



INQUIRY INTO THE INTEGRITY, EFFICACY, AND VALUE FOR MONEY OF THE LOCAL SMALL COMMITMENTS ALLOCATION PROCESS

Hearing: 27 June 2025

ANSWERS TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Mr Damian O'Connor, Former Chief of Staff, Office of the Hon John Graham MLC

- (1) Later in the Committee hearing, George Psihoyios gave evidence that he met with you on 12 February 2024 and watched you correct the 1 December 2023 emailed-Alison Morgan document with the column marked and headed "Original". Who organised that meeting and what was its purpose?

I can't recall the meeting outlined. That is not to say it didn't happen.

- (2) What did you say to Mr Psihoyios as you wrote on the document, explaining to him why and what you were doing?

I don't recall the meeting.

- (3) What discussions did you have with Cherie Burton prior to the meeting, as Mr Psihoyios said he returned to the Premier's office and gave his photograph of the new, hand-marked document to Ms Burton, presumably to confirm that the 'Alex/PO' allocations have been returned to the 'Original' allocations?

- (4) Had you contacted Ms Burton beforehand to say this meeting was needed to return the Sydney allocations to their original form and ensure they were within the LSCA guidelines? Were you acting on behalf of your Minister?

(3) & (4) As I believe I previously said, likely before February 12 I did raise that there were two sets of figures for Sydney electorate, and that this matter should be resolved. I don't believe I raised the Sydney matter with the Minister, as it was still being resolved at staff level.

- (5) What information and data did you use to write the numbers in the 'original' column? How did you know they were the numbers Skye Tito had promised as the ALP Sydney candidate during the election campaign if you had never spoken to Ms Tito?

My recollection of the source of the original numbers is the same as at the hearing. As I indicated I did not contact Ms Tito. I believe I would probably have needed to contact her if I did not feel certain about the accuracy of the original allocations. Therefore, I surmise, I felt confident in the information I already had.

- (6) Several times in the House, Minister John Graham has said he became aware that the Sydney allocations might not reflect Labor's election promises for LSCA and he asked his office to check on this. Was your meeting with Psihoyios part of that checking process?

I don't recall the Minister raising this matter with me. He may have, but not in any detail. I don't recall the meeting mentioned.

- (7) As Minister Graham's Chief of Staff, other than you, who else in the office did he ask to perform the checking task?

See above. I don't believe the Minister would have asked others to check as I was the relevant staff member.

- (8) To the best of your recollection, when did your Minister make this request?

See above.

- (9) What did Minister Graham say at the time as to why he was concerned about the accuracy of the Sydney allocations, thereby tasking you (and perhaps others in the office) to fix the problem? What was the source of his concern?

See above.

- (10) What conversation did you have with Ms Burton after the Psihoyios meeting? Did you confirm with her that the matter had now been finalised and the Psihoyios photo of the hand-marked document represented the final Sydney allocations going forward? How did Ms Burton respond?

Whether before or after this possible meeting, I spoke to Ms Burton about the two sets of figures and resolving it by using the original allocation. I recall the process with Ms Burton being pretty short and uneventful. I do not recall an updated brief coming to me before I left Minister Graham's office.

- (11) Did Burton at any time tell you that Mr Greenwich would not be happy with this Sydney outcome, as some of his preferred organisations were still short of funding? Did she at any time say the Premier's Discretionary Fund could be used to make up the shortfall for Mr Greenwich? Or did you suggest this?

I don't recall any such discussions about the Premier's Fund.

- (12) Did you also speak to Alex Greenwich after the meeting to let him know the outcome? How did he respond? Was the use of the Premier's Discretionary Fund discussed as an alternative?

As I indicated, whether before or after this possible meeting, I spoke with Mr Greenwich and indicated that the original numbers would be the basis for the Sydney allocation. His unremarkable preference was to apply the numbers he had proposed. The gaps between the original and later figures were noted. My involvement was via overseeing the LSCA, and the Premier's Fund is a matter for the Premier's Office.

- (13) Did you report to Minister Graham about the outcome and how did he respond?

I don't believe I reported this to the Minister. I awaited the updated brief.

- (14) You said in evidence you knew the exact amounts for the Sydney LSCA allocations (as Skye Tito's election promises, as per the program guidelines) because of either a Tito media release or story during the election campaign or because "it could have been Alex himself". Given that Ms Tito did not announce her LSCA allocations in Sydney, and there's no record at all of any such release or story, do you now acknowledge that you got his information from Mr Greenwich? When and why did Mr Greenwich give you this information? Why did you think it was accurate?

See (5) above. A lot of "givens" I'm not sure how to respond to.

- (15) In relation to (14), why didn't you check with Skye Tito or Cherie Burton or Josh Wright? Why did you rely on a non-Labor person who only got involved in the LSCA process after the election?

See (5) above.

- (16) You said in evidence that Mr Greenwich was a 'busy bee' in lobbying you about the Sydney allocations over several months, through the latter part of 2023 and then into 2024. Why was he doing this when his preferred Sydney allocations had already been accepted by Cherie Burton in the Premier's office and forwarded for processing by the Program Office in the consolidated document known as 'Source of Truth' for all 93 electorates and their LSCA

allocations on 28 July 2023? What was the concern Mr Greenwich was repeatedly raising with you after this date?

I'm not sure of the timing, but I recall Mr Greenwich outlining his preferred allocations and his reasons for such allocations. I assume he raised these matters because he supported his version of the allocations, which is unremarkable.

- (17) How do you explain that in Matt Cross's GIPA of 21 June 2023, Skye Tito's allocations for Sydney were initially lodged and recorded after the election as a blanket \$400,000 allocation for the needs of vulnerable people in that electorate? That is, under the terms of the program guidelines, with that lack of specificity by the Labor candidate, the \$400,000 should have been transferred to local Councils for park improvements. Why didn't this happen?

I never thought there was no specific allocation for Sydney, just two different allocations of \$400,000. So I'm not able to help beyond that.

(I should note generally that I am not following the detail of this inquiry, including evidence from other sources, as is implied in this question. I am answering these questions from recollections).

- (18) Was your Minister aware of the issue in (17) above?

I don't believe so. I'm not sure it's established as an issue either.

- (19) Given (17) above, do you now accept that your notion of the 'Original' allocations handwritten on the Morgan email may not have been valid? That, in fact, there were 4 iterations of the Sydney commitments: the pre-election Tito \$400,000 blanket allocation; Cherie Burton's post-election first cut at trying to turn the Tito \$400,000 into something more specific; the Greenwich intervention to produced the list you notated as 'Alex/PO'; then your actions in returning the allocations to version number 2 and finally, the Premier's Discretionary Fund top-up to compensate where Greenwich's preferences had missed out, as reflected in Tranche 16 and Minister Graham signing off on joint funding and noting the proposal for a joint letter to Wayside. Looking back, how do you respond to this likely scenario?

I don't recall thinking there were other than two different allocations of \$400,000, as discussed.

- (20) How would you in (17) above advise the Committee to report on the facts of the matter as you know them?

I don't recall thinking there were other than two different allocations of \$400,000, as discussed.

- (21) On what date in February 2024 did you last attend work in Minister Graham's office?

I'm pretty sure it was the end of February 2024. I do not have the exact date to hand.

(22) During the hearing you were shown a copy of a photograph of a printed email with handwritten annotations which you identified as in your handwriting. Evidence was given by George Psihoyios, which was in February 2024, a Caucus Liaison Officer in the Premier's Office that he attended your office, observed you writing on the printed copy of the email and took a photograph of the email with your handwritten annotations. Mr Psihoyios provide the photograph in response to an order for papers and described it as having the date stamp of 12 February 2024.

- (a) Do you recall Mr Psihoyios visiting your office, observing your writing on the document and photographing it?
- (b) Was anyone else present during Mr Psihoyios' visit?
- (c) Have you any reason to think that this event took place earlier than 12 February 2024?
 - i. If so, what date do you think it may have taken place?
- (d) What is your understanding of the purpose for which Mr Psihoyios visited your office and took a photograph?

(a)-(d). See (1)

- (e) Was there any reason you did not email the Premier's Office information about what you considered to be the "original" allocations for the Sydney electorate?

I don't recall if I emailed the PO or didn't.

- (f) In relation to the handwritten column of projects and funding amounts headed "separate", which totals "\$135 k" and represents the difference between the "Alex G/PO" allocations and the "original allocations", what did you mean by the term "separate"?

- i. At the time you wrote this, had you discussed the possibility of funding these amounts from a source other than LSCA, such as the Premier's Discretionary Fund with:

- (a) The Premier's Office;
- (b) The Member for Sydney;
- (c) The Special Minister of State; or
- (d) The LSCA Program Office?

I would have noted these amounts as the gaps could be the source of concerns expressed by the respective organisations, depending on what they were told. I would have felt we should be aware of that. It's likely ideas to address this issue were discussed, but I don't recall an outcome before I left.

(23) In your evidence you mentioned three possible sources for the projects and funding allocations for the Sydney electorate which you labelled "original" in handwriting in a column written on a printed copy of an email setting out the projects and funding allocations as provided to the LSCA Program office by the Premier's Office. You labelled that list of projects and funding allocations "Alex G/PO". The three possible sources as you described them were "either through a media release or through a story in the paper or through Alex himself, I was aware that there were two sets of numbers."

(a) When you wrote the "original" projects and funding allocations on the document were you copying them from another document? [Please note that no other document has been provided in response to the order for papers with these allocations that is dated prior to 1 February 2024]

Yes I believe I would have taken this from another document. I can't improve on my earlier recollection around that.

(b) Searches have failed to identify either a media release or a story in the paper relating to election commitments by the Labor candidate, Skye Tito, under the LSCA for the electorate of Sydney. Do you have any further recollection as to the nature of either a media release or a story in the paper that could have been your source for the "original" allocations?

See (a). All I would add is that it wasn't intended to be an exhaustive list of possibilities.

(c) Given your concern to ensure that the Minister only approved LSCA grants based on actual election commitments and that the nominated projects and funding allocations on which the LSCA Program Office was processing LSCA grants for the electorate of Sydney as notified to you in Alison Morgan's email of 1 December 2023 why did you never consult with Skye Tito about what election commitments she had actually made?

I would have likely chased down Ms Tito if I felt a need for certainty around her allocations. I don't recall feeling uncertain.

(d) The table published by the Cabinet office at: https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/TCO_A5794143%20-%20Disclosure%20log.pdf lists the electorate of Sydney as having just one nominated

project for a total of \$400,000. Is it consistent with your knowledge that Skye Tito may have made a general commitment that NSW Labor will deliver up to \$400,000 to homelessness services to support their work with providing essential services to vulnerable members of the community or, alternatively, nominated a single homelessness service to receive up to \$400,000?

As per earlier, I believed there were simply two sets of numbers – the Tito allocation and the later allocation as I indicated. I am not following the detail of the inquiry.

- (e) The Member for Sydney, in a personal explanation given in the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday 25 June 2025, stated that he had been “emailed about the Local Small Commitments Allocation grants. When I was informed about the Local Small Commitments Allocation grants, I highlighted that one of the organisations, Will2Live—a very worthy organisation—was not based in the Sydney electorate. I asked if funding could be provided to organisations that were based in the electorate, including Wayside Chapel, Rough Edges and Canice's Kitchen. The result was that those organisations, which feed people who are homeless, all received funding to be able to feed more vulnerable people.” In relation to the third possible source of the “original” allocations which you mentioned in evidence, namely, “through Alex himself”, is it possible that the Member for Sydney provided with you with a list of the projects and allocated funding amounts that the Premier’s Office had originally advised him were to be funded under the LSCA program in the email he refers to in his personal explanation?

It is possible that Mr Greenwich provided a list when he outlined his preferred allocation. Even if he did, I would not have relied upon it as the sole source of the original allocations. In that sense I believe I already had other sources of the original information. See answers above.

- (f) When you wrote “Alex G/PO” above the column of funding allocations on the printout of Alison Morgan’s email of 1 December 2023 what was your understanding of the respective parts played in the determination of these allocations by:
- i. The Member for Sydney; and
 - ii. The Premier’s Office?

I didn’t have an interest in that, and didn’t explore it. I just wanted the discrepancy sorted.

- (g) When did you first propose to the Premier's Office that the allocations for the electorate of Sydney that Cherie Burton had supplied to the LSCA Program Office on 28 July 2023 were incorrect?
- i. What was their response?
 - ii. Did you discuss their response with the Special Minister of State?
 - iii. If so, are you aware of any steps that he took in response?

See answers to similar questions above.

- (24) All of the briefs presented to the Special Minister of State for approval of LSCA projects state that the project meets the mandatory eligibility criterion of being a commitment made by the Labor candidate for that electorate prior to the March 2023 election. Apart from the briefs for Tranche 7 which you withheld from the Minister and were subsequently cancelled did you ever have any concerns about whether any other electorates had projects or amounts added or changed by the Premier's Office prior to the master list being handed to the LSCA Program Office on 28 July 2023?

I recall Sydney being a standout in terms of clearly two different allocations being claimed. This was the only brief I recall holding back.

- (25) The table published at https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/TCO_A5794143%20-%20Disclosure%20log.pdf lists the electorates of Castle Hill, Epping, Kellyville, Murray, Orange and Wollondilly as having no nominated projects and \$400,000 of unallocated funds. Do you have any knowledge of how projects and funding allocations came to be listed against those electorates on the master list given by Cherie Burton to the LSCA Program Office and described by her to them as "election commitments"?

No. I'm not sure of the status of the referenced list either.