



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 21 February 2024

Answers due by: Tuesday 19 March 2024

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BUDGET ESTIMATES 2023-2024

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Questions from Hon Chris Rath MLC *(on behalf of the Opposition)*

AGRICULTURE

Sheep and Goat Electronic Identification

- (1) At your prior Estimates hearing in December, the committee was told there had been 1680 applications for funding from producers to assist with the implementation of electronic identification. How many applications have been received between December 13, 2023 and February 26, 2024?
- (2) At the same hearing the committee was told that about \$11 million of the \$14 million available through this program was under application. How much of that \$14 million is under application as of February 26, 2024?
- (3) If the \$14 million is fully exhausted, will the NSW Government be providing additional funding to assist producers who may have missed out?

Drought Funding

- (4) As of the most recent reporting date, how much funding remains available in the Drought Innovation Fund, which had previously been known as the Farm Innovation Fund?
- (5) How many applications have been received for this fund between November 20, 2023 and the most recent reporting date?
- (6) How many applications have been received between November 20, 2023, and the most recent reporting date for the Drought Ready and Resilient Fund?
- (7) As of the most recent reporting date, how much of the \$250 million in funding for the Drought Ready and Resilient Fund remains available?

Local Land Services

- (8) Applications have closed for Ministerial appointments to Local Land Services boards. How many applications did you receive?
- (9) The Local Land Services website also outline that applications for the position of LLS board chair have closed, and an announcement was due in late December or January. When will that announcement be made?

- (10) How many applications were received for the role of LLS Board chair?
- (11) Board elections for the LLS regions are due to be held in May 2024, with 34 board members to be elected. How many applications have been received as of February 26, 2024?
- (12) A specific email address (board.recruitment@lls.nsw.gov.au) has been established for potential candidates to seek additional information about the roles and how to apply. How many people have made enquiries through this service?

Northern Rivers Agricultural Drainage Report

- (13) When did the consultation period commence in relation to the Northern Rivers Agricultural Drainage Report?
- (14) Was the commencement of the consultation period advertised and promoted by the NSW Government?
- (15) If so, which communication channels were utilised to promote the consultation period?
- (16) Have you had formal meetings with impacted stakeholders in the Northern Rivers in order to discuss the recommendations of the report prepared by John Cullerton?
- (17) Will you commit to future engagement with stakeholders in the Northern Rivers prior to the April 21, 2024, cut off date for consultation, which you quoted in your February 21, 2024, Estimates hearing?
- (18) Did you meet with Mr Cullerton between March 27, 2023 and December 20, 2024 to discuss the contents of his report and the recommendations included in it?
- (19) If so, when did you meet with Mr Cullerton to discuss the report and the recommendations included in it?
- (20) Have you sent correspondence or engaged in formal meetings with the Minister for Planning, Minister for Environment, Minister for Water, Minister for Local Government or Minister for Lands to discuss the recommendations of Mr Cullerton's report?
- (21) If so, when was the correspondence sent and/or the meetings held?

NSW Department of Primary Industries

- (22) When will the NSW Government start a formal recruitment process for the Grade 3 Senior Executive that will replace the former Director-General of the Department of Primary Industries?
- (23) Is it the intention for the role to be titled "Director General"?

- (24) Will this process be an open application process, or will it be an internal recruitment process?
- (25) Was the former Director-General provided with a pay-out at the cessation of his employment with the Department of Primary Industries?
- (26) If so, what were the terms of the payout?
- (27) On what date was the Premier or his department notified by either the Minister or her department that the former Director General had been sacked?
- (28) Is there a budget allocation to the Department of Regional NSW to cover the cost of a rebrand of the Department of Primary Industries, as flagged by the Secretary?
- (29) Has the Department received advice on how much a rebranding of the DPI would cost?
- (30) If so, what figure has been provided?

REGIONAL NSW

Regional Funding

- (31) Of the \$350 million announced in the Budget for the Regional Development Trust Fund, how much is still available as of February 26, 2024?
- (32) Given the 2023/24 financial year will see a reduced amount allocated through the program, how much is budgeted for distribution in the 2024/25 financial year?
- (33) Is the trust fund subject to any administration costs?
- (34) If so, how much has been expended in administration costs?
- (35) When will applications for this program open?
- (36) Who selected the temporary board members that were appointed in December, 2023?
- (37) Did the temporary board members have to apply for their positions?
- (38) If not, what was the process undertaken to find the seven people who make up the temporary board?
- (39) What metrics have been set to determine the success or failure of the program?
- (40) Has any correspondence been received from councils objecting to the change in government funding strategy?
- (41) If so, how much correspondence and from which councils?

- (42) Has the Minister sent formal correspondence to the Minister for Natural Resources in relation to a pause in the Royalties For Rejuvenation program?
- (43) Has the Minister received formal correspondence from the Minister for Natural Resources in relation to a pause in the Royalties For Rejuvenation program?

Regional NSW Travel

- (44) When were the Minister's flights and accommodation booked for her visit to Western NSW on December 12, 2023 and December 13, 2023?
- (45) Was the Minister ever scheduled to visit Eugowra and Orange with the Premier on January 23, 2024?
- (46) If so, why did she not attend?

Regional NSW Definition

- (47) What is the definition of regional NSW in reference to the portfolio held by the Minister?
- (48) Are Newcastle and Wollongong included in the defined area known as "regional NSW" as it relates to the portfolio held by the Minister?

Regional NSW Priorities

- (49) Does the Minister have a list of priorities for the area defined by the Regional NSW portfolio?
- (50) If so, what are the priorities?
- (51) If not, why not?

WESTERN NSW

Western NSW Definition

- (52) As of February 26, 2024, which local government areas are included in the Western NSW area, as defined by the Minister's portfolio?
- (53) How many of these LGA's has the Minister visited in-person?
- (54) Does the Minister have regular communication with stakeholders in each of these LGAs?

Western NSW Funding

- (55) Between March 25, 2023 and February 26, 2024, how many grants administered through the Department of Regional NSW have been announced for allocation to LGAs within the defined Western NSW portfolio area?
- (56) If applicable, what is the total dollar value of those announced grants.
- (57) Between March 16, 2019 and March 25, 2023, how many grants administered through the Department of Regional NSW had been allocated to LGAs within the defined Western NSW portfolio area?
- (58) What was the total dollar value of those grants?

Western NSW Priorities

- (59) Does the Minister have a list of priorities for the area defined by the Western NSW portfolio?
- (60) If so, what are the priorities?
- (61) If not, why not?

Questions from Ms Abigail Boyd MLC

IOAW

- (62) In relation to the NSW Government's intentions to establish an independent office of animal welfare, when will the public be given the opportunity to provide input through a public submissions period?
- (63) Has the NSW Government consulted with any animal welfare stakeholders on this to date?

Pig gassing

- (64) Is the Department undertaking any action to review pig gassing practices?
- (65) Is the Department undertaking any work towards more humane alternatives?

Animal welfare codes of practice

- (66) Can the Department advise when the Animal Welfare Code of Practice – Pound & Shelter Code of Practice will be reviewed with public input?
- (67) Can the Department advise when the Animal Welfare Code of Practice – Breeding Dogs and Cats will be reviewed with public input?

- (68) Can the Department advise when the Animal Welfare Code of Practice – Rodeo Code of Practice will be reviewed with public input?

Regional NSW

- (69) Considering the limited access to services in regional New South Wales, what commitment has the NSW Government made to urgently increase funding to rural and regional specialist domestic and family violence services to meet demand and ensure accessible services for all victim-survivors regardless of where in NSW they live?
- (70) On behalf of its disaster-affected regional members, Domestic Violence NSW made submissions to the Inquiry into the response to major flooding across New South Wales in 2022 and the NSW Independent Flood Inquiry. The NSW Government is yet to implement any of the 12 recommendations made to ensure the safety of women and children experiencing domestic and family violence whilst also being impacted by a major natural disaster.
- (a) How will the current NSW Government ensure that NSW disaster management planning includes responses to domestic and family violence?
 - (b) How will the NSW Government ensure that women and children experiencing violence have private, safe and child-friendly spaces in recovery centres, away from perpetrators?
 - (c) What training is being or will be provided to recovery centre volunteers to ensure they can appropriately identify and respond to domestic and family violence?
 - (d) What alternative accommodation will be provided for people at significant risk of violence when a recovery centre is not appropriate?
- (71) How will the current NSW Government ensure that domestic and family violence services are adequately resourced to provide accessible support to victim-survivors during periods of disaster recovery?
- (72) Will the current NSW Government work with Gender and Disaster Australia to incorporate the National Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines into NSW disaster planning? If not, why not?
- (73) The Domestic Violence NSW 2023 Regional Forum addressed the urgent need for domestic violence responses embedded in disaster management planning, along with adequate long-term funding for domestic violence responses – can you advise when this will happen?

Questions from Ms Sue Higginson MLC
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AGRICULTURE

Forest logging

- (74) Has any public consultation been undertaken to assess public support for native forest logging?
- (a) If yes, what were the results of that public consultation?
 - (b) If no, why not?
- (75) How many employees are there in the NSW Forestry Corporation?
- (a) How many are administrative?
 - (b) How many are directly engaged in forestry operations?
 - i. How many in the softwood division?
 - ii. How many in the hardwood division?
 - iii. How many are engaged in compliance monitoring?
 - (c) How many are neither administrative or directly engaged in forestry operations?
 - i. How many are directly engaged in conservation work?
- (76) How many entities are contracted by the NSW Forestry Corporation to conduct wood harvesting operations?
- (a) List the entities.
 - (b) How many employees, within each entity, are directly engaged in forestry operations?
 - i. How many are working in softwood?
 - ii. How many are working in hardwood?
- (77) How many sites have been identified as being appropriate for new development of plantation timber?
- (a) What is the total area identified in NSW as being appropriate for plantation timber?
 - (b) How many sites within the estate currently managed by the Forestry Corporation?

- i. What is the total area of these sites?
 - (c) How many sites are there that are not within the estate currently managed by the Forestry Corporation?
 - i. What is the total area of these sites?
- (78) Is there a forecast shortfall of timber supplies?
 - (a) What is the projected shortfall of hardwood?
 - i. List the projected shortfall for each timber type based on use.
 - (b) What is the projected shortfall of softwood?
 - i. List the projected shortfall for each timber type based on use.
- (79) What entities have been consulted with in relation to the development of an action plan for the industry?
 - (a) When did the development of the plan commence?
 - (b) When did consultation with entities commence?
- (80) What specific actions have been undertaken since March 2023 to reduce the chances of Forestry Corporation breaching conditions under the CIFOA?
 - (a) Have any work policies been updated since March 2023?
 - i. If yes, which ones?
 - (b) Have any new compliance policies been updated since 2023?
 - i. If yes, which ones?
 - (c) Have any additional employees been dedicated to compliance activities since 2023?
 - i. If yes, how many and in which regions?
 - (d) Have any additional employees been provided to conduct broad area habitat surveys?
 - i. If yes, how many and in which regions?
 - (e) How many operations have been subject to complaint by the public or other entities since March 2023?
 - i. How many complaints relate to a breach of the CIFOA?

- ii. List the compartment numbers and State Forests that have been subject to a complaint?
- (f) How many instances of written correspondence from the Minister to the Forestry Corporation since March 2023 have identified a need to ensure compliance with rules governing native forest logging?
 - i. List the dates of correspondence?
- (g) How many instances of written correspondence from the Minister to the Forestry Corporation have occurred since March 2023?
 - i. List the dates of the correspondence?
- (h) How many times has the Minister communicated to the Forestry Corporation since March 2023 a need to ensure compliance with rules governing native forest logging?
- (81) Who is Forestry Corporation “proper”, as referred to by the Minister on page 27 of the transcript?
 - (a) List the people and their positions.
- (82) What is the Forestry Corporation’s policy and process for employees that are misleading the public?
- (83) What protocol exists to support employees of the Forestry Corporation who witness a violent crime?
 - (a) Has counselling been offered to any employees of Forestry Corporation in relation to the assault committed against Mark Graham?
- (84) What protocols exist to support members of the public who are victims of violent crime at the hands of Forestry Corporation employees and contractors?
- (85) What requirements for training in de-escalation exist for Forestry Corporation employees and contractors?
 - (a) What free and voluntary courses exist for training Forestry Corporation employees and contractors in de-escalation?
- (86) Are employees and contractors for the Forestry Corporation allowed to continue working in public areas after being charged with a violent crime against a member of the public?
 - (a) What are the risk management procedures for allowing this?

- (b) Are employees and contractors that have been stood down pending investigation for violent assault still paid?
- (87) What is the current average return cycle for native forest logging?
- (88) What proportion of the public native forest estate has been logged over the last:
- (a) 10 years?
 - (b) 20 years?
 - (c) 30 years?
 - (d) 40 years?
 - (e) 50 years?
- (89) What is the current gross capacity for annual carbon recovery in public native forests?
- (a) What is the total estimated carbon emissions from public native forest logging?
 - i. List carbon emissions by source?
- (90) Have any estimates been produced that show potential annual carbon recovery if public native forests were not subject to logging?
- (a) What are those estimates?
- (91) Since August 2019, how many Greater Glider den trees have been identified by the Forestry Corporation during general operations and specifically during Broad Area Habitat Surveys?
- (a) How many hectares of high density Greater Glider habitat has been logged in that time?
 - (b) How many hectares of low density Greater Glider habitat has been logged in that time?
- (92) Since 1 January 2019, in Broad Area Habitat Searches, how many of the following have been identified by the Forestry Corporation:
- (a) Southern Greater Glider dens
 - i. Number per state forest?
 - (b) Yellow-bellied Glider dens
 - i. Number per state forest?
 - (c) Squirrel Glider dens

- i. Number per state forest?
 - (d) Spotted-tailed Quoll dens
 - i. Number per state forest?
 - (e) Brush-tailed Phascogale dens
 - i. Number per state forest?
 - (f) Glossy-black Cockatoo nests
 - i. Number per state forest?
 - (g) Barking Owl nests
 - i. Number per state forest?
 - (h) Masked Owl nests
 - i. Number per state forest?
 - (i) Sooty Owl nests
 - i. Number per state forest?
- (93) How many hectares of public native forest have been subject to Broad Area Habitat Searches since the CIFOA came into effect?
- (94) For Myrtle State Forest:
- (a) How many hectares in each forest have been subject to Broad Area Habitat Searches?
 - (b) How many Koala records (including Koala scats) have been made, and what management action is required in response to any records?
 - (c) How many records were made of other threatened species, how many of each species, how many dens or nests for each threatened species?
- (95) For Braemar State Forest:
- (a) How many hectares in each forest have been subject to Broad Area Habitat Searches?
 - (b) How many Koala records (including Koala scats) have been made, and what management action is required in response to any records?

- (c) How many records were made of other threatened species, how many of each species, how many dens or nests for each threatened species?

Rice Blast

- (96) When did the Department first become aware of the presence of Blast in the Northern Rivers?
 - (a) How did the Department communicate to agriculturalists about the presence of Blast on the Northern Rivers?
 - i. When did this occur?
 - ii. Where did this occur?
 - (b) Has there been any communication from the Department to agriculturalists on the Northern Rivers since the initial discovery and communication about Blast?
 - i. List the instances of communication?
 - (c) What information has been provided to rice growers in the Northern Rivers about the presence of Blast?
 - i. Where is that information accessible?
 - ii. What communication has occurred from the Department to rice growers on the Northern Rivers in connection with the latest outbreak of Blast?

Fire Ants

- (97) What steps is the Government taking to stop and reverse the spread of fire ants in Wardell?
 - (a) Will the Department inspect all post-flood construction sites for fire ants?
 - (b) Are there any precautions being undertaken for unoccupied properties and the lack of residents able to monitor the properties?
- (98) Has any work been undertaken to assess the impact of fire ants continuing to spread and potentially becoming an endemic pest?
 - (a) Can the Department say if management practice would change if it became an endemic pest?
 - (b) What would the financial cost be if the pest became endemic?
 - (c) If the pest were to become endemic, has the department identified priority exclusion zones?

- i. Are these zones predominantly agricultural?
- ii. Has the Department been in contact with NPWS about priority protection areas for National Parks?

Agricultural chemicals

- (99) What work is underway to work with the APVMA to review regulations relating to agricultural chemicals?
- (a) Has there been any direction from the Government that there should be a review of chemicals that are banned in other countries?
- (100) Is the Department aware of the report showing up to 174 pesticides in the Richmond River produced by Southern Cross University Researchers?
- (a) What work is the Department undertaking in response to traces of a chemical, fungicide benomyl, that was banned almost 20 years ago?
 - (b) Is the Department investigating what records of agriculture have been lost as a result of flooding in the Northern Rivers?
 - i. Would the Department be helped if there was a live, centralised and digital tracking of agricultural chemical use?
 - ii. Has any work been conducted into establishing that system?
- (101) Has the Department undertaken any work in relation to spray drift in the Narromine-Trangie area?
- (a) Has there been any work beyond education campaigns?
 - (b) Has the Department been in contact with the EPA in relation to spray drift?
 - (c) Has the Department approached any organic agriculturalists about the impact that spray drift is having on their products?
- (102) Has there been any assessment by the Department about the risks of certain chemicals being used that are banned in markets like the EU?

Rural Boundary Clearing Code

- (103) When will the Government review the Rural Boundary Clearing Code?
- (a) How many councils haven't got the required biodiversity mapping in place to protect threatened species habitat?

- (b) How much land has been cleared under the code?
- (c) Will the Government create a mechanism to allow councils that have opted in to the code to opt out?

Rates on Conservation Lands

(104) Is there any plan to review the rating system as it applies to private conservation lands?

- (a) If not, why not?

Private Native Forestry

(105) How many PNF approvals have been granted since 1 March 2023?

(106) How many compliance checks of PNF operations have been conducted by the Department since 1 March 2023?

(107) How many PNF operations have been and are being investigated for breaches of approvals?

(108) How many Councils have contacted the Department requesting oversight of applications for PNF approvals since 1 March 2023?

- (a) If any, which Councils?