

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 8 - CUSTOMER SERVICE

Friday 11 April 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND DIGITAL GOVERNMENT, EMERGENCY SERVICES, YOUTH JUSTICE

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The Committee met at 09:15.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Emma Hurst (Chair)
The Hon. Scott Barrett
Ms Abigail Boyd
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
Dr Amanda Cohn (Deputy Chair)
Ms Sue Higginson
The Hon. Aileen MacDonald
The Hon. Peter Primrose
The Hon. Rod Roberts
The Hon. John Ruddick
The Hon. Emily Suvaal

PRESENT

The Hon. Jihad Dib, *Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, Minister for Emergency Services,
and Minister for Youth Justice*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

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The CHAIR: Welcome to the third hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service for the additional round of the inquiry into budget estimates 2024-2025. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Emma Hurst. I am the Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Dib and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Customer Service and Digital Government, Emergency Services, and Youth Justice.

I ask everyone in the room to turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of those procedures. Welcome and thank you for making time to give evidence today. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. Witnesses who have already been sworn during this inquiry also do not need to be sworn again.

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Mr MICHAEL TIDBALL, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, on former oath

Mr GRAEME HEAD, AO, Secretary, Department of Customer Service, on former affirmation

Commissioner JEREMY FEWTRELL, AFSM, Fire and Rescue NSW, on former oath

Commissioner MIKE WASSING, AFSM, NSW State Emergency Service, affirmed and examined

Commissioner ROB ROGERS, AFSM, NSW Rural Fire Service, on former oath

Mr MAL LANYON, APM, Acting Chief Executive Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority, sworn and examined

Ms LEIGH SANDERSON, Deputy Secretary, Policy, Strategy and Governance, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Ms LAURA CHRISTIE, Government Chief Information and Digital Officer and Deputy Secretary, Digital NSW, Department of Customer Service, on former affirmation

Mr GREG WELLS, Managing Director, Service NSW, Department of Customer Service, on former oath

Ms MANDY YOUNG, Chief Executive Officer, State Insurance Regulatory Authority, Department of Customer Service, on former affirmation

Ms KYLIE DE COURTENEY, Managing Director, NSW Telco Authority, on former oath

Ms DANUSIA CAMERON, Registrar General, Department of Customer Service, on former oath

Mr MICHAEL TZIMOULAS, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Customer Service, on former oath

Mr SAM TOOHEY, Executive Director, Emergency Management, Premier's Department, on former affirmation

Ms JOANNA QUILTY, Head, Preparedness and Recovery, NSW Reconstruction Authority, affirmed and examined

Mr ANDREW GRAHAM, Chief Financial and Operating Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority, on former affirmation

Ms AMANDA LECK, Head, Adaptation, Mitigation and Reconstruction, NSW Reconstruction Authority, on former oath

Mr PAUL O'REILLY, Acting Deputy Secretary, System Reform, Department of Communities and Justice, on former affirmation

The CHAIR: When witnesses are called to come forward, please bring your nameplates to assist Hansard. Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session, from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon we will hear from the departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from Opposition and crossbench members only and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Thanks, everyone, for coming along. Minister, there is a fair bit of water moving down western New South Wales at the moment, coming from Queensland, obviously. Can you tell me when that's going to hit Wilcannia and at what levels?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thanks so much, and good morning to the Committee. Can I start by thanking everyone for agreeing to reschedule. Talking about water, I think the day that we were meant to be in the original Committee meeting was the day we ended up moving up north when we were dealing with the issue of Tropical Cyclone Alfred. Mr Barrett, you're correct that there is water that's moving around the State at the moment, and I know the SES has been working on that. I get regular updates. We've had some that's come down from Queensland. Working through with Wilcannia specifically, it might be better if I ask the commissioner to give more of a closer time around the date. But this whole moving of the water—we're talking about potentially a number of weeks. It could be six weeks; it could be eight weeks. We're just preparing for that. But if you like, I can ask the commissioner to give the specific dates.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You sort of pointed to it then. That's a pretty big range that we've got there—six or eight weeks.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

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The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do we know when it's going to hit there and what height it's going to be? If we don't have some specific information on that, why not?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We refer to the latest advice that we get, as we did with the cyclone, for example. We work with the Bureau of Meteorology—that advice. We're noting every single thing that's occurring. There are different parts where some of the water is being absorbed into the ground at a different speed. It depends on the tides. It's being continuously updated. But to ask to be given a precise detail, that's a really difficult science, especially when it's so far out. What we have seen is some parts of the State that we thought would be more severely impacted were not, and other parts that maybe we thought were not going to be as severely impacted got a further impact. But the thing that I want to assure you and assure everybody on the Committee is that, just like we did with Cyclone Alfred, the SES as the lead agency, working with all the other partner agencies and the local community, is doing everything that it can in terms of preparation.

Only recently there were some areas, for example, which had been isolated. Prior to that, we'd made sure that we supported those communities in preparation for isolation, in terms of evacuations and in terms of putting in contingencies such as the sandbags and other forms of water retention. But I'm not trying to be cagey. I can't give you an exact date, an exact time and the exact thing. All I can tell you is that the SES is working as hard as we possibly can and continuously monitoring the situation. As I said, it changes. It changes in terms of if we get more rain. It changes in terms of how dry the ground is. It changes in terms of how much of that is being absorbed into the banks. That's about the best that I can give you. I can hand over to the commissioner, who can tell you precisely what we're working on, which I would appreciate, but that is obviously the operational element.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner, do you have any more detailed or accurate estimations of when that is going to arrive?

MIKE WASSING: I think, as the Minister has described, we work with both local knowledge and we've currently got estimates. We have reconnaissance flights constantly, on a daily basis, in terms of the different flood aspects. We're working, through the emergency operations centres and through our incident management teams, very closely with the local governments and the local community with respect to the progress of the floods. There's been lots of localised messaging with respect to the progress of those floods. As the Minister has described, it's not a normal river system; it's a multichannel aspect.

What we are aware of and what we have already seen in the Wanaaring area, in terms of the community that's currently isolated, is that the flood levels have been in excess of the 1990 flood levels. We're expecting that to continue down through the catchment. What we are seeing at the Wanaaring level—the peaks have now levelled out and we're starting to see a decrease in those peaks, but the isolation for that community, in particular, will continue to be there for several weeks. We continue to work with the local community and the local resupplier with regard to that. Now we're watching that water and working with the local communities as that water moves right through to the Barwon River and beyond. I do have a range of details in terms of a lot of different locations, but they're quite complex in terms of—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Perhaps we can get some of that taken on notice or maybe even explore it this afternoon.

MIKE WASSING: Absolutely.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are there gauges and monitoring systems, Minister, upstream from Wilcannia and Menindee that help inform these decisions?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, there are.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: It seems like there's a lack of information. The community is certainly feeling a lack of information coming to them that could be given, you would think, given the technology we have these days.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Barrett, I'm not 100 per cent sure about the lack of information. What we have seen, particularly with the way that we've dealt with recent events, including the cyclone, was a change in the way that things were dealt with in 2022. We took the learnings from 2022 to make sure that we got information out quickly and that we had coordinated messaging. One of the things that came about from the inquiries after the 2022 floods was the fact that gauges were not consistent and not all the gauges were working. We really worked hard as a government and across all government agencies to ensure that we can do better. I think that's really important. We saw the outcome of that with the tropical cyclone in terms of the way that all government agencies work and the way the community responded.

We are keeping people updated as best as possible, whether it's through social media channels, understanding that not everyone is on social media; whether it's through traditional things like community

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meetings; whether it's working through local elected leaders; or whether it's working through community organisations. I can understand sometimes people's frustrations, that they feel not everything is there, but the information we are providing is designed specifically to keep the community informed and to help us be better prepared. We can pre-deploy, and we then need to respond, but at the very heart of it what we're really trying to do is make sure we protect communities and, most importantly, protect people and then protect property. In terms of that communication, the SES is the lead agency that works at the State level but also then with the local levers through all of the different partner agencies. The Reconstruction Authority also does a lot of work there, as well as the chief scientist. If there are some people who are feeling that they're not getting all the communication, we'll continue to try and improve, as we always try and do, but I would question that there isn't much information getting out at all.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We might come back to that, again, later this afternoon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, Commissioner Baxter was moved on in 2023. You're citing budget blowouts as a result of his dismissal. Is the organisation in a better or worse position now than before that decision was made?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I said at the time with Commissioner Baxter that we came to an agreement that we wanted to go in a different direction, so whatever language you want to use you can use. Let's go back to what had been inherited. We inherited a Fire and Rescue service that had been, for want of a better phrase, exceeding the budget by an exceptional amount. Over time had been a real problem. There were a couple of issues that I was concerned about, particularly, as the incoming Minister. Then we went through a rigorous process after that. To that end, Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell, AFSM, who is sitting next to me, was the successful candidate. I've had the opportunity and the pleasure of working with Commissioner Fewtrell for, I think, about the past 18 months in this role. I can see not only the effort that he's making across the board but also the incredible respect that he's held in by firefighters and the way that he is seen as a firefighter's firefighter. There had been some budget allocation that was in the first budget where we applied to remediate an overspend. We're talking about over \$200 million of overspend with Fire and Rescue. I would say we're in a much better position. I thank former Commissioner Baxter for his service and I acknowledge the excellent work that Commissioner Fewtrell is doing.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You pointed specifically to the overtime as one of the reasons for that decision. Has the amount of overtime gone up or down since that leadership change?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's gone down. We've implemented an overtime controller. What that person is charged with doing is making sure that they're looking at where the overtime is. Let me start with how we got to overtime to begin with. There was a structural deficit that we inherited as a new government. The previous Government had left I think 284 firefighters that had not been budgeted for. So we are already starting from behind the eight ball. This Government in the last budget made sure that they were funded. What we also did was look at this as a major focus around Fire and Rescue in terms of how do we bring things under control, under management. We made an election commitment for 600 additional firefighters.

Fire and Rescue had been structurally underfunded to be able to do the job that it needed to do. I know the commissioner implemented an overtime controller, working on what we could do to make sure that we can reduce that overtime. But, fundamentally, one of the key things was that there were simply not enough firefighters that were required to do the job. As a result of that, people were having to fill in gaps and it was paid for with overtime. The overtime has gone down. It's a body of work we continue on. But, fundamentally, what we have done as a government off the bat is make sure we have secured 286 firefighters with permanent full-time employment. Only last Friday I was at a graduation ceremony with the commissioner, where I think there were close to 170 firefighters that had graduated.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: As you talk about bringing it under control, how many fire stations have been offline in the past 12 months due to staffing shortages?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Are you talking about stations that are offline?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That are closed; that have been shut.

Mr JIHAD DIB: For different periods of time, yes. Again, this is not a new thing. My preference, of course, is to make sure that we've always got the firefighters there in that situation. Some of those stations have been offline for periods of things like five minutes and 20 minutes. We're not talking about extended periods of time. But, again, fundamentally, we come down to that really key issue, which is about needing more firefighters.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Perhaps, then, to get the answer to that question, can you take on notice how many fire stations have been shut in the past 12 months for more half a day?

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Mr JIHAD DIB: For more than half a day? So 12 hours?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure. When a station goes offline, other neighbouring stations are there. They work on what's called a dynamic, so they're constantly watching where the different stations are. So the communities are protected in different ways.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: According to the department's own report, appropriations fell—and it is a big number—from just over \$3 billion in 2023 to just over \$2 billion in 2024. That's a cut of, say, \$995 million in just one year to the budget for Customer Service. Service NSW has been the gold standard for Australia and yet almost \$1 billion has been cut. Where has that \$995 million gone?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms MacDonald, what are you referring to? Was that in the budget papers?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It's to do with your appropriations. Yes, it is in your budget papers. I don't have the page number with me because I didn't bring mine, but I'm glad you brought yours.

Mr JIHAD DIB: "Prepare for anything," as the commissioner tells me. That's the motto. If you give us—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: A page number.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let me have a look.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Sorry, I was going to my other questions.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, did you say 2022-23?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: If the member is quoting from a particular set of figures or a report, I think it's only reasonable that the Minister be availed of that. Perhaps the member could table that for the Committee's benefit so we can all see.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It's in the Customer Service report. Is it the annual report? That's what I was going from.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Could I get a copy of that page? Would that be okay?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I have my copy, which I've tagged.

The CHAIR: Did you want to get a copy of that and then come back to those questions?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I think that would be good for the Committee.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm happy to take the question, but, Ms MacDonald, as you'd appreciate, I want to see what it is that you're referring to specifically.

The CHAIR: We'll get another copy of that. Perhaps the secretariat can help photocopy that section and then you can come back to that line of questioning.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm more than happy, Ms MacDonald, to come back to it, but I'm sure you can appreciate that I want to have a look at what it is.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I will give it to the secretariat. But when we get to it, it is page 155 of the *Department of Customer Service Annual Report 2023-2024*. I will get a copy of that to you. I will move to different questions. Last month the Premier's Department was responsible for an alleged, it says, "accidental leak of highly sensitive personal information, including the home addresses of former Ministers responsible for Police and Counter-terrorism". Have the information and privacy commissioners been formally briefed on this breach?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I take that one on notice? I do know that we work with the Privacy Commissioner in terms of our work with the data and digital team. But I can take that one on notice and get back to you before the session is over.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If you take that on notice, if the commissioner hasn't been briefed, can you give the Committee a date either way—if he was briefed or if he wasn't briefed—and what kind of information he was briefed on? This is quite serious, when you think that addresses of former Ministers for Police and Counter-terrorism—they would be cautious.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Of course. Any data breaches are a major concern for us. We've got Cyber Security NSW that we do work with. Obviously it was through the Premier's Department, and the commission is an independent authority that I've got some responsibility for. But we will get that answer to you. I'm happy to take that one on notice, just so that I can give you a correct answer.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It's alarming that you don't have an answer now.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Well, not really, Mrs MacDonald. It is the Premier's Department. I'm not responsible for the Premier's Department, and the commission is an independent authority.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But we're talking cybersecurity. That is under your remit, is it not?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, and I can talk to you about some of the recent cybersecurity work that we've been doing, for example, with DCJ, which are government agencies. We have been working really closely with them. The work that we're doing in Cyber Security NSW, we take it incredibly seriously. We made sure that it was well funded and well resourced. But you'd know by now, Mrs MacDonald, that I like to give the correct answer rather than just say something that I'm not 100 per cent sure of.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, I do know that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And it was a privacy breach, not necessarily a cyber breach, in this case.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: True.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, in Parkes, the pipeline that goes from Lake Endeavour into the town, supplying drinking water to the town, was knocked out in the '22 floods. It still hasn't been fixed. This is critical water infrastructure for the town. Why wouldn't this come under flood recovery funding?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think we've had this discussion for quite some time—not with yourself. But the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements is funding arranged between the Commonwealth and the State. This does not fit within that. I see the real challenges. There has been very strong advocacy from the two local MPs. Andrew Gee, as the Federal member, and Phil Donato, as the local member for the area, have been very, very strong advocates for this. We continue to work with NEMA, which is the national body. There has been a body of work that has also been undertaken where States have worked with the Commonwealth about whether the DRFA is still appropriate. That work is continuing. But the short answer, Mr Barrett, is that it just does not fit within the guidelines of the DRFA. I know that it's been raised with me—when I was responsible for the Reconstruction Authority along with Minister Scully—a number of times. It is not something that has been a set and forget; work has been going on. But obviously these are the biggest challenges. If it doesn't fit within that, it's really just hard to say, "We want to fund it out of the DRFA."

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Similar infrastructure was funded in the Northern Rivers, I believe. How come this wouldn't apply to the Central West flood?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I wasn't the Minister and nor were we in government—I wasn't the Minister, certainly, when the Northern Rivers thing happened so I don't know how they funded it. But if I'm looking at the DRFA specifically, this does not fit in the DRFA.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you think it should?

Mr JIHAD DIB: When I was the Minister responsible, I had a conversation and I was able to have some input into some of the ways that we can improve the funding arrangements between the Commonwealth and the State. I was very clear in saying that I think that there are things that need to change. We need to have a look at things in individual circumstances. I also recognise that this is an expensive thing for small country towns, but it's also a really important piece of infrastructure. I've been on the record with that. I've been out there in the communities and said the same thing. We'll continue working on that. I know that the Reconstruction Authority continues having these discussions with NEMA, which is the national version of the Reconstruction Authority.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I have a few questions about the Resilient Homes Program. I understand that the Reconstruction Authority is moving to a different ministry, but obviously you've been responsible for this for some time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It has moved to another Minister, yes.

Dr AMANDA COHN: The NRRC originally asked for \$1.5 billion for the Resilient Homes Program. Do you accept that this program has been underfunded?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The program, in terms of just the Resilient Homes element, I think, is about \$900 million. There was a discussion of a tranche 1 and a tranche 2. Previously people have talked about a tranche 2, but there's never been any funding that was allocated to it. We are still working through that money. The actual \$900-odd million still hasn't been spent. As you know, some of it is for buybacks, some of it is for retrofitting and some is for home-raising. The previous Premier and the current Premier will continue working with that community in the Northern Rivers. While I was the Minister who incorporated the recovery element,

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I think I visited probably about nine to 10 times. This is front and centre for us. But there is still funding in that Resilient Homes package.

Dr AMANDA COHN: My understanding is that, as of December, only 16 grants for raises or retrofits had actually been granted through that program. How many applications have you had for raises or retrofits?

Mr JIHAD DIB: If it's okay with you, can I just ask the CEO of the Reconstruction Authority? But what I do know is there have been a lot of inspections and advice and so forth. But maybe in terms of that specific number, if it's okay with you, I will ask the Reconstruction Authority CEO to answer that question.

Dr AMANDA COHN: If he's got it—quickly, please.

MAL LANYON: There have been 262 homes assessed that may be eligible for the resilient measures program. For raises, there have been 41 offers approved to date, and 420 homes are prioritised for what would be resilient measures, whether raising or retrofits.

Dr AMANDA COHN: For how many of those grants that have been approved are the works actually completed?

MAL LANYON: For retrofits, I'm advised that there are four, and for raises, 17 at this time.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I appreciate you having those numbers to hand. Minister, it's now 2025. You can appreciate from those figures that's a very small proportion of applications actually getting approved and a very small number of homes that have had works completed. Do you think that's an acceptable pace of works with the funding that's currently available?

Mr JIHAD DIB: What occurred in the Northern Rivers is the biggest natural disaster we've ever seen in Australia. It was certainly the most costly. We've seen a record investment by the previous State Government, and continuing with this current Government that we're part of, and by the Federal Government. I was up there probably the week after the floods hit and the devastation was quite phenomenal. When I became Minister, Minister Scully and I both went up there to look at a reset. Part of it was looking at what it is that we need to do. That's where the retrofits and the home-raising came in.

I think it might have been about August or September—I'm not 100 per cent sure—last year where I went up and actually saw how the home-raising would go. We also worked with one of the local groups there called Resilient Lismore as part of the Two Rooms Project, I think it was called, so some funding. We're looking at doing things in a different way, but ultimately with the community. But I do recognise that it has been taking a while. We're trying to get it right. We're also trying to make sure that we can get all of the people who are, for want of a better phrase, the tradies and people there to be able to do that job. But it's certainly not from a lack of the funding or a lack of the effort. Indeed, the Reconstruction Authority has been out doorknocking over the past year to just find out what people's specific needs are.

We're trying to make sure that we work with people for their individual needs. We've got this pool of funding that falls under the Resilient Homes package. What we want to make sure is that people get the thing that works best for them, but obviously we continue moving at the best speed that we can. But the home-raising itself is quite a delicate operation. Effectively, you've got to brace the home, then you've got to, crudely, drive a truck under it, lift it up, jack it up slowly, slowly, slowly and then reset it. That's pretty specialised work, but we'll continue working with those. But I'm really pleased to see that the number of inspections and pre-approvals is quite high.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I understand that modular housing in the Northern Rivers is due to progressively come to an end from mid this year. Given you've visited frequently, I'm sure you appreciate the scale of the homelessness crisis in the Northern Rivers at the moment. What additional funding have you sought or advocated for for the modular homes?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The modular homes—there are some that were, for a certain period of time, basically local government. Local government or private property owners would have allowed us to put, effectively, temporary homes on there. It was always to be temporary. The Reconstruction Authority is working with the people there but also working with community housing providers to try to relocate people in suitable accommodation, recognising of course that there are some challenges in terms of where people can move to. But we're not flicking a switch and saying, "Okay, everybody needs to go." The Government is working with them. There's the community housing providers which, when we did the reset tour, people said, "We want local decisions being made by local people", and the community housing providers have better access to things.

There's investment in terms of social housing. There's support. We've seen now some of the places that have been moved. I think Mount Pleasant is almost ready to go where homes have been relocated to

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Mount Pleasant. We're opening up the Resilient lands. There's been some agreement. Some of that infrastructure is in place. We're not going to be just saying to people, "Okay, you've got to go. Time's up." But the fact of the matter is that, when these agreements were entered into with government, they were agreed to for a certain period of time. Each individual household, I'll call it, has also got their own transition plans. We are working with people on an individual basis.

I just want to make clear that people aren't just being left out in the cold. They're being worked with individually. We're working with the community housing providers and we're making sure that we support them into that next step. For some, they'll be able to move into their old home. For some, they'll be able to move their home. Others have sought out new properties and others have built properties, but each person is being worked with as an individual because each case is an individual case.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: Minister, can you confirm that you have awarded a 10-year \$400 million contract for the management of the Rural Fire Service to a Canadian company called Coulson? Can you also confirm that the tender was open publicly for six weeks over the summer holidays at the beginning of last year? Is that time frame standard for the awarding of a contract so large?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Ruddick, just to clarify something: It wasn't for specifically for aviation and it was a five-year and a five-year contract. Yes, I can confirm that. Commissioner Rogers, it was a six weeks tender? Yes, it was an open tender.

ROB ROGERS: Yes. Whatever the period was that was required by procurement guidelines.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We worked within the procurement guidelines.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: Industry is very concerned it was only a six-week period and it opened only in the first week of January. There was contract awarded by the Federal Government for the helicopter services in Antarctica recently and they had a three-month open tender process. I think some of the local operators felt like they weren't really given an open opportunity. Do you think that's fair?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Ruddick, we worked within the guidelines that are there for us, which are the State procurement guidelines. That would be the first step—that everything was done in relation to that. In relation to what the Federal Government did, you'd appreciate that it's not my place to speak about what they do.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: Sure.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I go back to one of the reasons why we've also made sure that we've tried to secure aviation? We need this and we need something long term. We continue, even with this Coulson contract, to work with local operators. But if we ever think about what occurred just recently in Los Angeles, post Los Angeles, the United States have now tried to tie up pretty much all of the available aviation aircraft to support that. We've also got situations where fire seasons in the past used to be pretty clearly defined. They now overlap, so this is about making sure that we've got the resources that we need, given that we will have fire seasons that extend for a long period of time.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: The bushfire inquiry after those bad fires five years ago did say that the local operators did a good job, so I'm still confused why we had to outsource it to Canada. Are you aware that when the contract was approved by yourself that Coulson was under investigation by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau for two of the worst fatal firefighting crashes we've had in recent history?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That is?

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: That's the one in Cooma and the one in Western Australia.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I believe that there was a report that's been handed down with Cooma.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: Yes. That report was being prepared while you issued them the contract, so it was still in play.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Ruddick, the tender went out openly to everyone who was willing to apply. People were aware that there was a tender. We need to make sure that we have the best possible protection that we can have for our State. Currently, we own a large air tanker. We're the only State that does it. We own a Chinook. We're the only State that does it. But, as we've just seen in recent fires across the State—I'm so grateful because we were able to see the use of our aviation to support people on the ground. I need to make sure, as the Minister—and I think that anybody would like to know—that we've got every possible resource. As part of the contract, as an example, there was also an element that had to involve local work and local training so that we could build our local—

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The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: The local work has been very significantly reduced. You would agree with that, wouldn't you? We're talking about at least two dozen operators—good thriving businesses which have had a very good relationship with the RFS for several decades—and now those operators are in serious strife because we've given \$400 million to a foreign company.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Ruddick, you'd appreciate we're still using and we're still working with our local operators. Indeed, we have, throughout the summer. You know, what I need to be very, very conscious of is making sure that when a fire happens, we've got the resources in place. I'm comfortable that in New South Wales we do the very best that we can to make sure that we've got those resources. It was an open tender, and that open tender was available to everybody to be able to put in a bid. Now, Coulson put in the successful bid. As a result of that, we were able to secure their services. Just to give you an example of how it would work, we need to procure, even with all of our locals, an aerial fleet at different times of the year. These are becoming much, much more difficult to procure and much more expensive to procure. Other places are starting to just tie them up.

We're actually in a good place in New South Wales with that. Obviously, the responsibility is I have to use public funding in the best way possible. This is the best way possible. For some of the specifics I'm happy for the commissioner to elucidate a bit more on some of the specifics that you're referring to, but I'm confident that we continue to use and continue to work with local operators, and that we've done the best that we can to ensure the safety of the people of New South Wales, particularly when it comes to fire season.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: When you awarded that very large contract to Coulson and CASA was investigating these two crashes simultaneously—you're right that CASA has now delivered that report. *The Sydney Morning Herald* in January this year summarised those reports. This is what it found about Coulson:

Coulson Aviation's safety risk management processes did not adequately manage the risks associated with large air tanker operations. The report also found that there were no operational risk assessments conducted or a risk register maintained. CASA went on to complain that a lot of their safety records are held in British Columbia. There have been two crashes and CASA said, "We're not thrilled about the safety record of this company." Is that a concern to you, Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think anybody would be concerned about safety. But, Mr Ruddick, I go back to this: There was a process and people and companies were allowed and enabled to be able to make a submission. Now, I don't know whether some of the contractors you've talked about made a submission or not, but obviously—

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: They said that they just didn't have the time and it was as though the tender process was not friendly towards local submissions. That is the strong evidence and feedback I'm getting from the industry.

Mr JIHAD DIB: As I said, we continue to work with local industry. I think there are 22 contracted aircraft. I think we've got an availability of up to 230 aircraft. When I'm dealing with a fire that's potentially spreading across the State, I want to make sure that we've got all the resources that we've got there, Mr Ruddick.

The CHAIR: Minister, the latest BOCSAR statistics show a 32 per cent increase in the number of young people in custody following the introduction of punitive bail law reforms, which have now been extended for another year. As the Minister for Youth Justice, were you consulted on the decision to extend those laws?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There is a discussion that happens in party rooms, Ms Hurst.

The CHAIR: Do you support the decision to extend the bail laws?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's a Government decision. I'm part of the Government, and I obviously supported that.

The CHAIR: Do you think that what we've seen so far—a 32 per cent increase in kids in custody—is a good outcome from the perspective of Youth Justice?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Hurst, I know your sincerity on this, and you know my sincerity on this. I think everybody here on this panel would love to see no kids in Youth Justice. We'd love to see kids being able to live their best lives. I think Mrs MacDonald, as shadow Minister, and I were at something about a month ago. It's inspiring, but the reality of it is that we've got to balance community safety with also giving a consequence for young people and, at the same time, trying to give them some hope and give them a chance to change and redeem things and maybe get onto a better path. I've been on the record very clearly about that—the support for young people and trying to make sure we get them on the right path.

By the same token, I've got to make sure that people who commit—there have been some pretty serious crimes. Young people have committed some pretty serious crimes. One, we need to stop that crime; two, we need to get to the heart of why that crime is occurring; and three, be able to support that. My job as the youth Minister,

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when they come into my responsibility, after the courts have made a determination, is to work with my Youth Justice agency and other agencies and say, "What is it we can do to make things better," and, to that end, the commitment in terms of funding. I'm really proud to have been able to secure nearly \$67 million of funding. It's the first time that someone has secured \$67 million of funding specifically towards working with diversion, with young people, and with communities. But the end stop is young people.

The CHAIR: I know that there are several good things that you are doing, and certainly I don't mean anything negative on that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know. I appreciate that.

The CHAIR: At the same time, I'm sure you are aware of the impact of these laws on Aboriginal young people, with the number of Aboriginal kids in remand increasing by 22 per cent to 129, according to BOCSAR. I'm just wondering how that is consistent with the work that you're doing and the work that the Government is doing on Closing the Gap. We've got all this work, this funding and these other great things that you're doing and, at the same time, we've got legislation passing that's putting more and more children in custody.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's the complexity of it. I wish there was just one straight line or just one simple solution. I think 10 of my predecessors would have done it, if they could. We continue to work in diversion and we continue to work with communities. We work with Aboriginal community controlled organisations. We also work with local communities and what the community leaders want. We also work with Education and Health. What's the holistic thing? In terms of remand, sometimes the young person is in remand for, effectively, maybe a day. It could be 24 hours, it could be 20 hours, or it could be until their next court date. What I am also looking at, in terms of sentencing is, are more young people being sentenced for longer periods of time, and what can we do with them in terms of trying to help them change this behaviour?

One of the things I'm really passionate about is making sure that, if we put a young person back into the place where they were doing the wrong thing, how are we supporting them so they don't do the wrong thing? Are we helping them, say, into education? Are we helping them into schooling? Are we helping them with the whole family wraparound service? That's how those two things work together. There are so many pieces to this, and there's a complexity, but there is a genuine will and desire to make things better. Even people who advocate—when we visited Moree recently to announce the bail accommodation service, I met with some people who had been victims of youth crime. Even they, with all of that, while they were advocating in terms of making sure that these consequences are given to young people, at the same time they were also saying we need to provide hope and we still need to provide opportunities. It's trying to find the right balance. But of course I'm concerned.

The CHAIR: In regard to Moree, I understand that there's just been the appointment of a provider for the Safe Aboriginal Youth program in Moree. The contract is to commence this month, I believe, and continue for four years. Are you able to explain why this contract has only commenced now rather than when the bail changes were introduced? If we are really trying to focus on building these bridges to help these kids rather than a punishment focus, why has it taken so long for this contract to commence?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think that's a really fair question and a fair point. At the time, Ms Hurst, I think I was with Mr O'Reilly and we were talking about this. We made it pretty clear that these things would take time in terms of firstly defining what it was that this program would be, working out what the parameters of it would be and then working with local providers in terms of what they could provide, how they could provide it, and then the next bit, which is actually sourcing—which is the step now—the accommodation. If we try to rush it too quickly and don't work with the local community as to what works for them, then I think we run the risk of doing it wrong. What might work in Moree is not necessarily going to work in another place. We're doing some work, for example, in Coffs Harbour and Dubbo, but we take those learnings.

Youth Justice is absolutely prioritising this. It's almost a constant discussion that we have. They're on the ground there working with people. The two successful tenders, I think, Miyay Birray and SHAE Academy, have got deep roots in the community. They're highly regarded. Whilst this has been going on, another body of work has been taking place in terms of making sure that we are engaging young people in night-time activities because, when you look at the data, most of the behaviour that we're talking about here occurred during the early hours of the morning. Kids need to be engaged and then brought back to what could be home. Again, these are some complex family situations. We are trying to work with people, and no-one could work better with local young people than local community providers.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The report that I'm referring to is the Department of Customer Service Annual Report. I've got a few other pages, but the first one is page 155, and it's basically the last paragraph, "The Appropriation Act appropriates the sum of," and you can see just over \$2 billion there, and in 2023 it was just over \$3 billion. My question is, where did the missing \$995 million go?

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Mr JIHAD DIB: The column on the right—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's what it was, what I really want to know is—

Mr JIHAD DIB: So that's 2022-23.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes. What programs have been scrapped, shelved or gutted to absorb this cut?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mrs MacDonald, having a look at this, the thing was talking about a cut, but what you can see is 2022-23 was the last budget of the previous Government, who we knew was just putting out money to all sorts of places. We inherited the largest debt ever handed to a government—a \$187 billion black hole.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I recognise that, but—

Mr JIHAD DIB: The fact is we inherited that debt because money was being spent. But in terms of where—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: My question is, what programs have been cut, scrapped or shelved as a result of this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: If you have a look at the following line, you can look at not necessarily cuts, but that one you referred to, for example, the Digital Restart Fund—money has been spent from the Digital Restart Fund. The Rental Bond Board is still the same. But then you go down to the next—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll ask some more questions about that then. You have got a copy of the report?

Mr JIHAD DIB: This is the page that you've provided me.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, but I have other questions with different pages that I will refer to.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can we get a copy of the—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: This is of the annual report, you mean?

The CHAIR: Minister, there has been a point of order.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: In terms of consistency with your previous ruling, if the member wants to—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I would have thought that the Minister would have a copy of that report.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Can I finish the point of order?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, sure. Sorry.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: If the member wants to quote from a document, it would be good for the benefit of the Committee and the Minister if the Committee was availed of the documents so that we can scrutinise them and be availed of what she's talking about. I would ask you to ask the member to table the documents if she is going to quote from them.

The CHAIR: If it's a simple report—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It's 217 pages. I'm not going to table 217 pages.

The CHAIR: If it's a simple report that's in the public domain, it doesn't necessarily need to be tabled with the Committee. It's up to the member. Of course, it can help to get some really clear answers from the Minister, if we're referring to a very specific part of a large report, to ensure that he is able to refer back to them and to be able to get answers to those questions. It's not a requirement that the member has to table or provide it, but it will make it very difficult for the Minister if it's too specific.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: I think it's a matter of courtesy that if a member asks a question, the Minister should be able to have reasonable time. He is attempting to answer to the best of his ability. In terms of lack of detail, the member has asked a specific question and has provided us with page 155 of the document. The Minister is seeking to respond, and we are now moving onto another line of questioning. I think the Minister, as a matter of courtesy, should at least be able to answer.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: To the point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Chair, I'm happy to answer the questions on this page; I'm more than happy to do that. But what I just ask is that if there are other things you're referring to, if I could just know that. I said to you before that I'm more than happy, and I will answer that. Your question was about what programs. If I'm looking at this page, I'm looking at things like the Medium Business Support Grant, for example, which was a COVID stimulus package. That was not as much of a priority in 2023-24 as it was in 2022-23—and the Dine and Discover vouchers, for example. The flood relief support grants were for the 2022 floods.

It's not a case of budgets being cut as opposed to that budget was no longer required. As Service, one of its responsibilities is, when a government makes an announcement about funding grants, then it's run through Service NSW. But there are COVID things here that are no longer relevant and there are flood things that are no longer relevant. We're talking about a budget from two years ago. But that answers the question about what it is that's not there. That's why I appreciate you giving me the paper, because now I know what you're talking about.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But do you have a copy of the 217-page report available to you now?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Not with me right now, but I'm sure we'll get a hold of it if we need to. I didn't bring it with me. I brought seven budget books.

The CHAIR: The secretariat is printing a copy of that out for you. Unfortunately, because of its length, it's taking a bit of time. It will be here soon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Even if you give me the numbers of the pages, that's fine. Obviously I'm talking about this year's budget estimates. This is for something from a couple of years ago. We've brought all the documents with us here.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: My further questions will be in relation to this, so I can tell you that the pages I will refer to are pages 38, 55, 71, 75, 76, 148, 91, 27 and 23—I believe.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No worries. There are a few questions there.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: There are.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: Can I clarify that we will be getting a copy of those pages?

The CHAIR: Yes, you will. The member may continue.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, Ms MacDonald, are you happy with my answer that I've given you in terms of why it looks like it's less? It's because those funds were no longer distributed through my department. It's not a cut; it's just that those funds were no longer required. COVID stimulus, flood stimulus—that's why it's different.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's part of the reason.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That is the reason; it's not part of the reason. That is the reason.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: There are other Ministers involved in putting together the report. It refers to the Minister for Better Regulation and Fair Trading and the Minister for Building. Do you have oversight of this cluster?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We don't have a cluster model per se. I'm the Minister responsible for the Community Services department. But within that, as you said, there's Minister Saffin, for example, with Small Business, and Minister Cotsis with Industrial Relations.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll just ask one question then. You might say, "No, that's not within my remit," and then I'll move on. On page 38, the portable rental bond scheme, is that something that you would like to comment on?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Does that fall under the Minister for Better Regulation?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: So the Minister's—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's all right. I'll move on. Sorry.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, that's okay.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll now refer to page 55.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm trying to answer without knowing the pages. We'll give it a go.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It's about the licensing program.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: Are we asking questions now about the document that we don't have and that the Minister doesn't have?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: To the point of order: The member's asking questions about the portfolio of the Minister. She's using a publicly available document as the basis for those questions. I don't think it needs to be tabled. These are things the Minister should be across. She doesn't have to say where she's getting this information.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: She does, actually.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: To the point of order: The issue is not whether or not the Minister's across his portfolio. To expect him to memorise, by rote, every line item of a particular budgetary item is just unfair. If the Committee wants to waste time so that the Minister can spend the next half an hour looking up the pages of a 400-page document, that's fine, but isn't it easier to table the document and give it to him?

The CHAIR: The documents are coming, as I said earlier. There is no requirement for the member to table the document, but it won't make for very good questioning if the Minister can't answer the questions.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What I'll do is I'll wait for the tabled document.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I may, Madam Chair, I'm happy to do my best in answering the question, but just appreciate that I do not have it. To the other point, I think you've seen, Mr Barrett, that I pretty much answer every one of the questions that I can, but I don't know the document you're talking about. I'm happy to try to answer the questions, as I just did.

The CHAIR: There's a copy coming to you now, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Was it page 38?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, that's what we were on. We're now on page 55.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I have written them all down.

The CHAIR: There will be other copies for the Committee coming soon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is that "Licensing and eRegulation"?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, it's on page 55. It has its own little title, "Licensing Program". Why is the licensing program claiming \$850 million in projected economic benefits without any actual proof of that? As you'll see, "The Government licensing system will transition to Licence NSW, with more than \$850 million in economic benefits projected to be generated by 2031." Can you give me a breakdown of that \$850 million claim? Has Treasury verified these projections, or are they internal estimates?

Mr JIHAD DIB: What I'll do is I'll give you bit of an overview of it and then, if it's okay with you, I might hand over to Laura Christie, who's the head of Digital. The licensing program we're doing, again, is like a nation-first thing. Like the photo card that we have just launched, we're really leading the nation in that way. I would assume that you might have a digital licence. There are other licences that we've got. We trialled the Working with Children Check—for want of a better word—licence as well. There are a number of licences right across the State, whether it's the plumbing licence or whatever the different licences are.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, I have a few.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What we're trying to do is make your life easier, Ms MacDonald, and everyone else's in the State, by having them available to you in that same concept—that wallet—which is really good at making sure that the consumer is also protected and that it's the right person who's able to provide that information, so if I ask somebody to come in and fix a leaking tap, I know they are legitimate. That's where we're doing it. We've got 52 licences that have been delivered to date. We've still got 78 schemes that are being moved over, and it takes them off the legacy. In terms of the economic impact, part of that is we're moving them off legacy technology which is, by its very nature, going. The other one is also the impact it has on communities. There's a lot of people who have to rectify things in different ways. This is in terms of the productivity gain. I'm happy, if you are, to ask Ms Christie to provide more detail than that, if there are more specifics that you have.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might do that this afternoon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure. Ms Christie is the Deputy Secretary of Digital. What you'll find is that what I have explained is pretty much what the licensing program is.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If I can now turn to page 70.

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Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you, Chair, and whoever printed this off. Pages 70 and 71?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes. We're talking about Revenue NSW compliance activities.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Revenue NSW falls under the responsibility of Minister Houssos. In the same way as we were talking about Minister Chanthivong, this is Minister Houssos.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll move on to my next question, then—pages 75 and 76. This one is right up your alley. That's the Digital Restart Fund. How many of the Digital Restart Fund funded projects needed extensions, amendments or top-ups?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The way the Digital Restart Fund works—it doesn't work necessarily on extensions and those things. What it does is it starts off with a little bit of seed funding. Let's say, for example, you're a particular department. You're responsible for the department of something and you've got this idea and you would make an application to the Digital Restart Fund, which then gets assessed. It might be "We need to trial this. We need to start up with a seed program. Can we have some funding for that? Can we get that different support?" At different points of time more funding is released if you meet what we call the gateway. In the end, what also happens is the department itself makes their own contributions. It continues with it. In terms of extensions and things like that, that's not necessarily how it works.

There are amazing projects happening with the Digital Restart Fund. One of the really great examples that I can point to is schools. I didn't know what a QR code was, really. I did know what they were but I didn't use them until COVID. We all started using QR codes. It became the norm. That was developed through the digital team. Now what they've done is the Department of Education has said, "We want to adapt that into something so when school visitors go in"—so you go to a school. Now, instead of the olden days like two years ago, when you used to have to write down your name and your details and all those things, you now do the QR code. Then, where the benefit of that is all the data, making sure that the right person is going in. But the next step as well is that, if you get people who are tradies and so forth coming in, you know they've got their Working with Children Check, all of that sort of thing. That, to me, is an example of what the Digital Restart Fund does and really good ideas. That's an extension but that started with a bit of seed funding, continuation and now the department will run with it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With those extensions, what is the return on investment, say, for any that have been extended to 2034?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can actually give you a number. The return on investment is quite phenomenal. Just give me one sec. I think I had a number for a particular return on investment: \$3 for every \$1 that is spent as a return on investment. We've done the digital birth certificate national rollout recently. The Rural Access Gap, RegStar, which is a driver learning licence, the Youth Justice CYMHS program, which is all of the database work in there, as well as cybersecurity, are just some. But the return on investment is good. What has been really important with this is that Digital NSW is working with individual agencies to make sure that they get the best outcome and they actually produce the best systems possible. We're using our expertise in digital with the expertise in individual and respective agencies to make sure that we do the very best that we can and get a really good outcome. But three to one is pretty all right, I would say.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If you can now turn to page 148—it is to do with licensing. Why did the Government reclassify over \$100 million in licence and regulatory fee income?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, that might be a question specifically to the financial team. Michael, would you be able to—we'll give you a quick answer on that if you wouldn't mind, sorry.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, that's okay.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is that us or Chanthivong?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: Can I ask the member which line item she is referring to, for our reference.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: There are several.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Wherever it says "licensing", you mean?

GRAEME HEAD: I think you have a range of licences presented here as required for the preparation of the accounts, each of which will be a licensing scheme that's accountable to different Ministers who've got licences here—mostly Minister Chanthivong's portfolio. Mr Tzimoulas, who is the CFO, may be able to make a general observation on why, from an accounting point of view, the reclassification was required.

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MICHAEL TZIMOULAS: We've reclassified between retaining taxes and that line basically after discussions with the Audit Office to make sure that we're reflecting it in the most appropriate accounting line as possible.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It was advice from the Audit Office.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That was a very quick answer, wasn't it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sometimes if you ask for an exact answer, they can give you the quickest one possible.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I have one question in my last 50 seconds—on page 91. It is to do with consultants—the third one down, for Keystone Negotiation. What return did taxpayers get from spending nearly \$190,000 for advice on how to negotiate with Microsoft?

Mr JIHAD DIB: So this was in 2022-23?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It is your report.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know, but the 2022-23 budget?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It is 2023-24. That's what we're reporting on.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Keystone Negotiation?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: We'll come back to that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll come back to that one.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: You have a very diverse portfolio and a very diverse day in front of you. I'm just going to make a bit of a statement to get you around where it is we're at. In rescue incident, where minutes make the difference between life and death, you would think that measuring the performance of various New South Wales emergency service agencies attending rescue work would only improve outcomes across New South Wales, but recently the chair of the State Rescue Board confirmed that little or no data is being analysed to evaluate the suitability of our rescue arrangements. This means in an area—and we'll use Port Macquarie, for example. Despite a rapidly growing population, you have the SES sitting in one shed and physically right beside them is the fire brigade, who are constantly on duty at Port Macquarie. In Port Macquarie you're relying upon the SES to do the rescue work although the firefighters are right next door. Minister, do you agree that staff firefighters at Port Macquarie responding to a local road crash incident are more likely to be able to attend in a quicker response in 99 per cent of all of those occasions?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is the Port Macquarie—and I'm not trying to play games here, but is the Port Macquarie fire station a retained fire station?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: No.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's a full-time station.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: That's why I'm asking.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's why I wanted to ask you that.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: I want it clearly on the record: This is no disparaging remarks towards the SES. They do an extremely good job. But we're talking about practicability. You've got volunteers being called out from home to run the SES. You have full-time firefighters sitting in a station. The work is going to the SES. Surely, in these circumstances, the best trained and most available unit is the fire brigade. What is your comment in relation to that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The State Rescue Board obviously looks at all of those things, and all commissioners across all of the different agencies work really well together. There are accredited rescue designations in certain points of time but they also work well enough together that, if one of the agencies is the first one to get there, then they will be there and they will do that work and they'll be supported by the others.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: They may be, but who is called first? That's the question I'm getting at. There is no data. As I said, the chair of the State Rescue Board says there is very little data collected or analysed. We don't know how long it's taking various volunteer rescue units to attend an accident scene, where we know the full-time firefighters at Port Macquarie are there ready to respond—no call-out from home, no getting dressed, no nothing. They are ready to go.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Roberts, I'll look into that one. I do know that they are working together and there are some discussions that have taken place that are around that. Obviously also what we are seeing is—and you

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highlighted it in your opening—the change in demographics of communities. We are seeing the peri-urban now become urban and we're seeing the semirural become more rural. But in the end it's the police that actually coordinate the whole rescue. They do that. I'm responsible for those.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: We know that, Minister. I'm not stopping you. I'm not interrupting your answer. Your answer is correct. We're not disputing that—who coordinates what. We're talking about the practicality of a call-out arrangement from somebody coming from home if, in fact, they are available—they're not at the kids' soccer practice or they're not at the church fete or something—where the fire brigade of Port Macquarie 24/7 are rostered on duty. Surely practicalities would say, in every instance, they're your go-to people.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think that's a good point that you make because obviously what we want to do is go, "How does this occur? What is the reason behind it?"

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Can we get an undertaking from you to reassess all this, then?

Mr JIHAD DIB: You've got an undertaking from me that I'll have a conversation with you. I'm happy to get a briefing with you as well with that, where we can have a discussion about it—I wouldn't mind finding out. If there are things that we can do better and areas that we can improve, you've got my undertaking that we'll do that.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Going further on that, you've recently commissioned a report that's been released about volunteering in rescue agencies, for example—unfortunately a reflection on society that perhaps there are not enough people are volunteering anymore. So your numbers are dropping.

Mr JIHAD DIB: True.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: In relation to that, surely that would tell you alone that you need to rely on your full-time employed, rescue-trained operators, not a dropping and diminishing volunteer work base. Wouldn't that tell you something in itself? And it was a report that you commissioned.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, we committed that report. I might just go back to that point about Port Macquarie. In Port Macquarie, for example, Fire and Rescue NSW is the accredited road crash rescue authority there, so we might look at other places.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: That's not what I've been told. I've been told it's the SES.

Mr JIHAD DIB: They're accredited for road crash.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: They're accredited for road crash. SES is the—

Mr JIHAD DIB: They're accredited for it so they can do it.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Sorry, I didn't hear what the commissioner said. The SES is what?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: They're an accredited GLR unit—general land rescue unit.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm more than happy to sit down with you and to ask for a briefing we can do together. The issue about volunteers, you're right. Volunteer numbers fluctuate in different agencies. Interestingly, Surf Life Saving, which is one of the emergency services that is a non-government one, has actually had an increase in the number of volunteers. SES has had an increase in the number of volunteers. What this report was about was that exact thing that were you talking about, Mr Roberts. Let's have a look at what we've got, where we're at, what the problems might be and are there other ways of solution.

As a result of that report, one of the things that we did was also then enable some spontaneous volunteering grants, where local organisations can have volunteers ready to go at different times and have some training. I tip my hat to people who volunteer; I'm so grateful for them. I saw them, as Ms Higginson did, up in the North Coast not too long ago, from all of the different agencies. Volunteers are people who put others ahead of themselves. They're like the best of us. I could wax lyrical, as I'm sure you would as well, knowing how much you respect emergency services. We work together. All of the emergency services do work well together. The training that's provided, particularly, say—RFS does a lot more than fight bushfires. They also do rescues. I get messages from the commissioner pretty much on a daily basis about crashes they've gone to. SES does more than just flood rescues. We do have a problem.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Minister, can I rudely interrupt you. I know it's your answer and you're entitled to your answer, but we're on the clock. I've got limited time and then I'll be gone. I'll be out of your hair. I just want to finish these off.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't have as much hair as I used to.

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The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: I have less than you, Minister, and there's probably a good reason why.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You should've seen me in 2015; I had a mullet.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: What I'm getting at is that we know that volunteer base is diminishing; we know that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, in parts.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: In parts, so surely then, going forward, we should be looking at how are we going to best serve our community. Perhaps in some locations it's best served by those that are fully employed and trained in rescue units.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's a continuous looking at where we're at. I use that phrase "where we're at" in—

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: There's not, because the chair of the State board said, "We don't analyse the data in terms of emergency rescues."

Mr JIHAD DIB: Individual agencies do keep their data, and maybe—

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Yes, but it's not compiled.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Well, maybe then that needs—

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: We can't sit back with an overview dashboard and say, "It takes this agency so long to respond, and this agency so long to respond." You don't have that data.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We do look at them regularly. Maybe then there's a bit more of a directive that can be spoken about—what it is we need to look at—which is where I think you're going. But, Mr Roberts, I know that you're not trying to—but I just really want to make it clear that our emergency services, whether they're the paid or whether they're the volunteers, are there for our communities in their time of need.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Granted. Not disputed. They do an excellent job. That's why I praised the SES in my opening about this. This is not an attack on the SES or the RFS and this is not a gotcha moment for you, Minister. This is concerning stuff that has been brought to my attention and I think it needs to be brought to your attention. I think it needs to be addressed because it's an identified problem. It's a problem that's getting bigger and it's one that needs attention.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll take that as a comment. The work that they do together is actually quite incredible. I saw that in Port Stephens when we had the storms a few months ago. I went to an RFS station but the SES were there, the fireys were there, others were there. They work well together. We'll continue looking and assessing what it is that we need to do where communities change. The commissioner for RFS, Mr Rogers, has told me—and he knows it better than anyone—one of the issues that's happening is even the changing nature of rural communities, where farms that used to be big farming families—

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Chopped down into smaller ones. I live on a rural farm. You know that, right?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. And of course what we're seeing is less people then invested in terms of volunteering, or who are available, which validates part of the point that you're making. We do work well together. There are joint standing fire committees and joint standing committees. I've said to you I'm more than happy to have a conversation with you outside of this process. You know me enough to know that I'm sincere. I say that if we can work together, we will.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Let's do that then. One final question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You're still going!

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: You have SES, RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW all competing for budget from the State Government. Do we agree?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Everyone competes for budget.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Everybody does; I know that. As I said, there are no traps to these questions, Minister. These are just factual things. Competing for budget—I think there are circumstances and red flags about government inefficiencies. Anyway, do we have duplication in rescue and emergency services more broadly?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think this year's budget allocation to the emergency services was about \$2.2 billion, maybe, so they're getting well funded. There's been a bigger funding increase since before 2019. The duplication bit is the bit where we work together in terms of trying to make sure that we support. So, for example, in flood

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rescue, one of the recommendations of the inquiries from the floods of 2022 was that we need to increase capacity in all of the agencies so they can support one another. They work together.

We're actually getting better at also sharing resources. Recently—I've lost track of time now—there was legislation that was passed, even in terms of that duplication and more efficiency, to ensure that training credentials are recognised across the board. If you are a member, as many people are, and are part of the SES and the RFS, training in one place—which is not common sense. We've been able to do that in terms of the equipment that we can use and in terms of making sure that we can use that same procurement. That's where I think we can work together. The word that I love to use—that probably annoys my office a bit—is interoperability. Each one is unique, each one is special, but there's a lot that they could do together, there's a lot that they can operate together, there's a lot that they could share together. Your example of sheds that are next to each other—we're seeing some of that, even down at Moruya, where we're going to be building stuff that is where agencies can be together so they can actually share the training, so they can share the resources, so they can learn from best practice. What you're saying is the track we're on.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Good morning, Minister. I want to ask you about when we were all up in the Northern Rivers and we were somewhat relieved Cyclone Alfred wasn't as bad as we were prepared for and thought it might be. Whilst we were still there, Chris Minns came back to Sydney and jumped on to 2GB and said that he was going to start demolishing homes in Pine Street and squatters had to go. It was really divisive and it was really nasty. Do you think it was really regrettable?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Higginson, we were up there together and I remember we had a bit of conversation. We missed each other.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: We did.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But it was that incredible—I've done almost like a sigh of relief, because that's how it felt the day after. I just wanted to say thank you to the community for the work that they did, and obviously all the emergency services. The thing that you're referring to are the comments that the Premier made in relation to homes that had been bought by the State because they were in an unsafe place.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Well, can I just interrupt you, if it's okay. I hear all of that, but I just want to cut to it. We have such limited time. You know as well as I know that he came to Sydney and he literally went on 2GB and said, "Those people"—so members of my community—"have just got to get out. It's untenable and we're going to demolish those homes." You now know the demolition program has commenced and people are really hurting. Firstly, do you think it's regrettable that he said those words and took that stand on that morning at that time about those people? Secondly, the demolitions that are happening right now are really hurting people. Do you acknowledge that? So there are two points.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Higginson, I think the question about what the Premier said and whether there's any regret in that is probably better directed to him, and I think I'll leave it at that. The second part, which is about the homes—I think just before you came in we were talking a little bit about that. I think there have been about 628 or 648—there have been 600-plus buybacks, and I think 648 buybacks have occurred. The reason those buybacks occurred is because they were homes in places that are deemed unsafe, and I think we need to keep coming back to that particular thing. You would remember, as I did, at the time of the cyclone we were so grateful for what happened. But the lead-up to it—that anxiety and that fear and not knowing what was going to happen, when the cyclone was going to hit, the impact, whether the levee was going to overtop, all those—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: We've lived with this for a long, long time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know, and you've lived through it much more than I. I mean, I was just a visitor.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But I just want to know this. Do you see that the Premier coming to Sydney, punching down on a small part of our community, has actually really impacted us? There is a lot of division. There is a lot of pain. There is a lot of trauma and suffering. And Minns coming to Sydney the day after he was there, punching down on that small part of our community, I believe was regrettable. I hear that you're saying that that's not a question for you to answer, but do you think—

Mr JIHAD DIB: It isn't a question for me to answer; it's a question for the Premier. I can speak—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But do you see that it's responsible for some of the division and the hurt and the pain when the leader of the State comes in and punches down on one small part of a community, who would otherwise be homeless?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let's go back and have a look at—

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The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister—

Mr JIHAD DIB: —where it is that they're at and how we got to this particular position. I will go back again. It seems to me I come back to the same point, but it's the key point. The State bought those homes as part of the biggest buyback program in history because those homes were unsafe.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But do you acknowledge that the basis—

The CHAIR: Order! There has been a point of order taken.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I was reluctant to do so, but now this is becoming quite repetitive. I understand the member is trying to make a subjective political point. The Minister has answered to the best of his ability—that is, that the homes were unsafe—but the member persists in re-characterising and framing it in a political sense.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: To the point of order: I'm happy to move on.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I ask that she be called to order and move on because we've got the answer.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm happy to move on.

The CHAIR: I note that the member is happy to move on.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you accept, Minister, that many of those homes were purchased on the understanding that they would be relocated and now, for some of those homes, a different decision has been made?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The decision at the time—there was always the potential that those homes would not be able to be relocated and not to be repaired. We had just recently—and I will preface that there's a new Minister who's responsible for this.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I know, and I've got Mal this afternoon. I can talk to him.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I won't deviate from that. I will accept what I did when I had the responsibility for it. But we did have an expression of interest that was open, as you'd be aware, where we really went out and said, "These are some homes. Some of them can be repaired. They can be relocated." We've opened up Mount Pleasant. There's a bit of a display village happening with—I think there were three homes when I was up there. We're really wanting people to move those if they could.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I ask about the timeline? Why is there so much haste now—"We've got to get these houses now; we've got to do it"? Where did this acceleration come from, given the Resilience land program is nowhere near ready in terms of commensurate time for the buyback program? We know that has been a flaw in the recovery process in terms of that, and I can talk to Mr Lanyon more about it. But where has this haste come from? Were you responsible for any decision about saying, "Come on, we've got to get this program. Go, go, go!"?

Mr JIHAD DIB: At the time, my biggest focus was making sure that people were safe. As you know, that included people who were in areas that had been bought back from the State. Making sure that we had our emergency services prepared and operational, making sure that we knew that the community was going to be fine, even in terms of the evacuation orders, that was the focus because it was in that response phase. But to go back to the question, the expression of interest process had been running. It has closed. They were working with local communities—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Why do we have all these end times and dates? Why can't we take a more iterative approach to the recovery?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Higginson, any future recovery questions—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I know—that's for Janelle.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And I'm sure that Minister Saffin, who is incredibly passionate and capable, and knows that community and has a love for that community as much as you do—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Not the squatters.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I take that with respect—that this is about a local community. That's your community; I get it. But if I could just say, if I just come back to when the cyclone hit, the biggest fear that I had at that time was that it was going to hit and make landfall at the same time as high tide. The second biggest fear that I had was that it was going to be during the middle of the night. That's why that decision was made by the SES.

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: To evacuate earlier. I understand all of that, and people did evacuate. People were brilliant.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The good thing was there was not another 600 homes that we had to go and doorknock or that we had to go and make sure that people were not there, because that was considered the most dangerous part.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I contest all of that. The people evacuated; they did brilliantly.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But that's where we were at at that time, and I agree with you: I thought the community was exceptional. I'm so grateful—and we all are—to them.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, in my last couple of minutes I just want to pivot to some of the Youth Justice issues. Are you concerned—well, I know you're concerned. What are you doing about the 85 per cent recidivism rate in Youth Justice that was exposed before the Senate inquiry by the Hon. John Dowd, AO, KC, and the cost of \$1 million per year per detainee?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you for recognising my passion and support for this. The recidivism—while they're in a Youth Justice centre or while young people are working with whatever the order might be, we're trying to help them change their life, whether it's in terms of improving their skills, in terms of some education or in terms of setting them up with the supports that they do need. I said to a bunch of the kids—I won't mention which one of the Youth Justice centres it was, but I did say to them, "Look, boys, I love you, but I don't want to see you again". I don't know how they took that, but I said, "I don't want to see you here. I want to see you doing really well in life." That's the passion of Youth Justice.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have you ensured that every cell in New South Wales that holds a young person has telecommunications, allowing them access to their family wherever they need it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might take that one on notice. You've asked about every cell in New South Wales, so I might just take that one on notice, if that's okay.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you have an understanding of which may or which may not? Are you aware that some do and some don't?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know there have been a lot of discussions. I just got a note. Do you mind if I just give you this note?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Sure. We're running out of time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm happy to go a couple of seconds over, if the Chair is okay.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, I'm happy for you to take that on notice.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can give you the answer on notice.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you concerned that right now you are incarcerating young people under laws that are more harsh for young people than they are for adults—the new bail laws? I know the Chair spoke to you about those awful bail laws that we have right now, which justices of the Supreme Court are really struggling with. What's your view? I know you said it's a Government decision, but you are the Minister for Youth Justice.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And I will continue supporting young people who are in the youth justice system, as I have and as I always will. When they come into my—and I say "my" because I take it as a responsibility—portfolio and responsibility, we will do everything that we can to support them. My preference, of course, is not to see young people engage with the youth justice system.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But you're putting more in prison. You're putting more kids in prison than ever before.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And the part, Ms Higginson, that I can change is that when they're in there and when they're engaging with the youth justice system, we do everything we can so they never engage with us again.

The CHAIR: There's one minute for the Opposition.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sure—a couple of half-volleys, Minister. St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Eugowra has developed an early warning system. They won a couple of awards with that themselves. I've actually seen a presentation from the kids. Minister, will you look into this one for us and perhaps meet with those students as they look into how they can now apply that technology to put a bit of homegrown peace of mind in the local creek there?

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Mr JIHAD DIB: I think it's fantastic, and I think it's brilliant that young kids are thinking about how they can solve problems. I'd heard a little bit about this and we're very, very keen on early warning systems. Minister Chanthivong and I made a commitment a while ago and provided some funding specifically to be able to explore early warning systems. I'm more than happy to. To the kids from Eugowra—it was St Joseph's?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: St Joseph's—St Joey's.

Mr JIHAD DIB: St Joey's at Eugowra, well done. We'll catch up soon. Maybe you and I, Mr Barrett, can do something together. But I think it's exceptional that young people are engaged in this. If they can find a way that we can create a better solution that will protect and help the community, I'm more than happy to. If they ever come to Sydney, please let me know, but maybe we'll get out to Eugowra.

The CHAIR: We now go to the Government if there are any questions.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: We're all good, thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: In that case we will take a morning tea break and be back at 11.15.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Thank you and welcome back to budget estimates. We will throw now to the Opposition for further questioning.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, in the last session I asked you about return on investment to do with the Digital Restart Fund. I can't quote you exactly but you said something about the national rollout for the digital birth certificate. If I look on the Digital website, it says, "Will be available soon".

Mr JIHAD DIB: The State one, not national. We were leading the nation but we've had the rollout of the digital birth certificate. As a State, we're leading the nation. We lead the nation in everything, including State of Origin at the moment.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When was that launched?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There was a pilot that occurred a while ago. It was within the last six months, I think. Was it within the last six months? It's fairly recently.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: If we can get someone to check that for us, that would be great.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, sure. It was in between the two budget estimates, the last budget estimates and this one.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That would be good.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can update you a little bit on the Wilcannia stuff, Mr Barrett.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sure.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've just got some information. The current level at Wilcannia at the moment is 0.57. The minor flood level is at nine metres and no rises at this time. We're receiving regular SES impacts. Menindee we're also having a look at. It's at 3.6 metres, so we're keeping a close look at it. The BOM has a service level agreement with the SES that they warn them around three days before the flooding, so when we're still preparing for it. In terms of community engagement, the western zone community communication includes community warnings with the Hazards Near Me app but also regular updates on our website, social media, virtual and face-to-face community meetings, and twice-daily radio interviews. We're trying the digital and the non-digital as well as the face to face.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With the birth certificate, if it's not yet available on the website, how can we be leading the nation?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're the first State in the nation to do it, so that's how we're leading the nation.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But when will it be available, though?

Mr JIHAD DIB: From 31 May they said the trial is potentially taking place. That's never happened before. We are well through the trial at the moment. We've been forecasting this for a while in terms of some of the digital verifiable credentials, and this one would be of them. We work with our colleagues in other jurisdictions in terms of sharing the different things.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, can I quickly circle back to Parkes? It's been more than two years now. You said it's a big deal that they don't have water. We're not shifting the needle as far as national disaster recovery funding. I was out there on the weekend. It's getting very dry. You can imagine the concerns of running out of water for a community like Parkes. Is it not time to fund this repair under some other fund? Can we commit to that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We will continue working with the Commonwealth.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You've been working for two years and we're no closer to getting there.

Mr JIHAD DIB: A part of that work is about making sure that, where possible and if the guidelines aren't working, the guidelines are at their right setting and do we need to look at other guidelines. There have been some serious conversations as well as reports into whether the DRFA is still fit for purpose. The commitment is that we're working. As I said, there are no stronger advocates than the two local MPs there, Andrew Gee and Phil Donato, who are going constantly at this. These are future funding decisions to be made.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: For all their advocacy, we're no closer to having this pipe fixed. Outside the tinkering you're doing around the national agreement, can we get some funding to get water into Parkes?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Barrett, it's more than tinkering. We have to still be able to get the funding from somewhere. We will continue working with the Commonwealth. These are future budget decisions that are still to be made. I know that the new Minister will continue to advocate for this. I know that the CEO of the Reconstruction Authority can expand much more on that. You've used the inference that they're tinkering with the actual genuine, serious work that's been taking place, but the bottom line is, Mr Barrett, that it currently does not fit within those funding guidelines that we have. It's a partnership between the Commonwealth and the State, and we use our disaster recovery funding arrangements. If we can't get it to that, our effort is to try and change the way we look at these disaster recovery funding arrangements. Mr Lanyon, can you update further on that?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We can talk more about broader funding arrangements later. I was wondering whether your Government can provide some money to help Parkes secure their water source.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There are different things we're doing at the moment. Mr Lanyon, if you want to add a bit more?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'll come back to Mr Lanyon this afternoon. Land buybacks in the Northern Rivers and the Northern Rivers resilient program—about 650 homes have been bought back. How many are we expecting to buy back?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I want to make sure I don't give you the wrong figure here. Just give me one sec. Sorry, Mr Barrett. We've got the \$800 million—nearly \$900 million—fund that has been approved.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, specifically for homes. That fund is for the whole Resilient Homes Program. I'm talking about the buybacks. You've bought back 648. What's the target of buybacks?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There are 884 buybacks that have been approved.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Out of how many homes in that affected area that are eligible for buybacks?

Mr JIHAD DIB: These are the ones that were prioritised as buybacks, given the ones that we prioritise are the ones that are in most danger and most prospective danger. So that's 884 that have been approved. Also, keep in mind that some of the homes have different values as well, so it could be more than that. But if you're asking for an exact figure, we don't know the value of every single home. We'll work through that, but 884 have been approved for buybacks. I will add that it is a voluntary scheme as well. There are some that were eligible but the families said, "We don't want it."

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We're hearing that people are taking the buyback offer and then buying homes in the area that has been designated for buybacks. Can you assure me that's not happening?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's the first I've heard of that. I don't think that would be the case, but can I get back to you on that?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sure.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Lanyon, have you heard that before?

MAL LANYON: No.

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Mr JIHAD DIB: Not within those specific areas. They would be buying within the LGA, I would be assuming—so somewhere like Goonellabah, which is much higher as a place—or buying in another, more secure place. But that's the first I've heard of that. Mr Lanyon, have you heard of that?

MAL LANYON: Mr Barrett, it goes across the seven LGAs up there. To your question before, to assist the Minister, we're targeting up to 1,340 homes for buyback. At this stage we've approved 880 offers.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: For the \$150 million for the Northern Rivers Recovery and Resilience Program, what mitigation work has been done? How much of that money has gone to mitigation projects?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can give you one example of mitigation that succeeded quite well. I can't remember the exact place, but it's a sugar cane growing area. I think it's near Wardell or somewhere, I think, or up in the Ballina area, where some of the money that was put into that resilience and mitigation-type work was for the drains, which had not been cleared for a long time—for years and years. Funding was provided to be able to do that. With the recent cyclone, what we saw was the benefit of all that rain that fell was that it didn't affect that town at all. There was another one up in the Tweed where something very similar had happened. We're working with the local communities as well and with local councils to identify what we can do in terms of mitigation.

Also, there's a CSIRO report that we're awaiting. I know that Mr Hogan up there, the Federal MP, has spoken to me about it. He's spoken to the Premier about it. There's some work going on there as well in terms of other forms of mitigation. But when we developed the State Disaster Mitigation Plan, we did that with the purpose—again, it's the first one in Australia and it's being looked at in other jurisdictions—of what we can do better to try to mitigate a natural disaster, try to mitigate the impact of the natural disaster, to change the way that we do our funding. Basically, 95 per cent plus of the funding that's used in natural disasters is used post event. We need to invest more money prior to the event, and well before that, to make sure that we build better; that we build in the right places; and that we're making sure that when massive rain comes, or whatever it might be, we're actually better in terms of mitigation. So it's also a change of thinking. Those are a couple of really good, simple examples that I've given you, and we saw they worked only a month ago.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So what difference are they going to make to another weather event? What infrastructure or what mitigation measures have been put in place that would actually make a difference to the height of floodwaters coming through that area?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The height of the floodwaters coming into the area depends also on the weather and what actually happens with the weather. I have said this publicly: We can't control the weather, but what we can be better at is predicting it. We can be better at responding to it. We can be better at trying to mitigate it. I've just given you a couple of other examples and we'll continue working with those. The Reconstruction Authority has projects in the pipeline as well. Mal?

MAL LANYON: Mr Barrett, we're happy to go through those this afternoon, if you like, to talk about the NRRRP and some of the projects. There has been a number of, particularly, town drainage programs that certainly reduce the risk. There are two types of flooding up in the Northern Rivers that we are trying to reduce the risk of: riverine flooding and, obviously, flash flooding. There is a range of mitigation strategies in place under the NRRRP. I'm more than happy to go through those.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Let's do that this afternoon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Just on that—and you'd appreciate this—it's actually a really important change way of thinking where we're putting that idea of disaster mitigation planning and saying, "We're going to spend this money. Where can we spend it so it's actually about protecting communities and minimising the impacts?"

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: In the Central West, how many buybacks have been completed in that area?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In the Central West specifically I might, for the latest—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can we get that on notice for this afternoon?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Maybe for the latest. But I do know that there have been people move back into homes. There are some retrofits that are going on and some raising. But the specific number—Mal will do it. It's \$100-odd million.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Speaking specifically of the buybacks, is the intent that once people buy those homes, they leave the community or stay in the community?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, the intent—and I'll preface this, because obviously it's not my responsibility anymore. It always was the intent that people would stay in the communities. Indeed, with the lessons from

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Northern Rivers, there was a lot that changed when it came to the Central West. The first point was making sure that community had a lot more say in what was going on. In that community leaders forum, for example, that was chaired by Mr Donato and included all the State, Federal and local elected representatives, we worked with community groups to say, "What would work for you?"

What we want to do is make sure that communities still thrive. That Eugowra community—there was something special about it the couple of times I visited. We use the words "salt of the earth". They were genuinely salt of the earth people who made it quite clear that they didn't want to leave. That's why you'd see more of the home-raising that's going on; it's a difference in that situation there. I think there's been a very clear decision by this Government, led by the local community, in that they want that community to thrive into the future.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Unfortunately, some of those salt of the earth people are having to leave because there's no land available to buy to build new homes on in that Eugowra area. In the Northern Rivers—and please don't take this as me begrudging anything that went to the people in the Northern Rivers.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, that's okay.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The Northern Rivers had the Resilient Lands Program, with \$100 million to unlock some more land up there. Will you provide the same sort of package or same sort of assistance to those in the Central West so new land can be opened up and people can stay in these salt of the earth communities you refer to?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think the last time that we were there, we had a community meeting and then I also spoke to people afterwards. Ms Saffin, of course, will deal with it, but I know at that stage they were actively exploring possible land that could be opened up. A lot of that land around that care area is held in big farms and so forth, and people don't necessarily want to give up that farm. I can't remember if it's called the Eugowra progress society, but they are really at the heart of this, working with everybody. I distinctly remember the conversation, talking about looking for land and hoping that people would be able—they were in those negotiations. That's a really important point. I know that, again, Minister Saffin will be very much of that view as well. She'll be able to continue with that work. But the local community is working on that. The availability of land is not in our hands, but if it becomes available, of course we'd love to see it opened up.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Will you assist the councils to open that up? Obviously the councils don't have the budgets to develop that land. Will you assist the local councils, as occurred in the Northern Rivers?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Personally, I'd love to see it happen. What I can do in terms of my ministerial responsibilities is a little bit different. The legislation for the Reconstruction Authority is now held by Minister Saffin and the Premier. I've just said that I know Minister Saffin would be very keen on seeing communities thrive. I know the Premier would be. There are powers within the planning Minister to be able to make things "significant". What we don't want to do is just go in and go, "This is us imposing." It's what the community wants and working with the community, and us helping enable that. That's the philosophy. But, definitely, you want to see communities thrive.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When you buy those houses back, who now owns that block of land?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's owned by the State. Is that correct, Mr Lanyon?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Which agency?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I take that specific—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Well, I have a couple of follow-up questions to that then, Minister; you might have to take all these on notice. How much money has been allocated to manage the pests and weeds on those blocks of land? Who has the responsibility for managing those blocks of land? If someone dumps a fridge or asbestos on that land or a tree falls over, who has the responsibility for managing that block of land?

Mr JIHAD DIB: If that's okay, we'll take those on notice and maybe Mr Lanyon may have an answer in the afternoon for you. We're talking about 20-odd blocks of land in Eugowra. But it's a point that you make.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: There are 650 in Lismore.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But there won't be 560 blocks that are there for the buyback. But of course Minister Saffin, I'm sure, will follow that up. Mr Lanyon may have answers for you this afternoon; otherwise we'll take it on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How many RFS trucks were equipped with Starlink before the start of the last bushfire season?

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Mr JIHAD DIB: We're rolling Starlink out and it's a process. There are 4,000-odd trucks in the fleet. I don't know the exact number, but we are rolling them out progressively. Commissioner?

ROB ROGERS: I don't have the actual number. It's a three-year program to roll them all out because we have 6,000 vehicles we have to install them on.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is 6,000, sorry.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We'll come back to it this afternoon again. There was a \$69 million announcement made in August last year.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is that on top of the \$11 million that was announced in '23-24 for that or is that included in that?

ROB ROGERS: The \$11 million that we—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: There was an \$11 million commitment made in '23-24.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Was that vehicles as a node, maybe?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Vehicles as a node and Starlink are slightly different. Vehicles as a node is also being used across all of the emergency services. Next time you see an SES truck or a fire truck, if you see a disc thing on the top, that's the vehicle as a node. Basically, that is a communication device that hooks up into the satellite with the great work of the Telco Authority. That was that particular thing. The RFS one is specifically Starlink. I will give some examples. We've used the vehicles as a node, for example, not only for the emergency services vehicles but they can then also be used in terms of communications with communities. We can triangulate—now I'm getting technical—and then of course we can use Starlink, as we have in emergencies where, if the communication goes down, we can use those. There is vehicle as a node and there's Starlink. Vehicle as a node is more across the whole board.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, this has come from my local RFS brigade. We can come back to it later this afternoon as well. Is there any reason we can't or haven't already looked into individual fireground comms?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Maybe I might leave that as an operational thing. Fireground comms as in?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: For each person on the fireground.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Like a walkie-talkie thing?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes.

ROB ROGERS: We issue some for the truck, so there are some on the truck, but they're not intended to have one for every single person. But normally they carry three or four fireground radios on the trucks.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And the thing is making sure that we also have them set up with those nodes and with the Starlink to make sure that everyone knows where they are at any given time. There are other forms of communication, but every truck has got some form of communication on it.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Having worked in disaster recovery myself, Minister, I have seen the negative impacts that donations can have into communities, and that was massive in the bushfires. How are we better set up now to manage donations? How are we better prepared for that than we have been in the past?

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I'm not mistaken—correct me if I am wrong—you used to work with GIVIT. I think, when we met—I've got a lot of time for them. I love what they do, and the Government has entered into agreements with them because we saw people's good intentions can actually sometimes create problems. We saw that with the bushfires. I remember going down to Cobargo. We did what we thought was right as a community and took some stuff down, only to discover that there was a whole heap of other stuff and other communities missing out. We're saying with GIVIT with a partnership and with others with a partnership to say, "Let them work with the local communities."

I think there's a really fine line between saying to people, "We want your help", and not dismissing them, but kind of saying, "Look, this is not really the kind of help that we need." I think those are really important with other community organisations, but anybody who helps in terms of supporting, that is much appreciated. I commend you for working with GIVIT. I genuinely have a lot of time for them. This Government has done

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partnerships with them before my time, but I think it's that idea of saying, "What is it that particular communities need at what point of time?"

I know we're short of time but just indulge me for one second. I remember things that I would never have thought to donate, but they've been buying things for families like toilet trainers because that's what people wanted or little bikes. For people who'd lost everything, I think that's really special. That's probably where I'd say we've made a really, really big improvement. Everything is about continuous learning. I talk about Kaizen, about continuous learning and getting better and better. The worst thing you can do is diss your predecessors. They did the best they could, I would do the best I could and my successor will do the best they can, but if we're not learning to make continuous improvement, then I don't think we're moving forward.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'd like to turn to the revised Heatwave Sub Plan, which has made some really important and welcome changes. Thank you for the work that went into that. Specifically, I'm interested in the role of local government. The new Heatwave Sub Plan encourages councils to identify cool spaces that the community can use during heatwaves. What we've seen over this summer is reduced opening hours of facilities like pools and local libraries, particularly in places like the South Coast because councils can't afford to keep those facilities open. What engagement have you had with the local government sector, or what support are you looking to provide to allow them to play their important role in responding to heatwaves?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I thank you for your involvement with the Heatwave Sub Plan. I think it was one of the first things you spoke to me about when I was appointed a Minister. I genuinely thank you for your engagement in it and your good contribution for us to be able to make the changes that we need to. NSW Ambulance is the lead for the heat plan, as you know. The idea is to make sure that it's a sub-plan that works with everybody. What you've raised are really important points because I saw the messages over summer and the warnings that were saying, "Stay indoors if you can. Stay cool if you can." Of course, some people have more means than others, but we do work with that. They get that information. I initiated the review for the emergency response not long after our discussion, and we are also making sure that we've established an interagency urban heat committee. On that, it also means that local government plays a role.

I think the key, though, is making sure of how we implement some of those things, and how do we look at unique circumstances? How do we make sure that we use some of the funding in the right places to be able to support those communities? Recently, there's a Disaster Ready Fund's Heatwave Hub. The Commonwealth funded \$670,000 and the New South Wales Government has committed \$690,000, which brings us to about \$1.34 million. That then means that there is some ability to work in terms of accessing some of the funds. But, ultimately, local government, as part of that taskforce as well, will all work together to say, "What is it we need to do? How is it that we can do it? Are there ways in which we can move forward?" The fact that the plan's there and a committee's there is an excellent point to be able to launch off with, and now there's some funding.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Funding to support implementation is very welcome, thank you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, thank you. And the good thing is that it's State and Commonwealth. We got some money out of those guys.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Can I clarify on behalf of local government? If councils need funding, for example, to employ lifeguards for enough hours to keep their swimming pools open on hot days in summer, is that eligible for the funding?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Premier's Department at the moment is tasked with developing a cooler local places framework. I would assume that when that happens, again: What are the cooler places? How do we establish the cooler places? What are the obstacles for the cooler places? That may be that there needs to be some of that funding is accessed, but the Premier's Department is currently working on the framework. If I flick over to another portfolio that I have, Youth Justice, there was an issue with a swimming pool in the community town where in the middle of summer when it was mid-30s, kids had nowhere to go in the afternoon because the council couldn't do it. We were able to provide some funding through the Premier's Department because it had a better end outcome. I would assume something like this would be quite similar, but work is going on.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'll come back to you before the next summer, but I appreciate the importance of implementing what is a very good plan. I just want to follow up. Mr Roberts asked some questions about State Rescue Board data. My understanding is that they do collect data on incident attendance or incident response times, but not on the actual outcomes of those responses in terms of how successful they were. You previously said you would take a look at the possibility of collecting outcome data. What work have you done on that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The fact that they collect data to begin with is really important. I'd be very worried if there was no data being collected. We ask about the data. The respective commissioners keep me updated with what data is being done. In terms of the success, I'm looking at how well the situation was resolved; what the

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situation was, depending on the complexity; how we were able to access that situation; did the relevant agency respond; were they able to respond straightaway; did they need any assistance from their colleagues? We were talking earlier about Port Macquarie where, for example, SES have Fire and Rescue accredited, but the SES has the lead accreditation there. That would have meant that Fire and Rescue couldn't actually do that task. I know that emergency services personnel just turn up and they help out. The thing that I've done personally is ask the State Rescue Board to have a look at this and develop some better datasets for me to be able to analyse with a view to using this data to help inform better decision-making and better planning processes. But we've already made a start with that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's helpful. Do you have any kind of indication of timeline from the State Rescue Board in terms of coming up with the data they're able to collect?

Mr JIHAD DIB: They meet on a quarterly basis and next May, which is next month, is when they will consider the risk framework and so forth. Work is underway. That doesn't mean it will be completed by May, but it is on the agenda for the May meeting in a month, and they will discuss some of the work that's already happened with a view to what more still needs to take place.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I will just come back to the Resilient Homes Program, which we discussed this morning.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Northern Rivers?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Northern Rivers. We're talking about less than 10 per cent of applications for raises and retrofits actually being approved and work being done. From the annual report, it's clear that the Reconstruction Authority spent 35 times more on staff, including their 38 directors, than what's been spent on the retrofits and raises. I appreciate that you've visited that community a number of times. You talked about the RA doorknocking again and asking people what they want. They've been fairly clear with what they want for people who want to stay and who are asking for raises and retrofits to their homes. They've made applications and more than 90 per cent of them have not been approved or responded to. Are you confident in that performance and priorities from the Reconstruction Authority?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Just in the first fit bit about the Reconstruction Authority, it was established as an Act of Parliament. I think it was in the last week or so of the last Parliament. You would expect that, in the initial part of 2023 and ongoing as this thing's being established, there is going to be money that needs to be spent on setting up the organisation itself. We have also tasked them with doing quite a number of things in working with communities, in picking up the work that had not been completed and in developing a framework that we have required through our State Disaster Mitigation Plan. The retrofitting, the house raising and the buybacks are all part of that process. I recognise that there is that frustration, but they are working away at it. Mal, I know there are a lot of places that have been—the approvals happen. We talked about buybacks, a bit earlier, where approvals have occurred but it hasn't yet gone through the process, for any number of reasons. Those reasons could be unique to certain circumstances. It could be for the fact that we need a specialist there to be available. I think the inference of your question was, is it going to be speeding up? Is that what—

Dr AMANDA COHN: The emphasis of my question was to do with your satisfaction and confidence in the priorities and performance of the RA when less than 10 per cent of the people who have been approved for raises or retrofits have actually had a response at this point.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know Minister Saffin will look at it. We have had some discussions around that. Would I like to have seen it faster? Of course, but it's got to be done right. There's a particular reason why there have been some delays in some areas. But, Mr Lanyon, there are some unique circumstances there as to why some of those delays have occurred.

MAL LANYON: Yes. Ms Cohn, if I can talk to that. The RA is unashamedly focused on the buyback program in the first event because they're the houses that are deemed to be in the highest risk of current and future flooding events. When you speak about the number of applications that have been made compared to those that are completed, there will be circumstances that actually slow that process down. It's voluntary for the home owner. Home owners may wish to move at a particular pace. If they're doing a raise of a home, that requires a DA, so there's a process to go through and that slows that down. We're absolutely committed to speeding up that process. There is little doubt that when you look at those figures compared to where we are with buybacks, it's skewed, but there is a reason for that. The focus, obviously, was on buybacks. I think we saw, with Tropical Cyclone Alfred, the benefit of having 640 households that were no longer on the flood plain, but we are committed to speeding up the resilient measures program.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I knew there was a reason!

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Dr AMANDA COHN: In my last few seconds—

Mr JIHAD DIB: In fairness, I took a little bit of time off others, so I'll make sure I don't cut, unless it's a bad question.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Queer Family is an outstanding service provider supporting LGBTQI young people.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, who?

Dr AMANDA COHN: The organisation is called Queer Family. They're a service provider in the Northern Rivers. They received a community wellbeing and resilience grant which they were very grateful for. Despite that grant, the service has had to move to an inadequate temporary space that's not suitable for the services they provide, and I understand that, following a resolution of Byron Shire Council to identify potential sites for Queer Family, some meetings have taken place. Are you aware of this, and can you provide an update on any work that's been undertaken to provide a suitable space for this organisation?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I probably couldn't. Minister Saffin would be better for that. I know that the grants have been received earlier but, as to where it's at at the moment and where they move forward, probably Minister Saffin would be more appropriate to speak to it.

The CHAIR: I'm going to go back to some more questions about Youth Justice before moving on. You've stated on record in the past that you're a big believer in diversion and diversionary programs. I'm just trying to understand how you reconcile that with the decision now to introduce punitive bail laws given, obviously, that that defeats the purpose of diversionary programs that are actually meant to keep kids out of the system.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The bail laws themselves fall under the jurisdiction of the Attorney General. You're asking me about my personal view, and I appreciate that you've acknowledged my view on the opportunities for young people and what we can do with young people. As a government, you make some decisions. As a member of government, you're also part of that decision-making process, so I accept that and I agree with that. I think the issue around the bail laws doesn't necessarily have to be conflated specifically with the diversion programs. I said a bit earlier, one of the proudest things that I've been able to achieve as Minister for Youth Justice is the \$66.9 million in diversion funding to make sure that we can keep programs that work with communities, specifically to diversion. That's the really strong focus that I have. I will continue working in diversion, whether it's through youth conferencing, whether it's the Safe Aboriginal Youth programs, whether it's programs like those the shadow Minister and I have been to, or whether it's working with community groups to develop skills. We've got Youth Justice at the moment working with jobs providers so that we can try and help young people get into better pathways. The Youth on Track, for example—

The CHAIR: I guess my question is, are you concerned that while you're funnelling, within your portfolio, a lot of effort into these diversionary programs, legislation that's also being passed is going to severely conflict with that and cause more problems in regards to the effectiveness of those diversionary programs?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think the effectiveness of the diversionary programs will be in that young people diverted away from the youth justice or criminal justice systems. That's the strongest effect that it can have. I can only do what I can do in what I have got responsibility for—things that I can manage and things that I see as a potential way of making that change. We said a bit earlier, it's about balancing the community safety as well as making sure that there are consequences. I was the principal of a school before I came in here. It was a school that I absolutely love—shout-out to Punchbowl boys; I can imagine every single kid is watching budget estimates today! I would always say to those boys that, if there was a misbehaviour or something that was wrong, there had to be a consequence. That didn't mean that we valued them any less or that we didn't think that there was a hope for them or a future for them. It was just the acceptance that there was a consequence.

The changes to the bail laws also only apply to some of the most serious things. We're talking about repeat offences when it comes to young people who are already on bail. It's about what support we can provide. It's not the first option there, but I will continue, no matter what, to advocate and to do everything within my abilities and within my portfolio responsibilities, and outside, to make sure that we get young people away from the youth justice and criminal justice systems because I think that's the least that we can do. But I do acknowledge that there are some young people who commit crimes that you can't just keep saying diversion to.

The CHAIR: On that last sentiment about working with the community to ensure that young people aren't finding themselves in the jail system, did you meet with any of the organisations that opposed the bail laws in regards to the impact that they'll have on vulnerable children?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Specifically about this, no, but I meet with a number, and I have met prior and continue to meet particularly with Aboriginal community controlled organisations. I can understand that, in some of their

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cases, they're disappointed in this. But they also can see where we're coming from and know the work that we do. I also spoke to different community groups and organisations about the focus on local place-based initiatives that are community led, community managed and maybe fit a little bit outside the box but they work for that community. Something that works in one place doesn't make the others—I met with ACCOs when I was in Moree. They made their views known to me. I acknowledged their views and then said, "Okay, what can we do?" Just recently we announced different lots of \$2 million to certain communities to be able to try and work on what would work effectively for them. What are some of the diversionary measures, what are some of the alternative measures, how do we establish the SAY program, how do we keep pools open—the community stuff.

The CHAIR: In regard to moving forward, I have asked you a few times about the overdue review of the Young Offenders Act, which was a recommendation of the 2018 upper House inquiry. Are you able to provide an update on the progress of that at all?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Young Offenders Act sits with the Attorney General.

The CHAIR: Have you advocated to the Attorney General to prioritise that review for young people?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We've had a lot of conversations, the Attorney General and I, over the last couple of years. I think we need to look at this not just in isolation. Certainly the Attorney General is receptive to conversations that we have. He's committed, like I am, and as this whole Government is, to try to make sure that young people are given the best opportunity to succeed in life.

The CHAIR: So you are advocating for that review to happen soon?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I wouldn't say it in those words. I would say that we've had lots of conversations, and the review has obviously come up. That doesn't mean it was yesterday or last week. We have conversations about a range of things, particularly when we talk about this one, which sits with him. There are other parts of legislation that I share with others as well, but my views are pretty well known.

The CHAIR: I have a question about the Fire and Rescue NSW Fire Investigation and Research Unit that employs a canine unit as part of the Accelerant Detection Canine Program. Are you aware of that program?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know there's a program, but I didn't know that was the long title. You'd probably understand if I said I might ask the commissioner about this one. Is there a specific question?

The CHAIR: Yes, I have some specific questions for you, Minister. I have been contacted by a whistleblower who that said some of these dogs have accidentally been killed in this program, and I wonder if that has come to you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: On that specifically, no. But I'm more than happy, if you are, for the commissioner to also answer that.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I can categorically deny that. No such thing has occurred.

The CHAIR: For absolute clarity, Minister, can I ask you to take a couple of questions around that on notice?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure.

The CHAIR: If you could take on notice whether any dogs in the unit suffered any injury or died in the past five years due to heat stress, and the details of dogs that may have died and their cause of death.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: We can answer those questions now, if you'd like, Chair. Certainly for the heat stress one, we've had no animals die from heat stress. I'm also not aware of any of our dogs passing away in the last five years.

The CHAIR: Could you take that on notice?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'll take that on notice and confirm.

The CHAIR: If you say you're not aware, I'd like to have that on record.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Animal welfare is top of the list for our handlers and for us an organisation. They have always done a very good job of looking after our dogs.

The CHAIR: What we received in my office is that the transport of these animals can be an issue, where only some of the vehicles in the fleet have standalone air conditioning that can produce air at the back, regardless of whether the car is running. Dogs can sometimes be left in the car, or in the back, where temperatures can reach 40 degrees. Are you aware of that issue?

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JEREMY FEWTRELL: At the moment we're in the process of upgrading the fleet that carries the dogs. There is a newer vehicle and then, as the older vehicles are due for replacement, they'll be going into a replacement one similar to the new ones, which do have a separate pod on the back with a separate solar-powered battery supply to run an air conditioner in there. The other older vehicles that are in service are a more traditional ute with a drop-down tray and a door at the back that can open. If the dogs are left in the vehicles during periods of inaction—and it's a regular part of their operational routine—it's a well-ventilated space, and the handlers have also installed misting systems in there to keep the dogs cool.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I just add that I've seen the way the emergency services are with the animals that support them. They care for them like you wouldn't believe, and I'd be very surprised if they would just leave them unattended. But if the commissioner can come back to you specifically, that would be great.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Further to my answer, Chair, at different times we've had inspections and checks by the RSPCA, so the way we're handling and transporting the dogs has all been externally assessed and endorsed.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might turn to PEXA questions now, if you like. There's an article in PayDay News from March 2005 where an elderly Sydney couple didn't get to enjoy their home overnight because of a regular PEXA outage. I'm advised that in the past 12 months there have been over 95 instances of that in the PEXA network. Are you aware of these outages and PEXA's claim that they have 100 per cent up-time?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, did you say 2005, or was it 2025? I thought I heard 2005. I may have misheard.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Sorry, March 2025.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, I thought you said 2005.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, that was way before PEXA.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know. I'm aware of an outage that had occurred, and the resolution to that, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is it being investigated? I'm advised that there has been more than one. There have been over 95 outages.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Any outage would be investigated. I haven't seen the specific article that you're talking about. Was it the Herald or the Tele?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It's PayDay News. I can table it.

Document tabled.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The LRG is here. I've got the Land Registry's Ms Cameron here. If you'd like, she can probably answer that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I can ask in the afternoon. I have a follow-up question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, ORG. I said LRG.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I knew what you meant.

Mr JIHAD DIB: She was the OG!

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If there was a CrowdStrike incident with PEXA, what would be your backup plan?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're talking about some hypotheticals. In the first instance we'd make sure, as we do with everyone, that we have a certain expectation in terms of what—they're protecting some really important information here, so there'd be an expectation in terms of what they have with cyber protections. Not to sound too political, but we're talking about an organisation that was privatised. This is as a result of the privatisation agenda of the previous Government, and we're asking questions about what I would do. In the first instance, I wouldn't have sold it off. This is how we're ending up in this situation. We're asked to make comments and what we would do to respond to something that had actually been a great New South Wales Government thing that the previous Government sold off as part of their whole privatisation agenda, and this is the problem we get.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Going on with interoperability, the Australian Registrars' National Electronic Conveyancing Council, or ARNECC, is going to commence a review into interoperability, which would deliver a backup if PEXA went down. Do you see a way forward which delivers competition sooner?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's ARNECC, and Ms Cameron, from the Office of the Registrar General, is a part of that. We have been asked lots of questions about this over different times. Again, I just want to come back—

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we're dealing with this because it was something that was privatised. It was sold off and then, after it was sold off by the previous Government, they introduced a reform to say, "What we want here is interoperability." But that wasn't part of the original thing they sold off, and this is the situation we have. I said then, as I continue to say now, that we are working through this process. There is a Senate inquiry that is underway at the moment, because this is linked to a national reform.

I have only recently met with both of the major ELNOs. I meet with them equally to make sure that there is no one perception that one is seen in a better light than another. But what we've actually got is a situation here where, if I was to use a one-liner, this was a government agency or government Act that was then sold. After it was sold, a reform was introduced. That's like taking the cash and then moving the goalposts afterwards. What we're left with, as a government, is to try to clean that up. We're working through it. It takes time. All States are at different stages, and we've been through this over and over again.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll move to Youth Justice. The Premier used Moree as a circuit breaker, promising a visible turnaround, yet communities across regional New South Wales are telling us that the crisis hasn't improved and that they're still scared. Why, almost a year later, is the Bail and Accommodation Support Service still not fully operational? What exactly will it look like when it is operational?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might start with that second point about what it would look like when it is operational. What it would look like is a situation where a young person who is eligible for bail but maybe doesn't necessarily have somewhere to go—rather than putting them into remand, having them in a house or a property where they've got some wraparound services, they've got some support.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Similar to A Place to Go, which we visited.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Which we went to, which was excellent.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: We have an idea of what it looks like. But when will that be delivered?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Youth Justice is working like the clappers on this one.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But it looks like you put the cart before the horse. Wouldn't it have been better to, instead of announcing the projects without delivering the necessary workforce, therapeutic supports—it just frustrates the community and puts distrust out there.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're working with the community. At the outset, we said this is one part of a package. It's not the panacea. It's not going to be the one thing that resolves all the issues or fixes all the issues. We said that it would take a little bit of time. I went through a little bit earlier and explained the processes in terms of, first of all, having the design of what it is that you want, then making sure—and we awarded that contract to the two local organisations that will lead on that. Youth justice is working—I used the phrase "like the clappers"—as hard as they can to try to secure a property. Some of that property may be something that is already built. It may be something that we need to build. It may be something that has been included. Youth Justice is working with First Nations communities specifically on this as well. It does take a bit of time. The second part, which was—the initial bit, which is about across different regions. There was that commitment that was made for funding specifically to different parts of the State for specific local place-based solutions that the community deems would work the most.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Has the ongoing public sector psychiatrists dispute impacted children in youth detention?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Youth Justice is part of the Government's working committee conversation that I'd had with Mr O'Reilly really early on and Secretary Tidball—was about the impact. There hasn't been an impact on Youth Justice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You can guarantee that all children in all the six Youth Justice centres, whether it is metro or regional, will have equal access moving forward as a result?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm advised that that's the case. Obviously, we provide all the support that we can and Youth Justice sits on a whole-of-government committee there. But I'm advised that there hasn't been an impact. Mr Tidball?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll come back to it in the afternoon if that's okay.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Tidball, did I say something incorrect?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Not at all.

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Mr JIHAD DIB: Just in case I said something that was wrong.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I have got it for this afternoon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If you could, thanks.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, if I can ask you a question on notice—has the department undertaken any economic modelling on the opportunity cost of the increased expenditure on incarceration? For example, what would be the potential impact if these funds were redirected to education programs for disadvantaged children? That's a question on notice. It might not be for you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What I would say is that the department is continuously looking at everything possible. There is a pretty clear direction set by the Minister that we'd love to see more diversion. But in terms of specifics, I couldn't answer it at the moment.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, what did we learn from the second trial into the use of the farm fire fighting vehicles?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We had the trial towards the end of last year. We had the trial to begin with—was it the fire season before that?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: There was a trial from January to March last fire season and then, after a debate in Parliament, there was a trial from I think about the same time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think it finished at the start of this month or something—only just recently finished. I'm still waiting for those findings. It would have finished within less than a week. The point that we wanted to make at the time—it is now the Minister for Roads, but the Minister for Regional Roads and myself—was to see what we could do to enable farmers to be able to still have their farm fire fighting vehicles in a way that they didn't need registration but there was certain expectation of their road worthiness, so to speak. We'd worked also with Farmers NSW about this. But it has only been literally a week since the trial finished. We'll get those learnings. The intent of it is to say, "Okay, how do we now make this a regular feature so that we don't have to do"—we just didn't have enough data with the first one.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The intent of the first trial was to have something in place by last bushfire season. Are we going to have something permanent in place by the next bushfire season at the end of this year?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I would really hope so. Transport will look at that. There are some things that need to be ironed out, particularly when it comes to things like your third parties, things like your insurances. The intent is a really good one, but we've got to think about what happens if Mr Barrett, as a good Samaritan, jumps in his farm fire fighting vehicle, drives down the road but has an accident but the car itself is not registered. Those are the things that we're working through as well. That's where Transport will take the lead.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, I think yesterday you visited the SES at Goulburn. Were the local State or Federal members invited to that visit?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I didn't go to the SES at Goulburn yesterday.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Recently?

Mr JIHAD DIB: SES at Goulburn?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Did you not recently visit an SES emergency response facility?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In Goulburn? No, not that I can think of. The Premier was there yesterday, not me.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The Premier was there. Sorry—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thanks for the promotion but it wasn't me. Who wants that job?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: There are plenty that would line up behind you. Minister, do you know then if the local State or Federal member was invited to that event?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't know. But I do know that this Saturday there is actually an official opening of the centre and that the State member will be there. I'm assuming the Federal member will be there as well.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can you tell me the timeline for the completion of the Surf Beach SES headquarters?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is it still out to tender, Commissioner?

MIKE WASSING: It's closed.

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Mr JIHAD DIB: The tender has closed and a design has been had. It is pre-designed. The commissioner and I visited it. It's ready to go in terms of, once we agree on the tender, we'll start building. We would anticipate, depending on the building times, it could take potentially 12 months or so, but there's nothing to stop it now.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What has been the hold up? Because the preparation works were done 18, 19, probably 20 months ago now. What has been the hold-up to now?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I understand that part of it was in getting the land, securing the right land. It needed to be a big parcel of land as well because I believe the ambulance—it involves other emergency services, not just the SES: RFS, the ambos and SES. So it needed to be the right land. Now the land has been, I suppose, cut out and been prepared. I've also asked that the SES be the ones responsible for making sure that this project is completed.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That initial work you were talking about was 20 months ago. Are we now going to see some quick movement on this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I would hope so. If you get a chance, just before you get to Moruya, you'll actually see that the land—because it's on the side of a hill. The land has been—I think the technical term is cut away. It has all been laid out. The fact that we've actually got the design means that, when we go out to tender, which is now closed, we would expect that, whoever the successful tenderer is, they're ready to go straightaway. There's nothing they need to do. We've got council approvals. We've got everything ready to go. What we need now is for people to start building it.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I understand the initial funding allocation was \$3.9 million. Given the time that has passed, is that still enough to cover the cost?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is going to be fully funded.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Back to flood mitigation, can you tell me what mitigation has occurred in the Central West since those floods in 2022, particularly Eugowra and/or Molong?

Mr JIHAD DIB: For that one specifically, I'll take it on notice—also understanding that it will now fall within Minister Saffin's office. But I might take that one on notice in terms of the specific mitigation for those two areas. You'd appreciate I wouldn't know off the top of my head.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Absolutely. In doing that, can we also have a look at—I know Molong Creek has some issues as far as growth et cetera in the creek.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think I know the creek you're talking about.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'd hope so. It was the one that flooded the town.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That was the one we went to—beautiful-looking creek and then council did point out there are a lot of the growth areas. That would be part of that State Disaster Mitigation Plan work that would be undertaken in terms of working with the council about what could we do in the future as government and any agency to make sure that water can flow. I think there were some tree problems around there and that's what potentially led to the flood itself being more problematic.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes, I was hoping to put those issues on your radar, particularly given some of the—I use a cliché—green tape around getting that moved. Can I also put on your radar—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, I'll put it on Minister Saffin's radar now, if that's okay. I can send her a text message later. She's going to be so happy.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Fantastic. Within that text message, can you also include the railway bridge at Canowindra, which is also contributing to the blocking up of the Belubula River there and causing flooding in town? Can you include that in your text message to her this afternoon?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There is a fund that's available. It's being administered by Regional NSW as well. They would work very closely with the Reconstruction Authority, and with Minister Saffin, specifically about those things. But as I said, I think the key point is—I may sound like I was a bit overexcited—that's where the State Disaster Mitigation Plan is such an important document because it really puts at front and centre this stuff that you are talking about. If that's clear, it will have less of an impact on something else down the track.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The new Lithgow Fire Station, I believe there's been a block of land purchased there for that station. There have been concerns around there around flood zoning and potential flooding risk. Can you update on how those concerns have been addressed?

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JEREMY FEWTRELL: We've been undertaking a revised flood study in that area, working closely with council. Council are also, I think, in the process of updating their flood analysis of the area and obviously the design of the station will be taking on board any feedback around that. There'll be appropriate drainage and access to make sure that the station is still readily available to use.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Were there other sites considered?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: It was a very difficult process finding a suitable block of land in Lithgow. It took a number of years to identify the best site. There were other sites that were looked at that were found not to be suitable, and even after that site had been selected, there were further conversations with council on the promise that they had identified sites that they thought might be suitable but subsequently they were found not to be.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, back to the mitigation, and you spoke about changing the breakdown of preparation funds versus the reaction funds—I'm probably using the wrong terms there—the 95 per cent versus the 5 per cent, and that sort of stuff.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, I think Minister Scully might reckon it's 97 per cent, but I'll go 95.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'd certainly always heard 97 per cent so I'll give you the benefit of doubt that there's been some change to that. I wonder what had other works have happened in Eugowra. There was a clear event there that we saw and we've now seen the mapping. What can we do to reduce the flood next time this event occurs?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think some of the things that you've been talking about specifically—you have given an example for Molong and you have given an example for Canowindra. The same would ring true for Eugowra. How did the flooding occur to that point? Was there anything that was in its way that could be rectified in that situation that would stop a similar thing occurring? We know Eugowra has flooded before. What happened in 2022, the locals have said to me over and over again—I thought that it was an incredible phrase—that it was like an inland tsunami that came and went. I remember they showed me some footage of it. You could see why it was so distressing for the community. Of course, let's not forget the fact that people tragically lost their lives and the impact that that has had on them. The Community Assets Program—\$25 million that was allocated—is specifically to try and do some work on restoring some of those things. The SDMP—but of a specific one, I might have to leave that with Minister Saffin.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The land that you're buying back—and removing homes and leaving those as vacant blocks—have any studies been done, or research been done, on what impact that might have on future water movement though those communities in a flood event?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Not that I'm aware of. But what I can say, not necessarily to Eugowra but to the Northern Rivers part where the local council there—so the local government—is actually looking at what they could do with that land for community purposes or other purposes, making sure that that land doesn't necessarily just sit there. In terms of that water thing, I couldn't give you a specific one but obviously if we are buying a home back, then we are buying it because it was really in harm's way.

Dr AMANDA COHN: One question from me and then I'll go to my colleague. It's about the New South Wales bushfire inquiry. Recommendation 61 was about reviewing fire control centres in areas that were heavily affected by fire and looking at combining those centres with the emergency operation centre for co-location. RFS personnel are still working out of facilities that are not fit for purpose. I understand that in Tumut, Wagga, Queanbeyan, Bega and Cooma, fire control centres remain in the same locations as they were prior to 2019-20. Is this something that you're going to address in the next budget?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Dr Cohn, I think—was it Moruya? We've actually just done the sod turn. It was an interesting sod turn because we were still waiting on the Aboriginal Heritage trust report. We couldn't turn the sod but effectively there's the parcel of land there in Moruya for that control centre for everybody. That one is ready to get going. I think I was in Cudgegong late last year for that one there. Obviously we continue working through our bushfire inquiries and continue working through that. The South Coast one you're talking about, the Commissioner and I were there about three months ago.

ROB ROGERS: The Tumut one, we've been trying to work with the Snowy council there for some time to get this sorted. We've got the money. The money is there. It's just trying to secure the bit of land so we can actually build it. It's fully funded and we're ready to do it.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Minister, just clarifying, it's your intention to continue rolling these out to complete the implementation of that recommendation?

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Mr JIHAD DIB: The funding's there. We've continued with the recommendations of the bushfire inquiries and we'll keep delivering them. As the commissioner has just indicated, with one of the ones in the Snowy Valleys area, for example, it's not an issue of the funding; it's an issue of the right place. It's not too dissimilar to what's happening in Moree. We've committed the money, we have just got to be able to get the place to make sure that we can continue in terms of implementing that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I might highlight that I've got some questions that you may need to go to Ms Young for, so perhaps if Ms Young wants to come up, just in case. Let's see how we go. As you know, our NSW Workers Compensation Scheme is a publicly underwritten one, and there is this limited group of self- and specialised insurers that take up coverage over some really narrow sectors of the workforce. Do you support an expansion of the specialised insurer schemes to cover more of what is currently within the nominal insurer scheme?

Mr JIHAD DIB: SIRA is working through those. Of the ones that you're talking about, there are some that are open. I think what's really important is making sure that we've got insurance schemes that are not only fit for purpose but have enough coverage. Organisations can apply for those different insurance schemes and then SIRA processes them. If there is a situation where the insurance scheme or an insurer is bespoke, and they can fit all the criteria and all the guarantees, I don't see that that's too much of an issue.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So you'd be aware that Trinity Insurance has lodged an application to extend, quite alarmingly, the coverage that it would have of workers, going from just covering what I understand is workers within certain church and church-related settings to actually being able to cover a whole range of people in different industries. Such an approach really would threaten the financial viability of the nominal insurance scheme. Would you be ruling out that broad extension of the self-insurance within the Nominal Insurer?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, Ms Boyd, to interrupt you. I need to be careful as a Minister not to be ruling things in and out before they've been completed. The role of SIRA is to make sure that they assess the impact that it might have on the rest of the sector and assess the viability of this. I know that they're working with that. There's been no decision that's been made specifically on that. But, as Minister, I wouldn't be saying yes or no. If I've got an agency that's tasked with making sure that, one, it's viable; two, it's possible; and three, it's not going to have that impact that you're talking about, then I will take that advice. But we're in that process at the moment. I don't know, if it's okay with you, if there's anything that Ms Young wants to add to that, but have I answered your question?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I think so. I'll just ask you one more. I think you've alluded to this, but section 177A (3) (a) of the Workers Compensation Act states that you can't really approve that sort of extension if it does have an adverse effect on the scheme. There have been concerns raised by a number of people that have contacted my office that this would lead to basically an erosion or an undermining of the entire foundation on which our publicly underwritten workers compensation scheme rests. You would expect that that would be adequately considered by SIRA, then, in making its decision.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, they will, and I've met with a range of different stakeholders as well. Obviously, the best advice that I get is from the agency, which is the absolute expert in this, and these decisions aren't made lightly. There's a direction to be given. You don't give those directions without letting the agency do the work that they need to do. I can't remember the exact number, but what you've referred to, Ms Boyd, is exactly that point about making sure that this is viable, that it's sustainable and that it's also possible for other existing insurers to be able to be in that market. At the very heart of it, it is about making sure that there are compensation schemes that protect people, that provide comfort to people—that do all of that. So I think I've sort of answered that question for you in that way.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, thank you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But I don't mind, if you're okay with Ms Young—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'll ask Ms Young if there's any update on where the application is at, but concerns were also raised that the consultation period closed on 10 January and it sat over that really awkward end-of-year period. Have you got any ideas for extending that consultation, or are you satisfied that everybody who needed to be consulted had been consulted?

MANDY YOUNG: To your point, Ms Boyd, it is a very big decision to make because they are asking for a broad range of industries. We're very conscious of that and we need to seek some further information to be able to make that decision. We're doing some work, additionally, at the moment around the legislative implications. We're working with our actuaries on some of the implications on the funding of the scheme and how that works, as well as the policy and market structure, and we will work through those. So it's not a rushed decision that we're making in respect of this. We'll continue to work through that, and Trinity have been advised that the decision won't be made imminently and that we need to get that information together to make a really informed decision.

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In terms of the consultation, there were two consultation periods. There was one in August last year and there was a second one in December, which is the one you're referring to there. Once we get back the further information, we'll continue to consider that and also consider, through that process, if there's a requirement for another consultation period. There has been a range of people come forward from all sides and with all sorts of views on this, so it is a really big decision to be making, and we want to make sure that we make that with all of the information in front of us.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I will come back to you this afternoon but, while I've got you there, I understand from icare that they do tell SIRA of the number of people who have suicided or self-harmed while they have been in the workers compensation system. I'm talking about people who have come to the workers compensation system with a claim but who have then gone on to suicide or self-harm. I asked icare for the current numbers of how many in the last five years and the answer was a little bit hard to understand, but I think they're saying that there were 50 suicides in the last five years. Are you able to tell me what the accurate number is?

MANDY YOUNG: We did get those reports up until January 2024, so we wouldn't have an accurate number for the last five years because we only received those reports up to January 2024, because it was part of a transitional arrangement from the previous legislation. So I couldn't give you an accurate figure for that period, but I could potentially, this afternoon, give you some numbers in terms of what we have got reported up until that date.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That would be very useful. On the basis of the answers to questions on notice that I received, Minister, I was told that there were 32 suicides in the TMF and 18 suicides in the Nominal Insurer in the five years to 2024. As you may know, my office continues to be contacted by people who are very concerned about the way they're treated through the claims system, which I know SIRA has some sort of ultimate responsibility for. As the Minister now technically responsible for overseeing SIRA, have you been doing anything in terms of ensuring that we have a more psychologically friendly claims process?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I became responsible for SIRA again, I think, about five months ago, but there is a SIRA inquiry particularly around looking at what we've learnt from the past, what SIRA can do better, how they can be better at the roles that they play and how we support people. What you've described is—I mean, you've got to be at your absolute—there's nothing left, to get to that tragic point, and the impact that that would have on family and loved ones and communities. And you think, "Was there anything along the line that maybe could have been done differently?"

The work that SIRA has been undertaking, and especially in relation to the review, is making sure that things can be done better, putting that heart and compassion into something that's so critically important. At the moment SIRA is looking at PTSD claims with responders, as well, in terms of making sure that we don't get to those points. But in relation to the question specifically, this is the work that we're doing. We're asking, and I've asked, and they're doing that work to undertake a review of what needs to be done and the things that can be done better.

The CHAIR: Minister, I've just got a couple more questions in regard to the concerns with the canine unit. Is Fire and Rescue NSW being provided with appropriate funding to ensure that the vehicle fleet is fit for purpose, including ensuring that appropriate vehicles are available to transport animals safely to avoid heat stress? I'm particularly concerned to hear that some of these dogs are just receiving misting systems in 40-degree heat.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Hurst, I think—correct me if I'm wrong, Commissioner—there was about \$19 million or so in the last budget allocated for appliances. There is a whole fleet that we have across all of Fire and Rescue. Obviously, we work within the budgets. There has been an increase in that budget. I'm happy to see where that's going. The misting—as the commissioner explained, we're actually rolling out and changing and renewing the fleet at different points. All of the newest fleet that we've got, particularly in relation to that canine transport, does have those things that would make it more comfortable—the solar-powered air conditioning and cooling operating system. The misting system is what we've got at the moment in some but, again, I will restate my point that in all of my emergency services, when I've seen their work with canines, the handlers who are responsible for them treat those animals like you wouldn't believe.

The CHAIR: I'm not talking about the personal, one-on-one treatment; I'm talking about the heat stress of animals going out in 40-degree heat with just a misting system. Did Fire and Rescue NSW receive the full amount of funding that they requested for those fleet upgrades? I know you said that there's been an increase, but I'm just wondering if there was any kind of gap between the money that they said that they needed for the full upgrades and the amount actually allocated.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Look, the full upgrades are ongoing. I think we've got 741 trucks, for example. You're not going to keep upgrading and replacing them all of the time. We push as hard as we can in our budget and we're

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able to do this, but we'll continue to work with Fire and Rescue on the resourcing and provide that. The commissioner is champing at the bit to say something.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Chair, I'm happy to take on notice the timeline of when those new vehicles are due to come in. It's part of our minor fleet.

The CHAIR: I think I'm probably more concerned about when the old vehicles are going to be removed and stop being used.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: That's the point when the new vehicles come in.

The CHAIR: So they're all going to be gone with these—

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're replacing them.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, as I say, we've got an old generation of vehicles, one of which was already replaced with one of the new dog-carrying pods. As those older vehicles that are still in service are due to be replaced, they'll be replaced with the current or the newer version as well. It's part of our regular minor fleet program, and we're happy to provide that on notice for you to give an indication of the expected timeline of those.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Thank you. Minister, maybe that's something you can give me a bit of a briefing on as well in regards to timelines for when we'll be getting rid of those problematic vehicles.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm happy to commit to that. The commissioner will have some information, if we can get it, later today. Otherwise, I'm happy to take it on notice. I am more than happy to have a briefing as well specifically around that. We might even get one of the operators to come in.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, bring the truck in.

The CHAIR: I understand that there are only four Fire and Rescue NSW stations trained and equipped to respond to animal rescue situations in New South Wales. These are often referred to as the tech rescue teams. Concerns have been raised with my office that this can sometimes leave gaps across the State and lead to longer response times in regards to commencing rescues. I'm wondering, Minister, what's being done to expand the coverage of that tech rescue capacity? Is it something the New South Wales Government is looking at investing additional funding in to be able to expand that further?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We have large animal rescue capacities across different parts of our emergency services, but because it was specifically about Fire and Rescue, if you don't mind I might ask the commissioner.

The CHAIR: I might go to you, Minister, because the question is whether or not the New South Wales Government is looking at investing additional funding and what's been done by the Government to expand those programs. I'm quite across the programs and where they are located.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is the question is there specific funding for this program in particular?

The CHAIR: There's one in Lambton, Liverpool, Blacktown and Wollongong. The complaint that is coming to my office is that because they're quite spaced out, there are often long response times to certain areas because they're quite a distance away. My question to you as the Minister is this: Is the Government looking at investing additional funding in these programs to expand them further or is anything else being done to expand the coverage of those rescue capacity programs?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is probably one I will need to work with the commissioner on. If I think about Alfred, for example, we made sure that there was also consideration specifically in terms of animals. There were some animal rescues but also we could take animals to shelter. I acknowledge your contribution to that whole rescue plan. I know that there were a couple of thousand animal rescues by Fire and Rescue last year. If the agency feels they need to expand that capacity to have them in different places, I think those are really important. Obviously, we will fight for every bit of dollar in the budget. Then also operationally, the commissioner and the team will work out where that money needs to go. If there's the potential for it to expand and if they feel there's a need for it to expand, I certainly wouldn't be saying no, but I don't see at the moment that this is specifically for this money. I will try and get as much of a budget as I possibly can. Every single agency always says they want to get as much of a budget as they can.

The CHAIR: I understand.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Chair, I can add a little bit more, if that assists with your question.

The CHAIR: I might come back to you this afternoon because there is such little time left. I understand that the Fire Brigade Employees' Union has been calling for greater distribution of rescue areas to Fire and Rescue NSW away from volunteer agencies so they can guarantee a response to incidents and can more effectively

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manage that risk. Is that something that's come to you as well to help deal with the concerns that have been raised in this space?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The State Rescue Board manages and considers these decisions, and I need to make sure they do that. In terms of discussions with the FBEU—the employees' union—I have regular meetings with them, as I disclose in my diary disclosures. They raise a whole range of topics, including topics of this nature. That's why we have a State Rescue Board, because they look at it from across a range of different factors.

The CHAIR: Minister, is this something that you're willing to explore, how the Government could support the expansion of these tech rescue teams across New South Wales, and look into further?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're exploring it. I used the phrase "peri-urban" a little bit earlier—the changes in nature of our communities and our societies. Are current places accredited? Do they have the capacity to do it? What I won't do is pit any of my emergency services against each other. I think they all play an incredible role. They play a collaborative and interoperable role, and I'm really pleased to see the way they work together. In making sure there's accreditation, we'll keep working through the State Rescue Board for that. But I certainly won't be characterising it as one group is going to do it because the others are volunteers, or whatever.

The CHAIR: Sorry, I think you've misunderstood the question there. It's not so much that some are volunteer agencies; it's the fact that only four volunteer agencies have been given the funding to be able to do this. The concern is that there's obviously a desire to expand that, because in some emergency situations it can take a very long time, given that there are only four locations where this kind of ability to help animals is located. One of the solutions that's been put forward by the Fire Brigade Employees' Union is to expand it so that other organisations can also help and assist in this. The other option then, of course, is to invest more funding so that more of these tech rescue teams can be put together.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, maybe I misunderstood a part of it. All of the agencies have a role to play. Obviously, Fire and Rescue has, as does the SES and as does the RFS. I think some of those decisions also need to be made within those respective agencies. As I said before, the commissioners work well together. Someone talked about duplication a little bit earlier. We don't want to see duplication, but if we can complement and fill in any of the gaps then that would be—but for budget decisions like that, there's a whole range of processes that are needed to go through. I'm happy to facilitate meetings between yourself and the emergency services agencies to be able to advocate for that—I am more than happy to do that—but I also think I need to leave it to the agencies to do the bit that they need to do.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I have one question. What arrangements are in place should an incident occur that requires national input during the election and the caretaker period?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let's go back to Cyclone Alfred. If that was in a caretaker period?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes, or the floods coming down the Paroo as well.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's obviously still a Minister for Emergency Management at a Federal level, but the other things that do occur and the things that don't change are the agencies. In New South Wales, for example, we have the Reconstruction Authority and in the Commonwealth we have NEMA, and they will continue to work together. But the Ministers will still work. When you're in caretaker mode, you don't stop being the Minister; just the decisions are a little bit different. I would expect or hope it would never happen, but if we got to the next election and there was a natural disaster and I was still the Minister but we might have been in caretaker mode, then I think the expectation would be that we would be as we still are in that continuation and we would work with the Commonwealth, as we do. The agencies will do that, because you're not going to make a decision of that nature other than to try and do the best you can to support local communities.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So there is still a Minister with the authority to sign off on funding?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. To that point, Minister McAllister federally and I were having little chat only a little while ago. They will still sign off. It won't be the agency.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Minister, the Red Cross recently published a really excellent report on the power of social capital in disaster incidents that I understand was sent to all members of Parliament. We've had evidence at a number of other Legislative Council inquiries—the social issues committee looking at loneliness and Portfolio Committee No. 2 – Health looking at mental health—about the role that neighbourhood centres play in building and supporting social capital. Is there any work happening to better integrate neighbourhood centres into our preparedness and response strategies?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Again, I am saying all of these things on behalf of Minister Saffin now. She's going to be my best friend by the end of this. Part of the Safer Places that we have is working within the local community

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in itself. Putting aside the evacuation centres—which could be neighbourhood centres, could be community centres or could be anywhere—part of it is what is the strength the local community and what's the social capital that we can work with in that local community? There is some of that work that is being undertaken. I saw the Red Cross—I think it was Julie that was the bubbly face I would see every day when I was up in the Northern Rivers recently—and the work that they do as part of the whole coordination around the response plans and the recovery plans. I suppose it shows the value that they are held in. But work is being undertaken on that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Are you aware that those neighbourhood centres at the moment are not actually receiving any ongoing funding for the role that they're playing in disaster preparedness?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Within local communities there are the local emergency management committees, and they work with them. For them, it's part of that determination of what would be the appropriate funding. Is the funding accessible through some government grants? Would they receive funding based on a recovery model or other things?

Dr AMANDA COHN: I suppose this is the specific issue I'm getting at. Where there are neighbourhood centres doing this really important work, they may get some sporadic one-off, short-term funding but they're not funded for disaster preparedness and recovery as part of their core role. Obviously there are places where they are playing a really important role, and it's good that that has been recognised by local emergency management committees. But is there an opportunity to consider long-term ongoing funding for the important role that these centres are playing?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think there might be. It would be good to have things that are ongoing. Obviously budget things are always the challenge that everybody has. The role that they play as part of a collective within the community to support community is really important. Most of the time the neighbourhood centres in different parts of the State are not necessarily funded for the work that they do, but they just do it; because they believe, they do it. As a government, we committed to five years continuous funding of neighbourhood centres and community centres to make sure that at least there was that funding there. There have been individual grants that are available through different agencies, but the local emergency management committee would have access to all of those sorts of things as well.

The CHAIR: Are there any Government questions?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Only, Minister, if you have got anything you would like that clarify or tidy up.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Because I haven't spoken enough today!

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: No, we can't get enough.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you very much to the Committee. I might just take a moment, if I can, to clarify or add a bit of information to things that I took on notice a little bit earlier. In relation to the driver records breach, Ms MacDonald, you asked about the former Ministers. They're already part of the GIPA Act, so that was in error. I'm advised the Cabinet Office has acknowledged the seriousness of this incident and has apologised for the error. The incident was notified to the NSW Privacy Commissioner, as is required, which is what the question was. It was also notified to the New South Wales police and to ID Support, which can support any person in New South Wales whose personal information is compromised. In terms of other engagement between the Cabinet Office and the Privacy Commissioner, they would be in the best place to answer those questions. But what I want to really note, though, is it was not a cybersecurity breach, rather a privacy breach that was caused by human error.

Wilcannia, I have covered for you. We have an answer on Starlink as well; I think that was a question from Mr Barrett. Some 4,950 units are to be installed. October to January was the detailed design phase and 20 units have been installed for testing and trials as part of this. To date, 50 have been installed. The installation has been phased over successive years; I think it was over three years.

ROB ROGERS: A three-year period.

Mr JIHAD DIB: So we have the design, the testing and the phasing, making sure that's all of that. On the Keystone question, I'm advised that over the three years to financial year 2023, New South Wales spent over a half a billion dollars with Microsoft. The benefit of DCS negotiating all-of-government contracts is the substantial savings that result from volume discounts by aggregating these arrangements. This approach makes sense—that we can negotiate the best value for money for taxpayers. The investment with Keystone reported in the annual report provided assistance to DCS to make sure it was getting the best possible deal in negotiations. While some of these details are commercial in confidence, I can assure you that the savings to the Government are in the eight-figure range. So that's what that was for, to help us actually bring down what had been previously—it was

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so much money. In the previous years to that, over half a billion dollars had been spent prior to us coming into government on consultants. This is where I make sure we can make sure we save money.

Madam Chair, if I may just indulge—I'm sure everybody is hanging with bated breath—I want to thank the Committee. I want to thank you, Chair, for chairing the Committee. I thank everybody for the participation in it and the respectful way in which it was conducted. I think we come here always trying to be respectful and we were treated with respect, and I personally really appreciate that. Thank you to the Committee for that. Questions on notice, we will continue. I also want to thank the parliamentary team. Sometimes, in all my thanks, I forget to thank the parliamentary team who do all the work behind the scenes. Thank you for the work that you've done through budget estimates. I am sorry to stretch it out so long for you, but thank you for what you did.

You see the team around me. The group around me are incredible human beings determined to do the very best and represent amazing people, whether they're volunteers, whether they're people at Service NSW, whether they're people who are just trying to make our lives better. I thank all of the public servants right across the State for the work they do. It is difficult, but it is really important work. We are so incredibly grateful to the people who did the folders, who sat down with me and who questioned me. I appreciate that. Thank you for that bit of work. Of course, my own ministerial team, as well as the DLOs and my team in Punchbowl, who I know are watching—they are probably eating a banh mi from Bankstown rather than popcorn, as everybody else is. Thanks, guys. We can't do this by ourselves.

I want to also take this opportunity—I didn't really get to do it properly during estimates—to acknowledge Cyclone Alfred. To the Committee, thank you your understanding. To the Chair, I really appreciate the way that you have followed it up for me. It wasn't something that had been planned, but obviously we needed to go there. But what I got to see in those few days up there were some of the best things that we should be proud of. In 2022 that community had horrific floods and storms. They still remain traumatised by that, and we saw that trauma. I want to acknowledge the Premier's leadership on this in going up there straightaway and being in there with the communities.

I acknowledge the work of our volunteer agencies, the SES-led response and Commissioner Wassing, who I think has been only a couple of months in the job—the work that he did in leading that; the Reconstruction Authority with Mal; but all of every single one of our emergency services that were there, and so was Service NSW, setting up all the systems in support. We don't often say it, but these are the best of our people, who give up their time to help others. We can be so incredibly grateful. To the community in the Northern Rivers, thank you for the way that you worked with the agencies, the way that you responded. We were so lucky and we were so grateful. We were prepared for the worst but we hoped for the best, and we got a really good outcome. But I think everybody would agree, regardless of what political persuasion you have, that the response to this incident was an incredible demonstration of the learnings from 2022.

Given that this is the last estimates for this session, it is also the last opportunity that I might have to say something. As you are well aware, Commissioner Rogers will be retiring in a few months. I just want to publicly put on record my thanks, and those of the Government and all governments over the years. I'm the last person to be here. Thank you for over 40 years of service to the RFS. You have risen from a volunteer to the commissioner. I appreciate the work that we have done together, particularly over the last two years. I'm sure we will get to say a proper thank you and a proper farewell, but I just wanted to say it here as well. With that, I can say I have still got half a glass of jellybeans. Dr Cohn, you have made me feel really bad; I am never going to eat these lollies again. Thank you. To everybody watching at home and on their computer screens, thanks for the work that you do. This is what holding governments to account is about. Have a good one, everyone.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Thank you again for working with the Committee in rescheduling this hearing and the open and honest way that you've done that. Thank you to Commissioner Rogers as well. I'm sure there will be a lot more congratulations this afternoon. Minister, your time before this Committee has finished. Thank you very much for your time.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the afternoon session for budget estimates. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Rogers, I will start with you, if that's okay, and return to the farm fire fighting vehicle situation. Early on in my readings on this, I learned how there are often problems about people turning up to firegrounds not adequately dressed or prepared to fight fires if they're not in official units. In my head, formalising that mosquito fleet would give an opportunity for you to reach out to those people

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and help to lift the standard of people coming to the fire. I wonder if you could care to comment on that a little further.

ROB ROGERS: Yes, certainly. I think historically we had a lot of farm fire units. RFS tried to centralise that, and I think in some ways we made some mistakes. We tried to overly formalise it and push people into a particular model that didn't suit a lot of farmers. This is the first stage of us trying to now re-engage with farmers—and we've been doing that, obviously, with the farm association—and trying to get at least that level of coverage for registration. We've also sort of agreed on standard channels—that, when brigades come, to turn to a particular UHF channel so they can communicate with farmers—with a view to try and get, I guess, synergy as much as we can without pushing too far so that farmers then feel that we're going too far. There's a level of bureaucracy that farmers don't like, so we have to be very conscious not to push that onto them. We're doing it, I guess, in baby steps to try to make sure that we keep them engaged.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Would it be fair to say that without formal recognition of this mosquito fleet, they are attending fires anyhow in unregistered vehicles—

ROB ROGERS: Absolutely.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: —with limited to no control?

ROB ROGERS: Absolutely, they are, and they always have. The very genesis of the RFS was farmers getting together and fighting fires down in Berrigan. That's the genesis of the RFS. People have always done that, and they'll continue doing it. That's why, I guess, we've got to try and make sure that we value-add to that. We've issued some guidelines to our firefighters to say, "When you arrive, try to engage with farmers; find out what they think is important," because we go into this to protect the house. Sometimes to them—the farmer—the house is not necessarily the key thing at that particular time. It might be the crop. It might be a machinery shed. Whatever it is, try and engage with farmers so that we can make sure we're working with them to try and achieve what they want to do. As I say, that's sort of the aim, but I think there's a fair way for us to go, and we need to do that in a measured way.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Were you involved formally in this trial enough to have numbers of how many people were involved and any outcomes from it?

ROB ROGERS: I don't know the actual numbers. I could take it on notice but, obviously, it would be with Transport. I do know people used it, but I'm not quite sure how many exactly used it. I think there was indication that there wasn't enough numbers; hence, why a second trial was engaged. I'll take that on notice, if I can.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes. I think there were 219 in the first trial. I'm not sure how many people have been engaged in this one, but I fear and suspect it'd be lower this time, having already been through that one trial.

ROB ROGERS: I think some of the issues have been about that insurance side of it and how that sits. I think there's no neat answer to it, in some ways. I think that there's a little bit more work to do, but I think certainly that we're very supportive of having farmers having a level of coverage for doing that because they're going to help their neighbours anyway. We need to recognise that and we need to try and work to make sure that the vehicles that are travelling on the road are as safe as they can be, but recognising that often they're not road vehicles. They are things dedicated for that purpose. I think we've got to continue to do that but support that continuing. I believe that it needs to continue and, obviously, over time then formalise it.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Mr Lanyon, can I come to you? I suspect it's you, coming back to the issue of who owns the land that we buy back in these buyback schemes. Have we managed to pin that down?

MAL LANYON: Yes, Mr Barrett. We have made inquiries. The land is owned by the RA on behalf of the State, once it's bought back.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do they then have a budget to manage this land?

MAL LANYON: We do. Ongoing maintenance at the moment, certainly for those that we bought back in the Northern Rivers and as we'll do in the Central West—we have a budget within the RHP, for which we engage Public Works to maintain the land.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Does that include pest and weed control?

MAL LANYON: It's all maintenance, so mowing—those types of things that are required to keep the land appropriately maintained.

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The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is it going to be clear to other residents in the area that if there's an issue with that block, here's who you phone? The examples I'm thinking about are people dumping asbestos on that block or an old washing machine or a fridge.

MAL LANYON: We certainly have communicated to make it very clear what happens with that land when it's bought back by the RA. We're happy to communicate. Councils certainly know, and councils are normally the first port of call if something like that happens. They'll refer it to us, and we'll take action straightaway. We work very closely with the councils. The councils are aware. As we go forward, we will work with the councils to decide what an appropriate land use is for that land that's bought back.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I guess that was going to be my next question. If a community does decide that would actually be a good spot for a walking track or some other low-risk enterprise down that way, what would be the process for them to get their hands on that land?

MAL LANYON: The process will be that we'll work closely with councils to work out what the best land use is in accordance with the needs of the community. So I suggest it will vary, depending on the area where we have bought back land.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are you able to shed more light on the discussion we had about opening up more land in the Central West, particularly Eugowra and Molong, to develop more blocks out there, and assistance that might be available from the council?

MAL LANYON: I'm certainly aware that there has been a request for that to occur. There is not a Resilient Lands Program for the Central West. That does not exist. We've worked closely with other agencies, including the Rural Assistance Authority, to see whether there may be grant programs that can assist councils. One of the challenges with that is it's not as simple as just finding land. There is then a cost to infrastructure, so it's really then working as to how that can possibly be funded and then work through a process with councils for that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is that what the Resilient Lands Program was in the Northern Rivers? Is that what that assisted?

MAL LANYON: Correct. It's about making flood-free land available for people to build on.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: And assisting with the development of that land.

MAL LANYON: Depending on the nature of it, depending on what is required—whether it's to purchase land that we develop. There are some places that we are developing up there, but primarily it will be to purchase land or to assist councils to understand what infrastructure is required in the first instance. As you can imagine, sewer, water—those types of things can be quite complex. If it's a council that already has, I suppose, almost a limit to their water and sewer, we need to understand what an upgrade may look like to manage that infrastructure.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can you talk me through the process? Once you've bought a block of land with a house on it, what's the process from that point?

MAL LANYON: Once we've purchased land and a home, it really depends on the nature of it. It may well be that the home has structural damage and can't be sustained there. It may be dilapidated to such an extent that it can't be there. It may be built on a slab and it's never able to be moved, and it may just be in an area of high risk. It's on a case-by-case basis. The Resilient Homes Program has a range of arms to move forward with homes, so relocation and gifting is one of the options there for the home owners. Once they settle on their land, they can make a decision within 12 months whether they wish to relocate the home. We've also had an EOI process where we've put up a number of houses to make them available for people to purchase, and then there are a number of homes that have been demolished.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you know how many homes in the Northern Rivers were eligible for buybacks?

MAL LANYON: We have prioritised approximately 1,340 homes for buybacks.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When you say "prioritised", in my head there's a line on a map and if you're below that height—

MAL LANYON: We work very closely with council and flood experts to understand which areas were of the highest risk both for current, but for future flooding. With those flood experts, there were then areas designated as those that were considered of the highest risk, and they were the areas prioritised for buyback.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Out of that 1,340 homes, how many are you estimating will be bought back?

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MAL LANYON: That's very difficult to estimate. We've already, as I said, made offers for 880 homes. We've prioritised that there is the ability to purchase back 1,340. It is a voluntary program, so we work very closely with home owners to understand what they want to do.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: If there has already been a transaction of homes—if I've bought one of the houses in that area, I'm not eligible for the buybacks.

MAL LANYON: Sorry, just repeat that to me.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: If I personally bought a house in that area since the floods, am I still eligible for the buybacks?

MAL LANYON: If you've bought a house since the floods in one of those affected areas, no, you're not eligible for a buyback.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Has that happened on many occasions? Have we got the numbers around that?

MAL LANYON: Can I take that on notice and come back to you? There certainly would be some figures where people have made application and we've been able to say they weren't eligible.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Mr Head, if I direct questions to you and then you can—I'll start on Youth Justice. What is the department's latest cost estimate for youth detention per child, per day in New South Wales?

GRAEME HEAD: That's a DCJ matter, so I'll hand to my colleagues on the left.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: And I will refer that, if I may, to Mr O'Reilly.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's \$2,800 a day.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I asked the Minister to take it on notice, but I might ask you as well, has the department undertaken any economic modelling on the opportunity cost of increased incarceration expenditure? For example, what would be the impact of redirecting this funding to early intervention programs in the community? That's a question on notice.

PAUL O'REILLY: Would you like me to answer it?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You can answer it now if you'd like, yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's not possible to undertake that kind of modelling in such a way that we would divert the funding in detention to diversion. Detention is a statutory service we must provide under the law, and it comes at a cost. We can't reduce the cost of that because that would reduce safety and quality. That has to be funded to meet the demand. The modelling that we do regularly is on the cost of diversion and the benefits of diversion, and we continually try to find more ways to increase diversion effort across the State. We do that, and community does that as well. There are a lot of community-led diversion efforts as well. Between us and those groups, and diversion from the police youth command, from Education and from Health, that all adds up to an aggregate diversion effort. The unit cost of that effort is well known and well documented in the research, and we are always keen to do more of that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What has been the financial impact of the Government's changes to bail laws on the youth justice system?

PAUL O'REILLY: The youth justice system has capacity currently, but it is—we're around 90 per cent full at the moment, and the changes to bail laws in the past year have coincided with an increase. It's not entirely clear that increase is entirely attributable to the change in the bail laws—those particular bail laws, section 22C. What we have seen is a change in bail decision-making behaviour from police and courts generally, and we've also seen an increase in offending and an increase in violence in offending. All of those things add up to more kids in detention and, at the moment, we are managing that within our current capacity. The cost impact is specific to location, so we may need to, for example, increase staffing or increase use of overtime on occasion if there's a sudden influx. But we haven't increased the bed capacity. We haven't invested any capital, for example, in Youth Justice centres to manage a demand increase at this stage.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You're managing that within the budget, so you haven't had to increase the budget.

PAUL O'REILLY: We're managing it within the budget currently.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You're managing that within the existing resources. Has there been an impact on overcrowding, service provision or staff workloads—you did mention overtime there?

PAUL O'REILLY: Not overcrowding. My policy and our policy is that children have a separate room with a separate bathroom. That's a really important child safety principle. We're not compromising on that; we haven't had to. Overcrowding, in the strictest sense, has not occurred at this stage, but there are pressures in terms of placement. It's really important in detention that we are very careful with every single placement because there are associations and conflicts that we have to manage to keep the place safe and harmonious and make sure kids get access to programs. We also have, in detention, on a regular basis, incidents, refusals to comply with direction, violence and conflict. When we are closer to our capacity, there is a greater risk of that and a greater incidence of that, so that has been something the teams have been managing.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You've been managing that?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What is the current staff-to-detainee ratio in each of the six Youth Justice centres, and how does that compare with best practice?

PAUL O'REILLY: In our six centres, the standard ratio is up to 15 children for three staff. That is the standard ratio. However, in some of our units where we have high-risk programs, the ratio is four staff to six children. In our enhanced support unit on the Central Coast, which is a therapeutic model, it is four to six as well but, generally, it's three to up to 15. It's not always 15 because it depends on—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Where you are.

PAUL O'REILLY: —the volume in that location at the time. There is no agreed national standard around best practice in terms of ratios but, for children, there is a very strong consensus that the ratio needs to be very different to what it is for adults.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Currently, how many Youth Justice staff are on leave due to workers compensation, and has that had any impact on the operational safety within the past 12 months?

PAUL O'REILLY: I can come back to you with the exact number of people currently on workers compensation leave. We have that data back at base camp but not here today. I don't think that impacts the operational performance or the day-to-day safety because our recruitment model for the centres is very intentional. We have a supply of trainees coming in all the time, getting training and getting exposed, so there is always a pool of staff we draw on to fill those shifts. There would have to be several hundred people off on workers comp in order for that to have that kind of impact, and that is not the case. It is a small number. It is a very significant number for those people, of course, but it's not having an impact on the filling of shifts on a day-to-day basis.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You mentioned before about critical incidents and things like that in terms of increase in children in—have you received any sort of internal risk assessments warning that current Youth Justice conditions, maybe with increased violence and staff shortages, could lead to unrest?

PAUL O'REILLY: People have that view. There are people with that opinion, absolutely. It's a very well-trained, skilled and very committed workforce in the centres. A lot of people are very experienced, and they've experienced incidents and violence before. For some people, that comes with trauma, and it can lead to a sense of strong or hypervigilance for some people. But that is really useful information for us as well in terms of assessing risk, so we listen to everybody. We have a really solid system of workplace health and safety committees in each of the centres, and we have really important compliance requirements under the WHS legislation. Those committees are made up of frontline staff—teachers, nurses, youth officers—who work on a regular basis to identify risks in the centre, flag them with management, and then they are tracked until they are resolved.

That's a standard risk management approach in a place like that, and our director of custodial services leads more systemic safety and security reviews on a regular basis. We have a separate centralised security team of very experienced officers who focus purely on safety and security. They attend all the centres on a regular basis and do checks and provide coaching. So there is a constant—I would call it a continual—risk assessment. It's not the place where you would set and forget risk assessment; it's ongoing. It's not ever going to prevent incidents completely, but it certainly reduces them and enables us to deal with them quickly and prevent the escalation of them in most cases.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Your first question was about the numbers, I thought, of workers compensation claims, was it?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, it wasn't. Sorry?

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MICHAEL TIDBALL: Your very first question in that bracket.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many—

PAUL O'REILLY: Staff off on workers comp.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes. How many are currently on leave?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I have the current claims. I do not have the staff numbers.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What is the current number of high-risk units operating in New South Wales?

PAUL O'REILLY: Two.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many children are in those units?

PAUL O'REILLY: They have a capacity of six each, so it would be up to six in each one.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How frequently are lockdowns, unit transfers or behavioural management strategies being used?

PAUL O'REILLY: I don't understand what "unit transfers" means, sorry.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When children are moved from one centre to another centre.

PAUL O'REILLY: Children are moved from centre to centre for a whole heap of reasons. Sometimes it's to attend court in a particular location or to be closer to family, and sometimes it is due to their classification. Not all of our centres are suitable for high-risk classification. Really, only Cobham and Frank Baxter are suitable for that classification. If a young person's classification changes in one of our regional centres, they will need to be moved, and that happens regularly. That's part of risk assessment and management.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Commissioner Rogers, good afternoon. It was recently publicised that in 2022, when he was then the Minister, Dugald Saunders travelled in an RFS jet from Dubbo to the Hunter. Since that came to light, have protocols changed around ministerial use of RFS assets?

ROB ROGERS: I certainly did review them. The Minister asked me to review them. What we did was reinforce the fact that those things could only be used if there wasn't any operational need—in relation to that, at that time there wasn't any operational need—but also to ensure that there's an appropriateness about it. The point is, there's a difference between going to do an event versus some other activity that may not be part of that event. From my point of view, we have ensured that people understand that they're there for firefighting purposes. At times they will do transport, but it's to be around a bona fide government activity.

Dr AMANDA COHN: In that review, did you come across other instances of ministerial use for non-emergency purposes?

ROB ROGERS: I don't believe so. Indeed, we did furnish all the manifests of all the flights in relation to Standing Order 52. That was all submitted, so we've submitted every manifest we have. I think it goes back four years or something like that. We've submitted all that. I don't believe there were any other instances like that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I just want to clarify—because you said "at times there will be use if there is no operational need"—to your knowledge, other than this one incident with Dugald Saunders, ministerial use has always been within their capacity as emergency services Minister in an emergency.

ROB ROGERS: Sometimes we will use aircraft where it's easier and cheaper for our own people to move them by our own aircraft, particularly from different parts of the State. There have been times where a group of people have been going to a funeral, for example, in a very difficult-to-get-to spot, when we've used aircraft and the Minister has accompanied me. To my knowledge, there is no other instance where someone has used an aircraft that isn't part of an official ministerial-type event or operational event. That's not just for fire; that would also be to support flood operations as well. Sometimes we'll fly SES people, and obviously Government Ministers may go to incidents and they may use those things. But it's all to do with official events.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Has the RFS denied non-essential overnight travel for employees, for staff members, because of budgetary constraints?

ROB ROGERS: Sorry, did you say non-essential?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Yes. Has overnight travel for employees, which they would otherwise be entitled to claim under the award, been denied because of budget constraints?

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ROB ROGERS: No. Overnight travel? Not that I'm aware of. I'm happy to take that on notice. I can't say I know every instance, so I might take that on notice, if I can.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Are there any former employees who have been re-engaged as contractors or consultants by the RFS?

ROB ROGERS: Former employees who have been engaged as contractors?

Dr AMANDA COHN: As contractors or consultants.

ROB ROGERS: Not that I'm aware of. I don't think we have anybody who's a consultant or a contractor. No, I don't believe so, but I'll take that on notice just to be thorough.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I want to come back to this issue of the numbers of active volunteers, which we've discussed at estimates several times. I understand the numbers cited have come from, for example, how many pages have been issued. I'm interested in what level of oversight you have at a State level of how many volunteers are on the books that have actually, for example, attended a job or attended training in the last year.

ROB ROGERS: The way we work, in brigades, is very much about what people have decided as active members of brigades, because what is an active member in a more urbanised area is a very different thing than what an active member is in Bourke. It's very hard to have it one size fits all. I know there are organisations that keep trying to paint this into a particular thing, but the point is that we let brigades decide who is active and who is on their books, and we report the numbers they give us. They report who is on the books and who is trained. Whether someone turns out every year, every week or in two years, I don't think it makes them a less valuable person. They're still a valuable asset to that community. From my point of view, I would still keep them on the books, if that's what the brigade is saying.

Dr AMANDA COHN: To be clear, I don't think anybody is trying to argue that volunteers aren't a valuable asset in any capacity. Even in my own experience as an SES volunteer, I know that there are particular qualifications that require regular updates to remain qualified to fulfil particular roles. I'm interested in what level of oversight you've got at a State level that shows which active volunteers have met the appropriate requirements for their level of training.

ROB ROGERS: For the training, there are 45,000 trained firefighters, but there are also then people who do catering and all of those other associated activities as well. But, again, there are varying levels of activity that those people have. I'm not quite sure what the end is in trying to dig down to the point of if someone has turned out at a particular time. I'm not quite sure of the utility of that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm trying to understand the numbers at a statewide level and how useful those are in terms of understanding the workforce that you've got.

ROB ROGERS: We report the numbers. I know some people say that we keep dead people on the books and all sorts of things. Different people say that; I'm not saying that you're saying this. The fact that in 2019-20 we had 76,000 people on the books and at the end of 2023-24 we had 70,000 people on the books I think shows that when people say they're no longer members, we take them off the register and we rectify the register. But, again, it's something that I deliberately leave to peak brigades to make these rules, because they all have different rules on who's active and who's not. Some require people—

Dr AMANDA COHN: That 70,000-odd figure I understand has been cited previously, but you're also quoted in *The Sydney Morning Herald* saying 40,000. This is what I'm genuinely trying to understand: Who is being counted in this figure?

ROB ROGERS: It depends on what the question is that's being asked. We've got 70,000 on the books. Of those, 40,000 are trained firefighters. There are other people who do other operational tasks, so it depends on what's being asked.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Of those 40,000 who are trained, can I clarify, are you saying that all of those 40,000 are people who are deemed active at a local level by the brigade, or does that 40,000 include people who, at some point in the past, did firefighter training but may not have maintained that?

ROB ROGERS: I guess it depends on how active the brigade are in the books. I'm not trying to be evasive here. I'm just simply saying that there are almost 2,000 brigades. They all have their own rules of who's active and who's not. It's very hard for me to give you a one-size-fits-all answer to it. I'm not trying to deliberately be evasive. I'm just being honest with you that those rules are made by the brigades. That might be someone that did training three years ago and they know in a big fire that they can call them out but they don't turn out every week. It could be that circumstance. It could be someone that comes to training every week. There are some brigades that have rules to say, "If you don't turn up to training every fortnight, you won't be active anymore."

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Dr AMANDA COHN: But you don't require brigades to submit that to you? You don't have any understanding of how many people those different rules apply to?

ROB ROGERS: We ask them to submit at their annual general meeting any updates to people that are no longer active, that have left the brigade. We ask people to update that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: But do they tell you how they're defining "active"? You're saying it's different in every brigade; I'm hearing that.

ROB ROGERS: No.

Dr AMANDA COHN: But you don't have an understanding of how that is being applied in different areas?

ROB ROGERS: I'll give you some examples. I understand it's been applied in a lot of different ways around the State.

The CHAIR: I've got some questions probably best directed to Mr O'Reilly or Mr Tidball. We've been told in previous estimates that it costs around \$2,700 per day to keep a young person incarcerated in New South Wales. Are you able to provide a bit of a breakdown of the major costs contributing to that figure of 2,700?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: We would, I think, need to take that on notice. But most of that cost would be employee-related expense, by far. But we could take that on notice.

PAUL O'REILLY: The only thing I would add is that includes all corporate overheads, all costs, including services delivered by DCJ central corporate service. It's the whole cost structure.

The CHAIR: That flows into my next question, which might relate in some way to that. I am trying to get an understanding of why it's such a higher figure than the cost of keeping an adult incarcerated in New South Wales, which is less than \$500 a day. I'm just wondering why there is this dramatic difference in cost.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: We have economies of scale, so a 10,000-plus prison system as opposed to Youth Justice centres with a total population, as of today, of 236—clearly the economies of scale are very different. The needs are also different. The staff to young inmate interface is different to that of the adult system.

The CHAIR: I understand that most children at Youth Justice centres spend around 14 hours a day confined in their cells. I want to get an understanding of what efforts are being made to ensure that the time spent in their cells can be used by children to access essential services that will support their rehabilitation, such as counselling. Is there any work being done to make sure that they're able to do that?

PAUL O'REILLY: It's important to note 14 hours a day includes sleeping time, which is nine hours or so. It's a number that's used quite frequently and it's a little misleading because people are locked in their cells while they're asleep for their own safety. That's a really important consideration. That means there are 10 or 11 hours a day not in the cell. That includes going to school. It includes working with psychologists, Aboriginal practice officers for cultural connection work. It includes trade courses. It includes family visits. For some young people who are at a particular stage of their behaviour in detention, they can have outings. They can go and work. They can go and do training outside the centre for approved leave. Then there's rec time. Kids in detention have access to sport, television, computer games, socialising. We have chaplains in all the centres for children who want to access religious services—and meals. It's a pretty normal day.

The CHAIR: With the five hours that are not sleeping time, are they able to access services like counselling or any other services specifically to do with their rehabilitation?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. That's in the evening—that time. The rehabilitation work generally happens through the day. That's when we have our clinical staff in the centres. In the evening, access to people outside the centre is usually family, so phone calls to family, for instance, or video calls to family in the evening. For some young people there will be activities in the evening as well. That number of hours might vary if there's a particular event in the evening or an activity. But we don't provide therapeutic services through the night when they are in their room generally, no. They have access to television and they can come out and make phone calls.

The CHAIR: To what extent do children in Youth Justice centres currently have access to those external counselling services? You mentioned that counselling happens in the evening before going to cells. Is that something that every child in a Youth Justice centre has access to on a regular basis?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, all kids in detention have access to psychologists. We have psychologists all across the State. We have around 46, I think, psychologists on our staff. They also have access to Justice Health services, which include psychiatrists. Not every child in detention needs to access a psychiatrist, of course, but those who do can get as much access as they need. Then there are caseworkers who work in the centres as well

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and they do a mix of some criminogenic intervention to try and address the root causes of offending, which is slightly different to the work of the psychologists. They also work with family connection and setting them up for the future in terms of exit planning. All those things happen in the centre. Every child has a caseworker. Every child has a psychologist. Those who need a psychiatrist get access.

The CHAIR: Are you currently looking at ways that tablet technology could be used to allow children to videoconference with an external counsellor or access mental health support when they are in their cells? I understand you're saying that nine of those 14 hours are sleep time, but I assume that there would be certain children that would need access during those hours. Is that something that's being looked into at all?

PAUL O'REILLY: We are very keen to implement—and we've talked about this at budget estimates a number of times—technology in cells, access to the internet, tablets that allow people to access education, family, and a whole range of services when they want to. We are on board with that suggestion. We want to do it, but it's extremely expensive and it's far more expensive than was initially thought. We are looking for opportunities to fund that and get it started in some of the centres, but we don't yet have a funding source.

The CHAIR: If it is introduced, would that include access to counsellors through the tablet?

PAUL O'REILLY: Perhaps. I'm not being difficult. It's just that it's difficult to access therapeutic services in the community in the evenings—for anybody. They're just not operating after business hours, generally. If there's an acute psychiatric or psychological need, we will take a medical approach and our nurses on staff will call an ambulance or bring somebody in if that's an urgent need. But there wouldn't be scheduled therapy sessions or counselling sessions in the evening, because that's not when they're operating. The benefit of having that technology is that the service can be tailored to the child to whatever mix of services they need to access.

The CHAIR: I might move quickly to Commissioner Rogers. Thank you for your time some months ago when we met with WIRES. We talked a lot about coordination between emergency services and animal rescue organisations. I was wondering if I could get an update on the work in this space to improve that coordination within the RFS and also with other emergency services agencies and animals.

ROB ROGERS: Since we met, there has been some work done about the—we had the presentation that was given to the coordinating committee. Also, there's been some work with National Parks and Wildlife. In October 2024 WIRES presented to the coordinating committee. National Parks are taking the lead as far as the wildlife management, which I understand WIRES are comfortable with. Basically there's a technical adviser role for wildlife that is now being established in incident management teams to make sure that we keep across the welfare of animals. Also, pleasingly, there continue to be more people. There's another 100-odd RFS people that've done that training.

We're keeping that training going to try and push out that as much as we possibly can. Once this gets put into place, in some examples and in a fire season, I think the idea then is to look at, in the broader State Emergency Management Committee, a presentation of how that could be handled in other emergencies. But the idea is to try to test it and iron out any issues we have and then make sure there's a package that can go to the SEMC that can be considered in all emergencies, which was obviously what WIRES were looking for.

The CHAIR: Is there a timeline, or a rough idea of a timeline, around when that would happen?

ROB ROGERS: I imagine that the next fire season we'll get an opportunity to test this out and make sure it works. Then following that fire season, I would think that a report would be able to go to the SEMC along with a presentation on what the best care for animals is moving forward and a model that then could be considered by, for example, SES to be used in any other hazard that may be relevant.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'll stay with you, Commissioner Rogers, just quickly, but then I will come to Mr Lanyon and Ms Leck, probably, for some mitigation questions next if we want to set up for that. Commissioner Rogers, I understand time to time you'll sell old RFS vehicles and they'll end up on farm as firefighting vehicles themselves or carting water. For those vehicles that are pre the end of using PFAS chemicals, are we confident that they are not contaminated still?

ROB ROGERS: The vehicles themselves?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Would they've been cleaned out or sterilised, for want of a better term, before they were offloaded?

ROB ROGERS: They certainly would be washed out, but the foam is not added to the tank water, as such. The foam comes out after the tank water. They go through a proportioning system or a foam induction system; it's not added in the main tank. It's added after that so obviously once all that's done and any water that goes through the pump, it's pretty well gone.

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The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Now you say that that's very obvious, now that I think about it. Thanks for putting us at ease. Back to the land buybacks question, 1,340 homes within that zone in the Northern Rivers, 840, say—for maths—contracts have been offered. That means there's 500 still in there. Is there a deadline for when those offers need to be taken up or offers need to be made?

MAL LANYON: The program is funded through till 2027. Obviously it's one of those ones where we try to give home owners options, and we certainly work with home owners as more funding has come online. I think the Minister spoke this morning about the fact that, originally, the Resilient Homes Program was funded for \$700 million—there has been a further injection of \$90 million, both by the State and the Commonwealth. That's allowed us to have more homes to be prioritised, and we'll continue to work with home owners that are now in areas that are identified as the highest risk. It's an ongoing program of works.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can I get the same sort of numbers for the Central West as well? How many were within that zone and where we're up to as far as offers?

MAL LANYON: It's a far smaller program. At this stage, I think we're envisaging about 20 homes, but I'll have myself corrected shortly on that, I'm sure. We've had about 190 applications so far for the Resilient Homes Program. If you're comfortable, I want to provide some more information on a previous question you asked me, which was about providing land within the Eugowra community there. We've been working very closely with Homes NSW to help Cabonne shire—Eugowra sits within Cabonne shire—to make a grant application under the Regional Economic Development and Community Investment Program to develop a new housing estate at Eugowra. If that's successful, that would open up about 20 blocks of land for which those that were eligible for a buyback would get priority.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you know any timelines for when we might find out the success or otherwise of that funding?

MAL LANYON: We're expecting by the end of May we should know the outcome of that funding program.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: There's still the CBD in Lismore, obviously. What steps have been made to protect the CBD of Lismore?

MAL LANYON: I know we spoke briefly this morning. If you're comfortable, I can invite Amanda Leck up, who runs our Adaptation, Mitigation and Reconstruction division, and she can talk through the NRRRP and a range of other things.

AMANDA LECK: As Mr Lanyon said, there is a range of programs underway in the Northern Rivers under the Northern Rivers Recovery and Resilience Initiative. That program is fully funded by the Commonwealth Government through NEMA for \$150 million. There are 36 projects as part of that program. There are a number of those programs specifically in Lismore. For example, in Lismore, we are currently working through a program of works with Lismore City Council that will upgrade a range of pumping stations, providing fibre optic cable to those pumps so that they become automatic, if you like, during the event of future floods. Many people here who would have seen the preparations in support of TC Alfred would have noted that there were still things like tractor pumps and the like being used, manual closing of floodgates and those sorts of things. This program is designed to automate and provide greater security to the Lismore CBD in the event of a future flood.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What sort of impact will that have? We talked a lot about meter reads during the flood. What impact is that going to have on meter reads?

AMANDA LECK: That program in and of itself will more efficiently and effectively deal with flood water through flash flooding events and so on. It doesn't increase the size or height of the levee bank, for example. There is another program of work underway both through NSW Reconstruction Authority with regard to the Northern Rivers Disaster Adaptation Plan. That seeks to understand potential options to reduce risk in around the Northern Rivers. In respect of your question, in the Lismore CBD area more broadly, we are also working closely with our colleagues in the Commonwealth—with CSIRO and with NEMA—who are undertaking a very large-scale catchment flood model as part of the Northern Rivers Recovery Initiative. That is actually looking at a large-scale flood model and effectively modelling the 2022 flood event to understand if there could be any mitigation measures put in place that would reduce the height of the flood waters in and around Lismore.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You say that models the 2022 event. Did that CSIRO work start—wasn't that underway prior to the floods?

AMANDA LECK: I can't comment prior to the floods; I wasn't working in New South Wales at that time. I can tell you that this particular initiative, the NRRP initiative I spoke about, and the CSIRO work has really—this current project is being delivered in support of the 2022 flood event.

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The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You mentioned earlier levee banks, and I'm not sure if you did or did not use the words "water diversion", but has any work been done on that front?

AMANDA LECK: That's what this model seeks to understand. As you would appreciate, water through flood plains is incredibly complex. For example, within the RA we're doing a lot of work in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley and there are some perverse outcomes with regard to where the placement of levee banks and the like might occur so what you don't want to do is impact other communities downstream of those mitigation efforts. It's really important that the flood model understands, at a catchment scale, what the impacts will be in terms of mitigation impacts for some communities, but making sure that other communities do not experience greater levels of flood impact.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You mentioned those 36 programs. Are we able to see a list of those programs and where they're up to?

AMANDA LECK: Yes, I believe they're freely available on the RA website. I can tell you that I was actually in the Northern Rivers yesterday and had the opportunity to view six of those projects, some of which are now complete. For example, during TC Alfred the Dorothy Street pump was able to clear 1,000 litres of water per minute and was able to mitigate flood impacts for 120 homes and, importantly, a sporting field, so the community could get back into their community immediately. Some of those programs are underway and 14 are now complete.

MAL LANYON: We can provide that on notice, Mr Barrett. That's no problem whatsoever. There's also a program called the drainage reset program, which is a \$5 million program designed to actually allow water to move from cane farmers' land. What we found during the most recent flooding event with Tropical Cyclone Alfred was that the level of impact for those farms that had been able to avail themselves of that program—there was significantly less impact. So all of those mitigation works that Ms Leck has spoken about showed a tangible benefit in the most recent example.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When did that \$5 million for that drainage program kick off?

MAL LANYON: After the '22 floods. I can give you that detail.

AMANDA LECK: Yes, it's been underway for about 12 months, and we are actually looking at opportunities to extend that program, given its success.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When we have infrastructure issues, for want of a better term, such as the bridge at Canowindra that is clearly going to increase the levels of flood in a different area—are you aware of the railway bridge at Canowindra?

AMANDA LECK: I'm not familiar specifically with that bridge.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: For example, if there's a bridge across a river that is causing a bottleneck and causing floods, who is the lead authority to remove that bridge to mitigate flood effects? Is it Heritage? Is it RA? Is it Water? Who has the reins on that?

MAL LANYON: There would be a range of bodies that would need to become involved—no doubt the council but also the asset owner, whoever owns that asset, because there may well be an impact on transport or some other service. The RA itself would certainly be having a look at it. As part of the disaster adaptation plan that now the joint organisation out in the Central West are looking at, that is one of the things we would look at as an option to mitigate potential flood.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: A similar question, then, for the Central West as far as mitigation measures that have been put in place. Do you have a similar list for there that you can share?

AMANDA LECK: No, I don't for the Central West. As I said, the NRRRP was funded by the Commonwealth in response to the 2022 floods. But what I can say is that the disaster adaptation planning that Mr Lanyon spoke to—we are going to commence that work in the Central West, working closely with the joint organisation there. They've just received funding through what's called the Disaster Ready Fund, a Commonwealth fund which requires matched funding between the State and local council. We will be working closely with those councils to develop the disaster adaptation plan. The first step of that plan is to understand the risk and hazard in that area—to bring together all the flood studies, all the bushfire risk management plans and the like and to understand whether that data is up to date. If it's not, we will seek to fill that gap and then to work out the options that will deliver the best mitigation outcomes for those communities.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Mr Lanyon, obviously there was a huge emotional impact that we can never put a number on. But we talk about the Northern Rivers floods being the biggest disaster event. Do we have a ballpark of the economic impact of that event?

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MAL LANYON: Not overall, Mr Barrett. We wouldn't know what the potential losses to the region were from that event. In terms of infrastructure, we can certainly estimate what the likely rebuild cost was, and we can provide that as an estimate. But for total financial impact, the loss of tourism in the region over a period of time, the build back and certainly the loss to small business, that would be very difficult to quantify because of the nature of it and the size.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Anything you can provide me on that would be very much appreciated.

MAL LANYON: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Has there been an increase in staffing for the Youth Justice court liaison services as a result of increases in bail refusal rates?

PAUL O'REILLY: No.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are there any specialist liaison officers for, say, First Nations children or children with cognitive disabilities?

PAUL O'REILLY: Can I just check what you mean by liaison officers? Youth Justice staff in the court?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we do have Aboriginal-identified positions for all of our classifications, whether it's youth officers, caseworkers or caseworkers who work in the court.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: And children with cognitive disabilities?

PAUL O'REILLY: All of our caseworkers have training in working with kids with cognitive disabilities. One of their primary functions is trying to connect kids with the NDIS. It's one of the things they do.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What specific support services are available to children in youth detention—mental health or substance abuse counselling? We know education is part of it, but what other programs?

PAUL O'REILLY: Children are assessed by Justice Health when they are admitted to detention, and part of that assessment is identifying existing treatment that might be underway for something. Quite often children have been in frequently, so they are well known, and it's a question of picking up their care plan and starting it again. For children who are new, there is a process of assessment, which takes a bit longer, and then they are matched to services that are provided by Justice Health or Youth Justice. They include drug and alcohol services and a whole range of counselling services. Where young people are convicted or have pled guilty to an offence, there is a criminogenic intervention that our caseworkers lead as well. A psychologist will do two things: They will focus on therapeutic support, but they will also undertake a range of assessments for the court down the track to try to help work out what the best pathway is for the young person later.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Aside from the criminogenic ones, are the services available for all children on remand?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, and there are some children who are still dealing with or resolving matters for which they have been found guilty or pled guilty and have other matters where they are not found guilty. So there can be criminogenic intervention for particular matters, but we have to stay away from the ones that are not resolved. But all children get access to school, all health services, recreation, religious supports, family contact—the full range.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I know you've said they're all trained, but how many staff are trained specifically in counselling, rehabilitation and program delivery, as opposed to, say, security and custodial staff?

PAUL O'REILLY: Most of our staff are youth officers because we need the volume of staff to do that supervision work. Across the State we have 185 caseworkers, I believe, and they work in our community offices and in our detention centres. They are trained in a range of other services, including the criminogenic intervention cognitive behavioural therapy, for example. Some of them are also trained in additional specialist programs in relation to domestic and family violence intervention. There are some who are also trained in family therapy for children, where that is appropriate and accepted by the family. That's the caseworker cohort, and then we have, as I said, around 46, I think—maybe it's 48, but we can check—psychologists, who have the standard training and qualifications for psychologists. And then we have access to Justice Health services in all the centres as well.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are you able to provide a breakdown of program funding across the six different centres?

PAUL O'REILLY: We can certainly try to do that, yes.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On notice?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. It'll be a complicated answer, but we'll provide it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What are the average daily out-of-room hours for children across each of the six centres?

PAUL O'REILLY: It's 10 hours a day except in the high-risk units, where it's a minimum of six, but it varies from six to nine. But minimum is the standard.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In the last 12 months, how many children have been placed in isolation?

PAUL O'REILLY: There are three categories of restricted practice. There are segregation, separation and confinement.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If we say confinement, then.

PAUL O'REILLY: Okay, I can get you confinement data. In 2023-24 there were 3,696 incidents of confinement. We'll have to come back to you to tell you how many individual children were involved in that, but it would be a smaller number, of course, because confinement can often happen multiple times. Over the last five years we've seen a steady reduction in confinement, so it's 29 per cent lower than it was five years ago.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What is the average duration of an isolation period?

PAUL O'REILLY: I can dig that out for you if you wouldn't mind some shuffling.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Sure.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: If I may just come back to your earlier question, Mrs MacDonald, in respect of workers comp, the number of staff on workers comp in Youth Justice as of December 2024 was 142. Of those, 72 were not at work and 70 were on restricted duties or returning to work.

PAUL O'REILLY: Average confinement time in 2023-24 was five hours and 10 minutes, which is very similar to the previous year.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What was the highest duration?

PAUL O'REILLY: I'll have to look that up for you. This could take some shuffling too. There are particular regulations around confinement. For example, for children under 16 it can't be longer than 12 hours, and there were none at that level. For children over 16 it can't be more than 24 hours, and there were none at that level. The highest would have been between five hours and 12 hours for kids under 16, and between five and 24 for kids over 16, but we can provide more precision than that on notice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So none in the past 12 months that were held for longer than 24 hours?

PAUL O'REILLY: None that were noncompliant.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can you confirm the total number of receptions into Youth Justice centres in the last financial year?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I can.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: And then if you're able to break it down into how many were remand and how many were actually sentenced.

PAUL O'REILLY: Okay. That will take some analysis, because they don't come in sentenced. They all come in on remand and then there's a process, pretty much. It will take a bit of time to do that analysis, but we can do that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Let's do that one on notice, then.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, sure.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What is the average time spent in remand for a young person?

PAUL O'REILLY: I do have that data, so bear with me. On remand in the last financial year, the median length of stay was 16 days. But it's worth noting that 58 per cent were less than 24 hours.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I have some questions, starting with you, Mr Lanyon, if I could. I apologise, because some things may have been answered by the Minister. I missed a lot of this morning. When you last gave

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evidence in a budget estimates hearing, there was at the time, I think, a total of 14 houses that had been relocated. Is that still an accurate figure or have we moved?

MAL LANYON: That's still accurate, I believe.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: At this point in time, that accounts for the 2.322 per cent of the total homes that have been purchased. Is that your understanding?

MAL LANYON: I'm comfortable to take your maths, if you say 2.3 per cent. Obviously there's a range of other measures and there are a number of houses that are in the pipeline, if I can say, to relocate. That's really what we're focusing on, encouraging people to take that step.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Obviously at the moment some pretty significant demolitions have been happening in North Lismore. I really want to acknowledge Ms Leck's explanation through various local media sources. I know they're very much appreciated. People are feeling that there are a lot of unanswered questions. Will the Reconstruction Authority release information about which houses are set for demolition to provide that kind of transparency oversight?

MAL LANYON: We have to notify the neighbours of any houses that we are looking to demolish, so we'll certainly work through that. You said there's been a significant demolition process that's been underway. Can I correct some of that? Demolition has been a factor of the Resilient Homes Program since it commenced. There have been homes being demolished through the duration.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So how many demolitions to date?

MAL LANYON: I will just check that. Forty-five demolitions, I've got here at the moment.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: In terms of the location of those 45, where are they? Is there somewhere that there's a register of what's been demolished to date?

MAL LANYON: There absolutely would be. I'd have to take that on notice. It wouldn't be a public record. It would be something that we would have as a record internally.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you think it's possible that the RA now commits to having some public registers and making that kind of information available so that the community can start to understand more publicly about what their future, their local environment, and their local town and community are going to look like and already looks like?

MAL LANYON: It would be something I'd be happy to talk with you offline about to see what that might look like and, obviously, the purpose of it. As you know, we have been very public about the Resilient Homes Program and the reason that it was put in place. Obviously resilience and adding safety to the community is the primary objective of the program. The buybacks have happened for a particular purpose. As you know, where we have been able to possibly relocate homes or work with owners to have that happen as a process, that has been.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: With respect, please don't take things as criticisms of what has happened. I really am trying to work it out. As you would know, right now the community of Lismore and the Northern Rivers is so divided and there are so many unnecessarily heated disputes happening. We are literally generally trying to find really, really clear, simple pathways forward. One that's so clear wherever you look is the lack of free-flowing, transparent information. The website is very good, but there is so much more that could be happening so that people can have some kind of agency over what tomorrow or tonight looks like for them. The other thing about the demolition program is that people are very keen to learn and understand at what threshold a premise is relegated to demolition, as opposed to suitable for relocation. We've obviously heard mould, lead paint, twisted beams—we've heard everything—but the reality is that I think people would like to understand who's making these decisions and at what point are those decisions made. Is there some way the RA could undertake to provide that information to the community?

MAL LANYON: We can certainly communicate the reasons why a home may be demolished. I think we've been fairly clear that it is if the home is structurally unsound, if the home is dilapidated or if there is significant asbestos that would make it problematic to do it that way. If it's on a concrete slab, it won't be suitable to be relocated. Or if it's in an area of highest risk, it may well be that the home has to be demolished to reduce risk to the community.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: To take up some of those points, I can hear those on that surface top level. But when we dig down into those, we're talking about homes that—whilst that may be a determination for the purpose of the Reconstruction Authority, or anyone else in the New South Wales Government or Cabinet, they're often explanations that don't have enough meaning for people, particularly people who are living in them last week or the week before or the month before and they're now seeing them demolished. The loss of logic from the

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bureaucratic process, which may make a lot of sense to some people, is not making sense to the people on the ground in the community who are living next to these houses.

Is there some way the Reconstruction Authority could commit to providing some form of transparency around the decisions that are being made, not just these high-level—when you say unsound, your version of unsound would be very different to mine. I've lived in Bridge Street, I've lived in the Northern Rivers, and I've lived in Lismore. We all have a very different concept of what is a sound home. There are many people right now in Lismore and the Northern Rivers, particularly North Lismore, that have a different version of what is unsound. Is there some way of trying to provide transparency when we tick that box and say that's unsound, or the expert does in these high-risk assessments that you're undertaking? Is there a way that people can see that and have some meaning and understanding?

MAL LANYON: I think there's a challenge even in your question there. When you phrased your question, you talked about the fact that people have different understandings of whether it's unsound for them or whether it's damaged and what that actually means. The premise of the program was to create safety and resilience.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But with respect, Mr Lanyon—sorry to interrupt you; I've only got a few minutes—there are very different versions. All I'm asking for is will the Reconstruction Authority commit to providing to the public what your versions have been? What versions have you made decisions upon to demolish houses? People want to see this. I've heard lead paint. If lead paint is the reason we're demolishing houses, I would strongly suggest there are thousands of houses in Sydney that need demolishing. I don't think that alone—this is what I'm saying. This is where the problems are coming from. This is why today there are people trying to stand in front of machines that are bulldozing and demolishing houses. We owe it to people to be a bit more honest and transparent around why each house is being demolished. Is that possible?

MAL LANYON: We're fairly straightforward about this. We've worked very closely with the community. The program was designed to—and, as I said, where we can, we will look to relocate and re-use those houses.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I appreciate that—

MAL LANYON: Sorry, can I just finish this answer? The homes have been bought back by the Reconstruction Authority on behalf of the Government. The decision as to their future needs to be made by the Reconstruction Authority. I understand what you're saying, but it can't be a process of asking the community, for each home, is that acceptable for that outcome to happen.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm not asking for that. I'm just asking for the one-way flow of honest information so that people can start to come to terms with the home they may have once lived in—the home you bought off them—that it was promised would be relocated and now isn't. They want to understand, and so do the other people who may have lived in there 50 years ago, 40 years ago. We're talking about homes. We're also talking about a whole community that is recovering, not just a government program. Do you think it is possible to commit to providing that level of transparency around the decisions that have been made and taken by the Reconstruction Authority—the criteria and the threshold for reaching those criteria?

MAL LANYON: Again, if I can take this offline with you, we can have a discussion about how that may be appropriate. There will be challenges in doing that because of the nature—and as you said, it's emotive. People have made a decision to sell their home, if that's the case. There were no criteria. There was no undertaking when people have sold their homes that it would be used in any particular manner, and I think that—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I know, but we're just talking about common decency now. I am trying to make an appeal to the Reconstruction Authority here about common decency, about transparency and honesty. The accountability is something else. That's between the community and the Reconstruction Authority. I am just asking, is it possible for people to have more understanding about the decisions that have been made? We can take it offline. Have you got a time frame on when you expect all the homes that are on your demolition list now will be demolished?

MAL LANYON: No, because we still have a number of homes that we need to do assessments on the actual status of the home—as in, their structural integrity. As you know, there were a number of homes that are illegally occupied. We haven't been able to do those. I think it would be misleading for me to say that I know exactly how many homes at this stage may be subject to a demolition.

The CHAIR: Commissioner Rogers, I'd like to ask some questions about the use of fire retardant. There was research published by Griffith University that raised concerns about the impact of retardant on wildlife and waterways, particularly frogs and tadpoles. The researchers raised concerns that there is very little known about the environmental impacts of many of the commonly used formulations, including Phos-Chek, which I understand

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is used by the RFS. I'm wondering if there are any steps that have been taken to guard against these potential impacts on animals and the environment, and if that information has come across to you at the table.

ROB ROGERS: Certainly. We have on two occasions referred the fire retardant we use to the EPA and asked them to look at it and give us their views on whether it is safe to use. On both occasions they've said it is an appropriate product, but they reinforce what I guess was practice always—to try and avoid, as best we can, waterways. I think that comes back into the points that you made about, obviously, aquatic-type life being affected by it. There's no doubt that if you put—because it's based on a fertiliser, it'll change the content of water and it can promote things like algal bloom if you get it into waterways. We work pretty hard to try and keep it away from waterways. That's not always successful because, based on what the pilot thinks the wind's doing at the time it can change a little bit. We've had instances where it's fallen on homes, fire trucks and a number of things where it wasn't intended. I guess, in that sense, we can't absolutely guarantee it, but we certainly plan to keep it away from waterways just because of that specific known fact that it can adversely affect them.

The CHAIR: Are there ever any follow-ups or audits afterwards to see if there has been an impact like you mentioned where it has fallen on homes and things like that? Have there ever been any audits to check if there has been any falling into those waterways? Is there any action that can be taken if it has accidentally gone into those places?

ROB ROGERS: I'd probably have to check. Probably one of the best sources we'd have for that would be National Parks and Wildlife Service because obviously a number of fires occur in park. I'm happy to take that offline and see if we can find out if there are any records through National Parks about that and, if so, what was the impact. I'm happy to take that on notice if that's okay.

The CHAIR: Yes, definitely. I also have a question with regard to the RFS online disclosure log. It currently shows that there are no details of any GIPAA applications since February 2019, yet the annual report shows that there were more than 340 applications since that time. I'm wondering why there is that discrepancy and why the RFS hasn't necessarily updated its disclosure logs.

ROB ROGERS: Sorry, this is in GIPAA's in where, sorry?

The CHAIR: There are the online disclosure logs of the GIPAA applications and then there is the RFS annual report. They're showing different things.

ROB ROGERS: I'm not sure why there would be a discrepancy, to be honest. We regularly get GIPAA's.

The CHAIR: I might see if I can get someone to give you a copy of the disclosure log so that you can see what I'm talking about. That seems to be the latest disclosure log that I can find online.

ROB ROGERS: Yes, I agree. I don't know the answer but I'm happy to have it fixed.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

ROB ROGERS: It clearly seems to be a bit behind. With your indulgence, I'll have it fixed. I'm happy to give the numbers in a return on notice.

The CHAIR: I'm assuming the numbers in the annual report are correct?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: I also have a number of questions about the 2019-20 bushfires that have come from community members, linked to the back-burning operations. I'm happy for you to take any of these on notice if they're a bit detailed. You've previously stated in the media that out of the more than 1,000 back-burns during 2019-20, only 4 per cent escaped containment. Are you able to provide the date, location and the cause of escapes associated with those fires and each of those back-burn escapes identified?

ROB ROGERS: Certainly, I can do that. Some of those back-burns would be that something hops out, it escapes, brigades wrap it up and it doesn't do anything else. We'll go through the records and see what we can come back with.

The CHAIR: I'm happy for you to provide any of those details as well, if it was just a small escape that was put out immediately. That would be really useful.

ROB ROGERS: Certainly.

The CHAIR: The Stockyard Flat fire destroyed or damaged 40 buildings, and tragically there was a death in the Wallacia LGA. Can you confirm that none of the back-burn escapes contributed to those fires at all?

ROB ROGERS: I don't believe so, but let me check to be thorough.

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The CHAIR: I would appreciate if you could take that one on notice. The Stockyard Flat back-burns were also conducted a day before extreme fire conditions. I'm just wondering if you know if the approvals of those back-burns contravened any back-burning protocols in place at the time.

ROB ROGERS: Sorry, you're asking if the back-burn contravened what?

The CHAIR: The back-burn was conducted a day before extreme fire conditions.

ROB ROGERS: Do you mean a hazard reduction back-burn?

The CHAIR: It was the Stockyard Flat back-burn. There was a back-burn in that area that was conducted the day before there were extreme fire conditions. I'm not talking about the actual fire but a back-burn that occurred. Because it was a day before extreme fire conditions, I'm wondering if that was within the current protocols at the time.

ROB ROGERS: The policy that we've had since 2019-20 is, basically, where there is going to be an elevated risk, it gets looked at by a more senior officer to examine it, but it doesn't mean it doesn't occur. Often, there's also a weighing up of the risk of not doing the back-burn and what the fire will potentially do. It's never quite neat because it's based on what's the best risk. Obviously, with the benefit of hindsight, you can look back and say, "Well, maybe we could've done X, Y and Z", but we also have to look at what the person understood at that time. That's very much how we look at those things: What were the facts available to them at the time? But I'm happy to have a look at it for you just to make sure I'm being correct.

The CHAIR: Great. I'd appreciate that. I'll throw back to Mr O'Reilly. I just want to get an update on the response of the *Inspection of Six Youth Justice Centres (2022)* report. I know that report made 51 recommendations. I am wondering how many of those have been implemented.

PAUL O'REILLY: Sure. I just need to check that I have the right one because there have been a number of Inspector of Custodial Services reports. Bear with me, please, for a moment. All of the recommendations were supported, except for four which we were unable to support for operational reasons. We've been working through them. I don't have the list of recommendation by recommendation, but my recollection is that, of the ones that we supported, which is all except four, work was either completed or underway, and there were a couple that required more negotiation with other stakeholders—for example, Health—and we're working through those.

The CHAIR: On notice, if you don't have it in front of you, are you able to provide just a brief summary of what has been fully implemented?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we can do that for each recommendation.

The CHAIR: Do you know how much funding has been allocated to addressing those recommendations? Has there been specific allocation of funding to allow those recommendations?

PAUL O'REILLY: Their implementation was within existing resources.

The CHAIR: Within existing resources?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

The CHAIR: I understand that, obviously, some of the recommendations will take longer to implement. Others were really quite straightforward, such as ensuring young people are provided with new underwear or sanitary products. Are you confident that those more straightforward recommendations have now been implemented?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, and our policy has always been new clothing for every child every time. That has always been the policy. We have always had a process of spot-checking the admissions in each centre to make sure there is a supply of all sizes and we've never found an instance when there's not a supply, and we've not been able to identify why that recommendation appeared in the report. We've not been able to identify an instance where there was not new clothing provided, but somebody has formed a view that there is, and so we have increased our spot checks and still not found a case. We are confident that the policy is the right policy, but there may have been some kind of mix-up with the laundry, perhaps. I'm not sure. But our policy has always been new clothes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many children in youth detention have been formally assessed as having a disability?

PAUL O'REILLY: I don't have that number for you at the moment. Every child is screened, of course, and checked. Sometimes the process of diagnosis takes a long time. If they're with us for a day or two, we can't

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complete that process, but every single child is assessed. We know that the incidence of disability among our cohort of young people is high.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, so the standardised procedures would be every child that enters is screened and then, depending on how long they're there—

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, although the screening process is not always completed if they're only there for a day.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, okay. What proportion of children in detention have been identified as eligible for NDIS support or other supports?

PAUL O'REILLY: I can't tell you that because we don't determine eligibility for NDIS, but certainly part of our role is to help young people access NDIS assessments.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When you say you start the screening but you are unable to complete the screening, is there a follow-up mechanism in place so that that screening can be completed, or once they've left—

PAUL O'REILLY: There certainly can be. The Justice Health teams work with the local health district to pass that information on, but it's not always appropriate. There are times when a young person comes in in the evening with police, and the next morning they have a bail hearing and they're out. The health screening is really triage: Are you okay? Are there any immediate health issues we need to assess? And that's it. But where we're well into a process and there are indicators of need, we would certainly refer those to the local health district to follow up.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might follow on from the Hon. Emma Hurst's questions with regard to the Inspector of Custodial Services. It's once every three years. Is that right?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you think that's enough to ensure, say, proper oversight?

PAUL O'REILLY: It's not for me to judge, but what I would say is that there's a lot of oversight and it's really helpful. The inspector does that inspection of every centre every three years, but the inspector and her team visit the centres much more frequently than that. I encourage unannounced inspections. The Ombudsman's office also inspects the centres and attends the centres on a regular basis. We also encourage the Advocate for Children and Young People to visit the centres. We liaise with the Children's Guardian as well, who provides oversight of Working with Children Checks. We have also, in the past few years, established a broad range or a diverse range of other oversight mechanisms, including partnering with Legal Aid and the Aboriginal Legal Service to come in, see the centre, visit kids in the centre and inspect whatever part of the centre they want to see. If one of their clients is involved in an incident, we'll share the footage and show them the footage. We also include community members, Elders or other community leaders who are appropriate. They can also come in and provide oversight.

The Inspector of Custodial Services has a team of official visitors who provide visitation and individual opportunities for complaints with young people in addition to the inspector's visits—in addition to the unannounced visits. She then provides me with a report every few months on what those official visitors have found; how many of those complaints have been resolved on the spot with a local manager; how many need to be escalated; and how many have systemic or thematic opportunities for us to improve. So there are probably five or six angles of oversight. In addition to that, we absolutely encourage anybody who has a legitimate interest in the system to visit. Certainly, Minister Dib visits the centres regularly.

The CHAIR: I asked a moment ago about new underwear and the sanitary products, and you gave me an explanation around the new underwear. Was it the same case with the sanitary products? If it wasn't the same case, is that something that has been rectified?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, they are provided absolutely as needed, and there is no policy reason why they would not be available. There is no budgetary reason why they would not be available. There may be a case where somebody was unable to access those products when they needed to but, again, we've not been able to identify the incident to work out what the problem is. The system is run by our staff—people—and there will be days where there are mistakes made, but certainly there is no systemic issue here or budget issue that would mean we would lower the standard for provision of sanitary products or clothing, or access to health services or family contact. All of those things are very important rights that must be upheld no matter what the budget situation is. There's some kind of misunderstanding there, which we haven't been able to unpack.

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The CHAIR: I understand the Inspector of Custodial Services is required to inspect all New South Wales Youth Justice centres at least once every three years, and I believe the last inspection occurred in 2022. Does that mean we can expect the next round of inspections to occur later this year?

PAUL O'REILLY: I believe so, yes. That's really up to Ms Rafter but, yes, I believe so.

The CHAIR: I've just got a couple of questions for Mr Wells about Service NSW Business Connect, which I understand is one of the only State-funded portals providing support for small businesses in regional and rural New South Wales. I'm just wondering if this program has ongoing allocated funding or whether you're waiting to hear if there's going to be more funding in the next budget for that program to continue?

GREG WELLS: That is part of the budget process for this year, so it's being considered.

The CHAIR: What was that, sorry?

GREG WELLS: That is part of the budget process this year, so it will be considered then.

The CHAIR: Are there plans at the moment, or a push at least, to expand that program to be able to provide more sustainable and targeted support for regional or rural small businesses?

GREG WELLS: Based on the decisions of the budget process, I think what we'd like to do is look at the history of the industries that has been applied to and where that might best fit moving forward. As part of any extension, we would look at the fit of the program and whether that's something that could be adjusted moving forward. But, at the moment, it's still under consideration.

The CHAIR: Have there been any assessments of the program and how effective it's been in actually supporting small businesses in regional and rural New South Wales? And, if there have been assessments, can you give me a bit of detail?

GREG WELLS: Yes, there have. I haven't got the detail with me, but I'm happy to provide that on notice. Those assessments were provided by Treasury or in conjunction with Treasury, and they found it to be a very successful program. But I'd have to take that on notice as to the detail. I'm happy to provide that report to you, which is probably public as well.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We heard a lot after the last flood—the Lismore floods—about this Tell Your Story Once scenario, and there was some work done and some development there. I wonder if someone can update me on where we're at with that.

MAL LANYON: I would probably defer Tell Your Story Once across to Mr Wells, if that's all right, Greg.

GREG WELLS: Yes. That's a platform that we developed as a result of numerous disasters over the past couple of years. That was used in recovery centres, for example, where Service NSW staff were assisting the Reconstruction Authority to capture customers' details, to just make sure we could refer people to different services as they came into those centres. That's a platform that exists. It wasn't used specifically to onboard people into grants; that was a separate process. But it's a platform that exists within Service.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We might have to come back to that after smoko.

The CHAIR: We will now have an afternoon tea break.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back to budget estimates.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Mr Wells, can you keep telling your story once again, please? You mentioned, though, that it wasn't also then used for the grant application process.

GREG WELLS: We weren't directly using the TYSO solution to onboard people into grant applications at this point. It's an enhancement that we're looking to build on. What we did use the Tell Your Story Once program for—and obviously, by the name, it's meant to stop customers and people coming into recovery centres having to repeat their story and re-traumatise them and so forth—was to manage consent about how we share information across agencies. We have used the platform now I think for the last year and a half or so in Eugowra, Wollongong, Port Stephens and again recently on the North Coast. We have used that to capture some basic information so that if we are making referrals to mental health services or other things like that, we can construct care plans for customers who are coming into recovery centres or outreach events. So we can just make it a simpler process for

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everyone. We have a road map for the product, including to integrate it with the grants product, so that's where it's up to at the moment.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'll use your example there—referral to mental health support. So the mental health support workers will be able to login to something and see that person's profile?

GREG WELLS: That's the goal of where we want to get to. For the moment, the people who have access to that system are the Reconstruction Authority, Service NSW—obviously—and parts of Communities and Justice. But the ultimate goal is obviously to use it exactly as you've said.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How wide do you think we can spread that sharing? There are a number of different agencies and NGOs that play a similar role in disasters. How tight are we wanting to keep that, or who do we think we can tap into?

GREG WELLS: Obviously, under the right conditions, we could look to share that information, with customers' consent, more broadly. Our focus, for the moment, are the government agencies that might need access to it or that could help customers in those scenarios.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You said you use it in Eugowra. Let's say—heaven forbid—they have another event, do people rock up at the service centre and say, "I'm Scott Barrett. This has happened"? Can you plug that in, or do I need evidence? How do we work that?

GREG WELLS: At the moment it would be used as a prompt. It might be something you search, first of all, if a customer re-presents or if there's another event that occurs. But, yes, that's right—exactly.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Mr O'Reilly, the program in Orange under the protection and parental responsibility Act, to my understanding, allows police in Orange council, unlike in other councils, to take potential offenders—do we call them that?—back to a residence?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, children who are obviously young and don't appear to be in a safe place in the community. They may or may not be potential offenders. But, yes, that's a program that's operational in Orange. It expires in June this year. I believe the Attorney General is undertaking some consultation at the moment about the extension of that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is there a consensus that this is working, that this is a good diversionary program? I'm imagining picking up a 14-year-old kid and taking them to a home would be better than taking them to the police station.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. I think there is some consensus. I have not consulted, myself, in Orange, but I have taken advice from the local DCJ team, who are supportive of it. Council is supportive of it, and I believe police are supportive of it. It is about exactly that: returning children to their home rather than to the police station. That is the intention, and it seems to be having some positive effect. But I have not seen detailed evaluation.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You wouldn't be aware of how we've ended up with Orange being the only jurisdiction that has that?

PAUL O'REILLY: No, I don't know.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: To me, it seems like a great program that we could look to expand.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I will direct my questions to you, Mr Head, about the agency financial statements. Can you detail what specific services will be impacted by the department's \$287 million reduction in total expenditure from \$3.04 billion, which was revised down from 2023-24 to what it is now in 2024-25 at \$2.76 billion? That is on page 5-1.

GRAEME HEAD: That's not something that I could just answer in the hearing. DCS includes both those functions that are responsible to Minister Dib, as well as functions that are responsible for other Ministers. It's an organisation of almost 13,000 people, so it has myriad programs. We would need to give you a general sense, on notice, of some of those adjustments, some of which have been discussed in previous hearings.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What programs are being scaled back or discontinued as a result of the \$440 million reduction in grants and subsidies? Is that in the same basket?

GRAEME HEAD: I'll take it on notice, but the Minister answered this morning that a number of grants initiatives, which were point-in-time support programs for natural disasters et cetera, of course finished, so we would need to give you a sense of some of those initiatives on notice. Any of those very detailed things, when the question is so broad, I'll need to take on notice.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Sorry. On that, does the department do any impact analysis on how cuts to programs or changes to programs affect regional communities?

GRAEME HEAD: I think the department is very disciplined, in my experience, in assessing what any adjustment—both an enhancement or a change in the level of funding—does for the communities that access different services and programs. Of course, it's different depending on which functional area you're talking about and the nature of the program, whether it's a direct, customer-facing program or a regulatory process—remembering that DCS houses multiple regulators, as well as Service, as well as Revenue, as well as Digital NSW.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Customer wait times—if I go to Service NSW, is there an impact on whether wait times will be increased?

GRAEME HEAD: Service monitors a range of parameters around customer experience, including waiting times. Mr Wells will be able to give you a bit more of a specific answer on that, if you would like.

GREG WELLS: Across our three main channels—in the centre, over the phone and our digital channels—we do monitor that all the time. We're keeping a very close eye on those things. If it's in relation to the programs that we talked about this morning, if they're one-off programs, like COVID support programs, they probably wouldn't have an impact on wait times and those sorts of customer service and delivery mechanisms.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With employee-related expenses increasing by \$72.9 million, what roles or areas are being prioritised for staffing in contrast to overall cuts? That's at 5-2.

GRAEME HEAD: Again, given the breadth of the portfolio and different ministerial accountabilities, we'll need to unpack that for you and do that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'm not sure who is best to answer this question, but it's about the funding for our NGOs, both in the disaster recovery space and the youth justice space. We've touched on Resilient Lismore. In places like Lake Cargelligo, you've got Down the Track that are doing a great job as far as reducing crime and increasing engagement with school. One of the constant areas of feedback that I get is these people are often hampered or restricted a little bit in this constant reliance on short-term funding. How can we see a shift to some more longer term, secure funding so these organisations can continue to play that role? I'm not sure who's best to answer that question. It's probably across a few different spaces.

MAL LANYON: I'm happy to start, if you like, Mr Barrett, and then we can work around. Certainly, in terms of disaster recovery and disaster arrangements, by the very nature of it, unfortunately, the DRFA is program funded, so funding for NGOs and other agencies to provide a service is generally tied to a program. That is the way it's resourced. That's the way we're funded. That's the way that we provide for the purpose of delivering a program. We're very much in conversations with the Commonwealth at the moment about what disaster funding needs to look like going forward. I think probably the way we do it at the moment, we've found, is inefficient, but we're finding that out more and more probably over the last three to four years because of the nature and the recurring nature of disasters as well. I think all parts of the sector are looking at better ways to fund. We would like to give certainty to NGOs because they play such a pivotal role in supporting the community. They really are the backbone when we're looking to deliver services to the community. The NGOs play a remarkable role at this stage, but the funding arrangements really lead to the fact that it has to be program funded.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Specifically, with disaster recovery, though, it's so much more efficient to have an organisation already standing before an event than to try and build one up after the event.

MAL LANYON: There are a number of programs that we would work through with NGOs as part of the preparedness function. We would very much work with agencies to make sure they are in the space with community long before there's a disaster. That's our preference. Obviously, preparedness is much better than doing recovery. We are looking at how that is at this stage. But, as I've indicated, a lot of that work has to be program funded by virtue of the way that the arrangements work at the moment.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: In relation to DCJ, we're in the process of transitioning to five-year contracts for our NGOs. As I've said, that's a process of transition. It's consistent with an election commitment of Government. In terms of specific programs and some of those being subject to availability of funding, if there are specific NGOs that are at the heart of your inquiry, I'd be happy to take that on notice or for you to direct approach for me to follow that up.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What about the accountability for that funding? I might come back to you later with some specific programs. But, more broadly, how are we accounting the funding that is going to these organisations? I mentioned one that I think is doing a good job, but how do we measure their effectiveness?

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MICHAEL TIDBALL: The commissioning and the contracting arrangements are rigorous. That is an integral part of the work that is being done as we move to our five-year funding arrangements.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Have we got any insight into the impact or the benefits of our other less formal assistance organisations? I'm thinking of the soccer club, the footy club, the bridge club or the dance club. Does anyone care to comment on what positive impact they have in a community when it comes to entertaining our youth and diversion programs?

PAUL O'REILLY: My view is they have an enormous value and that is a consensus view. I think our commissioning models don't take that into account very effectively. What we are doing more consistently now, and particularly in Youth Justice—we have converted our Youth on Track programs to five-year contracts quite recently. The Minister mentioned this morning that he secured recurrent funding for those programs for the first time last year. We've done community-based procurement in each location. We formed selection panels for that recruitment, for that procurement in the community, with community leaders and members making the decisions about who's best suited to be funded in that community. That's good because they are aware of what the soccer club or the Rotary or whoever else—they can actually work out how you can value-add. We're also encouraging more consortium bids. An Aboriginal medical centre service and another NGO might partner up, for example, in a community to provide more collective impact. They bring in direct contact with other services and investment in the community.

I think the only way to capture what you're talking about is to have a place-based approach where you can get local people who could actually tell you what those services are providing, how effective they are, their standing in the community, and whether there are any risks or concerns. It's difficult and probably not possible in the centre of government to have a commissioning model that can really measure and confidently explain how effective those community groups are if we're not directly contracting them. I don't think you can have that view. Local place-based planning is probably the most effective way.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You mentioned the soccer club, but it could be a dance club or a crochet club or whatever that is. Are there resources out there to help them deal with some of these—and I'm trying to think of the correct terms—troubled youth that they might be able to help with that diversion?

PAUL O'REILLY: There are grant programs available, but we could always use more. That is absolutely the case. We could use more.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'm also thinking of education for these groups, whether it's the third-grade captain of the cricket club that's got a 14-year-old kid that's playing cricket on a Saturday afternoon rather than running around town. Are there things that they can lean on to help educate them?

PAUL O'REILLY: In some communities there are NGOs who lead that sort of capacity building in the community, so that the social capacity and social capital grows in a community. Some organisations—that is their role to do that. We don't necessarily fund them. In some communities there is a lot of philanthropic funding going into towns as well to drive that capacity building in a community. But, again, it's very local, very place based and difficult to coordinate and then account for centrally.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'm going to go to Commissioner Wassing and Commissioner Rogers with a question you've probably both got about 500 times. I'll put it to Commissioner Rogers, because hopefully this is the last time that you have to answer this question. Particularly with our smaller communities, how can we closer align the training and requirements for RFS with SES so those two organisations aren't competing for the same small pool of volunteers?

ROB ROGERS: Whilst I'll try and get specifically to your question, there are certainly some issues in smaller rural communities in New South Wales and that is the reduction in population, the reduction in family farms and the change in demographics in those more rural areas of New South Wales. I think that puts pressure on those communities. We've seen in some instances where that does become a bit of a competition for people's time. There's some work that is being done at the moment in the rescue space, where it's looking at potential multi-agency roles certainly in rural parts of New South Wales where, rather than necessarily you have to join a particular organisation, you can still be in your own uniform but you can still hop on another agency's vehicle to help them do whatever work it is they're doing. I think there's a future for that. If this works out in the rescue space, then I think there's opportunity for us to consider that particularly with RFS and SES with the volunteer nature.

But, even with retained fire brigades with Fire and Rescue, often they're working on fires together and they do so and the training is complementary. That will bring with it the necessity then to look at trying to align where we can. Certainly the basic public safety modules, keeping people safe and keeping yourself safe, those sorts of things—I'd be very surprised if we couldn't make them more aligned because they are based on similar national

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modules. I think there is opportunity to do better there. Following, as I say, the rescue space, I think that will pave the way for more of those sort of innovative solutions, particularly as communities can't afford to lose one of those services. If you can have community members supporting both without doubling the training, then that's certainly something we should be aiming for.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Did you want to add to that, Commissioner?

MIKE WASSING: I support everything that Commissioner Rogers has just indicated, including the current program about how do you better share resources, particularly in the rural communities. I think there's a range of shared benefits. We're always exercising together wherever we can. We're training together wherever we can. I'm certainly aware that a lot of our training standards now are commensurate, so if you're trained in SES, you don't have to redo that in rural fire and the like. There's a lot of those interoperable integration-type things that are simplistic but practical in that regard.

We do have a State steering committee that is starting to drive those initiatives also and having that focus. Certainly from a State Emergency Service perspective, post the 2022 floods, one of the recommendations was to look at spontaneous volunteering. We've built that program now. Whilst it's a specific program to SES, we're looking at really sharing that. For me personally, as the new commissioner to the State, the volunteering aspect is changing. In some cases, it's decreasing, as we spoke about this morning. In other cases, it's just a changing aspect, changing with societal expectations.

Having this flexible model that is from informal volunteering, like spontaneous volunteering or the local footy club or the local cricket club, right through to highly specialised—what I would describe as the unpaid professionals of our organisation that are highly skilled, highly professionalised subject matter experts—and having that continuum where people can move up and down, irrespective of the agencies, we'll continue to work at that I think. Even right down to membership and interoperability, there are certainly cases where we've got a capability we've transferred to one of the other agencies, either Fire and Rescue or rural fire, because we've gone back to some of our core components in terms of flood and storm. Where we might've done other accredited rescue operations, we've shared that with another agency as well.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good afternoon, again. I'm flagging that my questions are going to be SIRA related so perhaps we will get Ms Young back up.

GRAEME HEAD: I can handle anything that relates to the SIRA inquiry and Ms Young can handle all the rest.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: This is going to be data heavy, I think, so we'll see how we go. I want to circle back on the questions from earlier in relation to the suicide data to check if you had anything you were able to give me now.

MANDY YOUNG: It's, as everything, not straightforward. We do have five reported incidents from icare for that period for which they were required to report. Just to clarify, that was up until May 2024, not January. That was my error this morning. Those were particularly in relation to those around the transitional arrangements for the 2012 changes. Those changes were that there was a reduction in the number of weeks people could be paid weekly benefits, and there was a recognition there was a potential high risk that people had become reliant on those and potentially that may impact their mental health. In that space there were five reported incidents of that from SIRA. We don't have any from any other insurers.

What I would also say is that we've got 59 suspected deaths by suicide since 2014. It's based on the number of self-harm claims coming into the system and the associated date of death, so it's not been an exact science. One of the things that we're doing to deal with this is developing a new reporting platform so that we can capture this better, because it isn't an exact science at this point. We're working through what do we do and we're working with icare on what could that look like as well for the other insurers.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Those questions on notice that got returned to me from icare, which talk about the 50 suicides in five years from, I think, 2020 to 2024, were they all people who had already made a claim and were in the system and had then suicided?

MANDY YOUNG: I think you'd have to ask icare for the detail on those, and we can come back to you on notice. But from the data that I have, it's more likely that they have made a claim and then had a death resulting in suicide relating to that claim earlier. So it may not be that—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But we're talking about 50 people?

MANDY YOUNG: There's 59, but that's the whole scheme, not just icare.

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Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Right, so 59 individuals who have suicided while they are in the workers compensation scheme—

MANDY YOUNG: They may have suicided whilst they were in the scheme or the suicide may be why they are in the scheme, so they're relative.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I guess that's what I'm trying to tease out.

MANDY YOUNG: So that's the bit that is unclear for us and what we want to work through in terms of developing a platform and a proper reporting regime.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That's really important. I'm sure you're aware that in 2020 there was quite a lot of talk about this and, anecdotally, we hear a lot of people coming in.

MANDY YOUNG: The other piece I would add about that is that our research team at the moment is just working through a scope of work. This is something that the Minister and I have discussed with some stakeholders as well—being a big issue for thinking about how being on workers compensation may impact on mental health, particularly with low return to work rates. We're scoping at the moment a piece of research to understand that better. There's been previous research done, but it's quite old so we're actually looking to go to market to do another set of research to see if we can get some more information on what are the impacts, and that would include suicide.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: These latest proposed reforms to the workers compensation system, particularly in relation to the limitations on psychological injury claims, when was SIRA first involved in the development of that piece of work?

MANDY YOUNG: The Treasurer is leading that piece of work, and I think anything that comes from that is best directed to the Treasurer. We have worked with Treasury and with our DCS colleagues to provide advice through that process.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What date did that begin?

MANDY YOUNG: It's hard to give you a start date because coming into SIRA, and I think previous even to me being in SIRA, we're always consistently thinking about what are the reforms that are taking place or that might need to be done. There's been a significant amount of inquiries, as you know. There's been constant conversations about what potential reforms could be.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sure, but in terms of a reform like that, where you've got at least three different Ministers involved—the Treasurer, the IR Minister and you've got Minister Dib—and you've also got SIRA, icare, and potentially SafeWork, presumably there was a working group established or something similar in relation to these reforms?

MANDY YOUNG: There's a working group that's been established now. I think the bulk of that work had started late last year but I'd have to come back to you on what date.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: All right. That's useful. In relation to that, one of the things that we asked icare for, which is actually a bit delayed—we've got the Nominal Insurer liability valuation from the end of December 2023. Normally the 30 June 2024 figures would have been published and that report would have been made available, but I haven't seen it yet so I believe that's delayed. Then there would also be the numbers from 31 December 2024. Even though they've not been published, presumably they've been delivered to SIRA?

MANDY YOUNG: We work with them on what they might be. I think it's a matter for icare in terms of what would be published.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But have they delivered to you their Nominal Insurer liability valuation as of 31 December 2023?

MANDY YOUNG: We've seen some draft numbers but, as I understand it, there's still work to be done on finalising some of those.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Even though it's four months in?

MANDY YOUNG: Not for December but they're constantly doing that and we're constantly having conversations around viability.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But obviously we have a reform on foot, which is pretty reliant on a lot of those numbers in terms of justifying its validity. I guess it is a question for icare, but at what point are we going to see it? Presumably you have seen it so that you can make some decisions on the back of it?

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MANDY YOUNG: Yes, we have seen it and it's a matter for icare to publish.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are you able to tell us how many psychological injuries exceed the 15 per cent WPI threshold currently, if you've got a 2024 figure?

MANDY YOUNG: I don't have that data on me, no.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are you aware that in the 2023 workers compensation system statutory review done by the Standing Committee on Law and Justice, there was a recommendation to lower the WPI level for psychological injury. That was recommendation 16, I believe. That was supported in principle by the Government in relation to effectively putting a consistent threshold for whole person impairment, regardless of whether the injury is physical or psychological. But what's now presumably or apparently being suggested, on the limited information we have, is a 30 per cent threshold for psychological injury. Do you have any insight into why that might be? Were you asked to do modelling around different levels of threshold?

MANDY YOUNG: I think that's a matter for the Government in its current reforms. I'm aware of the recommendation, and the Government will need to consider that through its reform process.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I appreciate that, but in terms of what SIRA has been doing as part of this process, did you model different thresholds for the Treasurer?

MANDY YOUNG: We've done a range of work in this space to provide that advice. But in terms of specific modelling on that, no, we haven't.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: When we look at the drivers of premium increase in the last one that we have, the Nominal Insurer liability valuation as at 31 December, there were a range of things that were seen to be the drivers of the change in premium levels, and not one of them was psychological injury. There were things like inflation, which obviously was a big factor from 2021 onwards, higher interest rates, and then they talk about an increase in expected ultimate number of high whole person impairment claims with physical injuries et cetera. In terms of the 2024 drivers for premium increase or pressures, keeping in mind that we have not seen it but you have, are you able to give us any insight into what they look like?

MANDY YOUNG: The premiums are set by icare and they're in the premium-setting process at the moment, so I think it would be premature for me to comment on that because I haven't seen them. SIRA's role in premiums is that we can either accept or reject a premium that may be set. Because they haven't given us those premiums, I think it would be hard for me to answer that at this point.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand how the setting of the premiums works, or at least I feel I understand it on paper. But when we talk about SIRA signing off on the proposed premiums from icare, to what extent will you take into consideration the factors that are leading to things like inflation and other things? Presumably you will interrogate that data to ensure that whatever icare is saying to you is correct.

MANDY YOUNG: Yes, that is correct. We interrogate that data and then we get an independent actuarial analysis of that from the scheme.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That's comforting, because when I look at the figures over the last five or six years—and I won't be tabling it because it's on your website under SIRA open data. If anyone doesn't have it and wants to see it, they can google it. It's got the system affordability, and it talks about the affordability of insurance as a percentage of New South Wales wages for 2023-24. It was 1.5 per cent, and then it's got a very handy table from 2014 showing that the premium as a percentage of wages has been stable at around that—between 1.2 per cent and 1.5 per cent—and has actually come down in the last couple of years. There's been a lot made about premiums going up or skyrocketing in the Nominal Insurer. But your own data shows, doesn't it, that as a percentage of wages it's completely stable.

MANDY YOUNG: I think that there are some settings which may influence that—for example, the Government putting in a direction that premiums couldn't be increased more than 8 per cent over a three-year period. That, I think, would mean that there is potentially a stabilisation because of some of the direction that has been in place. But whether that is equal to the viability of the Nominal Insurer in the way that they set the premiums is probably a different question.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'm glad you mentioned that 8 per cent announcement from the IR Minister because this is the bit that I struggle to understand in the premium setting. I understand that SIRA approves what the icare board puts to it in terms of premiums unless the Minister steps in to override. It's under the Act that there can be a direction given. The Minister for Work Health and Safety in that capacity, on 24 April 2023, set that 8 per cent limit for the next three years, which wouldn't end until the end of June 2026. What does that mean, then, in terms of restricting icare's ability to suggest premiums?

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MANDY YOUNG: Again, I think there's some clarification there that the Minister for Industrial Relations has set that and she has responsibility for icare. That is the direction that she has given. SIRA can reject a premium, but we don't actually approve a premium. We interrogate it to see that it makes sense, so to speak, and we can reject that or we can not reject that. So it's not an approval process, per se.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But if the Minister said it can't go above 8 per cent and has set that until the end of 2026, then presumably icare can't now put a 30 per cent increase on premiums in the Nominal Insurer for the next year.

MANDY YOUNG: I would say that is correct in terms of the direction, but that's, again, a matter for the Minister and for icare.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So the Minister would have to issue a new direction, presumably, to say—

MANDY YOUNG: To change that for that period.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: To change that for that period. But as things stand, there can be no large increase in premiums above 8 per cent for the next financial year.

MANDY YOUNG: No.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you for confirming that. Could I go back to the excellent report that SIRA wrote into the Treasury Managed Fund. This is the report that was published at the end of last year, but it actually has April 2024 on it. Curiously, on your website it doesn't have a draft mark on it, but when you print it, it says "draft" on it. It's really strange. I presume that is the final version.

MANDY YOUNG: That is the final report, and I will check why that happens.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: In amongst here, it was very interesting to read how much the TMF agencies are perhaps not managing their own claims in an optimal fashion. Could you talk us through some of the major recommendations out of this report and, in particular, what the Government itself could be doing to reduce the rates of psychological injury?

MANDY YOUNG: In terms of what the Government itself is doing, they have been working on a return to work strategy more broadly, for whole of government, that we have been supporting them with. Really, what came out of that review is a lot of work around—yes, they particularly have industries where there is a high amount of workers compensation claims because of the nature of the industry, so emergency services and care services and those sorts of things. We've been involved in that work around the whole-of-government response, and we've been really working with them on what that could be. Some of that has been about some of the best practice framework that they could put in place. We're doing some work with them on a claims management review to understand where the tensions are within the claims, to get a better idea of that, which has followed from the TMF review.

We are developing some tailored vocational support programs, so thinking about other ways that we can get people back into the workforce. And then we're doing some work with icare, specifically, focusing on their supervision over the next 12 months. From a SIRA point of view, we're really working through what are the things that we can do to help them in terms of that piece of work. One of the things that we are doing in terms of that icare supervision, both for the Nominal Insurer and for the TMF, is being quite strategic about how we do that over the next 12 months and quite clear about the things that we're going to look at and what that means. The work that's being done in the whole-of-government strategy, which is a matter for the Government in terms of how they do that piece of work, will continue and we'll continue to support that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: People have told me that they can have problems within the claims management within TMF where they feel their claim is being mishandled or has created an extra level of stress or traumatisation for them, or that they feel that they could have more easily been returned to work but, because of the claims process, they weren't. If they then make a complaint about that to SIRA, does SIRA have limited ability to do anything about it versus if they were in the Nominal Insurer? Is that correct?

MANDY YOUNG: There isn't a difference in terms of what we would have to do about that. But for an individual matter, we would be suggesting that they make that complaint to the IRO, because SIRA works more on systemic issues, whereas the IRO works on the individual matters. If they can make the complaint to the IRO then they can be supported through that complaint process. If there is a systemic issue with that, we will then look at that more broadly.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: The changes that you talked about that appear in this report that have been recommended, presumably they'll take some time to filter through. Would you view it as premature to make

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changes to the scheme in terms of what you can and can't claim for in the context of your excellent recommendations not having yet been implemented?

MANDY YOUNG: The TMF is one part of a bigger system. When we look at what's been recommended in that, it's all really about best practice and what can be done better. They represent 8 per cent of workers covered by workers compensation insurance, which is actually quite small in the scheme of things. I think there's some thinking for us systemically about what does that mean and what does that look like.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But yet 48 per cent, isn't it, of psychological claims?

MANDY YOUNG: Of psychological claims, yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So 8 per cent of the scheme as a whole is within the public sector and yet 48 per cent of the scheme is liabilities for psychological injury. So it's not really fair to say that psychological injuries within the small businesses or private sector are contributing to a great degree to psychological injuries in the scheme as a whole, correct?

MANDY YOUNG: Can I ask you to clarify the question?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes. It was said in a very convoluted way. Some people have been saying about this proposed reform that it's about people working in small businesses or in the business sector and saying that there are too many psychological claims there, and there have been some suggestions made that it's young people or something taking the mickey. But when you look at the TMF report that SIRA has written, it's very clear that 48 per cent of psychological injuries are within the public sector, and that's a disproportionate burden for just 8 per cent of the employees. Would you perhaps view that focus on the Nominal Insurer when it comes to psychological injury as being misplaced?

MANDY YOUNG: I think it's a matter for the Government to consider in whatever reform they might want to take on and whatever that might look like. Forty-eight per cent is still half of the system, so there's still the other half of the system that sits in that space. The matters for psychological injury are equally not doing so great for the private sector. So the reform should consider all of those things in however that might come about.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might follow on from my colleague Mr Barrett with regard to community-based programs. What proportion of the Youth Justice budget is allocated to funding community-based programs for at-risk youth?

PAUL O'REILLY: I can give you the figures and we can calculate the proportion. The budget is around \$300 million a year and we invest around \$70 million a year in community and NGO-funded services.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On notice, would you be able to provide a list of the community organisations receiving the government funding? What percentage of those are Aboriginal-led organisations? You can take that on notice.

PAUL O'REILLY: I can give you a list of the programs and the amount, but to give you a list of the individual providers—that is a very long list, which will take more time. Should we take it on notice?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes. That's why I said take it on notice.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's a long list.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On evaluations, do you require third-party evaluations or is it not compulsory as part of the funding?

PAUL O'REILLY: Certainly, there's ongoing contract monitoring, which is done between our staff and the provider. In some cases there might be a local governance group, which might include community members who assist with monitoring. Program evaluation itself is led by the department. It might be led by an internal department evaluation team or it might be contracted to a university. In previous years it was contracted to consultants, but these days it is much more likely to be the department and the university.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I've seen the University of New England do a report on BackTrack.

PAUL O'REILLY: We don't fund BackTrack, but yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I was trying to say those kinds of things. When you're doing this monitoring, how do you measure the effectiveness? Is it the recidivism?

PAUL O'REILLY: It depends on the program, but some of our diversion programs are targeting young people who are in contact with the police or are at risk of being in contact with the police. A straight recidivism measurement is not helpful, because recidivism is measured by contact with the courts or justice system and then

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repeated contact. We measure things like participation, attendance and access to education and employment, and we work with the young people and their families to identify other measures that will demonstrate an improvement and a return on the investment. We're trying to reduce expenditure on the tertiary end of the system and we're trying to reduce expenditure in other systems, like education and health. So a reduction in the need for those other services are other important measures.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Does the department publish the findings at all?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. All department evaluations are published.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are you able to say—again, on notice—what programs have been effective at reducing youth reoffending?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. We'll give that to you on notice. There are a lot of complex assumptions in that answer. For example, effectiveness can be difficult to measure if it's a small sample size, and young offenders is a small sample size, particularly if it's place based. It's difficult to get a meaningful effect size in a randomised control trial, for example, when you only have a couple of hundred people. Secondly, the long history of year-to-year funding has a significant impact on service delivery and effectiveness because of staff instability. They are really important considerations when you review our answer on notice about effectiveness.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is there a formal mechanism existing between the Youth Justice, police, corrections, housing, Aboriginal Affairs and family violence agencies?

PAUL O'REILLY: We have formal MOUs with most of those agencies for various purposes. MOUs are specific to particular functions or activities, but for most of those we have MOUs.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is there a whole-of-government Cabinet committee dedicated to youth justice reform?

PAUL O'REILLY: I can't really talk about Cabinet, not being in it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Sorry.

PAUL O'REILLY: But there are certainly inter-agency meetings that occur on a regular basis in relation to making sure that we de-silo the response, if that makes sense, and have a more joined-up approach. Sometimes that's coordinated by the central government agencies

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Does the department advise the Premier, the Attorney General or the police Minister on youth justice issues at all? I'd understand you providing briefings to the Minister.

PAUL O'REILLY: From time to time we provide briefings to the Premier, the Attorney General or other Ministers, as required. Yes, we do.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I will turn to the People Matter survey. I understand it's across—

PAUL O'REILLY: The public sector.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I've tried to drill down as much as I can. What has the department done in response to the 36 per cent of staff who feel burned out by their work, particularly in high-stress environments such as Youth Justice centres?

PAUL O'REILLY: Burnout is a relatively new measure in the PMES, so we are still trying to interpret it. But certainly, on face value, it's an indication that people need more support in their job. It depends on the job and location and the support needs. One of the things we do is make sure that we undertake our own surveys, in addition to the PMES, to make sure we understand what is happening for people. Because the PMES, being a sector-wide survey, it doesn't really give us a lot of detail. But we can drill down on, for example, psychological wellbeing in a much more targeted way if we do our own surveys. We task our directors and managers with inquiring with their local staff on matters that are causing stress or burnout. The kinds of themes we uncover are increases in workload, and increases in the complexity of clients that we are working with and the risk that comes with that. There are also tensions in workforces in relation to racism and, sometimes, allegations of harassment and bullying. We take a very proactive approach to addressing those issues, but they are complex issues with a deep history that take a long time to resolve.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I've got several other questions. So 54 per cent of staff are satisfied with current practices. Has any targeted support been put in place for frontline staff?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we provide a lot of support for frontline staff. There is a standard employee assistance program, of course, but some people don't use that service so we definitely have wellbeing activities in all of our work locations. We have a peer support program where staff are identified as peer supports for their

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colleagues, and we work closely with particularly vulnerable staffing groups in the organisation to provide very specific supports. For example, we have a lot of Aboriginal consultation structures in the organisation because Aboriginal staff in particular experience significant racism at work and in the community, and in relation to the overlap between being at work and being in their community. Supports for those people are very intense and with some success, I think, but it's clear that it remains an issue for those staff.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I will supplement that to say that in response to the 2024 results, we have developed a three-year plan, which as of this month is being implemented. We're not looking at a single year; we're looking at three years. The key organisation-wide areas that we're focusing on are supporting employee wellbeing and addressing burnout, which is highly relevant to DCJ given the service systems and the nature of the work we do; as Mr O'Reilly has said, eliminating racism in DCJ, which is a particular challenge for the agency; and, thirdly and importantly, improving how change is managed across the organisation.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Just on that, how many staff have completed training related to cultural safety or First Nations engagement?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I would be happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Mr Lanyon, I'd like to give you the opportunity to talk about what our learnings have been in relation to damage assessments after an event, particularly for small businesses. I could come to you with stories of people that have told me they didn't go through with grants and that sort of thing because of the administrative burden that came with it. Acknowledging that these are anecdotes, the issue remains that this can be a clunky process. I wonder what we've done or what we are doing to improve this process.

MAL LANYON: Thank you for the question. Quite a lot, and I'd say probably there has been the chance to exercise our recovery arrangements on a considerable number of occasions, unfortunately, over the past 12 months. In terms of damage assessments, initially we work very closely with the SES. If I just talk about flood impacts at the moment—obviously it's different with bushfires—it's really about working very closely with combat agencies to get a real initial assessment of what impacts there may be. We're actually developing a data analytics system within the RA so that we get a better picture of where impacts may have occurred with small business.

We've spoken a fair bit today about disaster funding arrangements, the Commonwealth guidelines and how they work with the State. Small businesses and other businesses, in terms of those that are impacted by a disaster, are largely unable to get any benefit unless there is a direct impact to the business itself; generally, it's impacted by floodwater or it's impacted by fire. If it's for a loss of trade, that doesn't fit the traditional arrangements within those disaster funding arrangements. We are working with the Commonwealth in terms of small business packages that actually provide some support, particularly when circumstances arise.

As we've seen recently with Tropical Cyclone Alfred, there were a number of small businesses that had to be evacuated. Areas were subject to a formal evacuation order by the SES, therefore there was food spoilage or there was a loss of business resultant from that. We also know that a number of businesses were without power for several days so there was again food spoilage and that type of loss. It's about working to understand those, then working within the guidelines to put submissions before government to provide support for small businesses.

One of the challenges as well is really getting an understanding right across the community about the purpose of the disaster funding arrangements. Unfortunately, it's not a compensation scheme. It's really about saying, "How do we best provide support?" We understand times are tough for small business, but to do that within funding arrangements—I think it's really that businesses that are directly impacted obviously fall within it. The standard suite of offerings within funding arrangements are more for loans and those types of things. It's really how we provide a grant that can support as well—but again, it's got to be within guidelines. So we work closely with businesses.

Alfred's probably a really good example to give. We've had a regional recovery committee, we've had functional areas and we've had parts of that recovery committee that have focused on business and small business to really get an understanding of what the impacts are. Similarly with primary producers, we've very much worked closely with them and worked with DPIRD to get a better understanding of impacts so that we can at least identify what support may be required, provide support in the first instance and then look, with government, at whether there's any other support that can be provided.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You mentioned the primary producers there. At the moment, my understanding is we still don't have category C funding for the primary producers affected up there but they have been asked to fill out a survey. Surely there's a better process we can come up with than asking people that have just been through this event to fill out a survey to demonstrate that they've been affected.

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MAL LANYON: I think that's one form—when I said before about developing data analytics, it's so that we can actually assist that process as well. To actually make an application for a C or a D requires a letter from the Premier to the Prime Minister seeking assistance. The Commonwealth do require a level of evidence from the State as to what the actual impacts are when they're considering a package. The survey is but one way. It has historically been the main way that we have done it, but we're actually more proactively going out speaking to—I can tell you from Tropical Cyclone Alfred, the recovery coordinator has personally met with farming associations and those types of things to get a better picture. We are really working to speed up the process and get a better idea of impact and what sort of tailored support can be provided.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I know Ms Higginson has asked about the buybacks and the demolition of houses. My question has got a very different motive, so to save conflating them I will ask specifically for the Central West. What kind of time frame are we expecting from when an offer has been accepted on a buyback home until that home is demolished?

MAL LANYON: I can refer this to Ms Leck for a question, as she runs the program. But what I can say is it will vary depending on the availability of contractors to do that, whether any other permit is required to work that through and whether there may be contaminated materials in a home. That will definitely determine how long it will take for that to occur. If you'd like further details, we absolutely can provide that either on notice or I can ask Ms Leck to come forward and talk about that process. She would have a better understanding of the timetable.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can I say on notice, depending how quickly we get through this next question of mine? You said you were working with Cabonne Council on trying to look for a different grant funding to expand the areas where they could build homes, which I'm sure they appreciate. By the same token, do you think there are any logs that you could suggest Parkes council could look in to have their water pipes fixed from Lake Endeavour?

MAL LANYON: We have been working closely with those, obviously with the previous Ministers I had within this portfolio and Minister Saffin, who's there now. We're absolutely working on that. We understand the traditional way that we would look to get that fixed. We have spoken before about the disaster funding arrangements, and because they are rateable assets, they're not, so we are looking at alternatives with the Government.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How close are we getting, then—moving away from that specific issue—to seeing maybe a change of the disaster funding arrangements that might incorporate some of this critical infrastructure?

MAL LANYON: There has just been a review at a Commonwealth level called the Colvin review. The Colvin review suggests a number of changes to the way that Commonwealth funding is positioned. We spoke before about adaptation, mitigation, resilience—some of that front-end funding—and he very much puts a view onto that. But he goes away from some of the categories of funding we have at the moment and he recommends things like short, medium and long term, which obviously, as a recovery agency, is very suitable for us because that's the way recovery occurs. Unfortunately there is a Federal election at the moment, which will pause some of that work with development. But the States have already, and certainly from New South Wales, I've written to my counterpart at NEMA to say the State wants to be very much involved in what the recommendation of that review looks like as part of a model going forward, because we understand the importance of it to the State and to our people.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So it could still be some time before we see?

MAL LANYON: I'd say it will be, absolutely.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Wassing, we talked earlier about the Paroo and the water coming down through western New South Wales. Do we have enough monitoring stations along those river courses that can adequately tell us what's going on?

MIKE WASSING: I'll give you a real-time example in terms of what we're actually doing about those scenarios currently in the west. We actually are working with the New South Wales water authority to put in two new stations and in fact some manual stations as well, which we'd manually read, both by local community members as well as SES members, too, so we've got a good monitoring system across what's a very complex river system, as I described earlier this morning. The current floodgates system, we don't own the floodgates system. It's owned by different water authorities at a State level—in some cases, the local council and in some cases the Federal Government. We continue to work with all of those levels in terms of where there might be particular needs in terms of gauge monitoring. The river system, particularly in the west, as indicated, is not your typical river system. The Paroo itself doesn't actually even directly run. It runs through a series of lakes, as I am sure you

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are well aware. Yes, we've got current gauge systems. It's one element of our flood intelligence system in terms of monitoring the progress of floodwaters—an important one, but only one of those inputs.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: This might close us out, Commissioner Rogers. I've handed you that paper out of the annual report and this is just a little bit of fun more than anything else. The difference in the budget versus the reality, the \$1.1 million for the sale of goods and services that was offset by the special projects, I wonder if you can talk more on why we saw that disparity between the budget and the reality, and also the special projects income.

ROB ROGERS: Sure. Thank you for providing the copy of this and thank you for a budget-related question. It's quite a rarity sometimes but thank you. I believe that was the sale of a helicopter and the market just changed when we sold the helicopter from what we forecast it was worth at that time, and by the time we actually sold it the market had changed—there were fluctuations in the dollar and all of those things. That was the expenditure side of it. I think the income—I will check that I'm right on this, but I believe it would have been probably related to work we did in California with our 737. We sent it to California for a few months and that generated some income back to the agency, which is what I believe you're seeing there.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: In my final bit of time, how many Starlink satellites do you think we'll have on trucks by the start of the next fire season? Can we give a broader timeline for the rollout for the remaining 4,000?

ROB ROGERS: As I said before, it's a three-year program, but I will certainly, if I can, get that for you on notice because I just don't know that off the top of my head, I'm sorry.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Thank you and congratulations on your time with the RFS.

ROB ROGERS: Thank you very much.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I would love to just go back to some of the Reconstruction Authority questions. Can you provide the number of houses that you currently have on the list—it may be Ms Leck, I'm not sure—for demolition?

MAL LANYON: Yes. I can put that on notice, yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: We understand that of the houses that have been demolished this week, there is a claim that the materials in those homes are being recycled. Can you explain just a little bit about what that means? I understand that the trucks are currently depositing materials over the border in Queensland. What can you explain is happening?

MAL LANYON: I'd love to give you a very fulsome answer for that, if I can invite Ms Leck back. She's very much engaged in the recycling program.

AMANDA LECK: There is a range of materials that come from those homes. There is obviously timber, metal, concrete, bricks—you know, a whole range of things. The recycling contractor has a range of different recycling streams, if you like, for those different products. For example, the hygienists do an assessment of the homes. Those particular products that are not able to go into recycling streams—so timber products, for example, with lead paint and/or asbestos products—are removed from that recycling stream before the recycling commences. Before the homes are even demolished, the asbestos is removed by qualified contractors and disposed of in those appropriate methods. The asbestos is wrapped and it's appropriately dealt with. With regard to the timber that remains, the timber that does not have, for example, that lead paint on it, those beams and the like that are of sufficient size and practicality are recycled. We're using a range of local recycling facilities for that.

If you don't mind, I'll just consult my notes about where some of those actual timber beams and the like have gone—and you would be familiar with these sorts of locations in the region. Some of them have gone through the Lismore City Council waste recycling facility, for example; Northern Rivers Waste; the asbestos-contaminated materials and construction waste, obviously, as I described earlier, goes to appropriate places. Some of the brick and concrete products, as I understand it, do go to a recycling facility in Queensland you described, over the border. I will come back to you with specific details, if you like, of that. Those products are crushed and used for things like road base and the like. Then, of course, some of the other metal materials go to other waste transfer facilities. For example, some of the disposal of timber and green waste and salvage has gone to Rocky Point mulching, Northern Rivers Waste, Stapleton Resource Recovery, Stotts Creek Resource Recovery, and Go Grow, Ballina. I'm assuming you're familiar with some of those locations.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: In the last few days, most of the trucks that have been filled with the materials that are the houses, including everything, have all just gone over the border to a premise. Have you been to their premise?

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AMANDA LECK: No, I haven't been to their premise.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I have seen it and other people have seen it. I don't necessarily think what you are suggesting is happening. Can I ask you to really have a look at what's actually happening.

AMANDA LECK: We certainly will. But we have discussed with our contractors, who have some requirements under their contract around recycling.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: When something leaves the State, what control do you have over it when it's in Queensland?

AMANDA LECK: We have control over the contract with the contractor to meet those recycling targets that we have asked them to meet.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: When it goes over the State border, the only accountability you have is that they've breached a contract if they don't do what they've told you they're doing?

AMANDA LECK: We are actively monitoring the contract and we have received advice as recently as this morning about those recycling facilities that I've described and where that material is going.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I called the number on the place yesterday, and the guy there told me a few things. He said, "No, most facilities in the region can't accept the materials that we have, and they'll be going"—and I said, "What, Ipswich?"—where everything goes from our region. He went, "Well, somewhere over the border, yes."

AMANDA LECK: Well, I'm not sure who you spoke with, Ms Higginson.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I spoke to the guy whose number that you call is on the website and whose trucks are removing all the material. Anyway, I think there is a lot of concern.

MAL LANYON: What about?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: About what you think may be happening and what is in fact happening. It doesn't take much to question what is happening and get some really suspicious next steps. I think it would be good—

MAL LANYON: We are in contractual arrangements. I'm more than happy to take that on notice and then we can come back to you.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. One of the things that people are asking me about is why these homes are literally just being demolished with big machines. Why are people not able to go in and do what proper home recyclers do? They go in and they get the windows, they get the doors and they salvage the parts of the premises. Why is everything going so fast all of a sudden? Why is there this haste to have vacant possession of all the homes and to then start demolishing all the homes? Where is the time pressure coming from?

MAL LANYON: I think that's probably a couple of different questions and I did answer one of those before, which is there has been a rolling program of demolitions. This is not something new. This is not something that has changed in the short period of time. There have been demolitions that have gone through. We have continued to work through the process, so there has been no change to the program, as such. Demolitions have continued to occur. Sorry, what was the second part of your question?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I was asking about the obsession with vacant possession and the haste to demolish, particularly North Lismore at this point.

MAL LANYON: Can I just say, vacant possession has never been a haste. We have bought homes back that are the greatest risk to the community. We've been very clear on that. That is the intent. That's the basis for the funding of the program. Upon buying those homes, we have fenced the homes and disconnected services because we don't want people living in them. If you are speaking about the occupation by illegal occupants, we've had that discussion on a number of occasions.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Why has there not been, or has there been, any consideration, rather than destroying some of these homes—and I accept that there may be a difference between what you say is unsound and what somebody else says, or that threshold or that criteria. Why has there been no consideration of actually moving these homes to a higher location and keeping those homes as stock until the land comes online through the Resilient Lands Program? We have often talked about that as being the problem with the program: The lands didn't come on in time for the homes to be relocated. Have you considered just maintaining these homes in a safe location in a paddock somewhere, like they do in Queensland, for the resale of these homes?

MAL LANYON: No, that's never been part of the scheme design. To be honest, this is the largest scheme of its time that's been undertaken.

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Exactly.

MAL LANYON: The practicalities of trying to remove homes and put them into a location for safe keeping to be used later on—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you not think that would be sensible in a housing crisis?

MAL LANYON: I think it's largely impractical by the very nature of the size of the program.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What part is impractical?

MAL LANYON: Finding a location that would do it, having the funding within a program to do it, and being able to make that happen at the moment.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have we considered what that would cost, what that would look like, or whether there is available land? I'm sure we could find some available land to hold some homes for a period of time.

MAL LANYON: The funding for the program is designed and is approved in conjunction between the State and the Commonwealth.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But the original plan was that there would be Resilient lands to relocate our communities to so that we could somehow maintain some cultural character and some existence together. But, at the moment, the program is radically failing because the Resilient lands didn't come on track, and everybody knew that any subdivision was going to take more than three, four or five years. Why was there no plan to make this actual project successful, like maintaining old, beautiful homes, whether they've got a bit of lead paint, whether they've got a bent beam, or whether they've got some twisted foundations—but maintaining that stock for a later time?

MAL LANYON: I certainly understand your point of view, and I know we've had this discussion before. The principal aim for the scheme—the reason that the scheme was funded—was to give people the opportunity to move from the flood plain to safer places. That is the principal aim of the scheme. That has been the object of the scheme, and it continues to be. I think, as I said earlier on, the fact that there are already 640 households that are no longer on that flood plain meant, in the most recent Tropical Cyclone Alfred, those people did not need to be moved and they were in a safer place.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It also means we've got a ghost town and a massive homelessness problem. I just wanted to ask about the river, but I'll put it on notice.

Dr AMANDA COHN: My question is to all of the commissioners. I understand that emergency vehicles are used for non-emergency purposes on a regular basis for things like fundraising, community events and education programs. My specific question is about the use of sirens, and I understand that there was a particular concern over the summer, in Bundanoon, with people who were quite traumatised and triggered by emergency vehicle sirens because of their experience of the fires. They made a complaint to Fire and Rescue about this, and I understand it was the decision of that local emergency management committee that, in future, for Christmas parades and that type of activity, the vehicle will be used but not the siren, specifically. Is there a guiding policy framework for the use of sirens outside of emergencies?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Not a specific, explicit policy on that. It really comes down to the judgement of the officer in charge of the vehicle. Obviously, as a result of that event, there have been sensitivities raised from within the community. That's quite reasonable and understandable, and we're adjusting accordingly. We are able to now provide further guidance to staff about that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Is that only at a local level in this LEMC, or has this prompted some kind of broader discussion?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I've not heard it come up from any other locations. At this stage, it's just related to that part of the Southern Highlands.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Would you consider the need for a broader policy framework for this without needing traumatised individuals to have to make a complaint?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, we're happy to take that. It's something that we'll give consideration to.

Dr AMANDA COHN: In October last year, I understand that the chair of the State Rescue Board issued a memorandum to all of the emergency operations controllers, reminding them of their reporting requirements for when rescue units are online or offline. Can you explain why that was necessary?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: That was a decision from the chair of the State Rescue Board or a direction from the chair of the State Rescue Board, so I think it's probably more appropriate for him to explain the rationale

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for his direction. But, certainly from an agency perspective, we'd all agree it is expected and best practice to be advising the rescue coordinators when units aren't available. We're more than happy to comply with that to make sure that the rescue coordinator always knows what units may be unavailable for any particular reason.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Can any of your agencies report any change since that memorandum was needed?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'll talk for Fire and Rescue first. No change from us because that was already a practice in place.

ROB ROGERS: Same with the RFS. We were routinely advising—if we had issues with rescue, we would advise straight away. We also advise the rescue coordinator of our helicopter locations daily, where they're online. It was very much what we were already doing.

MIKE WASSING: I can confirm the same—and having checked myself personally—in terms of the internal assurance mechanisms. Everything from being offline operationally for a short period of time right through to longer periods of offline, in terms of those, notifications and the sharing of that information has been occurring.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'll come back to Commissioner Rogers on a separate issue. My question is about the planning decision when assessments on, for example, a subdivision in fire-prone land require input from the RFS. Given that we're having increasing severity and frequency of bushfires, do you feel that those current planning settings are sufficient and that your advice is being taken appropriately by planning authorities?

ROB ROGERS: Currently, if it's just a straight subdivision that comes to us, then they're required to comply with our conditions. They can't proceed without a Bush Fire Safety Authority that's issued by the RFS. If it's a State significant development, then we provide advice to Planning. But I've got to say, Planning have worked very well with us as far as trying to make sure that they obviously do those bushfire safety things, because we only have to go back to 2019-20 and we lost 2,500 homes. I think the fact that we've had good planning controls in this State is something that's pretty important and, obviously, something that, since they were introduced in 2003, I recall, by the then Minister Debus, were very much groundbreaking in Australia. I think they're good and they serve us well.

But, of course, planning for bushfire protection is undergoing a review right now to ensure that it looks at changing fire behaviour with weather patterns, fire seasons, whether we're looking at—the model fires are the right ones we're looking at still. Those sort of documents are a living document, and that's why they're important. They're contained in legislation. They're called up in legislation, and that document is being actively worked on at the moment. Hopefully, that will keep pace with what the climate throws at us, but it's absolutely something that we very much focus on.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm glad to hear that is something that's regularly reviewed. Is there an expected time frame for the review that's currently happening?

ROB ROGERS: I believe it will be out in in early 2026.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I might come back to the Reconstruction Authority. Sorry, it's Friday afternoon and it's a real grab bag of questions. The modular housing program was discussed briefly this morning. Can you please update what the actual expenditure on that program has been to date?

MAL LANYON: I'd have to take that on notice, Dr Cohn. I don't have that in front of me.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm not sure if this will be for you or Mr Tidball, but in regard to evacuation centres in the Northern Rivers during Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred, I understand there were a couple of evacuation centres that had delayed the arrival of things like essential supplies and staff, and the local community did really admirably to step up and plug those gaps. What work are you doing to audit or review that and continue improving?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: We always review the work we do. Can I say we stood up, from memory, 25 centres at very short notice from the Thursday night through to Friday. We had a number of centres stood up over 24 hours. On the Saturday I took a couple of calls in relation to shortages of supplies and, from memory, in one of those cases with the supplies there was an issue around communication of the availability of those supplies. But I'm very happy to take that away. Clearly there are learnings with every event. They're all different. As I say, the speed of Alfred and the number of centres was a very significant undertaking. I might say also that, on this occasion, there has been a lot more positive feedback about the speed with which we moved. But on the question of supplies, as with all things, I think specific inputs about the locations—I've responded to two. We may be talking about the same centres, but we may be talking differently. If I could have the specifics, I could take that away.

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Dr AMANDA COHN: That's all right. My understanding, from reporting, is that the mayor of Byron Shire and Byron Shire Council expedited the opening of the Ocean Shores Community Centre because of delays in arrival of essential supplies.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: It depends what the supplies are. I heard stories about milk; I heard stories about particular types of things. It depends what the supplies were. I'm very happy to go as granular as I'm able to, but I would need the specifics, if you're able to provide them.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's all right. Given that I've only got one minute left, I might provide that as a supplementary question in writing. I'll come back to Commissioner Rogers, please. Last estimates, we discussed the monitoring of bullying within the RFS. I understand you had a new system, and you were on record previously saying you didn't think there was a problem with bullying but a problem with accountability. Could you give us an update on how that's going?

ROB ROGERS: Certainly. I'll just find the right page. That system kicked off on 15 July 2024, and since then, as at 28 March, we have received 223 workplace complaints through that process. I think that's actually—whilst I don't like complaints, I think it's a good sign that there are more complaints, because it makes people feel a level of confidence in reporting through it. I would expect that there'd be a level of surge. They've come through different ways—a formal complaint form and a third-party hotline that we've set up where people can ring a different outside agency to report it. We've been working through those complaints. The new system is there and it's working. We're actually carrying out a review. We've started a review now to look back and say, "Are there any lessons over that 12 months that we need to look at to make sure that the system is working the way we want it to?" That work is underway currently.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I appreciate your commentary that complaints do mean that people feel comfortable making reports, which is a good thing. Are you satisfied that those complaints are being responded to appropriately?

ROB ROGERS: That's part of what we want to do a review for. We've set notional time frames for these things. We want to see that they're being responded to, and then going back to the people that complained to check, "Do you believe you had a satisfactory outcome?"

Dr AMANDA COHN: Is that review process internal? Is it something that's being provided to the Minister or the public? Where does it go?

ROB ROGERS: As in, the process of it?

Dr AMANDA COHN: The review that you're conducting at the moment.

ROB ROGERS: The reporting of it?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Yes.

ROB ROGERS: I think we've done a report to the Minister on where we're at with it. I'll check that to be sure, though.

Dr AMANDA COHN: While I've still got you, Commissioner Rogers, can you update us on the status of the Black Hawk helicopters that were acquired in 2018?

ROB ROGERS: They were allocated, but we didn't receive them until last year. They were held by Defence until last year. Work's being done. I think most of the mechanical work has been done. They're being painted. We're expecting the first one to be launched next month, subject to CASA approvals.

Dr AMANDA COHN: When you say "launched next month", they'll be able to be operational and in use next month?

ROB ROGERS: Correct.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I also have questions about the Chinook. Are you able to advise how much operational use that has had and the impacts of downtime for mechanical issues?

ROB ROGERS: For mechanical issues, I'd have to take that on notice. It's busy quite a lot. It's up in Queensland at the moment, helping Queensland to ship supplies into areas and carrying fuel into areas. It's been pretty busy, but I'm happy to give you that on notice, if that's okay?

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm happy with an answer on that on notice. In my last minute with you, Commissioner Rogers—before we let you retire!—there was a discussion this morning with the Minister about the impact of the overlapping fire seasons. We've been historically extremely reliant on the US for equipment and

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also personnel. Given the impacts of climate change—and also given that the US is probably a less reliable partner than we've had in our experience—what work is being done to be more independent in our response?

ROB ROGERS: From a New South Wales point of view, I'm pretty happy that New South Wales is the only government that has invested in making sure that, of those larger assets that we bring in, we have some in this country and, indeed, in this State. With the large air tanker and the Chinook, having them here all the time gives us that capability wherever the fires happen. The Federal Government, in conjunction with States and Territories, is also looking at what the future is for aerial firefighting with those larger helicopters and large air tankers. That work is currently being completed in conjunction with States and Territories. That will give a road map forward for the nation as far as what does that look like for the next 10 years. That work is currently underway.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Ms Leck, can I ask you to come forward? I'll come to you in a moment. Commissioner Rogers, sorry, I thought you'd be finished with me, but I've got a new one for you now. How exposed is the RFS to fluctuations in fuel prices?

ROB ROGERS: Fuel prices?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Diesel in particular.

ROB ROGERS: We are absolutely exposed to it. We're at the mercy of whatever gets charged. We have accounts, obviously, with major fuel suppliers and then council ones for the brigades themselves. I think, like all the emergency services, we have accounts with different places, but that doesn't mean you don't pay different prices depending on the fluctuations at the bowser.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Does that mean each RFS vehicle now has a fuel card?

ROB ROGERS: RFS vehicles either have a fuel card or they have an arrangement with the council, because they might well be close to a council depot and that's where they regularly fuel up. I can't give you an absolute guarantee that every single vehicle has one, but they have arrangements for fuel.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can I ask you to take on notice for me, please, the usage of fuel over each of the last five years, and the bill for fuel over the last five years, broken down to a region that you think is appropriate?

ROB ROGERS: We will do our best, but given that the vehicles are still currently vested in councils, we may not have all the data. We'll see what we can do, but I don't think we'd have it. We probably have a global figure, but I'm not sure that we'll have it broken down.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Mr Lanyon, given the particular events up in the Northern Rivers of late—and I saw the mountains of mattresses and those sorts of things, for instance—how would we describe the capacity of our waste management facilities up there at the moment?

MAL LANYON: It varies. For specific events we've had to make separate arrangements, say, with the EPA to give temporary approvals for waste stations. I know back in 2022 we had one of those at Coraki and elsewhere to support councils. It does vary by region as to what arrangements are in place, but we do have the capacity, as I said, to work to actually provide space as a temporary arrangement, and then we would look to ship waste.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Ms Leck, what has been done in terms of mitigation or even monitoring to make the people of Eugowra feel safer should they have another event similar to the one two years ago?

AMANDA LECK: Thanks for the question. In terms of a more formal approach to disaster mitigation, as I explained earlier, we will be starting work on the disaster adaptation plan with the local council. But my understanding from being in Eugowra and meeting with the progress association is that the community itself has already taken a number of measures to become more prepared for the next emergency. We know that the best preparedness occurs at local scale. It occurs with local arrangements in place, supported through our emergency services colleagues and the like. The RFS and the SES regularly conduct awareness and preparedness campaigns. I can't speak specifically about Eugowra in that instance, but certainly the local progress association has indicated that they have taken active steps to enhance their preparedness in advance of more, if you like, formal mitigation investments, which the disaster adaptation plan will bring to that community.

The CHAIR: We now go to questions from the Government if there are any questions.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: All good, Chair, unless any of the witnesses have anything to elaborate on or clarify.

The CHAIR: If there are any questions taken on notice that people have further information with—

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JEREMY FEWTRELL: I've got one, Chair. Just to clarify about the canines, we've never had an in-service dog die on duty or while it's in service. In relation to the two new vehicles, they're due at the end of May to come into service then.

The CHAIR: And that includes injuries—I'm assuming. Or is that still on notice?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: The injuries? Yes, I'll take that on notice—only very minor ones that I have been aware of.

The CHAIR: Yes, if you can give those details—thank you. In that case we've come to the end of today. Thank you to all the government officers for your attendance today. The secretariat will be in contact with any questions that were taken on notice and if there are any supplementary questions from the Committee as well. Thank you again to Commissioner Rogers for all of your work.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.