



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEES

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2023-2024

Supplementary questions

Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW

Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales

Hearing: Wednesday 13 December 2023

Answers due by: Wednesday 24 January 2024

Budget Estimates secretariat

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Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales**Questions from the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC****Local Land Services**

1. What was the travel budget for Local Land Services in the 2022/23 Financial Year?

Answer:

I am advised that it was \$2.5m

2. What is the travel budget for Local Land Services in the 2023/24 Financial Year?

Answer:

I am advised that it is \$2.5m

3. If the 2023/24 travel budget for Local Land Services is less than the 2022/23 travel budget for Local Land Services, what are the reasons for the cut?

Answer:

See answers to Questions 1 & 2.

4. Does the Minister stand by her decision to reduce the remuneration of Local Land Services board chairs and board members from May, 2024?

Answer:

The independent review of LLS Boards and Committees identified the need for remuneration to be reviewed, the rate of remuneration for LLS Board members will appropriately reflect the advice that has been received from the NSW Public Service Commission. This change will be implemented in the first half of 2024.

Regional Development Roadmap Roundtables

5. As of December 14, 2023, how many roundtable events have been held across NSW to discuss the new Regional Development Roadmap?

Answer:

Six

6. Where have these roundtable events been held?

Answer:

Bega, Wagga Wagga, Orange, Casino, Bourke and Broken Hill.

7. Has the Minister attended each of the Regional Development Roadmap roundtable events in-person?

Answer:

The Minister has attended the Development Roundtables in Bega, Orange, Casino, Bourke and Broken Hill.

8. How many roundtable events are scheduled post December 14, 2023?

Answer:

A further Development Roundtable was held in Maitland on 20 December 2023 which the Minister attended in person, with further roundtables to be held in early 2024 in Coffs Harbour, Narrabri and Moree.

9. If there are future roundtables scheduled, will the Minister be attending these events in-person?

Answer:

The Minister has committed to attending as many roundtables as possible and has already attended the vast majority of them.

10. When were formal invitations issued for attendees at the round table events attended by the Minister in Bourke (December 12) and Broken Hill (December 13)?

Answer:

The Minister approved the recommendation of the Department of the forward schedule of roundtables in October 2023.

11. When was the Department of Regional NSW notified that the Minister would be attending these roundtables in Bourke and Broken Hill in-person?

Answer:

See answer to Question 10.

12. When was the Department of Regional NSW notified that the Premier would be attending the roundtables in Bourke and Broken Hill in-person?

Answer:

The Department of Regional NSW often engages in advice and communication regarding ministerial visits across regional NSW.

13. Who were the attendees at the Regional Development Roadmap roundtable in Bourke on December 12?

Answer:

The attendees will be available on the Minister for Regional NSW's 2023 diary disclosure summary.

14. Who were the attendees at the Regional Development Roadmap roundtable in Broken Hill on *Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales*

December 13?

Answer:

The attendees will be available on the Minister for Regional NSW's 2023 diary disclosure summary.

15. Were these events in Bourke and Broken Hill “invitation-only”, and if so, who was responsible for compiling the list of attendees and issuing invitations?

Answer:

Yes, all Roundtables have been invitation only and arranged by the Department of Regional NSW.

16. What modes of travel did the Minister utilize to attend these events in Bourke and Broken Hill, as well as other events in Walgett and Brewarrina on December 12?

Answer:

Plane and car.

17. If the Minister utilised charter flights, who were the other passengers on these flights?

Answer:

All Ministerial travel was taken in accordance with the relevant standards and guidelines set out in Part 5 of the Ministers Office Handbook (Handbook), available at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/premiers-department/ministers-office-handbook>.

18. If the Minister utilised charter flights, who booked the flights and when were the flights booked?

Answer:

See answer 17.

19. If the Minister utilised charter flights, were other MPs on those flights? If so, did they contribute to the cost of those flights?

Answer:

See answer 17.

20. If other MPs were on those flights and contributed to the cost, how much did they contribute?

Answer:

See answer 17.

21. If other MPs were on those flights and did not contribute to the cost, why did they not contribute?

Answer:

See answer 17.

22. When was the venue booked for the roundtable event held in Bourke?

Answer:

Ministers' diary disclosures record information about important meetings ministers attend.

Ministers' diaries are published on the NSW Government website.

23. When was the venue booked for the roundtable event held in Broken Hill?

Answer:

Ministers' diary disclosures record information about important meetings ministers attend.

Ministers' diaries are published on the NSW Government website.

Rural Assistance Authority

24. As of December 13, 2023, how many claims does the Rural Assistance Authority have that are unprocessed?

Answer:

Please note reporting is generated on a monthly basis for much of this data. RAA have provided data as at 31 December 2023 where this is the case.

I am advised that as at 31 December 4,279 claims were on hand for reimbursements to customers in relation to the three flooding events in 2022, Natural disaster grants.

25. How many of these claims are for figures of \$75,000 or higher?

Answer:

No claims for reimbursement are for \$75,000 or above.

26. As of December 13, 2023, what is the total value of the unprocessed claims?

Answer:

The information is currently undergoing validation.

27. As of December 13, 2023, what is the average time taken by the Rural Assistance Authority to process and approve claims, and reimburse applicants?

Answer:

I am advised that average processing times for claims or the three flooding events during 2022 was 35.5 days.

28. As of December 13, 2023, how many full-time equivalent staff are employed by the Rural Assistance Authority?

Answer:

I am advised that Rural Assistance Authority staff are highly flexible and workforce numbers fluctuate based on the need of farmers and regional residents in relation to disasters and weather events.

29. As of March 25, 2023, how many full-time equivalent staff were employed by the Rural Assistance Authority?

Answer:

See answer 28.

Regional Funding Programs

30. The NSW Government has allocated \$350 million to its Regional Development Trust Fund. Is this correct?

Answer:

Yes

31. If so, is this \$350 million Regional Development Trust Fund comprised of “new money” or is it reallocated from the previous government’s Regional Growth Fund, which had in excess of \$600 million unallocated as of March 25, 2023?

Answer:

The \$350 million was allocated to the Regional Development Trust as part of the 2023/24 Budget.

32. The NSW Government has also allocated \$250 million to its Working Regions Fund. Is this correct?

Answer:

To be referred to the NSW Treasurer.

33. If so, is the \$250 million Working Regions Fund comprised of “new money” or is it reallocated from the previous government’s Regional Growth Fund, which had in excess of \$600 million unallocated as of March 25, 2023?

Answer:

To be referred to the NSW Treasurer.

34. In relation to the Regional Development Trust Fund, will that \$350 million worth of funding be rolled out over the course of the 2023/24 financial year?

Answer:

Expenditure from the Regional Development Trust Fund will commence in 2023/24.

35. If not, over what period of time will the \$350 million be rolled out?

Answer:

N/A see answer 34.

36. How much of the Regional Development Trust Fund is budgeted for distribution in the 2023/24 financial year?

Answer:

All investment decisions from the Regional Development Trust Fund will be made by the Minister based on the considered advice of the Regional Development Advisory Council.

37. How much of the Regional Development Trust Fund is budgeted for distribution in the 2024/25 financial year?

Answer:

See answer 36.

38. How much of the Regional Development Trust Fund is budgeted for distribution in the 2025/26 financial year?

Answer:

See answer 36.

39. How much of the Regional Development Trust Fund is budgeted for distribution in the 2026/27 financial year?

Answer:

See answer 36.

40. In relation to the Working Regions Fund, will that \$250 million worth of funding be rolled out over the course of the 2023/24 financial year?

Answer:

To be referred to the NSW Treasurer.

41. If not, over what period of time will the \$350 million be rolled out?

Answer:

To be referred to the NSW Treasurer.

42. How much of the Working Regions Fund is budgeted for distribution in the 2023/24 financial year?

Answer:

To be referred to the NSW Treasurer.

43. How much of the Working Regions Fund is budgeted for distribution in the 2024/25 financial year?

Answer:

To be referred to the NSW Treasurer.

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44. How much of the Working Regions Fund is budgeted for distribution in the 2025/26 financial year?

Answer:

To be referred to the NSW Treasurer.

45. How much of the Working Regions Fund is budgeted for distribution in the 2026/27 financial year?

Answer:

To be referred to the NSW Treasurer.

Forestry

46. Has work commenced on a five-year statutory review of Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals?

Answer:

Yes.

47. If not, when will that review start and who is/will be the lead agency on that body of work?

Answer:

N/A see answer 46.

48. What portion of state forest operations on the South Coast have now been impacted by Stop Work Orders?

Answer:

Stop Work Orders have impacted Tallaganda and Flat Rock State Forest.

49. What is the status of new Wood Supply Agreements on the South Coast?

Answer:

I am advised that sales agreements have been in place since 2018 and are continuing.

50. What role does Forestry Corporation have in the consultation process on the development of the proposed Great Koala National Park?

Answer:

Forestry Corporation is participating in interdepartmental meetings and providing information and assistance as requested by the Government.

51. Has Forestry Corporation been invited to participate in this process? If not, why not?

Answer:

See question 50.

52. Have you met with Dr Brad Law to discuss his work on the impact of selective harvesting on koala populations?

Answer:

Minister Moriarty has met with a range of DPI personnel in relation to forestry operations and ecology

issues.

53. Do you accept that his work shows there to be no impact on koala populations from timber harvesting in NSW?

Answer:

See answer 52.

54. Have you made other Ministers aware of Dr Law's body of peer-reviewed work?

Answer:

See answer 52.

55. Which agency will be the lead agency in the development of the next iteration of the Forest Industry Road Map?

Answer:

The NSW Government will be taking a whole of government approach to the Forestry Industry Roadmap given the vital importance of the timber industry to the state of NSW.

56. Have you advocated for the Department of Primary Industries to deliver that work, as it has done previously?

Answer:

See answer 55.

57. Do you believe it should be the Department of Primary Industries that delivers that work, as it has done previously?

Answer:

See answer 55.

Cross-Border Commissioner

58. On what date did James McTavish cease being the NSW Cross-Border Commissioner?

Answer:

I am advised that the date was 8 December 2023

59. On what date was Kalina Koloff appointed as the NSW Cross-Border Commissioner?

Answer:

I am advised that the date was 11 December 2023

60. Was there a directive from the Minister, or her office, for Mr McTavish to be released from the role of Cross-Border Commissioner?

Answer:

No.

61. Is Ms Koloff acting in this role, or has her full-time appointment been confirmed?

Answer:

I am advised that Ms Koloff's assignment has been confirmed.

62. If Ms Koloff has been appointed full-time to the role, was there a recruitment process to fill the role?

Answer:

Yes. I am advised that the role was filled through an internal recruitment process using the mobility provisions of the Government Sector Employment Act.

63. If not, why not?

Answer:

See response to Question 62

64. Who selected Ms Koloff to fill the vacancy?

Answer:

I am advised that a panel convened to assess internal applicants and their suitability for the roles. Recommendations for appointment were approved by the Secretary.

65. Was there any correspondence between the Department of Regional NSW and the Minister, or her office, in relation to Mr McTavish no longer being the NSW Cross-Border Commissioner?

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Answer:

No.

66. Was there any correspondence between the Department of Regional NSW and the Minister, or her office, in relation to Ms Koloff being appointed to the role of NSW Cross-Border Commissioner?

Answer:

No.

Senior Executive Roles

67. How many senior executive roles have been downgraded within the Department of Regional NSW since March 25, 2023?

Answer:

I am advised that of the roles that have been reviewed, one has been evaluated at a lower senior executive Band level.

68. What was the budget for senior executive roles within the Department of Regional NSW in the 2022/23 Financial Year?

Answer:

I am advised that the budget for senior executives is included within the Employee related expenses as disclosed in the 2022/23 audited Annual Report.

69. What is the budget for senior executive roles within the Department of Regional NSW in the 2023/24 Financial Year?

Answer:

I am advised that the budget for senior executives is included within the Employee Related expenses detailed in the Department of Regional NSW Financial Statements in the 2023/24 NSW Budget Papers.

70. What has been the overall financial saving to the NSW Government as a result of those roles being downgraded?

Answer:

I am advised that remuneration information relating to senior executive Bands is published in the Annual Report and determined under section 24O of the Statutory and Other Offices Remuneration Act 1975.

71. Which agencies within the Department of Regional NSW had senior executive roles downgraded, *Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales*

and how many in each agency

Answer:

DRNSW – 1

72. What were the localities of the senior executives whose roles were downgraded within the Department of Regional NSW?

Answer:

I am advised that information cannot be disclosed without revealing employee personal information.

73. How many of the senior executives whose roles were downgraded remained employed by the Department of Regional NSW?

Answer:

I am advised that information cannot be disclosed without revealing employee personal information.

74. How many vacancies were created as a result of the senior executive roles being downgraded?

Answer:

Nil

75. How many of the vacancies created as a result of the senior executive roles being downgraded have been filled?

Answer:

N/A

76. How many of the vacancies created as a result of the senior executive roles being downgraded remain to be filled?

Answer:

N/A