



**Premier's Department
New South Wales**

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Ms Tanya Bosch
Director, Budget Estimates
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
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Dear Ms Bosch

I refer to the questions taken on notice by the Premier at the General Purpose Standing Committee No 1 hearing on 13 September 2004.

Set out below are responses to questions taken on notice during the hearing. Page references refer to the transcript of proceeding.

1. *The Hon Greg Pearce and the Hon Melinda Pavey asked for details of legal fees for appearances before ICAC (pages 10 and 11).*

ANSWER

A response will be provided to Question on Notice 1546 placed by the Hon Greg Pearce MLC.

2. *The Hon. Greg Pearce asked for the amount of Mr Wedderburn's salary (page 13).*

ANSWER

Mr Wedderburn's salary is \$204,512 pa

3. *The Hon Lee Rhiannon asked about the impact of longwall mining under the Georges and Cataract Rivers and proposed longwall mining under the Nepean River (page 16).*

ANSWER

(1)

The Government is aware of the cracking of the bed of the Georges River resulting from longwall mining at BHP Billiton's Appin coal mine.

The Minister for the Environment informs me that the company has completed significant remediation works to curtail water loss and has ceased discharging water for the purposes of maintaining environmental flow. A monitoring program has been established at the site to evaluate the effectiveness of the works.

I understand that the company continues to discharge water for mine safety reasons, and purchases water from Sydney Water to dilute such discharges and minimise their effect on the water quality of the river. The Minister for Mineral Resources advises that, over recent months, the Appin mine has discharged an average of 1.2 megalitres per day.

The discharge of this water, along with all aspects of the company's operations at the Appin mine, is subject to an Environment Protection Licence issued by the Department of Environment and Conservation. Under that licence, any underground mine water discharged must be of a suitable quality.

Moreover, in August 2004, the Department of Environment and Conservation finalised its requirements for BHP Billiton to implement a pollution-reduction program to increase the reuse of mine water and minimise the use of purchased water in mine operations. It is anticipated that this will be comprehensively implemented by the company by June 2006.

(2)

I understand that BHP Billiton has begun consulting with affected landowners on a proposal to conduct longwall mining under the Nepean River. However, the Government has not yet received a formal proposal on this matter, and therefore cannot comment further on the company's plans.

The Government has put in place stringent regulations to ensure that future longwall mining does not threaten river quality, national parks or housing.

As of March 2004, all underground coal mines must develop a Subsidence Management Plan that outlines the mining proposal, identifies all surface features, predicts the potential impacts upon these features, and identifies proposals to mitigate these impacts and protect significant features where necessary.

Subsidence Management Plans will be developed, reviewed and assessed in consultation with the community and a range of government agencies prior to any approval being considered.

In the case at hand, BHP Billiton would have to provide evidence that mining could proceed without unacceptable adverse impacts upon the Nepean River. If the company is not able to demonstrate this, the proposal will be refused or sent back for modification. The Minister for Mineral Resources has advised me that BHP Billiton would also have to provide an Environmental Impact Statement on the proposal, and meet all other development approval requirements under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

4. *The Hon Greg Pearce asked that the Ministerial Handbook be tabled (page 39).*

ANSWER

A separate Ministers' Office Administration Handbook was issued to update parts of the Ministerial Handbook relating to the administration of Ministers' offices. The document was last re-issued in 2003.

The Parliamentary Library's on-line catalogue indicates that editions of both documents are held in the Parliamentary Library and are confidential to members (see attached extract). The Ministers' Office Administration Handbook is currently being revised and the new edition will be provided to the Library when available.

5. *The Hon. Greg Pearce asked for details of Ministerial Office Budgets (page 40).*

ANSWER

The spreadsheet is attached at Appendix 1.

6. *The Hon. Melinda Pavey asked for details of the Strengthening Communities Unit (page 42)*

ANSWER

The Strengthening Communities Unit, along with a range of other programs, transferred from the Premier's Department to the Department of Community Services on 1 July 2004.

This Division combines a number of important programs from across the NSW Government including Families First, the Aboriginal Child and Family Strategy, Better Futures, Community Solutions and the Area Assistance Scheme. All these programs provide a substantial proportion of their resources in regional and rural NSW.

In 2004-2005 the work of the Strengthening Local Communities Strategy is likely to include a research program, leadership and asset based community development training and initiatives to improve NGO relations. All of these will have impact in regional and rural NSW.

Yours sincerely

C. Gellatly
Director General