



**Office of the Hon Don Page MP**  
Minister for Local Government  
Minister for the North Coast

Our Ref: 2013-A346830

Dr Stewart Smith  
Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5  
Budget Estimates - Room 812  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street, Sydney, 2000

03 SEP 2013

Dear Dr Smith

Thank you for your letter dated 15 August 2013, regarding 'Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2013-2014'.

In response to your correspondence, please find attached:

- 1) The corrected transcript;
- 2) Answers to questions on notice taken during the hearing; and
- 3) Answers to supplementary questions on notice lodged by Members of the Legislative Council.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Don Page  
**Minister for Local Government**  
**Minister for the North Coast**

Question from the Hon Sophie Cotsis MLC

Question 1: Can you provide me with the names of the people who sat on the LIRS assessment panel?

**Answer 1:** Richard Colley, Independent Chair, Steve Orr, Deputy Chief Executive, Division of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Richard Cox, Director, Economic Strategy, NSW Treasury, Michael Comminos, A/Executive Director, Strategy and Infrastructure Planning, Department of Planning and Infrastructure, Grahame Gibbs, Technical Specialist Sub-Panel Chair, Director, Performance Management and Compliance, Division of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Barry Nicholls, Technical Panel Member Planning, Strategy & Infrastructure Planning Unit, Department of Planning and Infrastructure, Nin Rejante, Technical Panel Member Finance, Principal Adviser Economic Strategy, NSW Treasury, Daniela Heubusch, Technical Panel Member Engineering, Coordinator Infrastructure, Division of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet

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Question from the Hon Sophie Cotsis MLC

Question 2: What is the name of the probity adviser who was appointed to oversee the assessment process?

**Answer 2:** Vic Baueris – Probity Advisor – Account Director Procure Group

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Question from the Hon Sophie Cotsis MLC

Question 3: What were the LGIRS projects for Port Macquarie?

**Answer 3:** A list of successful projects under the LIRS can be found on the DLG website at [www.dlg.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au).

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Question from the Hon Sophie Cotsis MLC

Question 4: Will you disclose the work in progress of those projects?

**Answer 4:** Councils are required to submit project progress reports with every claim for LIRS subsidy instalment payments (every May and November). Any proposed variations in cost or scope must be made in writing and go before the Chief Executive, Division of Local Government, for consideration. It is intended to biannually make public all project progress information on the Division's website.

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Question from the Hon Sophie Cotsis MLC

Question 5: Recently, the Liberal-dominated Blacktown council increased the pensioner rebate policy and council rates for pensioners in the Blacktown City Council have increased by up to 50 per cent. What are you going to do about this increase?

**Answer 5:** As was explained in the material provided by the Hon Sophie Cotsis MLC, Blacktown City Council implemented changes to its voluntary pensioner rebate scheme as part of its 2013/14 Operational Plan. Prior to 2013/14, the Council provided a pensioner rebate equal to 50% of the rates payable. The first \$250 of the rebate reflected the mandatory rebate prescribed under the *Local Government Act 1993*, with Council funding any difference up to 50% of the rates payable.

Very few councils can afford to offer such a generous voluntary pensioner rebate. As a result of the increasing cost burden from the voluntary contribution, the Council resolved to limit its voluntary

contribution to a fixed concession of \$105, in addition to the mandatory rebate of \$250. The impact of this change on individual pensioner ratepayers varies depending on the amount of rates payable.

On 20 May 2013, the Council wrote to all ratepayers who were receiving the concession to notify of the proposed change and how it would impact on their rates. The letter noted that the proposed change was included in Council's draft 2013/14 Operational Plan, which was then on exhibition, and invited feedback. It also advised that if the ratepayer would experience any hardship as a result of the change, they should contact the Council to discuss options for assistance. I note that a copy of this letter was included in the material provided by the Hon Sophie Cotsis MLC. I would encourage any pensioner ratepayer who is experiencing financial difficulty as a result of this change in the Council's policy to contact Blacktown City Council.

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Question from the Hon David Shoebridge MLC

Question 6: There was meant to be a review released in March about E3 Environmental Zones on the North Coast. What has happened to that review? Will you take it on notice and give an indicative time frame for the release of the report?

**Answer 6:** The consultants have provided a draft report to the Department which is currently being reviewed to ensure it adequately responds to the terms of reference. It is anticipated that the consultants will provide their final report before the end of the year. Once councils and local members have been briefed the report will be placed on exhibition for public comment.

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Question from the Hon Amanda Fazio MLC

Question 7: Minister can you give us an indication of exactly where those jobs are and where they have been relocated from? (In relation to jobs in Grafton)?

**Answer 7:** I am advised that additional funding will provide 45 new Crown Lands positions in Grafton. The Department of Finance and Services is relocating 26 jobs from metropolitan Sydney to Grafton. Roads and Maritime Services have created 30 new positions in Grafton. The Office of Environment and Heritage has also created five new positions in Grafton. The Northern Rivers Jobs Plan will see 150 new full-time private sector jobs in the region.

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Question from the Hon Adam Searle MLC

Question 8: What are you doing to address the low rate of vaccinations on the North Coast? Have you made written representations? Can you table them or provide them to the Committee?

**Answer 8:** I have spoken on this issue in the House. Further, I have made representations to the Minister for Health. The Northern Rivers region has historically reported lower vaccination coverage rates than the NSW average, including in the Ballina area. This has been associated with the relatively high number of conscientious objectors in the area. NSW Health and Northern NSW LHD are undertaking a range of activities to improve children's immunisation coverage rates in NSW and on the North Coast.

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Question from the Hon Jan Barham MLC

Question 9: Recommendation 20 of the Visitor Economy Taskforce Action Plan states that there will be advice and support to councils about delivering that special rate variation?

**Answer 9:** In March 2013, the NSW Government released the revised Integrated Planning and Reporting Manual for Local Government in NSW. The manual provides information for councils looking to incorporate tourism as part of their long term financial planning considerations. It also highlights the requirements for applying for a special rate variation to resource outcomes of Community Strategic Plans. Information on special rate variation is available on the DLG and IPART websites.

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Question from the Hon Jan Barham MLC

Question 10: Apart from the hospitals that have been identified in the budget paper can you clarify what other specific North Coast funding is available? I am particularly interested in social housing or homelessness programs. Are they identified specifically for the North Coast?

**Answer 10:** I refer you to my media release of Tuesday 18 June 2013 and the NSW Budget Papers 2013/14.

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Question from the Hon Jan Barham MLC

Question 11: Considering that the North Coast creative industries strategy identified that training and education is the number one priority for securing a sustainable future in that area, are we going to see a change or a reversal of the funding deficit for the North Coast in terms of TAFE positions and TAFE training? This is really hitting hard with that long-term package of actions the strategy developed and seems to have been ignored by government?

**Answer 11:** The NSW Government will not be reversing its decision to remove subsidies for Fine Arts programs as these are not the key programs that support the growth of the creative industries and the jobs that go with it. However, we will continue to provide funding for student places in a wide range of creative industries programs that do deliver job outcomes for North Coast communities.

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Question from the Hon Jan Barham MLC

Question 12: Why has a free vaccination program for women on the North Coast ceased?

**Answer 12:** I am advised that NSW Health had a four-year campaign initiated in response to an epidemic of whooping cough in 2008/2009 and 2009/2010. Whooping cough vaccine was provided free for the duration of the epidemic. NSW Health will continue to provide free whooping cough vaccine in public maternity hospitals for new mothers who have not received the vaccine in the previous five years.

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Question from the Hon Jan Barham MLC

Question 13: What action is being taken to deliver a targeted campaign to improve vaccination rates on the North Coast?

**Answer 13:** I am advised that NSW Health ran the 'Save the Date to Vaccinate' campaign in 2013 to educate and inform the community and immunisation providers about the importance of ensuring that children are fully immunised on time.

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