

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

**PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 2 – HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES**

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2017-2018

UNCORRECTED PROOF

HEALTH

**At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney,
on Tuesday, 31 October 2017**

The Committee met at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. Greg Donnelly (Chair)

The Hon. David Clarke

The Hon. Paul Green

The Hon. Courtney Houssos

The Hon. Trevor Khan

The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps

The Hon. Walt Secord

Ms Dawn Walker

The CHAIR: Welcome to the inquiry into budget estimates 2017-18. Before I commence I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I pay respects to elders, past and present, of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present and to those who may be joining us on the internet. I welcome Minister Hazzard and officers from the Ministry of Health to this supplementary hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Health. Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. A transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available.

In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while people may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I remind media representatives who are present or who may be joining us that you must take responsibility for what you publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside their evidence at the hearing, so I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments you may make to the media or others after you complete your evidence as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege, if another person decided to take action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcaster proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that a witness could answer only if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In those circumstances witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the gallery should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. The transcript of the hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Finally, I ask everyone to please turn off their mobile phones for the duration of the hearing.

All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies and corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already taken an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. I remind Mr Samuel Sangster and Mr John Roach from the Ministry of Health that you do not need to be sworn as you were sworn at an earlier budget estimates hearing of this Committee, and you obviously would be aware of that.

BRADLEY RONALD HAZZARD, Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research, on former oath

JOHN ROACH, Chief Financial Officer and Deputy Secretary, Financial Services and Asset Management, Ministry of Health, on former oath

SAMUEL SANGSTER, Chief Executive, Health Infrastructure, Ministry of Health, on former oath

The CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Health open for examination. The questioning of the Health portfolio will run from 10.00 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. As there is no provision under the budget estimates resolution to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, we begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Minister, what is the current status of the review into cladding? How many hospitals?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is well progressed. The last advice I had was that there were two facilities that had some very minor cladding issues that were being addressed.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: What are those two facilities?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Queanbeyan and Armidale.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I think some media reports said that it was the ambulatory care building of the Armidale hospital. What activity actually takes place in the Armidale hospital's ambulatory care building?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Ambulatory care buildings are generally used—and that one I think is as well; I visited that one—for dialysis and other activities that would involve patients coming in and out on a daily basis. They do not sleep overnight, in other words.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: At the Queanbeyan hospital, what is the status of that review?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will ask Mr Sangster if he wishes to answer that.

Mr SANGSTER: Mr Secord, the cladding has commenced being removed. If you have been down there you would have seen the cladding, particularly around the main entrance.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Yes, I have.

Mr SANGSTER: That is the main area of public safety. I thought you might have been there. That has been removed and we will look at how we best remove the balance.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: What is the timetable for completion of that?

Mr SANGSTER: We are looking at the best methodology to actually remove the existing cladding and we are working on what we are going to replace that cladding with right now.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Is the cladding on the Queanbeyan hospital the same or similar cladding to what was used in the Grenfell tragedy?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We are looking at it from the point of view of what is the safest possible cladding. There is a variety of substances that make up materials that are used in cladding and there is no clear indication of what particular substance was used in Grenfell. That is part of the review in the United Kingdom [UK] at the moment.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Okay. Back to the Queanbeyan one. The Government has determined that it is important enough to remove that cladding.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: On the basis of the precautionary principle, yes. We are doing everything to keep people as safe as can possibly be. If there is any doubt at all, we will remove it.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You are removing the cladding at Queanbeyan.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As I understand it, it is only around the entrance, though. It is not the whole hospital, apparently.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: It is just around the entrance.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Okay. Back to the ambulatory care building at the Armidale hospital. What is the status of that?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I might ask Mr Sangster to answer that.

Mr SANGSTER: We are engaging the builder that is currently building the new building next door to give us a methodology to look at how best to remove the cladding on that building.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Is it relatively new cladding that was put up on that building?

Mr SANGSTER: It is.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: How long ago was the cladding put on there?

Mr SANGSTER: Approximately 2014 the building was complete.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I noticed that in October 2017 it was said that Health Infrastructure completed a preliminary assessment of more than 4,600 buildings and that 97.5 per cent of those buildings were assessed. That leaves about 117 or 120 buildings that still have not been looked at. What is the status of those buildings?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am just checking: I think we have actually answered these questions that you have already given us on notice, so I am not quite sure why we are doing it all again. That is all.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I am getting to that.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: But we have already done all this.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: No, you have not. You have not answered the specific question details about the timetable or what the materials were. I have the material that you answered and none of that is in there. If you want me to read it, it will be very clear.

The CHAIR: Just continue with the questioning please.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You said that 97.5 per cent of the buildings have been assessed. That leaves about 115 buildings outstanding. What is the status of those 115 buildings? That is not in your notes.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We are working our way through those. Obviously there are specialists in this area that we have to get when they are available to do it, so it is progressing.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Maybe Mr Sangster can tell me. What is the timetable for the 115 remaining buildings?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We will give you an answer in writing on that one.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Why not Mr Sangster? He is just sitting next to you.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No. I have said I will take it on notice and give it to you.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: At the 1 September hearing, you said, "The advice that I received is that there is no cladding that is problematic." That is a direct quote from *Hansard*. That is what you said. I will say that again: "The advice that I received is that there is no cladding that is problematic."

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There is nothing that is causing any concerns in the health department. We are being extremely precautionary, as any responsible government would be.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You said there were no problems and the next day—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have answered the question, Mr Secord.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: No, you have not.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am sorry, but I am not here to accept your version of the facts. I have given you my version of the facts, and that is it.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I actually read from *Hansard*. You told the Committee hearing that "There is no cladding that is problematic", and then a day later your department put out a statement saying that there are problems with Armidale, Queanbeyan and Lismore.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have just indicated to you—I am sorry, Mr Secord. I have given you the answer.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You have not given me the answer. I want to know why you came to the parliamentary hearing—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have given you the answer.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: —and did not answer questions, and then a day later put out a statement saying that there were three hospitals that had problems.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have given you the answer.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You have not given me the answer.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You have 45 minutes. If you keep asking the same thing, I have already said you—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: No, he has not. He has 15 minutes.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Trevor, thank you for the reminder.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Actually, Walt, you have got eight.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Thanks for the assistance.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: We are waiting for the zinger.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Minister, yesterday during the discussion in the public arena about the flu vaccination, you said "... with the benefit of hindsight— and hindsight is a wonderful thing—that wasn't quite up to it", referring to the vaccines. Have you or the State Government launched a review into what happened involving this year's flu vaccinations?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Mr Secord, I thought we were called back for matters arising out of the previous hearing.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: You just told me that you had answered all the questions and I should move on to something else, so I am moving on to something else. I want to ask you about the flu vaccinations.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Chair, I am happy to take your direction, of course, but I was advised that these were related to matters that arose out of the last hearing.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I wanted to put questions to the bureaucrats about cladding. He has refused. I am just moving on.

The CHAIR: Please, Mr Secord. This is a supplementary hearing that is bound by the general procedures about the manner in which budget estimates hearings are conducted. They are pretty broad in their nature. I understand from just observing the exchange that the cladding part of it now has expired. It appears the member is moving on to another area, and that is perfectly legitimate.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I accept your direction on that. My understanding of it was that any supplementary hearing was in regard to matters that were raised and needed further clarification. But, all right: I am not sure why everybody is here, if that is not the case.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Vaccinations were in the original hearings and these flow out of those questions, and cladding also flows out of those questions. Minister, yesterday you said, "...with the benefit of hindsight—and hindsight is a wonderful thing—that wasn't quite up to it", referring to the 2017 vaccinations. Have you or your department launched a review into what happened with this year's vaccinations?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Obviously the Chief Medical Officer has taken an interest in this issue but the Hon. Walt Secord may or may not be aware that the principal issue is that under the National Immunisation Program it is not a matter for each individual State or Territory, it is a matter that comes from the Federal Government and the Therapeutic Goods Administration. The Chief Medical Officer is a Federal public servant, not a State public servant. I have no power over him. He has also publicly indicated that there are some issues they are looking at with regard to this year's vaccination that was provided. It would appear that the variants in the viruses that make up the influenza disease varied after the vaccination material was developed.

What they are telling us so far is that they are looking at how they can try to make sure that any variants are as up to date as possible for the next flu season, but it is a national issue not a State issue. Having said that, all of the State and Territory Ministers—majority Labor around the country but two Liberal governments—share the same view, and that is we would like to make sure that the Federal authorities take it seriously because this was the worst flu season on record. As I understand it, all of my State colleagues, Labor and Liberal, have asked the Federal Government, the Federal regulatory authorities and the Federal Chief Medical Officer to ensure that next year's vaccination is the most up to date and the strongest available.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Do you support calls for an independent, external, national investigation into what happened with the selection of this year's vaccines?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Who called for that?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Me, just now.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Of course he supports it.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Do you think there should be an independent, external investigation into what happened—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I can only say it will be fascinating if the Hon. Walt Secord ever gets to be Minister for Health, because evidence-based suppositions will go right out the door.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: My question was simple; do you think there should be a national, independent, examination—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You expressed some surprise in the first hearing—I think you said I was not but I in fact have been a scientist—and I am reliant on evidence, not on the Walt Secord view of life. That is quite good. I will wait and see—

The Hon. WALT SECORD: That there should be an independent, evidence-based external investigation?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: If this is the sum total of what the Hon. Walt Secord will ask me this morning, he has wasted a hell of a lot of staff time and his own colleagues' time.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: If the Minister had answered the questions involving cladding honestly and truthfully in the first hearing—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will not say it is stupid or ridiculous, Mr Chairman, I am being very careful. What I would like to say is that the Chairman's time and my time is being wasted.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: If the Minister had answered the questions about cladding truthfully in the first hearing we would not be back.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: So it is cladding?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: If the Minister had answered the question truthfully in the first hearing—

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I get more common sense out of going to the local school kindergarten. This is ridiculous. I have not said stupid. I will not say stupid.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: My point of order is that the Hon. Wald Secord is quite entitled to ask questions. He is not here to make statements, particularly offensive ones.

The CHAIR: The format is that members direct questions to the Minister or one of his staff and receive answers. The Committee operates on that basis. Please proceed.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Will we call it quits now?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you said that there is in the future a need for people to receive the most up-to-date immunisation. Would you guarantee that every person who received the flu vaccine in 2017 in New South Wales received the most up-to-date version?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have had no indication from any of the other Federal or State authorities, indeed any of the State authorities or State Labor Ministers around the country, that anybody has received anything less than that. It is just a matter of whether or not we can get it better for next year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: There was no distribution of previously-used flu vaccines in New South Wales?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I have not heard of that. Is that a theory of the Hon. Walt Secord? I do not know. I have not heard of that. Where has that come from?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It is a question that I am asking you.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: But where has that supposition come from? Is there an evidence base?

The CHAIR: Minister, the question has been put. I have corrected the Hon. Walt Secord, now I am correcting you. The question has been put and you are responding with a question. The Committee proceeds by way of question and answer.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Mr Chairman, this is not a portfolio that is to be based on matters that are plucked from the universe. This is a matter that is based on evidence.

The CHAIR: I will stop the clock.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am asking the honourable member whether she has any evidence for the supposition that she is putting to me.

The CHAIR: The member is not putting—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do you want me to read Standing Order 65 as to what is and what is not allowed?

The CHAIR: The Hon. Courtney Houssos is not putting a supposition, she is putting a question to you. The Minister may answer as he sees fit but may not question the nature of the question. The Committee does not operate in that way.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Mr Chairman, you and I have had this discussion before and I do not know whether in the interim period you have looked at the rules for questions in the Legislative Council, but I have them here. One of them is you are not to ask any hypothetical matters, you are not to ask for expressions of opinion. There are a number of things. If something is put to me I will answer it as best I can. I am asking the member whether she has any basis for her question?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am happy to say that this was an issue that was raised with me by a general practitioner in Sydney who said that there could have been distribution of previously-used flu vaccines. That is why I am asking the question.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As I have said, I have not heard of that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are not aware of any?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Minister, what is the current status of orthopaedic services at South East Regional Hospital?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: There are orthopaedic services and they are going quite well, from what I understand.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: What about the case of Dr Chris Phoon?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What about it?

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Is he back on staff? What is his current status?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: He is not currently working at South East Regional Hospital.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Who is providing orthopaedic services at that hospital?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The orthopaedic surgeons.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: How many orthopaedic surgeons are there at the hospital at this moment?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: My recollection is they have the equivalent of about three but they also have a number of others that they are using as needed.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Despite the replacement or the removal of the Southern NSW Local Health District chief executive officer and its chair and the review into the hospital and its orthopaedic services, why are elective surgery lists at that hospital and waiting lists in the emergency department longer in the new hospital than they are in the old hospital?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not think they are.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: They are. The most recent Bureau of Health Information data shows that the average wait for orthopaedic surgery at South East Regional Hospital is 240 days, compared with 167 two years ago. That is independent data that the Government releases.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will take that question on notice and I will look into it.

Ms DAWN WALKER: My questions are about Nepean Hospital and paramedics. In 2008 the status of Nepean Hospital was downgraded from a T1 trauma centre to a regional trauma centre. What that means is that paramedics have to travel an hour to Westmead Hospital when Nepean is the closest hospital because Nepean no longer holds the T1 protocol. Is the Minister aware of this?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes .

Ms DAWN WALKER: Does the Minister have any plans to reclassify Nepean Hospital?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As the member would be well aware, that was a decision made by the former Labor Government. That decision was made, as I understand it, not by political interference—which is unusual for the former Labor Government—but by the protocol review committee on a medical basis and it is in the interests of patients. I know there are a variety of views because I have visited the Nepean Hospital on a number of occasions. Last week I was there with the medical practitioners, the Nepean Medical Staff Council. They are a fantastic group of people led by the chairman of the council, Dr Nhi Nguyen. I understand they are of the view that as matters progress they would like to see their facility returned to its former trauma status.

I think that goes back to what I was saying to the Hon. Walt Secord and the Hon. Courtney Houssos that it is a fine line as to whether or not a Minister should make a decision or whether a Minister should challenge decisions as to the evidentiary basis of decisions. My view is that the role of the Minister for Health is generally more to challenge decisions and I certainly have challenged that decision on behalf of medical practitioners and the local community. I have been advised by the health authorities that the current trauma arrangements are in the best interests of patient safety.

I did make some inquiries as to the only similar jurisdiction, which is Victoria, and I found they have only two trauma hospitals whereas we have a lot more than that, so at the moment—and I thank you for the question on behalf of the local practitioners—all I can say is that I am looking at it. I have asked for further reviews of it just to make sure that it was the right decision made under the former Labor Government, but I also understand what you are saying about the additional time for paramedics; it does take up additional paramedics time, which is certainly an aspect to be considered but at the end of the day it is about patient safety and what I am being told at the moment is that the current protocols are appropriate for trauma.

Ms DAWN WALKER: I am pleased that you are looking at that. Do you have a time line on that? Have you set some parameters?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: At the moment the advice from the Ministry is that the current arrangements should continue but I have told them that I would like that to be actively reviewed as the work proceeds. We have just announced, as you may be aware, that the work has commenced at Nepean for stage one redevelopment. Again for the 16 years of the former Labor Government they promised lots of development at Nepean and nothing happened. Our Government has made the promise that we would actually get underway with redevelopment of Nepean and we are delivering on that. In fact, the Premier and I were out there last week and commenced the construction and preparatory works. That is a \$550 million commitment plus about \$26 million, I think, for the car park.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Gosh, that's a good news story.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is.

Ms DAWN WALKER: That is a good news story if the paramedics could actually take the patients to the hospital but at the moment they cannot. If I could be clear on this: if someone has an accident out the front of Nepean Hospital, the rules say that the paramedics have to drive them to Westmead because it is within 60 minutes. That is absurd. While we can develop the hospital—tick—if we cannot actually get patients who are suffering major trauma there, then it is a farce.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Are you a doctor, a nurse or a medical practitioner?

Ms DAWN WALKER: I am someone who has had the community, the paramedics and the medical officers who work at the hospital plead with me to speak up about this issue because they are desperate.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I thank you for raising that but what I am saying is if you were in my position as the health Minister for the State you would seek evidence-based consideration.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Absolutely, but people who have had accidents, are losing blood and need to be taken to the closest hospital instead are being driven to Westmead; it does not take a scientist or a medical practitioner to know that is an absurd situation facing that community and they are speaking out about this.

I appreciate that the Government is putting money into the hospital but I am now a little bit concerned that there is no time line on what seems an urgent situation for the people of Nepean.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: If you would like to send me a further written question on that, I am happy to obtain advice from the medical people within the Ministry to advise you and satisfy you on what they consider to be the appropriate issue. I say to you that there are hospitals all across this State that do a wonderful job; the staff are fantastic. The staff generally will give it their best shot, no matter what the circumstances are but at the end of the day there are some hospitals that do not have, and it is not appropriate that they have, an opportunity to do certain treatments—and trauma generally means very substantial trauma—and the view from the Ministry of Health is that the current trauma network of hospitals is appropriate, but I am happy to ask the question on your behalf as you are advocating on behalf of both the doctors and the paramedics, although I can assure them, if they are reading this, that I have asked the same questions but I will happily ask again for you.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Thank you, Minister. I will move on to e-cigarettes. Are you okay with that?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Sure.

[Time expired.]

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am happy for Ms Walker to ask that question.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Thank you; I appreciate that. I am interested in whether the Government is aware of a cafe called Misty Vapours in Neutral Bay. Apparently the cafe is dedicated to the sale of vaping and e-cigarette products, including a dedicated lounge where patrons can vape together.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: With a name like that it sounds more like they would have a cat bowl out the front and a cat called Misty there.

Ms DAWN WALKER: I am surprised you have not been there, Minister. It sounds like a lot of fun. Is this kind of cafe legal and how can a cafe full of e-cigarettes fumes be considered in compliance with the Smoke-free Environment Act?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I do not know, putting it bluntly, but I will find out for you.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: I can answer that question but I am not going to. Provided there is no nicotine there is no illegality.

The CHAIR: That can be discussed over a cup of coffee.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I admire Dr Phelps' enthusiasm on a whole range of issues; sometimes we disagree and sometimes we agree—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You are very wise when you agree with me.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: —but because we are all part of the same team we will not talk about it outside our own party room, will we, Dr Phelps?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Of course not.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: No, of course not. We have that strong rule in our party room.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: We never talk about the party room, Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is right.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I want to hear about Misty Vapours.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Unlike some ministerial colleagues.

The CHAIR: I think we will stop the clock and pick this up.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I cannot comment on that either, Dr Phelps, can I? Back to the topic in hand, can I just say—

Ms DAWN WALKER: I suppose a supplementary question is—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Can I answer your question because this is actually quite interesting? I thought that there were some arguments to say that these particular devices were better than cigarettes—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Hear, hear!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: —but the latest research says quite the opposite; they are quite dangerous.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That's wrong.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Well this is an evidence-based view. This is really an evidence-based morning. This is fabulous; it does not matter whether you are Liberal or Labor. I was over at the Woolcock centre, a wonderful respiratory research facility in Sydney. The researchers there were talking to me just last week about a whole range of issues. One of the issues was around e-vape cigarettes and I was told that in fact their latest research indicates that they are extremely detrimental to people's health and a great source of concern is that pregnant women think that it is okay to use these devices but in fact it is not. The research, which obviously has not been published yet—there is more work to do—but preliminary research indicates that people should take extreme care using those devices just as they would with cigarettes. As the health Minister and someone who suffers from asthma, I absolutely hate cigarettes with a vengeance so hopefully we will see less of them.

Ms DAWN WALKER: I appreciate the question but hopefully we can regulate it and I would be interested to know what your department is doing about that.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will have a look at that for you.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, you are probably very aware of issues around ambulance and paramedics staffing and resources given that it has been on 2GB quite a bit. Can you answer some questions about those concerns? The first deals with the superstations and that the time between P1A cases being addressed is a loss of up three minutes. Can you give us a snapshot of how those superstations are going and what evaluations are being put in place to ensure that people are better off with those superstations and not worse off?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The superstations concept is actually one that came from the former government. It was underway apparently, I was advised, because that was one of the first questions I asked.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: That is not true. Mrs Skinner was the architect of that.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I was advised that the superstations and the modelling around that was all done before, under the Labor Government. Yes, she did accept the advice that proceeded from the professionals in the area. I have asked for information on that and at this stage it is still progressing. But there are some reasons why the executive of the Ambulance Service are supportive of it. One issue is having a team that refits the ambulance located within the superstation, whereas if you have a normal, smaller station the actual paramedics have to refit and clean out their ambulance between each attendance with a patient. I have not seen it yet; I am hoping to get out with an ambulance crew and look at what they are talking about but I have been very busy so far. They tell me that having that extra assistance of a team who can clean out the appliance and put the requisite materials into the ambulance is helpful. I am looking and I have asked the Ministry of Health to look at what the relative benefits have been to make decisions on what other superstations will go forward.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Will you have a line in the sand where you will say that we have to evaluate whether these have been successful or unsuccessful?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am weighing all those aspects up at the moment. I think it would be overstating it to say that I am going to intervene and reverse the current arrangements, but I am certainly looking very closely at that. It is an issue for me because, clearly, I would like the paramedics to be able to respond as quickly as possible and also to be happy in their environment.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Three minutes in a P1A cardiac arrest case can mean the difference between life and death, as you can imagine.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It can.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That makes those superstation evaluations very important. Some allegations have been made about paramedics not being able to take what are called crib breaks, which is a half hour break twice per 12-hour shift. There were allegations that paramedics were made to work through those or basically eat and run rather than have their half hour break. Are you able to intervene and make sure it is compulsory for people to get their half hour breaks at least somewhere in their shifts?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: First of all, if at all possible we all should have breaks at an appropriate point in our work—and so should paramedics. I have spoken to paramedics who tell me that sometimes they do give those up voluntarily. They do not want to, but if it means saving a patient's life they will do it. We do not have

boundless amounts of resources and therefore boundless amounts of staff. But certainly I will say that I am very keen for the Ambulance Service to be looking after paramedics. The paramedics I have met are amazing and I think that the service should be making sure as far as is humanly possible that those, in effect, normal human rights are retained. We need them to be healthy; it is just a simple fact. I will take up that issue with Dominic Morgan and get some specifics on that. I will find out for you and drop you a line and tell you exactly what the outcome is.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is important for their mental health. If they do not have time to quickly grieve and download the last case they attended that stuff will just pile on until they get PTSD or something like that. They need those crib breaks to make sense of some of the trauma they have had to face.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I think with nurses, doctors and paramedics those aspects are really important. That is why in this sort of environment we should not be saying things that are negative about anything they do, because they need to have encouragement and support.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming along this morning. We have run out of time.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I understand that the Committee arranged a different time to fit around my dairy. I thank you for that. Being the Minister for Health is a little demanding.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming. There are a couple of questions on notice that we will provide in the normal fashion.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.