's numbers, how much is left in the fund?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** As the Minister advised, over \$100 million. It's \$126 million.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** The Minister spoke this morning of—is it the drought infrastructure fund? Is this the new fund that is possibly going to replace the Farm Innovation Fund? Is that correct?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's one for the Minister to make an announcement on very soon.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** You have no detail on how that will work?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** As the Minister highlighted in her answer this morning, this is a refocus of the Farm Innovation Fund to put the spotlight on drought infrastructure and drought preparedness pieces as part of that low-interest loan—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So your understanding is that it will transition from the Farm Innovation Fund to a new fund?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's correct, yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Are there any plans internally within DPI or the Department of Regional NSW to top up that fund? Once the \$126 million is expended or allocated, what's the plan then? Because we could come on with drought conditions very quickly over the course of months, and that funding could be drawn down pretty quickly, couldn't it?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It could be, and we'd hope it continues to be of use for people coming into these drought conditions. The question about top-up funding—that will be a decision of government.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** With regard to the types of infrastructure, the department is not in a position to advise what types of infrastructure might be included in the new fund. Is that what you're saying?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, that's right. But if we use the current Farm Innovation Fund as a starting template, we know that, of the approved loan applications to date, which the Minister highlighted was 3,200, 730 of those fall into the category of drought preparedness infrastructure. That's currently in the fund.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** What are examples of that?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's water irrigation systems, stock water systems, bunkers for storage of feed et cetera.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Moving on to the RAA. How do you budget—and Ms Fox mentioned this earlier. How do you plan the numbers in staffing levels and resources for the RAA? Because there are peaks and troughs, and it moves around. On the same day that the New South Wales Government handed down its budget, the Bureau of Meteorology declared El Niño. One would think we are going into drier conditions and drought conditions. We asked the Minister this morning around how much of the State is in some form of drought. Eventually we got an answer. Obviously, the trajectory is up. The trajectory is that the numbers are rising. It's 44.4 per cent of the State as of two days ago, according to your combined drought indicator on your website. Are you already planning internally for more resources and staff for the RAA? Because it appears as per the budget papers that it has had a \$96 million cut.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Again, the budget papers reflect a number of those disaster emergency relief funding programs coming to an end. As a new program starts up, the new program comes with budget to be able to administer and deliver the program. And that's where we then swing to contingent, casual and fixed-term

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contracts to be able to fulfil that. We do keep an eye on what we think might be coming over the horizon. A good example is that as we had programs finishing 30 June and we knew that we'd have a Sheep and Goat eID Rebate Scheme starting up not long after and we would need additional people on deck to administer it, we held back some of the staff to be able to transition across to that.

Any of the funding that comes via the emergency responses—so at the moment category B disaster responses for the seven local government areas up north—all comes with capacity for us to ensure that we've got people on to handle administration of, in this case, loans. So the programs come with the budget for admin. We're lucky to be able to reach out to people who have been on, been off and are in the community. We see if they're available to come back on to assist us in short-term stints again.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** In the budget under personnel expenses, it obviously talks of a drop from last year's budget of \$12.2 million down to \$8.095 million. That's directly within the RAA. Is that correct? That's the personnel expenses in terms of that drop? Or is that separate to the travel expenses we were talking about earlier?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That would just be staff expenses.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's probably the conclusion of a couple of the big program areas in that period. If you think about the original fire, we were running the catastrophic fire programs at that stage. As we've worked down, we'd expect to see tapering off. We've had a tapering off on 30 June and 30 September this year, and will on 31 December. As program areas come to an end, so does the funding for those program areas and the necessity to actually administer them. That's that kind of tapering that you see.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** If your department was faced with another disaster, whether that is a flood response, a fire response, or drought conditions, you really have no contingency within the department to absorb any additional costs in response, do you? You would need additional funding to deal with any disasters or any change in conditions for the ag sector moving forward. Is that a fair assumption?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** With regards to RAA and administering programs?

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Across DPI.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It's fair to say we've become pretty adept over the last 10 years of swinging resources to where the biggest priorities need to fit. If you have a look at the staff logs for any of our emergency responses—whether it's white spot, red imported fire ants, varroa or khapra beetle—we swing staff from our ag teams, biosecurity teams and fisheries teams across to where the immediate demand and the immediate need is. That's where we get our capacity to respond to these areas.

**REBECCA FOX:** And we work right across the department. We've had Public Works staff and rural fire staff working on the varroa response and we've got a good track record of doing that over the last three or four years, being able to do what we need to do in that space. We use all the resources.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I really respect what you're doing for the people of New South Wales in your roles working for the public service. It's fair to say, though, that if either DPI or the broader Department of Regional NSW were faced with another significant weather event such as a fire, a flood response or possibly drought, based on some of the cuts that you've had to make—I appreciate that they're decisions that you didn't make and they have come from the Minister down—you really have no contingency to deal with a major response, do you? You would need the support of ERC and Cabinet for additional funding, wouldn't you?

**REBECCA FOX:** In most of those cases, we work in a very well-defined national framework. Most of those programs are funded with the Commonwealth. We've seen it this week with the declaration in relation to fires in seven LGAs. That gives us immediate funding if it's category A or B, for example. We're well resourced in that space and we've always been able to do it previously. I have no doubt that we will be able to do it again.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Mr Hansen, I tabled this morning a copy of the combined drought indicator that demonstrates that the State is drought impacted in one form or another, at 44.4 per cent. How often is that updated online?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Every couple of days, based on satellite data uploads.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** And that's public? I just printed it off the website.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It is.

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay. In your experience—because you've been around a while, Mr Hansen, and you're pretty well respected—at what point do you feel or where is the trigger in terms of intense drought statewide before communities need more support, do you think?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** I will hear the point of order.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** That's seeking an opinion on a policy question, I would suggest. I accept there's a line, but it's seeking to draw a distinction between, presumably, the opinion that's elicited and what the Government position is.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** It's not a policy question.

**The CHAIR:** I dare say that it is a fine line in terms of whether it goes to a policy position or whether it's seeking the expertise of Mr Hansen and his tenure in his position. I'm confident Mr Hansen will be able to answer that without necessarily giving an opinion on policy.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I appreciate the confidence, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Don't let me down.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** There's an extension to the answer that was given by the Minister this morning which is about—and everyone here would be aware—intense drought as measured by the CDI in Brewarrina is very different to intense drought in Taree. It is very much both place based and duration based because people can handle certain periods with the frequency that they would experience these kind of conditions.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I suppose in your experience in previous droughts—you were Director General DPI in the last drought—at what point in your experience in the role as director general is the statewide drought impact enough for a declaration?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Unfortunately, this is where I'd need a 3D graph to show you that combination of axes. It's that piece of how much of the State, how intense is the drought, and what's available around the rest of the State to assist with drought impacts. Unfortunately, I was in this role even in the last drought—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** You did a good job.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** —and actually the one before that in 2014-15.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I suppose, Mr Hansen, what were the trigger points?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** The last one was the fact that there was no relief anywhere in the State.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Right.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** If you think about the last drought, it very quickly became a whole of New South Wales drought.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** How quickly did that turn from drought impact to essentially intense drought?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That was basically an eight-month turnaround.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Within eight months?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** This year I showed a NSW Farmers conference the series of progressions of month-on-month CDI measures from the lead-in to the last drought and how this drought was tracking on a very similar pattern. Now, we've had one change and there's a lot of things different between the last drought and this drought. We can talk about livestock prices. We can talk about a whole range of things.

**REBECCA FOX:** Water storage.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** But the one thing that is different is that we have just had BOM update their summer rain forecast to now say there's an average chance of average rainfall across all of New South Wales. That's a more positive update than we had previously, but it still needs to be taken in the context of the fact that we are seeing record-low soil moisture measurements across a large tract of the north of New South Wales. We are still experiencing, or expect to experience, one of the hottest summers that we're going to face. So even with average rainfall, on a dry environment with increased heat, it's going to be a challenging summer even with those forecast pieces.

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Just moving on while I've only got a little bit of time left, I have a question for both of you, Mr Hansen and Ms Fox. Are there any planned job losses or cuts for the DPI head office in Orange as part of the 400 staff that work there?

**REBECCA FOX:** I can start with the senior executive staff. You will know that the Government has made an election commitment to cut the senior executive staff by 15 per cent, so we are currently working right across the sector on what that looks like at the moment. I don't anticipate that that will be significant for any of those staff in Orange.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So I suppose to that point, you're talking about executive level?

**REBECCA FOX:** Senior executive staff.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So how many senior executive roles are looking to be cut out of DPI in Orange?

**REBECCA FOX:** We don't have a number at this point in time. We will work right across the sector to make sure that there's mobility options et cetera. That's 15 per cent.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** When do you envisage that there will be a number?

**REBECCA FOX:** In the next 18 months.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Right.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** So just further, I mean, we've tried to be really fiscally responsible around senior executive numbers in DPI. The number hasn't changed from 2018; in fact, it has gone down by one from 2018 to this year, in terms of senior executives, and that's managing the surges that come and go with assorted pieces. That is because we can deploy people from one project to another, so we can move someone from an animal welfare reform project on to another priority project and sort of swing them as those—but there are always changes. The problem with a blanket answer of yes or no is that we are always going to be changing staff.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But I suppose the point is, from both of your answers, there are cuts coming. What they are is obviously not determined, and they would be in executive level positions.

**REBECCA FOX:** At executive level, that's right.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Across the Department of Regional NSW and DPI?

**REBECCA FOX:** Across the whole of the public service.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Including your agencies.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** And you're already running lean.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Hansen, before lunch you made some comments around how the Recreational Fishing Trust audit would facilitate some discussions around the concepts of what a peak body is and what a statutory authority is. If that's the case, why are we running peak body workshops next month before we've actually had an audit? It seems premature that you would run those workshops without a clear path. I know Mr Sloan is coming up, and I'm aware that he signed the letter that went out to all the associations.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Before lunch I was purely buying time to be able to get Dr Sloan to the table for you, Chair, so I might throw to him. But as I do so, we do need to bring all the recreational fishing groups together around a table and have a conversation around what would this look like for them and what do they see. That'll be also—

**The CHAIR:** But you implied that the audit was dependent on that. If the audit was dependent on or would feed into that discussion then why have the discussion now, when the audit is nowhere near having commenced?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, but I don't think the first conversation is going to be the last conversation on the peak council, either, so commencing them around the same time might actually help us. But I'll throw to Dr Sloan, if I might.

**SEAN SLOAN:** The sequence that we're following to implement the Government's election commitment is to first have the audit conducted, and I think you covered that off in the morning session around the fact that there were some draft terms of reference that were sent out to a group of recreational fishing stakeholders. We got comments and that process will shortly proceed. The next step in there, which I think is what the director general was referring to, is the fact that there's a whole package of election commitments that relate to fisheries, and one of them is on the Recreational Fishing Trust audit. There's another one on establishing an

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expenditure board, and I think that process around looking at the requirements for an expenditure board will follow the trust audit.

Separate to that, there are election commitments around establishing peak bodies for both the commercial fishing sector and the recreational fishing sector, and so we're proceeding with those processes because that's a separate process around how those fishing sectors can represent themselves to the Government. I wrote to quite a long list of recreational fishing groups just recently to invite them to what will essentially be a series of workshops to work through what that would look like, and engaged all of the bodies that are out there. We engage with a lot of fishing bodies, particularly in the recreational fishing space, and so we want to bring them all together, have the discussion about what it might look like and then work from there. Similarly, with the commercial sector, we've started the same process.

**The CHAIR:** My understanding is the commercial peak body discussions are more well advanced than the recreational ones. On notice, are you able to provide a list of the associations that have been invited?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Happy to do that. If I've got a bit of time, I can probably search it and bring it up and run through it now.

**The CHAIR:** I don't want to waste my question time in rattling it off now. I think that's all I have for that line of questioning at the moment. Perhaps on notice, how much money is being given to external organisations, particularly the Invasive Species Council, from your various departments? I just wanted to get some figures over the last five years. Whether directly or indirectly, how much money have your departments given to the Invasive Species Council? I'm happy for you guys to take that on notice.

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

**The CHAIR:** I have some questions for LLS, if I may. I'll get the secretariat to pass a photo to Mr Orr. When we were discussing a release of documents and some conversations around aerial culling, we raised concerns about some of the contractors taking advantage of their contracts and using them for personal gain, landing their helicopters and taking trophy animals. You said you weren't aware of the case. I draw your attention to the photo that's been provided to you. From our investigation, that is an LLS contractor in full flight suit, posing with a very substantial trophy. Will you provide some comment as to what would be the consequences for that person outside of saying, "Don't get caught doing it again"?

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Banasiak, all aerial operations are run in accordance with the FAAST protocols. Since that photo has been provided to us, the matter is now under investigation.

**The CHAIR:** I want to go to some questions about some of the documents that you provided. Do you have those documents to hand, or would you like me to give you copies?

**STEVE ORR:** It depends on your question, Mr Banasiak.

**The CHAIR:** It goes to specific documents that were released in connection with some concerns we had over the management of the Moonlight travelling stock reserve. Do you have those documents to hand, or would you like me to provide them to you?

**STEVE ORR:** I'm generally aware of the matters, but Mr Kelly may also make himself available, subject to your questions.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I might invite Mr Kelly to come up as well. There obviously was a concern from a private landholder regarding the management of that travelling stock route. They wrote to you, Mr Orr, as the CEO. You wrote back to them saying that there had been no breaches of the public service Act. You are obviously aware of that letter since you wrote it. Given that there have been some statements as part of the independent report into the management of that reserve and the complaint—where some of your staff have advised that they didn't handle it too well and did show favour to one landholder over the next—how can you say in that letter that there were no breaches of the public service Act, when the Behaving Ethically guidelines are quite clear about acting impartially?

**STEVE ORR:** What I can say, Mr Banasiak, is that there have been several investigations into the matter which you're referring to in terms of Moonlight TSR. The consequence was those investigations found that there was no wrongdoing or breach of the code of conduct by the staff members involved.

**The CHAIR:** Is that with both reports?

**STEVE ORR:** That's correct.

**The CHAIR:** Because there were two reports, to my understanding, Mr Orr.

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**STEVE ORR:** That's correct.

**The CHAIR:** There were some fairly scathing findings from Ms Raheby about your department. She mightn't have extended it to the point where she said that there was corruption, but I draw your attention to the summary of evidence and findings. She is one of your managers and said:

... in essence, this situation has not been managed well by Riverina LLS and we are acknowledging that. We could and should have done better.

We have failed to effectively manage [or] reduce the conflict issues that have prevailed on the reserve and between the adjoining neighbors relevant to managing the TSR.

She went on to say, "What is surprising and concerning is that all interviewees acknowledged that they did not know the terms of the permit." So there's clearly an issue there in terms of training of staff as well.

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Banasiak, if I can just jump in, your initial question was whether there'd been a breach of the code of conduct, and the investigation showed there hadn't been. The investigations did say that there were some areas of practice which could be improved, and those matters have been addressed. But Mr Kelly may wish to add further.

**ROB KELLY:** Mr Banasiak, in reference to the Mary Raheby report, it goes back to the original complaint that was received in around April 2021. It does acknowledge that the initial complaint, the way that it was handled—it identified some deficiencies in how we were managing the process. Having received that report and acknowledged the findings of that report, we did act on that. We rectified those issues, and we put the staff that were involved in that through retraining and made sure that they fully understood what their role was, and particularly how the long-term grazing permits worked and how they were to be managed.

**The CHAIR:** Help me understand this. You're saying it's not a breach of the Act for—

**STEVE ORR:** What I'm saying, Mr Banasiak, is that we all have a code of conduct, as public servants, to abide by. There wasn't found to be a breach of the code. In terms of could we have handled the matter better, as it has been alerted to, we could have. But individual staff members weren't found to have breached the code.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Mr Hansen, I wanted to check if you had anything further on the *cestrum nocturnum* available yet.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes. The investigation was into the *cestrum nocturnum* plant. The teams have reached out and spoken to retailers and ascertained that the key retailers in the State of New South Wales don't sell that plant. As you would be aware, there's a prohibited list within the Biosecurity Act. That's currently under review, and we're looking to make some changes as to whether that should be on the list and what else should be on that list as well. It's probably one of the jobs likely to be picked up by the Independent Biosecurity Commissioner, if that legislation passes through Parliament, obviously.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Does that review have a time line at all?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, except that we'd want to get it done pretty quickly.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** But the *cestrum nocturnum* is definitely on that list of being flagged?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Given the fact that the retailers themselves are not selling it, and given the potential risk it poses to livestock, it would make sense.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** When you say that it's not being sold, do you mean by the major retailers?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's correct.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Going back to the varroa mite response, just before you said that fipronil is no longer being used. Have all of the fipronil baiting stations been removed from the former eradication zones?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, as far as I'm aware. They were only there in the presence of staff. It wasn't as though we set and forgot them. The way in which they worked would be we would have staff at those baiting stations using sugar syrup in the first instance to build up a large enough European honey bee presence around that so that it would ensure a low likelihood of any native bees coming into those bait stations. When that number got to that level, that's when the bait station would be spiked with fipronil. Once those numbers started to diminish and they went back to their feral hives, that's when that fipronil would be removed and the bait station would be closed down until staff returned back there for another baiting.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I think I was advised that even though staff were monitoring those stations, they weren't there constantly with each station and that they might be moving between different stations. It wasn't necessarily that they were there in front of one station the entire time. Is that your understanding?

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**SCOTT HANSEN:** I will get this confirmed, but my understanding is that they might have been moving between different stations that they were operating at any one point in time. My understanding was that there was staff present there whenever we had fipronil in those baiting stations.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If you could take it on notice to find out how many stations one person might necessarily be watching over when that program was running—

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Given that it has been reported that fipronil can remain active in honey for up to two to three years and is highly toxic, is there any work being done to monitor and mitigate the ongoing effects on fipronil, even though the actual poison stations have been removed?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'll have to take that on notice, or I'll come back to you with an answer before the end of this hearing with regards to what ongoing surveillance and sampling of honey might be in place.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Earlier this year the Federal Government announced that an investigation had found serious concerns regarding the regulatory capture within the APVMA, raising questions about their effectiveness as an independent regulator. Can you advise what actions the DPI has taken in response to that announcement, particularly given that the APVMA is the agency responsible for approving fipronil and other poisons, like 1080?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** We continue to be confident in the fact that if something is registered for use by APVMA, then it has undergone significant and rigorous scientific testing. I don't think anything in that report threw doubt over any of the registered products or any of the registrations they had conducted. Certainly, anything that is registered by APVMA that we use is used across the country and is used off the back of the process that they've undertaken. We haven't done anything differently or anything specific with regards to APVMA since that report was handed down.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** How often is the DPI in communication with the APVMA?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** On a regular basis, because we hold a couple of permits. For example, the use of some of the chemicals required for treatment of varroa mite, we hold a permit for use of those within Australia. We work with the APVMA on those permits to allow us to make those chemicals available to beekeepers at the moment within what were previously the red zones—the eradication zones—to try to keep suppression on the mite loads in those areas. We would have pretty regular conversations with APVMA on those types of topics.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Have you had any briefings with the Minister on the situation with the APVMA and the investigation findings, and how that might affect the use of agriculture chemicals like fipronil or 1080?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** All States and Territories, both senior executives and Ministers, were on a call, in which Minister Watt talked about the APVMA report and the result out of that. But we've had no specific conversation at a State level with regards to APVMA, no.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will any analysis or research be undertaken to determine exactly how many bees were killed under the failed eradication program and the impact of the loss of the bees on biodiversity and pollination?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** There's two parts to that question. The first part is it's going to be incredibly difficult to know the number of bees, given the fact the number of bees in a hive is determined around the strength of the hive and how long the hive's been established et cetera, so no. It's probably unlikely that we will spend too much time thinking about the number of bees. I would highlight, however, that this mite will kill bees itself. The absence of a control program means that there will continue to be, in some cases, the potential for significant European honey bee losses. Managed hives will have a chance of being able to mitigate those; obviously, wild hives will not. So no, we haven't done anything around those.

In terms of impact on biodiversity, that's one that we don't have a full picture on. That's because the best we can do is turn to what's happened in other countries, and we're so different to so many of those other countries. Even if we look to our closest neighbours in New Zealand to see what was the impact there, both our native flora, plus our seasonal conditions, are so different to what both North Island and South Island have over there in terms of they get a bit of a cold break over the year that slows down bee activity. Most of our coast doesn't have that break. We are working on estimates, and we are working on best guesses in terms of those impacts. We will be monitoring to see what it looks like.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** My understanding is that the actual varroa mite doesn't affect our native bees. Is that correct?



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**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's correct.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I understand what you're saying about monitoring to try to reduce the number of native bees that are actually getting poisoned through the program, but was there any research done or any data around that monitoring and making sure that native bees weren't affected by this program, as much as possible?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, there was a lot of monitoring done. In fact, the teams who put together the—everything, from the infrastructure and the hardware of the bait stations through to the behavioural patterns of the actual European honey bee to make sure that they minimised the risk of native bees being impacted. An incredible amount of work went into minimising that risk to them. So we've done a lot of work to make sure that we've reduced the risk to native bees out of this process.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can you just give me a bit of a run-down? I know that this is a big question and there are 30 seconds left, but what sort of processes were put in place, other than monitoring, and what sort of data was collected?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** If we want to park this one, I might get Dr Tracey to come up and he might talk to you in a bit of detail about the monitoring, the records and what we've got on that, because I feel as though I won't do it justice in the 30 seconds we've got.

**The CHAIR:** We've got about nine seconds now.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** In that case, can I use that nine seconds to say the title of that additional role that's joined the Animal Welfare Team?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It is Coordinator - Stock Welfare Panels.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** That's the new role. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** That perfectly takes us to the afternoon tea break. We will break for 15 minutes and return at 3.45 p.m.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back after that short break. I will throw straight to questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you, Mr Chair. My question is to the secretary, Ms Fox. This is a question that I posed to the Minister as well, but there was a bit of uncertainty. What is the current status of the Office of the Cross-Border Commissioner?

**REBECCA FOX:** The Office of the Cross-Border Commissioner exists as usual. Its functions are being carried out.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Who is in charge of that office today?

**REBECCA FOX:** Today there is an acting director in charge of that office.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Is the actual Cross-Border Commissioner not there?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'd prefer to take those questions on notice. I'm very concerned about my obligations to ensure the health and wellbeing of all of the staff and to ensure that I don't breach any privacy obligations, so I'd prefer, if the Chair allows, not to comment on employment arrangements of individual staff.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay.

**REBECCA FOX:** But I can assure you that the Office of Cross-Border Commissioner is functioning.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** For the record, the commissioner and assistant commissioner are both on leave, let's just say.

**REBECCA FOX:** I'm not confirming that or answering that question at the moment, if that's okay. I have got some information on the Working Regions Fund that Mr Taylor asked me about, if that's okay.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Of course.

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**REBECCA FOX:** I was correct; it does sit with Treasury. That fund is set aside under Restart NSW, and that Restart NSW Fund Act is administered by the Treasurer. So the Treasury and Treasurer teams will look at developing the government structure and guidelines for the allocation of those funds. We'll obviously work closely with Treasury, in our regional capacity, as they do that.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you for that; I appreciate it. How many people currently work for the Department of Regional NSW?

**REBECCA FOX:** I've got 4,432 at June 2022, which is the last Public Service Commission data. We're waiting on the June 2023 numbers. That excludes Forestry Corporation of NSW, who are a separate statutory entity, and Local Land Services as well—in that number—because they're an executive agency. So we work on about 5,000.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Are you able to take that on notice and come back to us?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, that's no problem—with everybody wrapped up together?

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Yes, and maybe by department or by agency—under the Department of Regional NSW. In total, how many executive positions, as the secretary, are you needing to make redundant across agencies?

**REBECCA FOX:** I don't have a number for the department at this point in time. We will work across the whole of the public service. We have an election commitment of a 15 per cent cut across the whole of the public service. The Public Service Commission will run a mobility process and people will be redeployed rather than exit the public service. I don't have a number, at this point in time, for the Department of Regional NSW, other than to say we are working on that 15 per cent across the whole of the public sector.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** We posed these questions to the Minister earlier with regard to the report that the Minister's office requested regarding the staffing levels in your office, Secretary. Has that report been finalised?

**REBECCA FOX:** The informal report, yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** What are the conclusions, recommendations or findings in that report?

**REBECCA FOX:** I've made some changes in my office, which I did after the election. I was appointed in November last year. I waited for the election to take place. Some of those changes have been driven by the skills that I have and the skills that I think need to sit close to me. I've moved the general counsel, the legal governance and risk team to directly report to me outside of my direct office. I've got the Parliament and Cabinet team. I've got a small media team and some direct staff that report to me. Those changes have been made to make sure that we're well aligned and can do what we need to do.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** How many staff did you have prior to that restructure?

**REBECCA FOX:** I inherited, from the former secretary—I think it was 83 staff.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** How many are in your office as of today?

**REBECCA FOX:** There are 42 or 43.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay—half. Do you believe that the restructure you've put in place is now finalised, and do you envisage any further cuts needing to be made by the decision of government for your office?

**REBECCA FOX:** Not in relation to my office. I'm a big believer in the process of continuous improvement. I think we've still got some work to do to make sure that we can deliver the Government priorities, work to our new budget, make sure that we can, as I said, go into drought, do those kinds of things and support communities through drought. I don't believe that any group should stay static. We often work in project teams, and Mr Hansen has talked about how we move resources around. I'm comfortable with the team that I've got at the moment. I don't envisage cuts as a result of any further reports, et cetera. We will do some more work with some of our teams to make sure that we've got the right resources in the right place at the right time. That's like any business that's got a budget the size of ours. Our workforce planning is important and is adjusted constantly.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** The Department of Regional NSW set up four key offices in the regions. That was Armidale, Coffs Harbour, Queanbeyan and Dubbo. Can you advise how many staff work in each of those offices?

**REBECCA FOX:** I can, if you give me one minute. The commitment was for 100. I think we're well over 100 in three of those offices. I think Armidale has been a little bit slower in our recruitment there.

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Because, under the former State Government, there was, obviously—to ramp it up to 400 jobs split across those four regions. Obviously, it doesn't mean they're all 100, but it was 400 split across. I'm just interested to know what the numbers are.

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes. We're very close to that 400. I just can't find the numbers. I will take it on notice and come back to you.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Do you envisage cuts that will need to be made in those positions, in those offices?

**REBECCA FOX:** No.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay. Excellent. How many executive level positions are based in those offices?

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

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I want to move to the Regional Development Trust Fund. With regard to that, there will be an application process, won't there, in order for the trust to be established?

**REBECCA FOX:** We're not quite at that level of detail yet. The trust is being set up and we're about to appoint a Regional Development Advisory Council. One of the first roles for that council will be to determine the need for the trust, the investment strategy, how it will work. So we've got to modernise the Act, set the trust up and work with the Minister and the advisory council, so we're not yet down to that level of process detail. Will there be applications—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Will people have to apply to be on the council or will they be just automatically handpicked by the Minister?

**REBECCA FOX:** There will be an initial appointment for 12 months—we'll make some recommendations to the Minister—and after that initial 12 months there will be a comparative assessment, a more open process.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So there will be then a full, possibly, expression of interest after that first 12 months?

**REBECCA FOX:** That's what I expect, yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But initially they'll be appointed for a 12-month term.

**REBECCA FOX:** Term appointment, that's right.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** With recommendations coming from your department?

**REBECCA FOX:** And that was because we wanted to do it fairly quickly and not go through a long process—get it up and running to start with.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Who will be eligible to apply?

**REBECCA FOX:** In 12 months' time?

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** In both.

**REBECCA FOX:** I expect it would be open and the rules or the regulation set out people with particular skills. They include things like expertise in regional industry or economics, Aboriginal enterprise, those kinds of skills in people that we're looking for.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** How will you identify people to initially sit on that council as recommendations to the Minister? Will you, as the department, need to have an EOI process or do you have a list of possibly qualified people that you'd be comfortable with?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, we'd have a list of qualified people that we would interview and run a sort of comparative process and make a recommendation to the Minister.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Is there criteria available as to what the eligibility is to be considered?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, there is, in the regulation.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Is that public?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes.

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Is that publicly available?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, it's publicly available, but I can give it to you.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay, it would be fantastic if you could, Ms Fox. Who would be ineligible? Are there any particular community members or positions that you may feel have a conflict of interest, like local government involvement?

**REBECCA FOX:** I would expect that we would consider conflicts of interest. I'm not aware of anybody or any particular category of people that would be ineligible at this point in time.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** That's interesting because I have had some feedback, whether this is accurate or not, that members with an involvement in local government or local government areas or local council may be deemed as having a conflict of interest and ineligible.

**REBECCA FOX:** I haven't heard that.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay. So would a councillor of a local council in a particular LGA who might be a community champion who you've worked with—or apolitical, whatever—be eligible under the very sort of hypothetical proposition I just put to you?

**REBECCA FOX:** That is very hypothetical and my initial reaction to that—I haven't heard it before—is that they would potentially have a conflict of interest in providing advice to the Minister, but we would work our way through that.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** What sort of oversight will the Minister's office have in terms of the trust itself?

**REBECCA FOX:** The advisory council will work and provide advice to the Minister on what that trust should look like. We've set some high-level objectives on what the trust should be doing and that's still all to be worked through.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Do you have on hand what date the advisory council will be fully established with the initial 12-month term or members serving the initial 12 months?

**REBECCA FOX:** I would expect by the end of this year or early next year.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Are the positions paid positions?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, they're paid in accordance with the guidelines for board appointments and committee appointments that are set by the Public Service Commission.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Right. Are you able to table what, in accordance with those regulations, the board members would be paid?

**REBECCA FOX:** I think that is all publicly available, yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Yes, but would you mind taking it on notice and submitting it with the other questions?

**REBECCA FOX:** No, that's fine.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** One of the concerns I have—and I put this to an experienced department and the people within the department—is whether there is a need for an advisory council when we essentially already have an apolitical independent department that has a track record of delivering in the regions, in particular, grant programs? Do you believe an advisory council takes away some of the expertise that has been built up within your agency since its creation?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: seeking an opinion on a matter of Government policy.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I will redirect the question. Is an advisory council needed because your department does not have the resources to continue to grade and to assess grant applications?

**REBECCA FOX:** Sorry, could you repeat the question?

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Is an advisory council needed because of the cuts to your department as a decision of Government in order to grade these community grants?

**REBECCA FOX:** The use of an advisory council in this kind of regional development program and trust is a model that works in other jurisdictions, for example, in Western Australia. Those jurisdictions also have

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departments that are responsible for primary industries, for regional development, all of the functions that we have in our department. I always welcome additional input. I think it's important to get as many perspectives as you can in that regard. It would be helpful to have community input and input from different stakeholders.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Would you be able to provide on notice a list of the eligible LGAs in regional New South Wales that would come under the trust or would be eligible for projects in their LGAs?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Excellent. Are parts of Wollongong, Newcastle and the Blue Mountains now considered regional New South Wales within the department?

**REBECCA FOX:** The definition of regional New South Wales as you know is often quite controversial and has been controversial over a long period of time. I would expect that one of the first things that we will do when we're modernising the legislation is consult and work out what that definition of regional New South Wales looks like. It's usually contentious when those cities of Newcastle and Wollongong are either excluded or included from particular programs, so that's one of the first things that we'll look at—who is eligible.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** What is the current definition of regional New South Wales?

**REBECCA FOX:** The current definition we use is the one that we have used for a number of years.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But based on the Restart program?

**REBECCA FOX:** Set-up, yes, excluding the metro—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So is it fair to say that Newcastle, Wollongong and Blue Mountains are not considered regional for the moment until there is a review of the definition of regional New South Wales?

**REBECCA FOX:** I wouldn't normally include Blue Mountains in that. It would be Wollongong and Newcastle and the Sydney metro.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Blue Mountains is not part of the Restart guidelines for regional, though.

**REBECCA FOX:** I'm not sure about the Restart guidelines.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I can confirm that one. At the moment the Blue Mountains local government area is considered metropolitan.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay, excellent. I want to move on to the Stronger Country Communities Fund and your understanding of the way that that program is being rolled out because it is part of the budget and we have projects that are continuing to be rolled out as part of the current budget papers. That program was rolled out per local government area, wasn't it?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, that's correct.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** What was the allocation per LGA?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'll ask Mr Wheaton to confirm that.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** There were five rounds of that program that have been run since 2017 and the base allocation for each local government area changed in each of those rounds, but for each round it was a minimum of \$750,000 for each pre-merged local government area.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Mr Wheaton, it would be true then that every local government area that was defined within the parameters of regional New South Wales got at least \$750,000 under the Stronger Country Communities funding model?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Yes, in each of the rounds, so if you add that up over the five rounds, the minimum per local government area is much higher obviously than \$750,000.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So the baseline funding from that program was delivered to those LGAs irrespective of who was the local member?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** That's correct.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Which Legislative Assembly electorate got the most funding from the Stronger Country Communities Fund?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Firstly, we never tracked the expenditure per electorate. All of our data and application process was always done with the local government area. I would have to take that on notice.

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**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Would you say it would be the one with the most local government areas?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Yes, that's how the fund usually works. But there are some council areas that are pre-merged, so that would join together a number of council areas. Yes, Barwon and Murray, like you said, I think have the highest number of local government areas covered in their electorate.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** To either Mr Wheaton or Ms Fox, Western New South Wales—you obviously look after that portfolio as well. Is it fair to say that the Legislative Assembly electorates of Barwon and Murray define pretty well what is western New South Wales?

**REBECCA FOX:** I think we've used the same definition of western New South Wales that we've used for the last three or four years, but we've picked up Dubbo. I'm not sure if that answers the question.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So Dubbo is an addition?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Since the change?

**REBECCA FOX:** Since March.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I can probably talk to that more specifically, if you like. Narrabri LGA, I think, is covered by Barwon, but it's not in the definition of western New South Wales. Then there is a suite of local government areas that are covered by the seat of Dubbo—Narromine and Gilgandra. Then down—I think Murray is split in terms of local government areas. So in terms of western New South Wales, you'll have Wentworth, Hay, Balranald and probably a couple of others. But Murray covers a few more that are not in western New South Wales that would be deemed to be in our region of Riverina Murray.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Ms Fox, I wanted to ask about airstrip upgrades. The previous Government committed, prior to the election, to rolling out \$8 million worth of funding for airstrip upgrades—sorry, I need to get my language right here. Now, they were for several remote communities, in particular in western New South Wales. Was that commitment honoured, or is there funding there for that program currently through the Department of Regional NSW?

**REBECCA FOX:** I'll have to refer that one to Mr Wheaton. He can answer that.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** No, that commitment for the \$10 million was an election commitment made by the Coalition Government pre-March 2023. That funding was not allocated at that time. It was an election commitment.

**REBECCA FOX:** Chair, could I just correct—I've got some information from the team. Local government members and councillors are not eligible for the advisory council. That was my mistake.

**The CHAIR:** I might pick up where we left off with you, Mr Orr. Can you help me understand what is or isn't a breach of the public sector Act or the code of practice as it pertains to your entity? The general manager of the LLS office in question and two of the staff members acknowledged that they treated the permit holder with favour over Mr Slattery because they didn't like him. Can you explain how that's not a breach of the Act or even the *Behaving Ethically* guide? I draw your attention to the responsibilities. It says:

**Equal access and opportunity**

Treat people equally, whether they are members of the public, customers or colleagues.

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Banasiak, there's a code of conduct. That's probably the document you're referring to. It's not a piece of legislation per se. There's the code of conduct, which LLS has and which the department has.

**The CHAIR:** So treating people differently because they don't like someone—

**STEVE ORR:** If I can just finish. Then there have been two investigations into the matter. One of those investigations was a little while ago, which is the Mary Raheby investigation you referred to, and then there was another.

**The CHAIR:** Version one or version two?

**STEVE ORR:** It was version one, and then there was another one, which was an internal investigation. Both of those investigations concluded at the end of it all that there was no breach of the code of conduct. There were things, as you alluded to before, which should have been done better, but the staff in themselves did not breach the code.

**The CHAIR:** So treating people differently—

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**STEVE ORR:** You're going off on a bit of information which I don't have and which was considered through the investigative process. The conclusion was that the staff did not breach code of conduct.

**The CHAIR:** You have the same information I have, Mr Orr. You have the GIPAA documents. I'm going off the GIPAA documents where you have three of your staff members acknowledging that they treated one person of the public differently over another person because they didn't like that person. How is that not a breach of the code?

**STEVE ORR:** All I can say, Mr Banasiak, is that the investigations were conducted and the conclusions were reached, but there was not a breach of the code. Mr Kelly, who is far more closely involved in the matter, may wish to make some further comments.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Kelly, would you like to come forward and tell me how that's not a breach of the code?

**ROB KELLY:** Mr Banasiak, I think what we're talking about here in terms of the information you have, particularly in relation to those emails—we do acknowledge and did acknowledge from the initial Mary Raheby investigation that we did not perform the way we should have in terms of understanding the requirements of long-term grazing permits, and particularly responding to Mr Slattery's original concerns around how they were being applied to the TSR that stretches out the front of his place and past others. As a result of Mary Raheby's investigation into that, we did make changes. We re-educated the staff.

It was a new process that was put in at the time for those long-term grazing permits, and the staff members were working off normal grazing permits at the time. They obviously—and we've retrained them—didn't understand what the differences were between long-term grazing permit conditions and management and what was required. In relation to what wasn't achieved on that TSR, we rectified those situations and the long-term grazing permit was cancelled. Since then the staff are fully aware and have been retrained in understanding what the conditions are.

**The CHAIR:** I accept all that, but that doesn't really explain how all three of them admitted that they treated one person differently over the other, notwithstanding that they didn't understand the long-term grazing permits. That's a separate issue. All three admitted that they treated one person from the public differently over the other. Surely it's a basic principle of working in the public service that you treat people equally. It's listed there in the *Behaving Ethically* guide.

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Banasiak, the consequence of that—and as to what someone's intent is here, Mr Kelly said that an error was made. It wasn't a malicious error; that was the conclusion. The investigation, which was done, was an independent investigation. Those are the conclusions which were reached.

**The CHAIR:** One of the other big concerns for me when looking at these documents, Mr Orr and Mr Kelly, is when we talk about record keeping, it seems that your department, or that particular office—I don't know whether it's systemic for your whole department—wasn't taking accurate file notes on conversations they were having with members of the public. In the case of one of the staff members, they were asked to retrospectively—actually, my understanding is three staff members retrospectively put file notes against Mr Slattery labelling him as aggressive, post them becoming aware that there were complaints or concerns being raised about the conduct of that office. Can you see how that would look to Mr Slattery and even to me, where your staff are retrospectively recording file notes saying someone's being aggressive after a complaint has been made about your department?

**STEVE ORR:** I can understand your point, Mr Banasiak. Mr Kelly, do you have any further information?

**ROB KELLY:** I can completely understand the point. As you've said, I wasn't privy to those conversations about the circumstances surrounding why those entries were made in there.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Kelly, you didn't direct the general manager or any of the other staff members mentioned to actually make those notes about Mr Slattery's behaviour? Did anyone direct those staff to make those notes retrospectively?

**ROB KELLY:** Not to my knowledge.

**The CHAIR:** Have we checked to see whether other officers are following good practices around record keeping?

**STEVE ORR:** Each LLS region per se, Mr Banasiak, has its own responsibilities in terms of record keeping. They are an entity and need to comply with the State Records Act. Each general manager is aware of their obligations in respect to record keeping, as is all of Local Land Services, and if there's any concerns with record keeping we certainly look into those.

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**The CHAIR:** Would you not agree, though, that taking file notes from phone conversations, it's a pretty standard requirement in both the public and private sector for workers? When someone calls, you take a file note as to the precis of what was discussed? I know you say that each office is their own entity, but wouldn't you, as the overarching—

**STEVE ORR:** It would depend on the circumstances, Mr Banasiak. I mean, a ranger in the field getting a phone call from a landholder about 1080 baits, or whatever the case may be, or asking for some advice, my expectation is they're not always in a great position to be able to take file notes.

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate that.

**STEVE ORR:** But people should make good records in terms of the decisions which they're making.

**The CHAIR:** But you agree, particularly if an issue or a dealing with a member of the public was contentious, you would expect your staff to make file notes.

**STEVE ORR:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Just going back to that previous comment where you said each office is their own sort of master in terms of record keeping, is there not a standard process for LLS to actually—

**STEVE ORR:** Every office needs to comply. So every region and sort of—sorry, that's what I meant. Each region of LLS has a responsibility to comply with the State Records Act, and that's all pretty clear. People understand their obligations in terms of the State Records Act and that's the expectation which we have of staff.

**The CHAIR:** But you don't set a standard in terms of what that looks like for all the different regions?

**STEVE ORR:** The State records requirements are pretty clear, Mr Banasiak.

**The CHAIR:** Given that, you would have thought that some better file notes or better record keeping would have happened with this office. Would you not agree?

**STEVE ORR:** Correct.

**The CHAIR:** I might just bring up Mr Sloan in the last couple of minutes to talk about mullock, if possible. We might start this conversation and finish it later. Mr Sloan, there are obviously some changes to mullock boat limits recently. I just want to understand how this is going to be enforced, given that we've gone from an individual possession limit to a boat limit. In the 29 seconds, can you explain to me how going from an individual possession limit to a boat limit will actually be enforced? I see some potential court challenges.

**SEAN SLOAN:** Thanks for the question. First of all, boat limits are used widely across Australia and other parts of the world. Essentially, we have a possession limit for mullock for recreational fishers, which is one, and we've placed a boat limit for recreational fishers of two, and then a boat limit for charter fishers of three fish. It's designed to help contribute to the recovery of the depleted stocks. Would you like me to keep going?

**The CHAIR:** I'm conscious of Ms Hurst's time, so we might pick this up when we come back.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. Mr Hansen, I've just got a couple of follow-up questions. I'm happy for you to take these on notice if you don't have the details for them. In regards to the 14 roles in animal welfare within the DPI, could I get a breakdown of the title of each of these 14 roles—how many of those roles are full-time roles and also whether any of those 14 roles are part of those roles you discussed before, which had that shared responsibility within other portfolios, or whether some of those 14 roles are very specifically focused only on animal welfare?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I can certainly do that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. Mr Chaudhary, I've been contacted by a number of community members who are concerned about the proposed logging at Kiwarrak State Forest, which is home to many koalas and other native species. Why is logging to this forest being undertaken, given it's been declared an area of regional koala significance?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** So, Ms Hurst, as I was explaining earlier, our harvest plans are drawn up in accordance with the coastal IFOA, which is the strict environmental rule set within which we operate. That rule set has been developed—it took a number of years to develop it—with input from experts and scientists and so on. As part of that prescription we have a number of requirements there to protect native animals, including koalas and we conduct surveys and searches to identify koala habitat and we provide protection for koalas.

With respect to Kiwarrak, specifically, there are a number of compartments in there, but generally about 40 per cent, I think, of one of the compartments in particular will not be harvested, and, if it is, it's a low intensity



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harvesting. I think it's important also to note that we are only harvesting in regrowth forest where we go in again and again over time. There's good research that backs up that koala occupancy in harvested and non-harvested forest generally remains the same, which gives us confidence that the prescriptions in the IFOA are working.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** What led to the decision to delay logging at Kiwarrak?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I don't have specific answers on that particular forest, but generally it could be a number of reasons, such as logistics—you know, trying to arrange crews, making sure the harvest plans are in order. A whole range of things could go into commencing or delaying operations.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you able to take that on notice if that information is available elsewhere?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Sure. I might be able to come back to you by the end of the session.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Great. Thank you. Will Forestry NSW continue to work with the community and the local experts regarding their concerns about this proposed logging operation?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Again, as part of our harvest plans, we do consult and engage with local community members and we will continue to do so. If there are concerns there, absolutely we will engage.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. In September the New South Wales Government announced logging would be immediately ceased within koala hubs found within the boundaries of the proposed Great Koala National Park. Which compartments were either active or planned to be logged and had to be stopped as a result of this decision?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** There's about 106 koala hubs that have been identified as a result of that Government decision. It covers an area of approximately 8½ thousand hectares. The actual impact may be a bit more than 8½ thousand hectares because the koala hubs—if you look at it on a map, it's actually scattered across the landscape. To make sure we're not harvesting in those areas, there will be exclusion zones and buffers and those sorts of things. That means that there'll be a larger area than the approximate 8½ thousand hectares that will be excluded.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do we know exactly which compartments or zones will be included in that yet?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Yes. We have a map that has been provided to us which outlines which areas of the forest are designated as koala hubs. The regulator has also amended the regulation to ensure that those hubs are now excluded from harvesting and our harvest plans are now going to be developed in accordance with that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can we get a copy of that map?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I'll have to check that to see how we can make it—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Could you seek some advice?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** It's not our map. We didn't produce it, but I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. Can you also provide—and this might be one to take on notice—a list of where logging crews and contractors were redeployed to after the moratorium on logging in koala hubs came into place?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Yes. I mean, I can take that on notice in terms of specifics, but generally we've been trying to relocate them to other areas. There have been some impacts. At the moment we have stood down some contractors as well. It is a combination of the koala hub decision but also the voluntary standdowns that we have in place.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Can I just confirm as well, with that map, does it just identify the koala hubs or does it actually identify the components and the zones that will be stopped?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** I believe it identifies the koala hubs, which are those patches of forest that I was talking about across the landscape. So, yes, that defines the boundaries which we then put into our mapping system and allows us to exclude those areas from harvesting.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And of that 8,400 hectares of koala hub subject to the moratorium, how much of this had been logged in the past 10 years?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** The specifics of that I'll have to take away, Ms Hurst, because we haven't looked at it as koala hubs. We look at it basically as State forest in our landscape, and we have been harvesting in

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State forest in accordance with the environmental rules in regrowth forest over many, many decades. Specifically for the 106 koala hubs, I will have to take that away.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will that data be available? I understand that it has been divided into hubs now, but will there be some sort of way of tracking whether or not those spaces have been logged previously?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** That's a very good question. I'm not sure about it because we haven't been tracking data based on those hubs. That's a new configuration. We've tracked harvesting data and surveying and searches based on State forest or compartments. I'll have to go back to our staff and see whether that's something we track and we are able to produce that information or not.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If you are, could I put that on notice as well?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Sure. Absolutely.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** How many hectares are currently on the coastal integrated forestry operations approvals plan portal for logging—active, approved or planning—within the boundaries of the proposed Great Koala National Park?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** That information is available on our plan portal. The plan portal looks at what is planned and what is proposed as well. So it gives you a bit of a forward look into our operations. I'm not sure exactly how much that is, but I can tell you, on average, as I was explaining to Ms Higginson earlier, we harvest about 1 per cent of the entire native forest estate that we have got. Generally that would be about 30,000 hectares, but that's across the State forest. It's not up in the koala park area. It's in the entire State forest we've got.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you able to take that question on notice in regard to how many hectares from that coastal integrated forestry operations approvals plan portal for logging so that we've got that specific data?

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I've got a couple of questions for Mr Orr as well. It has been estimated that we lose 50 million trees a year to habitat clearing. Ken Henry's report on the Biodiversity Conservation Act has highlighted that 83 per cent of all land clearing occurs for agriculture, and more than half of native vegetation clearing has no known regulatory explanation. Given Mr Henry's recommendation that nature be given priority in all laws, what plans are there, if any, to review some of that code-based clearing?

**STEVE ORR:** The Biodiversity Conservation Act has a statutory review requirement. Dr Henry, as you referred to, completed that review, and that review was tabled in both Houses back in August. Concurrently, there was a review of the Local Land Services Act, part 5A—which is basically native vege on rural regulated land which is largely agricultural land—which also made a series of recommendations about changes to the land management framework. What the Government has decided is that there will be a whole-of-government response which will consider both of those reviews.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So we're still waiting for the whole-of-government response on that? You're not able to comment on the time line around this?

**STEVE ORR:** That's correct. What I can say is that there's a senior officials group which has been put together, and they're meeting for the first time tomorrow.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I want to go back to Mr Wheaton around the airstrips. You said in your previous answer to the question that it was an election commitment from the previous Government, and it was not honoured. That's fine. I accept that. But I wanted to go one step further and ask, within the department, is there any consultation or any conversations or programs that Western New South Wales councils would be eligible for to upgrade their airstrips?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** None at the moment.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Sticking with the airstrips theme, I will go to Ms Fox and you can redirect if you want to. It's with regard to the partnership between the New South Wales Government and the Far North West Joint Organisation. This was started in 2019, supported by the Department of Regional NSW, with the JO, FlyPelican and Air Link, from memory, servicing far Western New South Wales with air services. Prior to the election the former Government did commit to an additional \$4 million to ensure the long-term sustainability of these services. Was that commitment honoured by the Government? Was that funded, or was there any work done on continuing this partnership?

**REBECCA FOX:** I think I'll have to refer that one to Mr Wheaton, if you've got any information. Otherwise, we'll take it on notice.

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**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I'll answer in a number of parts. The \$4 million commitment, we did not have the budget allocated for that commitment. It was an election promise that was made, but it was not costed or budgeted to the department. I'm aware that there was previously an allocation of \$8 million that was allocated to the Far North West Joint Organisation to provide subsidised air services across Western New South Wales. Those routes are from out of Dubbo to Bourke, Walgett and Lightning Ridge and also out of Sydney and Cobar. We've undertaken a review of those, in September 2023. We've been partnering with the Far North West Joint Organisation. They have sought a variation to the current arrangements, which we have agreed to extend for a further 12 months.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** When was the contract due to expire?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** November this year.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** From what you just said, the department has accepted a variation request from the JO to use unspent funds to extend the partnership for 12 months. Is that correct?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** That's correct. The current arrangements, as they stand, with the subsidised routes, will continue for those 12 months. That will enable us to have a period of operation which is longer, without the disruption of COVID. When we had done the assessment report, the data really was skewed to the impacts of COVID and other disaster activities that were linked with the patronage of those services. The extension will allow us to do a better assessment of the economic benefit of those routes for the next 12 months.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Your review that you spoke of in your earlier answer—did you say that was started in September? Has it concluded, or it's still ongoing?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** We've completed that initial review.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** What were the findings of that initial review?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** The review said the current routes are well patronaged. Like I said, the data needs to have a longer period of operation without the disruption of COVID-19 to get a better assessment of the economic benefits of the service.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** How much of the initial investment from the department to the JO was leftover, unallocated, unused or not expended?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I'm going to say that that's likely a commercial-in-confidence figure that I wouldn't be able to disclose at the moment. There are two providers, like you mentioned, that have those subsidies that are currently provided through the contract with Far North West JO. All I would be able to say is that, with the extension of those services for the next 12 months, we've come to the conclusion that there is enough funding that is available at the moment to cover off the extension of the current subsidised routes for that period.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Obviously it's fair to say that longer term you'll be looking at collecting data in a non-COVID world, and you would hopefully consider more normal operating patterns. But it's fair to say, without going into the details, that that partnership is a success. Would that be a way you would describe it?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Certainly the community connectivity and the air services that are enabled by those services that are provided at the moment are well valued by the communities that use that.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** While I have you, Mr Wheaton, I might continue. I've got some questions that you may be able to answer. They're regarding Walgett pool. You're probably well across this issue. I think it has been ventilated a fair bit in the local community. Ms Fox, is Mr Wheaton the best one?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, Mr Wheaton.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Mr Wheaton, when were you first made aware of the seriousness of issues confronting Walgett Shire Council regarding its local pool?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Likely the same time that that was made through the media and the council resolution was made initially to decommission the pool.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Right. So a rough time line?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I'm going to say it was mid this year that council had passed the resolution that they were going to decommission the pool.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Okay. I will continue with you, Mr Wheaton. In an answer to a question on notice that was asked on 1 August and answered on 5 September, it was stated:

- (1) Staff from the Department of Regional NSW are in regular contact with Walgett Shire Council.

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- (2) The Department of Regional NSW is working with Walgett Shire Council to identify potential solutions to remediate its pool. This includes support from NSW Public Works which have undertaken an initial assessment of the works required to make the pool operational.

Does this mean that prior to 5 September your department had a fair idea of what was required to make the pool operational?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Yes, prior to 5 September. I know that the council—and the dates I've got in front of me at the moment—rescinded their initial decision to decommission the pool on 23 August so naturally there had been some time passed before 23 August, where our local team on the ground, based out in western New South Wales, and Public Works had engaged with council on the options and the costing of the works that were required to make the pool operational.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So if that's the case, Mr Wheaton, it obviously took another month to find—what is it—the \$375,000, and that needed to come from the Premier's Discretionary Fund, didn't it?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I'm not quite sure whether it has been made as a grant through the Premier's Discretionary Fund or another source. It's not from the Department of Regional NSW as a grant.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Ms Fox, would you be able to come back on notice to advise the Committee on which fund the \$375,000 came from?

**REBECCA FOX:** I won't be able to answer that except to say it didn't come from any Regional NSW fund, so I suggest that's directed to the Premier's Department. Mr Farraway, while I've got you, I've got the numbers for the four hubs, if you would like them now.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Yes.

**REBECCA FOX:** These numbers are as at the end of June 2023. Queanbeyan is 147 people, Coffs Harbour is 234, Armidale is 94 and Dubbo is 167, which is a total of 642 on the initial 400 target.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Excellent. If it's okay, I have a follow-up question. It's a different question because the numbers are different. Do you envisage, Ms Fox, any cuts to those 642 people that are based in those four regional cities?

**REBECCA FOX:** The only cuts I would envisage were if there are any senior executive staff that are caught up in the 15 per cent cut, which is across the whole sector. I don't have the numbers so I don't know whether anybody sits in those offices.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Because we've got different numbers, are you happy to take on notice how many executive level positions are in those four different centres, and are a part of the 642?

**REBECCA FOX:** Yes, I can do that.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you. Okay, I've done Walgett pool. Thank you, Mr Wheaton. I'll direct this to Ms Fox and then you can work out who you want to refer it to. It is the first one, regarding the Community Assets Program. Clarence Valley Council was invited to make an application under the Community Assets Program for up to \$7.5 million. It was one of seven local government areas in the Northern Rivers that was impacted by the 2022 floods. It was deemed unsuccessful, their \$7½ million grant. Do you know anything about this or are you able to advise why Clarence Valley was the only LGA in the Northern Rivers deemed unsuccessful in its application for funding?

**REBECCA FOX:** I can't give you anything specific, and I'll refer to Mr Wheaton in a minute. Generally any applicants for any of our programs that are deemed ineligible or unsuccessful are offered a briefing, so I would have expected the team to go back if the applicant wants a briefing. That would have explained it to them. I'll ask Mr Wheaton whether he's got any further information on that particular one. If not, we can take it on notice.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I'm aware of the situation with Clarence Valley under the Community Assets Program. Each of the local government areas that was eligible under that fund was written to and given a notional allocation of funding for them to guide their applications. Clarence Valley was in the vicinity from an area of around \$2 million and they took the decision to apply for over \$7 million for a single project. Also, in terms of the eligibility criteria for that program, the asset needed to be directly impacted by the natural disaster event—the flooding. The decision was taken in the assessment that the asset pool that was proposed under the application from Clarence Valley was not directly impacted by the floods.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** To confirm, the assessment from the department in grading that application was that the pool was not directly impacted by the flooding event and that their application was over the allocated amount of \$2 million that they would be able to claim for?

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**JONATHAN WHEATON:** We had done an impact assessment of each of the local government areas. We then provided notional allocations out of the total pool of funding, pending on the projected impact of that local government area. Clarence Valley were advised of that notional allocation in writing but then chose to submit a project which was over three times the total value that was their notional valuation. They also didn't submit any other projects for consideration. As I understand it, they had submitted a report proposing, in terms of the impact on the pool, that there had been structural changes due to the water saturation in the soil that had been a direct impact on the structural integrity of the pool. We made the assessment that that correlation that was proposed by the council wasn't a direct impact of the flood.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Picking up on that point specifically, Mr Wheaton, can you advise was there any peer review that was undertaken on the geotechnical advice provided in support of Clarence Valley Council's application?

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** I would have to take it on notice, specifically to that point. Each of the projects that you submitted under that program would have had an assessment by Public Works, predominantly on the deliverability and viability of the projects and also on the projected costings submitted by each of the applicants. There is the likely scenario that Public Works—and Mr Varnum is in the room at the moment, who can talk to it more broadly—do have a key role in assessing the impact on assets post-natural disaster and working with the Commonwealth and State to determine whether there is that direct attribution of the natural disaster with the proposed damage that is being engaged in those discussions.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Thank you, Mr Wheaton. My question is now to Ms Fox—or it might be Mr Hansen. It's regarding the extension of the RAA flood grants, in particular around the mid North Coast. With regard to those RAA flood grants, I've been contacted by quite a few farmers, in particular up around the mid North Coast and North Coast, that were unable to complete their upgrades or their repairs due to either further flooding or trade shortages, which were across the country, if not just regional New South Wales. My question is why were those farmers and impacted landholders not given an extension?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Thanks for the question. In recognition of some of the challenges that have been faced there, I think every one of the natural disaster grant programs actually were extended beyond their usual time frames. The January 2022 disaster grants were extended for—it ended up being 19 months and a extension of 10 months was provided for applications and claims. The June 2020 natural disaster grants were 14 months with an extension of five months provided for applications and an extra two months on top of that for claims.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** But I suppose, Mr Hansen, the issue is that getting tradies to do anything has become such an issue. I'll just redirect the question to keep it on point. How many people requested an extension from those events? How many applicants or landholders were unable to be given an extension?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'm happy to have this number checked, but I think it was fewer than 20 that sought extensions. Each one of those was individually looked at to work out whether there were extenuating circumstances around that. I'll come back to you with the number that finally—

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I'm happy if you want to take it on notice. How many people requested an extension and how many were not given an extension? But take it on notice. I'm not expecting you to know off the top of your head.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** But it is important to note the extensions that were given across the board. The September flood ones, it's 18 months—which is a lot longer than the six months for these natural disaster grants, which were quick and urgent, "get back on feet" kinds of pieces.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** To that point about extensions, is there an issue or does your department come under significant pressure from your Federal counterparts around trying to finalise claims and the issuing of extensions?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Actually, it's the Reconstruction Authority in New South Wales who negotiates with the Federal Government with regard to the time frames on these.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So, essentially, the RAA is the processing element of it.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's right, and we collect the information. We collect the data. We collect the inputs that go to RA for them to actually mount those conversations and discussions.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** With regard to the individual reviews of extensions, was there a particular geographical area that for one reason or another needed more extensions than other areas? That could be for a multitude of reasons, but do you know if anything stuck out? Could you take it on notice to see if a

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particular area stood out? I have had concerns in and around the Oxley area and in and around the south of the Clarence—mostly a lot of the mid North Coast, going into the North Coast and the Northern Rivers.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, I'm happy to have a look at that when we look at those numbers. But we've had things such as someone has thought that they have lodged a claim, only to realise that all they did was save it rather than lodge it. We've been able to see that in the system and go back to them and say, "Well, this is why you haven't heard anything—because you haven't actually lodged the claim. It's just been saved." That wasn't from North Coast; that was from Central Tablelands. There's a whole series of things that we find, but I'm happy to see if there's a geographical pattern to it.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I appreciate that. I suspect the next question may be for you, Mr Hansen, but you can redirect. It is around support for independent fish restocking programs and the Manilla fish hatchery. Do you know much about that or about an application to the Minister and to the department for some restocking programs? On 8 August this year the Government announced \$850,000 for the Habitat Action Grants, and the fund closed on the twenty-ninth. Concerns have been raised around the \$2 for every \$1 native fish stocking program due to be opened in February, but I don't think there has been any announcement on that yet either, has there? Sorry, I'll try to make that a bit more succinct. First, do you know about the Manilla fish hatchery's application to the Minister and to the department for support? Secondly, are they eligible under the Habitat Action Grants program?

**SEAN SLOAN:** I'm not familiar with a specific proposal from Manilla fish hatchery, so I can take that on notice. Yes, I think we are due soon to be opening another round of recreational fishing grants.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** If you're taking that on notice, just for context, the member for Tamworth wrote to the Minister requesting funding. The Minister denied the request for discretionary funding and encouraged them to apply for future funding under the Rec Fishing Trust, which is the \$1 native fish restocking program. We're hearing from the smaller independent fisheries and hatcheries that they just can't afford to operate under that model. That gives a bit of context to take it on notice.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes, we'll take that on notice. To Mr Farraway's earlier question about RAA staff numbers for last year, if I might, I ran through the numbers, which were 117 in total by 31 August this year. On 30 June or 1 July last year it was 101, and it did grow to 140 in December 2022 as we brought additional people in to keep up with applications and the workload. As I said, it's back now to 117.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So 140 would have included the casual and permanent totals.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** It's 26 sort of standing, ongoing, permanent, and the rest are all scaled.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** So 26 is the baseline, and then the rest are scaled.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That's it.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Sloan, we might continue where we left off before. There are a lot of references in the Act to "individual" or "person", and I note your comments where you say that we're not the only State to have boat limits. I'm just wondering how that's enforced when a lot of the Act speaks about the individual or person. When it comes to a court process or a prosecution process, how would that be enforced?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Thank you. We do actually have a boat limit in place for gemfish in New South Wales, which has been in place for quite some time, so mullocky is not the only species to have a boat limit. Essentially, the way boat limits work—and for mullocky, the boat limit for recreational fishers is two fish—is that that boat can only have two fish on board. We've introduced a boat limit for the charter fishery, which is three fish, which means that a charter boat can only have three fish on board. Part of the thinking here is that because of the size limit for mullocky, which I think is 70 centimetres, they're large fish.

With two people on board a boat and two large fish, if you, say, fillet a mullocky, that's actually a lot of fish to take home. Potentially, you could have multiple people all taking a feed of fish home, and that's really how boat limits work. You limit the overall take, and it engenders that sort of thinking around having a feed of fish, taking only what you need and not over-catching. Mullocky has been depleted, which essentially by definition means that the stock is having trouble naturally replenishing itself.

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate what you're saying, and I'm aware of the status of mullocky. That boat limit states:

The possession limit applies in or adjacent to any waters or when transporting or storing the Mullocky.

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Can you explain how storing the mullock, in particular, will be enforced? Does that mean storing on the boat? Does that mean storing at the person's residence? Are they in breach of the Act if they have a mullock in their freezer and then they go out and catch another two? Where does "storing the mullock" apply?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The fisheries Act defines possession of a thing as including having the thing under control at any place. That means whether it's stored at home or it's in an icebox. Essentially, the possession limit deals with the point that you were going to. You can be in possession of the fish by not physically having it on yourself but having it at home in your freezer or in an icebox. The fisheries Act actually defines how that works.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I think we had this issue at the end of last year with the cultural fishing and the abalone, and I think there was a clarification made in legislation. Going to the point about the charter, is that boat limit over the course of a day, or can the charter operator have multiple clients booked in through the day—obviously in separate bookings—and go out, get two caught for two people, drop them off, get another two people, do the same thing and continue throughout the day?

**SEAN SLOAN:** The possession limit is linked to the person, the individual. A charter boat limit of three mullock means that they can do it—

**The CHAIR:** Is it limited to the charter boat operator or is it limited to the person?

**SEAN SLOAN:** It's to the person. But the boat, when it goes out fishing, let's say there are six people on that boat, there can only be three fish on that boat for that trip. If that charter boat then returns to port and those people get off and take the fish, the master of that boat can do another trip with a separate group of people. However, the master of that boat can't be in possession of more than his possession limit or her possession limit.

**The CHAIR:** What would stop someone taking a boatload of spearfishers off into the water, dropping them off and then picking them up again? Technically they're not on the boat.

**SEAN SLOAN:** Probably safety issues would be the paramount issue there, I'd think. You wouldn't want to be dropping people into waters where they were unattended. That's not a practice we would encourage or support.

**The CHAIR:** I just want to clarify some data around the recreational fishing fees over the last couple of years. There seems to be a bit of a discrepancy in what's been reported. In one instance, I've got you, Mr Sloan, saying that in 2021-22 there were 376,363 people paying the recreational fishing fee over a three- or one-year period. But then, in another instance, it's recorded on the DPI website, where it's 265,000 people paying the fee. I'm just wondering for clarity which one is correct? Do we have any figures for more recent times?

**SEAN SLOAN:** We can check if there's some different figures on the website, but the figures I've got are for the 2021-22 period. There were 376,363 fishers. The figure I've got here for the 2022-23 period is 390,146 fishers. These are the number of fishers that paid the fee. But I can check the figure on the website to make sure that's the right figure. I can take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** I note there was a decline in the 2020-21 to 2021-22 period of around 98,000. Are we attributing that solely to COVID?

**SEAN SLOAN:** There was a reduction. I don't have the exact figures in front of me, but there was a reduction in the number of short-term recreational fishing licenses during that period. We had a lot more people opting to take up a longer term licence, which we think has had some effect on the following year, because more people hold either an annual or a multi-year—you can get a three-year fishing licence. We think, particularly during that COVID period, a lot of people opted for those longer term licenses. That could be an answer to that.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That period would coincide with the periods of lockdowns, where people didn't get to go away for their holidays and their trips that they would normally have done.

**The CHAIR:** I acknowledge that. But anecdotally, I note on the flip side I noticed an increase in people applying to do the R-Licence course during that lockdown period because they were sitting at home bored and they were preparing for when they could be released from purgatory. I'm just curious that there was a drop in recreational fishing, but there wasn't necessarily a drop in the R-Licence.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** But a lot of those fishing licence ones would've been the ones that they buy from the bait-and-tackle shops at the holiday resort that they go to be able to go fishing and so forth.

**The CHAIR:** Can we talk about participation from recreational fishermen in research that has been done by the department, particularly around the sustainability of recreational fishing in terms of the department surveying recreational fishermen either by phone, by diaries, boat ramp and interviews? It seems like there's been

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a steady decline in participation. I'm just wondering whether the department has done any work to understand as to why there has been that steady decline in participation or willingness to participate in those surveys.

**SEAN SLOAN:** I don't have the figures to—

**The CHAIR:** Some of the figures that I have are that in 2019 and 2020 it was lower than the previous year by around 23 per cent. I don't have any more current figures than that, but it seems like it has been a steady decline over the years. I am wondering have you done any work to ascertain why that might be the case?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Previous recreational fishing surveys—and there are obviously various types of surveys we do, but I think the one that you're pointing to is the one that we do every two years to estimate recreational participation and catch for all of the key species. When we started doing those back in around 2001—I think that was the first national recreation fishing survey—it was done using data out of the phone book. Obviously, these days most people don't have their names and details in the phone book, so we have had to move to different techniques. I am happy to take the figures that you've got, have a close look at them and see if we can provide some clarity for you.

**The CHAIR:** Maybe even some more up-to-date figures on what the participation rate has been over the last couple of years. The data I've got is from 2020, so that would be good.

**SEAN SLOAN:** Certainly.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** And there might still be a bit of a COVID influence on that as well. But we'll have a look at that because that's the first time it has been raised.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Sorry, Chair, you asked a question about the Invasive Species Council contribution. I think your colleague in the upper House also asked a similar question on notice to us recently, so I know our number, which is a \$33,000 contribution in the last five years from DPI. That has been our payment into an interstate government and industry program that the Invasive Species Council is managing.

**The CHAIR:** Before I pass to Ms Hurst, on notice can you provide some information about how you provide some level of accountability for how that money is spent?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I'm happy to provide that. I think we provided similar in the response to questions on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I'll go back to Mr Orr. In the statutory review of part 5A of the Local Land Services Act tabled in Parliament in August, it concluded that the Government should reduce unallocated land clearing by better identifying native grasslands and non-woody vegetation. The review recommended that the Government introduce interim requirements for landholder self-assessments of native grasslands and non-woody vegetation to be reported to the LLS. Have any steps been taken to implement that specific recommendation?

**STEVE ORR:** I'll go back to my answer before, which was that the Government is considering both reviews in terms of an overall response. There are a series of measures which the Minister is keen to progress with. I need to take on notice whether that was one of those. To your point about unallocated clearing, because there is a rather large number of unallocated clearings, what that means is there is not a paper trail to actually determine whether or not there was an approval or not. In some instances, there's no approval required. What the intention was in relation to that, as it applies to non-woody vegetation, was that when people self-assess and they form a view that they don't need an approval, they just notify Local Land Services. That's what the intention was, and that's all designed to improve our understanding of what's actually going on with unallocated clearing. That was one of the recommendations. Whether it was one of the recommendations which the Minister was keen to quickly progress with, I will need to take that on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I assume that, right across the statutory review, you're still waiting on that advice for all of it or—

**STEVE ORR:** The Minister is keen to progress with a number of the recommendations which are largely within her complete remit and don't, of themselves, actually cut across the recommendations within the BCA review, which was Dr Henry's review which you referred to before. There are a number of those. I'll take on notice which ones they were.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you know what proportion of New South Wales emissions are attributable to rural land clearing?

**STEVE ORR:** No, I don't.



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**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you able to take that on notice or is that something that your department would not have?

**STEVE ORR:** It's not something which we look at specifically. Mr Hansen may know the answer to that. Are you talking about emissions from—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** From rural land clearing specifically.

**STEVE ORR:** From clearing itself?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes.

**STEVE ORR:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. Also, do you have any projections on whether or not it will increase or decrease as well?

**STEVE ORR:** The emissions or the land clearing?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** The emissions. Do you also know what proportion of privately owned farms across New South Wales are currently benefiting from carbon farming and biodiversity stewardship agreements? Again, I am happy for you to take that on notice?

**STEVE ORR:** Broadly. Obviously, with the advent of the environmental markets, many landholders are looking to both understand and take advantage of those particular markets, and it is certainly something which, within LLS, we are looking to put more resources on to actually assist landholders to understand those markets. Ultimately, it is their decision as to whether they do or do not get involved. Do we know a number as to what proportion? I don't have that on hand, but I am happy to take that on notice.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I have a couple of questions that might be relevant to Ms Filmer, if I could get her.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** While she comes forward—it is actually 12. I said 14, but 12 and 12 are the two years' numbers within the animal welfare unit.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Did it use to be 14?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** No, it used to be 12 and it is now 12. I am happy to step through them at any stage, if you want to step through those.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Maybe at the end. Could we do that?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. I do have a quick question for you, Mr Hansen. I think this one might be most relevant to you. Last year the previous Government was looking at stopping the sale of fruit tree netting that was not wildlife friendly. Do you know, now that there has been a change in government, if that is still progressing within the department, or has it stopped?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Actually, I am not aware. Let me find out about that.

**KIM FILMER:** I can probably answer that one. That would be something that would be considered part of the animal welfare legislation reform. So there has not been a decision made on that yet, but it would be part of that process.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you. Ms Filmer, I note that the latest statistics on animals in research were published in February 2023, and they relate to the year 2021. We have previously spoken at other estimates about the delay in that data being published, and I believe I was told that the sector was moving to an electronic system and that it was going to make that process much quicker. Are you able to provide an update on this, and when we can expect the statistics to start being published much sooner?

**KIM FILMER:** They should be published early next year, so the statistics are due to go to the next Animal Research Review Panel meeting, and then, once they have been through that process, they go up through the normal approval process to the Minister. Given that the next Animal Research Review Panel meeting is in December, I think we are probably looking at early next year for that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will that be early next year for the 2022 data?

**KIM FILMER:** That's right. It goes on a calendar year, so the statistics are collected and come to the department in March. Then it takes quite a few months to sort through that data to make sure it is accurate, then

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go through the process and then up through the approvals. Making it an electronic system has probably taken a couple of months off the process.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will it still be about a year to get that data public?

**KIM FILMER:** There is a lot of information. There is a massive amount of information there, so it does take a bit of time to go through it. And it has to be accurate, so the time looking at it—to make sure it is as accurate as possible is the aim, rather than just getting it out quickly and it not being so accurate.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I've got a question about the New South Wales puppy farm taskforce, which was ongoing within the RSPCA. Is this something that is continuing? Can I also get an update on that program and what has been achieved through it to date?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes, I've got that data. The puppy taskforce was established in August 2020. The stats we have on that are that, since then, they have undertaken 703 audits. They have done 375 revisits, and they have done three prosecutions during that time. They have issued 353 24N notices and 88 PINs. They have inspected 15,588 animals and there were 141 seized, but that was back in 2021. There have been no seizures since then.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Is the program still going?

**KIM FILMER:** The program is still going. There have been two inspectors. There were four at one stage. There have been two, but they are in the process of putting another two on. It will be back to four very shortly, is the information I have been given.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Will that program wrap up soon? What is the projection?

**KIM FILMER:** No, there is no intention for it to wrap up. It has waxed and waned a little, in terms of the numbers involved in that program, but, as I said, it is moving from two back to four soon.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you know how much more funding that program has, to be able to continue?

**KIM FILMER:** The RSPCA has been funding that directly.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are they doing it themselves now?

**KIM FILMER:** Yes.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** In regards to breeding, at the end of 2021, the DPI released a consultation paper on the licensing and regulation of cat and dog breeders in New South Wales. Can you advise where that work is up to, whether it is continuing and whether there have been any meetings with the Minister on that?

**KIM FILMER:** In terms of the licensing?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** The licensing and regulation of cat and dog breeders. It was a consultation paper.

**KIM FILMER:** The paper has been looked at by the animal welfare reform team, though I can't give you any updates in terms of conversations with the Minister on that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** So there have not been any discussions with the Minister that you are aware of?

**KIM FILMER:** Not that I'm aware of, no.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you able to tell me, Ms Filmer, if there are any full-time or full-time equivalent staff that work specifically in the exhibited animals division at the DPI, and, if there are, how many?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Is it now time for me to come in?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Sure.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Excellent. There is obviously the Chief Animal Welfare Officer, sitting at the table here, and an executive support officer. Then there are two team leaders. There is a manager for policy and programs. There is a leader of exhibited animals. There are three senior policy officers, two policy officers and the stock welfare panel coordinator. Hopefully, that adds up to 12.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** They are all specific animal welfare roles. They are not shared.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That is right.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** And they are all full time.

**UNCORRECTED**

**SCOTT HANSEN:** That is right, and they have access to both policy teams. They have access to the communications teams and they have access to the compliance teams for assistance as well.

**The CHAIR:** I might just ask one remaining question of Ms Filmer and then invite members to clear the decks in terms of anything that they have taken on notice that they do not want to take home for homework. Ms Filmer, Ms Hurst was asking questions about the puppy farm taskforce. You listed a few achievements there. How many puppy farms have been identified and closed down as a result of that puppy farm taskforce?

**KIM FILMER:** There have been three prosecutions.

**The CHAIR:** Were they identified as puppy farms, or were they prosecutions for just animal welfare? Happy for you to take it on notice.

**KIM FILMER:** It depends on your definition of "puppy farm". That's something that's quite loose.

**The CHAIR:** Were they identified based on the department's definition of a puppy farm? Perhaps you can tell us, on notice, how many were shut down or identified and shut down?

**SCOTT HANSEN:** Those prosecutions were breaches of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I will now invite anyone to come up and clear the decks.

**SCOTT HANSEN:** I just want to square the ledger with you, Chair. I talked about cattle yardings being up, and I said I didn't have the number for sheep. Sheep yardings are actually up 37 per cent year to date. I talked about processing numbers being up. In fact, lamb processing is up 17 per cent on the 10-year average. Mutton is up 22 per cent on the 10-year average. That just rounds out those numbers that I gave you this morning. If I may, there was a question that the Opposition asked with regards to the RAA and the request for extension. There were actually seven official requests to NEMA for extensions, and five of those were approved by NEMA.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Sloan?

**SEAN SLOAN:** Thank you. Mr Faraway asked a question about the Manilla hatchery and I can answer that question. The Manilla hatchery has participated in what we call the \$2-for-\$1 stocking program, which means that the Recreational Fishing Trust contributes \$2 for every dollar that a private hatchery contributes. I think there has been some difficulty for the Manilla hatchery to continue to participate in that program, so they were encouraged to apply for a grant out of the Recreational Fishing Trust to essentially help boost what they're doing at Manilla, so that work has been assisted by staff in the department and essentially Manilla hatchery is just waiting for the next round of funding applications to open, and then they'll be able to apply and go through that process.

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Banasiak, I think you had a question about spend on the feral pig program to date?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**STEVE ORR:** The spend as of the end of September was \$119,000, noting the New South Wales budget was handed down on 19 September. Also, Mr Banasiak, given the discussions we had about the Moonlight, if it's useful to have another follow-up discussion I'm more than happy to be involved in that through the Minister's office.

**The CHAIR:** Sure, thank you.

**ANSHUL CHAUDHARY:** Chair, there is one other one. Ms Hurst asked a question about the koala hub maps, and the map is available on the EPA website.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**JONATHAN WHEATON:** Mr Banasiak, I have a couple to clear up as well. Just with regard to Walgett pool, the first motion that was passed by council to decommission the pool was on 5 July. Our team had no notice of the issue with the pool prior to the media report that indicated that the cost would be at \$1.7 million, and then the decision the council office confirmed was rescinded on 23 August, like I said. Just to confirm, the flood Community Assets Program application through Clarence Valley, their notional allocation was \$2 million. They had applied for \$7.5 million for the Grafton Memorial Pool, and we will take on notice how we assessed the geotech report that was submitted by council with its application. Lastly, I just want to say thank you very much to the Committee for letting me join online. It's time for me to boire du vin rouge, which is to drink some red wine for the folks at Hansard.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Wheaton, for rubbing salt into the wound.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Mr Wheaton just got that into *Hansard*. Very good, very clever.

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**UNCORRECTED**

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**SCOTT HANSEN:** Just to allay any concerns with regard to the fipronil baiting question, fipronil baiting stations are only ever operated in the presence of an authorised officer. The team actually did a really clever piece of marking bees that went to these baiting stations and following them back, tracing them back to their wild hives, and then took samples from those hives, sent them to the Newcastle uni, where wax, nectar, pollen and honey were tested. The uni found extremely low levels of fipronil in pollen and wax, but none in the honey. The bees die too quickly for any honey production. It also has an extremely short half-life and it doesn't persist longer than four hours, and it was used at levels lower than what you'd normally find in a dog flea collar.

**STEVE ORR:** Mr Banasiak, the last comment just on drought generally, I wouldn't want the Committee to think that there's not a lot happening in relation to drought. I know within my organisation, Local Land Services, we're deploying a lot of resources to deal with the drought situation to provide advice and information to landholders, be it about animal welfare, animal health, weeds, pests, and other ag production related things, so there is a lot which is happening. Again, I wouldn't want the Committee to think that there isn't. There are a lot of things going on across the State.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** And we think we're getting rain on Friday up north. We'll see.

**The CHAIR:** Now we've descended into a weather report.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** We're ploughing right now.

**The CHAIR:** I thank all witnesses for their time today. You have agreed to take some questions on notice. Some of you have cleared them up, others might be still outstanding and the Committee secretariat will be in touch regarding those. Once again, thank you very much for your time and travel safely back to wherever you are going.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**