

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 8 – SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS – 28 February 2024

Questions from Hon Emma Hurst MLC

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Backburn Escapes in 2019 / 2020

(1) Has the Minister received any briefings from the NSW Rural Fire Service or other agencies relating to any of the fires involving backburn escapes or incidents identified in Appendix 1 below:

(a) If so, which ones?

(b) Has there been an internal investigation conducted by the NSW Rural Fire Service into the response and management relating to each of these backburn escapes or incidents?

(c) If so, can you please provide a copy (or a summary) of the findings of each of these investigations?

ANSWER

I am advised:

The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) is aware of escaped backburns in the Busbys Flat, Gospers Mountain, Currowan and Green Wattle fires. The RFS is not aware of any other escaped backburns on the list provided that impacted communities.

1 (a) Upon taking office, I received a brief from the RFS on the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and NSW Coronial inquests and inquiries process, including Stage 1 and Stage 2 hearings. It made reference to the expert report on backburning submitted to the Coroner on 15 December 2022, which covered the Mt Wilson and Lake Conjola backburns. The brief also noted a future Coronial hearing on backburning would examine the Mt Wilson backburn, Gospers Mountain / Grose Valley fires, the Conjola backburn, and the Currowan fire.

1 (b) and (c) The NSW Bushfire Inquiry and Coronial inquiries superseded a number of internal agency investigations that may otherwise have been conducted, and provided a wholistic, transparent and arms-length investigation of the emergency response by all agencies, firefighting techniques, incident management, resourcing and impact on life, property and the environment.

The Final report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and quarterly progress reports on adopted recommendations are available at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/premiers-department/access-to-information/nsw-bushfire-inquiry>.

The State Coroner is due to hand down findings and recommendations for the 2019/2020 NSW Bushfires Coronial Inquiry on 27 March 2024.

The RFS cooperated fully with requests for evidence and assistance from the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and Coroner.

In cooperation with the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, the RFS completed investigations for the following fires:

- Gospers Mountain Fire (Mt Wilson and Bilpin, within the Hawkesbury LGA)
- Currowan Fire (Conjola, within the Shoalhaven LGA)
- Green Wattle Fire

Summaries of the investigations are provided at Attachment C.

Recommendation 47D of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry

(2) Has the NSW Rural Fire Service carried out meetings with communities affected by Backburns? If yes:

(a) How many meetings have occurred?

(b) Which communities were involved?

(c) On what dates did these meeting occur?

ANSWER

I am advised:

The NSW Rural Fire Service provided information to communities through a variety of means and resources during bush fire operations throughout the 2019-20 season. For the fires on the supplied Appendix, these included community meetings, community newsletters, door knocking, Emergency Alert messaging, Major Fire Updates, updates through the Fires Near Me app and RFS website, social media, media outlets and deployment of Public Liaison Officers and Rual Liaison Officers to keep local communities informed. Backburns would have been discussed at meetings if relevant or raised by those in attendance.

The Bushfire Inquiry also held 16 community meetings to help inform its report, findings and recommendations. The full list of the locations and dates of these meetings was published in the Inquiry Report. Consistent with Recommendation 47D, the RFS held three information sessions with communities where there were widespread concerns about back burning.

- 7 May 2020: the RFS held a virtual community meeting (due to the impacts of COVID-19) for residents and affected people in the Conjola and surrounding areas.
- 15 September 2022: the RFS held a community meeting with residents and affected people in Berambing and surrounding areas (Gospers Mountain Fire)
- 24 October 2022: the RFS held a community meeting with residents and affected people in Kurrajong Heights and surrounding areas (Gospers Mountain Fire).

(3) Is the NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner aware of any communities that were affected by backburns during the 2019 / 2020 fire season that have not had a meeting as per the recommendation?

(a) If so, which communities?

(b) When will these meeting(s) be carried out?

ANSWER

I am advised that:

The NSW Bushfire Inquiry recommended the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) hold community meetings where widespread concerns were raised about back burns. In response to Recommendation 47, the RFS has made amendments to the Section 44 Declaration Incident Controller Appointment Letter that states that a community meeting must be held within 21 days of the revoking of a fire emergency, with the intent of explaining the fire strategies and gather community feedback. The location and dates of NSW Bushfire Inquiry community meetings were published in its report.

No further meetings are planned at this point. The RFS will meet with communities who request a meeting and comply with any recommendation from the Coroner to hold additional public meetings.

Early suppression of fires in 2019 / 2020

(4) What were the number of aerial resources requested, approved and actively engaged in the following fires for each date set out below? Please break down the figures into each category (requested, approved, engaged) and date:

(a) Green Valley / Talmalmo (29-30 December 2019)

(b) Dunns Road (27-29 December 2019)

(c) Badja Forest Road (27-29 December 2019)

(d) Busbys Flat (4-7 October 2019)

(e) Stockyard Flat (including Stockyard East and Stockyard West 4-8 November 2019)

ANSWER

I am advised that:

Throughout the 2019-20 fire season, aircraft were dispatched to Section 44 fires for prolonged periods, across a number of weeks. Daily taskings between the firegrounds under the relevant Section 44 Declaration were determined by the Incident Management Teams and not all taskings were recorded against each individual fire. Specialised aircraft such as the Large Air Tankers were deployed strategically in response to identified risks to communities.

A number of aircraft also were diverted en route to provide support if there was an immediate threat to life or due to local unfavourable weather conditions and fire behaviour preventing aircraft use, such as widespread and persistent smoke or fire-generated thunderstorms. Not all of these were recorded against the fires to which the aircraft were diverted.

- a) 4 including a Large Air Tanker.
- b) 7 including 4 Large Air Tankers.
- c) 4 including 2 Large Air Tankers.
- d) Nil during those dates.
- e) 23 aircraft were allocated to the Northern Tablelands Section 44 fire (which included the Stockyard Flat fire) on those dates, of which 18 were capable of water bombing and 6 were bombers.

(5) Is the NSW Rural Fire Service aware of any issues relating to the availability and/or commitment of aerial resources to early suppression of any of the above fires?

ANSWER

I am advised that:

During the 2019-20 bush fire season, aircraft allocations were prioritised according to operational needs, risks to communities, the number of aircraft already tasked to fires, and availability of combined firefighting resources. In some cases, aircraft were reallocated from one fire to another. At times, poor visibility due to smoke also significantly impeded aircraft access to some firegrounds. Fire-generated thunderstorms also generated 'downbursts' and extreme winds which limited aircraft operations at some points in time. Under a Section 44 declaration, aircraft can move between fires within the declared area at the direction of the Incident Management Team.

NSW BUSHFIRE INQUIRY 2020

(6) What information, data and documents were supplied by the NSW Rural Fire Service to the NSW Bushfire Inquiry 2020 relating to each of the fires involving backburn escapes or incidents identified in Appendix 1 below?

- (a) Was the RFS and other agencies response and management regarding backburns specifically examined for each of the fires identified in this list as part of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry 2020?
- (b) Can the NSW Rural Fire Service provide a list and summary of the documents supplied to the Inquiry for each fire?
- (c) Can the NSW Rural Fire Service produce the documents that were supplied to the 2020 Inquiry to the committee?

ANSWER

I am advised that:

The Rural Fire Service (RFS) provided all information, data and documents that was requested as part of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry 2020. The RFS is unable to advise which fires the NSW Bushfire Inquiry specifically examined, as the Inquiry obtained information, evidence and submissions from multiple stakeholders. Reference to backburning and the fires that the Inquiry examined are identified throughout its report.

Documents provided were also submitted to the Coronial Inquiry. The State Coroner is due to hand down findings and recommendations for the 2019-2020 NSW Bushfires Coronial Inquiry on 27 March 2024.

Legal Costs for NSW Bushfire Inquiry 2020 & Coronial Inquiry into the 2019/2020 Fires

(7) What are the total costs to date incurred by the NSW Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue NSW relating to each agency's participation in the following inquiries:
 (a) The NSW Coronial Inquiry into the 2019 / 2020 Fires?
 (b) The NSW Bushfire Inquiry 2020?

ANSWER

I am advised:

- a) Total costs for the Rural Fire Service (RFS) are \$2,104,478.86. Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) did not pay any legal costs in respect of the Coronial Inquiry.
- b) Total costs for the RFS are \$1,149,035.80, which includes costs for the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. FRNSW did not pay any legal costs in respect of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry.

Questions submitted on behalf of the Opposition

CUSTOMER SERVICE & DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

NSW Data Analytics

(8) How much did the GovHack Platinum sponsorship cost this year?

ANSWER

I am advised in 2023 the GovHack Platinum sponsorship cost \$12,000 (ex GST).

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Fire & Rescue NSW Female Firefighter Facility Upgrades

(9) In relation to the \$50 million commitment to upgrade female facilities at FRNSW stations:
 (a) How many upgrades have been committed to?
 (b) What projects have been committed to?
 (c) How many have been committed to since March 2023?
 (d) How many projects have been completed?
 (e) How much of the funding has been allocated?
 (f) How much funding is still available?

ANSWER

I am advised:

- (a) 17
- (b) Refurbishment of fire stations at Merewether, The Entrance, Merrylands, Singleton, Uralla, Cootamundra, Alstonville, Ulladulla, Coledale, Thredbo, Cooma, Bondi, Gladesville, Glenbrook, Blayney, Tumbarumba and Lake Cargelligo.
- (c) 10
- (d) 7
- (e) \$10 million (FY22/23 and FY23/24)
- (f) \$40 million (FY24/25 – FY31/32)

Community Engagement Protocol

(10) What is the protocol for Fire and Rescue should there be an incident while the crew is out conducting community engagement activities?

ANSWER

Please note this question was answered by Commissioner Fewtrell on page 85 of the Uncorrected Transcript.

(11) Are brigades short on firefighters during these times or is additional crew rostered on?

ANSWER

I am advised minimum staffing is maintained at all times.

(12) Is there always a crew available to respond to incidents?

ANSWER

Please refer to the answer to Supplementary Question 11.

Resilient Homes Program \$700m & Tranche 2

(13) In relation to the resilient homes program in the Northern Rivers:

- (a) How many applications have now been received for a buy back?
- (b) How many applications have now been received for a retrofit?
- (c) How many applications have now been received for a house-raising?
- (d) Have many houses have been retrofit or raised so far?
- (e) How many homes have been bought back?
- (f) How many homes have received a guarantee that they are eligible under the program?
- (g) What is the average cost per buyback to the program?
- (h) Can you provide a breakdown of that figure between admin costs and what goes directly to the homeowner?
- (i) How much of the \$700m has been spent to date?
- (j) If the current rate of buy-back approvals continues, how long will this process take to be completed?

ANSWER

I am advised that as at 8 March 2024:

- (a) 1090
- (b) 336 applications have been received for a raising or retrofit, which are covered by a single application form.
- (c) Please see Supplementary Answer 13 (b).
- (d) 1 home has received grant funding for a home raising.
- (e) 339 buybacks have been completed, 577 offers have been accepted, and 141 buyback offers are in progress.
- (f) 882 homes have been approved for participation in the Resilient Homes Program.
- (g) \$620,000
- (h) Administrative costs vary from project to project.
- (i) \$325 million (as at 31 January 2024)
- (j) The Resilient Homes Program is voluntary and completion of buybacks and grants relies on homeowners submitting application forms and supporting paperwork in a timely manner. As

homeowners have the option to request an extended settlement to assist their transition to safer housing, completion of the buyback process will be variable.										
(14) The timeline for the Resilient Homes Programs advises people in the Northern Rivers that this program will take 5 years to complete, given the current rate of recovery do you believe that to be an accurate timeframe?										
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>I am advised that:</p> <p>Recovery from disasters of this magnitude can take many years and is not a linear nor simple process. Delivery of buybacks, raisings and retrofits under the current Resilient Homes Program is anticipated to take approximately five years.</p>										
Western Sydney Aerotropolis										
(15) Regarding the Western Sydney Aerotropolis, has any land been purchased by Fire and Rescue NSW?										
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>I am advised that Fire and Rescue NSW is actively planning for delivery of services to support the Western Sydney Aerotropolis.</p>										
(16) Are there any plans currently in place to establish a fire station, in addition to the airport brigade, in the Aerotropolis?										
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>Please refer to the answer to Supplementary Question 15.</p>										
Comsafe Training Services										
(17) How many employees are employed by ComSafe Training Services?										
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>I am advised there are 33, including 21 in casual or temporary positions.</p>										
(18) How many training courses have been provided by ComSafe Training Services in the last 12 months?										
<p>ANSWER</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>2022-2023 Financial year</th> <th>Courses</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Accredited</td> <td>38</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Non-Accredited</td> <td>337</td> </tr> <tr> <td>eLearning</td> <td>83</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>458</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	2022-2023 Financial year	Courses	Accredited	38	Non-Accredited	337	eLearning	83	Total	458
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(19) How much revenue has been generated by ComSafe Training Services in the last 12 months?										
ANSWER										

I am advised that in the 2022-23 Financial Year ComSafe generated revenue of \$1,207,218.62.
(20) What is the cost to run ComSafe Training Services?
ANSWER I am advised that in the 2022-23 Financial Year ComSafe incurred expenditure of \$2,565,963.
(21) Are any cuts being made to ComSafe Training Services in the future?
ANSWER I am advised: Fire and Rescue NSW is working to ensure the agency is financially sustainable while continuing to keep the community safe. This includes consideration of commercial operations which are running at a loss to the taxpayer.
(22) If cuts are being made to ComSafe Training Services, will this results in less training being delivered to the community?
ANSWER Please refer to the answer to Supplementary Question 21.
(23) What other fire safety initiatives is the NSW Government considering if ComSafe Training Services are being cut?
ANSWER I am advised Fire and Rescue NSW has numerous existing fire safety initiatives that engage communities and industry about prevention and preparedness.
(24) What other programs have been cut in Fire + Rescue?
ANSWER Please refer to the answer to Supplementary Question 21.
RFS & SES Volunteers
(25) In relation to Rural Fire Service (RFS) Volunteers: (a) How many new recruits have been onboarded in the last 12 months across NSW? (b) How many volunteers have departed in the last 12 months? (c) Are exit interviews conducted? (d) What reason is cited most for departure? In relation to the SES volunteers: (e) Minister, what is the total number of NSW SES volunteers? (f) How many new recruits have been onboarded in the last 12 months across NSW? (g) How many volunteers have departed the SES in the last 12 months? (h) Do you conduct exit interviews? (i) If yes, what reason is cited most for departure? (j) Is culture ever cited as a reason for departure? (k) How much funding has been allocated to drive recruitment of volunteers in the SES and RFS? (l) What programs have been implemented to increase numbers and improve retention of RFS and SES volunteers?

ANSWER

I am advised:

- (a) The number of volunteers who joined the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) between 12 March 2023 and 11 March 2024 was 4,658.
- (b) The number of volunteers who left the RFS between 12 March 2023 and 11 March 2024 was 4,235.
- (c) Exit interviews for volunteers are not conducted centrally by the RFS. Volunteers may request a confidential exit interview with their District Manager if they choose.
- (d) The RFS conducted volunteer entry and exit surveys between 2017 and 2020 as part of a research partnership with the University of Western Australia. The reasons cited most often for leaving by survey respondents were:
 - Relocation (FY 2017/18)
 - Work commitments (FY 2018/19)
 - Health reasons (FY 2019/20)
- (e) 10,600 (as at 31 December 2023).
- (f) 2046 (for the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023).
- (g) 1037 (for the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023).
- (h) NSW State Emergency Service (SES) is currently enhancing its Volunteer Offboarding process. The new process will include exit interviews.
- (i) N/A
- (j) N/A
- (k) In the 2023-24 budget the RFS has allocated funds for:
 - Recruitment promotion program (for both staff and volunteers) - \$180,000
 - Volunteer Leadership Program - \$100,000

The SES has launched its 2024 volunteer drive and allocated \$150,000 towards an information campaign.

- (l) The RFS has a wide range of programs and practices including:
 - A Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Kit for brigades and Districts.
 - A range of 'Join the RFS' audio visual, print, and social media material.
 - The Secondary School Cadet Program.
 - The eMembership online portal promotes volunteering opportunities.
 - The Mental Health Strategy 2023-2027 and mental health support services.
 - Development of an Inclusion Strategy and Reconciliation Action Plan to increase volunteering in diverse communities.
 - Ongoing local community engagement activities to promote bushfire preparedness while connecting communities with their local brigades.
 - Farm Fire Units and Community Fire Units which provide flexible volunteering options.

The SES also has a wide range of initiatives including:

- Delivering volunteer recruitment and retention workshops across the state during leadership and member conferences. These workshops aim to provide strategies to assist volunteer unit leaders to attract, engage and retain volunteers.
- The SES recently developed updated recruitment campaign materials to support the recruitment and onboarding of new volunteers. These resources include a toolkit that provides training around the retention of volunteers to provide a consistent and positive volunteer experience, including volunteer interview guides, a recruitment framework and training on strategies for retention that can be tailored to each unit location.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2023, NSW SES rolled out the Youth Internship Program, which was designed to engage young people and provide a pathway to volunteering. This successful trial program will be continued in 2024.
<p>Fire and Rescue NSW Staffing</p>
<p>(26) In regard to Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW):</p> <p>(a) How many firefighters are currently employed on a full-time basis?</p> <p>(b) How many firefighters are on overtime each shift?</p> <p>(c) How many full-time firefighters have resigned from FRNSW in the past 12 months?</p> <p>(d) Do you conduct exit interviews upon departure?</p> <p>(e) What is the reason most cited for departure?</p>
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>I am advised:</p> <p>(a) 3,553</p> <p>(b) The number varies daily depending on staff leave patterns and availability of on-call firefighters.</p> <p>(c) From 1 March 2023 to 29 February 2024, 118 permanent firefighters exited the organisation.</p> <p>(d) Exit interviews for permanent firefighters are voluntary, however an exit checklist is conducted.</p> <p>(e) Medical Retirement.</p>
<p>YOUTH JUSTICE</p>
<p>Raising the Age</p>
<p>(27) In regard to Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility:</p> <p>(a) The Minister confirmed a meeting on 15 November 2023 with the Ministers for Youth, Aboriginal Affairs and the Attorney-General specifically about the minimum age of criminal responsibility. What is the government's position on raising the age?</p> <p>(b) Were other topics canvassed such as intervention/programs and the expanding the Koori Court to other regional areas?</p>
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>(a) The minimum age of criminal responsibility falls under the portfolio responsibilities of the Attorney General.</p> <p>(b) Early intervention and diversion programs are critical to support young people at risk of contact with the criminal justice system. Questions regarding the Koori Court should be directed to the Attorney-General.</p>
<p>Remand</p>
<p>(28) In regard to Youth in Remand:</p> <p>(a) Minister, you confirmed that of the 174 people in youth detention, 45 had been sentenced and 129 were on remand. You said it was an issue for the courts and the Attorney-General, but you conceded it was an issue. Will you intervene and strengthen the bail assistance support service to lower the numbers?</p> <p>(b) What is the cost per day of keeping each of those 129 ten- to fourteen-year-olds on remand?</p> <p>(c) What is the average length of time these young people spend in remand?</p>
<p>ANSWER</p>

<p>a) The NSW Government has announced a new \$8.75 million bail and accommodation support service as part of a \$13.4 million investment in a targeted response to address youth crime in Moree. This initiative will provide evidence and insights to support future programs delivered by Youth Justice NSW.</p> <p>b) I am advised the average daily cost per young person in custody in 2022/23 was \$2759.13.</p> <p>c) I am advised the average length of time young people spent on remand in 2022/23 was 15.8 days.</p>
<p>Broadmeadow Pilot Scheme</p>
<p>(29) Given the scheme had an independent evaluation which concluded it did address the immediate needs of young people coming before the court, will the Minister expand the program to other regional areas?</p>
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>I am advised the Broadmeadow Children’s Court Program (BCCP) received \$0.37 million in the 2023-24 Budget. Future funding for diversion programs will be addressed through the usual Budget process.</p>
<p>(30) Did the Minister raise the expansion of the program to other areas in his meeting with other Ministers on 15 November?</p>
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>As Minister for Youth Justice, I regularly advocate for effective wraparound services.</p>
<p>Throughcare</p>
<p>(31) Can the Minister inform what programs are in place with respect to setting youth up for success when they come out of the custodial setting?</p>
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>I am advised:</p> <p>Young people are supported to maintain connection with family, community and culture whilst continuing schooling and engaging in co-curricular skill programs while in custody.</p> <p>Education Training Units at Youth Justice centres are staffed by Department of Education teachers in line with curriculum.</p> <p>Try a Trade and Try a Profession are delivered in partnership with local tradespeople and businesses, allowing young people to gain hands on, practical experience in trades such as carpentry, mechanics, painting, hospitality, electrical and plumbing. This program enables young people to build relationships and pathways for future employment opportunities upon their release.</p> <p>Cultural activities support young people to maintain cultural connections and are delivered in partnership with local Elders, community representatives and Aboriginal Youth Justice staff. The My Journey My Life and YINNAR programs support young people with maintaining relationships and identity.</p> <p>Caseworkers also facilitate case conferences with relevant parties including education, justice, health, community organisations and family while the young person is in custody. Members of case conferences consider the individual circumstances of the young person to develop a meaningful reintegration and relapse prevention plan to support the young person to reintegrate back into the community.</p>

(32) Has the Minister met with Youth Action NSW to discuss improvements to 'Throughcare'?

ANSWER

Yes.

(33) Since having become Minister what has been done to improve support and services for young people in 'Throughcare'?

ANSWER

I am advised:

Youth Justice has a suite of programs targeting remand reduction, youth diversion and individualised support. Young people at risk or in contact with the criminal justice system can be referred to a range of early intervention and diversion programs.

During my time as Minister, place-based tendering and procurement procedures have been applied to align with priorities of Aboriginal-led, designed and delivered services. In the recent Youth on Track recommissioning process, six of the nine successful service providers are Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). Youth Justice is partnering with these community organisations to co-design the Youth on Track program to ensure services being provided are culturally appropriate, strengths based and holistic.

A focus on place-based responses ensures that while core elements of Youth Justice programs are universal, the service offering in each geographic location is flexible responding to local and individual need. In Wagga Wagga, for example, Wollundry Dreaming First Nations Youth Hub provides young people with a safe place to engage with local Elders, prosocial and cultural programs, and learn life skills.

Youth Justice has actively engaged the Mawang Gaway Aboriginal Elders and Community Group, government and non-government organisations, local community members and young people with lived experience of encountering the criminal justice system to design the youth hub and outreach service.

The Riverina Police District has been a key stakeholder throughout the design and implementation of the Short-term Remand Pilot. This pilot works alongside the Bail Accommodation and Support Service to support young people with accommodation support as part of the bail process.

For young people in custody, reintegration work includes maintaining connection with family, community and culture whilst continuing schooling with co-curricular skill programs. During my time as Minister this has included the opening of the Trade Centre at Cobham Youth Justice Centre, a brand-new facility where young people can learn new skills and try different trades, creating pathways for young people to seek employment upon release.

(34) Has the Minister taken steps towards a whole of community approach when working with young people, e.g. working with family, care givers and service providers, can the Minister give examples?

ANSWER

Yes. I am advised that:

Youth on Track delivers a range of holistic supports to empower young people and uplift families and communities around them to prevent contact with the criminal justice system. This includes collaborating with community on identifying measures of success and outcomes that are meaningful. Families are actively engaged in each stage of the program.

In the recent Youth on Track recommissioning process, six of the nine service successful providers are Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). Youth Justice is partnering with these

community organisations to co-design the Youth on Track program to ensure services being provided are culturally appropriate, strengths based and holistic.

In the new Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Family Workers program, parents and carers of young people are provided with targeted, therapeutic and family-based supports. A whole-of-family-based approach supports young people to change their behaviour within their family, increasing safety and strengthening the capacity of families to manage conflicts independently.

Youth Justice continually rolls out training to increase the skills and knowledge of caseworkers across funded programs and services. In 2023, a suite of domestic and family violence training was delivered to equip funded service provider caseworkers with the knowledge and skills required to work effectively with young people and their families who experience domestic and family violence.

Youth Justice Conferencing

(35) Of the 17 areas that provide Youth Justice Conferencing, can the Minister provide an area by area breakdown of referrals to the scheme, actual conferences, and completions?

ANSWER

YJ Area	Referrals	Referrals resulting in a conference	Outcome Plan completed
Ashfield	78	71	64
Blacktown	105	86	72
Campbelltown	96	82	75
Central West and Far West	148	112	92
Far North Coast	50	39	33
Gosford	62	55	47
Maitland	83	69	49
Mid North Coast	93	58	46
Newcastle	51	45	41
New England	57	48	34
Parramatta	96	89	86
Penrith	97	78	61
Riverina/Murray	103	88	73
South Coast	65	51	35
Sydney	74	58	43
Wollongong	63	50	42

(36) Is Youth Justice Conferencing more cost effective than Children's Court?

ANSWER

I am advised:

The cost per Youth Justice Conference is \$964.04. Questions relating to the cost of the Children's Court should be directed to the Attorney-General.

(37) Is there any evidence to show Youth Conferencing is more effective than the Children's Court in reducing re-offending?

ANSWER

I am advised:

62.1% of young people who participated in a Youth Justice Conference in the 12 months ending September 2022 did not have further contact with the justice system within 12 months.

Youth Justice Conferences have been examined in a number of publications and BOCSAR studies including reoffending rates, victim and participant satisfaction, and cost effectiveness. These measures take into consideration that a Youth Justice Conference aims not only to address a young person's offending and encourage them to take responsibility for their actions, but also provides victims of crime with the right to discuss the impact of the offence and how the young person may begin to repair the harm caused.

(38) If so, will the Minister provide more resources to strengthen the scheme to assist young people from re-offending?

ANSWER

Investment in early intervention and diversion programs is essential to reducing crime in the short and longer term. Youth Justice Conferences are part of a wider suite of diversion programs to support young people exhibiting offending behaviour.

Asset Maintenance

(39) Are any of the current 6 detention centres for youth detention earmarked for closure?

ANSWER

I am advised:

No.

(40) What maintenance measures are in place to ensure the centres are operating at best practice?

ANSWER

I am advised:

The maintenance program for this financial year has included unit refurbishments at Acmena Youth Justice Centre, as well as an upgrade of audiovisual link (AVL) visitor suites, new CCTV cameras and air conditioners in classrooms at Reiby Youth Justice Centre.

Closing the Gap

(41) Given the disproportionately high number of Indigenous youth in custody (59% as of 28 February 2024) what steps has the Minister taken towards reaching the Target 11 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap ?(<https://www.niaa.gov.au/2023-commonwealth-closing-gap-implementation-plan/delivering-outcomes-and-targets/outcome-11-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-young-people>)

ANSWER

I am advised:

The Closing the Gap Target 11 program of work has been designed to reduce the number of Aboriginal young people entering custody. Youth Justice and the Aboriginal Legal Service co-chair the Target 11 working group.

The Short-Term Remand Pilot is currently operating in the Children's Court in Surry Hills and Wagga Wagga and testing models aimed at reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in custody.

Recommissioning of diversion programs is focused on achieving strategic priorities under Closing the Gap. This will include increased investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) for the delivery of Aboriginal services for Aboriginal young people and their families.

In the recent Youth on Track recommissioning process, six of the nine service providers selected are ACCOs. Youth Justice is partnering with these community organisations to co-design the Youth on Track program to ensure services being provided are culturally appropriate, strengths based and holistic.

Youth Justice also requires that at least 50% of caseworkers are Aboriginal. Aboriginal staff advise on the development of culturally appropriate assessment processes, staff training for Aboriginal specific programs, and dedicated funding for cultural activities.

(42) What measures has the Minister taken to ensure that any initiative is culturally appropriate?

ANSWER

I am advised:

Youth Justice adopts a number of measures to ensure programs are culturally appropriate for young people in their care.

Youth Justice recognises the need to employ a diverse workforce of different cultural backgrounds in positions across all grades. This is essential to support service delivery and improve decision making. Youth Justice has commenced a recruitment and retention project which is increasing targeted recruitment and providing ways for Aboriginal people to work towards senior positions.

Youth Justice has implemented the Aboriginal Practice Mandate, which provides greater clarity on cultural programs and responses for young Aboriginal people. It specifies that all Aboriginal young people have a right to a culturally rich service and cultural programs must be prioritised.

Youth Justice currently requires that at least 50% of caseworkers who work directly with Aboriginal young people are Aboriginal. This supports service delivery for Aboriginal young people which is culturally responsive and places cultural practice as a priority in the response.

Youth Justice delivers the My Journey My Life and Yinnar programs which support Aboriginal young people, both in custody and in the community, by providing criminogenic work in a cultural framework.

(43) When will the Minister update the NSW implementation plan for Closing the Gap especially in regard to target 11 (as above)?

ANSWER

This question should be directed to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty.

(44) In the Minister's meeting on 15 November 2023 with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs was there any discussion about Closing the Gap?

ANSWER

The 15 November 2023 meeting with Raise the Age NSW was focused on the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

(45) If so, can the Minister provide detail on the nature of that discussion?

ANSWER

Please refer to the answer to Supplementary Question 44.

(46) Was it resolved to take any measures towards Closing the Gap with relation to Youth Justice?

ANSWER

Please refer to the answer to Supplementary Question 44.

Questions from Ms Abigail Boyd MLC**CUSTOMER SERVICE & DIGITAL GOVERNMENT****Accessibility NSW**

(47) How much funding does Accessibility NSW receive?

(a) Please provide a funding breakdown for each financial year since its commencement.

ANSWER

I am advised that Accessibility NSW did not receive ongoing funding from the previous government beyond a \$2.75m allocation from the Digital Restart Fund.

(48) What is the progress to date of the Government's commitment to ensure all government documents relevant to people with intellectual disability are published in Easy Read by 2025?

ANSWER

This question should be directed to the Minister for Disability Inclusion.

(49) Will Accessibility NSW be funded beyond 30 June 2024?

(a) If funding will not be provided past June 30, what agency or department will be responsible for making all of NSW Government websites and services available in Easy Read by 2025?

ANSWER

Program funding decisions will be made via the usual Budget processes.

a) Please refer to the answer to Supplementary Question 48.

Questions from Ms Sue Higginson MLC**YOUTH JUSTICE****Cost and scale of incarceration**

(50) For FY 2022/2023 and the current financial year, please provide the total number of young people in custody

(a) Of these young people, please provide:

- i. the number who were younger than 14
- ii. the number who have a disability
- iii. the number who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- iv. the number who have previously lived in out-of-home care
- v. the number of females
- vi. the number of males

ANSWER

I am advised:

In 2022-23, the total number of young people in custody was 1609.

(a)

- i. 176
- ii. 458
- iii. 821
- iv. 284
- v. 299
- vi. 1307

For the current financial year (to 7 March 2024), the total number of young people in custody was 1273.

(a)

- i. 127
- ii. 276
- iii. 682
- iv. 189
- v. 254
- vi. 1014

(51) For FY 2022/2023 and the current financial year, please provide the total number of young people in custody on remand

(a) Of these young people, please provide:

- i. the number who were younger than 14
- ii. the number who have a disability
- iii. the number who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- iv. the number who have previously lived in out-of-home care
- v. the number of females
- vi. the number of males

ANSWER

I am advised:

In 2022-23, the total number of young people in custody on remand was 1557.

(a)

- i. 176
- ii. 438
- iii. 809
- iv. 280
- v. 297

vi. 1257

For the current financial year (to 7 March 2024), the total number of young people in custody on remand was 1224.

(a)

i. 127

ii. 259

iii. 666

iv. 181

v. 251

vi. 968

(52) For FY 2022/2023 and the current financial year, please provide the total number of young people in custody on remand who did not have access to an appropriate place to return to

(a) Of these young people, please provide:

i. the number who were younger than 14

ii. the number who have a disability

iii. the number who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

iv. the number who have previously lived in out-of-home care

v. the number of females

vi. the number of males

ANSWER

I am advised:

In 2022-23, 195 young people in custody on remand did not have access to an appropriate place to return to.

(a)

i. 30

ii. 77

iii. 90

iv. 58

v. 65

vi. 129

For the current financial year (to 7 March 2024), 157 young people in custody on remand did not have access to an appropriate place to return to.

(a)

i. 32

ii. 39

iii. 66

iv. 23

v. 56
vi. 100

(53) For FY 2022/2023 and the current financial year, please provide:
(a) the cost of incarceration per young person
(b) the total cost of keeping all young people in custody

ANSWER

I am advised:

In 2022-23:

(a) the cost of incarceration per young person per day was \$2759.13
(b) the total expenditure on detention-based services was \$201,372,000.

Figures for the current financial year will not be available until January 2025 (ROGS 2025)

Police engagements with young people

(54) For each of FY 2019/2020, FY 2020/2021, FY 2021/2022, FY 2022/2023, and the current financial year, please provide the number of police engagements with young people that involved the discharging of a firearm.

(a) Of these incidents, please provide:
i. the number involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people.
ii. the number involving children under the age of 14.
iii. the number involving children with disabilities.
iv. the number involving male inmates
v. the number involving female inmates
vi. the number that resulted in an investigation into misconduct of the officer(s) involved
vii. the number into misconduct arising from these incidents that resulted in the disciplining of the officer(s) involved

ANSWER

This question should be referred to the Minister for Police.

(55) For each of FY 2019/2020, FY 2020/2021, FY 2021/2022, FY 2022/2023, and the current financial year, please provide the number of police engagements with young people that involved the discharging of a taser.

(a) Of these incidents, please provide:
i. the number of incidents involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people.
ii. the number of incidents involving children under the age of 14.
iii. the number of incidents involving male inmates
iv. the number of incidents involving female inmates
v. the number of incidents that resulted in an investigation into misconduct of the officer(s) involved
vi. the number of investigations into misconduct arising from these incidents that resulted in the disciplining of the officer(s) involved

ANSWER

This question should be referred to the Minister for Police.

(56) For each of FY 2019/2020, FY 2020/2021, FY 2021/2022, FY 2022/2023, and the current financial year, please provide the number of police engagements with young people that involved the use of pepper spray.

(a) Of these incidents, please provide:

- i. the number of incidents involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people.
- ii. the number of incidents involving children under the age of 14.
- iii. the number involving male inmates
- iv. the number involving female inmates
- v. the number of incidents that resulted in an investigation into misconduct of the officer(s) involved
- vi. the number of investigations into misconduct arising from these incidents that resulted in the disciplining of the officer(s) involved

ANSWER

This question should be referred to the Minister for Police.

Access to computers, tablets, and live entertainment in the youth justice system

(57) Provide an update and timeline on the “scoping process” to provide all young people in custody with tablets.

ANSWER

I am advised:

Youth Justice is working towards completing the scoping process by the end of the current financial year. The scoping process includes consideration of the Wi-Fi connectivity capacity of each centre, cost implications and identifying potential suppliers.

(58) Identify any other measures undertaken to “increase the access to technology by young people in custody” as stated by Youth Justice at last year’s budget estimates hearings.

ANSWER

I am advised:

Youth Justice continues to support young people in Youth Justice Centres to access digital devices, programs and skill development programs, including:

- Deployment of tablets for virtual visitations to allow young people stay connected with family and support networks.
- Trialling the use of tablets to deliver psychological services virtually.
- Using devices to support learning programs delivered by the Department of Education within centres.
- Piloting the use of tablets for caseworkers to communicate with young people subject to community supervision interventions.

Rollout of body cameras in use-of-force incidents in youth corrections centres

(59) For each of FY 2019/2020, FY 2020/2021, FY 2021/2022, FY 2022/2023, and the current financial year, please provide the number of use of force incidents that occurred between guards and inmates in youth corrections centres.

(a) Of these periods, please provide

- i. the number of incidents that were recorded on body camera footage
- ii. the number of incidents that resulted in investigations into misconduct of centre staff
- iii. the number of those investigations that found misconduct on the part of centre staff
- iv. the number of staff sanctioned or disciplined as a result of these misconduct findings

ANSWER

I am advised:

2019/20: 1506
 2020/21: 1215
 2021/22: 1043
 2022/23: 1024
 2023/24: 964 (to 28 February 2024)

(a)

i.
 Body Worn Cameras were introduced in July 2022 at Cobham and Frank Baxter Youth Justice Centres; therefore, data is only available for 2022/23 and 2023/24 (up to 28 February 2024).

2022/23: 367
 2023/24 (up to 28 February 2024): 209

ii.

2019/20: 4
 2020/21: 2
 2021/22: 8
 2022/23: 8
 2023/24 (as at 28 Feb 2024): 11

iii.

2019/20: 4
 2020/21: 2
 2021/22: 7
 2022/23: 7
 2023/24 (as at 28 Feb 2024): 0

iv.

2019/20: 4
 2020/21: 1
 2021/22: 4
 2022/23: 6
 2023/24 (as at 28 Feb 2024): 0

Behaviour Assistance Pathways

(60) Provide a summary of the outcomes to date of the transition from Detainee Risk Management Plans to Behaviour Assistance Pathways

ANSWER

I am advised that Behaviour Assistance Pathways have been implemented at all Youth Justice Centres.

Recidivism

(61) For each of FY 2020/2021, FY 2021/2022, FY 2022/2023, and the current financial year, please provide the number of young people who appeared before a court, having appeared before a court previously.

(a) Of these young people, please provide:

- i. the number who were younger than 14
- ii. the number who have a disability
- iii. the number who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- iv. the number who have previously lived in out-of-home care
- v. the number of males
- vi. the number of females

ANSWER

This question should be directed to the Attorney-General.

(62) For each of FY 2020/2021, FY 2021/2022, FY 2022/2023, and the current financial year, please provide the number of young people who appeared before a court having previously participated in a Youth Justice Conference.

(a) Of these young people, please provide:

- i. the number who were younger than 14
- ii. the number who have a disability
- iii. the number who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- iv. the number who have previously lived in out-of-home care
- v. the number of males
- vi. the number of females

ANSWER

I am advised that this data is not readily available in an accessible format.

(63) For each of FY 2020/2021, FY 2021/2022, FY 2022/2023, and the current financial year, please provide the number of young people who received a custodial sentence, having previously received a custodial sentence.

(a) Of these young people, please provide:

- i. the number who were younger than 14
- ii. the number who have a disability
- iii. the number who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- iv. the number who have previously lived in out-of-home care
- v. the number of males
- vi. the number of females

ANSWER

I am advised:

2020/21: 111
2021/22: 92
2022/23: 83
July 2023 to December 2023: 36

(a)

i.

2020/21: 0
2021/22: 2
2022/23: 0
July 2023 to December 2023: 0

ii. this data is not readily available

iii.

2020/21: 89
2021/22: 74
2022/23: 72
July 2023 to December 2023: 34

iv. this data is not readily available

v.

2020/21: 105
2021/22: 83
2022/23: 79
July 2023 to December 2023: 33

vi.

2020/21: 6
2021/22: 9
2022/23: 4
July 2023 to December 2023: 3

Out-of-home-care

(64) For each of FY 2019/2020, FY 2020/2021, FY 2021/2022, FY 2022/2023, and the current financial year, please provide the number of children who appeared before a court who had previously lived in Out of Home Care.

(a) Of these young people, please provide:

- i. the number that were less than 14 years of age
- ii. the number who have a disability
- iii. the number that identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- iv. the number of males
- v. the number of females

ANSWER

This question should be directed to the Attorney General.

Attachment C

The RFS cooperated fully with requests for evidence and assistance from the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and Coroner.

In cooperation with the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, the RFS completed investigations for the following fires:

- Gospers Mountain Fire (Mt Wilson and Bilpin, within the Hawkesbury LGA)
- Currowan Fire (Conjola, within the Shoalhaven LGA)
- Green Wattle Fire

Summaries of the investigations are provided below:

GOSPERS MOUNTAIN

The RFS Investigation Report concluded that on 14 December 2019, while implementing a strategic back burn to strengthen the southern containment edge of the Gospers Mountain Fire and reduce the likelihood of the main fire front impacting communities, a breach of the southern containment line resulted in the impact on the communities of Mount Wilson, Mount Irvine, Mount Tomah, Berambing, Warawalong and Bilpin. Its subsequent spread was exacerbated by the weather conditions on 19 and 21 December 2019. The spotting across Mount Wilson Road and rapidly spreading fire was influenced by a combination of local terrain, extended drying of vegetation and observed wind speed and direction on the day being significantly different from the forecast conditions.

The southern containment strategy was the result of careful planning by the Hawkesbury Incident Management Team (IMT) and adjoining IMTs, due consideration to resource needs and community consultation before, throughout and after the planned event. The strategy was based on an assessment by the IMT of the threat posed to communities in light of a revised weather forecast which included impending days of elevated fire danger and tactics designed to optimise the productivity of available resources in the time available.

CURROWAN

The RFS Investigation Report concluded that on 31 December 2019, a breach of the eastern containment line occurred in the Conjola area resulting in fire impacting on the communities of Yatte Yattah, Conjola Park and Lake Conjola. The investigation found that the impact on Conjola Park was likely to have originated from the spot over on the powerline easement near Golden Flats Lane on 31 December 2019. While there were a number of other outbreaks, the weather observations and progression of Triple Zero (000) calls indicated that this was the most likely origin. The spot fire in Golden Flat Lane is likely to have originated from the main fire front, however, a spot fire from the back burn once weather conditions deteriorated cannot be ruled out. Weather on 31 December 2019 significantly deteriorated due to high temperatures and strong winds resulting in extreme to catastrophic fire danger and a fire generated thunderstorm.

On the night of 30 December 2019, crews were mopping up the edge of a back burn that had been undertaken during the day between Gooloo Creek and Pointers Gap Road / Porters Creek Road. By 0316hours (31 December 2019) crews were unable to continue working safely in the Porters Creek Road area due to falling timber. Due to the safety concerns, the Divisional Commander withdrew crews, however, maintained periodic patrol of the containment lines and surveillance of fire activity from safety vantage points. Over the following hours, fire ground conditions were reportedly deteriorating as winds and temperatures increased. These conditions led to an increase in fire behaviour from the fire and the back burn, within containment and spotting. By 0911hours, the Division Commander reported spotting on Golden Flats Lane and significant fire progression. At around 1428hours, a fire generated thunderstorm (pyro-cumulonimbus) was observed over the Currowan fire, west of Nowra, resulting in a significant escalation in fire activity.

Fire Behaviour Analysts undertook fire spread simulations which demonstrated there was no significant difference between the back burn going ahead and an alternate scenario in which the back burn did not go ahead and the fire front spread uncontained. The post event analysis simulations suggest that the primary driver of the fire's behaviour and its ultimate extent was the severity of the weather on 31 December 2019. While the back burn was likely to have been effective under the Ulladulla forecast (closest), observed conditions exceeded this forecast and lowered probability of success of the back burn. It is not believed that the back burn exacerbated the situation.

GREEN WATTLE

A back burn on 14 December 2019 was inadvertently extended beyond its planned southern termination point due to a lack of clarity on containment line and back burn alignment and status within the Incident Action Plan and operational mapping.

A number of attempts were made to contain the extension of the back burn including direct attack by aircraft, tasking of heavy plant to construct containment lines and planned retardant lines. Escalating fire behaviour, increased spotting and subsequent issues with close containment attempts necessitated the fall back to a broad containment option in which a back burn was implemented along Seabrook Road Fire Trail and Seabrook Road in an area of reportedly elevated fuel loads. This fall back was ultimately unsuccessful, with a breach of containment occurring on 19 December 2019, a day of elevated fire danger.

The breach in containment resulted in the fire impacting the communities of Balmoral, Buxton and Bargo and a number of strike teams responded into the area to assist with property protection. Notably this included Horsley Park 1 Alpha, part of Cumberland Strike Team Bravo, which was struck by a falling tree, resulting in the death of two RFS members, which has been the subject of a Coronial inquest.