

# **GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 1**

**Thursday 15 August 2013**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area**

## **THE ILLAWARRA**

**The Committee met at 4.15 p.m.**

### **MEMBERS**

Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile (Chair)

The Hon. C. Cusack  
The Hon. G. Donnelly  
The Hon. A. R. Fazio

The Hon. M. R. Mason-Cox  
The Hon. M. J. Pavey (Deputy Chair)  
Mr D. Shoebridge

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### **PRESENT**

**The Hon. John Ajaka**, *Minister for the Illawarra*

## **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**

**CHAIR:** I declare this hearing of the inquiry into budget estimates 2013-14 open to the public. I welcome Minister Ajaka and accompanying official to the hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of The Illawarra. 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.

**SIMON SMITH**, Deputy Director General, Department of Premier and Cabinet affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Illawarra open for examination. Minister, I note that the Committee has agreed to no Government questions; therefore, the portfolio of the Illawarra will run from 4.15 p.m. to 4.45 p.m., there will be 20 minutes of questions by the Opposition, 10 minutes of questions by The Greens and 10 minutes of questions by the Christian Democratic Party. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questions we will begin with questions by the Opposition.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Minister, can you provide details of how many public housing properties there are in the Illawarra?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Have you visited any public housing estates in the Illawarra region since becoming Minister?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No. I have visited Newcastle. I have visited the proposed construction taking place in Ryde. This coming Saturday I am visiting in the Illawarra. In my 13 days I have been trying to get to as many as I possibly can.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Are you aware what the current level of demand is for public housing in the Illawarra?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Approximately how many people in the Illawarra are currently on the Housing NSW waiting list?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Given your own admission that there are a significant number of Illawarra families on the waiting list for Housing NSW, why did the O'Farrell Government cut \$22 million from the budget that would see these new homes built?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I would have thought you would ask the Premier that question but I will take it on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** I refer to the recent \$37 million cut in the Housing NSW budget for maintenance. What proportion of those funds would have been allocated to the Illawarra and how will those cuts affect Illawarra residents living in Housing properties?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Again, I am happy to take that on notice. As you would be aware, I have been the Minister in this portfolio for only 13 days and I have not had an opportunity to look at each and every aspect and try and commit it to memory. Please be patient with me. Mr Smith might be happy to provide some information.

**Mr SMITH:** I thought it would be worthwhile remembering the background that there is no budget appropriation to a regional Minister. A regional Minister does not have legislation to administer; he has a specific function, which is to represent the interests of the Minister in Cabinet and to be the face of the Government in the region. The numerical questions about budget provisions are probably better addressed to the portfolio Minister.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Yes, I am aware of the responsibilities of the regional Ministers. But some of the regional Ministers are quite forthcoming—for example, the Minister for the North Coast, was quite forthcoming in the information he provided at budget estimates relating to proposals in his area.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** The previous Minister had the Housing portfolio. I am thinking the questions might need to be updated.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** These questions are not for the previous Minister.

**CHAIR:** Order! Members should be allowed to ask questions without interjections.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am quite happy to take the questions on notice. I am more than happy to secure the appropriate information and get back to you.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Minister, are you aware of the waiting times for maintenance issues in public housing in the Illawarra area? The leasing of Port Kembla is a very important issue for the Illawarra. Can you advise how communities such as Bowral, Moss Vale, Mittagong and Nowra have had their economies negatively affected by the sale of Port Kembla?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Firstly, it is a lease of Port Kembla not a sale. I think that is important to remember. The New South Wales Government has let long-term leases for Port Botany and Port Kembla to help fix the infrastructure backlog that former Labor Government left behind. Following a six-month competitive bidding process, the transaction has delivered an outstanding result for New South Wales with gross proceeds of \$5.07 billion, \$4.31 billion from Port Botany and \$760 million from Port Kembla. This price comfortably exceeds retention value and is 25 times the annual earnings of the ports. We can compare this with the Port of Brisbane transaction undertaken by the Queensland Government, which only delivered 16 times annual earnings.

The successful bidder for these New South Wales ports was the NSW Ports consortium. More than 80 per cent of the consortium is comprised of Australian super funds, including many industry super funds. The net proceeds of \$4.3 billion make this the largest-ever New South Wales Government transaction. These proceeds will be reinvested in Restart NSW and put towards critical infrastructure across the State, including \$1.8 billion for WestConnex. There are also upgrades to the Pacific Highway of \$400 million and the Princes Highway of \$170 million.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** That is very interesting, Minister, but my original question was: Are you aware that communities such as Bowral, Moss Vale, Mittagong and Nowra have had their economies negatively affected by the Port Kembla transaction? Are you aware of that?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** What I am saying in attempting to answer your question is this: These projects have a flow-on effect.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** You are telling me what you have earmarked the money for. I would like to know whether you think those communities I named have been negatively affected by the transaction involving Port Kembla.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I do not accept that they have been negatively affected—

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Okay, if you do not believe that they have been negatively affected then—

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:**—if you would allow me to continue to answer, there is a clear flow-on effect—

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Minister, my question was not in relation to the lease of Port Kembla in general; it was in relation to the localised effects of it. My second question is: Why then have projects in the communities of Bowral, Moss Vale, Mittagong and Nowra been shortlisted to receive funding from the proceeds of the Port Kembla sale if you do not think they have been negatively impacted by it?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Because, as you are well aware, the \$100 million for the Restart NSW Illawarra Infrastructure Fund was provided as a result of the lease of Port Kembla. That is in addition to the \$170 million for the upgrade of the Princes Highway. As a result of that—

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Thank you.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Ms Fazio, I have not even got to—

**CHAIR:** Order! Let the Minister finish his answer.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** The Minister is not answering the questions I asked. In fact he did just give me a short answer then so I would like to ask my colleague the Hon. Greg Donnelly to ask the Minister a question.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Since becoming Minister, have you had any meetings, telephone calls or emails from Mr Dominic Kelly, Mr David Begg, Mr Chris Stone, Ms Natalie Christiansen, Mr Michael Photios or any other representatives from PremierState consulting regarding any matters with respect to your portfolio responsibilities?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No. I believe I received an SMS from Michael Photios and an SMS from David Begg congratulating me on my appointment. But I do not believe I have received any other communication from them, and nor have I received any communication from the other people mentioned. For some of the names you just listed, I do not think I even know who those people are. I may, but the names do not ring a bell.

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Perhaps you can check the *Hansard* record and identify those names.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am happy to do that.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Minister, given that the most adverse effects of the sale of Port Kembla will be felt by the people of Port Kembla, why have no projects been selected from the Port Kembla area to proceed based on the funding available from the long-term lease of the port?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** As you are aware, all of the original 124 applications came from the community—whether that was direct community involvement, from the local government representing the community or from some other entity representing the community. Of those 124, my understanding is that approximately 73 were not eligible. That left 51—excuse me if my figures are not exact—and those 51 were shortlisted to 20. Neither I as the current Minister nor the former Minister have had any role in selecting the appropriate projects, because the whole intention was that this was to be community based—using appropriate community advisory panels to do so.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Minister, given your answer, will you publicly release the full applications of each of the groups who were unsuccessful?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Will you publicly release the assessments of each of the shortlisted projects?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Can you specifically indicate what instrument the assessment panel will be using to evaluate the projects? In particular, what cost benefit ratio and job creation figures will they be looking at?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Minister, what will be the process for auditing the various outcomes of the projects such as job creation and economic impact as outlined by the proponents?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice, but I can indicate of course that there is the involvement of Infrastructure New South Wales as well as the involvement of the Cabinet Standing Committee on Expenditure Review.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Minister, what, if any, processes will there be to support local firms, contractors and businesses in the construction of these projects where applicable?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** That is a great question. The starting point has to be this: This is going to result in \$100 million worth of projects in the Illawarra. In addition to that \$100 million, remembering that much of it is being levied where those successful applicants are also placing their own funds in. So we could ultimately end up with projects in excess of \$100 million or \$200 million. The projects are being built in the Illawarra. There are companies in the Illawarra that will clearly be tendering for those projects. I have no doubt that the assessment panel will be looking at the final proposals that are being put in with the information and that is one of the matters that will be taken into consideration. Then you have to recall that there is a flow-on effect from this. If you start building \$100 million and \$50 million projects in the Illawarra then it will flow on to all other sectors of employment within the Illawarra. This is why it is Restart the Illawarra.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** But there is no preference for local contractors all local businesses to be involved in Restart the Illawarra?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice. As I said, I am not involved in selecting the final applicants who are successful. That is not my role. So I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** I understand that, but I am saying that as a matter of policy it seems that restart Illawarra does not have a preference for local contractors, suppliers, builders, et cetera, to get a foot on the ladder to be able to really reap the benefits for the Illawarra.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Minister, do you believe that Newcastle and the Illawarra have similar economic bases?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will have to take that on notice. I am not aware of all of the economic bases of Newcastle so I will really cannot answer that question.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Because what is of concern to me and a lot of people in the Illawarra, if you have been checking the local media down there, is that in comparison to the allocation made to Newcastle the Illawarra has only been given \$100 million.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I do not agree with that at all, and you know that is not correct. That is not correct. Out of this Port Kembla lease, the Illawarra has received the \$100 million plus the \$170 million in relation to the Princes Highway upgrade. The actual figure is \$270 million. Why you or any of your colleagues would continually argue that it is only \$100 million confuses me. I do not understand.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Perhaps it is because when you look at the amount of money that has been touted for Newcastle as a result of the Newcastle port transaction they are not adding in the funding allocated for the Hunter Expressway and the extension of the F3. We are not dealing with apples and apples. It seems to me to be an attempt to boost the paltry \$100 million for the Illawarra because it has been short changed in comparison to Newcastle.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** That is not correct.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** They deserve the upgrade of the Princes Highway separately. You know that.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No, it comes from the proceeds. That is not correct, Mr Shoebridge.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** But do you not see that your role is to advocate for the Illawarra and that you should argue in Cabinet that the Illawarra should be treated equally to Newcastle and get a decent amount of money out of the 99-year lease of its port asset?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** You indicated earlier that you are not comparing apples to apples. You also have to remember that in the 2½ years of the O'Farrell Government we have budgeted a substantial amount for other projects in the Illawarra. With due respect, your Government clearly failed to do that in its 16 years. I have got a list of projects of more than \$419 million that we have listed for the Illawarra. I am happy to read each and every one of those for you.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Unfortunately, you will not get the opportunity because the Government is not asking questions.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** You cannot compare the Illawarra to Newcastle.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Seeing that you are so concerned about funding for the Illawarra, are you aware of staff shortages affecting case workers in the Coniston office of the Department of Family and Community Services?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Is there, or has there been, a freeze on filling any caseworker positions?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice. I would assume that you would have asked Minister Goward those questions, but I am happy to take that on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** I am sure that low staffing levels in a critical area like child protection would be of interest to you as the Minister for the Illawarra.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take the question on notice.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Given that the Illawarra has one of the highest rates of cases per DOCS caseworker, what are you going to do in the Government as the Minister for the Illawarra to try to address this?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Let me be clear on this: Like all six Ministers for the regions, like all Ministers with other portfolios and like all members of Parliament in relation to their individual electorates, whether they be Liberal, Labor or crossbench members, each and every one of us will continue to advocate more for our specific area. That is what I will do. I will continue to advocate for the Illawarra. But what is discussed in Cabinet will remain in Cabinet. I do not intend to sit here and tell you of the discussions that are occurring in Cabinet, and you know that.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** That is fine, because I did not ask you to. I will now turn to public transport in the Illawarra. Can you tell me the price of a daily return ticket from Wollongong to Central, or Central to Wollongong?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am happy to tell you that. I am happy to tell you as much as you like. I can tell you that the cost of a single adult train ticket from Wollongong, including Kiama, Oak Flats or Dapto, to Central is \$8.40. It is \$4.20 for a child or a student. It is \$2.50 for a pensioner. A return ticket is \$16.80. A return ticket for a child or a student is \$8.40. A return ticket for a pensioner is \$2.50. I did not anticipate that my job as Minister for the Illawarra at budget estimates would be to pass a memory test, so please forgive me for not having memorised each and every one of those.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** That is okay. I commend you for having done your homework by looking at what other members for the regions have been asked at previous estimates hearings and making sure you were not caught out. It is a smart move on your part. Has the State Government leased the office of the Minister for the Illawarra in the New South Wales government office block in Wollongong?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** For some reason people, including some of your colleagues down there, keep asking me why I have closed the office. There is no closed office. There is an office there. It has the Premier and Cabinet staff. My understanding from memory is that there is a staff of five. The office still exists, the desks still exist, the equipment still exists. It is open for me to attend that office any time I want. I have indicated before on record and I am happy to say it again that my view is that I should be seeing the people of the Illawarra face to face at the relevant sites that affect their issues and their interests. I am not a great believer in sitting in an office and forcing everyone to come to me. But if that office is needed, if that is the only venue where people can see me, I am quite happy to sit at any desk at that office.

The other aspect that I have also said on record before is that in today's world of technology with our iPads, mobile phones and every other piece of technology that surrounds us and takes over our lives I am able to work effectively from any location whether it be in a car, on a train or at one of the offices. I can do that. I know



you are an absolute expert in that area because I know how well you do that. I do not really believe that I should look at the expense of setting up an additional office for the Minister of the Illawarra and take additional staff. I do not believe that that is the best use of government funds for the Illawarra.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** How often do you intend to visit the Illawarra and how do you think you will break up your time between being the Minister for Aging, and Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for the Illawarra?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** That is a good question. In the 13 days that I have been the Minister for the Illawarra I have been there on three occasions and I am going again on Saturday. I would have thought that from a reasonable point of view I should be visiting the Illawarra to look at any relevant issues hopefully once a week, and once a fortnight at worst. Like a lawyer in court cases, you would like to think that you are going to be at court one day a week but you suddenly have a week when you are there for five days and then you have two weeks where there is no requirement to be there. I want to ensure that it is not a visit for visiting's sake. I want to ensure that there is a relevant issue that needs to be dealt with. There was an urgent matter that came up only recently. I was not able to visit but the proponents of that issue were good enough to come and see me at Governor Macquarie Tower to see if we could try to deal with that issue. Of course, that is also available.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** You have not worked out your time split yet?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I would estimate that an appropriate time split would be approximately 20 per cent for the Illawarra and an approximately equal split between Aging and Disability for the remaining 80 per cent. Of course, what will create a synergy is that the Illawarra has substantial aging issues and substantial disability issues. There may in fact be times that I am in the Illawarra and I am meeting all three issues at the same time, so I cannot really split that up.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Do you have a dedicated person to deal with the Illawarra issues in your ministerial office or is that spread across your general staff?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Again, I am 13 days in and there are teething, administrative and logistical issues in trying to set up an office from scratch. I have proposed that I have a policy adviser in relation to Aging and Disability and I have a separate policy adviser in relation to the Illawarra. I have a chief of staff, of course, who covers all areas. I will have a personal assistant who will be managing all aspects relating to correspondence and diary. That personal assistant will have a role to cover each and every area. My most senior adviser is in Disability. Without taking anything away from the other areas, I see Disability as probably one of the most sensitive areas. Of course, with the National Disability Insurance Scheme being introduced, and which has to be finalised by 2018, that area needs that additional work.

**CHAIR:** What is the level of unemployment in the Illawarra?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice.

**CHAIR:** I gather it is a high level. In view of that, what plans do you have for regional development of industry in the Illawarra?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** One of the first aspects is the Restart NSW fund of the \$100 million and we hopefully will introduce projects of approximately another \$150 million. There are other aspects in the Illawarra in relation to both health and education. They are being implemented. I have asked for a report on youth unemployment. That area is important from my perspective and I believe that it needs to be looked at carefully. I am still awaiting that report.

**CHAIR:** That is why I was asking about regional development to help provide jobs in the Illawarra.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** We also have the regional development funds that are available. Applications have been made in relation to that.

**CHAIR:** I realise you have only been Minister for the Illawarra for a few days, but are there any plans to expand the movement of government departments to the Illawarra to provide jobs?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** One of the areas in relation to decentralisation of the various government departments is applicable. Wollongong is one of those areas and one that I am very keen to look at. We do have the data central reform as well in which we are looking at opening an additional office. I can probably give you a closer indication of the time for that, if you just give me one moment. We are hoping to have that delivered and open by the end of August. Of course the Silverwater centre is also being looked at in relation to that.

The agencies that are being anchored of course are the Department of Finance and Services, Ministry for Health, Department of Education and Communities, and Corrective Services, which are all looking to mitigate. The data centre project combines a market-based approach with new technology and will deliver to the government agencies the kind of innovative services that simply are not possible under the old arrangement. They are the matters that the O'Farrell Government is looking at to increase employment in the area and of course to have a flow-on effect.

**CHAIR:** I know that because you are newly appointed you will not have had any impact or input into the brochures Infrastructure overview, NSW Budget 2013-14 overview, which cover health, education and training—all the different areas of government. I just cannot see any in the Illawarra listed in a brochure at all, except somewhere down in Bega.

**The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX:** That is a long stretch.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** My understanding—and correct me if I am wrong—is that a number of those brochures were issued and some of them were modelled, if I can say that, in relation to specific areas. I am happy to take that on notice because it may be that there is in fact a specific brochure for the Illawarra or the Illawarra/South Coast region if, for example, in relation to the regional action plan there is a specific brochure simply for the Illawarra/South Coast. Can I take that on notice in relation to the one you raised?

**CHAIR:** Definitely. I would like you to tell us what infrastructure developments are planned for the Illawarra that do not appear to have been highlighted in the material put out for New South Wales. It is not Sydney; it actually states "across the State", and the Illawarra is still part of the State.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** I know it has been neglected, but it is still there.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** That is the reason for the \$100 million Restart NSW for the Illawarra and the \$170 million in relation to the Princes Highway upgrades.

**CHAIR:** Good. Another area where there has been some stress in relation to an industry is the fishing industry. That has been affected in recent years in Wollongong and Kiama. Are there any plans to invigorate or assist the fishing industry?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice. Some of these areas, as you would know, Chair, relate to other ministries, but I am happy to contact the relevant Ministers, obtain the information, and get back to you.

**CHAIR:** Yes. I am looking at you as the overall person.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am happy to do that.

**CHAIR:** We can now streamline all that through you.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Yes. I am happy to do that.

**CHAIR:** You are the guardian for the Illawarra now.

**The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX:** The guardian angel.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Congratulations on your guardian status.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Thank you, Mr Shoebridge.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Congratulations on your appointment.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Let me just deal with the Minister status for a moment.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I think they are different. Can you advise the Committee of the exact terms of the SMS text you got from Mr Photios—what its precise terms were?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** It was simply, "Congratulations on your appointment." That is to the best of my recollection.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Could you take it on notice?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am happy to take it on notice and give you the exact words.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Not "There's \$2,000 in your letterbox when you get home"?

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** And the same for the other.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I think the message also added that his wife had given birth to a baby girl. I think that was part of the message as well.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Could you do the same from the SMS text you got from the other PremierState consultant?

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** Mr Kelly.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No, I think that was Mr Begg.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** You know who you got the short messaging service text from; we do not.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Yes. As soon as I find my—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Could you give the full terms of that on notice?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Happy to do that.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Very good.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Are you going to the christening?

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I will be.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Can I just indicate this: If the message was received on my old phone, which no longer exists—because it was handed back to Parliament—I may have problems with extracting it. If it was sent on my new phone, I can easily look.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Just ask the Independent Commission Against Corruption—it will tell you how to get it off!

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Thank you.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** It can be done.

**CHAIR:** If it is only a personal comment, I do not think that is our role.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** There is nothing inappropriate about that message.

**The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX:** It is personal congratulations.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am happy to say what it was.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Thanks. Minister, you would have been aware of the flooding in the earlier part of this year that shut down the rail line, particularly between Port Kembla and Wollongong.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Yes.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** What is your Government doing in respect of infrastructure investment to flood-proof that rail line?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Let me take that part on notice, but I can also indicate to you that quite a bit of work is being done in relation to the new State Emergency Service [SES] headquarters, which will be of great assistance. I will take the specific question that you asked on notice.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Indeed the transport links that particularly link the Illawarra and the southern parts of Sydney are vulnerable to flooding and interruptions. What are the other infrastructure plans your Government has?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Again, I am happy to take those on notice and I will obtain the information from the Minister for Transport.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, you would be aware that feral deer are a significant problem in the Illawarra.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Yes. I nearly ran over some.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have been told that on many occasions, Mr Shoebridge.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Hear, hear!

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** In fact, as you head down at different parts through the Royal National Park and anywhere near the escarpment, you will see an increasing number of signs warning you of deer.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** They are down in Morton now, unfortunately.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Are you aware of that?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have not seen the signs, so I am not aware of that.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** I have seen the deer.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have seen the deer as well.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Indeed I will tell you that almost on any night, the next time you are in the Illawarra you can go to almost any of the reserves that in any way connect through creeks to the escarpment—

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** He does not do that. He is not like that, David. He does not creep around the place in the middle of the night.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** —and just run your lights across those reserves as you are driving past. You will see 20, 30, 40 or 50 deer grazing.

**The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX:** That would be a great shot for the *Daily Telegraph*—the Minister creeping after deer.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** "Oh, that's the Minister for the Illawarra!"

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** As the Minister for the Illawarra, what are you going to do to tackle that feral deer problem?

**The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX:** To tackle those deer?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that question on notice, and I also will obtain the information from the relevant Ministers.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** When you are doing that, could you talk to the local council and the other significant land management authorities in the area about their feral—

**The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX:** Greens?

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** —deer management program, which has now been crippled because of the legislative changes that your Government put in with a deal with the Shooters Party—

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Well, I do not agree.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** —that has prevented those professional shooters from operating. Will you speak to them?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Mr Shoebridge, I am happy to take the appropriate parts of your question on notice.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Right.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** But I can tell you now that I do not agree with two aspects of your question—the word "crippling" and the term "deal with the Shooters Party". But I will take your question on notice.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, I will be very precise. In the legislation that went through the Parliament in the middle of last year that opened up hunting in national parks, there was a provision that required professional shooters to get a licence from the Game Council if they were to cull feral deer.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am well aware of that.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** That licence from the Game Council comes with the standard conditions that prevent them from culling deer during large parts of the year. They have a limited deer season for most breeds of deer. It also prevents them from using spotlights and other effective management tools for controlling feral deer. Would that trouble you?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Mr Shoebridge, can I ask you this so that I can understand the question properly: Is your concern that not enough shooting is taking place, or too much shooting is taking place, or the way the shooting is taking place? Let me just try to understand because I am a bit confused.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I will tell you what my concern is. I can see you are confused, but that is okay.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Thank you for that.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** My concern is this: The humane, careful, scientific, feral deer control programs that have been put in place by all the major stakeholders in the Illawarra have now been seriously jeopardised to benefit amateur hunters so that there will be plenty of deer for amateur hunters to shoot in the Illawarra. That came about because of the ridiculous conditions that have been imposed on professional shooters in your legislation that passed through the Parliament last year. That is my concern. Will you speak to the stakeholders?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take the question on notice and I will speak to the relevant Ministers and obtain information from them, and I will come back to you.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** And will you speak with the council?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am happy to speak to the council. I speak to the council all the time now.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Good.

**CHAIR:** Which council?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** In the short time I have been there, they are the ones who speak to me the most.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** The Wollongong City Council would be the primary council district.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I know which council it is and I know who the mayor is.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Will you go and have a look at some of the damage that has been done in the escarpment from the extent of the feral deer that are literally eating out the rainforest undergrowth in the Illawarra? Will you go with the council officers who are undertaking the project and have a look at that?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will examine the issue.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Will you look at the \$20,000 to \$30,000 deer pen that they constructed that is now illegal for them to use because of the changes that were put in last year?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** As I said, I will speak to the relevant Ministers. What I do not intend to do is to do the exact same work another Minister is undertaking through their department, and if they are able to provide me with the necessary information I will come back to you.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I appreciate that. Minister, how many non-political staff—so staff in the department proper—are attached to your portfolio as Minister for the Illawarra?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I do not know what you mean by non-political staff.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** He means Simon.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Apart from your ministerial advisors, have you got a department liaison officer [DLO]?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** In my office I currently will have, when someone starts on Monday, a staff of seven and my understanding is I have approximately 3.4 DLOs. I say 3.4 because one comes in two days a week. As far as my department as a whole is concerned and the entire workforce, one of the figures that comes to my mind that I read is that I have over 13,000 people employed in relation to Ageing and Disabilities. I do not have any staff or budget in relation to the Illawarra.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** None of the DLOs are in relation to the Illawarra?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No, none of the DLOs are in relation to the Illawarra. Any information in relation to regional occurs via Premier and Cabinet. I have assistance from Premier and Cabinet, including the five people that are at the Illawarra office that I mentioned earlier.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Mr Smith, in what capacity are you here?

**Mr SMITH:** One of my responsibilities is each of the regional co-ordination officers that support the regional Ministers or that are otherwise located in regional New South Wales.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Through Premier and Cabinet.

**Mr SMITH:** So reporting to me is Michelle Kellaway, who is the senior regional co-ordinator for the Department of Premier and Cabinet, who is based in Wollongong in the office the Minister was talking about.

Four other staff report to her who work solely on coordination of government matters and with the community based at the Wollongong office.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** So there is five staff in Wollongong and they report to you?

**Mr SMITH:** Correct.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Is that the beginning and the end of the—and I am not being critical—staff attached to the Ministry for the Illawarra?

**Mr SMITH:** Well, they are the people who do nothing but focus on the Illawarra. As a team, they of course draw on the resources of the department and advocate for the region within the business of the department.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, I refer to the criteria under which the short listed projects have come in from Kickstarting the Illawarra. Will that criteria be made publicly available?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Will the personnel in the panels that will be assessing those projects be made publicly available?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, your assertion is that the funding for the Princes Highway has come from the Port Kembla port sale, is that right?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** My understanding is that in relation to the proceeds received from the port sale, part of that is the \$170 million that was allocated for the Princes Highway.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Your Government would not have upgraded the Princes Highway if you had not sold the port; is that what you are saying?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I cannot answer that question. I am happy to take it on notice if you want me to.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Thank you.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Minister, can I just ask you one final question?

**The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX:** I think your time is up.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** Are you prepared to convene a committee, a consultative committee in Parliament House, of all the members in the lower House who represent the Illawarra to assist you in making sure that correct priority is applied to the Illawarra?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Ms Fazio, one of the concerns I have had in the short time that I have been a Minister for 13 days—and I say this genuinely because I hope you can get this message to some of your colleagues—is that some of your colleagues have been tremendous in the way that they have come forward with some great suggestions and wanting to work collaboratively. However, some of your colleagues simply want to play games where they want to go to the media and make nonsense statements about me. I find extraordinary that I have been called one of the faceless men who is now the new Minister for the Illawarra. The short answer to your question is this: If I am convinced that your colleagues want to work genuinely in relation to the best interests of the Illawarra and not play political games where they want to make every attempt possible to somehow or other embarrass me, yes, I would love to work with them.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** What about Gareth Ward?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** And I mean that genuinely.

**The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO:** What about Gareth Ward? He is not one of my colleagues.

**CHAIR:** We will have to conclude there.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I said your colleagues.

**CHAIR:** The hearing is now concluded. We thank the Minister and Mr Smith for their attendance at this hearing.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**

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