PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 6 - TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

Tuesday 11 March 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE, ROADS, ARTS, MUSIC AND THE NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY, JOBS AND TOURISM

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

Ms Cate Faehrmann (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Banasiak (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Anthony D'Adam
The Hon. Greg Donnelly
The Hon. Mark Latham
The Hon. Stephen Lawrence
The Hon. Tania Mihailuk
The Hon. Jacqui Munro
The Hon. Nichole Overall
The Hon. Emily Suvaal
The Hon. Natalie Ward

PRESENT

The Hon. John Graham, *Special Minister of State, Minister for Roads, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Music and the Night-time Economy, and Minister for Jobs and Tourism*

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

The CHAIR: Welcome to the first hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 6 - Transport and the Arts for the additional round of the inquiry into budget estimates 2024-2025. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Cate Faehrmann. I am Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Graham and accompanying officials to this hearing.

Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Special Minister of State, Roads, the Arts, Music and the Night-time Economy, and Jobs and Tourism. I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside the hearing, so I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of those procedures.

Welcome and thank you for making the time to give evidence. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. 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. I'd like to remind all other witnesses that you do not need to be sworn as you have already been sworn before this Committee during this inquiry.

Mr JOSH MURRAY, Secretary, Transport for NSW, on former affirmation

Ms TRUDI MARES, Deputy Secretary, Planning, Integration and Passenger, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

Ms CAMILLA DROVER, Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure, Projects and Engineering, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms BRENDA HOANG, Deputy Secretary, Finance, Technology and Commercial, Transport for NSW, on former affirmation

Ms SALLY WEBB, Deputy Secretary, Safety, Policy, Environment and Regulation, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr HOWARD COLLINS, Coordinator-General, Transport for NSW, on former oath

Mr MATT FULLER, Deputy Secretary, Road Maintenance and Resilience, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

Ms RACHEL SIMPSON, Executive Director, Tolling, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

Professor ALLAN FELS, AO, Chair, Independent Toll Review, sworn and examined

Ms KATE BOYD, PSM, Secretary, the Cabinet Office, affirmed and examined

Ms ELIZABETH MILDWATER, Secretary, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport, on former affirmation

Mr TAREK BARAKAT, Deputy Secretary, Hospitality and Racing, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport, affirmed and examined

Mr MICHAEL RODRIGUES, 24-Hour Economy Commissioner, and Acting Deputy Secretary, 24-Hour, Screen and Sound, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport, sworn and examined

Ms LIZA NOONAN, Acting Chief Executive, Create NSW, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport, sworn and examined

Ms KAREN JONES, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Destination NSW, affirmed and examined

Dr MICHAEL BRAND, Director, Art Gallery of NSW, on former affirmation

Ms LISA HAVILAH, Chief Executive Officer, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, on former affirmation

Ms ANNETTE PITMAN, Chief Executive Officer, Museums of History NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms EMILY COLLINS, Head of Sound NSW, Sound NSW, on former affirmation

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon, we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions, there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 15 minutes is allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. I note that there are witnesses in the overflow seating area. I would like to remind you that if you come forward to answer a question, please bring your nameplate with you and place it in front of you at the table. This assists Hansard in ensuring the correct witness is identified in the hearing transcript. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, in relation to the Allan Fels toll review and Mr Fels' responsibilities, what's the current contract value or estimated amount payable to him by Transport for NSW?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thanks, and firstly welcome to the Committee and thank you to all the officials who are able to be here. Ms Ward, as you know, we have released all the figures.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. The current contract.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: For the toll review and the external consultants.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's his current contract value?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: About a total of approximately $8 million has been the public figure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: To Mr Fels?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: For Mr Fels? We will take that particular question on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You haven't released those figures publicly, so you might want to correct those. Those amounts haven't been released in detail. What is the current contract value for Mr Fels?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The current contract value at the moment for his—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: His current role.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'll refer that to the secretary.

JOSH MURRAY: Ms Ward, the current contract value is $165,000.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. Minister, the steering committee that Ms Drover and Ms Mares sit on, does that report to Mr Fels or does he sit outside the direct deal framework?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Fels—and you are welcome to ask Professor Fels this—is advising the Government.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, does that committee report to him?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He's advising the Government directly. That committee does not report to him. That's the steering committee for the toll reform process. Mr Fels is advising the Government directly, having completed the report.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So it doesn't report to him. Thank you. Treasury said last week that he is not on the negotiation team. What is his exact role, and why is he not on the formal negotiation team?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Professor Fels—and this is also true for David Cousins—completed the Independent Toll Review. They have set the road map for toll reform in New South Wales. They brought the tolling companies to the table in April last year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure, but he sits outside that framework.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They had that breakthrough moment where they brought the tolling companies into the process, and I'm very grateful for their work to do that. In an ongoing capacity—and this is the contract the secretary has just referred to—they are providing advice as we go through the direct deal negotiation about how this intersects with their independent toll review.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is he inside or outside the formal framework?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He is formally engaged by the Government, and he is being briefed as we go, so I would say he is very much inside the process, as is David Cousins.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. Mr Murray, is Mr Fels inside or outside the formal framework?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes, as the Minister has said, I would regard him as inside the framework. He is a formally appointed adviser to government as part of the ongoing toll reform.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Treasury said last week he is not on the negotiation team. What's his exact role, and why is he not on the formal negotiation team?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Firstly, throughout the course of the toll review, Allan and David both met with the concessionaires, were involved with them and were crucial to bringing them to the negotiating table. We've then moved into the next phase—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I know the context—thank you for that. I'm just interested in why he is not on the negotiation team. What is his exact role?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We've moved into the phase of the toll negotiation. That's a formal, direct-deal negotiation. As you know, there are very strict rules around that. As a result, we've appointed a negotiating team in the room, a steering committee—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But he's not on that negotiating team?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —advisers to Government, including Professor Fels and Dr Cousins.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But just to be absolutely clear, Mr Fels is not part of the negotiation team? That's right, isn't it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He is formally engaged in the process, but we have a negotiator who's sitting in the room along with senior officials from Treasury and Transport.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Alright, so is he a part of the negotiation team?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He's part of the formal structure advising Government during the negotiation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's not a yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He is not the lead negotiator. Sitting in the room with the concessionaires, if you can imagine that, is the lead negotiator—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But not a formal negotiation team participant?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He is formally engaged. I'm answering quite specifically. He is not part of the team in the room with those concessionaires.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: He's not?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've described to you who those are. And that's the normal direct-deal arrangement.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Ms Mares, when was the last time you met with Mr Fels?

TRUDI MARES: Last Thursday. We were in a joint meeting.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Murray?

JOSH MURRAY: Same meeting.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you take on notice all the times that you have met with Mr Fels since July last year?

TRUDI MARES: Sure.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can I take that on notice as well?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You can answer in any way you like, but this is your chance—clarity, accountability.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'll take that question on notice, given the number of times I've met with him. I wouldn't be able to tell you that without going back to examine the record.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When was the last time Mr Fels met with Transurban?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's a question best put to Mr Fels, and I encourage you to ask Professor Fels that question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will you take it on notice?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's not really a question for me. You've invited Professor Fels here, so I think you should put that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you don't know?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wouldn't want to speak for Professor Fels.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you know whether he's met with Transurban or not?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I can confirm he's certainly met with Transurban—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When was the last time?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wouldn't feel confident speaking for Professor Fels on that. He's here. I encourage you to ask him.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What are you hiding, though? Either you don't know, or you're hiding that he's met with them or he hasn't. Has he met with them?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He is two metres away from me. Why don't you ask him?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I can ask him. I'm asking you, Minister, as appropriate. Do you know? It's your budget estimates, I'm asking you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You've called the professor here—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What are you hiding?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He's metres away. I encourage you to ask him.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So, you don't know, or you won't say whether Mr Fels has met with Transurban?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is a parliamentary Committee. It's a budget estimates hearing—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, that's why we're asking.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not going to be imprecise in front of this Committee. You've got a witness here who can answer the question, and I encourage you to put it to him.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And I will ask him. I'm asking you, as Minister responsible, when did Mr Fels last meet with Transurban? You don't seem to be able to answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And I'm telling you I can confirm that he has met.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: He has met.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not going to speak on behalf of a witness who is sitting 2½ metres away from me.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But I'm asking you. You are the witness here at budget estimates. It's appropriate to ask you if the person that you've appointed has met with Transurban recently.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, and I'm confirming he has.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When was that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I propose that you ask Professor Fels.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you. I have all afternoon to ask him. I'm asking you while you are here.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not going to speak on behalf of Professor Fels. I don't want to be imprecise in front of this Committee. In my experience, that's very dangerous.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Does Mr Fels not have any direct responsibility for the negotiation?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't think that's a fair characterisation, because he's a key adviser to Government, having set the framework for the whole negotiation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We understand that. You've said the context, and I understand that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As you've heard, he's in the room with the officials—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I followed that very closely.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —as Ministers are being briefed on the direct deal negotiation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, but what we want to ask about it his specific role now.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm answering your question. He's in the room—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And so his specific role now, he has no direct responsibility—directly—for that negotiation. That's right, isn't it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No. He is formally engaged. I don't accept the premise of your question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But he's not part of the team. He's not the negotiator. He's sitting in the room, but he doesn't have any responsibility. That's what you've told this Committee. That's right, isn't it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No. That's incorrect.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I mean, it's unclear. It seems to me that you would want to clarify this. You would want to make it very clear whether he is the lead negotiator, which he's not. He's not part of the negotiation team, but you can't say seem to say other than a broad brush that he's in the room. What is his responsibility? Or does he just sit there and observe?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He is a key adviser to Government, as we drive toll reform. And I've got to say, I'm very thankful for his help.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, we'll get to that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Professor Fels is one of the key public policy people in Australia. The fact he is prepared to engage in this complex problem has really provided a breakthrough moment in the task of reforming these complex toll contracts—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've said that a lot, we know that context and we appreciate that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —that your Government locked motorists into until 2060, charging them $195 billion.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is Mr Fels still able to charge taxpayers for five-star hotel stays and business class flights?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Professor Fels is on the same arrangements that he was on when he worked for the former Government, when he served in senior roles—for example, monitoring the emergency services—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is he able to still charge for the five-star hotels and business class flights, as of today?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Professor Fels is on the same arrangements that he has been on previously.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So, that's a yes. Okay. Can you take on notice, since 1 July last year—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I encourage you to put those questions to the agency. It's not—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you take on notice how many times since July last year, the times, dates, cost and nature of Mr Fels' expenses to the taxpayer?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I encourage you to put that to the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm putting it to you, Minister. He's your guy, you've picked him, hand-picked him to do this review. He's charging money. The taxpayers want to know what they're getting for that. Surely you want to be transparent and accountable about that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I encourage you to put that to Professor Fels.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you're declining to take on notice the expenses of Mr Fels?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You've called the witness here. You've called Professor Fels here to—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you, Minister. So you're declining to tell this Committee, on budget estimates—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm encouraging you to put that to the witness—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —what the taxpayers have paid for: five-star hotels, business class flights. And you won't tell the people what they're getting. Is that correct?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You've called Professor Fels here—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm encouraging you to go direct to the witness, sitting in the room—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You can encourage all you like. The encouragement the taxpayers want to know is what was incurred, what were the dates, what are they paying for?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I won't be taking that on notice. You should ask the witness.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You won't tell the taxpayers of New South Wales what they have paid for?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Government has released all this information. That's why you are able to talk about it: because we've released all this information.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Murray, will you take on notice—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order—

The CHAIR: A point of order has been taken, Ms Ward. I'll hear it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: A question was put to the witness. The witness was in the middle of answering the question—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll move on.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —so he should be afforded the opportunity to give the answer.

The CHAIR: I will remind members to allow the witnesses to answer questions. I think it's particularly important. If there is a Minister or a witness wishing to take something on notice, I think it needs to be very clear for the secretariat and Hansard that that's the case, so allow a little bit of time for that, please.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Murray, will you take on notice the dates, times, costs and nature of Mr Fels' expenses to the taxpayer?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes, I'm sure we can take that on notice as part of the process.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I want to ask about Mr Fels' spending habits. What do you think your colleagues say when they see your hand-picked man charging New South Wales taxpayers $750 a night at the Capella Hotel?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand there were two of these nights, but I encourage you to speak to Professor Fels about that. I'm incredibly grateful for the assistance of Allan Fels and David Cousins. They have provided a breakthrough moment. Just to be clear, we have spent much—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But I'm asking about the $750 a night.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —much less getting drivers out of these contracts than your Government spent locking them into the toll contracts up until 2060—$195 billion.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And you've said that. But Minister, is it appropriate—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's the problem your Government created—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking about your time, your toll review, and as you sit here today, the taxpayer dollars that you're spending on this.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —that we're trying to get drivers out of. That's the issue we are dealing with.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll ask it again. Is it appropriate, in your view, to spend $750 a night on a five-star hotel?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You spent twice as much as this privatising half a toll road—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you about your incurring of $750 a night, five-star hotel—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —than we're spending on all these toll roads, trying to get drivers out of the toll trap you've set.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you okay with that? So you're perfectly fine with $750 a night? Is that appropriate?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is the toll trap your Government set until 2060. We're trying to get drivers out.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it appropriate?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's what's going on here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it appropriate to spend $750 per night at a five-star hotel, in your view?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Just privatising half a toll road, you spent much more than this. How do you square that?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you, Minister. So, under John Graham, $750 per night for a hotel is perfectly fine. Is that what you're saying?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not saying that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What are you saying? You've got the opportunity now. Is it appropriate?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm saying you spent twice as much as this privatising half a toll road. It was quite incredible.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it appropriate for your advisers and taxpayers to pay, in a cost-of-living crisis, $750 a night to stay at the Capella Hotel?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I encourage you to put that to Professor Fels.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Would you say the Labor Government is supportive of Mr Fels' million-dollar salary and expenses?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We have released all the information for consultants. That includes for the Independent Toll Review. I don't like spending this money. I'll be really clear. I'm not one of the Ministers who likes spending money. I'm on the Expenditure Review Committee.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've just said it's fine.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are spending millions of dollars trying to get motorists out of the toll trap that was set.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've said that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't like doing it but it's—I want to be clear here—millions of dollars, but this a $195 billion problem.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's right. That's why we're asking. We agree on that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's what motorists are paying out of their pocket. We're trying to improve that. We actually can't do it without spending these billions of dollars.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Minister. Sure, I understand, but I want to ask about the specifics of the expenditure.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't want to walk into these negotiations—these are tough negotiations—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Certainly. You've said that many times. It's on the record. We understand that. What I'd like to know, Minister, from you, though—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —without the best backup from the public service, from the independent toll reviewers.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What I'd like to do is—you can't possibly do that without five-star hotel stays?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: These are the same conditions that your Government signed up Professor Fels to. I encourage you to put that to him.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. So you've just said that you can't do it without five-star hotels and $750 a night. That's correct?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, that's incorrect.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why was Mr Fels travelling business class from Sydney to Melbourne?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As I understand it, and feel free to put this to the officials, all of Professor Fels' expenditure was within the guidelines and within the arrangements that had previously applied when he worked at a senior level for the New South Wales Government.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So will you take on notice—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will remind you he's also worked for the Victorian Government, for the Commonwealth Government, for the ACCC—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking very specific questions, Minister, and I'd appreciate—I don't need to understand what's happened in other jurisdictions. What I'm asking about is this jurisdiction and your toll review. Is it acceptable to fly business class from Sydney to Melbourne under John Graham?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I won't be telling people which plane to catch, as a Minister. This is within the guidelines. I've been clear. I'm hugely grateful for the assistance of Professor Fels—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes and you've said that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —when it comes to getting drivers out of the toll trap your Government set—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But what we'd like to understand is the expenditure.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —where they are bleeding money out of their pockets to the tune of billions of dollars.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Speaking of bleeding money, we'd like to understand why this Government is bleeding money on a review.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you grateful for the business class flights and the $750 hotel stays?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I note your position is you wouldn't use these consultants.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's not my position; it's yours. We're asking about your expenditure during your time as the Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, that's the position you've put publicly, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking about you, Minister, and your expenditure, bleeding money on five-star hotels.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But the record of your government is to spend far more on this, locking drivers into these contracts. That's the record.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I wouldn't pay for someone to stay for $750 a night at a five-star hotel in a cost-of-living crisis. That's what I wouldn't do.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Your record speaks for itself, unfortunately. That's the great flaw in the case you're putting here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's talk about Mr Fels. Can you take on notice—actually I'll move on.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why did you fail to disclose to the public that Mr Fels's recommendation was going to cost the budget $95 billion?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Because it is—well, the Government put this legislation to the Parliament. We debated it. I'm grateful to the Opposition for its support of this legislation. The model that's been adopted by the Parliament doesn't have the accounting effect which was described in that Treasury advice, or in the media this morning.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What else hasn't been disclosed?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is a very complex negotiation. Working out how to get out of these tight contracts, signed as your Government privatised these toll roads, is very difficult. So it's very complex.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've said that many times.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What we've done, though, is tried to do that in public as much as possible. So Professor Fels' review was public.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We're aware of that. I haven't asked that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The interim report was public.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What I've asked about—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The work of the former Government—what we could release, we made public.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —is the hidden $95 billion cost to taxpayers of the recommendations. That's what we'd like to understand.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm just contrasting the fact that the review conducted by the former Government was done in secret. We've released much of this work, thousands of pages of work, so that people can understand.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, why is it up to me—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But, Ms Ward—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —to be transparent about your mates' expenses, about suppressed information, about $95 billion? Why is it me that has to uncover all these documents, when you were about transparency and accountability? We found the hidden $95 billion, we found the hidden expenses and we know that you were aware of those. Why is it up to us and the Opposition to be holding you to account on your expenditure, which is outrageous in a cost-of-living crisis, in five-star hotels—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Are you all done yet?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —in business class flights and in a review that's been sidelined? When were you first informed of the cost—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept the premise of your question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm sure you don't, but it's taxpayer dollars.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let me respond to it. Firstly, we released the information about the consultants' costs. The question you're asking about the accounting principle is just wrong, because Government took account of that Treasury advice and adopted a different model before your party and my party voted for it in the Parliament.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Treasury said it would cost $95 billion—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd like to thank all the members here who did.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —to implement Mr Fels' recommendation—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to make an offer, though.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —that taxpayers paid for. Taxpayers paid him to do the work and come up with a report. He came up with a report. Treasury said that will cost $95 billion. That was hidden and buried and no taxpayer was told about that. You ignored Mr Fels' advice, didn't you?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm responding to your question, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's be clear about it, though.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm responding to your question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You paid for the review. You've now ignored this report. That's correct, isn't it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm responding to your last question, just to make an offer to you, which is this—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You ignore—I don't need your offer.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order: The questioner is consistently speaking over the witness when they are trying to answer the questions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's he hiding?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There's been a series of questions—

The CHAIR: I've heard the point of order. If the member can please not speak over constantly and if the Minister could also not constantly speak over the person asking the questions, that would be a lot easier for everybody.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, I don't need an offer. I need some answers. The answers I need are to understand why you've sidelined Mr Fels, you've ignored his advice, it's been 706 days, we've got five-star hotels, business class flights and nothing to show for it. It looks like under you we will get higher tolls, tolls for longer and increased concessions. This is going nowhere. You seem to rule out a lot of things, but you can't rule out longer tolls, higher tolls and the high expense that's been paid by the people of New South Wales.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When is it okay to ask questions?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: It's such an impossibly unfair question. It's got about 10 premises in it.

The CHAIR: I've heard that point of order. It's not a point of order. Continue, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, we'd like to understand when it is okay to ask these questions. You've spent a whole lot of money on this. It's been 706 days. When is it okay to ask these questions? Is it 700 days, 800 days, 900 days? Is it when we've spent billions of dollars?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Now would be a good time, but I'm failing to understand what your question is.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Answer the questions.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When you have a question, I'm all ears.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We'd like to understand what your view is, what you are proposing to do on tolling, why you've sidelined the very person that you hand-picked to write this report? You've sidelined him from the negotiations. You're ignoring his recommendations. You've got new people in, all at great expense, and you can't rule anything out.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept your question.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Minister, do you believe the almost $30,000 cost of the Christmas party event at the Powerhouse Ultimo campus in December for last year was appropriate?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would regard it really as a matter for the Powerhouse. If we're talking about the same function, I did see the media that this was approximately $56 a head, plus GST. I place that on the record. But really it's a matter for the Powerhouse. As Minister, I've tried not to interfere or direct these independent institutions as to what events they run, or particularly what they program. That's a principle I've tried to adhere to.

The CHAIR: Minister, public money of course goes into these organisations, museums, cultural institutions. Do you believe it's appropriate for the museum to spend that kind of money on an event like that? Shouldn't it be better spent delivering museum programs, for example, to the public?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Look, the Government's focus is on making sure that we have the best museum possible. That's my ask of these independent institutions. The Parliament did set them up with their own legislation to be independent institutions, so I haven't sought to give them guidance about particular events or particular programming. I think that's important as the arts Minister. But I would understand if members have got particular views that they want to express today about particular events, especially given the publicity for that specific event.

The CHAIR: You don't see any problem with that event and the money spent on it? It was kind of marking the closure, really, wasn't it, of the museum in that location?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wouldn't like to speak for what the event was like. I'd encourage you'd to put that to Ms Havilah.

The CHAIR: So no comment, as Minister, in relation to whether other cultural institutions should stage and be okay staging such events in the future?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd encourage all the institutions to have regard to the public mood at the moment and the fact people are under financial pressure. I think that is relevant and I'm sure that would be the view of other members. But I don't think it should be the role of the arts Minister to be intervening, where that's possible.

The CHAIR: Since we last had budget estimates, there's been a legislative change in relation to music festivals. You know that we've had multiple exchanges in this place about user-pays policing and the impact of that on music festivals and other events in this State. What has happened since then? Has any music festival or other dance party, for example, been relieved or eased in relation to user-pays policing? Has there been any impact on festivals as a result of that legislation that's passed?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Firstly, a couple of things have changed. The legislation, that I was very grateful to the Parliament for passing, has changed the Act by making it a much more supportive Act and setting up those review mechanisms. Secondly, it created specific funding support for festivals, given that they're under pressure over this two-year period. We know this is a particularly tough moment for them. You should feel free to check with the officials. I don't believe those review mechanisms, particularly the central review mechanism, have been triggered yet. But we have funded a number of festivals—I believe four, but again check with the officials this afternoon—to give them that assistance to get through. Thirdly, one of the reasons I was encouraged was we had an informal round table at the Yours & Ours Festival with a number of MLCs. I know

the Hon. Jacqui Munro was there. There were also agency officials, a number of whom are here, and industry people. They indicated there were significant changes happening on the ground.

The CHAIR: Minister, have there been festivals that have had their user-pays policing costs reduced as a result of accepting government sponsorship?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's not necessarily how the review mechanism in the Act works. That review is there for festivals of a certain size, regardless of whether they're government-supported or not. So that review mechanism is there. We've certainly had a fair few inquiries about it. I encourage festivals to use it and to raise those issues with agencies. That central overall review hasn't yet been triggered, but there will come a time where that is the case. In the meantime, we've been practically assisting a range of these festivals.

The CHAIR: So what's the central overall review?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There are two reviews. One, an internal review, say within police, so the police costs, where a separate part of police looks at the cost to a festival. Then there's a central panel that is set up to review if a festival is still uncomfortable. So I'm just making the observation that, to my knowledge, that hasn't yet been triggered, but the Contemporary Music Festival Viability Fund has been in effect, and that's one of the things helping festivals through at the moment.

The CHAIR: Have there been any festivals, then, that have had their user-pays policing costs reduced or waived as a result of government sponsorship? In other words, the police still do what they do; they charge and they have their presence in the form of dogs, strip searches and whatever else they do. I'm assuming it's Sound NSW or Create NSW that asks for money transfers from your department to Minister Catley's for the pleasure of that. Is that actually happening at this point, and you stamp a logo onto that festival's promotional material?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I couldn't speak to that, but check with the officials. Firstly, I can confirm that for music festivals, we have been assisting to liaise directly and encourage those costs to drop, and that has occurred in some instances.

The CHAIR: Can you be more specific?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd encourage you to get the specifics from the officials this afternoon. I don't want to mislead on that.

The CHAIR: But your evidence is that you or your department—has it been yourself that's liaised specifically with Minister Catley to see some sense in relation to the exorbitant user-pays policing charges?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In relation to music festivals and other festivals, there's an active discussion. I don't want to go into all the details with my colleagues, but I've certainly been concerned, as I've said here.

The CHAIR: It's been quite active for two years now, Minister, hasn't it, under your Government?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, and we've changed the law. There's funding now. There are review mechanisms. I'm confirming that there has been active engagement by my office and myself in dealing with these issues, to some effect, for music festivals but other festivals as well. The Government will continue work on this. One of the things we're looking to do is to establish a cross-government look at major event costs, which, after COVID, are still too high. We're going to look across the board at that, and I'm grateful to the Premier's Department for assisting with that.

The CHAIR: In relation to major events and what they do bring into the New South Wales economy each year, are you aware of how much the Mardi Gras celebrations—the parade, afterparty, the festivals and Fair Day; that three-week block—bring into the New South Wales economy?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We would have that figure here for you. I'm happy to take it on notice, or you should get it this afternoon. But it's a hugely important part of the city's economy and a crucial time of year when you add up all those elements. We get a significant number of visitors, particularly from North America, at that time. That adds greatly to the visitor expenditure in Sydney, but also to the character of Sydney as a city, so it's a highly valuable exercise.

The CHAIR: I note that last year the New South Wales Government co-funded a reimbursement to Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras because of the losses experienced by the cancellation of Fair Day. This year there were in fact three Kylie Minogue concerts on over the Mardi Gras weekend.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: A tragic clash.

The CHAIR: It was great for Kylie Minogue fans, but they also like to go to the afterparties and the various different events. It's not really a laughing matter because in fact it did impact ticket sales significantly in terms of Mardi Gras. Does the Government consider Mardi Gras worth supporting over an ongoing basis, similar to other major events? You've just said how significant it is. Mardi Gras is struggling financially, like many different festivals.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let me answer a couple of things about that. Firstly, the parade alone generates $42 million in visitor expenditure from 38,000 visitors, so that gives you some idea of the impact. Absolutely the Government has supported Mardi Gras through Destination NSW. We've moved that on to a long-term footing—a three-year footing. We've also established the foundation event framework. I anticipate that this is the sort of event that would fit into that framework—events that the Government is backing long term that are part of the character of the city. In all those ways, the Government support for this event—for all the reasons you've articulated—is quite important.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might just pick up on the Christmas party—Tunagate—story that we were faced with yesterday. Minister, given the emphasis on sustainability in the arts and the cultural sector, how does a whole tuna performance square with that messaging of sustainability in the arts?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I can understand why you're asking the question. Having read the publicity about it, I note that that was funded, I think, by the director personally rather than by the institution. I'm glad that was the case because I think that would have been out of step had it not been the case, if there was some suggestion the institution or taxpayers were funding that. I note that fact, and I'll refer you back to my previous answer.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That was described as a special gift to staff. How does that sashimi performance actually align with the Powerhouse's own codes of conduct and gift policy, if it was a gift from discretionary funds?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The advice to me, but I would encourage you to check, is this is within the guidelines, particularly given how it was paid for. I can understand why it has attracted some attention. I encourage you to put that question direct to some of these officials to reassure yourself as well that this is within the guidelines.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I probably will put some of those questions. I will go back to some of the metrics we spoke about in a previous estimate, where we looked at a 33 per cent decline in visitation over five years for the Powerhouse Museum. Education participation at the museum was down 56 per cent. In terms of how that gauges with other museums, it's 67 per cent below the Art Gallery and it's 90 per cent below museums Victoria. When I gave you those metrics, I also talked about the fact that operating expenses are up 86 per cent and exhibition costs are up 211 per cent. When I put it to you, "If this is a private business, what would you do?" you said that you would shut it and fix the problem. Instead of fixing the problem, we are celebrating those results by spending $30,000 on a sashimi performance.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We have shut the Powerhouse, though.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What are we rewarding? If I can be completely blunt: What are we rewarding when the metrics are, frankly, in the toilet for that museum?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Banasiak, you've put that case over the years. I don't need to take you back through the twists and turns of the tale of the Powerhouse. You've prosecuted a case over the years. I think it's clear why that is the case and why the institution has got to this moment. We are hopeful of brighter days ahead. That will require the investment that the Government is making in both Parramatta and Ultimo. Ultimately, Ultimo has to reconnect with the community that loved the Powerhouse so much.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But do you see that it's out of step? They are asking Treasury for additional funds to complete the revitalisation process and then they are indulging in those sorts of events. The common people who would love to go and see the Powerhouse Museum aren't going to have yellowfin tuna on their plates. They probably won't even see a yellowfin tuna in their lifetime, because the majority of those fish actually go overseas in the export market. It is completely out of step with the common people that they are supposed to be trying to engage with.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is why I have given you my view, which is that if that was funded by the institution and funded by taxpayers, I am certain that would be the view of the public. I have noted the fact that this was personally paid for by the director. It is in line within the guidelines—that is the advice to me—but feel free to press that case.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Other things were in line with guidelines that we have discovered recently probably don't pass the public perception test.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can I just go to the Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum, Minister? Can you tell me what you and your office have done to help the Lithgow small arms museum after its recent burglary.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I had heard about the recent burglary. There have been questions in Parliament. I have met with MPs, including the Hon. Robert Borsak, about this matter. My office has reached out to the volunteers at the Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum. They had several meetings in December last year and again early this year. I know that there has been the potential of coming to some arrangement with Thales, who are the owners of the space. That long-term security, I understand, is very important.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Have you taken any steps to try to meet with that international company, Thales, around the Lithgow small arms museum?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. I have written to Thales to set out the Government's view about the future of this museum. I put the view that this is an important community asset. I don't think everyone will understand just how important this collection is. But this is a really crucial community asset. The Government wants to see it continue. I have written to Thales to make that point and encourage them to work with the museum. I will also be speaking to them directly. I understand that meeting is being set up or has been set up.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Have you asked your agency or any of your agencies to provide any funding to the museum or any kind of support? As you said, it's an important part of the history. It's not just about firearms; it has a huge amount of Australia's engineering history held on site as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have asked Create NSW to directly assist the museum with what their funding options might be. They actually do have some significant reserves that they've built up, which is remarkable for a community institution like that. Pending eligibility, the advice to me is that one of the options might be through the Create NSW Arts and Cultural Funding Program. The 2-Year Multi-year Funding would support a small-to-medium organisation up to $200,000. It's the sort of program where they would have to work through the details of the eligibility, but they may well be eligible for that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Have they been given that information?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd have to take that on notice, but there have been active discussions with Create NSW to try to assist, given the Government's view. Look, I accept the case that's been put to me. This is an important community institution.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might quickly go to the glow-in-the-dark line marking trials, particularly in the Bulli Pass. When is it actually supposed to start glowing?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Firstly, I will turn to the officials on the date. This is a fantastic trial. It is so commonsense.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: If it worked, it would be.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I spent a lot of time putting glow-in-the-dark decals on my Daytona race car set. This is a similar idea for line marking for our roads. If it's a dark road and if it's a winding road, having the line markings glow in the dark is one of the ways we can give motorists guidance. It doesn't work in some places. If there are lights about, it is less effective. That has been some of the Victorian evidence.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is it light activated like our glow-in-the-dark Daytona sets and the stars on our ceilings we had as kids? Is that how it works?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can't speak to the stars but I can discuss the Daytona issue for quite some time. Yes, it absorbs light during the day and then omits it at night. On dark stretches of road, where there aren't lights about, it is potentially effective. But that is exactly what we are trialling. As to the date, I would have to refer to the officials.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It has been there for quite some time now. I drive that road almost daily. I can tell you that it's not glowing. I am wondering whose idea it was to put it in an area that has, during the day, probably 10 per cent or 20 per cent maximum sunlight. Whose idea was it to put light-activated glow-in-the-dark lines in an area that doesn't get light?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is fantastic feedback about the trial. It isn't going to work everywhere. The sort of thing you are describing is probably one of the constraints. Bulli was picked for research reasons. I would have to refer to the officials as to precisely why.

JOSH MURRAY: Mr Banasiak, thank you for the question. This was a trial proposal that was actually put forward by Transport's hardworking staff. It has come from the organisation itself. We do understand that there will be limitations, particularly around the amount of light that the photoluminescent paint can absorb during the day. But it was determined that the site would provide ample opportunities to start to generate some of that energy. Also, the safety impacts on that stretch of road would be of benefit as well. We are, of course, observing it, as you are when you drive past it, to see how it performs. We don't rule out using it on other stretches of road that might pick up more sunlight during the day. We'll take that feedback on board that you're not noticing it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How much does it cost per metre more than normal line marking?

JOSH MURRAY: I would have to take that on notice. My understanding is that it's not a material impact on cost in terms of line markings. Obviously this is a heavily regulated area in terms of safety protocol, so we want to make sure that we have all the details right before we transition to a full rollout.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, you said you wanted to answer some questions.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I did.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, so let's answer some questions. Will there be new tolls under Labor?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're in the middle of the toll reform process. What we're looking to do is lower tolls for motorists—that is the goal of toll reform—particularly for those drivers who the Premier singled out before the election. What we're really concerned about is drivers going low distances. Often they don't have access to public transport. Often they are travelling frequently. That's a particular driver cohort that we're really trying to assist here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Given that, will you answer the question: Will there be new tolls under Labor?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Look, we're working through the toll reform process. We want to reduce the toll burden here in New South Wales. That's the goal of the toll reform.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will there be new tolls?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not going to get into all the specifics of toll reform solutions. We are looking to lower tolls.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You were very clear before the election that there would be no new tolls. You are not being so clear now.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are going to do exactly what we said before the election.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll ask you for a third time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are going to reform tolls with a view of lowering tolls for motorists, particularly that cohort.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll ask you for a third time, Minister. You were very clear before the election. You said you want to answer questions. I'll ask you for a third time today: Will there be new tolls under this Labor Government?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Ms Ward, we're looking to lower tolls for drivers. That is quite clear as a result of toll reform.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will there be new tolls under Labor?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think the commitment that was made before the election was no new tolls on old roads, and we'll stick to our commitments before the election.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You could've answered three questions ago that there will be no new tolls under Labor. Is that your evidence today?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've given you my answer, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You can answer right now.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've already answered—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I don't think you have.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —but I'm always happy to repeat myself if that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will there be two-way tolling on the Harbour Bridge and tunnel under Labor?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Government has not made a decision about that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you rule it out?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I note in the Independent Toll Review, as Professor Fels and Dr Cousins looked at this, their view was—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. Is this—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Ms Ward, this is an important issue.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They said you should.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Their view was if you're going to move to a network toll, it's very difficult to build one tolling system on the old principles, which were this: If you live in the west, you pay tolls in two directions and your tolls go up every quarter or every year. If you cross the harbour, you pay tolls in one direction and your tolls don't go up for 14 years.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So it's a recommendation and you'll be implementing that recommendation to do two-way tolling on the Harbour Bridge and tunnel. Is that correct?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That was the view the Independent Toll Review came to.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is that what you'll do?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Government hasn't made a decision about that. We'll work carefully through those issues, but in the interim report and in the final report, that was the final—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I know the reports. I'm asking you, though. You ruled it out before the election; now you can't seem to answer. You said you want to answer questions today. Will you be doing two-way tolling on the bridge? And you can't answer that, even though you were clear before the election.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've specifically answered that question, which is the Government has not decided to do that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is the Sydney Harbour Bridge an old road, in your view?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, it's about to have its 100th anniversary in eight years time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So it's an old road.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To that extent it's an old road.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So no new tolls on old roads?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't think it was specifically the age of the road infrastructure that that commitment was aimed at. It was the fact that your Government placed a toll on the M5 East—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, I'm asking—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —which had been free for 20 years. It hadn't been tolled. It was built for $800 million. Now you're charging motorists 15 or 16 times that in tolls on a road that was free.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's go there, then. Let's deal with that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's the example that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you for the example. Can you rule out new tolls on the M5 East and M5 West?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can I rule out—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: New tolls on the M5 East and M5 West.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're looking to reduce tolls here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will you rule out new tolls on the M5 East and M5 West? I'll ask a third time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not looking to rule in and out any of those solutions here. That's not what the Government is considering.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So it's on the table?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's not what the Government is considering, but I'm not looking to rule in or out toll reform in the middle of this complex negotiation with the toll road owners. I think it's unreasonable of you to try to ask the Government to do that in the middle of a very complex and—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What, to ask for transparency in budget estimates about your toll reform? That's unreasonable? Is that what you're seriously saying to this Committee? It's unfair to ask questions.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Independent Toll Review is public. I direct you to its thousands of pages, between the two reports.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, I'm asking about your election commitments and I'm asking about your budget allocation and your proposals.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm confirming we will meet our election commitments. I'm confirming we'll meet them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No new tolls on old roads and no two-way tolling; you'll meet those commitments?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We'll meet our election commitments.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There you go. There's an answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We have already met our $60 toll cap commitment, one you have opposed, I understand, for 435 days.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Certainly, but how is it unfair to ask you and the Premier about your election commitments?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We will deliver on our election commitments. We've delivered on the $60 toll cap and we're still hopeful that after 435 days, you might finally back us.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's 706 days after the review. We're no further on that and you've sidelined poor Mr Fels here.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are further.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's talk about that. Let's go to the specific answers. Let's go there.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The first thing we did was set up the $60 toll cap, despite your opposition. It has been in place for more than a year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, NSW Treasury has confirmed that they have modelling on the financial value of concession extensions, in a sense extending privatisation of roads. Is that under active consideration by the Government?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd refer you to the advice you've already had from the Treasury. That was quite specific and—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They've done that modelling on concession extensions. Is that on the table?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I endorse the evidence that was given.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you, Minister, in your budget estimates, about your view about Government policy. Treasury has done the modelling on the value of extending these concessions. Is that under active consideration under your Government?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Government hasn't made a decision about that. I'm not going to rule things in or out in the middle of a complex negotiation with the toll concessionaires. I don't think that's useful.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, but I'm asking you about Government policy, which you were very clear about before the election. You said that there wouldn't be tolls for longer, there wouldn't be new tolls and you wouldn't have two-way tolling.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm confirming—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're very unclear and getting tongue-tied now. Here's the opportunity to set the record straight. Are you extending concessions?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We will deliver on our election commitments. The string of sentences you have just put together does not bear much relationship at all to the election commitments that were made before the election.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. Then did you—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We will deliver on the commitments we've made to the public. Professor Fels and David Cousins have set out road map for that to happen—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. We've heard that and I know that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —and we'll take serious regard to that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, did you ever provide a direction that there was to be no new tolls in the review?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is an independent toll review. We've asked Professor Fels and David Cousins to try and unravel the mess that your Government left us with 'til 2060.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll ask you again. I'm not asking about them. I'm not asking about what they did, I'm asking about you. In your ministerial capacity, did you ever provide a direction that there was to be no new tolls in the review?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: At no stage did I offer a formal ministerial direction to the Independent Toll Review. I regard that would have been inappropriate to do so, and I'm surprised you're asking that question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you've never said, "We are not going to consider new tolls. That's not part of our policy."?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have never issued a formal ministerial direction in the way you're proposing to the Independent Toll Review. It wouldn't be independent if I'd done that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Did you provide any casual advice in your discussions with Mr Fels? "We're not looking at new tolls. That's something that we have said we will not do." Is that something that you said casually to him?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We've certainly made the independent toll reviewers aware of the Government's election commitments. That's an important issue but that hasn't constrained them. They've felt free to suggest some things that were not in line with the Government's election commitments and, at times, the Premier—or I, as Minister, or the Treasurer—have ruled those out publicly.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which version of no new tolls is correct?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What is your question, Ms Ward?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which version of no new tolls is the correct one?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Our election commitments stand. We'll deliver on them, despite the contracts you signed us up to.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just to be clear—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: These are pretty hard to escape.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —you have never told them that you wouldn't consider new tolls?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The contracts you spent millions of dollars on for lawyers and consultants, and locking drivers into, they're pretty hard to escape from—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You have never said, "We won't consider new tolls."

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —but we're going to give it a go.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've never said, "We won't do new tolls" to the independent adviser to the committee or to anyone else?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This will be the greatest escape act since Houdini if we get out of these contracts your Government signed.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You never told them.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm very grateful to Professor Fels.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, will you be privatising the Sydney Harbour Bridge and tunnel?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will you be privatising the revenue of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and tunnel to fund toll reform?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Privatisation was your policy. That's how we ended up in this mess.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will you be privatising the revenue?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We won't be repeating the billions of dollars of privatisation—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you can rule it out right now?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —that your Government engaged in.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will you privatise the revenue?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's exactly how we got here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking, in budget estimates, will you be privatising the revenue from the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the tunnel to fund toll reform? I'm asking you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is your prescription. The Government has made it clear that—and this is why we debated the NSW Motorways legislation. That is the entity that will hold the assets.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not asking about the entity. I'm asking about the revenue from those two. Can you rule it out, here and now—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Privatisation is your policy, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —that you won't be sending that money to Transurban?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We won't be repeating your mistakes, if that's the question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So the money from the Harbour Bridge and tunnel will not be sent for toll reform. You won't include that in toll reform?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We won't be repeating your mistakes. We will be delivering on our commitments.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But I'm asking about what you will be delivering. You said you wanted to answer questions today. I'm asking those questions about what that revenue will go to and you can't rule out the revenue from the Harbour Bridge and tunnel—two-way tolling—going towards toll reform.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We were clear before the election that one of the things we'd consider is some of that revenue going towards paying for toll relief for drivers. That was a discussion we had openly with public.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You could've said that three questions ago.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You distracted me with your unreasonable questioning, Ms Ward. But perhaps you are right, I could have.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's ask a reasonable question, then. Does the Government have plans to privatise the revenue from the Sydney Harbour Bridge and tunnel?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You'll have to repeat that question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you have plans to privatise the revenue from the Sydney Harbour Bridge and tunnel? Will you give the money to Transurban?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We've been clear about our commitments. We did discuss before the election dedicating that revenue towards toll relief for motorists. We'll fulfil our election commitments.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do any plans presently exist?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Government is yet to make decisions on toll reform. We're in the middle of a toll negotiation. Some of your questioning, and I don't say this about today, but in other forums—particularly with Treasury officials—has been inappropriate—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, they're very simple, straightforward questions. You don't need to dodge them. Will you sending that money to Transurban? You can rule that out right now.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —particularly asking about the value of particular elements of the toll reform. That's not in the public interest, to have that disclosed in the middle of the toll negotiations.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, they are pretty straightforward questions. You were very clear before the election: no two-way tolling, no new tolls on old roads, no longer tolls. It seems like you can't give a straight answer to any of those options to say what the Government is doing. Are you breaking your promise now or did you break it then?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We will fulfil all our election commitments—not your version of our election commitments—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking how.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —but the commitments that the Premier, in particular, and I, as Minister, made to the public. I look forward to doing so. This is a tough problem to unravel—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: These are straightforward questions. The public deserves to know.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —given the contracts you and your consultants and your lawyers—that conga line of lawyers who signed these decades-long contracts the former Government left us with. It's a tough problem.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But your commitment was no new tolls; that's still on the table. Your commitment was no new tolls on old roads; that's now on the table. You committed to not doing two-way tolling; that's now on the table.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We'll fulfil all our election commitments, Ms Ward, and not your version of our election commitments.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How many options are currently being explored under the direct deal provisions?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I encourage you to ask the officials for that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you, Minister, while you're here. I've got all afternoon with the officials. You know that. I know that. How many options are currently being explored under the direct deal provisions?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Quite a number. I don't want to spell those out. I don't think that will be helpful to the negotiation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not asking the specifics; I'm asking how many there are. Do you know?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It depends on your precise definition, but quite a number of models are being looked at.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It doesn't depend on my definition; it depends on how many options are on the table. I'm not even at the trick questions yet.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We've worked through a number of iterations, but my characterisation—but I'd encourage you to ask the officials about that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I don't need your encouragement; I need your answers, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm about to give you my characterisation. I would say there are five or six models under active consideration.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's very helpful. Is corridor pricing, which was not supported by the review, currently being examined by the direct deal committee?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't think it's sensible to go into the precise options that are in the middle of this direct deal negotiation. I note the advice of Treasury officials—and I think this was a fair question—when you asked, "Is the declining distance model advocated in the Independent Toll Review on the table?" Yes,

it is. That was the advice of Treasury officials. I can confirm that. I don't think stepping through the models in the middle of a direct deal negotiation is in the public interest.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We have a review on the table that specifically said that it was not supportive of corridor pricing. Is it on the table or off? You've paid for the review. Mr Fels has given his advice. He doesn't support corridor pricing. Are you ignoring his advice and proceeding with it, or are you following the advice and it's off the table?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Government is yet to conclude a deal and yet to settle a model, so no.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: "No" what? No, there's no corridor pricing or no, you're not ignoring his advice? Which?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Precisely the answer I've given you. The Government is yet to make a decision and yet to select a model as a part of these direct deal negotiations.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, Mr Fels doesn't support corridor pricing. He put that in his report. It's been 706 days since his report, and you won't come clean with the public about whether it is on or off the table. Is corridor pricing an option? Is it one of the five or six?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I know, Ms Ward, you'd like the answer to how we're going to escape these dastardly contracts that your Government signed us up to.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But you've got the report.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're working hard on it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've paid for the report.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The report has been a fantastic blueprint.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've got Mr Fels. He has stayed here, he's written the report and you have sidelined him and his recommendations.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can confirm the Government's expectation is we'll be able to do it, but I'm not going to tell you how we're going to escape your contracts in the middle of the negotiation because it will actually hurt the public interest. We'll get a worse deal for drivers if I spell out our negotiating tactics—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's talk about the report, then, that we've paid for.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —around the estimates table.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Last estimates—let's talk about that. Last estimates, you stated, "The Government will respond to both the interim report and the report of the toll review together, and that report will be released publicly." You remember you said that. Did you mislead the Committee at that time?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We have already responded with our legislation. We'll continue—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, not the legislation. You said you will respond to the report, both interim and the report of the final toll review together, and that will be released publicly. You haven't done that, have you?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We have not released publicly a Government response, and I confirm we will do that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You said at estimates last time that you would. You haven't done that. Were you misleading the Committee then?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So when will you respond?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We'll alert you when we respond. We're in the middle of the direct—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How many days will it take?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're in the middle of the direct deal negotiations. The Government is working through this in an orderly way.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: For 706 days, no response to Mr Fels' interim report, his final report—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's not "no response". For 435 of those days, we've had the toll cap in place.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You haven't responded.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're still hoping for you to back it. That was the first—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You assured this Committee that you would provide a response together publicly—you'd release it. That's what you told us under oath, and that hasn't eventuated. We have no response. How many days will it take to respond to this very expensive report?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We'll deliver on our election commitments before the election.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it 700 days, 800 days, 900 days?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Our election commitments, unsurprisingly, will be delivered before the election.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking about your evidence to this Committee—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To be really clear, we're doing exactly—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —under oath that you would respond to both reports. You haven't done so, and you can't tell this Committee when you'll respond to both the interim and final report that we've paid for.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're doing exactly what we said we would do before the election: working through, setting up toll relief, moving into toll reform—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We know that. I'll move on.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —and we'll deliver on those commitments before the election.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, when were you first advised that the toll road modelling completed by Clarity Consult and commissioned by Mr Fels was peer reviewed and found to be not fit for purpose for negotiations with Transurban?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept the characterisation of that research.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But your review said it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd have to take on notice the specific question you're asking about the date.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When were you first advised that that modelling was not fit for purpose? The peer review said it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As I just explained, I'd have to take on notice the specific date, but I'm happy to do so.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When did you become aware of it? I mean, you've got a peer review that says you can't rely on the traffic modelling. When did you become aware of that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I reject the premise but, as I've said twice now, I will take on notice the specific date. I think that's a reasonable question. I'm happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you're aware of it. What's the expertise, then, in traffic modelling that you'll rely on?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There's a very significant team working on this problem. You've been very critical. You've encouraged the Government to proceed without any of these consultants or lawyers—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, I'd like to understand what you've said and what you're doing; they're two very different things.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —even though they're half the cost of what you were charging the public to privatise. I've made it clear I'm not walking into a gunfight with a water pistol. We need a serious team in place to advise the Government to get the public out of the contracts your Government signed.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, what is your expertise in traffic modelling?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Let me describe it to the Committee as very, very low.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The peer review said, "Stop. Don't use this," and yet you get running with it. You run off with it and say, "Yes, we're going to rely on that." The peer review said, "Don't rely on this traffic modelling," but you pushed through anyway.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think you're trivialising the significant amount of work going into this.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, I'm not. I'm very concerned that you're relying, in negotiations with Transurban, on this modelling that a peer review has said, "Don't rely on it. Stop. It's unreliable."

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept the premise of your question. You are trivialising the significant amount of work—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The peer review said it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —and the significant Transport teams that are working on the traffic modelling here, as well as some of these consultants. We can answer the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They pleaded with you, Minister. They asked you not to rely on this traffic modelling. They said, "Don't go into this gunfight with dodgy traffic modelling." Yet, you have.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept the premise. We can take you through that specific modelling and correct the record for you, should you give us the opportunity.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Were you advised of this prior to entering into stage two of the direct deal?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've said I'll take on notice the date. I think it's a fair question to say when was I aware of this particular modelling. I have been briefed by officials. I did raise some—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But not just the modelling; the peer review. Were you aware of the peer review and the warnings to you about this traffic modelling before you entered into stage two of the direct deal?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As I was saying, Ms Ward, I was briefed by officials. I did ask some questions about the modelling and the peer review. I was reassured by the answers I was given.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They were pleading with the Government to stop.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm happy for officials to also reassure you, should you want to put those questions to them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They said it wasn't fit for purpose. "Please don't proceed with this." They said to you, "It's not fit for purpose. Please don't use it." Why did you proceed to stage two based on that modelling?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Having been briefed by officials, I was reassured by the answers that I received.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And you still kept going.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is not the only modelling that the Government is using.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Good morning, Minister. I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions, one in relation to Sound NSW. What is that currently costing taxpayers—the full cost of Sound NSW?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sound NSW, firstly, is the contemporary music agency established by the Government. It's modelled on Screen NSW, so it's a very similar format.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So it has a board and staff?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct. It's very similar to the set-up for Screen NSW, but to support contemporary music.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How many people work there, Minister?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's part of a $103 million commitment to the contemporary music industry over the term of the Government. I would have to take on notice the specific numbers, or we could get officials to answer you now. But we certainly have that information.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: And there's a full, functioning, paid board, is that right?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Firstly, I can tell you that the budget allocation for this year is $18.5 million. That includes both staff and the grant programs. There is a fully functioning board. That's been operational now for more than a year, but we've also legislated it recently, as you would be aware.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes. So staff, grants—and how many staff are there?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We'll get that—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You can take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm certainly happy to take it on notice, but we may be able to tell you more rapidly than that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's okay. What about the board itself? Are they paid positions?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't want to mislead you. I think they may be paid a small amount. It's a very serious board. We've been lucky to have some of the most senior people in the national music industry step onto that board.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you confirm if they're paid?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I will confirm.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Is it Ms Collins? Is that right? If she's here, can she confirm if they're paid?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, we can ask her to come forward. I can tell you that Sound NSW at the moment has 15 full-time equivalent employees.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you confirm that the board are paid, or are the chair and deputy chair paid?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're just taking that on notice.

The CHAIR: Ms Mihailuk, did you want Ms Collins to come forward?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: If Ms Collins can answer, I'm happy for an answer now. It doesn't have to be the Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think we can answer that now. I just don't want to mislead you on that one.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: No, that's fine. Ms Collins, could you let me know if the board members are paid?

EMILY COLLINS: Correct. They are. The chair is paid $10,000 a year, and general board members are paid $5,000.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And that's in line with—obviously, it went through the usual—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Is there a deputy chair to the committee?

EMILY COLLINS: There is.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What is the deputy chair paid?

EMILY COLLINS: The same as general members.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How long is the tenure of their board?

EMILY COLLINS: There were varying term lengths. Each member is able to be appointed for up to three years, with a maximum of three terms.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Thank you, Ms Collins. I think that's all I need to ask you about.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will just say that grading for the pay obviously goes through the government grading process for these committees.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So that's a normal—that doesn't seem overly too much, but I just wanted to know what they're paid. Obviously that comes out of the $18.5 million. Is that how it works?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I believe so.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, I just wanted to ask you about—it would be good if I had the document in front of me. I just wanted to also ask you about John Watson. He's the deputy chair, is that right? Can I confirm that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: He was the deputy chair. Yes, that's correct. And we're going through—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Why is he no longer the deputy chair?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: John Watson is a very senior music industry figure. He agreed to serve, but only for the initial set-up. I had a good discussion with John. He viewed it as an important moment to help New South Wales recalibrate, but the agreement with John was only that he would serve for one term. I understand he might be serving, potentially, on the Federal music body, but we were very lucky to snare him first in New South Wales.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How long was he on the board for?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It would be for approximately 15 months, as we set it up, before we legislated it, and now we're reappointing at the moment.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Could I just bring to your attention—his company is Eleven: A Music Company. Is that correct?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When I had a look at the reportable political donations disclosure for NSW Labor 2022-23 financial year, it was interesting to me that Eleven: A Music Company donated $1,900. Are you aware of that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would have to take that on notice. That's really a matter for the party rather than the Government.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I just want to know whether, as Minister, you were aware that John Watson had donated, through his company, $1,900 in that financial year?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wasn't aware that Eleven had donated.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It never came to your attention?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wasn't aware that Eleven had donated to a party.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That brings me to a question then. Were you involved in any of these board positions? Are you involved in the final signing-off of board positions?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I am involved in—there's a recommendation from the agency, and then I sign off on those board positions.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Do you know if the agency or yourself does any due diligence checks to see if you're actually promoting people that are donors to the Labor Party, that have donated to Sussex Street? Is there a process?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I certainly didn't check. You would you have to check with the agency if they had. To be clear, John Watson is the leading manager in Australia.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That doesn't mean anything to me. It might be exciting for you, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Jimmy Barnes, Midnight Oil, Missy Higgins—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm more worried about people giving money to the Labor Party and getting rewards for it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, but Jimmy Barnes, Midnight Oil, Missy Higgins, I suspect Birds of Tokyo—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Wonderful. But it's a pretty good deal for him because he got at least $5,000 back for that $1,900 that he gave the Labor Party, so well done to John Watson.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can assure you he was not appointed because he was donating in the political system.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, you are also Special Minister of State. I did ask this question the other week to the Minister for Sport about the processes around grants but also about people taking on board

positions and the need that they might have, if they are being offered a position like this, that they should declare that they have donated to a party—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, look—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —particularly during the political process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd be happy to take that on notice, but there's obviously a conflict—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm just interested, because you're the person that would normally bring legislation in that regard, as Special Minister of State.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There is obviously a conflict of interest process that all these boards go through. I'm not aware of the specifics, and you're now asking about the general process. I'd be happy to take the general process on notice to come back with an answer about what the existing arrangements are and what might be appropriate.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You said to me you didn't know that he donated. Could I just ask Ms Collins to come forward? Ms Collins, I'm going to ask you the same question: Were you involved in Mr Watson being recommended for the board?

EMILY COLLINS: Yes. Sound NSW put forward a list of, I think, approximately just under 60 potential industry candidates for appointment to the board.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You put forward 60?

EMILY COLLINS: Yes. We put forward a long list with some recommendations about people.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Who does the final choosing out of the 60? I've got the list of board members here. There's not 60 here.

EMILY COLLINS: No, sorry—the long list. When the board was first appointed, we put forward a recommendation of potential candidates, and we made a recommendation of, I think, closer to 20. I'll have to come back to you on notice about what the final—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: And who made the final decision, Ms Collins?

EMILY COLLINS: That final decision—they're appointed by the Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And I can confirm that. That's as I advised earlier.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you then looked at this list and chose who you wanted.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I looked at the recommendations.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Ultimately you're responsible for Mr Watson going on?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: My issue is—and nothing against Mr Watson. Well done for what he has done for the music industry. That's fantastic. I'm more concerned about the process before you, Minister, particularly given your other role as Special Minister of State. I would expect that due diligence check to happen. Ms Collins, you weren't aware that he donated to Sussex Street, $1,900?

EMILY COLLINS: No, I was not aware.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How can we fix that, Minister? I think that's a problem. These are the sorts of declarations that should actually happen.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can I offer the secretary to give you some general guidance on this?

KATE BOYD: This issue has come up before in relation to employment in the public sector as well, and it would be potentially counter to the integrity aims of the public sector to ask people whether they have donated to a political party.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What? Are you suggesting it's counter to integrity that they should actually advise, given they're taking on a public service role, even if it could be just a minor question that you put to them: Have they made political donations?

KATE BOYD: You wouldn't want to infer that that was a necessary criteria for appointment.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You would think that they would perhaps make that available—they would provide that information, I would have thought.

KATE BOYD: It is made available.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: There should be a process where you can ask: Are there any conflicts that you might think we need to be aware of?

KATE BOYD: I don't think making a lawful political donation is a conflict, and all of those donations were publicly disclosed.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm not suggesting it's unlawful; I'm suggesting that he made a donation to the Labor Party and within months was put on a board that pays a stipend or fee. Does it meet the pub test? No, it doesn't. Minister, will you commit to making changes in this regard?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've taken it on notice, and I'm happy to do that and look at the issue in a serious way. I would, of course, take the agency advice, but government will make its own decision about what was appropriate. I'm certainly happy to talk to you further about it.

The CHAIR: Minister, I've been contacted by residents who are living near the Warringah Freeway upgrade who have concerns about the closure of the Alfred Street off-ramp. They were notified, they're telling me, in one email that was sent on 6 November last year telling them that that would be closed for seven or eight months and that it would reopen sometime in mid-2025. Firstly, is there anything more specific that the residents can hear in terms of a date for that closure? It's a very long time. They're concerned about the lack of consultation and the lack of detail.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Firstly, this project is really important. But it's also been really disruptive, so I really want to thank motorists and also local residents for their patience. If you're driving through this area, it changes pretty much every week you drive through, so people would know what a big impact it's been. You've referred to one of the specific impacts, which has had a local impact, particularly on residents. The Alfred Street off-ramp was temporarily closed on Friday 22 November. The advice to me at this stage is it will remain closed until mid-2025. The reason why it's closed is, if we didn't do that, this would take far longer. It takes out 90 nights of noisy work and it removes the need for 10 weekends of extended-hours work. There's no easy way to do this work. This was the judgement about the quickest way to do this with, in the end, less impact.

The CHAIR: I understand that the Milson Precinct group has requested details of the proposed traffic management plans for the closure. At last communication with them, that hadn't been provided. Is there any reason why not, Minister?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can't answer that. I encourage you to take it up with the officials. There has been significant community engagement—for example, the normal letterbox and email notifications, street meetings, information settings, paid social media and radio advertising. There's specific information on the website and a media release. There have been briefings with key stakeholders and impacted residents' groups—that normal consultation. This is a disruptive project, though, so I'm sure—I know residents have really been impacted here so, if there's more we can do, we should. If we can provide that information, then my view would be we should, but I encourage you to ask officials.

The CHAIR: But you're here now as the Minister who can make a direction and suggest that that traffic management plan be provided. Given that all they found out about it, in terms of the community, was this one email on 6 November—you said a lot of consultation—they don't think they've got enough information. Are you going to say now that it should be released for them?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd certainly be comfortable with it being released. What's the view of the agency on that matter?

CAMILLA DROVER: The closure of that off-ramp is static, so it's been closed. I am surprised of the lack of information, but I'm happy to take that on notice. There has been a lot of information provided to the local community. There's also been media done with—

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Drover. The Minister just said he was happy for the traffic management plan to be released and passed it to you. You said you'd take it on notice. Is that what you're saying here now? The Minister has just said he's happy with it.

CAMILLA DROVER: I'm taking on notice the fact that it hasn't already been released because a high degree of information has already been shared.

The CHAIR: Okay, and if it hasn't been released?

CAMILLA DROVER: There's no problem with explaining the changed traffic arrangements—absolutely not.

The CHAIR: All right.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It may have been released but, if not, we'll release it publicly and discuss it with the residents.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Now, with all of this disruption as well for residents that live around Milsons Point, Lavender Bay, Mosman, Kirribilli and North Sydney obviously, have there been any discussions within Government about a toll waiver for residents while they're undergoing this extremely disruptive construction which, obviously, for many months, has been incredibly disrupting for them?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We have been. Firstly, the advice to residents is to take the toll-free option. That's the advice that has been given. That's the toll-free exit at the Pacific Highway, Artarmon, if they're accessing North Sydney, Neutral Bay and Kirribilli. We have had inquiries, though, from local residents saying, "That doesn't always suit and we are incurring more tolls than we otherwise would." We're working with those residents who've raised those issues, and the local community, to assist where we can. I might direct you to the officials so we can tell you the latest status of that either this afternoon or now.

The CHAIR: I will come back to that. I appreciate that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm certainly aware of the issue. It's one we've been working closely on.

The CHAIR: Okay, another issue—this time from Cammeray Voices, but similar, of course. Minister, in October last year, you assured Cammeray Voices that an independent environmental representatives review would be completed—this is in terms of the Western Harbour Tunnel—within several weeks. Are you aware of what that is regarding?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, just repeat that.

The CHAIR: It's an independent environmental representative. This is in relation to the upgrade I asked you in budget estimates and wrote you a letter.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

The CHAIR: They were told it would be within a couple of weeks.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Understood.

The CHAIR: Nothing has happened, as I understand it. What's the update?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Cammeray Voices released a report in September 2024. Transport then took the views out of that report and escalated them to the Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway upgrade environmental representative to do this review. What the review is looking into is the allegations about noncompliance that were outlined in that report. It has required some thorough work. It's not yet complete. Our expectation is that it may still take a number of weeks to conduct and finalise it. As soon as that is final, we'll be going back to Cammeray Voices to inform them of the results of the review and any recommendations. That's the current status as of today.

The CHAIR: We're at budget estimates once again. It's a couple of weeks from budget estimates so I think, last October, whenever it was, you said a couple of weeks. Now it's a couple of weeks. Is that a guarantee that it's a couple of weeks?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's the advice to me. I accept the point you're making.

The CHAIR: The project will be done and dusted potentially—many couples of weeks later.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Possibly not, given just how big this project is. But I accept, Chair, the point you're making that this has taken quite some time. I'm happy to speak to the agency about what we can do to make sure that delivers on that timeline.

The CHAIR: Yes, you were just summarising the situation.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I also encourage you this afternoon to accept advice from the officials about what's caused that delay.

The CHAIR: Hopefully you will follow that up yourself, too, as Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I've committed. I'll do that.

The CHAIR: You summarise the independent environmental representative as being appointed by the project team. I just wanted to get clarity on that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can't answer that question. I would have to refer that or take it on notice.

The CHAIR: Somebody, just to be clear—and this is the political point I'm possibly wanting from you, Minister, or response. This independent environmental representative needing to look at compliance issues with the upgrade—quite a few significant breaches, according to the community—was appointed, is being briefed and is, essentially, paid for by the project team, the very team that it is enquiring into and investigating into. I understand that's the situation.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not aware of the method of appointment or the circumstances, so I'd have to—

The CHAIR: Mr Murray, are you aware?

JOSH MURRAY: No. I'd have to take that on notice, Ms Faehrmann.

The CHAIR: Okay, maybe if somebody else within the team—

JOSH MURRAY: I think we could come back later today with a more fulsome report on where that's now up to.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, it's been delayed. The community's very frustrated. We're unable to get from here at this point any information about that independent review. It does appear as though it's a bit of a delaying tactic, wouldn't you think? Why isn't it being accelerated?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Chair, I don't agree with this. I don't want to take the time up this morning but I think you should ask the officials what has caused this delay.

The CHAIR: I'm asking the question, as in I'm wanting to get from you just in—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm giving you the status update, but I can't tell you why your reasonable question about why this is taking so long, I can't—

The CHAIR: So you're assuring the community, which is what you did last time, that you were onto it, that you were trying to ensure action was taken, that those breaches were being looked into. Now it appears that you're here with your officials, and who knows whether they're being looked into or not?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't agree with that, and I've updated you on the status of that project.

The CHAIR: Are there any questions from the Government?

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Yes, Chair, just a couple of questions for Professor Fels. Can you elaborate on how motorway tolling is impacting motorists in Sydney?

ALLAN FELS: Yes. They're up for $195 billion. But maybe I could just tell you what we were told by people affected by it, because we did very extensive consultations. Somewhat amazingly, we got 1,150 submissions from the public, and then a whole lot of submissions from other people. And there were surveys and so on. But the predominant view that was put to us was about the level of prices and their escalation. The overwhelming sentiment was that tolls in New South Wales are too expensive, particularly with cost-of-living pressures, other taxes and so on. And also, the regularity of big toll increases—four per cent in some of the main areas—is extremely unpopular with the public; also, inequitable social outcomes coming from the regime, with low-income people. Western Sydney feel it's really unfair. There's also effects on people's behaviour, whether they'll use toll roads. I'll give you a few quotes from members of the public. One said:

- The current toll charges are absolutely unfair for common and regular commuters.

These are all separate comments. We got hundreds, and we published them, by the way, in a report. Other comments stated:

- Motorways are supposed to be a convenient means to travel long and complicated distances, and the current toll rates are hindering this.
- The cost is prohibitive and drives traffic onto surrounding roads making it an overall nightmare.
- The taxes we pay on car rego, licences and petrol are supposed to be going to building and maintaining our road networks, but either this isn't happening, or the government and residents are being ripped off.

Now, a lot of views about tolls—some people say there shouldn't be tolls at all. But certainly a strong view is that they are "unfairly biased against Sydney's poorest population". Other comments stated:

- The government really needs to understand how much we are struggling. We don't just have money in our savings anymore.
- The government incentivises moving out west of Sydney, to receive a better chance for first home buyers incentives, yet increases tolls drastically.

- The exorbitant charges hinder socioeconomic mobility and restrict individuals' ability to seek employment, education, healthcare, and other essential services located outside their immediate areas.
- Sydney families are being punished for seeing their loved ones—

especially seeing their families outside the immediate areas. There's a whole lot of others. I mean, we got a lot of this from the public. Personally, I felt there needed to be an inquiry to look into these concerns. For example, we got a lot of concerns from car-share users, who are sharing cars, and they cop the tolls. They thought there should be some lesser toll for them, and environmental benefits and all sorts of things of that sort. I thought it was quite important that, if we're hearing this view, the public is saying it, that there should be some analysis of this. Hence, sorry, very long report. There are a lot of views on privatisation. We didn't come out for or against privatisation. But just to pass on views, one comment stated:

- Roads are a public resource, having major thoroughfares owned and used as a source of income by private businesses is an injustice, and a sign of a government's failure to take and hold responsibility for its road networks.

Well, we heard that quite a lot. Another comment stated:

- There should be a rule against a monopoly on toll road ownership to generate competition on pricing.

Now, that one—we did have a big look at the competition question. To me, there are glaring issues about competition to get the job, to get the contracts, and other questions about competition, so we've spent some time on that important question. There were a lot of views that infrastructure operated under a for-profit model hurts the average consumer. There's very little choice in using other means. There was quite a bit on the link between the tolls they're being charged, the policies and so on, and other parts of transport policy. Maybe the Government could provide better public transport and active transport options, including better cross-city links like metro lines, light rail, buses, footpaths and cycleways to help reduce the community's reliance on toll roads.

There was a lot about toll relief, and whether it was a good or costly approach. We've got a lot of people saying it was great and there should be more of it. There were some people who said, from a taxpayer point of view, they didn't like it. They didn't see why they should do it. There is a lot on capped pricing. Again, we heard a lot about people favour caps. There were some who said not such a great idea, because the taxpayer's somehow paying for this. Then we heard a huge amount about toll exemptions or reductions for motorhomes, recreational vehicles, campervans, and then exemptions or reductions for motorcycles; a bit about peak and off-peak pricing—there's not really much of that; bridge, distance-based pricing, and so on. So a lot was said from stakeholders, and we get the obvious impression—I'm sure everyone here knows—the public has got very strong opinions about tolls and how much they're paying, and wondering if there's some better way of doing things.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Professor Fels, did the toll contract signed by the previous Government sufficiently consider motorists when setting toll prices?

ALLAN FELS: I don't particularly want to point fingers at previous whichever governments did it, but I would have said firstly that the general feeling is that the contracts were not good, particularly the escalation rates. There's a bit of a tendency to make a deal that sounds good in year one and then add on, more quietly, huge escalation rates, including the 4 per cent a year. In our report—we called it *Motorists First*. We think that it should be motorists first when it comes to tolls policy, not concessionaires first, not business interests or profit making or what. It should be motorists first. We do pick up that there is quite a lot of non-use of toll roads because of the high rates. That means more congestion on non-toll roads. We also referred to some work by Professor Hensher at Sydney, who talked about toll saturation. People are paying so much in tolls that they just decide, "I'm not going on the toll roads."

Our own view was that the good toll roads here, they're good but they're underutilised. Just about the contracts, maybe I'll tell you a story. After I finished my work, I spoke at an international conference of tolling people in Singapore. A lot of countries and experts and so on were there. I thought it might be interesting for them to hear about New South Wales and our thoughts on what to do about it. But the general feedback I got from practically every country in the room was, "Are you doing this in New South Wales? We thought you had a serious government there. This is a very messy and costly way of doing tolls." I think I said, "Yes, well, we have to actually figure out a bit about how we might get out of some of this." That's quite a challenge.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Tell me, how complex is the toll reform process compared to other processes that you have dealt with?

ALLAN FELS: I've been in quite a few reform things. This is a very difficult and complicated one. In New South Wales, for example, I spent about five or six years working for the previous Government on the emergency services levy. That was quite complicated. A lot of individuals were involved. Frankly, one of the problems—why they abandoned the reform, I think—was that they got feedback from individuals about what—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Point of order, Chair. I do appreciate your contributions, Professor Fels, but I'm not sure how an emergency services levy process is relevant to this Committee's purposes.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: To the point of order, Chair, my question was quite specific about comparing the toll reform process to other processes that Professor Fels has dealt with.

The CHAIR: Yes, I'll allow the Professor to continue.

ALLAN FELS: It was a complicated thing. The electricity job was not so complicated as this one. I've been in quite a few of them. I rate this as one of the most complicated and difficult, because of the pre-existing contracts. There are also a large number of parties involved in it and you need very skilled and capable negotiating teams. There's a lot of law, finance, funding, economics, transport policy, road policy. It affects also where people live and work. I've got an economics background, but tolls over 50 years have a very big effect on the social life of people in New South Wales. Those things need to be brought into account. Also, tolls have quite an important impact on the flow of traffic, obviously. That needs to be looked at and modelled. It's not kind of an ordinary public service process, in my view. You need a lot of people to go into it. I won't say we haven't wasted a word in here, but there is 350 pages of fairly dense material on this whole complex subject. It's a long-term, difficult reform to achieve—it won't be achieved in a day; it'll be achieved over time—with many conflicting interests involved.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Thank you, Professor Fels.

The CHAIR: We'll break for morning tea now and we'll be back at 11.15 a.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister. We'll go straight to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I had the great pleasure to tour the New England Regional Arts Museum over the weekend. Have you had the chance to visit, Minister?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would have to check if I've been to the New England Regional Arts Museum. I've been to quite a few regional museums and galleries, so I'd want to check before telling you for sure.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It boasts probably one of the most significant collections of art in a regional setting and one of the greatest acts of artistic philanthropy and benefaction in Australian history, so I do recommend a visit.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Very good. I'll take that seriously.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I don't believe that it may be on your ministerial schedule at this point in time. But with your lack of visitation to regional areas in your capacity as arts Minister, are you aware of a growing concern that there's not enough focus and support for the arts, particularly in the regions? How do you respond to that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Firstly, I don't accept that premise of your question, but the point you're making underlies the whole policy change that the Government has taken in the arts. Previously the arts policy in New South Wales was about our amazing cultural institutions. The trouble is they're all clustered around Sydney Harbour. We've now moved to a policy that recognises the creative communities of the State. That recognises regional communities far more effectively. That was what we heard from regional communities during the consultation. That's why we made that policy shift, and I believe it'll lead to a funding shift and a priority shift over time.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's great, Minister. But you've just talked about recognising the importance and the significances of arts in the regions—that's one thing—and leading to a prioritisation and greater funding, but what's happening right now? You've two years into government. You're suggesting that you've had consultation, but in the conversations that I've had with various arts organisations around the regions, they're suggesting that they're not feeling the love from you or your Government at all.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Just last week we've kicked off the regional arts strategy—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We'll get to that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —which will drive the approach in regional New South Wales, and that's how we're working. We'll consult further on that and we'll look to make sure. But we're funding very significantly into the regions. That's true, regardless of the art form.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: If we're talking about funding then, and you're talking about funding big for the regions, how much?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We can come to some of those specifics if you give us just a minute.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That'd be great. While you're coming to those specifics, you might also let us know the funding for capital upgrades and new facilities. How is that broken down?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To give you some sense, probably the last round of the Arts and Cultural Funding Program, the 2024–25 round, is the best place to start. We invested $10.6 million as a part of that round. That went to 72 regionally based organisations, and also to artists directly, in some cases. Some of the highlights were annual program funding, which really funded them throughout the year and went to 21 organisations. We're putting a focus on regional touring after we heard a range of the towns we consulted with said, "Look, we've got great art here, but we want to send it to nearby regions." So 17 applicants are getting $1.2 million for regional touring. The RADOs, the Regional Arts Development Organisations that you'd be very familiar with, 15 of those got $3.3 million. Also a range of other regional organisations, including local government associations, received more than $3 million under multi-year agreements, giving them funding stability. That's one round. That's an example.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I will come to some regional touring aspects in a moment, but you just mentioned the regional arts culture and creative industries strategy. Yet another strategy, Minister. Lots of reviews and inquiries and consultations and strategy, not so much on outcomes and producing results. So where are we at with this strategy?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't agree with that observation. I just want to explain what the strategy is about.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We could go through the list, many of which have been mentioned this morning.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: For the first time, we've got a 10-year policy which sets out what the State's aspirations are in the creative sector, and it's a big change from what the policy was before, even though last time the policy was not—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But it was promised for 2024, Minister. It's March 2025, so where's it at?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The policy was not written down. The strategies are not about what government's doing. It's what the sector itself wants and what government can enable. That's a real change. We're moving away from government simply helicoptering money in to really working closely with the sectors.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's terrific to hear, but when can we expect it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It kicked off just last week, as I've let you know. I'd encourage people to—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We've made the announcements where the strategy itself has now been produced with your key priorities and recommendations around all of that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No. As I stated before, we've commenced work on that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Commenced work on it, yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, exactly, and we've been consulting—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: How much longer do we need to wait until that work is completed?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The direction I've given in general with these strategies is we've got to be highly sensitive to the timing of the sector. The screen sector, for example, that one's done, or Western Sydney or the regions. Government should be prepared to move quickly, but we've also got to be prepared to move at the pace that the sector is moving at. These are not government plans. They're government and industry plans or government and region plans working together, so that'll depend on the feedback.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I understand that. Perhaps, Minister, you should do less on over-promising and underdelivering. You did say 2024. It's March 2025, and you still can't give us a timeline on that. Perhaps you just need to take into account that you don't set these stones for yourself around your neck if you're still consulting and engaging with the various sectors, as you should do.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is very much a partnership, so I think we've got to be aware of how these industries are organised. This won't work if government turns up and says, "Well, this is what we're doing." It hasn't actually listened to the sector.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I hear you, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's the change that were driving.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But again, "We're still waiting?," is the question that's coming back to us as well.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd encourage people to get involved in this process now it has been kicked off.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Have you done any of the things that you stated in your media release on growing and supporting local activities that you were going to be looking at, or are you going to be waiting until the work is completed?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You'll have to remind me of what's in the specific media release. There are quite a few that go out.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It states:

> Working with local councils to reduce red tape for festivals …
>
> Working with regional communities, councils, creative organisations and venues to support a connected network of regional touring … activate the network of regional halls and spaces to support local touring across music, performance and visual art/exhibitions.
>
> Supporting at least 4 new creative industries/artist workspaces in regional NSW in the next 4 years.

So are all of those things going to be in the strategy that you'll be releasing?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, we've made significant progress against those things, and you can see that, in part because that ACFP funding that I referred to earlier has been increased and indexed, so that sort of security that's there for the sector has allowed us to really take significant steps towards those goals that were articulated there.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are they your key take-outs? Are you able to share any of your key take-outs? Don't keep us in suspense any longer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You'll have to be more specific. Key take-outs about—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That you'll be talking about in your strategies. Is that pretty much going to be it? What do the arts organisations, the arts community and the sector have to look forward to in all of this?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In the regional strategy you're asking about, specifically?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To me, the thing that really came through—the first place we did the consultation was in Lismore because it had been flooded in 2022 and the arts organisations were particularly impacted. The number one thing that came through to me was the need to support touring. People saying, "Look, we know there's great arts culture and creativity going on up the road," but we want to have that here, including the best from the cities all round the country or the next region, but we've also got some remarkable things happening in Lismore or the Northern Rivers, and we want the ability for those people to succeed on the national stage. We want to be able to do that, so we've stepped up that touring support. I'd like those organisations to be able to work on the national stage. We are open to collaborating with the other States to do so. I know that is not the traditional approach.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I do want to get to touring, particularly for music. But we will get to that. First, I want to ask: Minister, your Labor Government is set to fall at least 40 per cent short of its housing target. Can you explain how you're going to be able to deliver 40,000 hotel rooms to assist with accommodation that is much needed and is being called for?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Firstly, we have actually got a good record in New South Wales. Full credit to the sector and full credit to the former Government. Over COVID we actually put thousands and thousands of hotel rooms into New South Wales, but we need more if we're going to achieve our goals. We can't to that, in my view, with the planning system we have got. We need to make changes to the planning framework

for hotel accommodation if we're going to succeed. I want to succeed because the growth dividend by 2035 for the State is very significant if we can reach that $91 billion visitor expenditure target.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: If you do achieve those very ambitious targets that you've set, and even if you achieve half of them, what about the impacts on the short-term rental accommodation industry?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They are ambitious, but you have to remember that these are great regional jobs. This gives people the advantage, especially in our regions, to do great work and stay in their communities. That is one of the reasons I am so passionate about hitting those goals. Yes, there will be pressures with short-term accommodation. I agree with where you're heading. My point is this: Those pressures will be worse if we don't tackle the hotel accommodation challenge, don't change the planning system and don't strive to achieve those goals.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Let's talk about the short-term rental accommodation sector review. Again, another review. Do we have an update on that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That question will be best directed to my colleague. I am not the Minister who is best placed to give you the most recent update on that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's fine.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would be happy to take it on notice, though, so we can provide you—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's right. It does lead into previous answers.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wouldn't object to taking that on notice and we could get you some information from my colleague on that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That would be great. Yet another strategy—and I said I would be happy to provide the list—is the Visitor Economy Strategy. Where are things at with that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Firstly, I really want to thank the review team. We have Secretary Mildwater here, but also Sally Loane, Chair of Destination NSW, and Andrew McEvoy, who is now on the board of Destination NSW. They have completed a review of the existing strategy.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Great. It's completed. It is on track then?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The full strategy will be released shortly. We have already released the punchline—$91 billion of visitor expenditure. That is a significant upgrade to the previous $65 billion target. That is great news. It reflects how dynamic it is and the potential for New South Wales. That is great potential, including for regional New South Wales.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes. When you are talking about "shortly"—coming back to the Chair's previous point—is that a matter of weeks? Will we be back here next time still asking the same questions?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have an update for the Chair on her question. I have learned my lesson from that previous experience. I won't be giving you a timeline on this occasion. It is an important strategy. The review really did the job, though, to signal where the Government wants to head. I'm really grateful to the review. It has really reset the approach in New South Wales. To be fair, it is building on the significant successes of the former Government and Destination NSW. It is time to strike out and be more ambitious.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Let's hope it achieves that, absolutely. We have just lost out to Melbourne to host the significant National Football League. There are a lot of very unhappy people. To quote Natalie Godward, the CEO of the NSW Tourism Association, "This is an epic failure for the NSW Government and Destination NSW". How did this happen on your watch?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I note the comment. I thought that was very harsh—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It's a pretty big deal—the NFL.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —particularly since we had announced the week before that the third biggest event in the world, the Rugby World Cup, would be centred in Sydney. The Victorian Government didn't get the same criticism times three when they missed out on that the week before. If I had to choose between the NFL one-off or, perhaps, over three years, and the Rugby World Cup, essentially, after the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup— Ms Ward could tell you this—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You are probably a rugby man, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —this is a huge event. It will set Sydney alight. If I had to choose which one to win, we chose right in New South Wales.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You spent big on the UFC, but an average NFL game has 15.8 million viewers in America, compared to under two million for the UFC. What are you going to do to ensure that this sort of thing, where you have been accused of dropping the ball, doesn't happen again?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't know why you're opposed to the UFC. It's a very popular sport, particularly amongst young men. It would be hard to fit an extra event in once you consider the Rugby World Cup, South by Southwest and the Sydney Marathon—now a marathon major, which is great news for Sydney. We can't win them all. I wish our colleagues in Melbourne well. But if you had to choose—and your colleagues will tell you this—the Rugby World Cup is where the action is.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I am a rugby fan, Minister. I am well aware of what a great game it is.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am a tourism fan.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It's the game they play in heaven. It's not about choosing.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: From a visitor expenditure point of view, this is rolled gold.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Let's talk about one that was achieved and what the heck happened with it. "Sydney let sports fans down at the Race of Champions". Do you know of the Race of Champions, Minister?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If you want to ask me a question, go right ahead.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do you know what the Race of Champions is?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Feel free to ask me a question.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That is the question: Do you know what the Race of Champions is?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am familiar with the title, but I don't know.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: In other words, that's a no, Minister. You can say you don't know what it is. It was a "blockbuster contest played out in front of thousands of empty seats" in Sydney's largest stadium on the race track.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Oh, this was the other night?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes. The fact that you didn't even know about it, clearly people didn't turn up. Why didn't people know about it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I did weigh up going.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But you didn't know what it was!

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I had another event. I will happily confess that I am not a rugby fan. I am a motorsports fan. I did weigh up going but I was unable to attend.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You're a motorsports fan but not enough to know of, help, promote, support or assist this?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I hadn't heard that review, but I am surprised that it wasn't more popular.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Clearly it wasn't. What are you doing to try to make these things more popular? Is it another one you've dropped the ball on or, perhaps, not dropped the crutch on, as it turns out to be?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To my knowledge—and I could be wrong about this, which is why I've invited the officials—it wasn't an event that DNSW was supporting. As a motorsports fan, I'm upset to hear that it didn't go well. But in terms of the Government's tourism strategy, that is of less concern than many of these major events that we're backing.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Again, if we are missing out on events and events aren't turning out as well as they should, that's got to be part of the overall strategy that needs to be addressed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The events space is going very, very well in Sydney. I want to credit Destination NSW and the former Government's strategy, including Minister Stuart Ayres.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Terrific.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The major events part of the strategy is going well. We are continuing to lift it. What we are doing in the review, and what you will see in the strategy, is that we are then adding a supply side tourism focus on airlines and hotels. If you do that together—keep the events humming and add the hotel and airline supply side—we are set for growth in New South Wales.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: If we are going to be talking about airlines, why did you cut the Aviation Attraction Fund and are you going to bring it back?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't think that is an accurate characterisation, firstly. We have allocated significant funds, over my term as Minister, to aviation attraction. You've seen some of those announcements unfold. That is relevant to Newcastle. It has been relevant to Kingsford Smith. We're in discussions with the Western Sydney Airport to make sure it reaches its potential. That is an active discussion about airline attraction.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Coming back to Destination NSW, yes, previously under Stuart Ayres, it did a fantastic job. Steve Cox, the CEO of Destination NSW, is no longer the CEO?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can confirm that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What has happened there?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Steve Cox is no longer the CEO. I refer you to the secretary, given the nature of Mr Cox's employment, for any questions on that. I am just referring to who is responsible for the employment of particular individuals. Either now or in the session this afternoon, you are welcome to ask about that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: In the session this afternoon, I'll be out of time. Thank you, Minister. Great Southern Nights is supposed to be promoting live music from around New South Wales. How many regional tours were there last year and how many are scheduled for this year?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm glad you've asked about this program.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm sure you are.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This was the one good idea—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: One?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —of the former Government in this space. We've got a raft of programs. This was a great program by the former Government, and we kept it as a result. We're reshaping it to make sure it works to the Government's precincts approach. At the moment, this was a random collection of events across the State at random times.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Why are bands from Victoria getting gigs in New South Wales, paid for by this program?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't know the specifics—feel free to supply them—but my observation would be that in the music industry often you will have band members coming from a range of States. They tend not to exclusively stick to one State, but I don't know the specifics that you're referring to.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm very sorry we're out of time, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister. I understand you've got an update on questions I was asking.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, can I briefly update you on the Cammeray Voices issue? What I can advise you is the report is complete. We will be able to supply further information to Cammeray Voices this week, including a copy of the report. It'll respond to the significant detail they've raised, and I invite you to ask the officials this afternoon if you'd like further detail about that response.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you, Minister. Minister, the Music Festival Act legislation review that took place last year—the report was provided to the Government, I understand, in April 2024. Why was it only made public on the day that the legislation was introduced in, I think, September?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think we'd committed to making it public. It's obviously a very complex area, as you know, so I can't recall a specific reason why it was released at that time. The review itself I found really helpful. It obviously went into a lot of detail, as you'd be aware, and the legislation has been highly effective.

The CHAIR: Minister, given it's a very complicated or complex issue, as you suggested, why would you have kept the review from the public and also all of the members in this place, who obviously want to pass legislation in that area that works and that supports the music industry? Why did you keep it from us until the legislation was before us?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I obviously had to consult with my colleagues—as you'd understand, these are cross-government issues. Frankly, that was one of the timing issues.

The CHAIR: Six months?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I recall being around this table trying to update about the principles—and running out of time last time—to give details in public about what to expect when we were last together at this Committee, so I don't accept that we've been hiding it. In fact, it's a really valuable report and I'd encourage people to read it. There's more work to do in this area.

The CHAIR: Minister, at that time as well, I asked for any submissions by stakeholders and who was consulted. The submissions, I understand, also haven't been made public; is that correct?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wasn't aware of that. Again, I would be open to the submissions being released publicly, except to the extent where they have requested confidentiality. I think we should be aware that some of the organisations may well have done that. I'd expect that to be respected, but I don't have a problem with the submissions being released publicly.

The CHAIR: In terms of the portfolios that you have carriage of—for example, the Sound NSW legislation and other legislation that comes before this Parliament—do you support the principle of transparency? You're saying that here today?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, although we've got to be careful. For example, the questions that have sometimes been asked about the confidential tolling negotiation have been mad and against the public interest in some other instances. In general I think we should be transparent, but there are sometimes reasons why Government needs to take a different approach.

The CHAIR: Just to be clear, because there has been a number of different bills that you have had coverage of—let's not include the tolls; again, there's probably more reason for confidentiality there—but there are quite a few for which submissions haven't been released. The example I've just mentioned around the music festival regulation—the report wasn't released to us. I want to get some kind of assurances from you that this will change, because this seems to be a bit of a culture of lack of transparency, despite what you promised when you got into office.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm grateful to you for raising it. In the specific example, I think we should release the submissions with that caveat—except if they've asked for it to be confidential. Of course, that's my first preference—to be able to be as open as we can be with MPs and the public. If there are other specific examples, then I'm open to members raising them with me.

The CHAIR: Minister, I asked you earlier about music festivals and user-pays policing. Are you aware of the Federal Senate inquiry that has just been released that also recommends action be taken, particularly in New South Wales, around user-pays policing?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I haven't read the report but I'm certainly aware of the proceedings. I haven't been able to follow it in the detail I would like, although I hope to catch up over the Christmas season. I'm aware of the specific—

The CHAIR: I hope you mean Easter.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd be even happier at Easter. I'm aware that New South Wales was singled out in submissions to the inquiry, and perhaps by the inquiry itself, for some of the tough regulatory and cost approaches here. That's exactly what we're trying to change.

The CHAIR: In terms of trying to change, what conversations have you had with the police Minister to try and get a whole-of-government solution to the fact that the police are absolutely ripping music festival organisers off with their outrageous charges for the presence of police, strip-searching tents and dogs outside music festivals.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm going to give you two answers, one in relation to music festivals and one in relation to events generally. In relation to music festivals, with the assistance of the Parliament we've set up these review mechanisms and we've got to see how that travels over the next year, and I was explicit about that with the Parliament as we moved to the debate.

The CHAIR: Just to be clear, with that one, that's just about cost, though, isn't it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

The CHAIR: So, again, that's this potential transfer of money from one department to another but it doesn't deal with anything in relation to the overall presence of police?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I don't think that's fair. For example, if there was a police or ambulance or, say, a Transport presence and it was reviewed, the review would look at the cost but also ask, "Is this level of resourcing the appropriate amount for the event?" The principle is first an internal review to have someone else in the organisation take a commonsense look at it and ask, "Have we got the resourcing right?" and then an independent review in the centre of government. That would have implications, though, not just for costs but also potentially for resourcing.

The CHAIR: While we're here, and while you're here, I want to check with whoever in the department can answer the question as to whether that review process has been triggered over the summer we've just had since the legislation has passed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's probably Liquor and Gaming.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Barakat.

TAREK BARAKAT: Thanks, Ms Faehrmann. In terms of the internal reviews, those are reviews for Health to have a look at their requirements for user-pays ambulance and, as the Minister said, for police as well. To the best of my knowledge, that hasn't been triggered over the summer festival process, but I am happy to take that on notice and check with those individual agencies and confirm that. In terms of the central review mechanism, which is effectively a government panel that has a representative from Sound NSW, Destination NSW and the Premier's Department, the Minister has published an order outlining the criteria that festivals would need to meet to be considered by that panel. That panel is in the final processes of being set up. It wasn't actually set up until such time as that order was published, but it's now been published in the gazette. I'm told that that panel will be established from either later this month or next month and then it will be open to festivals, should they meet the criteria published in the Minister's order to apply for consideration.

The CHAIR: That's very useful information, thank you. Are we expecting that to be in place—no, it will be too late for Easter, so all of this really isn't until the next summer festival season to really see an impact.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Those internal reviews are in place, so that's up and running. But, as you've heard, they haven't necessarily been used. One of the reasons is the Contemporary Music Festival Viability Fund, which has directly assisted with funding for those festivals, and that has—

The CHAIR: That's for over 15,000 people, though. Is that the one?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct. Precisely right. It hasn't assisted all festivals, but it has made a big difference, as I talk to the sector.

The CHAIR: I'll go to the Great Southern Nights again. What is the process for how artists are selected for that event?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Full credit to the former Government, this is a former Government event. Minister Ayres drove this, working with ARIA, the recorded music industry. It is one of the ways that some of the great Australian artists are able to plug in and be supported, working with our venues. ARIA manages much of that process about exactly what happens, obviously supported by Government.

The CHAIR: Are you satisfied that that's an open and transparent process in terms of what artists perform and are chosen and how that selection process happens?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd certainly want to be reassured that's the case. I have had some concerns. My concerns are more about making this the best program possible to support venues and precincts, so I've certainly been working with ARIA to make sure that works with the rest of the Government's programs. This is a good program from the former Government, but it could be better if it worked well with some of the other Government programs.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, I might go to the pill testing trial at the Yours and Owls festival. Your Government has claimed that the trial was a success. What metrics are you basing that statement on?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That was the first drug-checking or pill-testing trial that unfolded. It was largely led by Health, but we may be able to give you some information from Liquor and Gaming about the details of what has unfolded. There has been some public reporting. I did travel down to that festival and observe the checking in process, and spoke to the Health staff. That was certainly their review. They felt for the first trial it had been a success. We have released some information about it, and that was the forum at which we also had the

broader informal discussion with industry figures about how festivals were tracking more generally. If you would like information now, or perhaps later—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'll put some questions to you based on observations from people that were at the festival and have come to me. Were police instructed not to search or arrest individuals for drug-related offences inside the venue, or in proximity to the pill-testing area? It was observed there was obviously a heavy police presence outside, but there seemed to be a safe zone within the actual festival.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not aware of what directions were issued. I wouldn't feel confident speaking to that. In talking to the local organisers, there had been close government coordination between the agencies to coordinate exactly how this works—for example, between Health and police—at a local level. I'd see that as more of an operational set of decisions, but that inter-government agency cooperation was clearly crucial to allowing this trial to proceed.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'm going to use one of your lines. I don't accept the premise of your statement that it is purely operational. They are actually administering a policy decision of your Government. If it is your policy decision that we are going to effectively turn a blind eye to drug-taking within the festival, but ping people for having been in possession with it outside the festival, I think that steps outside an operational and more into a policy decision of your Government. I will press you a little bit.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think you are right to raise those concerns. Part of my constraint here is I'm not the relevant Minister driving the trial. The Health Minister is generally in charge from a ministerial point of view. Obviously the police Minister may have some views.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can you provide details of how much this trial cost? I know it was free to get the pills tested, but how much did it cost the taxpayers to effectively test 80 pills, from the stats that I've seen?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can't answer that. I don't have that information. Perhaps Liquor and Gaming would, either now or this afternoon, or Health certainly would.

TAREK BARAKAT: We don't have it now, but I can get it for you this afternoon. It will be a Health question, but I'm happy to provide it later today.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might leave the remainder of those questions until after. Minister, your Government has allocated $500,000 to trial coloured pavements and AI-assisted animal detection systems to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. Is that based on any independent peer-reviewed evidence that these technologies have actually delivered results elsewhere?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is absolutely evidence-based, and part of the—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can you table the evidence?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What I'd be prepared to table this afternoon, if we can get it, is the information we have got from the wildlife strike symposium that was conducted by the Government last year. We recognise this is a serious issue. It is not made easier by the fact we have got to keep humans safe on the roads, wildlife safe, and we're trying to build housing at a rate of knots. All those things make this harder. It's one of the reasons the Government did pull together some of the best experts to examine what we could do. These are measures that have come out of that close look at what we can do in this area.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Did you consider the trial by the Eurobodalla Shire Council that they were doing about virtual fencing, as to whether that was a more cost-effective process?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I haven't examined the trial itself, but I am aware of the virtual fencing trials that have happened here and elsewhere. The Government made a commitment to trial these sorts of technologies, including virtual fencing, of $500,000 before the election. These measures have really come out of this, based on advice from the symposium and from the agency to say these are the most effective measures we can recommend at the moment. Virtual fencing has slipped down the order of effective measures based on what we know about the evidence from elsewhere; however, this is obviously an emerging field so we are open to new information.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: If the coloured pavement and AI technology is the way forward, has your department done any costing or modelling of costing to roll out that technology across the State in the areas that we need it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In the first instance, we have committed $500,000 to these trials.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'm looking at beyond. If that trial is successful, have you foreshadowed what it would cost to implement such technology in the areas that it is needed across the State?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If these work, we'd certainly be keen to apply them elsewhere. However, we are not at that point. We're very much at the start of the trial process. As you'd be aware, these were announced very, very recently, just ahead of estimates, and therefore we are not at the point you are asking about. But I hope they are successful.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do you have a breakdown of what that $500,000 is getting us, in terms of technology? How much is actually going to the installation, how much is going to planning et cetera?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can give you some details. There are four measures we are trialling. One is the lighter pavement. It is a pale pavement so you can actually see animal silhouettes as you are driving. We are testing that at Cudal, at the road safety centre there. We are also doing these AI trials. Rather than a static sign that indicates "There might be koalas here," an AI sign would detect if there are those animals present. It would then light up for drivers, making it much more realistic. If we can do that, the drivers would take care and slow down. We are also looking at new road markings, particularly on Appin Road, for known koala zones. Finally, we're looking at changes to the fencing, again focusing on a range of areas that include Appin Road. There are safety doors that are one way, so the animals can move outside the fences and away from the road but not back the other way.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are you aware that some of that technology, where you have tunnels under the road, actually just create a choke point for animals to be ambushed by feral cats and foxes?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is a complicated area; there's no getting around that. Certainly some of those views and complexities have been put to us. That's why we're carefully working through what we think will work best. These are measures that are underway at the moment, but we are really open to seeing what works and, if there is other information, we are keen to apply it in this area.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can I jump to your announcement on 25 February around the Western Sydney truck rest stop? What's the expected timeline for construction of that rest stop in Western Sydney?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Firstly, I'm glad you asked about it. This is such a commonsense proposal. There is nowhere for a truck driver who is freighting through Sydney to stop and pull off the road in between Wyong and Pheasants Nest. That can take two hours; it can take three hours on a bad day. That is dangerous and it's not safe. These hardworking drivers deserve a place to be able to pull over. We are going to create that in the middle of Western Sydney, working with the industry.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What's the timeline on that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There is not a timeline at the moment for this reason: We've allocated, with us and Federal Government, $80 million. We want to make the best use of those funds. We're currently doing the business case. That will determine the model and the timing. It might, for example, involve some commercial operator—a call for interest from commercial operators to partner with us.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is it going to be built to Austroads' standards and guidelines?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm sure we'd take account of all the relevant standards, but this is a great measure.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do we know what classification of heavy vehicle rest area it will be—one, two, three, four or five?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We haven't done the business case yet, so I can't answer that question. But it's very significant—six hectares in scale and well over 100 vehicles.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I know the press release mentions all these different features, which would lead me to believe that you have some idea of what the classification would be, because that is based on what features are in a heavy vehicle rest stop.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Not prior to completing that business case. For that reason I've outlined, we are looking at the best way to deliver this.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, Fifteenth Avenue—will the upgrade create the full transit corridor from Liverpool to the new airport?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sorry, you will have to repeat that. Do you want to pull the microphone—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Fifteenth Avenue—will that upgrade create the full transit corridor—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you pull the microphone—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You can try all the tricks you like. It is a very serious question. Will the upgrade to Fifteenth Avenue that you announced with full fanfare with Anthony Albanese and Chris Minns create the full transit corridor from Liverpool to the new airport?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No is the answer, but it will get us a lot further than the zero dollars which your Government allocated.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When you announced Fifteenth Avenue you were clear in your media release that it would be a link from Liverpool to the Western Sydney international airport. You are now saying that's not the case. Were you lying at the media press conference and in your press release?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This will make a huge difference right along this corridor. It's going to transform travel. This billion dollars, which had not been allocated up to now, is now allocated.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But you said it would connect to Bradfield, the metro and the airport, but it will not do so. Your media release said it will connect—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's a precise description of where Fifteenth Avenue runs.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But not under your funding.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: A precise description.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When you announced Fifteenth Avenue, were you aware the plan was for a 15-year build?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept that's the timeline.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Your own documents show that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept that characterisation of—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will it be delivered then?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are working through the business case for that, as you would expect for the significant amount of public funds which have now been committed, in great news for the south-west.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will it be delivered? If they're significant funds, you would expect that you'd have a date.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's $1 billion.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's not a laughing matter to the community there, who aren't going to see it for 15 years. If you disagree with that, when will it be delivered?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are doing that business case work now. We have gone from zero under your Government to $1 billion rapidly.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: At the last election—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd like—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, I'm not going to talk about the previous Government; I'm asking you about your media release—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to talk about—I'm answering your question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —which doesn't go end to end. You have now confirmed that your media release was wrong. It's not going to go all the way to the airport, which is what you promised.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Point order: The Minister is having words put into his mouth. The position is that he didn't make any concession that you would like him to make in terms of the media release.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: He can clarify now.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You can't put words into the Minister's mouth, have a transcript tomorrow record that, and put out your own media release. That's not the way it works.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: He is very capable. He can answer the question now.

The CHAIR: I think the question was fine. The Minister is being quite fine in responding as well. We will keep going.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Chair. At the last election, the member for Leppington promised the community an upgraded road by 2027, not in 2040. Does it come as a surprise that only half the road will be built under the funding?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Firstly, I would be hopeful of attracting further funds over the $1 billion that we've already attracted to this road, because I accept it is important and also because this local member will not let me off the hook. He is just relentless in pursuing this—for money over this.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why did you put out a media release that said it would go all the way to the airport?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I confirm the comments from the local member. That would have been delivered by the Government. That commitment that he made, we would have fulfilled.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why is it not being delivered until 2040?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Now we've got nearly $1 billion extra to be able to do that with. That's going to make a huge—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But it's still not being delivered until 2040. That's right, isn't it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept that characterisation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will it be delivered, if you don't accept that characterisation?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're doing the business case at the moment, as you'd expect. You'd be very critical of us if we didn't.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So your local member promised it would be up—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're working through the normal process that you would for any road where you've got $1 billion and you've come from zero.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You promised an upgraded road by 2027. They didn't say it will be 2040. Your media release said it will go all the way to the airport. You're now saying that you've got some funding but not enough. That wasn't in your media release. It's not going to be delivered until 2040. That wasn't in your media release.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If the local member's comments were accurate, this $1 billion will transform this road, and we could have got started earlier if your Government had allocated any money to planning.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Devonshire Road is a 17-minute drive from the airport, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We've gone from zero to $1 billion.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know how much the Government paid to hire the Sydney Opera House for the royal visit of King Charles and Queen Camilla?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I do not know those specifics, but I think it's an appropriate question. I'd be happy to take it on notice, or I'd certainly encourage you to ask officials this afternoon.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My understanding from the public record is that it's $172,075. Do you think that's an appropriate amount that the taxpayer has to pay, given the taxpayer already pays around $75 million a year to support the Sydney Opera House?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think it was an important visit. It was a very popular visit, it was my observation, as crowds turned out, so I don't object to that money being spent.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you have any negotiation power with the Sydney Opera House around these costs?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I should clarify, this wouldn't have been a decision of officials who I work with. This probably would have been coordinated through the Premier's Department, so those questions are probably best put to them. However, I'm certainly happy to answer any of your questions that we can here.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know how many events are being held at the Opera House and paid for by the Government?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Opera House, as an incredible icon and a significant venue, would certainly receive a range of government support. We could detail that for you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm just asking how many events are actually held at the Opera House and paid for by the Government, in terms of hiring spaces?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's obviously a very complex question to answer. I doubt we would have that information all in one place. We could give you information about the public support for the Opera House but, perhaps, if there are agencies—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Would you ask the Sydney Opera House to provide that information to you? They probably don't have a complex—there's probably a line item for the Sydney Opera House.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd certainly be happy to take that on notice. It's a complex question though, so we'd have to work hard to—but we'll see what we can produce for you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Don't you think it's just one line item for the Sydney Opera House? They have the fees that they collect—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I think it's unlikely that that's how they're accounting for it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It might be worth asking.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We'll take it on notice and give you a full breakdown of the government support and any event support in the way you're asking.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, the Government is paying $154,000 for a company to provide specialised executive recruitment services to find a new CEO for the Art Gallery of New South Wales, plus 25 per cent of that CEO's salary. Assuming the salary stays the same level, which is $450,000, the fee that is additionally paid to the provider would be $113,000. So the total cost of recruitment for a new CEO for New South Wales art gallery is going to be $267,062. Do you think that's exorbitant for a six-month contract?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Firstly, I think it would be appropriate to thank Michael Brand for his service. He's done an incredible job leading this institution.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I appreciate that, and there is a time for thanks, but I'm asking about your view of spending over one-quarter of a million dollars on a recruiting process.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I assure you, it's relevant. He and Ed Capon, together, have served for what must be close to 50 years—just two directors.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This isn't the question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is an incredible institution.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand that, but that's not my question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is a remarkable leadership position. We're grateful to both those individuals who've served in it. I'm hopeful of getting someone of their standing, and we're going to search the world to find them, even if that's the cost.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You think that one-quarter of a million dollars is an appropriate amount for the taxpayer to be spending to find a person to be the CEO.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd like to spend less; I think you know that. But that is what it costs to search the world—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You're actually the Minister so, if you'd like that, you can, in fact, do that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're not prepared to cut corners on a worldwide search for this incredible institution, particularly after it's been doubled in size after investments by the former Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you confident that it will be a six-month process?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm confident that the process is running very smoothly and rapidly. I've been updated by the secretary.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: If that process takes longer than six months, have you been briefed about what that might cost?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't anticipate that will be the case.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: With contracts backed by government, are you aware of concerns raised with the Sydney Festival director that two actors were given contracts by a producer that were not in line with the most recent MEAA negotiated awards for performance?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Just repeat that question, just so I can make sure I've got it right.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The Sydney Festival director was told that two performers at the Sydney Festival were given a contract that was not in line with the most recent MEAA negotiated award. Are you aware of that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't believe I am but I have to take on notice to check that the office hasn't been alerted. I'd be happy to do so.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Knowing that is the case, would you commit to investigating all contracts that have been provided to performers from producers that are getting government funds through the Sydney Festival?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I won't commit to that until I've got a sense of the scale of the problem, but I'm certainly happy to follow up on this individual example. If that shows that there's a more widespread problem, or I do have concerns, then of course I'd be happy to widen the investigation.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And will you make that public?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would need to get some agency advice before that. That'd be my first instinct but I'd want to get some advice from my officials before I committed to that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is something that's been publicly aired already, so I would be concerned if the festival director hadn't alerted your office about that. To the Christmas parties, we've discussed that: All parties have discussed the parties. I'm wondering if you're now looking into the funding for other agencies and departments and entities that fall under your responsibilities to ask them how much they've spent on their Christmas parties.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I haven't done that, but it'd be an excellent use of the estimates process and I encourage you to delve further. As I said earlier—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm actually asking if you will delve further, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As I said earlier, I encourage agencies and institutions to be aware of the public mood at the moment. People are under financial pressure. Those agencies should—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: There is a difference, Minister, between encouraging these pathways of action and actually holding your departments and agencies and entities to account. Given you haven't looked into this so far, will you ask your agency heads to report on how much they've spent on their Christmas parties last year?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm certainly happy to take that offline and speak to the secretaries of the agencies who report to me and ask them if they have any concerns. I think that's a reasonable question. I'd be happy to action that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I don't think it's just about their concerns; it's about your concerns.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm happy to seek advice on that from the senior officials.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you going to make that advice public?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It depends what the answer is, but if I've got concerns—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's a bit of a worry, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If I had concerns, I'd certainly be happy to raise them.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The whole point is that we have concerns, given the demonstrated behaviour is concerning.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. We spoke about one of those issues earlier today. If you do have issues you want to raise, I'm open to guidance on it. I think it is appropriate for members to express views about those things, to make sure that these institutions know what the public mood is, bearing in mind—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sure, but we only get to know some of that because of very specific information shared. We're actually looking for transparency about how taxpayer money is spent.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've committed to following that up, but I think you're significantly underestimating the powers of the upper House in that statement.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I hope I'm not underestimating your powers as Minister to investigate that information. That is your responsibility.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've committed to following that up.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Has the Powerhouse Ultimo revitalisation project been approved?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, it has been approved.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What is the total budget for that revitalisation?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I just want to give you the very specifics on that. It was $300 million of which the New South Wales Government has committed $250 million, and the Powerhouse has got a plan to raise the other $50 million through its philanthropic campaign.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you. Minister, the Liquor Act 2007 included section 163A, which was all about reporting on the effectiveness of various amendments included the Liquor Amendment (Night-time Economy) Act 2020. This was repealed by your Government at the end of 2023, along with section 163, meaning that there's no legislative requirement to report on progress made. Would you commit to reinstating those sections, given their importance to keeping the Government accountable and transparent?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm familiar with the section, because I think I in fact inserted it into the Act in an Opposition amendment with the assistance of Ms Faehrmann—and Victor Dominello, in the end. I don't agree that there is no reporting. This has now been replaced by the regular reporting which we've set up to examine the night-time economy more generally that the commissioner will do to report to the public. Frankly, I was in two—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is that legislated, though, Minister?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I think so. No. Haven't we—

TAREK BARAKAT: I don't know the answer to that question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, I don't think that that's legislated, Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We might take that on notice. I think you might be right that it's not legislated, but we might be open to legislating it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That would be important.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can I just conclude the—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Please.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I was advised that it wasn't necessary because of this State of the Night report by officials. I took that advice, although I was in two minds about it. I suggest we revisit this after the next night-time economy report. If the Opposition had a strong view, I might be open to revisiting it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I think that that would be a good idea, Minister, given the other types of legislation that we've passed recently which seemed reasonably innocuous but was at the firm insistence of the Government.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're looking to set up this architecture across these various areas, as I outlined in the debate.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What's the unemployment rate in New South Wales, Minister?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I do have some details here about where things are up to.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You are the jobs Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Unemployment was 4 per cent in January 2025.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay. And what's the youth unemployment rate?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't have that in front of me but I'm certain we can get it for you. It's a lot lower: 8.8 per cent for New South Wales is probably the most recent one I've got, although that's the 12-month moving average. It's 9.6 for the headline rate.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know the top three electorates in New South Wales which have the highest unemployment rate?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't, but my experience is often regional electorates are particularly hard hit on this. I couldn't name them for you now, but I'd be interested if you had them there.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My concern is that you're the jobs Minister and these numbers aren't front of mind for you. What are you doing to create jobs in the areas most affected by unemployment if you're not even sure what they are?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is a real discussion amongst my colleagues. I've outlined some of the plans for growth in the cultural sector, in the tourism sector. We're also working with the business community for specific proposals that have an impact on jobs.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many jobs were created last financial year in New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can give you the figure since we've taken government, and that's 210,000, which I don't think is a bad record, although I'd like to see it higher. As I was discussing in the context of a school assignment only last night, the unemployment rate is so much lower than when I left school and it skyrocketed. That's good news, but we can always do better.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, we're not talking about a school assignment. We're talking about the running of our State. It's quite serious, actually.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sure. That's why I've given you the figures.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I might ask your staff later this afternoon about some breakdowns. The Visitor Economy Strategy Review aimed to grow the tourism workforce to 450,000 workers. You've just said in the entire two years since your Government came to power there's been about 200,000 jobs created. So how is it possible that the tourism workforce alone will be up to 450,000 workers? How are you progressing on that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, because there is a significant tourism workforce already of 300,000 workers. So it's 150,000 extra workers. It's over the course of 11 years. That is the recommendation of the review to the Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What's the progress on that? What are we up to?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The strategy is about to launch, but we're working on those three metrics: the visitor expenditure—and we're using the jobs, and we're using the airlines and the hotels, to drive that change.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just on some of the courses that are available, there's an introduction to the visitor economy microskill course. Do you know how many people have successfully completed that course?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's a question which, as you know, should be put to the TAFE Minister. So I encourage you to put it to him.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Well, I'm just curious about your responsibilities as the jobs Minister. Are you taking responsibility for all the jobs created in New South Wales, just some of them, the unemployment, just the visitor economy?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are working as a team, as a government. One of the key things I do discuss with my colleagues is job creation in the public and the private sector in New South Wales.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So are they reporting to you?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not accepting responsibility for all the jobs in New South Wales. I've got quite a lot on my plate.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Why not? You're the Minister for jobs.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm back here tomorrow.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You're "the" Minister for jobs.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, but it's a team effort, I can assure you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But it's in the title.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, sure.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So are you asking your colleagues to report to you regularly about the jobs growth in their portfolios?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Cabinet is receiving updated information on a routine basis. I can't go into all those details of the deliberation or the information that flows there, but I can assure you it's a concern for the Government and for me as Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you speaking to your Ministers directly about this area of your portfolios?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would routinely have jobs discussions with my colleagues, also with the private sector, also with agencies.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you please provide a breakdown for the public service jobs versus private sector jobs that have been created under your leadership?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Well, I don't think it's fair to say "of my leadership". I think it is fair to ask about a breakdown of that 210,000 jobs since the Government's been elected—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you're the Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —that the team has created. But I'm making it clear—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can I just clarify—what is the point of the Minister for jobs if it's not a leadership position?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's a Cabinet position to focus in on this issue, and that's exactly what I'm doing. But I don't—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you've just said it's not under your leadership.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that underestimates the team effort that's going on in this Government. That's my experience. Feel free to disagree.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I certainly do!

The CHAIR: I understand that recruitment is underway for the new executive director of Create NSW. However, it's being advertised at SES level 2, which is less than what was there when the former executive director, Annette Pitman, was in the role. Why is that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Firstly, you're correct. It is being advertised. For the details of that, I encourage you to talk to the secretary because the secretary, rather than the Minister, is responsible for those decisions. I'd make the observation that the agency has made changes to the structure of the agency, principally putting together Sound and Screen with the 24-hour section, and away from Create NSW. So it's one of the changes that's happened. That's an internal reorganisation that the secretary's led. They may be related. I want to thank Annette Pitman for her time in the role, too, by the way.

The CHAIR: So that internal—what did you call it? A reorganisation, restructure, essentially. How many redundancies have been offered to Create NSW staff as a result of that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They're really, importantly, questions for the secretary and not for me as Minister. So I have—

The CHAIR: Are you across this, though, Minister? I mean, you're a Minister who—as a Labor Minister, I'm sure you are worried about and want to be very across redundancies in your department. We're hearing that quite a few have been offered to Create NSW, a potential devaluing of Create NSW, and both redundancies as well as less pay for the chief executive seem to indicate that that's what happened, don't you think?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I don't accept that. Yes, I would expect to be briefed. Secondly, these are matters for the secretary. Third, redundancies, to my knowledge, have not been offered in the way you're describing.

The CHAIR: Mr Murray, do you have a figure?

JOSH MURRAY: Ms Mildwater?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: As the Minister said, the reason for the change of level was we previously had an executive director band 2 level commissioner for the night-time economy and a band 3 for the Create CEO role, when Sound and Screen were part of Create NSW. But with the moving of Screen NSW and Sound NSW into a new division with 24-hour economy, we had the two roles regraded and that made the flip. One went up and one went down.

The CHAIR: What went up and what went down?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: We have a new deputy secretary position that Mr Rodrigues is currently acting in that sits across night-time economy, Screen and Sound, and Create NSW.

The CHAIR: Where's Create NSW?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Create NSW did have Screen and Sound sitting underneath it. They've now moved out and are sitting in a new division with night-time economy. Based on the regrading of what remains in Create—which is the focus on the grant funding for the not-for-profit sector largely, industry support, implementation of the new policy—that role is now a band 2, and the other one that has 24-hour, Screen and Sound in it is now a band 3. So that's the reason for the change in grades. We haven't actually implemented any other major structural changes, though, in terms of what you were alluding to, redundancies or anything. It's been a move of two branches from one division to another.

The CHAIR: You're saying Create NSW now fits within the night-time economy?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: No. It is separate, but we have taken Screen and Sound out from underneath Create NSW. They used to sit in as branches under Create.

The CHAIR: Is Create NSW more or less, Minister, like a glorified grant-making body now? Is it doing much else?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No. I definitely want to address that concern, because I know it will be of interest to people in the sector. I see this as Create NSW really working to its strengths. Create has got an incredible ability to back the very diverse small and medium sector. They're specialist skills that have been built up over time that are highly valued by the Government, so I think it's really about Create NSW playing to its strengths that have evolved over time. The Government set out its policy aspirations really clearly. I'm pushing the department to say, "Let's implement this policy", and the secretary is making the decisions about how to best do that with their structures in the agency.

The CHAIR: With Sound NSW and Screen NSW removed, if you like, from Create NSW, what's the core staffing structure in terms of FTE, Ms Mildwater, that's left with Create NSW?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: If you give me a minute, I do have that—or I can come back to it this afternoon. So it is still, as at December, it's about 133 people. Just over 100 FTE.

The CHAIR: So that's the new Create NSW. Is that what you're—

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes. I can get you the figures as of today, but that was the end of December.

The CHAIR: Okay, we'll come back to that with more questions in the afternoon. Minister, back to the announcement today in relation to the wildlife crossings—good to see the Shooters and The Greens are asking questions about our poor little kangaroos and koalas.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I was encouraged.

The CHAIR: I am concerned about the one-way doors that allow koalas—it says in the media release—"to escape the road corridor, where fencing is in place, but do not allow them to pass back through into traffic". It says koalas frequently attempt to cross roads in search of mates or new habitat. What happens if their mate's on that side of the road and they want to go and look for some feed on the other side of the road, and then they can't get back to their mate on the other side of the road? What happens? This sounds like a technology that shouldn't be trialled in the real world unless it actually works like overpasses and underpasses do.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think your question highlights some of the complexities here with these interventions. We've got to be careful that they have the desired impact and they don't have unexpected impacts. That's one of the concerns I know the wildlife groups have talked to me about: where this fencing is installed, how the fencing is installed. So we do have to be quite cautious. The best advice is that this will help. Partly, they're teamed with the existing timber pole escape structures, and I've seen some examples of those from Queensland. We're planning to implement some more of those, including in the south-west of Sydney. Together, they may well be a successful intervention, but we're really going to monitor this closely, and I know you've got strong contacts in this area. If there is evidence, we're going to adjust as we go.

The CHAIR: By "poles", do you mean poles that go over the road for the animals to crawl across? Is that what you're saying?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Some of the escape poles really allow a vertical crossing in some instances, I think.

The CHAIR: For possums and koalas?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

The CHAIR: Does this mean that the various commitments around underpasses and potential overpasses along that stretch of Appin Road—particularly, we're talking about the very vulnerable south-west Sydney koala population—still haven't been commenced, or even committed to?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've updated the House and estimates previously on those. We can give you a further update today. But, no, those are still in place. These are all additional measures. I've heard the message from the local community that we've got to do more, and these are the four best evidence-based interventions we can make. That's on top of—and it certainly won't replace—the underpasses. If you would like, I can give you some detail on those.

The CHAIR: We don't know, in terms of the timeline, how they're going, because, again, that population is still getting hammered by the traffic on that road.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We're still working towards a total of three koala underpasses between Rosemeadow and Appin. We're working on those designs. I would have to check the timing, but we'll get that to you today, just the latest on that. I've updated previously.

The CHAIR: When we debated the Sound NSW board legislation this year, I made the observation about the budget of Sound NSW, the fact that out of the $18½ million there are $5.1 million staffing costs, $2.8 million operational expenses, and that appeared to be for 10.2 full-time equivalent staff. I made the point at the time, that's a lot of money for 10.2 full-time equivalent staff. Have you inquired into that? Is there more to this than the budget papers seem to suggest?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You'd be welcome to ask the secretary this afternoon. I'd make the point that you've just heard the figures for Create NSW, this is much, much smaller, for example, than Create NSW. My main engagement has been pressing hard to have the agency deliver on the Government's commitments in this area. I don't share the concerns that the agency size is out of scale with what's required to deliver the Government's commitments, but I encourage you to ask some more questions of the secretary.

The CHAIR: I will have to do that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just sticking with truck rest stops, are you the Minister responsible for the rollout of the informal green reflector bay rest stops or is that a question for Minister Aitchison?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I may be able to provide you some information. I'm aware, but in truth Minister Aitchison is leading on a lot of the rest stops, given they're regional. I have been heavily pressing this Western Sydney rest stop, though. I believe it's a game changer for truckies trying to do their ordinary job.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might save that for Ms Aitchison, then. Can I just stick with roads and road fatalities. Obviously numbers of fatalities and serious injuries are still high, but according to the Premier's Department in estimates in September 2024, no outcome data from road crash rescue incidents are recorded by the State Rescue Board. This is the case regardless of whether the rescue incident happens in the geographical response area of a volunteer rescue unit, such as SES or Fire Rescue NSW. Given both the social and economic impact of road crashes on our State roads, wouldn't you agree that sort of dataset would be valuable for your department, and you as a Minister, when you are trying to design responses that reduce these road statistics?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Firstly, we have already this year had 51 people die on our roads. Pleasingly, that's 12 down from this time last year, but the Government's very concerned about the road toll. I wasn't aware of those specifics, so I'm certainly happy to take that on notice. Data is a real strength in this area and if there's better use of it we can make then certainly it's something I'm very interested in. I'd have to take that on notice too.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Apparently we're not collecting data in terms of the speed at which a rescue unit arrives on the scene with an appropriate number of trained staff and equipment. I think we all can agree, the quicker we get someone there with appropriate equipment and trained staff the better the chances are of reducing fatalities and injuries, and also clearing the road for better traffic flow. Will you commit to looking at collecting this data, if it's not already being collected somewhere?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd certainly be interested in it. I'd have to take it on notice. I'd have to consult with my colleagues, most likely. I think it's a really good suggestion, and we're happy to look at it with an open mind.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can I just go to some questions I asked you last estimates about traffic congestion along corridors in Lake Macquarie and lower Hunter regions, particularly at Speers Point, in both directions, and between Dora Creek and the Pacific Highway. This is an area that there was a proposed music venue being developed in the area, which obviously would have increased traffic flow in the area, but I notice it has now been designated as the North West Catalyst Area, which is expected to accommodate 5,466 new homes, 13,000 new residents, apparently over 3,000 new jobs, and an economic output of $6.3 billion. Coupled with all of that extra traffic from new residents, new jobs, new industry, we're going to potentially get a lot of money for the economy out of this industry. What are we putting back into the community in terms of road infrastructure? What have you done since we last had a conversation about this issue?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm very aware of the developments in the area. There are some exciting plans for this area of the State. I've been up to see for myself quite recently to examine what's required from a road and transport infrastructure point of view. I want to congratulate the mayor for the work he's doing, taking over from Mayor Kay Fraser. There are some big plans here to deliver on housing and jobs together in this area. In terms of the formal responsibilities, this is an area that Minister Aitchison delivers on. This was an area that wasn't getting the support it needed previously, and we need to make sure it's supported.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You would agree, jobs and investment are great, but if it takes 30 minutes to get to the Pacific Highway from five kilometres away, it's kind of irrelevant.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There are some game-changing plans here, and I think it's in the State's interest to make sure the transport infrastructure is there to support it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can I go to the $300,000 in consultant fees that were provided to a recruitment agency to headhunt a new CEO for the New South Wales art gallery? Do you have a breakdown of what that $300,000 fee included?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might refer to the secretary, who's running that process.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It's not $300,000.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How much is it, then?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: The fee for the recruitment, and it's an international search, is up to $154,000, as disclosed in the contract register. I think there was a reference earlier to a 25 per cent salary. That's not for the director search. That's if, out of the process, another position—it's quite standard in a recruitment process. They're getting paid for this recruitment process but if they happen to identify a candidate that's then subsequently appointed to another position, that's the fee for that appointment. The art gallery appointment is $154,000.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Have we used this recruitment firm in the past?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: The recruitment firm is Spencer Stuart. They're quite a well-known international recruitment firm.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is that coming out of the art gallery's existing budget or is that something separate?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: At the moment the department is paying the fee. What would be the standard thing is that we would run the process and then charge the agency at the end, depending on what the final fee is.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, sticking with jobs, I know you might not necessarily be the Minister directly responsible for the legislation we passed to remove the five-kilometre rule with clubs, but I'm just wondering whether you've had any feedback from clubs, as the Minister responsible for jobs, in terms of how that's impacting patronage, memberships to clubs, which obviously are an important source of income for clubs in the past? Have you had any information or representation from clubs on that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It has been anecdotal, but it has been really encouraging. It varies club to club, depending on the local community. But you do have a range of clubs where this is just a really practical barrier to joining in. We didn't remove the sign-off, but we did remove this requirement that if you live inside the five kilometres that you have to actually join the club. It was stopping clubs doing business and sending them to

other venues. Good community clubs are worth backing. They are places where the community comes together. This was a real head-scratcher of a rule, and one we've scrapped.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Picking up on questions from the Opposition around tourism-related jobs and this idea we're going to build all this hotel development, what is your Government doing to actually encourage the very clear skill shortages that exist in our hospitality industry at the moment? What are we doing to encourage either training, recruitment, retention and engagement in that area? You've got a lofty goal of 150,000 new jobs by 2035, and I think a decent chunk of them may be in that sector, but you go to restaurants, pubs and hotels these days and owners are scratching their heads trying to find people.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's a really good point. It's one of the things that really comes up in light as a real barrier to achieving those goals. The Opposition was asking before about some of the TAFE courses. I do recommend those. You'd have to talk to the TAFE Minister for details, but we have rebooted TAFE training for tourism and the tourism sector. Secondly, we've got to advocate for the fact that this will grow, and people should see this as a serious job and a potential career. Thirdly, we've got to make Sydney and New South Wales a great place to live, and the whole Government program around bringing Sydney back to life and bringing New South Wales back to life is a lot about attracting young, talented workers to the State. Of course, you've also got to tackle housing to make that possible.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The hospitality industry has developed into a bit of a transient industry with a lot of overseas migrant workers or students on visas working in the industry and then disappearing. Are you doing anything specific to change that trend? That's really what I'm hearing from business owners is really hurting them—just that transient nature of the hospitality industry.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I absolutely agree. That's one of the pressures. We've also got some of the best hospitality operators and workers in the world operating here in Sydney, and it is a hidden strength, although many of those people travel around the world and do a great job there. There is more we can do in this area. A range of the programs that the 24-hour team are running are really working deeply with the hospitality sector, particularly in certain areas of the State or the city.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I know that you've been following somewhat the HSC syllabus debacle with drama and music education. I'm curious if you have had direct conversations with the education Minister about that education process being reviewed, and that a new draft syllabus be presented for HSC music and drama.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I won't detail the individual discussions with my colleagues, but I have sought some reassurance in government after this was raised in committee. It was also something that you and others raised with me as we were working, so I've sought some reassurance about that. The Government's response to the arts and music education committee will be published shortly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It should be tomorrow.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In fact, I have just signed off in the break. So I direct you to that once it's released publicly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So this is specific to the HSC music and drama syllabus rather than the committee. We had evidence from people who said:

> The current draft is unteachable and unworkable and, in my view, will lead to the demise of the subject.

That was Professor Michael Anderson. Dr Hatton said:

> The evidence that they have used is actually not evidence at all. They've got some of my work there, and I do not support the changes.

So given your commitment to building the music and performance economy, could you please explain why you haven't advocated more strongly to your colleagues to actually have this process changed, because this will fundamentally affect the portfolio matters in your purview?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I did take seriously the matters that you and others raised, and I have sought some assurance, and I've expressed some views.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But has that led to any change?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I was pleased to see that NESA changed its initial approach and dealt with some of the community concerns around these processes, but I'm certainly happy to continue to follow this.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, does your work in your portfolios align with the new State Industry Policy?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is a very good question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not the only one asking it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've taken a close interest in the State Industry Policy, and I'm really pleased with the state it's in at the moment. It's taken a little bit of time to—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sure, but I'm just asking about your responsibilities as Minister and whether they fall within the whole-of-government industry policy.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: My colleague Minister Chanthivong is leading on that process. Some of the processes we're applying in the arts sector with the sector strategies or in the tourism sector are what I would describe as industry policy interventions. We're really talking as Ministers and learning from each of those processes. I've been recommending some of the approaches we're taking, and we're certainly learning some things to apply in those sectors.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It sounds like it's not really related.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't agree with that observation.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, are you familiar with the Tech Central cooperation agreement?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm familiar with Tech Central and some of the arrangements. I would need to really check whether I'm familiar with that particular agreement.

The CHAIR: Minister, did South by Southwest operate at a loss last year?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's really a matter for them. A lot of these arrangements are commercial in confidence, so I'd want to be cautious about what I was saying about financial results.

The CHAIR: How much government money or contribution was provided to South by Southwest last year?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As you know—and feel free to put this to Destination NSW—those are commercial in confidence. That's been of some frustration to Committee members, including myself in the past.

The CHAIR: Is the Government providing funding again this year?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, we will be funding South by Southwest again this year. I do see it as heavily aligned with the policy direction that the Government wants to head in. It's really aligned with the Creative Communities policy.

The CHAIR: Is the Government funding roughly the same as what was provided last year?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd have to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: You would have seen that just in the last few weeks, they're offering very discounted tickets compared with last year. There are lots of incentives. Does that seem to imply that the event is struggling?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wouldn't jump to that conclusion. I think the first two editions have been very successful. I do think that applying a model from Texas to here, with our culture of public participation and often free events, is something that they have had to think about. We've got a very different culture here, and I love that. I think I would see it as them adjusting their business model to the Australian environment, which is important. But I wouldn't want to speak for the organisation.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can I go to the sound camera trials?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might redirect you to the environment Minister for that. It really is the EPA.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I won't go to the sound camera trials then.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've got a range of views, though, but it wouldn't be productive.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'm happy for you to voice those views, particularly if they're in contradiction to the environment Minister. I might pass for the moment.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, when do you think the $80 million truck stop will be complete?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I answered some questions about this earlier. We want to do a business case. We're not sure of the model because we might try to engage a commercial provider to make sure we get the best bang for our buck. That business case hasn't happened. The timeline isn't set.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What do you want to see though? Do you want to see that in a year or in 10 years?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd like to have seen it done yesterday. This is so important. It's so commonsense, I can't believe it hasn't happened already.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's your expectation?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We should do the business case. That's my expectation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What do you get for $80 million?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You're going to get a monster truck stop, and that's what is required to look after those drivers. It is overdue.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will the delivery start?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We've got to do this business case first. I'm so pleased about the backing of the Federal Government. We've made a commitment about this. I want to get going as soon as we can.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The community of Leppington expected that they would get the upgrade on Fifteenth Avenue by 2027, as promised by the member for Leppington, not in 2040. Have you turned your back on the people of Leppington?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The commitment the member made will be delivered, not assisted by the fact that you provided zero dollars. We've now provided $1 billion.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How will you deliver it by 2027? Your own plan says 2040.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The upgrades that the member was talking about will be delivered in the timeline he talked about.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: To the airport?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We'll now be able to be much more ambitious with this billion dollars.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's just not true.

The CHAIR: Are there any questions from the Government?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I just wanted to ask the Minister if there are any issues or matters that he would like to elaborate on further.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Perhaps the sound cameras, but I won't do that. No, thank you for the opportunity.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much again, Minister, for making yourself available. That's the end of your time with us. The officials will be back after the lunch break.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: By leave: I table some documents that are relevant. I have the "Using technology to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions" review and directions paper, and Transport's response.

Documents tabled.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: We are commencing the afternoon session. Welcome back. If everybody is settled, we will kick off with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you all for coming back. Mr Fels, my questions are to you. Thank you for coming along today. Do you need me to speak up, or can you hear me all right from here?

ALLAN FELS: A bit louder, if you don't mind.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You can hear me?

The CHAIR: Just a bit louder.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Certainly. I'll do my best.

ALLAN FELS: Thank you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Fels, did you advocate to the Labor Opposition regarding toll reform, or did they seek you out to chair the review?

ALLAN FELS: They sought me out.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So they asked you if you'd take the position—that was obviously prior to the election. They then announced that you would be heading the review.

ALLAN FELS: They took some position? I didn't really have a position.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Fels, are you billing taxpayers for your accommodation tonight?

ALLAN FELS: Last night? Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you stayed last night?

ALLAN FELS: Not tonight.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay. But you billed taxpayers for your accommodation in Sydney last night?

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Did you expense taxpayers to fly up here, presumably yesterday?

ALLAN FELS: Taxpayers paid for my flight up and back.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And what class of travel did you use for those flights?

ALLAN FELS: Economy.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Economy, for both ways?

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What were your total expenses—not salary, but disbursements—for your work on the toll review?

ALLAN FELS: The whole thing?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

ALLAN FELS: The total expenses were close to $80,000. I'll say $80,000.That's accommodation, flights and so on.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you able to provide on notice the breakdown of those disbursements?

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just on notice, if you're able.

ALLAN FELS: It was $50,000 and $30,000.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you provide that to the Committee in writing afterwards? I think the Committee will contact you, and you are able to provide that in written form.

ALLAN FELS: Yes, sure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Fels, why did you charge taxpayers to fly business class Melbourne to Sydney?

ALLAN FELS: Look, I think I did about 45 visits, from 90 flights. I did one business. Frankly, I'm struggling to remember why but I think there was a scheduling thing and I had to catch a plane, and that was it. Honestly, I just saw it in the press. I have a struggle remembering it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. So the entirety—

ALLAN FELS: I did about 150 flights under the previous Government and didn't travel business. But this one, for some reason—it wasn't comfort.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Of all of your flights, throughout the entirety of the toll review, you took one business class flight. Is that correct?

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you take on notice to confirm that that's the case, Mr Fels?

ALLAN FELS: Yes. Sometimes I paid for an upgrade, but I was always in economy.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Did you pay for an upgrade for that business class flight?

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you paid, yourself, for that business class?

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And you can confirm that to the Committee?

ALLAN FELS: Yes. I paid on points.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it correct that you charged taxpayers to stay at the Capella hotel?

ALLAN FELS: With the Capella, what happened was—yes, I had two nights stay there.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And the Fullerton Hotel, that's also a five-star hotel. You also stayed there. That's correct, isn't it?

ALLAN FELS: Correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Has the Government showed you or offered you, throughout the toll review or subsequently, opportunities to use Zoom or online meeting technology like Microsoft Teams?

ALLAN FELS: Did they pay for my technology? I think they gave me a computer or something, but I didn't—I used it a little bit.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They gave you a computer?

ALLAN FELS: They lent me a computer, and I returned it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You returned the computer?

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why was that?

ALLAN FELS: They said, "You can borrow a computer for the duration," and it was something to do with complications of getting into the New South Wales system on its own.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you were provided with a computer but couldn't get into the system, couldn't get access so couldn't do Zoom.

ALLAN FELS: They gave it to me and it was something to do with a bit of a preference that if I'm engaged with the New South Wales government, I do it on their computer, not on mine.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which you handed back. Mr Fels, who decided that you would not be on the steering committee or the negotiation team for the direct deal?

ALLAN FELS: It was never proposed or envisaged by me, and the report makes pretty clear the negotiations were over to the Government, so I assume the Government made a decision. The idea that I was dumped, it was never—if you look at this report, it couldn't be clearer—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I've read the report.

ALLAN FELS: Good, well then it's really clear it's over to the Government to negotiate.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We'll talk about that, but who told you that you wouldn't be on the steering committee?

ALLAN FELS: I don't think anyone called me and said, "Hey, you're not on the steering committee."

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Your understanding is it was never part of the plan.

ALLAN FELS: I was never expected to be on it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Right, so it was never part of the plan for you to be on the steering committee?

ALLAN FELS: No, I never envisaged being on the negotiating committee. There are a couple of reasons maybe. One was there was sort of a lot of legal, commercial, financial and other sorts of details for others, and

secondly, quite importantly, it's up to the Government to decide these things. It affects citizens and voters and everyone.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's go there. When you were announced, the Government said that you would be leading the negotiations. Can you recall what they said your role would be?

ALLAN FELS: I think they said something like that. Maybe you could ask the Minister, but I never thought I'd be negotiating. What I did think was that I should negotiate with the parties while I'm doing the report, and that happened quite a lot. I'm pleased to say they said they'll come to the table and have a negotiation with the Government.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When was the last time you spoke with Transurban?

ALLAN FELS: Not since the report in July or whenever it was—July 15-ish.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay. Last year.

ALLAN FELS: Nor did I think it was appropriate, actually.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It appears to me, Mr Fels, you're not on the steering committee and you're not on the negotiation team, despite the Government's announcement that you would be leading the negotiations. Did you expect that to be the case?

ALLAN FELS: All of the time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It appears to me that you've, in a sense, been sidelined. You're a bystander or an onlooker. You're in the room, I think the Minister said, but you're a bystander to the process now. Do you think that you are still in charge of this toll reform process, or do you think that's now the bureaucrats?

ALLAN FELS: No, I'm under no such illusion. What's been invoked is the direct dealing framework, which governments for quite many years in the past have invoked. I'm not on it, nor, I think, would it be appropriate, nor, I think, is the Minister, nor under the previous Government were Ministers on the direct dealing negotiating things—so no expectations.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Well then, Mr Fels, what is it that we are paying you for?

ALLAN FELS: I'm advising the Government and the Ministers on all aspects of toll reform, including matters that come up to them from the direct dealing framework.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So let's go to how you go about that. How do you give that advice?

ALLAN FELS: If I hear from the Minister there's some issue he wants advice on, I—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it written down that advice?

ALLAN FELS: Not necessarily, no. It can be a conversation, a meeting, whatever. It's not necessarily a written thing, no.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, so you're on call.

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: At the end of the phone.

ALLAN FELS: I'm on call, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But no written advice from you formally.

ALLAN FELS: No, I don't get a letter saying, "Hey, look at this issue. Could you give us some advice?"

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're being paid $150,000 to be, essentially, on call—if you like, a call centre.

ALLAN FELS: No, hang on—up to $150,000. Not necessarily it will be. It's not an on-call $150,000—far from it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's be clear then: What are you being paid for this?

ALLAN FELS: I'm being paid the same as I got from you all, except it's been adjusted. It's about, I think, $6,500 a day.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I never paid you, Mr Fels, to do anything.

ALLAN FELS: No, I mean the Coalition used to pay me.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What I'm talking about is your current role. That's what we're talking about today—your current role.

ALLAN FELS: The Coalition—when I worked for them. That's how the rate was set.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, how much is your hourly rate then?

ALLAN FELS: I think it's $825, but there's a limit of—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's $825?

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's for an hourly rate.

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: For a 10-minute call, how much is that worth?

ALLAN FELS: Nil.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Nothing. You don't charge for a 10-minute call?

ALLAN FELS: No, I don't charge for 10 minutes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You are on call and you're $800-odd an hour. That's a reasonably expensive on-call service, isn't it?

ALLAN FELS: It's reasonably what?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Expensive call service. I'm trying to get to what it is that you do charge for.

ALLAN FELS: When the rate was set it was—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They're not trick questions. It's just what are you charging and what is the taxpayer paying for?

ALLAN FELS: I'm telling you, and then you asked me for an opinion. I'm pretty agnostic about it, but the rate was set. I worked six years for the Coalition—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm interested now, Mr Fels—

ALLAN FELS: I'm telling you how it got there.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I just have limited time, that's all.

The CHAIR: A point of order has been taken by Mr Lawrence.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I think the witness should be given the opportunity to give a relatively expansive explanation, given the content and the tone of some of the questioning.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order, and I would ask the member to allow Professor Fels to respond as much as he needs to, to get out the facts.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Fels, what was the last thing you charged for?

ALLAN FELS: Hang on. I was just going to answer that question. The $6,500 was the rate set for me in 2014 or so. It was paid for about five years by the Coalition and then, when I came onto this, it was adjusted partly for inflation—not quite fully, but more or less for inflation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Respectfully, Mr Fels—

ALLAN FELS: It was roughly in between. I know at the time it was a good deal less than, say, if I'd been working for a big consulting firm. It was somewhere in the middle.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But that's not relevant. What I'm asking you about is your current role. I do have limited time—

ALLAN FELS: Same here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —so I'm going to ask that you come back to the question. What you are here for is the toll review. What was the last thing you charged for?

ALLAN FELS: This time, I've had some meetings with the Minister, the team of officials and the negotiator, where we discussed quite a few issues. It took—I hesitate to give you the exact time, but it was about three or four hours.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And are you charging taxpayers to be here now?

ALLAN FELS: No, not at all. I'm doing it out of the kindness of my heart. I'm a Victorian, actually.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: On that, Mr Fels, in your report you said, in regard to corridor pricing proposed by the toll road owners, that "this was explicitly not the preferred option of the reviewers", being you, "and not one that we would now support." Is that correct, and is that still your position?

ALLAN FELS: It was a bit more—I think I should just explain. As you know, the previous Government did quite a bit of work. It didn't reach a position, and we had some access to a whole lot of proper processes where we saw some of it. But the key problem with it was that the corridor pricing approach involved the taxpayer having to kick in a lot of money. That was our number one concern: They're running a corridor scheme and you read through the report—maybe okay, maybe not—and then you read that the bill to the government is very big. I was very unkeen on the corridor from that point. That was my overwhelming concern about it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Does it remain your position that you don't support corridor pricing?

ALLAN FELS: If it involves a huge bill to the taxpayer, I'm very unenthusiastic about it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So, should the Government implement that corridor pricing, that would be against your recommendations. That's correct, isn't it?

ALLAN FELS: It depends on the price they pay. That's what I'm trying to say. There are other problems with it too. There are other problems with the corridor pricing, but—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Fels, you went on record on the ABC and alleged that three deputy secretaries stopped you from releasing information to the public concerning your review. Do you recall that ABC interview?

ALLAN FELS: Sure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Who were the deputy secretaries that covered up what you wanted to do?

ALLAN FELS: I don't know that I'd use the term "covered up", but the steering committee was the deputy secretaries of Premier and Cabinet, Transport and Treasury.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Who were they?

ALLAN FELS: I'm just having a moment.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Would you like to take it on notice?

ALLAN FELS: Yes, I'll take it on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You said a deputy secretary of Transport?

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Who else?

ALLAN FELS: Trudi.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Ms Mares, yes.

ALLAN FELS: Sonya Campbell from Treasury and from Premier's—I've just forgotten for a minute.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Ms Mares, is it correct that you're one of those deputy secretaries who indicated that Mr Fels was not able to proceed with those ideas?

TRUDI MARES: Correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Who were the others?

TRUDI MARES: Deputy Secretary Marcus Ray from the Cabinet Office, Sonya Campbell from Treasury and myself.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why did you stop Mr Fels?

TRUDI MARES: The governance process at the time, under the Independent Toll Review, was Professor Fels and Doctor Cousins as chair and co-chair of the steering committee. We brought information and advice into the steerco for both independent reviewers. That particular instance was information that was deemed as commercial in confidence, so while we were happy to provide information to the reviewers, the discussion at steerco was about whether it was suitable for public dissemination.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Fels alleged that he was threatened with criminal prosecution if he did. Is that correct?

TRUDI MARES: I'm unaware of that. I have not had a discussion with Professor Fels of that nature.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That was the public statement that he gave.

TRUDI MARES: I have not done that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Fels, prior to the election the Labor Opposition announced that you would lead its toll reform, and then three weeks later the Haven Foundation, of which you are Chair, got $20 million as an election promise from Labor. Just to be clear, I have no issue with the Haven Foundation, but I just want to be clear on the timelines. That's correct, isn't it?

ALLAN FELS: I think so, yes. That's roughly right.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Did you have a conversation with the Labor Opposition regarding the election commitment prior to starting the toll review?

ALLAN FELS: No, there was this thing about it as a condition of my work or something. There was no such condition or any of that stuff.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You just independently had a conversation unrelated about the Haven Foundation?

ALLAN FELS: Yes, the two were not connected in any way, and I'm not heavily involved in that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Has the Haven Foundation ever received $20 million in one go?

ALLAN FELS: We got $125 million from Victoria.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But prior to your involvement in any review in Victoria or any work undertaken?

ALLAN FELS: Prior to that, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And you see no issue with that?

ALLAN FELS: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Was the discussion regarding the Haven Foundation's $20 million prior to the discussion about you heading up the toll review, or after?

ALLAN FELS: I wasn't all that heavily involved in the Haven stuff, but the appointment was—in opposition, you were supposed to do the tolls, I think.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry?

ALLAN FELS: I think the toll thing was announced before and they announced about Haven later.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, but you had some discussions with the now Government while in opposition about providing funding to the Haven Foundation. That's correct?

ALLAN FELS: No, it wasn't linked.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, I didn't ask if it was linked; I asked if you had discussions with the then Opposition about making a donation of $20 million to the Haven Foundation.

ALLAN FELS: As you may have read in the press, the main pressure came from a group on the Central Coast.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And you're the chair of the Haven Foundation?

ALLAN FELS: Yes, so I knew something was going on.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And you raised the issue of the Haven Foundation with the Opposition?

ALLAN FELS: Did I raise the issue with?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The then Opposition.

ALLAN FELS: Not really. I mean, I knew this was going on and so on, but it didn't come into the toll thing.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Did you suggest to the Australian Labor Party in New South Wales that they give funding to the Haven Foundation?

ALLAN FELS: No, it wasn't—as I said, there was—largely a community group did it, I think, but I knew it was happening.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How did the funding come about?

ALLAN FELS: I think it was—I don't quite know the answer to it. I wasn't particularly involved but—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You can take that on notice. But did you ever speak to the then Opposition about the funding?

ALLAN FELS: Maybe, but not in connection with toll—not surrounding any of that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I didn't ask if it is in connection. I just asked—

ALLAN FELS: No, I mean it was roads—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —if you ever spoke with the then Labor Opposition about the Haven Foundation donation.

ALLAN FELS: No, I didn't talk to—it did not come up in connection with tolls in any way, direct or indirect. And there was some discussion—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I didn't ask about the connection.

The CHAIR: Order! I have given a bit of leeway.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You might take that on notice.

ALLAN FELS: There was some discussion about it with the Opposition, led by a community group.

The CHAIR: I just wanted to go back to the questions that I was asking about the South by Southwest Sydney event. I understand that the investment itself is commercial in confidence in terms of the contract that was approved by the former Government—five years from 2023 to 2027. The public doesn't know what that investment is, how much taxpayer funding is put towards this event. What is the event attendance data, though? Surely the Government has access to that and can inform the Committee about that.

KAREN JONES: If I can just clarify the question, is it about attendance for last year or projected attendance for this year?

The CHAIR: Both would be excellent.

KAREN JONES: I can say that projected attendance for South by Southwest Sydney 2025—we are looking at a visitation of around 36,805 ex-region visitors. That doesn't include those that might be local that are also attending. South by Southwest 2024 attracted 33,000 ex-region visitors.

The CHAIR: When you're saying "attracting visitors", does that mean how many people attended the event or how many came to the city as a result?

KAREN JONES: I can also say, in terms of 2024—obviously, 2025 hasn't happened yet. Therefore I can't tell you how many people have attended. But for 2024 it had over 92,000 attendees from 56 different countries.

The CHAIR: Any other information you want to share with us about that event, considering we haven't been able to get much at all in relation to it? Any other data that you've got there?

KAREN JONES: I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have. Or if you've got any follow-up questions, I can take those on notice for you, or even supplementary.

The CHAIR: What about whether the event covers its costs? Let's forget about the Government investment—but whether the event breaks even, whether it makes a profit, whether it doesn't.

KAREN JONES: That's a matter for the event organiser about whether or not it actually covers their own expenses. You're right in saying that the contract itself between the event organiser and Destination NSW is

commercial in confidence. However, the risk in terms of running the event and whether or not it turns a profit is one that is borne by the event organiser.

The CHAIR: Just to be clear, with the data that you were just saying to me—for 2024 I think you said 92,000. Can I just get the ticketed attendance?

KAREN JONES: I'll take that on notice.

The CHAIR: So, yes, the ticketed attendance for the past year and then you've got a projected—

KAREN JONES: We've got projected for 2025.

The CHAIR: Which I assume you're projecting more because of the discount rate.

KAREN JONES: Correct. The figure I quoted at the start was in terms of people who were out of region, which means out of Greater Sydney, who would be attending the event.

The CHAIR: Okay, and the revenue if that's possible.

KAREN JONES: Sure. I just want to clarify—the difference between those two figures is obviously those people who are local who attend.

The CHAIR: Yes. I want to go to questions about Sound NSW now. Ms Collins, I wanted to ask you, because I mentioned it a couple of times, about the budget for Sound NSW. Particularly, at this point, what I have in front of me is the budget that appears to be for 10.2 full-time equivalent staff. Are there any updates for the Committee in terms of what the staffing is for Sound NSW?

EMILY COLLINS: Yes. Since that we now have 15 FTEs.

The CHAIR: With the budget allocation of $5.1 million for staff costs, is that taking into consideration the potential or the need for a particular number of staff—for example, 15, if that's what you're saying—or was that the expenditure on the 10.2 full-time equivalent staff that was in the figures that I grabbed late last year?

EMILY COLLINS: The $5.1 million is the LEC ceiling; that means the amount that we could spend on staffing. We have not met that at all at this point.

The CHAIR: And $2.8 million for operational expenses—what does that largely cover?

EMILY COLLINS: I think at the time the 2.8—as I'm sure you're aware, we just released the 10-year strategy in December. Some of the costs at the time were still yet to be properly allocated. At the moment, operational costs are sitting closer to $600,000 for this financial year. They cover things like payment of grant assessors, payment of independent probity advice and things like Sound NSW's industry engagement events. So, yes, they're our operational budget.

The CHAIR: Are you able to provide on notice an organisational chart, the positions in that and the salaries?

EMILY COLLINS: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: You're saying that the operational expenses at the moment are $600,000. You just said that Sound NSW is paying for grant advice or probity—what was that, sorry?

EMILY COLLINS: For a lot of our programs, to make sure that we're meeting probity, we get independent advice to sit in in some of our processes and make sure that we're meeting proper processes.

The CHAIR: Is that one person?

EMILY COLLINS: It can be one person, yes. But we usually engage a company to do that.

The CHAIR: Who's that company?

EMILY COLLINS: I'd have to take that on notice, but I believe it's OCM. I'll just confirm that for you.

The CHAIR: Part of what I'm getting at is the amount allocated for grants that goes out to the community, compared to what Sound NSW is spending on staff and operational expenses. The $2.8 million, when you're saying that $600,000 so far—is that estimated for the whole year? Or is that to date?

EMILY COLLINS: For this financial year, yes. The updated figures—of the $18.5 million budget allocation we had for this financial year, we're looking at spending closer to $15.7 million on grants and funding.

The CHAIR: Does that mean, therefore, that Sound NSW has realised some savings, in terms of you saying the operational expense figure I have here has now been reduced and gone over to boost the grants available to the community?

EMILY COLLINS: Correct. I think when the budget was first developed, there were quite a few unknowns because we're a new organisation and still going through our 10-year Contemporary Music Strategy development. Now that we have that strategy and we have a clear list of things we're trying to achieve over the next 10 years, that money has been sort of directed towards funding and grant programs. We're really happy to be spending such a large portion of our funding on supporting the community.

The CHAIR: That is music to many ears, I am sure. Excuse the pun; I didn't even mean that. Just to be 100 per cent clear, the unspent budget has been dispersed, largely, and will be dispersed to the sector in grants?

EMILY COLLINS: Correct, yes.

The CHAIR: Could you talk me through the consultation around the Contemporary Music Strategy? Who was consulted?

EMILY COLLINS: Yes. In part of the strategy development process, we met with over 100 music industry professionals and artists from the New South Wales music industry, across eight focus groups, and had a lot of one-on-one consultations as well. So we had a fairly robust process for speaking to various parts of the community. Focus groups looked at priority areas around Western Sydney, regional New South Wales, as well as First Nations and artists.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I had a question for Ms Jones, representing Destination NSW. Why did Destination NSW provide a gift of rugby league grand final tickets to Minister Rose Jackson in October 2023, valued at over $1,600? What did this do to improve tourism in New South Wales?

KAREN JONES: Mr Latham, that was clearly before my time as the chief executive at Destination NSW. I'm happy to take that question on notice for you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Is this a practice that's ongoing—that Destination NSW books a box at major concerts or sporting events and invites Ministers to attend, in this case with four tickets for the one event?

KAREN JONES: What I can say is that Destination NSW—we do allocate hospitality to facilitate government representation at events, and that's received as part of the New South Wales Government investment into those events. Those allocations actually form part of a strategic investment agreement and sponsorship arrangement between the event owner, Destination NSW and also the New South Wales Government.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What investment agreement or sponsorship agreement have you got with the NRL that requires the invitation of Government Ministers to major matches like the grand final and also, I assume, State of Origin?

KAREN JONES: I'm happy to take that on notice for you, but I think you'll find that the majority of the agreements that we do have between event organisers and ourselves are commercial in confidence.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Commercial in confidence when you're spending taxpayers' money to invite Ministers to events, not only in the State but in the city where they live. Is there any justification for this, in terms of boosting tourism numbers and the economy in New South Wales, which is why you've got your job?

KAREN JONES: In terms of the grand final and also State of Origin, there are statistics. I don't have them in front of me now, but I might be able to source them for you this afternoon.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why does giving Rose Jackson four tickets to the game boost tourism numbers or economic activity around the match?

KAREN JONES: Mr Latham, as I mentioned before, I'll take that on notice. That allocation happened before I became the chief executive.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Sure, but earlier on you said that these things are commercial in confidence. Are you telling the Committee that Destination NSW has formed contracts and signed contracts for these events that require the attendance of New South Wales Government Ministers?

KAREN JONES: What I can say is that there are strategic investment agreements, like all of our major events, that we enter into with the event organisers. There are, of course, terms and conditions associated with those agreements. I can't disclose those agreements because they are commercial in confidence. But in terms of the matter that you're directly raising with me now, I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Does this mean that Destination NSW rents out a box for these events and invites Ministers?

KAREN JONES: Again, I'll take that again on notice for you, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, but you must know. Can you answer the question?

KAREN JONES: What I do know, as I said before and as I've already disclosed, is that, depending on the event, there are different terms and different conditions involved in the strategic investment agreements. But if you have—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Do you have that for the NRL grand final? What's the Destination NSW agreement that you have with the NRL?

KAREN JONES: The NRL grand final—again, I'd have to take that on notice. Obviously the NRL grand finals that were hosted for the last couple of years were the subject of an agreement with Destination NSW under former leadership, as opposed to myself. The NRL grand final this year is still in discussion.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: For this year's one, are you planning to sign an agreement that requires Ministers to be given four free tickets valued at over $1,600 to attend?

KAREN JONES: Again, those agreements are negotiated with the NRL. I take the point that you raise as a concern. Again, I will take that into consideration.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If you did that in the future, in what possible way could it boost tourism numbers in New South Wales?

KAREN JONES: I want to be really clear that I didn't do that in the past. In terms of your question about what it might contribute to the visitor economy, again—I repeat myself—I will take that on notice for you, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why did the same Minister receive two tickets to the opera on Sydney Harbour for *Westside Story* at the beginning of 2024 in March? Have you got a commercial agreement with some opera outfit whereby Ministers have to be given tickets to attend?

KAREN JONES: All of the major events that Destination NSW supports are subject to a strategic investment agreement. They are all contracted. Again, you are asking me details. I am happy to take them on notice, absolutely. But you're asking me for details of contracts that were entered into before I became the chief executive officer.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Would you agree that the average taxpayer who works very hard to pay their taxes would think this is a complete waste of money, given that it does nothing to increase tourism numbers or the visitor economy in New South Wales?

KAREN JONES: The whole purpose around engaging major events is to boost the visitor economy and attract tourism not just into Sydney but also across regional New South Wales, particularly for our regional events. The reason why we engage in those events is solely to promote the visitor economy and promote visitation. In terms of representation from the New South Wales Government, again, that would be subject to the strategic investment agreement.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: On notice, can you find out if there is one for the opera and can you find out if all the agreements you've signed require Ministers to attend with free tickets?

KAREN JONES: I am happy to take that on notice, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Ms Jones, what role did you play in helping the Minister answer or not answer question No. 3340 on the notice paper, which asked about the gifts that Destination NSW has given to Government MPs since March 2023, how they can be justified given that the gifts are already in New South Wales and what the purpose was of the gifting practice?

KAREN JONES: The question on notice that you're referring to—it's obviously the Minister's answer.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What role did you play in drafting it?

KAREN JONES: Of course, they might have sought advice from Destination NSW on that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Okay, they sought advice. On notice, can you answer that question? You must have a list of the Government MPs who have received these gifts under your very unusual investment agreements and sponsorship arrangements. Can I get the list that I asked for here?

KAREN JONES: I will take that on notice, Mr Latham. I don't have that sort of detailed information available to me today.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Would you agree that an answer that says that MPs are required to make disclosures of pecuniary interests doesn't necessarily tell me who has received the gifts because some MPs, for various reasons, don't declare?

KAREN JONES: I will take that as a statement, Mr Latham. There is not much I can comment on in relation to that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Would you agree? You had some role in drafting the answer. It's nonsensical to the point where you are telling me that you can't give me the list of MPs because they have made disclosures when we know that not all MPs do. It mightn't pass the monetary value that is needed or they forget or they choose not to. Can I get my list and an answer here? What is being hidden here in this non-answer?

KAREN JONES: Mr Latham, the level of information and the detail of information that you are asking for today I don't have in front of me. As I said, as per due process, I am happy to take those questions on notice and provide you with the information and provide you with a response.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There was another non-answer—I suppose more directly under your responsibility—to question No. 3334 as to, over the past three years, the conferences, seminars, meetings and other events that the staff of Destination NSW have attended outside of New South Wales. I only got one such event. But there are many more, aren't there?

KAREN JONES: Destination NSW staff do represent the New South Wales Government and Destination NSW at a variety of events. I want to fully disclose and be transparent that some of those events do actually occur interstate. The reason for that is because we're obviously trying to do partnerships and trying to attract people to come to New South Wales and to come to Sydney. We are not necessarily trying to encourage people within New South Wales and within Sydney to participate in tourism.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Within the three-year period, how many are being conducted in tandem with Racing NSW?

KAREN JONES: I will take that on notice, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There was one two years ago where, at the end of the Royal Ascot carnival, people were expected to go to the centre of London for some cocktail party. What sort of evaluation do you make of the benefit to our visitor economy of such events that really seem quite misplaced and self-indulgent?

KAREN JONES: I'm aware of the event that you're talking of. I'm also aware that the Government actually looked into that event and there were some outcomes and some recommendations that were adopted as a result of that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Not to do it again.

KAREN JONES: And also in relation to the level of delegation and what sort of approvals were needed to be in place in order to conduct such an event again.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's good to hear. Regarding 3334, you mentioned transparency. Can you provide the transparency of an answer as to the different events that staff have attended outside the State over the last three years?

KAREN JONES: I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can I ask the secretary, Mr Murray, have we previously discussed here the legal costs incurred by Transport for NSW? Has that been raised today? I don't want to duplicate.

JOSH MURRAY: The legal costs in regards to which matter?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why has Transport for NSW stopped publishing the New South Wales legal panel reports that it manages?

JOSH MURRAY: I'll look into that. I would not be aware why we would stop. We continue to run the legal panel on behalf of the government sector. Those reports should have been published in the normal manner.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I'm told that they haven't been and I'm told that the annual overall panel spend now exceeds $200 million, for which the Transport for NSW contribution is high and rising—over $90 million. Why has it gone up?

JOSH MURRAY: I would have to have a look into the specifics of that, and I'm happy to do so. I know that, as part of the Government, we have got specific targets in reducing the cost of legal representation. We are working on that through Transport. But also we have achieved a number of great results through the use of that government-wide panel, which is run through Transport.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Mr Murray, when I asked the Minister this morning about the sudden departure of the CEO of Destination NSW, Steve Cox, he punted it to you. Could you explain what happened there?

JOSH MURRAY: Ms Overall, I'll hand to my colleague here who's the secretariat responsible.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Destination NSW is part of the portfolio for which I'm secretary, not Mr Murray. Mr Cox finished in November last year.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And what were the reasons for that?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Mr Cox was terminated without reason.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Terminated without reason?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Without cause, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: By the Minister?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: No. He reported to me. It was me.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are you able to expand further or elucidate on that further?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: No, I'm not. It's a term in all of our contracts—termination without cause. It wouldn't be appropriate to say any more.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: How long had Mr Cox been in the role?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I could take that on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can we perhaps redirect that question and ask if there are any concerns or anything that should be raised with this Committee around that?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I'm not sure what you mean.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Clearly, it was unexpected that this has happened, the termination of the former CEO.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I can't really comment, other than to say that the clause in the contract—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Allowed that to happen?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So now there's a process in place for Mr Cox's replacement, bearing in mind that Ms Jones is acting?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes. We ran an expression of interest process across government and did an assessment, and Ms Jones is acting. And then we will run a full process for a permanent replacement.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Any idea of timeline or scheduling for that?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Because of the workload of doing the Visitor Economy Strategy and other workload on the agency, we haven't scheduled it yet. But it will be this year in the coming months.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: If I could please have a bit of a chat with Ms Noonan. The Minister indicated in this morning's sessions that work on the regional arts, culture and creative industries strategy is starting now. What does that work look like?

LIZA NOONAN: That work is a focused plan for regional New South Wales—so specific initiatives and actions in regional New South Wales in support of the Creative Communities policy.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Why wasn't the work undertaken in line with the Government's commitment to release the strategy in late 2024?

LIZA NOONAN: I can't speak to that. I can speak to the fact that we are now working on that plan and convened the first meeting last week.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You can acknowledge, though, that it has certainly been delayed from the announcement that it would be late 2024.

LIZA NOONAN: That is correct. I can say, though, that there has been a serious amount of engagement by Create NSW staff across regional New South Wales throughout last year, including a regional roadshow which took place across October and November to promote the reforms around the Arts and Cultural Funding Program. Part of the ambition of those reforms and the policy itself is to increase the amount of funding allocation going to regional New South Wales. We are in the middle of the assessments of the four-year and multi-year project rounds, which were promoted to regional New South Wales at the end of last year. In coming weeks, we'll be able to see the impact of that regional engagement and collaboration with the regional arts and culture ecosystem.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Have any other parts of the policy fallen behind schedule?

LIZA NOONAN: Not to my knowledge, no.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You're suggesting that the focus is going to be on regional New South Wales and the funding allocations for regional New South Wales increasing—I think you used that word. So regional New South Wales hasn't fallen behind with any of this in terms of the overall strategy?

LIZA NOONAN: No. There's the plan itself but, through the consultation on the Creative Communities policy throughout 2023, there was a significant amount of engagement with regional New South Wales on practical actions to be put in place before the finalisation of the formal plan. I would say that the practical work with regional New South Wales has continued across the duration of 2024.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you expand a bit more on the practical action that you referred to?

LIZA NOONAN: Sure. One thing I would call out is that Create NSW is supporting the delivery of a number of regional Creative Capital projects. There are over 132 regional projects that have been delivered under the Creative Capital program fund. That's out of a total of 169 projects, including projects like the Flying Fruit Fly Foundation's Borderville Theatre in Albury, Orange City Council's regional conservatorium of music and planetarium and the WAYOUT Artspace in Kandos. Also, under the Community Local Infrastructure Recovery Package, there has been the ongoing delivery of projects on the art streams of that particular fund. That work has continued, and there are a number of Create staff actively involved in supporting the delivery of those projects to regional communities.

In addition to the multi-year funding and the project funding I mentioned earlier as part of the reformed ACFP, there are also specific initiatives targeting regional communities, including the Regional Arts Touring grant, which provides up to $120,000 to support creatives to tour their work across regional New South Wales. This round is currently open until 17 March. There's also the Country Arts Support Program, which is providing grants of up to $3,000. Again, that's currently open until 31 March. This is managed in partnership with the regional arts development organisations.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Great, that's good to hear. The Minister said that he encouraged regional stakeholders to take part in the consultation process for that strategy. Where and how can they do that?

LIZA NOONAN: As the Minister mentioned this morning, we had the first meeting convening the ecosystem—so practitioners, the RADOs, local government and arts administrators working in the region. They are obviously an incredibly important network to regional stakeholders. They are a conduit into government and into that plan. We will be promoting—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Sorry to cut you off there, but consultation and engagement with them has already commenced?

LIZA NOONAN: Yes, that started last week.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Please continue.

LIZA NOONAN: That is a key conduit, and we are encouraging the RADOs, local government and representatives of the arts and cultural sector to represent the voices of their communities.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Once all of this has been worked through, will there be a discussion paper released for consultation?

LIZA NOONAN: Our view is that the consultation has taken part, as part of the policy development.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So there won't be anything further to that?

LIZA NOONAN: This is really picking up now on the very specific actions and practical actions for regional New South Wales. That was certainly referenced in last week's session, that a reflection on some of the input was provided through the consultation, which we played back to make sure that that material is, of course, still current and relevant to those stakeholders.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You've mentioned, and the Minister mentioned as well, the announcement regarding the work that started last week. I can't seem to find it on the Create NSW website. Where is it available?

LIZA NOONAN: I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That would be good. The Government has committed to supporting four new creative industries or artist workspaces in regional New South Wales over four years. Is there any update you can provide us where the locations might be?

LIZA NOONAN: Unfortunately not. We are, though, in the middle of an audit or a survey across various local government and public institutions right across the State, including regional New South Wales, to identify spaces which may be appropriate for creative production and performance—certainly to identify spaces which are currently underutilised and that we can get those creative uses into those places.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm sorry, I may have just missed you answering that. Did you talk about how you were going to identify those?

LIZA NOONAN: We're doing it through an audit. The Create NSW team are actually operating an audit.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you very much, Ms Noonan. Could I have a chat, please, with Ms Collins? You've been responsible for setting up a new office fairly rapidly. How many members of staff do you currently have?

EMILY COLLINS: We currently have 15 full-time equivalent roles.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: How many of those staff would be considered senior executive roles?

EMILY COLLINS: Just one—me.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Just you?

EMILY COLLINS: Yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Have you commissioned any external consultants for professional development?

EMILY COLLINS: For the team?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes.

EMILY COLLINS: Not to my knowledge, no.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you provide any update on how much of your budget is going to be allocated to regional and remote New South Wales?

EMILY COLLINS: Of this current financial year?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes.

EMILY COLLINS: Many of our grant programs are still currently open. We had one major grant closed yesterday and some closing at the start of April. The allocation across regional will depend on the applications.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you give me any comparison, then, perhaps of—

EMILY COLLINS: I can give you last year's.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, that'd be great.

EMILY COLLINS: Across, I believe, five funding programs, we spent a quarter of our budget, which was $15.1 million, on regional activities and regional areas. It doesn't include organisations that were city based that were delivering regional outcomes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Concerns have been raised regarding the application process for positions on the Sound NSW board and complaints about a question that was raised regarding LGBTIQA+ status. Can you confirm that that question was part of the application process?

EMILY COLLINS: I can't confirm at this moment. I'll have to take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can I also get you then to take on notice if it was compulsory to make that declaration?

EMILY COLLINS: Absolutely. I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'll note that the legislation passed by Parliament didn't have any requirement for LGBTIQA+ members on the board and that there was no legislative requirement for the question to be included.

EMILY COLLINS: That's correct. However, as I said, the expression of interest process that was run commenced in December, before the legislation had passed.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thanks for that clarification. I appreciate that. I just quickly have a couple of questions on Great Southern Nights. I'm not sure who would be best to address those.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Ms Jones, I think.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thanks, Ms Jones. Can you let me know how many performances—the bands et cetera—are scheduled for regional areas?

KAREN JONES: Yes, I think I have that here. For 2025, there will be 300 gigs held across inner Sydney, Western Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, the Central Coast, Broken Hill, Byron Bay, the Central West, Orange, Tamworth and Tilba. Over 148 gigs are being held in regional locations.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What's your qualification of "regional"? Wollongong is now being included as regional, is it?

KAREN JONES: Correct. I can say 148 gigs are being held in regional locations, including Newcastle, Wollongong, the Central Coast, the Hunter Valley—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So Newcastle now is regional?

KAREN JONES: It's got that listed here, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's a very interesting turn of events. I think there might be some debate on that. So that's how you're using it. It's 148 out of approximately 300.

KAREN JONES: Approximately 300.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's the suggestion, that you're still trying to indicate that almost half of the gigs are intended for regional New South Wales, but it's a pretty broad brushstroke on that.

KAREN JONES: If you let me finish, I think I got to the Hunter Valley. There's Bathurst, Byron Bay, Broken Hill, Orange, Tamworth and Tilba. They're included in that as well.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you explain—as the Minister tap-danced around it—how Victorian bands are being included when it's specifically about promoting local live music from New South Wales?

KAREN JONES: ARIA is responsible—I think the Minister touched on that today—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: He did, yes.

KAREN JONES: —for the talent acquisition for Great Southern Nights, and that's done through an EOI process.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But, again, surely there's the stipulation. If it's local live music from New South Wales, even ARIA would be made aware of that.

KAREN JONES: I'm not across the full selection criteria that ARIA use as part of that EOI process, but I'm happy to take that on notice for you.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you share with us what's being done to increase live music initiatives in regional New South Wales more broadly?

KAREN JONES: That might be a question better placed for Sound NSW. We're Destination NSW. Of course we support events like Great Southern Nights, but if you're asking around how we can promote music more generally in regional New South Wales—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Not just the music initiatives as well. I guess it's the events. What I'm wanting to hear from you is that the focus is still very much on regional areas of New South Wales and that we're not falling behind and we're not missing out when it comes to planning and scheduling. We've had some terrific things in the past, but we're seeing a lot of the live music industry—Groovin the Moo and all of these things—now falling by the wayside. We're not losing focus on our regional areas.

KAREN JONES: I agree with you. We are not losing focus in terms of regional New South Wales. Not only is there Great Southern Nights, but of course we have our key events—our marquee events, if you like—particularly around Elvis in Parkes and the Tamworth Country Music Festival as well. Also this week our Regional Event Fund opened. It's a $1.5 million fund which enables grants of up to $50,000 for regional events.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Ms Mildwater, I will come back to you. What was the cost of terminating Mr Cox's contract?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I could take that on notice, but the contracts contain a standard 38-week provision.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Sorry, how long?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Our contracts all have a 38-week provision. But I can take it on notice and come back to you with the detail.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What about the costs involved with Mr Cox's replacement and the recruitment?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: As I said before, we haven't started that process yet. The process to run the EOI to recruit an acting CEO was run in house, so there were no external costs there.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So you don't have a timeline that's specified at the moment?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: No. But, as I said, I would expect it in the coming months.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do you have an idea of who the recruiters will be at this at this point, or is that still to be determined?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: No, we haven't started that process.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And the process will, I presume you're going to tell me, take as long as it takes?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I think that's probably the right answer. We won't take any longer than we need to. But, yes, it will be a thorough process.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I have a couple of other very quick ones. Again, Mr Murray, I might be directed by you as to who this may be for at Destination NSW: the Race of Champions, which we discussed this morning. You're in the firing line today, Ms Jones.

KAREN JONES: That's okay.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So what happened?

KAREN JONES: The Race of Champions wasn't actually a government-sponsored event. It wasn't actually sponsored by Destination NSW.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do we have any involvement?

KAREN JONES: No. It was an event that was hosted at a Venues NSW facility, being Accor Stadium. I'm assuming that they booked that venue to run the even—and when I say "they", the private operators. I would suggest, if you need any questions around the performance of that event, they're probably best directed at Venues NSW.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Possibly something that emerges out of that is there might be the opportunity for event organisers of this kind to be working better with Destination NSW and the Government to ensure that they're more fully embraced, shall we say?

KAREN JONES: As it currently stands with Destination NSW, obviously we take a very keen interest in those events that we have investment relationships with, and we set key metrics and targets around visitation

and what it is that we want them to achieve and get out of the event. In this instance, for Race of Champions, I think it was solely just a higher arrangement of Accor Stadium.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Again, I only saw it myself, as well, so I'm not suggesting for a moment that this morning, when I saw it, I have the in-depth detail. I'm asking the questions genuinely to find out what might have occurred and what we can do better. There was a media release on the New South Wales Government website about the event that was then removed. Why would that be the case?

KAREN JONES: I couldn't comment on that. I wouldn't know. As I said, it wasn't a Destination NSW sponsored event. I would suggest that the closest government agency that would have information on that would be Venues NSW.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I have a few short seconds left, so perhaps someone can answer more broadly. We know that the Premier managed an extremely well-timed news grab on a question he apparently was so surprised by. The demolition of the Angus and Malcolm Young house in Burwood, from an arts perspective, how did we allow this to happen and what are we going to do about it?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Unless Ms Noonan has anything to say, I don't think we've got a comment on that. I'm happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Great. I think the Premier has taken it on notice. From an arts perspective, I'd say that we should be doing better on such things. Let's hope that we're going to make it clear what stood there and just how important it was. Can't let him take all the limelight for AC/DC, can we?

The CHAIR: Mr Barakat, I have some questions about music festivals and the new laws. I asked the question to the Minister today. Have any music festivals actually gone through the new process over the last few months in terms of developing either a health and medical plan or an agreed health and medical plan as per the legislation?

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, they have. I do have just a couple of things to clarify for you too, Ms Faehrmann. Whenever you want me to do that, that's fine. The number of determinations made regarding the requirement for a festival to have an agreed health and medical plan has been 38 since the new legislation came in. The number of agreed health and medical plans required has been 12 of those 38.

The CHAIR: That was based on the process of advice from the Commissioner of Police and advice from the organiser, as laid out on the website and the legislation?

TAREK BARAKAT: I can talk you through that, if you'd like me to, briefly.

The CHAIR: So 12 of 38?

TAREK BARAKAT: Those are the figures I have here, yes.

The CHAIR: Have those events largely occurred over the summer?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'd have to take that on notice, but my assumption would be yes.

The CHAIR: What is the hold-up for the appeals process?

TAREK BARAKAT: That's what I wanted to clarify for you. The internal appeals processes that the Minister described have been set up. Health has in place an appeals process for festival organisers to review user-pays ambulance costs. We did check in with Health during the lunch break, and they have received one application from a festival for those costs to be reviewed. We also checked in with the police. Their advice was that they'd need to come back to us because they'll need to check with their individual police area commands, which is fair enough.

The actual overarching central review process that the Minister referred to—and when I spoke about that earlier, I described it as being a panel that will have a representative of Sound NSW, Destination NSW and the Premier's Department. That will make a determination as to whether a festival that meets certain eligibility criteria can access financial support. Actually, there's nothing stopping festivals applying to that process now. So that order was published by the Minister at the end of last year, I think, and the ministerial order is publicly available. It's published in the gazette. It sets out the eligibility criteria that festivals must meet. It sets out the things that that panel will consider in assessing applications, and that process commenced upon publication, which was at the end of last year. To my knowledge, no festival is yet to apply to that process, but there are very strict eligibility criteria that they must meet in order to apply.

The CHAIR: You checked in with who today in terms of the police?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'd have to take that on notice. I didn't do it personally. It was a member of the team who checked in with the police to see if they'd had any applications from festivals to review costs through their internal mechanism.

The CHAIR: So NSW Health has set it up. They've had one festival, is that correct—

TAREK BARAKAT: That's my advice from Health.

The CHAIR: —starting to go through that process, appealing the costs imposed by Health for—

TAREK BARAKAT: I believe it's in relation to user-paid ambulance on that particular matter.

The CHAIR: What is the delay, then, from your perspective with the appeals process within police? What have you been told?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'm not aware that there is a delay. Our advice was that the police would need to check with their individual police area commands as to whether any festival had utilised this process through those individual police area commands. The police area command in which the festival is being held would be the relevant police area command through which to appeal any imposition of user-paid policing costs. The police advice to us was simply that they'd need to check with their individual police area commands as to whether any appeals had been made.

The CHAIR: Remind me with the appeals—so, for example, if there has been a music festival, it has tried to appeal through the police, firstly, is that—when I look at the website, by the way, in terms of setting up a festival and the reforms to the Music Festivals Act and what people need to know, it doesn't seem as though it's ready because it says here still, "Festival organisers will be able to apply to New South Wales police for an internal review." It says the same in terms of NSW Health and that information on how festival organisers can apply will be updated shortly. It also says, about the appeal pathway for user-pays government costs to be waived, that that pathway will commence at a later date.

TAREK BARAKAT: I'm happy to take on notice whether our website needs to be updated, but the appeal pathway for Health based on the advice from Health has been set up, given they have received an application. That is my understanding. The Minister's order outlining what criteria festivals must meet very clearly says it commences on publication, which was at the end of last year.

The CHAIR: How are music festival organisers being informed of their appeal pathways, then?

TAREK BARAKAT: I don't think the communication has been particularly clear on the central government panel that I described, and I think that's probably because the internal processes have been dealt with first. As I said today, I think my understanding is that that panel will be set up either at the end of this month or next month, so that will be in place shortly. Then there will be a communications program rolled out. In terms of the internal processes, festivals are advised through a range of stakeholder groups that we have. They'll be informed through the music festivals round table. That round table will be aware of these appeals processes that are in place now, and the industry side of that round table is very proactive in communicating with their stakeholders. There's a range of sort of different mechanisms through which festivals will be advised about how and what to do. And obviously, if our website needs to be updated, I'm happy to take that on notice and look at it.

The CHAIR: Those 12 festivals or parties that needed to get an agreed health and medical plan, are you comfortable that they were informed of their options to appeal?

TAREK BARAKAT: They have an appeal mechanism to ILGA, actually. If they disagree with my determination that they need to prepare an agreed health and medical plan, then they can appeal that decision to ILGA, and my assumption is that they are aware of that. That is very clearly articulated. To my knowledge, no appeals have been made to ILGA.

The CHAIR: They appeal the decision.

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes.

The CHAIR: But then the conditions are placed post-decision, for example, by the Commissioner of Police that they have to have X number of police and dogs and "That's going to cost $130,000, thank you very much". Isn't that correct?

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, and then they could appeal. I'm confident—well, it would be a surprise to me if they did not know that these internal mechanisms were available for them to appeal. As I said, one festival appears to have taken the matter on—

The CHAIR: To NSW Health.

TAREK BARAKAT: —to NSW Health, and police said they were going to check. It might be that none have taken that on, but I'd be surprised if they didn't know that the processes existed.

The CHAIR: Are you able to take on notice, in fact, the 12 agreed—the festivals with the agreed health and medical plans. Do you have that list there?

TAREK BARAKAT: I don't have it here, but I'm happy to take that on notice and provide it to you.

The CHAIR: If you could take it on notice. In terms of the costs that the police imposed, is that a question for police, or can you provide that?

TAREK BARAKAT: It's probably a question for police, Ms Faehrmann, but I'm happy to provide any detail that we have and that's appropriate for us to provide.

The CHAIR: Yes. Also, with appeals and decisions made, is that public? If anything is granted in terms of reducing fees or dropping fees, there's what the police do, what NSW Health do, and then there is the—what's that central body called?

TAREK BARAKAT: I don't actually know if it's got a name at this point.

The CHAIR: It hasn't even got a name yet.

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, but I think that whether or not the police or Health would make their internal review processes public would probably be a question for those agencies. I can take on notice whether outcomes of this festivals panel will be made public.

The CHAIR: But you'll need to get a sense of whether the reform is working according to the statutory review, given that what is dragging the music festival industry in this State down—which, of course, is the regulatory environment—but the costs.

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes.

The CHAIR: You will have to, of course, have a record of all of that to see whether the reforms are working.

TAREK BARAKAT: Correct.

The CHAIR: Liquor and Gaming NSW, I assume, will be collecting all of that.

TAREK BARAKAT: As we would with any new program that we put in place, be it for festivals, be it for gaming or whatever else, we will be evaluating this—absolutely, yes. We will be able to access the information from police and Health for their internal reviews, for example. How that is then made public or how that is then made visible to others will be something we'll have to work through with those agencies.

The CHAIR: What is the reporting requirement? Is it, say, after this summer, to have a look and then, of course, next summer? But what is there for the public to know that it's working and for the industry to know, hopefully, that these government charges are reducing to save the industry? How is that being reported publicly?

TAREK BARAKAT: I will take that on notice, but I can assure you that we will be looking at whether or not these changes have had the intended effect.

The CHAIR: Will the public know about it though?

TAREK BARAKAT: That's probably not a decision for me to make, but I'm happy to commit to you that we will do the work.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To the secretary, the legal panel contribution of Transport for NSW has gone up over $90 million. On top of that, what decisions have you taken to increase the staffing size and cost of the in-house legal advice and service available to you and the Minister at Transport for NSW?

JOSH MURRAY: Thank you very much for the question. I will just take you back to the point of the previous question you made. I have checked that the Department of Communities and Justice website has that report for the past financial year. It has been published on the website. It shows that we used 53 firms on behalf of 184 agencies outside of Transport. That's other government departments, councils, universities and community groups that came and used the in-house panel. They delivered a reduction in overall legal spending on the previous year of $10 million and, for the Transport use, a $16.3 million reduction on the previous year. In relation to your question, then, about our in-house legal team, the team has undergone a restructure in the past 12 months and has reduced its total size.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Which new positions, at which salary levels, have you created in-house for this legal service since starting as secretary?

JOSH MURRAY: I'd have to take that on notice. But, as I say, in total there may have been positions advertised which would have been as part of a restructured legal service. That team has been through a change in its structure to reduce overall numbers and to streamline, but they will have recruited and advertised positions as part of that restructure.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: On notice, can you give us those relative numbers before and after—

JOSH MURRAY: Yes, I'm happy to do that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —as you've claimed? Approximately how many people work in the Community and Place branch at Transport for NSW?

JOSH MURRAY: I would ask Ms Mares to perhaps assist on that one.

TRUDI MARES: Thank you for the question. I think I would have to take that on notice and come back to you, but they are the staff that do our project and community engagement across the State.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What role is Ferrous Advisory playing in trying to resolve a series of staff complaints about workplace safety and abuse? If this is true, why has it taken eight months so far to try and get a resolution?

JOSH MURRAY: I'm happy to take that on notice. Just by the company name, I'm not aware of the particular piece of work but I'll check that quickly and we can come back to you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Could you also, on notice, provide some figures on how many staff have been stood aside on workers compensation or leave as a result of this unresolved series of complaints in what's described to me as a toxic work environment?

JOSH MURRAY: I'll take that on notice. As I say, I'm not sure which issue that relates to but I'll check under the company name and take the numbers on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Ms Havilah, I just want to go to what was a series of questions asked by all of us around the Christmas party last year. Can you confirm that the Minister was correct in saying that the $5,000 for the yellowfin tuna performance was a personal contribution made by yourself?

LISA HAVILAH: Yes. The event was an end-of-year event that brought together donors, partners, collaborators and Powerhouse staff to recognise the things that were achieved over the last 12 months. Yes, I contributed the cost of that element to the event.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How would that be reported in financial statements? Would the public be able to see in some way, like in the museum's financial statements, that you made a part contribution to the hospitality?

LISA HAVILAH: Yes, that's correct. I was set up as a supplier and sent an invoice, which I paid.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: And that would be viewable in the financial statements?

LISA HAVILAH: Correct.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You would have done it for free!

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I would have. It's reported as saying that 207 people were invited but 400 showed up, which is obviously nearly double. How do you account for the cost discrepancy between who was invoiced and who attended?

LISA HAVILAH: What was reported wasn't quite correct. Some 643 people were invited and an estimated 400 people attended.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Was it 480?

LISA HAVILAH: Around 400.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Were all those 400 people invoiced?

LISA HAVILAH: No, they weren't. They were guests of the museum.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How much of the costs were recouped in terms of people who were invoiced and donated et cetera?

LISA HAVILAH: Four hundred people attended. The total cost of the event was $22,380, and those costs were covered through the museum's self-generated revenue. That's commercial revenue, not taxpayer or philanthropy income.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: There was a report of an extra $11,000 on a VIP party the night before. Was that figure correct?

LISA HAVILAH: That figure is correct.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How much of that was paid from self-generated revenue?

LISA HAVILAH: One hundred per cent of that $11,000 was paid through self-generated revenue.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What would come under the category of "self-generated revenue"? Is it ticket sales?

LISA HAVILAH: Yes, ticket sales, retail sales, sales for programs and events, and also venue hire.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Given the stats I shared earlier with museum attendance down, do you think using self-funded revenue for such events is, in the long term, sustainable?

LISA HAVILAH: The statistics that you were quoting weren't correct. I'm happy to provide, on notice or now, the correct information.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, if you'd like, but could you also address that question of, if it's based on these things, do you think that's a sustainable way of funding lavish events?

LISA HAVILAH: This was an exceptional circumstance because of the key elements that were achieved over the 2024 year. Those things included the opening of our new building in Castle Hill and it included the finalisation of the digitisation project, which digitised over 340,000 objects. It also included the finalisation of the ongoing work that was being done to decant the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The New South Wales Government's hospitality policy makes it clear that expenses should be reasonable and publicly defensible. Would you believe that that event met that standard?

LISA HAVILAH: We complied with the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences gifts and benefits policy. But I hear your point and I take that advice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You understand how that looks. It's an expensive process you're going through in terms of a budget, a $915 million museum. You're seeking more funding and then, on the other hand, you have these expenditures of a Christmas party to the tune of probably close to $40,000. You see how that may look to the public?

LISA HAVILAH: Yes, I do.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You can confirm that this is a one-off event? How does it compare to the Christmas party of 2023 in terms of expenditure?

LISA HAVILAH: We did have an end-of-year event in 2023.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Like most government departments and organisations do. I'm just wondering how it compared in terms of—

LISA HAVILAH: This was a larger event because there were so many people involved in what needed to be achieved in 2024. There were 400 people that attended. That's why I made the decision to personally invest in the event as well.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: So everything is in context. How many people would have been invited to a more normal event like in 2023? What would have been the expenditure of a more normal event like in 2023? I am happy for you to take it on notice.

LISA HAVILAH: I'll take it on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: In the 30 seconds I've got left, I'll start asking about the southern on-ramp proposals in the Illawarra just to get some advice as to—

TRUDI MARES: Dapto ramps?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, Dapto ramps. Why do we still not have a confirmed timeline or budget for this project?

TRUDI MARES: We were funded for planning works. We're working with the Minister's office on scope for that and progressing the design for the Dapto ramps project. We don't have full investment money for delivery at this time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Murray, you can direct this as you like. I'm suspecting it's probably Ms Drover or Ms Mares. The Sydney Harbour Bridge is starting to come to the end of its life design. What steps is the department taking to secure the bridge for future uses? It's not a criticism of the beloved bridge, just wondering what contingency plans are in place.

JOSH MURRAY: I think we're all concerned at the idea of end of life of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, but we also have a significant maintenance acceleration program. I'll ask Mr Fuller to talk to that program.

MATT FULLER: The bridge is obviously undertaking its centenary in eight years time and the Government has been very clear that they would like the Sydney Harbour Bridge to look at its best at that time. Over the next few years, we've got an accelerated program. There's a new schedule for the renewal of the coatings on the bridge. The team have been doing a fantastic job over the last number of years, but to meet the objective of recoating all of the surfaces on the bridge—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry to interrupt you; I've only got a minute. But just in the end-of-life design, given it's a 100-year-old bridge—the end-of-life design for future use, not just painting it, if you like, or coating, which I agree is important. What other work is being done to secure that bridge for future use?

MATT FULLER: The bridge undergoes continued and ongoing engineering assessments and maintenance assessments of its condition. Many of our bridges across the State—we have literally thousands of them that have quite a number of year-age. Many of them are in very good condition. They've been maintained—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just the Sydney Harbour Bridge—are there any structural issues with that almost 100-year-old bridge?

MATT FULLER: I am not aware of any structural issues on the bridge.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Has the department received advice regarding the bridge's suitability for car use after reaching the end of its 100-year design life?

MATT FULLER: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you would. I would have thought there would be some contingency planning that's more than just coating.

MATT FULLER: There's a very structured asset maintenance planning process across Transport.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand that; it's just about the bridge, though.

MATT FULLER: We have a 10-year strategic asset management plan for the bridge that's been recently renewed and undertaken. What that led to was an acceleration in the renewal of the coatings on the bridge. We're achieving about 16½ thousand square metres this year in terms of that renewal process, and our aim is to get—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are there any structural issues?

MATT FULLER: As I said, I am not aware of any structural issues and there's nothing in that asset maintenance program at the moment, but I will take on notice if there are any other referrals.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you take on notice also, if you can't answer here, whether there is risk to the structural integrity of the bridge? I want to know that cars are able to go across it for many decades. It's not a trick question, just understanding the structural integrity.

MATT FULLER: The bridge is assessed on an ongoing basis. We have a very experienced set of bridge engineers in Transport. I am not aware of any issues that they have flagged recently that suggest there are any issues with cars utilising the bridge.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just to be clear, the question for on notice is whether there is any risk to structural integrity.

MATT FULLER: We'll take that on notice.

The CHAIR: I have questions for Mr Barakat again—or maybe it's for Mr Rodrigues. It's special entertainment precincts. How many have been created over the last financial year in New South Wales?

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: There's one in existence, which is the Enmore Road precinct. I don't want to give you incorrect information. I'm not sure exactly the date that was finalised.

The CHAIR: No, I think it wasn't. I think it was before.

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: Previous, yes. But if the question is when are future ones coming, probably—

The CHAIR: Yes, that's what I'm getting to.

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: In the most immediate future, and just understanding that it's a process ultimately led by councils, the most recent information I can give you is through the Inner West Council, who, on its website, is now in the final stage of community consultation on a proposal for six additional special entertainment precincts. They expect them to be operational by August 2025.

The CHAIR: That's Inner West. Is there progress on any others?

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: Yes, there are at least 15 other councils that have resolutions to establish special entertainment precincts, and that's across the State. The Committee would be aware that our office has been engaged in, essentially, concierging councils into the process. We're relatively pleased with the uptake of that initiative. There's a program being established to support, financially, councils as they go about the process of establishing special entertainment precincts. That will, in time—provided the trials commence and so forth—lead, we think, to more.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sticking with you, Ms Mares, what was the total budget for planning for the southern off-ramps?

TRUDI MARES: I believe it was $10 million. We are just testing whether we need the full budget allocation for that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: If you don't need the full budget allocation, where will that money go, or will that perhaps stay in reserve for the actual action and completing the project?

TRUDI MARES: I might ask Ms Hoang if she wanted to answer that from a financial perspective.

BRENDA HOANG: Generally, if the budget is not fully utilised, it comes back to the broader portfolio pool to be used for other projects.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Given that nearly 4,000 community members participated in this process and 97 per cent support the project, what's causing the delay in moving from consultation to action?

TRUDI MARES: I don't believe we're delayed on the planning work for that. I will have to get the exact date for you that we'll be ready to take that for investment decision to see if we get delivery funding.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I'm just looking at your next steps. You believe are on track for that, do you?

TRUDI MARES: Yes, we are.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do you know how much has been expended so far in that $10 million?

TRUDI MARES: No, I'd have to take that notice, but I can certainly get that.

The CHAIR: With that, we'll break for afternoon tea now. We'll be back at quarter to four.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We'll go straight to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you, Chair. My first question is for Mr Murray, around the Central State significant precinct rezoning proposal. You're familiar with that?

JOSH MURRAY: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's been under consideration for some time now. I'm curious about where your department is up to in deliberations with Planning on actually getting a determination.

JOSH MURRAY: I'm going to ask Ms Drover to assist with that question.

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes. You'll be aware that that application was with DPHI, the department. It has, obviously, been through all its community consultation. There was an announcement by the Government last year about the over-station development component of that proposal for the rezoning. There's been a decision of Government to not pursue the over-station development. Therefore we've been working with DPHI with some

amendments to that proposal. They are now being considered by DPHI, and we're hoping for a decision in coming months.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is that revised proposal required to go through another public process?

CAMILLA DROVER: We understand, not at this stage. That's the latest advice we have from the department of planning.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is there any commitment to jobs and office space, for example, that's contained within your revised proposal?

CAMILLA DROVER: That sort of analysis would have been done as part of the rezoning application and would have been displayed with the community consultation as part of that process. It obviously covers many hectares of land around the Central precinct. It's not just actually within the Central station. It's some surrounding parcels of land that are owned by the Transport Asset Manager entity. So, yes, it would deliver some significant uplift in employment opportunities and, potentially, housing opportunities as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have those changed significantly since the last proposal? Obviously the over-deck component of the proposal was pretty substantial.

CAMILLA DROVER: Obviously, yes. If that is not proceeded with, it's a different scheme, but there is still merit in seeking the rezoning, the right to rezone. Any development that would occur across that precinct would still be subject, obviously, to a development application process. But at least the rezoning will occur, so it can be used for non-rail uses.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you planning to put anything forward by way of development application, in addition to the rezoning?

CAMILLA DROVER: The first step is to get the rezoning. There are opportunities to redevelop many of the sites across that precinct, and we've done some early analysis on some of those, but it would depend on the outcome of that rezoning application.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Would you be seeking to work with the private sector to submit DAs in accordance with the rezoning proposal?

CAMILLA DROVER: The land that's proposed to be rezoned is still all government-owned land. So we would be looking at those opportunities in the first instance. Whether down the track we involve the private sector would depend on the nature of the rezoning.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You said it would be a couple of months before that is determined by Planning.

CAMILLA DROVER: I don't have a definitive date, but that's the guidance I've been given.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In terms of differences between jobs targets, for example, how has that been determined if there was no public consultation process?

CAMILLA DROVER: The rezoning application is largely the same as what was previously put forward and consulted on, absent the over-station development component.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay, so it's literally a calculation that says, "This is what was expected as part of the over-station development application and we're just minusing these figures from this next version of the proposal"?

CAMILLA DROVER: I think we have to remember that it was always a rezoning application. There was never any expectation that the whole precinct would be redeveloped in the near term. It really just changes the potential use of that precinct. Over time, individual development opportunities may arise and, therefore, be taken forward.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you been working with Investment NSW on the proposal with Planning?

CAMILLA DROVER: Investment NSW led the Tech Central initiative. We've also obviously got other developments happening in that general precinct. We've got the Western Gateway projects. There is one unsolicited proposal that is currently in delivery. That is the Atlassian building. Then there are two other unsolicited proposals which are in various stages of the processes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Who are those unsolicited proposals with?

CAMILLA DROVER: For the first one the proponent is Dexus and Frasers. They are delivering an integrated mixed-use facility. The primary tenant is Atlassian. That is the one under construction. There is another proposal from the TOGA Group that is adjacent to the Atlassian building. That is in stage three of the USP process. Then there is the Central Place development, which did achieve approval to proceed.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is the TOGA development primarily residential or is there a commercial element?

CAMILLA DROVER: It's a mixed-use development. There are a number of uses within the building proposed.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you familiar with the Tech Central cooperation agreement?

CAMILLA DROVER: Not the specifics of it. I am aware that there are agreements and arrangements in place across various government departments. But I am not familiar with the detail of that specific agreement.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know if Transport is a signatory to that agreement?

CAMILLA DROVER: I suspect we are, given that we are the landowner for many parcels of the land in that area. I would have to take on notice the exact arrangements, though.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That would be helpful. Thank you very much. On special entertainment precincts, Mr Rodrigues answered some questions earlier. I wanted to follow up and clarify how many have actually been set up. I understand that you said that there are some in the inner west that are underway in addition to Enmore Road.

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: The answer I gave previously was that there is only one that is set up. That is the Enmore Road Special Entertainment Precinct. There is a process underway, which we believe in time will give rise to further. It's a process—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is there a timeline on that?

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: It's a process that's ultimately led by councils. We're enabling councils. I noted to Ms Faehrmann's earlier question that the Inner West Council has published on its website that it is expecting six to be in place by August 2025. You will have seen media and will be aware of the City of Sydney's own process that it is conducting for special entertainment precincts. They are still out for consultation and so forth. It is a pipeline of opportunities. Again, behind that, we have launched our own support process for councils.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just on that, there is a $1 million grant program. How much of that has been distributed to councils at this point?

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: I might need to take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I am also curious—I understand that there was $100,000 to be put aside for councils outside the Sydney metropolitan area. I would be interested to know how much of that has been disbursed.

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: Yes, I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'll now go to section 156 of the Liquor Act. This is probably for Mr Barakat. Thank you, Mr Rodrigues. I'm sorry if I'm jumping between you. I might come back to you later. Could you please point me to the annual report of the liquor licensing authority that's in line with section 156 of the Liquor Act which requires the authority to report things like the number of licences in force, the number of new licences granted by the authority and the number of licences suspended or cancelled?

TAREK BARAKAT: If it's the annual report of the Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority, that's not something that falls within my remit. But if there's a requirement for it to be published, I would imagine it should have been published. I'm happy to take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I have some questions about the $250 for musicians that was promised by the Government. I'm not sure if that's a Sound NSW question.

TAREK BARAKAT: Probably Ms Collins.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand that this was a government commitment that was made. Originally, it was supposed to come into play in late 2023, but it came into play late last year. Minister Graham said, under questioning from the Hon. Mark Latham, that this policy is operative in some places. I'm just wondering where it is operative and where it is not operative.

EMILY COLLINS: The commitment specifies that, for any recipients who are getting government funding for commercial events, there's a commitment to pay $250 per musician. Currently that is, I believe, in place with Create NSW and their funding programs. We are looking at a further rollout across other parts of government to make sure that commitment can be met.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You're asking other departments and entities and agencies to report back to you on whether they're complying with this policy?

EMILY COLLINS: Yes. What we're doing is talking to other parts of government about what funding they might provide to commercial music events and working out if it is something they do and what their ability to report on those funding recipients would be to us. And, yes, trying to make sure that it is a whole-of-government approach because that is the commitment. It's work that's ongoing. We're trying to do it in stages to make sure that we can meet it at its earliest delivery. But it does take time to work with other parts of government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I would have thought that it might just be an email out to all the departments to say, "This is the policy. You have to comply with it." Is there something that's more complicated than that?

EMILY COLLINS: We've had to seek legal advice around what it means for government to stipulate this criteria and to make sure that we're operating within appropriate guidelines. We're trying to get an assessment of whether this will have a financial impact on other parts of government and funding programs they may run. But the good news is that Create NSW already has it in place and Sound NSW, for the appropriate programs, is looking at how it delivers it as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What kind of issues are you facing? Having to seek legal advice is pretty serious, if you're getting pushback. I imagine that that's the reason.

EMILY COLLINS: No, not pushback. We're just trying to make sure that for us—for government—to stipulate a minimum fee when there isn't an award, we're doing the right thing by our grant processes and contracts to make sure that we can actually stipulate this. The other complicating factor is what enforcement looks like. Often we're providing funding to commercial events. Do they report back? If they don't meet their requirements, what does that mean for us and their funding agreement? It is a bit more complex than it might appear.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you also asking departments to report on the number of musicians that they had to pay, for example, in the last two financial years and what they were paid to understand what that gap might be?

EMILY COLLINS: We've commenced that process of having that conversation. It's a bit of an ongoing conversation. We're hoping that this policy will be fully in place by the end of this year. We're just making sure we're dotting our i's and crossing our t's to make sure it is something we can actually commit to and make sure we're providing that standard to industry.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What happens if a department comes back to you and says, "Sorry, we don't have enough money for this; this will decimate our ability to run events in particular areas and we can't possibly absorb this cost"?

EMILY COLLINS: That's part of the scoping of the process that we're currently undertaking. We're trying to work out who it does impact, if there are adverse impacts through the policy. It can be difficult for some industry organisations, in particular, to meet the requirements. The minimum fee is $250 per musician, so who does that impact—larger bands that may have more members—and what flow-on effects does that have in the industry and for people who are applying for government funding? We're trying to make sure we get a good sense of what is enforceable and what is suggested process and policy that we'd like to see funding bodies follow.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you haven't received any pushback from any of the departments, agencies or whoever you have contacted so far?

EMILY COLLINS: Not currently, no. We're still working out the broader consultation with other government departments.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you started that consultation?

EMILY COLLINS: We've mapped it out and gotten advice around some of the things that we need to be mindful of. We will be further delivering that in the next couple of months.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: As part of that mapping out, is there, for example, an additional budget set aside to support certain departments if they say, "We can't do this"?

EMILY COLLINS: Currently, no. But that's part of why we want to do the proper scoping—to make sure that if there are any financial impacts, there's consideration of that in future budget processes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I wanted to follow on from the questions I was asking of the Minister about the Sydney Festival artist contracts. I don't know who that would be with.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Ms Noonan might come up. We did have a discussion about this over lunch. I'm not sure that we have much information.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is it something that the festival director raised with you at all?

LIZA NOONAN: No. I've checked in with the team over lunch, and we haven't had that from the festival—that information shared.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is it something you will pursue with the festival director?

LIZA NOONAN: Absolutely, yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is there any ability to check which contracts are being used for artists and performers for government-funded events? They might be huge or small or like Sydney Festival.

LIZA NOONAN: To speak in terms of the point that was just discussed with Ms Collins, part of the Arts and Cultural Funding Program criteria is that a $250 minimum is in place. Contracts would come through our acquittal process. We'd obviously review that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is more broad than the specific musician payment. This is for other performers and artists that haven't been given the MEAA-approved contract or the latest award. Is there any process to review those contracts?

LIZA NOONAN: I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That would be helpful. This may be with you as well, in terms of grants. Perhaps it's with Mr Rodrigues. Is any data collected about how long it takes for organisations to fill out a grant application? When they're completing their grant application, at the end, does it say, "Did this take you one minute, 10 hours or 50 hours," so that you can collect that information?

LIZA NOONAN: Not in terms of hours, but as part of the reforms for the major grant program that Create NSW runs, which is the Arts and Cultural Funding Program, one of the key areas of reform was to make it simpler and faster. There have been a number of reductions in the amounts of steps that applicants need to take. I think the number is that we've been able to reduce paperwork for grant applications by 25 per cent. The feedback that we're getting from the sector is that that's been a positive improvement.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you think it would be useful to collect that information to actually understand how long it takes for organisations or individuals to apply for different grants?

LIZA NOONAN: I think there are a number of variables. It would obviously depend also on the program and the amount of funding that's being asked for. Obviously there's going to be more detail.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Of course, but that would be relative.

LIZA NOONAN: Sure. My understanding is, based on the reform work and the consultation that took part to inform that reform, that type of consultation has taken place, but I'm happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I think it would be a great idea to have that information. The Data After Dark platform—I might have time to come to back to this later, but is this going to be public, the actual platform itself? I know that up to, or maybe more than, $1.3 million was spent on developing it, and it was launched, but it's only giving us static reports at the moment. I'm just wondering if that platform will be made public.

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: You're across the project. The reports are what we're able to currently produce and publicise. The platform itself has a number of proprietary datasets, which have restrictions in respect of those datasets from the data providers, which makes opening out to the general public commercially challenging for the reason that some of the data providers obviously want to sell their data to the same people that we would probably be making the platform available to. I think about it this way—as an ambition to take the data and make it as available and as standardised as possible across the market. It's a relatively new project that's just finding its feet within government, expanding it out to a subset of councils as the first step. That's where it's at.

The CHAIR: I have a question about the Mona Vale Road West upgrade. That funding was there; it was postponed for a couple of years. I've been contacted by members of the community, who are still incredibly concerned about that, particularly now that Mona Vale has been named as one of the new town centres in the

Government's low- and mid-rise housing policy. Where's that up to? Is the department planning to upgrade that road? Is there a timeline? Is there a budget allocated to it?

CAMILLA DROVER: You'll be aware that we finished the Mona Vale Road East project last year, and that was open to traffic in 2024. We have got funding to do the detailed design for the Mona Vale west, which is the next stage of that corridor, but that's the only funding we have. That arose out of the infrastructure reviews. We are almost complete with the detailed design, which is funded, and then we don't have any additional funding to progress the project at this stage.

The CHAIR: So the funding for the design—where was that allocated by?

CAMILLA DROVER: We have that funding.

The CHAIR: And where did that money come from?

CAMILLA DROVER: It comes out of—

BRENDA HOANG: It was part of the 2024-25 budget.

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes.

The CHAIR: That's what I was after.

BRENDA HOANG: It's $5½ million.

The CHAIR: Thank you. And that's all?

CAMILLA DROVER: That's all we have at this stage, just the money for that detailed design process.

The CHAIR: Is any work being done within the department to liaise with the relevant planning department folk in terms of the road upgrades that are needed for particular areas in relation to the new housing policies that are making bigger town centres? I assume the upgrade of Mona Vale west is something that's been fed into that, as necessary?

CAMILLA DROVER: Not to my knowledge, but I might—

TRUDI MARES: I'm happy to take that question. As the development applications come in for any of the uplift for housing or mid-rise proposals, we assess what's required. I would have to check if there has been anything that we've responded to in Mona Vale that we've specifically called out that project on, but we would look at any surrounding works required as part of DAs.

The CHAIR: But isn't there another committee or working group—Mr Murray, maybe—that is whole-of-government or across various departments, looking at what is needed for particular town centres that are being uplifted?

I thought there was. I think I recall a question on this, maybe last year, and I was told there was a working group. Is there?

JOSH MURRAY: There is both the Cabinet subcommittee on housing and below that is the officials working group, which ensures that with the development of the new precincts, they have all the buy-in from Transport, Water and other agencies as part of that process.

The CHAIR: That's probably what I'm thinking about in terms of infrastructure. For example, take Mona Vale. The various roads and different transport connections that need upgrading are being fed in somehow by Transport via that group. Is that fair to say, or maybe not?

TRUDI MARES: Yes, that's correct. When DPIE are looking at any rezoning, whether it's for TODs or other housing uplift proposals, they talk to us about public transport availability, capacity of the network and travel time. So we definitely provide input at that time.

The CHAIR: Has Transport for NSW done work on determining that the Mona Vale Road West upgrade is essential if that Mona Vale precinct becomes low- to mid-rise?

TRUDI MARES: I understand your question. I'll take that on notice and just check what advice we've provided.

The CHAIR: I'll now ask some questions in relation to the Liquor Act for Mr Barakat. How many venues have been granted extended hours for dedicated live music and performance under section 12A of the Liquor Act in, say, the last financial year? Do you have that data?

TAREK BARAKAT: I think I do.

The CHAIR: This is around how things are working.

TAREK BARAKAT: As of 6 March 2025, 482 is the number of licensed music and performance venues in New South Wales that are accessing incentives, and 208 is the number of licensed music and performance venues accessing incentives in regional New South Wales, if that's helpful.

The CHAIR: What was the first number?

TAREK BARAKAT: It was 482. Then if we break it down by the number of licensed music venues, taking out the performance part, it's 412, with 178 of those being in regional New South Wales.

The CHAIR: Thank you, that is useful.

TAREK BARAKAT: I did have an answer to Ms Munro's question. Do you want me answer that now or do it later? Whatever is appropriate.

The CHAIR: No, later. We get very possessive about our time in these things.

TAREK BARAKAT: My apologies.

The CHAIR: How about the progress in terms of streamlining the process for obtaining development consents under the EP&A Act and the Liquor Act? How is the single integrated application process going?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'd have to take the exact status of that on notice. That is integrated with the planning system, so it is a little bit more complex than some of these other reforms. We have—and I'll correct this if I'm wrong—streamlined the consultation processes. Previously for a liquor licence, for example, there was a 30-day pre-consultation and then another 30-day consultation process. That has been cut back, so it's just a 30-day consultation process—the idea being that that would make it easier, obviously, for applicants but also members of the community, who only have to participate that one time.

The CHAIR: Again, what's the working group that's working—so Liquor and Gaming are working with Planning on this process. What is that group?

TAREK BARAKAT: It is effectively that: It's a group of staff from Liquor and Gaming NSW working with department of housing and infrastructure staff to look at how the Planning liquor licensing system can be better integrated. It is quite a complex piece of work. As you'd probably be aware, both of those systems are complicated in themselves. Linking them together to streamline the process is a bigger piece of work, but it is something that we want to do. We've been wanting to do it for a while. I think Planning is on board. I don't have a time frame; I'm happy to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: I was about to ask the time frame.

TAREK BARAKAT: I thought you might have been. I will have to take that on notice. I don't have one here in front of me today, though.

The CHAIR: Has any progress been made with any new licensing incentives, developed or implemented, to encourage licensed premises to program live entertainment?

TAREK BARAKAT: The incentives are as they were through the legislation. You can access two-hour extended trading on the nights you offer live music, as long as they're over 45 minutes, on an average of two nights a week or more, and you also get to access an 80 per cent reduction in your liquor licence fees. They are the incentives as they currently stand. Those numbers of venues that I read out before would—I don't have the breakdown as to which of those incentives they'd be accessing, but they would be eligible for one or both if they're meeting those criteria.

The CHAIR: So they're basically the incentives, so to speak?

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes.

The CHAIR: I'm going to ask you, because you're here, about music festivals one more time. Are you saying that, for example, if a music festival organiser appeals to NSW Health, they just go to, I assume, not the LHDs, obviously, but within NSW Health as the entity? But within the police, to appeal any user-pays, are you saying that they need to go to the local area command, to whoever they're liaising with there, to appeal and the decision rests with—it's decentralised?

TAREK BARAKAT: I can read to you what's on the police website about this.

The CHAIR: Yes, please.

TAREK BARAKAT: It might take me a little bit of time, but I'm happy to read it. Otherwise I can provide it on notice.

The CHAIR: Is there a sentence or something that sums it all up?

TAREK BARAKAT: I can try and summarise it: An application for internal review should be in writing addressed to the NSW Police Force police area command commander or region commander and must be made within 28 days of a decision. Sorry, I'll start again: If the client is not satisfied with the decision of the police for the amount payable for user-pays police, then they can apply for an internal review, and that application for review must be made to the police commander of the relevant police area command. That is on their website.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Banasiak?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just to close off the Dapto on and off ramps, Ms Mares, is the department committed to releasing the options report to the public, which I believe is due to be finalised by mid-2025?

TRUDI MARES: I understand we did the consultation in—at the end of last year we did release something. My advice is that we're now looking at, based on the feedback, potential ramp locations and finalising the options report. We will publish it when we're done. I haven't got an exact timeline for you, though.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: No worries. Can I then go to the Mount Ousley interchange? Your Government was proposing to invest $78 million into that project as part of a $390 million total prize pool. How much of that $78 million has been released, and how much of that has been actually spent?

CAMILLA DROVER: The project is in construction. It's been in construction for many months. We anticipate spending this year's budget allocated to that project.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What is this year's budget?

CAMILLA DROVER: It's $293.8 million over the next four years and $71 million for this financial year.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The $71 million, is that the lion's share of the State's commitment?

CAMILLA DROVER: That would cover the contractors' costs and also the Transport for NSW costs.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Given that this is going to take over four years, has there been any modelling done on the impact of daily commutes for local businesses and freight operators in any real terms?

CAMILLA DROVER: That analysis would've been done as part of the business case and the design for the project.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Has there been any monitoring to check whether that's being realised, in terms of those impacts? Because I know, anecdotally, when I'm not trying to escape via Bulli Pass and I'm trying to escape via Mount Ousley, the ability to get out via the main route is becoming incredibly difficult because of the slowed traffic coming down, heading from north to south. Has that actually been recorded in any way other than anecdotal observation?

CAMILLA DROVER: I know there is some ongoing monitoring. There's obviously engagement with the community and there are feedback mechanisms. We're also working very closely with the Traffic Management Centre and, particularly, the freight industry. There's a couple of instances where we have to close the road to do some of the works; perhaps we close it overnight. We had one of those weekends last year. There is another one coming up shortly. When we do that, we work very closely with the Traffic Management Centre and provide early and comprehensive advice to motorists, particularly that freight industry.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How do you do that? The Transport for NSW website hasn't been updated for over 12 months regarding this project. Is that advertised somewhere else?

CAMILLA DROVER: It will be on the Traffic Management Centre avenues, like Live Traffic. But there will be a proactive campaign, particularly with the freight industry. I know late last year when we had one of those closures, we had media—radio et cetera—and variable message signs giving guidance that there would be a significant closure.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Jumping north, the Bulli bypass or the Memorial Drive extension, or further extension: Where are we up to with that?

CAMILLA DROVER: We are doing the development work for that project, heading towards the business case. We're funded for that. That's the extension of Memorial Drive north, with the potential bypass of Bulli.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Who decided what was defined as a "local resident" within the department? You've defined local residents as Bulli, Thirroul, Woonona and Corrimal, but there are about 1,600 residents that live in a suburb between Corrimal and Woonona—as in, Corrimal is the furthest south; then you have Russell Vale, which has another 1,600 residents; and then you have Woonona. Were those 1,600 residents in Russell Vale considered as part of the local residents or are you considering them as visitors?

CAMILLA DROVER: I'll have to take the specifics of that on notice. There was quite broad consultation last year on the project and some of the early options. But I can take on notice exactly the specifics of that consultation and which groups were involved.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Likewise with Thirroul, if residents of Thirroul wanted to access Bulli Pass presently, they wouldn't actually have to drive through Bulli or access Bulli at all. What weighting was given to residents of Thirroul, given generally they largely would not be impacted as much as other residents?

CAMILLA DROVER: I'll take that on notice. We are in the planning phase so there will be ongoing and further opportunities for the community, and the broad community, to provide input into that project. We haven't done the planning process yet for the project, so that would be the major opportunity for anyone in the community to give feedback, including non-residents, freight groups et cetera.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are you able to on notice provide a copy of the survey? I'm just curious as to what specific questions were asked. You obviously received quite positive feedback, but if you ask people if they want less traffic, of course most people are going to say yes.

CAMILLA DROVER: Happy to take that on notice and bring back the nature and extent and what questions et cetera were asked as part of that process. But I just note it was an early process. There will be ongoing consultation.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: When do you think you would present potential routes? Where the route of the new road will potentially go will obviously maybe alter people's opinions on whether they're in favour or not. When do you think you may have a set of maybe several route options that you could present to the community?

CAMILLA DROVER: I'll need to come back with an exact time frame for you. I suspect it's either later this year or early next year.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How much money has been allocated to planning for that? Likewise, how much money have we expended?

BRENDA HOANG: I'm happy to confirm that there's $20 million allocated.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Perhaps on notice, can we come back as to how much of that has been expended so far?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, we can do that.

The CHAIR: I will go back to Ms Collins. I want to ask for a little bit more detail around the Contemporary Music Strategy consultation. I think we were stopped earlier. You said over 100 artists and musicians, maybe. Could you talk us through what the format of that consultation was for the 10-year Contemporary Music Strategy?

EMILY COLLINS: Absolutely. There were a few different points we had for consultation and contribution to the strategy, the first being the development of the Creative Communities policy, where we sought submissions from the music industry. I don't have the exact figure of how many submissions were made from the music community, but those submissions were considered as part of—

The CHAIR: That was in relation to the—what was it?

EMILY COLLINS: The Creative Communities policy development—so the overarching policy. And then, in setting up the consultation for the Contemporary Music Strategy, we had, I believe—I'll have to come back to you on the exact number, but I believe we had eight focus groups across eight different areas, one being an artist-specific session, a First Nations specific, Western Sydney, regional, live, and festivals and venues, I think. We had those focus groups, and we had over 100 people participate in those various focus groups to contribute ideas. We also did a series of one-on-ones with industry leaders to get specific consultation or specific ideas from various organisations and leaders within the industry.

The CHAIR: Were the focus groups conducted by a company—a PR company, a company that conducts focus groups—and how were the participants chosen? Were they randomly chosen in terms of the artists and First Nations and Western Sydney?

EMILY COLLINS: They were selected through a database that Sound NSW had of artists active in the space, or leaders, or people who had contacted us. I think the actual invite list was significantly higher than what the final attendance was. We invited quite a lot of people to participate in those events, and many that couldn't make those focus groups were also offered one-on-one opportunities.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Fels, just briefly—I understand you need to be on your way. I think you mentioned that you attended a conference in Singapore. That's correct?

ALLAN FELS: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Who paid for that?

ALLAN FELS: I did.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You paid personally to go to—

ALLAN FELS: I think I might have got $1,000 from the sponsors as some kind of private international thing, but I paid a lot more than that out of my money to go there.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But you think, or you know, that you were given some amount, possibly $1,000.

ALLAN FELS: I had accommodation for two nights in a hotel.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Paid for by—?

ALLAN FELS: Paid for by the conference organiser. I think I'd better take the other thing—actually, it was just the accommodation. It was not the fare or anything extra. I'd just like to check that out. It now comes back to me. It was just accommodation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you perhaps take it on notice and we can be clear about it?

ALLAN FELS: Yes, sure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's all I have for you, Mr Fels. Thanks for your assistance today.

The CHAIR: Professor Fels, you are right to go. Thanks very much for appearing today and for giving us your time.

(Allan Fels withdrew.)

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Ms Drover, what's the latest advice regarding the delivery timeline for the M6 stage one?

CAMILLA DROVER: We are continuing to work with our contractor. The guidance is targeting completion of the overall project by 2028. I appreciate that is a significant delay to the original date. Having said that, though, we are on target to complete President Avenue by the end of this year, as per the original program. Most of the impactful works will actually be finished by April this year, so next month, then there'll be some minor resurfacing works that will continue for the rest of this year. We're also hoping to open all the active transport paths, so the cycling and walking paths for the project, by the end of this year, absent one small section which will remain within the construction site for the project.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But just onto the main M6 tunnel, stage one, I understand it's with insurers, lawyers and potentially other advisers. Will taxpayers be paying those bills for this project?

CAMILLA DROVER: We are continuing to pursue those processes. They are very complex and there are a number of parties involved. We obviously need to ensure that government gets best value. The project, absent that 245 metres of tunnelling, is progressing well. For example, in the balance of the tunnel, half the pavement has already been placed, which is the final wearing course for that road. That's our intent, but we are still working through those processes. They are complex and they are lengthy, and they will take some time. Our primary focus is to ensure that the interests of government are protected, but that we keep the project delivering and we finish the project as quickly as possible. That will ensure that we mitigate any costs associated with the delay, to the extent possible.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you take on notice what additional cost taxpayers will be paying? I appreciate it's complex and I appreciate it was a sinkhole.

CAMILLA DROVER: I can answer, to some extent, now. To date there has been no additional cost to government other than that we have provided some support over and above the insurance processes to some of the impacted landowners, tenants et cetera, particularly at the Kirby estate. They are some additional, fairly modest costs that government has supported whilst those complex insurance processes et cetera continue.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it being redesigned?

CAMILLA DROVER: There has been a redesign of just the 245 metres of tunnelling which was subject to the subsidence events in March last year. We're very close to receiving from the contractor the final detailed design for that section. You'll be aware that earlier this year we started the relocation of utilities in that 245-metre section. In fact, at the end of February, we finished the relocation of the Jemena gas line, which was the major utility. We're about to start the ground improvement processes, and Howard and I announced last Friday that from 18 March—so today week—we will actually reduce West Botany Street down to one lane in each direction until possibly the end of 2026 to facilitate those works.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What is the estimated cost of the new delivery date of 2028?

CAMILLA DROVER: We don't have an estimated cost at this stage. We are still in discussions, of course, with the contractor about the works required to complete the project, the specifics of that revised detailed design for that tunnelling component and, therefore, what the costs will be—and then obviously there'll be a conversation about who bears those costs. So those discussions continue.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you explain to me, though, how the Government will budget for this if Transport doesn't know how much it will cost?

CAMILLA DROVER: We're still working within the current funding envelope—the budget for the project. We obviously know that there will be additional cost, and we've been very public about that. Who bears that cost is still subject to very complex and what will be lengthy processes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So it's still the $3.1 billion?

CAMILLA DROVER: The current budget for the project is, yes, the $3.115 billion.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How much have we paid in legal fees so far?

CAMILLA DROVER: Generally for the project, or for this matter?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: For this issue.

CAMILLA DROVER: I'd need to take that on notice; I don't have that information at hand.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I may come back to that if there's time. When will construction begin on Fifteenth Avenue?

TRUDI MARES: Ms Drover can also assist with this. There are two lots of works happening. The initial $50 million allocation—there are a number of early works and safety improvements being undertaken around Cowpasture Road for that. With the additional funding that we've got, we are in the design phase. We really do need to land the design and the business case before we can confirm the program.

CAMILLA DROVER: But I can confirm that those—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's not listed on the Infrastructure NSW website.

TRUDI MARES: We would have to check with Infrastructure NSW, but the funding was only just received. It may not be registered just yet.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you maybe take on notice when that is anticipated? It's been announced.

TRUDI MARES: Yes, we can do that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is the $1 billion cost just for the existing section?

TRUDI MARES: If I could just take one minute to explain where we got to the timeline and where that 2040 date came from.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It'll have to be super quick, but yes.

TRUDI MARES: The 30-year vision by Transport was completed in 2023, and I'm happy to leave that with the Committee. That was us really looking at public transport, roads, freight and active transport and land use requirements. Following that, we were very pleased to work with INSW on the aerotropolis sector report, which is really one of the first times I've seen—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm sorry, I'm going to have to move you along because I've got one minute.

TRUDI MARES: Yes, but we have managed to look at the staging and options for each of the priority projects. While this section is stage one of the upgrade to Fifteenth, it does give a timeline and certainty for the rest of the staging of the project and when it will be required to be delivered.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What is the staging within that document?

TRUDI MARES: The staging shows that we need to complete various sections leading up to 2040, so it's a 15-year program.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, for the road upgrade component.

TRUDI MARES: Yes, for Fifteenth Avenue.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's the timeline for that?

TRUDI MARES: It's within the aerotropolis sector report.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, I know that. What is the staging?

TRUDI MARES: We've been funded for the first stage and, when we've done the business case, we'll be able to look at the further staging to complete the corridor.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: For the road upgrade component of that, within all that work that you're talking about, when does that work on the road upgrade start?

TRUDI MARES: I believe I answered that question. We're doing works now, in '25 and '26, on safety improvements and some traffic and congestion improvements.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In the plan that you referred to, there's a plan, there's staging, there are early works and there are other things. It's a 30-year plan. Within that 30-year envelope, when will the road upgrade itself start?

TRUDI MARES: Let me just check exactly what it says for you so I don't get it wrong. It won't have the specific start date for construction in the sector plan; it gives timelines. But it certainly says that we need to be looking at the first stage in the first tranche, which is for early '27. But that needs to be confirmed through the design process, and we'll come up with a program.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are coloured boxes all the Government has for Fifteenth Avenue?

TRUDI MARES: No, we will have a detailed design now that we have funding to progress that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I can't see it anywhere there. When will the planning be completed?

TRUDI MARES: We're just working through the program now. We need some decisions on design first, but we'll be able to bring that back to you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So there's $1 billion just for stage one, and we don't have any information about when the project will finish.

TRUDI MARES: We've only just received the funding for that, so we're just working through it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's not what the media release was about, but okay.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Mr Rodrigues, back to you. On the Data After Dark platform, did you spend additional funds apart from the $1.345 million grant from your own department, or was that pool of funds the entire cost?

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: Just for clarity, the original funding was from the Smart Places fund, and that was $1 million. Further funds have been expended beyond that. I'd probably best take on notice any questions around additional funds spent, but it's paid from our operating budget.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My understanding is, or my suspicion is, that data from Westpark, DSpark, MobilityData and Roy Morgan Business Confidence—as sources for data, they're the ones that are causing the platform to remain private.

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: To be honest, I don't want to comment on things I'm not 100 per cent sure of. I might have to take that specific question on notice. Those are commercial datasets, for example, that I know are sold to other target customers.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: As part of that, is the agreement with those companies essentially that the data will be used privately by government departments and that you have a certain amount of logins or you can only log in from a government email address? Is that the idea?

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: I can't really comment on the specifics. There are a number of datasets. As far as I understand it, they are individually negotiated. Some of them may not even be negotiated by our team; they may be negotiated by DCS or one of our partner agencies. I'm sorry I can't be more helpful on that. The ambition is to get to a point where information can be standardised and shared as broadly as possible. Getting us to this stage has been a giant leap forward from where we have come. Normally, data in this space has been anecdotal. For what it's worth, this project is seen globally as the market-leading project for a State-based economy, to get to this stage where at least government agencies can share the data and councils—the two significant stakeholders in the ecosystem.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I fully appreciate that. I think it's a phenomenal step forward. I hope the ambition is to make the information more public. I want to double-check, are Data.NSW, Digital NSW and Minister Dib's office involved in the work that you are doing here?

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: I might, again, take that on notice. We have done this in partnership with DCS and the Data Analytics Centre, and then other agencies are working alongside in the provision of data as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Given the Government has now scrapped the Six Cities references—and obviously this is something that you reference in your reports a lot, I think, to great effect—are you still planning on using the Six Cities framework as a way to report the data that you're collecting?

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: I'm happy for any thoughts on that. What we have been shaped partly by is the evolution of our own office—Greater Sydney, then Six Cities and now the State. I think there is some value in the Six Cities approach because of the population centres, but I would like to emphasise that we see this as a State-based system, and information is being shared as broadly as possible, including into the regions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes, I know that the Committee for Sydney agrees that the Six Cities plan was a good one. Going to Screen NSW, are there any plans for studio space increases for Screen NSW?

MICHAEL RODRIGUES: That is identified in the Screen strategy. There are two aspects to it: There's permanent studio space and then looking for temporary studio space. I don't know, Secretary, if you want to comment?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'll just give context. I've been provided with feedback that essentially the lack of space at Moore Park means that smaller productions are actually getting kicked out of the studio space when international productions come through. There is a question of who's getting the benefit there.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes, both our original creative industries policy and more recent consultation has identified the need for more screen infrastructure, so Create NSW is going to run a process. It will do some market sounding and we will see this year what comes of that, but it's an acknowledged shortage.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is that budgeted for—to have a pot of money to actually expand the space available?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: The process to work out what space is needed and go to market will be run out of our department funds, but then we'll see what comes from that and what further expenditure is needed to address or see what ideas come in and what the actual infrastructure need is.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can I just understand the relationship with Screen NSW? How does that work between your two offices?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It's actually Create NSW that has the infrastructure team and does the market sounding. They provide expertise in the business cases and that sort of thing, under Ms Noonan at the moment; whereas the screen industry expertise sits within Screen NSW. They're involved, but in terms of processes for engagement with the market and infrastructure processes and that sort of thing, that would be run out of Create.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Back to Sound NSW, there was a claim a year ago that the number of venues in New South Wales hosting live performances soared by 84 per cent since November 2023. I'm just wondering what that is based on. How is that calculated? What was the base figure? What is that figure today?

EMILY COLLINS: My understanding with that figure is the base figure was 133 venues from the Liquor and Gaming list that was listing live music venues who were receiving incentives. That was the data available at the time of that commitment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So it was actual venues who were getting the live music incentive or applying for it?

EMILY COLLINS: Correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Were they receiving it or just applying?

EMILY COLLINS: I believe they were, yes, receiving it. They were published on the website at the time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What is that figure today?

EMILY COLLINS: It's 412.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know how many of those are in the regions?

EMILY COLLINS: I believe I do have a breakdown somewhere, but I can probably take it on notice if you're short on time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That would be helpful.

EMILY COLLINS: It was 178, according to Mr Barakat behind me.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I have a question for Ms Jones. It's a quick one. It's about the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse and how Destination NSW is engaging with that platform.

KAREN JONES: Yes, so the chief executive officer position—that's myself at the moment. We have a position on the board of the ATDW. How we engage with that platform is, obviously, we encourage it to be sort of the single source of truth in terms of data across the country. It's actually used to inform future policy development not just for New South Wales but more broadly across the country.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Does Destination NSW put any funding towards that warehouse?

KAREN JONES: I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Who are the other people involved at that leadership level?

EMILY COLLINS: There are other heads of the tourism agencies across the State. I think all but two of the States are represented.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Under the festivals amendment bill that is now an Act—who is best placed for that question? Mr Barakat? Thank you. I just wanted to clarify how many festivals have received the fund and how many have applied.

TAREK BARAKAT: Sorry, if you're talking about funding, it's not me. It's probably back to Em.

EMILY COLLINS: Sorry, can you repeat the question?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I was just wondering how many festivals have received the Contemporary Music Festival Viability Fund funding and how many have applied.

EMILY COLLINS: I think there are five applications in process and four currently have been approved.

The CHAIR: I have questions again for Mr Barakat. This is just to get a little bit of clarification around the question that I asked you about the extended trading hours. What I was asking was how many of the venues have been able to get the extended trading as opposed to how many venues are on the list of dedicated venues. How many have been able to access—or applied and got it and are operating as part of that extended hours?

TAREK BARAKAT: Just so I'm really clear, of the 412 that are licensed music venues accessing incentives, how many of those are accessing that extended trading—is that the question?

The CHAIR: Yes.

TAREK BARAKAT: If that is the question, I'll have to take that on notice, because it does depend on whether or not the development consents allow them to trade the additional two hours. But if we can get that breakdown, then I'm happy to provide it to you on notice.

The CHAIR: That would be good—again, just seeing how successful some of the reforms have been. I'm still getting contacted by some venues who are having difficulties. One is—I think they actually went to Liquor and Gaming NSW after being frustrated with the City of Sydney as well as New South Wales police—Mirage Kings Cross. Are you aware of—

TAREK BARAKAT: It doesn't ring a bell, but we do have what's called a Hospitality Concierge that does try and guide venues through some of the bureaucratic red tape that exists not just in the New South Wales sphere, but also City of Sydney as well. It may well have been that they've come in through the concierge, so I can take that on notice.

The CHAIR: How many people are working in that concierge?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'd need to take that on notice, Ms Faehrmann.

The CHAIR: Is it a biggish team, or is it one person?

TAREK BARAKAT: It's not one person.

The CHAIR: You're saying it's a concierge; it's a group.

TAREK BARAKAT: It's a team of people, yes.

The CHAIR: Is Kings Cross still classified as a high-risk area when it comes to venues licensing? Is it classified differently still? Because, again, I've been contacted that it is.

TAREK BARAKAT: I know exactly what you're referring to. There were different classifications for Kings Cross and the Sydney CBD at one point. I think they have been repealed, but let me take that on notice and confirm for you.

The CHAIR: Mr Barakat, what I might do is, via the Minister, send this information to you, which would be interesting.

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, sure.

The CHAIR: Rozelle interchange and Rozelle Parklands—has the New South Wales Government or Transport for NSW entered into any formal agreement with Inner West Council regarding the care, control and management of Rozelle Parklands?

TRUDI MARES: Not just yet, so we are still working with them. We are hopeful to reach agreement this month.

The CHAIR: I've got information that potentially means that is a lump sum or a figure that is going to be—I've got $20 million here—given to Inner West Council for them to care for the parklands. Is that what we're looking at?

TRUDI MARES: Two slightly different things. The care, control and management agreement is really looking at how the fields will be maintained and the parklands in the coming years, and then the interface with Transport, because obviously it's sitting on top of a motorway. That's what that's working on. The $20 million was in recognition that the full scope expectation of the community wasn't met, and the allocation is to look at a master plan for what any future works to the parklands might be. That is made to the Inner West Council to do that work.

The CHAIR: So there are two separate things. The $20 million is, essentially, almost compensation.

TRUDI MARES: It's for them to do further works, and that was agreed with government.

The CHAIR: Whose responsibility will it be for the local sporting clubs to be able to use those playing fields? I assume we're talking now Inner West Council, once this agreement is signed.

TRUDI MARES: That's right, yes. We've had some delays in being able to get the turf to a standard that was required to hand over to council as well. So there has been a number of practical issues as well as actually working out who's responsible for what. But yes, ultimately it would be up to the council to manage the sporting fields and manage the grounds under that agreement.

The CHAIR: The $20 million is there. With the management, is there money as well that Transport for NSW gives to the council each year for that care, control and maintenance for Inner West Council to undertake that instead of Transport for NSW? That's a separate agreement; is that right?

TRUDI MARES: Generally speaking, when we do asset transfer from a project and it's on council land, then it would go to council and become part of their operating budget. We have covered the costs until that handover continues and then it becomes a matter for council.

The CHAIR: So there isn't ongoing funding.

TRUDI MARES: Not operation and maintenance funding, no.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is the M12 scheduled to open on time in 2026?

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, I can confirm all stages of the M12 will be opened, in line with the commitment to open before the Western Sydney airport. We'll have some announcements shortly on the exact timings, but it will be opened in a staged manner.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In 2026?

CAMILLA DROVER: Certainly, yes. I don't want to make the announcement here, but it may be earlier than '26.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That would be a bonus.

CAMILLA DROVER: I'm not saying, all stages. But it will start to open progressively.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In relation to projects more generally—it's no surprise; I ask this every time—what projects will go to tender for delivery by the end of the financial year?

CAMILLA DROVER: There's a whole raft of them. I haven't got a comprehensive list in front of me.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you able to provide that list on notice? I think we do this every time.

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes, we can. I might just mention that, for the first time, we've updated our project pipeline. It's on the Transport for NSW infrastructure portal. And it's also shared on the Infrastructure NSW portal. For the first time, we've updated that for industry every half year, every six months, not annually.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's helpful.

CAMILLA DROVER: So some of that information—I accept that some of the timeframes are broader, but that is now available. And the benefit for industry is that they can get those more regular updates.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Terrific, thank you. And also for us. If you could just take on notice, though, specifically, which projects will go to tender for delivery by the end of this financial year, please, for the Committee.

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes. And ones that are currently in tender? We have quite a few in tender at the moment.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. If you could itemise each of those rather than a general statement, that would be helpful. What's the total payout of the heavy vehicle rebate this year and last calendar year—each calendar year, this year and last year?

TRUDI MARES: I'll just see what we have here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'd like that answer today, if I may. While you're looking for that, Ms Mares, have roads projects been reprioritised this year that would affect delivery date? Are there any roads projects that have been reprioritised this year that would affect their delivery date?

CAMILLA DROVER: Not to my knowledge. We had the comprehensive, both State and Federal, infrastructure reviews in 2023, that led into 2024. That largely set the program for our portfolio of projects, and we're sticking to that program.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No roads projects have been reprioritised this year that would affect the delivery dates?

TRUDI MARES: The only thing I'd add to Ms Drover's comments is that we've received Federal funding for a range of roads projects. That would allow us to reprogram and reprioritise timing. So, yes, that may have occurred with the injection of some Federal funding.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So Mona Vale Road will be done, then.

TRUDI MARES: I think we've responded to the Mona Vale Road West question. We've got design funding.

CAMILLA DROVER: Yes. We've opened Mona Vale Road East last year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm well aware. Mona Vale West?

CAMILLA DROVER: West? We're only funded for the detailed design. And we are due to finish that shortly.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you could provide that information either now, Ms Mares, or—

TRUDI MARES: The truck multiplier figure? Did you want that now, Chair, or later?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. The heavy vehicle rebate. How much for last year and this year?

TRUDI MARES: Later?

The CHAIR: Yes, maybe later. I've found a few more questions, so I'll jump in now. Ms Mildwater, I'm told that, as about a month ago, there was no permanent occupation certificate for the Powerhouse's Castle Hill facility. Is that correct?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I might ask Ms Havilah to answer that.

LISA HAVILAH: The new building in Castle Hill is complete. In the process of finalising the commissioning, a minor defect was identified to an internal door, which required rectification. An interim occupation certificate has been issued, allowing full occupation and operation of the building. The minor defect is currently being rectified by NSW Public Works with a view to achieve full certification in the next week.

The CHAIR: At the moment, it's under temporary. Under full certification, there will be a permanent occupation certificate. Is that correct?

LISA HAVILAH: Correct.

The CHAIR: That's good information. Ms Havilah, with the fundraising at the Powerhouse, I understand that the director of sponsorship resigned at the end of last year. Is her position being replaced?

LISA HAVILAH: Currently, I am leading the campaign team. We have an external adviser who is working with us, alongside the campaign committee, which is chaired by Tony Shepherd.

The CHAIR: With the director of sponsorship, in terms of bringing money in, was there sufficient campaign money raised or is it behind target?

LISA HAVILAH: No, it's an ongoing program. The target is $75 million. The timeline to achieve that target is by the time we open.

The CHAIR: How much has been raised of that target?

LISA HAVILAH: To date, $60.4 million.

The CHAIR: When is the opening date?

LISA HAVILAH: The date hasn't been set for opening, but it will be in the second half of next year.

The CHAIR: The second half of 2026?

LISA HAVILAH: Yes.

The CHAIR: Are you replacing the director of sponsorship with a position or are you continuing in the arrangement that you have now with the external contractor?

LISA HAVILAH: We are planning to continue the arrangement that we currently have.

The CHAIR: What about exhibitions for the Powerhouse? Are there any plans? Is anything firmed up for what we can expect?

LISA HAVILAH: Yes, currently the Powerhouse curatorial team are working on the development of five major exhibitions that will open when Powerhouse Parramatta opens.

The CHAIR: Is there anything more you can reveal?

LISA HAVILAH: They are yet to be announced, but we are really looking forward to announcing what those exhibitions will be. I can tell you that they will absolutely feature the Powerhouse collection. They will also work right across the applied arts and sciences. We are working with museums and partners around the world to make sure we are bringing into Parramatta and the museum incredible objects and incredible stories.

The CHAIR: The opening program is going over how long? Do you know how long that will be for? Are we talking several months?

LISA HAVILAH: For the first series of exhibitions, some will go for two years and some will go for one year. There will be a changing program of exhibitions. All of the exhibitions will be in place for the first year that we are open.

The CHAIR: Is that funded? Are you seeking any more money from Treasury or the Government to fund that?

LISA HAVILAH: The exhibition program is funded. Of course, we're always looking for external partners and collaborators to offset those costs as much as we can.

The CHAIR: How much of the $60 million raised from philanthropy has been banked? Is that what you've said in terms of what has been raised so far—the $63 million, I think you said?

LISA HAVILAH: It's $60.4 million.

The CHAIR: Has that all come in or is that pledged?

LISA HAVILAH: That's pledged through a contract. That will be paid over a period of time. It's phased.

The CHAIR: Over the forward estimates?

LISA HAVILAH: Different contracts are over different periods of time. I'm happy to take that on notice and give you those details.

The CHAIR: Thank you. For example, the Lang Walker foundation has committed $20 million. Has that all been paid, or is that one of the ones you will take on notice?

LISA HAVILAH: I will take it on notice but it's phased over a number of years, which is a normal practice for a philanthropic contribution of that scale.

The CHAIR: What about the planning approval for the Ultimo redevelopment? Where is that up to?

LISA HAVILAH: I understand that planning approval is imminent. We are yet to hear.

The CHAIR: You can't give me assurances about that. That was a ministerial question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're coming back to me, Ms Mares, on the heavy vehicle rebate?

TRUDI MARES: I've got it now, if you'd like it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, last calendar year and this calendar year.

TRUDI MARES: Last calendar year, the truck multiplier of $16.7 million in rebates has been credited to customers. Did you want the toll cap figure as well?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What year was that $16.7 million?

TRUDI MARES: It was 2024.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And this calendar year?

TRUDI MARES: I don't have the current figure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will you take that on notice?

TRUDI MARES: Yes, I can do that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In relation to the roads projects reprioritised, are you taking that on notice or are you able to indicate any that have been reprioritised in this year that would affect their delivery date?

TRUDI MARES: I think we can probably provide that when we give the tender document. We can look at that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Could you list any that have had that date affected because of the reprioritisation, which is understandable in some circumstances?

TRUDI MARES: Just programming changes and reprioritisation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which roads projects have been reprioritised this year?

TRUDI MARES: I'll take that on notice as part of the response.

CAMILLA DROVER: I'm not aware of any. As Ms Mares said, there's additional funding that's coming in. In some instances, we're trying to accelerate projects. We'll take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What percentage of the four-year forwards is for roads projects? That might be one for Ms Hoang. While you're looking that up, I might keep moving. Just to be clear, that's the capital expenditure—the capex. The Bankstown Airport intersection—that is, the upgrade of Murray Jones Drive and Milperra Road intersection—what is the timeline for that? It seems to be an issue bouncing between the State and Federal governments and some documentation outstanding to commence that work. What's the commencement date?

TRUDI MARES: We'll just check that. It's part of the Henry Lawson Drive project, from memory.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: While you are both checking that, I might hand to my colleague.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Ms Mildwater, if I could possibly go back to the situation with Mr Cox's termination, are you able to provide the dollar cost of the 38-week termination?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Correct me if I'm wrong—I'm sure you will—that you made the decision to terminate. It wasn't a mutual agreement?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: That's correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Is there a budgeted amount for the recruitment process?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: No.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Would that be the standard procedure?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Not really. Recruitment costs are usually within contingency or just normal operating budget. They're not of a level that need to be separately budgeted, typically.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So you'll have to come up with a budget or a figure that you're working around once the recruitment process is in place?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes, that's right. There's a usual tender process where you get quotes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And you'll be able to provide that to us at some point in the future?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: When the time comes, yes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Deploying Mr Cox to another group or department wasn't an option?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It's always considered, but it didn't happen.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It was considered in this situation?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It's always considered. But I can't go into details of an individual's private circumstances.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You can't explain why he couldn't be moved to somewhere else, as someone with that experience?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It's not appropriate for me to talk about individual circumstances, but I can say it's always considered.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do we have answers?

CAMILLA DROVER: Just checking, are you talking about Henry Lawson Drive section 1B?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's the finalisation of the agreement with Transport and the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts regarding the upgrade of the Murray Jones Drive and Milperra Road intersection at the Bankstown Airport, knowing that there are a lot of emergency services there and so these delays are affecting those operators.

CAMILLA DROVER: I know we're doing investigation works for the 1B project. That's part of the planning process. Perhaps we can take on notice the specific issue that you've raised.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you could take it on notice—it seems that there are some outstanding issues that have to be resolved before the works can commence. They seem to be relatively minor things to be sorted out, or business-as-usual things—details of the lots to be valued for transfer, valuation costs and agreeing on a sunset date for commencement of works, all of which are minor matters that seem to be holding up what is

otherwise broad agreement between the State and Feds to get it done. Could you give some indication of when those things might be finalised and what is causing the ongoing delay?

CAMILLA DROVER: We have started some of the investigation works and even property acquisition for the 1B project. If I could get the exact intersection that you're talking about—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's the upgrade of the Murray Jones Drive and Milperra Road intersection at Bankstown Airport. It seems to be in place with the operator, Transport and the Commonwealth department, but there seems to be some paperwork broadly from the bureaucracy that is holding that up.

BRENDA HOANG: Ms Ward, Roads projects are 47 per cent of the four-year capital project.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's the capex?

BRENDA HOANG: It's 47 per cent.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Of the four-year forwards is for Roads projects. That's capital expenditure?

BRENDA HOANG: Yes, that's right.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We did get to something.

The CHAIR: There is more time if you want it. Don't feel compelled. Ms Suvaal?

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: No questions from me, Chair.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Through you, Chair, is there anything else coming back that had been on notice?

TRUDI MARES: I did have one correction for Mr Banasiak. It was on the Dapto ramps timing. I believe I said to you that we had been consulting with the community at the end of last year, but it was the end of 2023 and early 2024.

CAMILLA DROVER: For the Bulli bypass, the submissions report—which is the summary of all the community feedback from the last round of consultation—went out in January 2025. That's available on our website.

The CHAIR: Thank you, all, for appearing today. We really appreciate your time. The secretariat will be in touch because there was a fair bit taken on notice. That is the end of today's hearing. I regret to inform a fair few of you that we'll see you tomorrow for Transport. Have a lovely evening.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.