



The Hon. Kevin Humphries MP
Minister for Natural Resources, Lands and Water
Minister for Western New South Wales

10 September 2014

Mr Stewart Smith, Director
Budget Estimates
Legislative Council
NSW Parliament
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Smith,

Please find attached copies of answers to Budget Estimates questions on notice taken during the hearing on 18 August 2014 for the portfolios of Natural Resources, Lands and Water and Western South Wales.

Also attached are the answers to the supplementary questions on notice and the transcript corrections from the hearing.

Yours Sincerely

The Hon. Kevin Humphries MP
Minister for Natural Resources, Lands and Water
Minister for Western New South Wales

QUESTION

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

What is the current staffing of Sydney Water, full time equivalents?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

From memory, I will take a stab, I think it is 2,065.

Mr YOUNG:

It is 2,400

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Sorry, 2,400, half the 5,000.

Mr YOUNG:

Yes, that's correct, Minister.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

How many of these staff are employed in maintenance?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I will refer that to Mr Young

Mr YOUNG:

I will take that on notice for the exact details of that.

ANSWER

415

QUESTION

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

What is the staffing of Hunter Water full time equivalent?

Mr WOOD:

There are 466 employees.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

How many of those are employed in maintenance?

Mr WOOD: I will need to take that question on notice.

ANSWER

133.6 full time equivalent positions

QUESTION

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Mr Young, Peter Mills was Sydney Water's general manager of human resources from November 2004 until December 2014, is that the case?

Mr YOUNG:

I think that is probably right.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Can you tell me why he left Sydney Water?

Mr YOUNG:

It came to a position where Mr Mills resigned from the organisation at that time.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Had he been placed on special duties and another person placed to act in the general manager's role?

Mr YOUNG:

Someone had been placed to act in the general manager's role, but that occurred after he indicated he was resigning and he would stay in the organisation for a certain time period, which I agreed to.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

For what period was that person placed in that role?

Mr YOUNG:

I will take that on notice, but it would be a number of months. I can give you the exact time.

ANSWER

Three months

QUESTION

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Who took the decision to stand Mr Mills down?

Mr YOUNG:

Mr Mills was never stood down. Through agreement and discussions he indicated he was resigning from the organisation and he would like that period to be to the end of the year and it was considered if he was going to take that role we should have someone else act in the position.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Did he continue to receive full payment during that time?

Mr YOUNG:

He did receive full payment for the period that he worked for Sydney Water.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Were there any matters involving Mr Mills that had been referred to the audit and risk committee?

Mr YOUNG:

There were some issues that had been referred to the audit and risk committee that were dealt with satisfactorily.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Are you able to tell us what those are?

Mr YOUNG:

I cannot.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Can you take that on notice? Has Sydney Water undergone organisational restructuring in the last two years?

Mr YOUNG: Yes.

ANSWER

As stated in the hearing, Sydney Water cannot comment further on this matter.

QUESTION

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

How many maintenance staff have been outsourced to the private sector as part of this restructure?

Mr YOUNG:

I will take that on notice but the major outsourcing that occurred some time ago was the outsourcing of our electro-mechanical maintenance. Thiess, as a private sector participant, came in to do that work

ANSWER

55

QUESTION

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

How many maintenance staff remained with Sydney Water?

Mr YOUNG:

Again we have the details of that. The majority of our maintenance staff would be in the civil area and that remains today.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Can you take that on notice?

Mr YOUNG:

Absolutely.

ANSWER

As above.

QUESTION

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Can you take that on notice? Has Sydney Water undergone organisational restructuring in the last two years?

Mr YOUNG:

Yes

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

What did these restructures involve?

Mr YOUNG:

The first restructure was a change in the executive team that involved a smaller number of executives reporting to me. It was a restructure based on our strategy moving forward. Restructures of the team and organisation are ongoing, as it has been in the past.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

How many maintenance staff have been outsourced to the private sector as part of this restructure?

Mr YOUNG:

I will take that on notice but the major outsourcing that occurred some time ago was the outsourcing of our electro-mechanical maintenance. Thiess, as a private sector participant, came in to do that work.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

How many maintenance staff remained with Sydney Water?

Mr YOUNG:

Again we have the details of that. The majority of our maintenance staff would be in the civil area and that remains today.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Can you take that on notice?

Mr YOUNG:

Absolutely.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

What briefings or proposals have been put by you to your board to outsource further maintenance to the private sector?

Mr YOUNG:

None that I am aware of. In terms of our civil workforce the briefings that have taken place with our board relate to a discussion that we are making great progress with our internal civil workforce and they have achieved great things in the last two years. An agreement with the Australian Services Union and Sydney Water is that our workforce aims to be the lowest cost

most productive suppliers in Australia. I believe there was a briefing, as the Minister said, on that fact. We are in alignment on that.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

The Minister has been briefed on these outsourcing proposals?

Mr YOUNG:

No, the Minister has been briefed on the great success we have achieved with our internal workforce in hitting the targets.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I ask the same organisational restructure questions of Hunter Water on notice.

Mr WOOD: I will provide those answers.

ANSWER

Hunter Water has not undergone any organisational restructure in the last two years.

QUESTION

Dr JOHN KAYE:

When was the electro-mechanical function passed from Sydney Water to a non- State entity?

Mr YOUNG:

I think the decision was made in September 2012 with an announcement that we were going to the market. I think Thiess started on 1 July 2013.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

What are the anticipated savings?

Mr YOUNG:

I can provide that information, but they would be substantial.

ANSWER

6.8 million per annum.

QUESTION

Dr JOHN KAYE:

What will be the change in terms of the number of person hours per year involved?

Mr YOUNG:

I can take on notice the number of person hours involved, but the staffing position previously was that out of the 2,450 there were around 145 staff involved in electrical mechanical maintenance. A number of them would have transitioned to Theiss.

ANSWER

92,400

QUESTION

Dr JOHN KAYE:

Do you know how many transitioned to Theiss?

Mr YOUNG:

I will take that on notice.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

When they transitioned did they maintain the same conditions?

Mr YOUNG:

They did.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

For what period?

Mr YOUNG:

To explain, 40 per cent of our electrical mechanical maintenance was already done by the private sector. That was being handled by Transfield.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

Was that decision made under the previous Government?

Mr YOUNG:

Before my time the decision was made that 40 per cent of electrical mechanical maintenance should go to the private sector. We had that benchmarking in place and then made the decision, when the contract was coming up, to put 100 per cent to the market. There would have been a significant proportion of our existing employees who shifted to Theiss and a significant number of private sector employees already working for Transfield on Sydney Water who transferred to Theiss. Theiss would have gone to the market to make up the balance.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

Mr Young, you will get us those figures I am sure.

ANSWER

As above.

QUESTION

Dr JOHN KAYE:

I turn to the desalination plant and, in particular, the turn-on and turn-off thresholds. They are called "pump marks", but that is a confusing expression. These thresholds were formed under the previous Government. I recollect it turns on at 70 per cent and turns off at 80 per cent.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Correct.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

No, that is not correct; it is the wrong way around. They turn on at 70 per cent and off at 80 per cent.

Mr YOUNG:

I think this was also before my time, but it was the Centre for International Economics that did the study. That was part of a previous Metropolitan Water Plan.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

Is there anything in your agreement with the owners or operators of the Sydney Desalination Plant that would lock in those numbers?

Mr YOUNG:

As part of the agreement there is a commitment to meet the Metropolitan Water Plan, which is based on the 70:80 model.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

Is that a static or a dynamic matter—that is to say, if the Metropolitan Water Plan were to change, could you change the pump marks?

Mr YOUNG:

That would be a matter for the Government of the time to try to get the best value for the people of New South Wales.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

I am not asking that. If they were to change, is there anything in the agreement between Sydney Water Corporation and the owners and/or the operators of the desalination plant that would lock that in?

Mr SCOT MacDONALD:

Point of order: Is that matter commercial in confidence?

CHAIR:

There is no point of order. It is a matter for the Minister to determine, no-one else.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

Minister, would you like to comment?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Sydney Water and the desalination plant operate under a licence. We can take on notice some issues you have raised. The Metropolitan Water Plan is the overarching set of principles governing how the valley and the catchment work. If there were a change of configuration, for reasons such as flood mitigation or enhanced storage, could that equation change? It possibly could.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

Is there not an absence of flexibility created by the contractual arrangements signed with the owners or operators?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

No.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

So, as Minister, you could ask for a review of the Metropolitan Water Plan and that could recommend changes to the pump marks, and the desalination owners and operators would have to suck it up?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I am not sure of the finite details, so I will take that on notice. You asked if there was some flexibility in the licensing agreement and as far as I am advised, yes, there is.

ANSWER

The '70/80 operating rule' for the Sydney Desalination plant Pty Ltd is set out in the network operator license granted in 2010 under the *Water Industry Competition Act 2006*. One of the conditions of the license is as follows:

When the Available Storage falls below 70%, the License Holder must, until the Available Storage rises to 80% operate and maintain the Water Industry Infrastructure with the objective of maximising the production of drinking water for the exclusive supply into the Sydney Water Corporation's area of operation (as defined in Sydney Water's Operating Licence).

Under section 15 of the WIC Act, the Minister for Natural Resources, Lands and Water may at any time vary the existing conditions of a licence. In imposing licence conditions, the Minister is to have regard for a number of licensing principles set out in section 7 of the Act.

There is nothing in the arrangements between the Government and the long term lessee of the Sydney Desalination Plant Pty Ltd that would prevent the above licence condition from being changed.

QUESTION

Dr JOHN KAYE:

Mr Wood, I understand—and it is relevant to the Minister's answer to a previous question—that in Catherine Hill Bay there is a private water provider under the Water Industry Competition Act, both a wastewater and drinking water provider. Does your organisation get a chance to see the plans, see the design in any way?

Mr WOOD:

We are involved in discussions with three proponents in our geographical area and Catherine Hill Bay is one of those, and we have a high level of visibility of the proposal that the proponent puts forward.

Dr JOHN KAYE:

A "high level of visibility" means you have seen the proposal?

Mr WOOD:

I will need to take that question on notice, but I am quite certain we would have.

ANSWER

Yes

QUESTION

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

The Government has undertaken a statewide review of water utility rebates. When do you expect the review to be finalised?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I might have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

This review will be undertaken by the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

QUESTION

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

If you are going to take that on notice, can you also take on notice: Will the findings be made public? I note that nearly 45,000 properties in the Hunter receive a pensioner concession rebate. What will be the estimated reduction in the rebate for pensioners in the Hunter and, indeed, the rest of New South Wales in 2015-16?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I will comment generally on that. Certainly the Government has made a commitment on all fronts, whether they be power pricing or water rebates, to make sure that nobody is disadvantaged in terms of that. The Government has made a position in lieu of some redirection of funding by the Federal Government so that there will be rebates continued, certainly by Sydney Water and Hunter Water on that front.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:

Yes, I noticed that for 2014-15, but my question relates to 2015-16. I look at the forward estimates from the Office of Finance and Services relating to Hunter Water Corporation pensioner rebates and also for Sydney Water Corporation, and note that there are a whole lot of dashes in the forward estimates for those. Again, I would be grateful if you could take on notice what you propose will happen to those rebates in 2015-16.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Sure, thank you.

ANSWER

From May 2014, payments for measures provided by Sydney and Hunter Water, including pensioner rebates, are reflected in the Trade & Investment cluster Budget Papers. Further details can be seen on page8-12 of the Trade & Investment Budget Paper No. 3. It is expected that such measures will continue in 2015-16, subject to any adjustments made as part of the budgetary process.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Mr Paterson, on 8 November 2013 the then Lands Minister, the Hon. Andrew Stoner, sent a letter with regard to the Crown Lands Amendment (Multiple Land Use) Bill 2013. Were any departmental staff utilised in the construction of that letter?

Mr PATERSON:

I will take that on notice

ANSWER

No

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Can you also take on notice whether any departmental resources were used in the construction of that letter?

Mr PATERSON:

I am happy to take it on notice.

ANSWER

No department resources were used.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

When will the strategic plan for coastal and inland water holiday parks be completed?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

That is a good question.

Ms BROOKS:

Are you talking about the State parks?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Yes.

Ms BROOKS:

I have to take that on notice in terms of the exact timing.

ANSWER

By the end of the year.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Who is preparing the plan?

Ms BROOKS:

I imagine—but I will need to confirm this—that it is being prepared by the Crown Holiday Parks Trust or someone on behalf of the Crown Holiday Parks Trust, which is now responsible for managing those areas.

ANSWER

The NSW Crown Holiday Parks Trust is preparing the Strategic Plan.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

As a matter of interest, are members of that trust paid? Are they remunerated as directors?

Ms BROOKS:

I might have to take that question on notice.

ANSWER

Yes

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

How often do they meet? You might want to take that on notice.

Ms BROOKS:

Yes, I will.

Answer

On a monthly basis, or as required.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

While taking questions on notice, what funds are currently available in the Public Reserves Management Fund [PRMF]?

Ms BROOKS:

I will have to take on notice exactly the quantum that is available in the fund. I do not have those details with me.

ANSWER

As at 30 June 2014 available funds were \$25 million

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Why did your Government scrap the draft blueprint for the Port Macquarie waterfront?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

We have not scrapped any blueprint regarding the Port Macquarie waterfront. What we have done in Port Macquarie was open up for a final consultation with the community and input, which is not finished-it is not far off; it should be later this month-to ensure that the community has the opportunity to put any concerns, final input or suggestions. So Lands has led the final consultation out of the Taree office. There is no scrapping of any plans, but I can say that that planning process has gone on for years and it needs to draw to a conclusion. The community is anxious to see that happen.

The Hon. Mick Veitch:

What is the cost of developing that plan to date?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

The foreshore plan-the draft plan of management?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Yes.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I will have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

\$30,770

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

What is the status of the legal action regarding Tallis Reserve?

Ms BROOKS:

My understanding is that that is still active and matters are being adjourned until September, I think.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Can you provide advice as to the total cost of legal fees to date to the Government for that particular action?

Ms BROOKS:

I am not able to provide that today but I can take it on notice.

ANSWER:

The legal proceedings relating to Talus Street Reserve have been adjourned until 17 September 2014 for a directions hearing before the Supreme Court of New South Wales.

The total cost of legal fees and disbursements incurred by the Crown to date is approximately \$53,150 (excluding GST).

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Which legal firm or firms is the Government using to do the work?

Ms BROOKS:

I will have to take that on notice as well.

ANSWER:

The Crown has engaged the New South Wales Crown Solicitor and Tiffany Wong of Counsel.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

What is the status of the King Edward headland reserve action?

Ms BROOKS:

I will have to take that on notice as well.

ANSWER:

The Land and Environment Court has reserved judgement in the legal proceedings relating to King Edward headland reserve.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

I have a similar series of questions: What is the cost to date? Which firm or firms is the Government using to do the work?

Ms BROOKS:

We can take those questions on notice.

ANSWER:

\$207,568.01 (including GST). The Crown has engaged the New South Wales Crown Solicitor and Shauna Ross and Chris Birch of Counsel to provide advice and appear on behalf of the Crown in the legal proceedings.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Is the Minister aware of an issue in relation to the Adelong Creek woody debris clean-up? In particular, who owns the land between what is known as the C J Dean depot workshop and Bleak Street? Council is of the view that it is Crown land.

Ms BROOKS:

I am certainly not aware of that issue.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Have you any more detail?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

The woody debris piles up on a bend in Adelong Creek during a flooding event, which holds the water back which then overflows the woody debris and hence it has cost the Government quite a lot of money in replacing the swimming pool and a bridge. The residents of Adelong want it cleaned up again before the next flooding event.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS:

Is that today?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

It may well be today.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Was that the swimming pool that was replaced under disaster funding?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

It is.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

The only one in Australia.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

The only betterment funding in Australia.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

It is actually iconic.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Thank you very much; I did put in a lot of effort.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Well done. I can get you some more information on it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

The issue is: Who owns the land between the C J Dean depot workshop and Bleak Street, Adelong?

ANSWER

It is crown land.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Mr Paterson, how many employees this year have been subject to external investigations within the portfolio areas of the Minister?

Mr PATERSON:

I will take it on notice. Can you clarify what you mean by “external”?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

The same as last year’s question around external investigation companies being used for, I guess, employees who are suspected of having breached the public service code.

Ms BROOKS:

Within the Minister’s area of responsibility?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Yes. Also, what external companies are being used to conduct those investigations?

Ms BROOKS:

Yes.

ANSWER:

There have been 2 employees. These investigations were conducted by the Internal Audit Bureau.

QUESTION

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

In October last year the Deputy Premier signed a lease over Crown land in Tweed Heads. The land was created for public recreation south of the Gold Coast airport. The lease was signed with the Gold Coast Airport Pty Ltd for the purposes of works associated with runway extension. Does this Government support the extension of the Gold Coast runway on to the Crown land that was leased to Gold Coast Airport for 90 years?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I am not aware of the specific details.

Ms BROOKS:

I do not think I could comment on the specifics either except to say that in my recollection I am certainly aware that there was a lease. There is often space required well beyond the extension of runways so there is no space for planes to take off as opposed to actually having runways constructed on them. I am just speculating that that might be the situation there but I do not have those details in front of me.

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

Will you take that question on notice?

Ms BROOKS:

Yes.

ANSWER

The lease issued by Crown Lands does not approve any works such as an extension of the runway.

QUESTION

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

Was there any community consultation undertaken by the department before this lease was signed?

Ms BROOKS:

I think we would need to take that on notice. There are a very large number of leases signed every year and I do not have at my fingertips details on the conversation focus on all of them.

ANSWER

No

QUESTION

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

Will you also take on notice: Is this lease consistent with the plan of management for that Crown land?

Ms BROOKS:

Yes, we can take that on notice.

ANSWER

Yes

QUESTION

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

How many other large storages are on the upper reaches of the Belubula River?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

You should know that. One.

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

But do you know as Minister for Water?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Yes, Carcoar.

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

Are there any others?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Not that I am aware of.

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

There is Lake Rowlands and there is also Cadia's massive dam as well, so there are three others.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I will just table this in response to your previous question. A subsequent study by Central Tablelands Water in 2013 concluded the construction of a larger dam on the Belubula would be a better option when compared to enlargement of Lake Rowlands. This study concluded that the proposed Needles Creek Dam site provides a better location for constructing a dam for the expenditure involved. That was following a central New South Wales or Centroc study in 2009 that identified a range of potential measures, including the need to increase dam storage capacity for urban water security. The study recommended an increase of 22 gegalitres at Lake Rowlands, a dam operated by Central Tablelands Water. The dam is on a tributary of the Belubula as we know. Central Tablelands Water took that work and obviously wanted to pursue another direction. If the member wants any further information we can take that on notice.

CHAIR:

Point of clarification: Minister, did you say you wish to table a document?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

No.

CHAIR:

You were just reading from it.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I was reading from some advice but I am happy to provide the member with more information.

ANSWER

Carcoar Dam is the only major dam on the upper reaches of the Belubula River. Three other major dams are located on other watercourses that are tributaries of the Belubula River.

QUESTION

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

Recently you would have received an Ombudsman's report into a complaint about the New South Wales Office of Water that was lodged by the Calga-Peats Ridge Community Group. Will you table the final investigation report made by the NSW Ombudsman into various aspects of how the New South Wales Office of Water carried out its functions in this regard?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I will take advice on that.

Mr HANSEN:

We will take that question on notice.

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

Will you also take on notice what recommendations the Ombudsman made that you are prepared to make public and have you conducted a review into the policies relating to the alleged breaches? I would appreciate it if you could take those questions on notice also.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Yes.

ANSWER

The NSW Ombudsman operates as an independent and impartial body. The Ombudsman chose not to make the report public. The Government supports the valuable work of the NSW Ombudsman and his independence.

QUESTION

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

Minister, does the Government expect any applications for compensation from high security licence holders based on this change and who will be liable for compensation if the change to the legislation results in a loss of water to high security licence holders?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

No-one has raised that with us.

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

The New South Wales irrigators have not raised that with you?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Not formally, no. They were happy with the amendments.

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

Informally?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

That was the discussion: they were very supportive of all of the amendments we made. If there is anything specific you are concerned about I can take it on notice.

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

They did not make a written submission?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

There would have been a written submission but I did not read it all. I will take it on notice. In the discussions I had with New South Wales irrigators—and I meet most of them on a regular basis—it did not seem to be a problem for them.

ANSWER

The NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) made a written submission on the *Water Management Bill 2014* dated 17 April 2014. This submission is publically available at www.nswic.org.au/

QUESTION

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness was recently charged \$456 to undertake a charity walk on the Six Foot Track between Katoomba and Jenolan Caves. Why does Crown Lands charge a minimum of \$456 for a charity walk in the public interest on the Six Foot Track and is the Government planning to impose a similar charge on charity walks in other national parks?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

No idea. I will take it on notice.

ANSWER

Crown Lands licenses a range of uses and other events on the Six Foot Track and other iconic walking tracks in NSW each year. Licences are issued under the *Crown Lands Act 1989* to authorise use of the walking track and provide appropriate conditions to govern that use. Rents are applied in accordance with the Act. For community and charity events, the statutory minimum rent applies (currently \$456).

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Minister, how many items have you referred to the Cross-Border Commissioner in the last few months?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

In writing or discussions?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Both.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I would have to take the question referring to writing on notice. I have had a number of discussions with the previous Cross-Border Commissioner, but I have not met the present Cross-Border Commissioner.

ANSWER

The Cross Border Commissioner and I are in regular contact, both formally and informally. The most recent meeting took place in Mungindi in February 2014.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

With regard to your portfolio of Western New South Wales, how many staff within your office are allocated to that responsibility?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Within the ministerial office?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Both: Your office but also within the department. First, within your office.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Within my office there is one person.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Within the department?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I will pass that on. As you know the regional ministries do not necessarily have entitlement straight back into a department. It is designed to cross all areas. The DPC cut back through them. We have on-the-ground representatives in Western New South Wales as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

How many?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

In Bourke, one; in Tamworth, three; in Dubbo, at least three as far as I know; and Wagga Wagga—I am not sure how many we have in Wagga Wagga.

Mr BRADY:

We can confirm that for you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

And the locations?

Mr BRADY:

Will do. We will confirm the numbers.

ANSWER

The Department of Premier and Cabinet has an FTE of 9.4 to progress the Department's work program in Western NSW.

Bourke (1 FTE), Dubbo (2.4 FTE), Tamworth (3 FTE), Wagga Wagga (3 FTE)

QUESTION

The Hon. STEVE WHAN:

It was your Government's decision to stop drought declarations. Do you think that is a consequence that should have been anticipated?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Possibly it should have been. However, again, it was raised during the drought by a number of people. As far as I know, the issue has been dealt with and no-one has been disadvantaged.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN:

Can you provide an answer about how it has been dealt with?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Yes, I can go through the process.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN:

Can you also reassure us that it has been dealt with appropriately?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

Yes.

ANSWER

The Government recognises the importance of mulga as a fodder supply during times of drought. A draft Ministerial Order establishing a code of practice for the use of mulga as drought fodder under the Native Vegetation Act is before the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. With the approval of the Minister it will be exhibited for public comment.

QUESTION

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

I turn to the payroll tax rebate scheme, which is targeting about 9,300 workers. Have you made representations to the responsible Minister about progressing that bill?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

It is an issue we have discussed at length as part of a regional development support package.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

The bill has been adjourned in the upper House for more than three months. I thought it was an important bill that we all agree on, so it should have progressed simply. I am surprised it is still on the *Notice Paper*.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

I will take that on notice.

ANSWER

The NSW Government is committed to reforming the Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme (Jobs Action Plan) Act 2011 in order to provide for an additional payroll tax rebate for individuals whose employment has been terminated because of redundancy.

QUESTION

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

In terms of your response to the Wilcox report, will mandatory public liability be part of the response, mandatory occupational health and safety induction and also biosecurity requirements? Will they form part of the Government's response?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

To what?

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

To the Wilcox inquiry.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

On the first section, as far as I know—I can stand corrected—any person who enters or participates in mining activity on a rural landholding is covered by insurance, as far as I am aware.

Mr JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:

They are or they should be?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES:

They are, as far as I am advised, but I will take it on notice. That outcome had been communicated, as far as I am aware, to NSW Farmers as well some time ago.

ANSWER

The final Government response to the Wilcox Report is available on the NSW Trade and Investment website at www.resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au.



**Kevin Humphries MP
Minister for Natural Resources, Lands and Water
Minister for Western New South Wales**