

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 8 - CUSTOMER SERVICE

Monday 25 August 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

BETTER REGULATION AND FAIR TRADING, INDUSTRY AND TRADE, INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, BUILDING, CORRECTIONS

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Emma Hurst (Chair)

Ms Cate Faehrmann
Ms Sue Higginson
The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine
The Hon. Mark Latham
The Hon. Aileen MacDonald
The Hon. Tania Mihailuk
The Hon. Jacqui Munro (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Bob Nanva
The Hon. Peter Primrose
The Hon. Rod Roberts

PRESENT

The Hon. Anoulack Chanthivong, *Minister for Better Regulation and Fair Trading, Minister for Industry and Trade, Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology, Minister for Building, and Minister for Corrections*

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**

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Welcome to the first hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 8 - Customer Service for the inquiry into budget estimates 2025-2026. 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 respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Emma Hurst. I am the Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Chanthivong and accompanying officials to the hearing.

Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Better Regulation and Fair Trading; Industry and Trade; Innovation, Science and Technology; Building; and Corrections. 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 of their evidence at the hearing. 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.

CORRECTED

Mr GRAEME HEAD, AO, Secretary, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Ms NATASHA MANN, Deputy Secretary, Fair Trading and Regulatory Services, NSW Fair Trading Commissioner, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Mr JAMES SHERRARD, NSW Building Commissioner, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Ms TRINA JONES, Rental Commissioner, NSW Fair Trading, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Mr ANGUS ABADEE, Strata and Property Services Commissioner, NSW Fair Trading, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Mr GARY McCAHON, PSM, Commissioner, Corrective Services NSW, sworn and examined

Dr ANNE-MARIE MARTIN, Deputy Commissioner, Community, Industry and Capacity, Corrective Services NSW, sworn and examined

Mr LUKE GRANT, Deputy Commissioner, Strategy and Governance, Corrective Services NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr LEON TAYLOR, Deputy Commissioner, Security and Custody, Corrective Services NSW, sworn and examined

Ms REBECCA McPHEE, Deputy Secretary, Investment NSW, Premier's Department, affirmed and examined

Professor HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE, Chief Scientist and Engineer, Premier's Department, affirmed and examined

Ms LIZA NOONAN, Executive Director, Fostering Innovation Branch, Investment NSW, Premier's Department, sworn and examined

Mr MICHAEL TIDBALL, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome and thank you for making the time to give evidence today. 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 Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We begin this session with questions from the crossbench, so we will start with 10 minutes from me. Thank you, Minister, and good morning.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Good morning, Chair.

The CHAIR: Minister, I want to ask you some questions about the Residential Tenancies Amendment (Protection of Personal Information) Bill. The bill will allow people to apply to a rental property without declaring that they actually have an animal moving into a rental, and then they have seven days after moving in to apply to have the animal. I want to get an understanding from you about what happens to the animal in that situation if the landlord says no. We know that there are several reasons that a landlord can say no in that application. What happens to that animal after those seven days?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As you know, the bill is currently before the Parliament. It's based on the feedback that we've had from stakeholders. Specifically in terms of the seven-day grace period that we're giving renters to make that application, you'd be well aware that property owners have up to 21 days to make that decision. On the mechanics and the operations, I've asked the Rental Commissioner to continue to monitor that process.

The CHAIR: My question was: If somebody has not put the animal into their application, they have moved into the property and the landlord has said no, what happens to the animal? What happens to the tenant?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Where there's a disagreement between the tenant and the property owner, there's an opportunity for the tenant to take that decision to NCAT to have that adjudicated. Depending on that outcome, it will determine what the options are.

The CHAIR: What happens to the animal during that NCAT process if they can't keep the animal after the seven-day period?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Those mechanics of the implementation, assuming the bill passes in its current form—obviously, I have to wait for the Parliament to determine whether there are any other amendments to that. I might ask the Rental Commissioner if she might further elaborate on the mechanics of that particular scenario.

The CHAIR: I will come back to her in the afternoon. My understanding from reading the bill is that they would be in automatic breach, if they did go to NCAT, if the animal remained there. I'm trying to understand how the mechanics of this work. My understanding is that the feedback about having animals off the application process has come from other jurisdictions where that has been put into place, but that was put into place along with laws that allowed renters to rent with animals. Because our laws are not strong enough to allow people to necessarily rent with animals—there are a lot of reasons why a landlord can refuse to have an animal—it kind of makes no sense to take this one piece and put it in. Essentially, we're going to have people move into properties and the animal will get refused. Are you open to amendments, for example, to ensure that the animal can remain there if the tenant goes through an NCAT process? Our pounds already have a one-year waiting list to drop an animal. What happens in those situations? They are automatically in breach. How do we protect those tenants who are then going through the NCAT process?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The bill is currently before the Parliament. We'll wait until what the Parliament decides as to what amendments you want to—

The CHAIR: This is your portfolio. This is your legislation. I'm asking you if you're open to amendments to make sure that, on a practical level, this is workable. If somebody does move in, they haven't put an animal in their application and they move in with that animal, are you open to amendments to ensure that animal can remain there if that person goes through the NCAT process?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Once the legislation is passed, and implementation takes place, we will always continue to monitor. I've asked the Rental Commissioner to continue to monitor the implementation of all our rental reforms. If there are opportunities to improve it, then of course we'll always consider reasonable amendments that are proposed.

The CHAIR: You're not open to amendments at this point—before the legislation passes?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I want to see how the legislation works in practice as well, Chair. I think we've got to give that a bit of time.

The CHAIR: Minister, what I'm trying to point out to you is that it's not going to work in regards to animals, in practice. If they've got seven days and they're locked into a new contract for a new lease, and the landlord says no to the animal, there's nothing in the legislation that allows the tenant to break that contract without any sort of financial penalty. They've got no opportunity to go to NCAT and keep the animal in the property during that NCAT process. It doesn't function, it doesn't work, so why would we, as a Parliament, pass legislation that we can see very practically isn't going to work in its current form?

I'm asking you if you're open to amendments now before—one of two things will happen. If we pass it in a way that doesn't work, one of two things will happen. We'll either see a lot of people lie and never apply for that animal knowing that, obviously, then they'd be at massive risk of not being able to do anything. Or we'll have people dumping more animals into pounds and shelters, or having healthy animals euthanised, because they can't break a contract that they've just signed. We don't want that mess. I can't see any other options there. If you can see another pathway forward for those tenants, I'm happy to hear what you think would actually potentially happen in that situation. Otherwise, I think it would be sensible for us to look at amendments and agree to amendments to make sure that people aren't put into those situations in the first place.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As amendments are proposed by the Parliament—of course, the Government is always willing to consider and have those discussions. I can't determine the outcome of that without having seen the amendments and also studying the impacts of what those amendments might actually have but, as a general principle, are we always willing to engage with members of Parliament about their amendments? The short answer is yes.

The CHAIR: You are open to considering some of the amendments around ensuring it's practical?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That will go through just a normal parliamentary process.

The CHAIR: Another concern that's been raised with me is around what landlords are required to disclose when advertising a rental property. As you are aware, section 73F of the Residential Tenancies Act provides a number of reasons an animal can be refused. For example, if fencing is inadequate or the landlord lives on the premises. However, tenants may not necessarily know about those potential barriers when they're applying for a rental property unless they are required to be specified on that rental advertisement.

CORRECTED

Would you be open to considering amendments which require that those ads specify when they believe that the property would not be suitable for animals—so when it fits into those lists? Because the other problem we've got is someone may look at a property, think it's suitable for an animal, not realise that the landlord lives on the top level, for example. Then the landlord has a genuine reason, based on the current legislation that's passed, to say, "No, I don't want to allow an animal because I live on the property." Wouldn't it make more sense to ensure renters are aware of that before they apply for that property by requiring the landlords to put that in the ad?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Just to clarify, are you referring to the current bill that's before the Parliament or the former bill that's already been passed and the regulations are already in force?

The CHAIR: I'm talking about both pieces of legislation. I'm saying this is what's in the bill that has passed, which is the Residential Tenancies Act, providing a number of reasons an animal can be refused, and then how that will work with the new bill that hasn't yet passed the Parliament. The proposal that people cannot, if they've got an animal in the application—what I am asking is would you be open to an amendment that made sure that, if a landlord had one of those reasons in the other legislation to refuse an animal, that they include that in the ad for the rental property, so that renters with animals know this property is not going to be suitable for animals before they sign a lease, move in and seven days later find out that they can't keep their animal there?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think on the former bill that's passed the Parliament—it's only been in place for a number of months. I have asked the Rental Commissioner to continue to monitor the implementation to see whether there are any practical barriers or any practical consequences that we weren't aware of. That's an ongoing process. But in terms of the current bill that's before the Parliament, then certainly, where there are reasonable amendments that have been proposed and the Government is open to having those discussions, we will work through the parliamentary processes.

The CHAIR: You're open to an amendment that would ensure that landlords advertise when a property is not suitable for animals?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In short, if there are reasonable amendments and that doesn't alter the core principles and intentions of the legislation, then the Government's always open to them, to having those discussions. Whether we agree with them, of course, they're just discussions we'll continue to have. Whether the Parliament agrees with them as well is something that is a matter for the Parliament itself.

The CHAIR: When you talk about the core purpose of the legislation, would you say that one of the core purposes of the legislation is to make it easier for tenants to be able to rent properties with animals?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, the legislation that was passed and the regulations that are currently in force do clarify the rules about when a tenant and a property owner can also discuss about having pets in rentals. I think it's a move forward. We'll continue to monitor its implementation to ensure it works as intended and, going forward, if there are issues that arise or particular themes that perhaps weren't foreseen in the development of the legislation, then we will always be open to consider those things.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Thank you, Minister, and the other witnesses here today. If I can take you to wearing your Corrections hat. Did you see the Premier in his estimates with Jeremy Buckingham last Wednesday with regard to this set of pictures: a sketch of a person of interest at the Wanda Beach murder case from 11 January 1965 and a picture of Ivan Milat?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I haven't. I saw snippets of the actual hearing of the Premier with Mr Buckingham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I wanted to take you to a series of questions about Ivan Milat, given he was a long-time inmate of the corrections system in New South Wales and died in Long Bay jail in 2019. For many months either side of 11 January 1965—the day of infamy at Wanda Beach—Milat was in the Penrith prison. I think it's now the Emu Plains Correctional Centre. It was depicted to the Premier, as he took amazing interest in this matter, that the centre at Penrith at that time was a holiday camp. Was that true?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That also well precedes my time. I might have to ask the department to provide further information on the use of that facility but, at the moment, it is the Emu Plains Correctional Centre.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What was the status of this Penrith facility in 1965, given Milat was in there? The inference from Buckingham has been it was a holiday camp, a walk-in walk-out facility. Is that right?

GARY McCAHON: I'll have to take that on notice to look back in the facility and the operations of the facility back—

CORRECTED

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Generally, would you agree that in the 1960s internment and incarceration standards at these facilities were a fair bit tougher than they are today?

GARY McCANHON: I think the facilities have changed significantly since 1965, but I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, are you surprised the Premier entertained this stuff given that, obviously, once Milat was done for the Belanglo murders, the police professionals in New South Wales would've worked backwards in his chronology every single step of the way? You would have known Superintendent Clive Small, wouldn't you, from Campbelltown?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I remember Superintendent Clive Small. Certainly, I think he was quite the commentator during that particular period. I think he might have been based around—I think he did a book as well.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: He broke the case about Belanglo, and Clive Small enjoyed publicity as much as Gary Jubelin.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think he wrote a book as well. Is that right?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes. Very high profile. Do you think, if Clive Small had evidence that Milat was involved in the Wanda Beach murders, that he would've kept that secret?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have to take that on notice, Mr Latham. I'm not too well-versed in that particular—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware that, as the Premier entertained this stuff—to the amazement of many—Jeremy Buckingham has told MLCs that he first had the theory of missing persons on the North Coast associated with Milat because he dreamt it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've read about the running commentary and the interest that Mr Buckingham has had in the Milat case.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did you know that this originated because his dreamt it one night, and your Premier took it seriously at budget estimates?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think questions and answers from the Premier are a matter for the Premier.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But are you surprised, as the corrections Minister, that this could possibly be the case? Could you imagine Neville Wran or Bob Carr taking a proposition that someone dreamt seriously for a criminal matter in New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the answers from the Premier are a matter for the Premier, Mr Latham. But certainly I read some of the headlines and the commentary from Mr Buckingham's interest in Mr Milat.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You have? That's good. Would you be aware that when Buckingham says "Milat and associates" he's referring to John Marsden?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm not aware of that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware that Buckingham has told MLCs he believes John Marsden to still be alive?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Everybody knows that Mr Marsden has passed away.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did you attend his funeral in 2006 as a Campbelltown councillor to that large gathering in the Catholic church in Campbelltown?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm not sure, but I do remember going to the event at the wake, I think. I'm not sure. I can't recall whether I went to the church, but I remember the wake.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You went to the wake. But what do you think of the Buckingham proposition that in front of Gough Whitlam, Michael Knight and other civic leaders, possibly including yourself, perhaps even Peter Primrose, the box at the front was empty?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I can't recall that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's an act of insanity, isn't it, for your Premier to be entertaining this at budget estimates on a Wednesday?

CORRECTED

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: I'm reluctant to interrupt the line of questioning, Chair, but I do question whether it is a line of questioning that's relevant under the terms of reference with respect to the estimates of expenditure from the Consolidated Fund.

The CHAIR: I think he's straying a little bit off course in regards to the Minister's portfolios and the work there. I direct the member back to the leave of the question.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Chair, the relevance to expenditure is that the Premier has entertained a parliamentary inquiry into this matter—to the surprise of many—which would draw on records from the Corrections service as to the many, many incarcerations of Ivan Milat. They'd be doing a lot of research on behalf of this theory.

The CHAIR: I think those questions are fine, but you were starting to talk about Minister Chanthivong's position on Mr Primrose and other people.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, sure. In all the research that Corrections would be doing, Minister, the Buckingham theory is that John Marsden as the solicitor temporarily for Ivan Milat assisted him in this murderous spree around New South Wales. How do you respond to that proposition?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The proposition of what?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That John Marsden actively assisted Ivan Milat.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: Again, not wishing to interfere with the honourable member's time, but this is seeking a legal opinion from the Minister and I think that's inappropriate.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: The Premier entertained legal opinions the other day, and everyone was happy with it.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That's up to them.

The CHAIR: That's up to the Premier. I direct the member to continue his questions but to be mindful of the parameters of budget estimates.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Thank you, Chair. Minister, in knowing John Marsden, were you aware of his role on the police board?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Of whose role, sorry?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: John Marsden's role on the police board.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I'm not aware of that, Mr Latham, and it's beyond my portfolio responsibilities.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But in Campbelltown everyone knew John Marsden, didn't they?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Marsden family is a well-known family within the Campbelltown community.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Do you have any response to the theory that on the police board Marsden ran cover for this mass murderer Milat?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I don't have an opinion or any well-versed information.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Do you think a parliamentary inquiry into this is justified, using the resources of—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's a matter for the Parliament to determine and not a matter for me.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You wouldn't rule that out? You're like the Premier, are you? You think this has some—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, answers from the Premier are a matter for the Premier and the parliamentary inquiry is a matter for the Parliament to determine.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But you can confirm that, to the best of your knowledge, having gone to the wake, John Marsden died in 2006?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The what, sorry?

CORRECTED

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To the best of your knowledge, having been to the wake, John Marsden died in 2006.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think that's a matter of fact.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you also aware that Milat ultimately sacked John Marsden as his solicitor? When Milat was done for Belanglo, Marsden told him to plead guilty and Milat got rid of him at that point. Wouldn't you think Milat, having sacked his solicitor, at that point could've done a plea bargain that lagged in Marsden if he had any role to try and reduce his sentence?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think these are legal matters between a client and their lawyer. It's really beyond my responsibilities as a Minister of any of these portfolios, so I really can't comment.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware that in the upper House Jeremy Buckingham sought the Franca Arena papers for evidence of John Marsden's involvement with Ivan Milat? Have you inspected any of those papers?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, I'm not aware of those.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Those papers belong in a nuthouse, don't they, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, that's beyond my portfolio.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Will you check the prison records at Penrith regarding his incarceration during the period of the Wanda Beach murders? Could you give us on notice a full list of all the incarcerations of Milat, which I'm sure will rule out a large number of these allegations that have been made by our answer to Patrick Bateman?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think all requests for departmental information will go through the proper processes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: From a Campbelltown perspective, do you think the Marsden family deserve this? They're having to relive an allegation that a man dead 19 years has been involved with this murderous animal Milat other than being his solicitor. Isn't this a complete betrayal of the Marsden family and their association and support for the Australian Labor Party going back to the election of Cliff Mallam in the seat of Campbelltown in 1971 and John Kerin in the seat of Macarthur in 1972? Has anyone in Campbelltown ever made this sort of heinous allegation against a good family?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Not that I'm aware of. But, as you and I both know, being from south-west Sydney, the Marsden family is held in the highest regard for their contributions socially and also through their firm.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So why would your Premier entertain a parliamentary inquiry to put them through hell?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: Again, my point of order goes to relevance. This inquiry is related to the estimates of expenditure from the Consolidated Fund and related budget papers. I just don't believe that question fits within the terms of reference of the inquiry.

The CHAIR: I think that the member has strayed in and out. Certainly in regards to areas of Corrections, I think it is fine to be questioning the Minister, and I think that the Minister has made it clear where he can and can't answer questions.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, do you get representations from families wanting to reopen cases?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I get representations from a range of constituents, and they will be properly assessed by the department.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To entertain this Milat stuff based on a dream based on the falsehood that John Marsden's still alive, wouldn't it be a cruel hoax to reopen this investigation into Milat through a parliamentary inquiry, a cruel hoax on the families to put them in the hands of our answer to Patrick Bateman?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think the parliamentary inquiry, as I said, is a matter for the Parliament. All correspondence received by the department will be assessed appropriately.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Good morning, Minister. Thank you for appearing and all the witnesses. Minister, when did you become aware of the Investment Delivery Authority as a policy?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Can I thank you for your question, Ms Munro. Can I firstly thank you for coming to Minister Graham's fashion launch strategy. I understand your faux fur stole jacket was a real hit amongst the attendees on that evening. In terms of the Investment Delivery Authority, as you know, it's a policy that the Premier and I and the Treasurer and the planning Minister launched a few months ago. It's about making sure that we can support significant investment in New South Wales.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I'm so sorry to do this already. You've commented on my fashion already, which is well outside the responsibilities of your portfolio, I would have thought. It's a specific question. I've read the media release. I'm just wondering when you became aware of the Investment Delivery Authority.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I've said, it has been a discussion amongst my colleagues for a while.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are we talking many months? When did you become aware of it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, these are Cabinet discussions that we've been having for some time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What was your specific involvement in developing the policy?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Investment Delivery Authority would obviously require the resources of Investment NSW, which reports to me.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes, so what was your specific involvement in developing the IDA?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, Investment NSW reports to me, and as one of the Ministers in the IDA, I will play my role there.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Were you involved as the Minister in developing the IDA as an idea and an authority?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. It's a combination between myself and other government departments and other Ministers.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When did those discussions begin with you?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, they are part of ongoing discussions with my Cabinet colleagues and I'm not at liberty to discuss Cabinet discussions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Were you aware of the IDA in April, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, these discussions have been happening for some time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So in April?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. These discussions have been happening for some time and will continue to evolve.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The Trade and Investment Strategy, which is presumably under your responsibility areas, was released earlier this year and it doesn't reference the Investment Delivery Authority. Why is that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Why does it need to?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I would've thought the Trade and Investment Strategy, which is your Government's, apparently, key policy to generate investment would've included the Investment Delivery Authority, which is designed to generate investment.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, it's a complementary policy to the Trade and Investment Strategy. It's one of the ways that we're delivering on that strategy.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Don't you think it's quite a huge omission that the Trade and Investment Strategy doesn't include reference to the Investment Delivery Authority?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What's the point of the strategy if people can't read it and understand how to engage with investment in this Government?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, as I said, the Trade and Investment Strategy, at its fundamental core, is about diversification into markets. We will always look at different ways to attract investment and grow our export base.

CORRECTED

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It actually includes reference to the Business Connect program, which your Government is cutting. What is the point of a document that doesn't have relevant information for investors and businesspeople about how they can make decisions as to where they want to invest?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, they can. The Trade and Investment Strategy makes it clear that it supports the industry policy, around which the Government has three core mission objectives: housing, local manufacturing and cleaner energy.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Does the industry strategy have reference to the Investment Delivery Authority?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Investment Delivery Authority was developed as one of the ways to attract further investment. It's a complementary policy to what's existing.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Were you aware of the Investment Delivery Authority when you released the Trade and Investment Strategy?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, these are discussions that the Government has been having for some time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But were you aware, Minister? I'm trying to ascertain how the Investment Delivery Authority didn't make its way into the Government's Trade and Investment Strategy. My fear is that you weren't actually involved at all in the Investment Delivery Authority discussions and the Premier and the Treasurer made this decision without your knowledge, and, therefore, the documents that you're responsible for don't include this apparently critical part of delivering investment.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think your fears are unfounded.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So why can't you explain when you first discussed the Investment Delivery Authority?

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: Ms Munro has asked the same question of the Minister on my count I think at least five times and the Minister has answered. May I suggest she be requested to move on.

The CHAIR: The question has been asked several times, although I think the member has been trying to get different information out of that question. I will not rule the member out of order at this point. However, I encourage the member to find a way to put the question and to then find a way to move on if she is still unable to get the answer she desires.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: At this stage, if you can't explain when you first learned about the policy, I can only assume it didn't make its way in here because you didn't know about it—if you can't explain otherwise why it wasn't included.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Your assumption is wrong.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Does every Minister have to agree on a project to be approved through the IDA? As in, when the IDA makes a recommendation to you, the planning Minister and the Treasurer, do any of those Ministers, including yourself, have a veto power over the approval of a project?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the structures and the decision-making of the IDA are a matter for Cabinet discussion.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you will take the proposals to Cabinet?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Submissions will be made to the IDA, they will be considered by the department and recommendations will be made to the Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But it says that the IDA will make recommendations to the Treasurer, the planning Minister and the Minister for Industry and Trade. So what happens then?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, once recommendations are made, they will be properly considered, and we'll go from there.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Does any Minister have a veto power over whether those proposals go to Cabinet?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We always have collegiate discussions at the IDA.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What are the assessment criteria for projects between yourself, the planning Minister and the Treasurer?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Those criteria are currently being finalised and they will go through a consultation process shortly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When will they be made public?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Shortly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are projects expected to have terms that include government expenditure?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: For the IDA?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: As in, the IDA will recommend projects and, presumably, there will be contract terms.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. The IDA is mainly a private-based investment proposal that's presented to the Government. It's about shepherding through the government departments to ensure that it gives a seamless experience for investors.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Your media release says that the IDA will be able to "offer government assistance to support a proponent if their project is chosen". Are you saying that will never include financial assistance?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, it depends on the proposal. Those are still being developed and we'll consider it appropriately.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So there may be financial assistance granted or there may be some budgetary impact to the proposals that are approved?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. Those processes are currently being finalised and further announcements will be made at the appropriate time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You say these will go to Cabinet. Presumably that implies that there is some budgetary impact.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, not necessarily.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: If there was to be a budgetary impact on projects, where would that money come from?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's a hypothetical. I can't debate hypotheticals. All proposals through the IDA will be assessed appropriately.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So I'm guessing no projects have been recommended to you by the IDA, just to be clear?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: At the moment it's still being finalised, and further announcements will be made at the appropriate time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The media release says that the IDA is expected to generate \$50 billion worth of investment every year, but in the Trade and Investment Strategy the foreign direct investment target over 10 years is just \$25 billion. How does that work together?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the IDA is one of the mechanisms we're using to try to attract investment into New South Wales. The Trade and Investment Strategy has a 10-year target of attracting investment, and the more investment the better.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sure, but if your strategy doesn't reflect your Government's policies, what is the usefulness of the strategy as a guiding document?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The strategy makes it very clear that the Government is not only seeking to restructure the economy, given the fact that coal will continue to decline and we're looking to diversify our economy into different markets and different products. It's a good thing that we have clear signals to the market and internally about where we want to go.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The whole problem is that there aren't clear signals because some policies seem to not relate at all to the strategies that your Government has released, and that you've released as Minister. That's the lack of clarity that I'm referring to.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, that's an assessment I obviously don't agree with.

CORRECTED

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Will you change the Trade and Investment Strategy to reflect your Government's policies and increase your goal for foreign direct investment, which is half the level of the last five years in twice the time?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You're not going to change the strategy to reflect your Government's policy?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. The strategy is being implemented as we speak. I think it makes very clear the targets we've set around our export base, our diversification and getting into different markets and different products.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, have you been reading and listening to the media about the Wynyard Sydney Startup Hub and the consternation about the lack of information on facilities at Tech Central?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government made the right decision late last year regarding the Wynyard Sydney Startup Hub.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not asking if it's the right decision. I'm asking if you have looked at media reports about the decision.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. I've seen some commentary around it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you met with any of the people or organisations who have raised their concerns in public?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the Government made the decision. Communication of the management of the process is currently being managed. Yes, I've seen some of the media reporting that has been made.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you haven't met with any of the people or organisations that have raised public concerns?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the Government, through the department, has been working closely with the anchor tenants, through Stone & Chalk, and Fishburners, as they connect with their subtenants.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's interesting you raise that. Media reports have stated you haven't responded to detailed questions that have been raised. You also said in an email to shadow Minister Coure and myself in July that anchor tenants support the move, as well as other key stakeholders. But this isn't actually true, is it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, it's totally true. The Government made the decision to wind up the Sydney Startup Hub based on the fact that the contract that was signed by the former Government was so bad that it needed to be totally revamped.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm actually not talking about that. I'm talking about the truth of what people think about how the move has been handled in addition to the decision to close it. Bradley Delamare, the CEO of Tank Stream Labs, which is an anchor tenant, said, "Demand down that end of town is a fraction of our demand for the Sydney CBD." They've decided not to move to Tech Central at all, so it's hard to see how they support the move. Mike Abbott, a partner at venture capital firm Antler, which is also a tenant, said that he hasn't been able to find a space big enough at Tech Central. He said, "Sydney Startup is where the magic happens. You can't replicate that community in scattered locations."

Majella Campbell, the Fishburners CEO, has said, "Without a clear and structured transition, the Government risks creating a serious gap in infrastructure. It is my sincere hope the Government rises to the challenge." There are many more. Even Chris Kirk, the CEO of Stone & Chalk, who has said he notionally agrees with the move—and, obviously, they've benefitted from having a scale-up hub in Tech Central—has said, "It's actually really hard to understand. What is Tech Central? Where is it? Who's in? What are the options? How do I get in?" These are all public comments. How can you possibly claim that anchor tenants support this move, and your Government's handling of it, when you hear those comments?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: One, the Sydney Startup Hub is no longer commercially viable. The anchor tenants can't get enough paying subtenants to the facility.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's not my question, Minister. My question is your handling of this whole situation, which is leaving startups and founders totally dispersed.

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The communication process with the anchor tenants has been happening since late last year. The Government has made a very clear decision in winding the Sydney Startup Hub, given its non-commercially viable nature. The management process of the relocation of tenants is something that I've tasked Investment NSW to manage.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you happy with how that's going?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly all support will be provided to those who are seeking to relocate. Not all—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm just telling you that it's not happening, so are you comfortable with the way it's happening? You've suggested that founders sign up to an e-newsletter to find out what the literal future of their own businesses holds.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government has tasked Investment NSW to manage this process. If there are minor—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you're the Minister. Are you comfortable with how this is happening?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think the communication process with the anchor tenants and subtenants has been happening for quite some time. The decision has always been based on the feedback from the anchor tenants and the fact that this is no longer commercially viable. It is the right decision for the sector.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, given what I've just said, will you commit to a public briefing with the sector?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll consider all requests as presented to me.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My request to you is: Will you commit? Can you please hold a public hearing, in person and online, where people can ask you exactly what your Government has in store?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I'm not going to make those, because there's no need to. Because, one—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Why not? No, there is a need to. I'm letting you know from stakeholders that there is a need to.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government has made a decision, which is the right decision, on the closing of the Sydney Startup Hub. It is in the best interests of taxpayers. It's in the best interests of the sector. For those who are wishing to relocate, then support will be provided.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But it's not being provided, Minister. Could you tell me what support has been provided?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: If there are minor instances where perhaps that level of commitment has not been, for instance—it's not ideal—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: These are the anchor tenants that you referred to, saying that all the anchor tenants support this move.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, Investment NSW will provide the appropriate support for those who are seeking to relocate. If there are instances where that might—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But I'm—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: I would just ask if the witness could be allowed to answer the question in a more fulsome way than what he's been permitted to, because that would be courteous to the witness under paragraph 19 of the procedural fairness resolution.

The CHAIR: I uphold that point of order. There has been a bit too much jumping in in that particular section.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Finally, Minister, I'm asking you on behalf of the startup sector and founders in New South Wales to commit to holding a public hearing where people can ask you and Investment NSW questions, so that they know what's coming and what's happening, from you as the Minister responsible. Will you do that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Stone & Chalk support the move. As to the anchor tenants, the Government, through Investment NSW, has tasked its department to provide ongoing support and advice for those who seek to relocate.

CORRECTED

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, earlier this year Investment NSW hosted the trade and international directors from its global network for an intensive week-long program in Sydney. Did you attend?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How much did this cost per attendee?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Per attendee, I don't know, but I understand that it's a great way to bring all our investment directors together, because some of these meetings you can't do online. It's important to share the ideas and share some of the challenges. In terms of the exact cost, I'll defer to the deputy secretary.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We'll just take that on notice or I can raise that later today, thank you. Can you or someone please tell me why this post from Investment NSW on LinkedIn was deleted? If I can ask the secretariat to share this. We don't have much time but I'll just let you know it's been deleted. Rebecca Ball is pictured in that post. What is her role at Investment NSW?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: All arrangements with employees regarding Investment NSW is a matter for the deputy secretary, so I might defer to the deputy secretary to make those comments.

REBECCA McPHEE: Thank you, Minister. Rebecca Ball was offered and had accepted the post of trade and investment commissioner for South-East Asia. She commenced for a week to attend that international week but, unfortunately, prior to her formal start date, she has withdrawn from the role for personal reasons. We are recruiting for the trade and investment commissioner again at this moment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, how many New South Wales trade commissioner positions remain vacant across the six priority markets?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, all employee arrangements for trade and investment commissioners are a matter for the deputy secretary. But I understand that it's only the South-East Asia one that's currently being recruited. Is that correct?

REBECCA McPHEE: No. We're currently recruiting for the Greater China and South-East Asia trade and investment commissioner roles.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: But somebody is in their role.

REBECCA McPHEE: We're also in the recruitment for an associate director for the London and Europe office.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How long have these been vacant?

REBECCA McPHEE: I'll have to take that question on notice, thank you. Sorry—the trade and investment commissioner roles have been vacant since April. I'll have to take on notice the other role.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, have you heard of Fraser Institute's annual survey of mining companies?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, that doesn't ring a bell.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The most recent report for 2024 was released in July. It says that New South Wales has fallen from twenty-seventh out of 77 worldwide jurisdictions in 2020 to sixty-second in 2024. That means that we rank only ahead of Victoria and Tasmania for attractiveness to mining investment. Does that concern you?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, all mining-related matters are best answered by Minister Houssos. But in terms of—that's why we'll continue to implement the IDA and our trade investment strategy to attract investment to the New South Wales economy.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are mining projects included in the Investment Delivery Authority's purview?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Those discussions are currently being finalised and an announcement will be made shortly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you don't know if there will be restrictions on sectors for the IDA?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, those criteria around the IDA are currently being finalised. We'll be consulting with the sector and it will be announced shortly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you involved in those discussions? What's your role, as Minister for Industry and Trade, in the IDA's development?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, my role is to be on the IDA with my other two ministerial colleagues and to—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But it's not the IDA. You're a part of the group that the IDA reports to.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Of course I'm totally involved. That's why I'm me.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you haven't been able to answer basic questions about how the IDA policy was developed. When you say "of course" you were there, why should I believe that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Because it's the truth.

The CHAIR: Ms Cate Faehrmann, you have 10 minutes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, the draft building bill, or just the building bill, the building reform package—when is that going to come to Parliament?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We're currently finalising the consultation. As you would be well aware, late last year stakeholders requested an extension and we received a number of submissions. We've gone through those submissions and are trying to finalise the bill.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So the consultation with those stakeholders was last year, the formal consultation period?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That wasn't public. Is this building bill, the package, going to be made public for public consultation before its introduced to Parliament?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Usually in the development of all our legislation, we always go through targeted consultation with the sector at the appropriate time.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I asked about public consultation, Minister, not targeted consultation with the sector.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, we'll go through the consultation process once the bill is finalised. If it's required to go through a broad public consultation, then that can well be considered.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: When you say "if it's required", what does that mean? It's the Government's call in terms of whether bills like this go public. Is there a reason this bill has been so tightly held and not made public at this point?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Because it's going through the finalisation process as we're trying to develop the bill. It's a significant piece of reform. We've had feedback from a range of stakeholders with varying views. We're just trying to find a balance and what would be balanced for the sector.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In terms of it being a significant bill, that's true. Why have you as the Minister refused to provide the Public Accountability and Works Committee with a draft copy of that bill?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The draft bill has to go through Cabinet first. Once that's finalised, it will go through the consultation process.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: No. You've already gone through the consultation process. Initially, the letter that you sent to the Public Accountability and Works Committee—this was from 30 November last year to the chair—said, "Consultation on the draft legislation commenced on 16 August last year and concluded on 18 October 2024." The Public Accountability and Works Committee is undertaking an inquiry into that legislation. It agreed to publish those submissions, despite the fact that you wanted them kept confidential. You sent them to the committee, yet you have refused to release the bill to the upper House committee to undertake its work to look into both the Design and Building Practitioners Bill and the residential apartment buildings bill, which is its legislative requirement to do, knowing that there is this reform in place. What is the Government's reason—your reason—to not release the draft bill, that 100 stakeholders have seen, to the committee?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the bill is still being finalised. Once that has been finalised, appropriate consultation will take place.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: One hundred stakeholders have seen that bill, are appearing before the inquiry and talking to us about the bill, and we have to state this embarrassing thing that the Minister hasn't given the committee the bill. I know you're saying that you are finalising the bill, but why can't an upper House committee in this place undertake its inquiry with that bill in front of us so we can make recommendations about the bill? Why wouldn't you release it?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think the current PAWC committee that's doing the inquiry is obviously based on a bill that's not the Government's final bill. Once the final bill has been developed, we will go through the normal consultation process.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's the issue. Let's look at what the normal consultation process is, then. Once it has gone to Cabinet or something like that, that's the bill. You are aware of the statutory duty that was put into the Design and Building Practitioners Act for the Public Accountability Committee to review? It states:

- (b) to determine whether the policy objectives of the Act remain valid and whether the terms of the Act remain effective for securing those objectives

This bill, I understand—which I haven't seen—is replacing the Design and Building Practitioners Bill, isn't it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct. The bill that is being finalised will supersede what the PAWC inquiry is currently doing.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: For the committee to undertake its work to look at the policy objectives of the Act, don't we need to see whether the new building bill is incorporating those policy objectives of the Design and Building Practitioners Act so we have faith in the new bill?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, once the bill is finalised, the Government will make a decision on the consultation process, which will inevitably include members of Parliament.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: When you're saying a consultation process, do you mean an open consultation process with many weeks—say, a minimum six-week public consultation process and being able to examine all the feedback? Will it be a genuine consultation process, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government always takes sincere consultation processes with the sector, with industry and with the general public. We will make those decisions once the bill is finalised.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So you are going to do consultation on a final bill?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We always do consultation sincerely with the sector with all of our bills.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you worried at this stage about the Legislative Council blocking that bill? Don't you want to bring us on board, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Absolutely, I want to bring you on board. We will continue to engage with members of Parliament, as we always do and as we always have. Once that legislation is finalised, we will engage with the sector and members of Parliament.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is that a public consultation period?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: For the new bill?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, once the Government makes a decision on the new bill, we will also consider the consultation process. That decision hasn't been made yet.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You're not committing at this point to having a genuine public consultation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it also depends on—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Even Urban Taskforce—probably the biggest supporter of this change—has said that a change of such significance should go to public consultation. You won't even commit to that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the Government will make those decisions at the appropriate time once the bill is finalised. Part of that will be ongoing consultation with the sector.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Where is it up to? When can we expect it to be finalised?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the Government is considering all the feedback that we've got. I also make the point, Ms Faehrmann, that the stakeholders and the industry in particular have asked us to slow down on the reform process. We are taking those comments into account as well.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Maybe that means that at a certain point there will be another inquiry as a result, in terms of dragging it out even further. You are aware that not giving the committee the bill at this point in time probably ensures that the whole reform process is going to be delayed? It is of such significant concern

CORRECTED

that the ability and capacity of the Legislative Council to review the Design and Building Practitioners Act was put into the Act. To do its work properly, we will probably have to extend it out and examine that bill.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, the work of the Legislative Council is a matter for the LC. If the LC wishes to do an inquiry, that's a matter for the members of the Legislative Council.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: When can we expect the bill, again?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We are going through the stages of finalisation and consultation with the sector.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That has been going on for a year.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I mentioned, a number of our stakeholders—significant ones—have asked us to slow down the process. We will continue to engage with stakeholders to deliver a bill that works.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, last time in budget estimates I asked you whether you had seen the McGrathNicol report that was handed to Fair Trading. I think at the time you said you hadn't. Have you seen that yet?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Are you talking about Netstrata?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's right.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I have seen it.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Have you seen the full report or the summary?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I recall the report that was provided to me and I know that there is an ongoing investigation into Netstrata.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you able to ask any of your officials whether you were handed the full report or the summary?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I know I fully read the summary. I might defer to the Fair Trading Commissioner on Netstrata and whether a full report was provided. I can't recall. I know I read the summary of the findings and the analysis of that. I just can't recall.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Ms Mann, we spoke about this last time as well. Do you know what the Minister was handed?

NATASHA MANN: My recollection is that he was handed the findings of the McGrathNicol report and then a way forward from NSW Fair Trading.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So he got the sanitised version?

NATASHA MANN: It's not a sanitised version. The version that had all the commercial in confidence and things like that was not provided, to my recollection. We provided him with the findings and the pathway forward from a regulatory perspective.

The CHAIR: Minister, to round off some questions around the rental law changes, the changes to the law regarding animals in rentals commenced in May, and you talked about reviewing that. They passed about three months ago. Have you been briefed or updated at this point in relation to how those laws are running?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, it has only been a short few months. Certainly if there are significant issues that the new rental laws are experiencing, then I would expect the Rental Commissioner to brief me appropriately. At this stage, there hasn't been anything that has been experienced that would alter the intentions of the rental laws that are being enforced.

The CHAIR: Have you sought feedback from the commissioner in regard to how this new piece of legislation that's coming to the House to consider will interact with those laws that are already in place?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, of course. I always seek advice from the departmental officials on specific issues that they believe might be worthwhile for my attention.

The CHAIR: Within that, was there any indication around some of the concerns that I raised in the first part in regard to how this idea of tenants not actually putting that they have animals in their application could conflict with those previous laws that were passed?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think, certainly, the development of the current bill before the House would have taken into consideration the views of all stakeholders about any impact or any interaction with

CORRECTED

current legislation or legislation that has already been passed. Certainly if there were any issues that were experienced, then we would consider those things based on the advice the Rental Commissioner provides.

The CHAIR: Were there concerns raised to you in that process?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Not that I can recall specifically on that front. Certainly if issues do arise, then I would expect to be briefed appropriately.

The CHAIR: I will move on to some further questions around the building bill from Ms Cate Faehrmann. Minister, I spoke to you previously about concerns from interior designers specifically about the Government's proposed reforms. At the last estimates you told me that this work was still progressing and you would continue to engage with the Design Institute of Australia. Can you give me an update on what that consultation looks like and what consultation you have personally done with the Design Institute of Australia, given your previous commitment?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. Thank you very much. I know I've met with the interior designers association on a number of occasions. Certainly their views have been put forward around licensing as part of the building bill reforms. That was a consideration. However, in developing the building legislation, we've always taken a risk-based approach, where the licensing should really only be, I suppose, allocated to those professions that have a real structural risk to the building. The intention at this stage is to keep the current framework around interior designers to be the status quo.

The CHAIR: I've had a look at your meetings. I can't actually see any meeting with the Design Institute of Australia in your meeting disclosures for the year. When did you meet with them?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I can't recall when I met with them, but I'm always open to meet with the association. I know I have met with them.

The CHAIR: So you've met with them since the last budget estimates when you said that you'd meet with them, but it's not in your disclosures—is that what you're telling me?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I said all my meetings are disclosed appropriately, but I know I have met with the interior designers association. I can't recall the exact date, but that would have been disclosed appropriately.

The CHAIR: I'm talking about the Design Institute of Australia, which is the organisation which you committed in the last budget estimates to meet with to consult around this. There is nothing in the disclosures that you've met with them. Have you met with the Design Institute of Australia?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I can't recall whether a meeting request has been submitted to my office. If it has been, then we would certainly consider that meeting request.

The CHAIR: Have you directed your department or anybody that you're working with to meet with the Design Institute of Australia after the last budget estimates?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly. All meeting requests are considered. If the Design Institute wishes to meet with the department or myself, then I'm happy to consider that.

The CHAIR: I understand the Design Institute of Australia gave evidence before the Public Accountability and Works Committee last week. They seemed frustrated that the work to resolve the issues has been stalled and nobody seems to know when the New South Wales Government's legislation to resolve these issues is going to be brought forward. Can you shed some light on this? Is there a timeline for these reforms going forward?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We're going through the consultation process at the moment, Chair. There are certainly a variety of views that we're getting from all stakeholders. In general principle, we would want to get to the end of the reform as soon as possible, but there are also discussions that we've had and feedback that we get from stakeholders about the pace of the reforms or the breadth or the width of the reforms, and we want to take those considerations into account.

The CHAIR: I understand and respect that there is a process. I guess people are just asking: Is there a rough timeline? Are we going to see this legislation in the next couple of months, before the end of the year?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, in general principle, I'd want to do the reform as soon as possible, but we're also mindful of the feedback that we get from the sector. Once that has been finalised, the Government will make that announcement in due course. In short, I can't give you an exact timeline because we're still going through the consultation process and the feedback that we're getting.

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The CHAIR: Minister, your Government has acknowledged that addressing the housing crisis requires urgent action on adaptive re-use of existing buildings. Yet in New South Wales 8,309 qualified interior designers, 74 per cent of whom are women, are currently restricted from coordinating even the most simple modifications. How can you justify delaying addressing the barriers that interior designers are facing, especially during this cost-of-living crisis and this need for more housing?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The work on the interior designers—we are going through that. As I mentioned, the licensing approach about interior designers has always been based about risk-based, that is, if a profession has an influence on the structural safety of the building, then that's something we would consider licensing for. At this stage, interior designers are intended to be the status quo, as they are operating now. But I understand they also can operate on aspects that are actually not covered by the DBP.

The CHAIR: Yes, but that was always in place. The problem is that even very simple modifications are being excluded from actually being able to do that work. How can you justify that that is a risk issue when they can't even—we're talking about people with years of experience in this space that are already qualified. We've got over 8,000 people, the majority of which are women—qualified interior designers. They've worked in this space for a long period of time. They've got the same professional indemnity insurance as architects. How can we say that those 8,000 workers can't be involved in even very simple modifications that aren't a risk in those buildings when we've got housing that needs to be built?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As part of the skills challenges that we have in the housing sector, the Government is looking at ways to increase the supply of those professions in the housing sector to get more houses completed. The specific consultations with the interior designers or any other association—I might ask the Building Commissioner whether he can provide further light on discussions that we've had with this particular association.

The CHAIR: I will have some discussions this afternoon but, Minister, my question is really to you because, in September 2024 at the hearing, the Acting Building Commissioner was actually unable to provide any evidence of interior designers having caused structural or safety failures. Considering interior designers already carry equivalent professional indemnity insurance and they have decades of experience coordinating minor structural safety work, why have you continued to exclude them when there isn't any kind of safety risk that seems to be eminent, particularly during a situation where we need more housing?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In terms of the work of the interior designers or any other profession in the housing space, this will be part of the finalisation of the building bill once it is completed.

The CHAIR: Has there been any specific evidence-based assessments that have come to you and been briefed to you to justify the exclusion of interior designers?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, if there are issues that are of significance and importance, my expectation is that the Building Commissioner would brief me appropriately. In terms of that specific topic, I might ask the Building Commissioner if he can provide a bit more light—

The CHAIR: My question is whether you, Minister, have been briefed on anything. It sounds like you would expect to be briefed on it but you haven't been briefed on anything.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Absolutely. I would be expected to be briefed on all of the issues that any of my departmental officials believe are important for my knowledge.

The CHAIR: But, as far as you're aware, you haven't been briefed on any evidence that interior designers have ever caused any kind of safety issue?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Not that I can recall but, if it is a major issue and it's important for the Government's strategic objective to get more housing, then my expectation is that the Building Commissioner would bring that to my attention.

The CHAIR: With that in mind, given that you haven't been briefed on any evidenced assessments to justify the exclusion of interior designers, what is the justification to exclude them?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think this is about the consultation processes that we're finalising for the bill. We'll take those considerations into account from the interior designers association and other advocates for the profession.

The CHAIR: How does excluding a skilled workforce align with your stated housing crisis priorities, particularly around women's workforce participation goals?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly we don't want to exclude any profession that can help the New South Wales economy build more houses. As part of the finalisation of the building bill, we're always trying to make the approval and assessment process as seamless as possible but also balancing the need to ensure there is trust and confidence in the quality of construction happening in the residential sector in New South Wales.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might start with Corrections, if I may. Last time I asked how many employees or staff were suspended on full pay—I believe in September it was 82, from recollection. Has that number changed?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The latest number that I have of staff who have been suspended for misconduct is 72. Now, I understand that four of those are without pay so therefore 72 minus four would give me 68.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, can you confirm how many correctional centres across the State have had to implement full lockdowns in 2025 due to staff shortages?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll have to take that question on notice. But certainly, from the department's point of view, we try to maximise out-of-cell time for inmates as appropriate.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are you personally briefed then, Minister—you're taking that question on notice, I understand, but are you personally briefed when an entire centre or prison is placed on lockdown? Or do you classify that as operational and not on a need-to-know basis?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. As I said, my expectations from, whether it's Corrections or all my portfolios—if it's an issue of significance, then I would be expected to be briefed and provided information at the appropriate time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How do you determine what is significant?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's the department. My expectation is that if it is a significant, important issue, then I would expect to be briefed appropriately.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Just as one example, say Silverwater, having at least 10 separate whole-of-centre lockdowns in 2025. Would that be significant number for you to be briefed on?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: If the department believes it's important to come to my attention, then I expect to be briefed appropriately.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Why are you not asking your department? I would have thought, having—just one centre, we're talking about. I've got examples of other centres where they've had full lockdowns. It implicates or impacts not just the staff but also the inmates in those centres. For instance, in Silverwater, we have got mental health units where they are locked down on full day. How do you justify denying vulnerable mental health inmates access to therapeutic programs on days like this?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Firstly, in terms of lockdowns at all our centres, Corrections always intends to maximise out-of-cell time for our inmates. The second point that I would make is I'm advised the number of positions of correctional officers is not issue in itself; it is about staff absences. And staff absences is actually due to, mainly, workers compensation. That is why the Government is actually working to reform workers compensation, so that we can actually prevent more lockdowns, so that staff can get back to work as soon as possible.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just on what you consider significant, is a full lockdown significant? Is a partial lockdown significant?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The department will advise me. They do generally advise me about lockdowns at our correctional centres from time to time, when it's appropriate, and then the expectation is always to minimise those lockdowns.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you are the Minister responsible. Presumably, you have to also direct your staff to provide you with information that you want so you can make decisions. Do you consider a partial lockdown significant?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's circumstantial. Lockdowns are not the first point. They're not the preference. However, there are operational risk issues that result in lockdowns from actually eventuating in that sense.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you consider a partial or full lockdown significant enough for you to be briefed? What do you expect of your staff?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I do get briefed on lockdowns from time to time. However, if there is a continuing issue that relates to lockdowns, this is mainly due to the fact that a number of staff are on workers compensation. That is why the Government's reforms on workers compensation are important. So I really—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not asking about workers compensation.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: But they're interrelated.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm just trying to understand if you're being briefed on lockdowns or not.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It doesn't appear so.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Of course I get briefed on lockdowns. I've mentioned that. Ms MacDonald, going back to your first question, I misspoke. I understand it is six employees who were actually suspended without pay and not four. I said four, but I thought it was six—just to correct the record.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On the issue of whether it is partial or full lockdowns, does your department conduct any analysis on the correlation between, say, increases in self-harm or staff assaults on—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: They're operational matters. I might ask the commissioner or Mr Deputy Commissioner.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, why is it an operational matter? You are the Minister responsible, are you not?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. These are operational matters on a range of factors why lockdowns actually happen, whether in part or in full. It's mainly on the principle of safety and risk to staff and to inmates.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I understand that, Minister. But what I'm asking now is if you look beyond that. Are you looking at the impacts that this is having on not only your staff but on the inmates that are in those centres, who are being denied programs?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, of course. If there is a thematic issue that's happening at all of the lockdowns, then I would expect the department to brief me appropriately and also—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But have you been briefed at all on any of this?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I said—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes or no, Minister. Have you been briefed at all on any of the lockdowns, whether they're partial or full?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The department always does advise me about lockdowns when they occur.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But have they in 2025? We're talking about over 10 days of separate, whole-centre lockdowns, and you are saying that you have not been briefed. I'm talking 10, probably more.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: I'm extremely reluctant to call a point of order on my colleague, but she was not allowing the Minister to answer and, indeed, had reiterated the same question multiple times, with the same answer, which is contrary to the courtesy principles.

The CHAIR: I ask the member just to allow the Minister to answer. She can rephrase the question if she doesn't feel that she has got the answer that she wants.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If he is unable to provide an answer, I will move on to the next one, to do with, again, in-centre lockdowns and partial lockdowns. In some of those centres or prisons, we have mental health units and support services. Minister, when the Mental Health Screening Unit and the step-down unit are locked down—these are essential services—psychiatric care, therapeutic intervention and assessments are cancelled. Do you know how many service hours have been lost this year due to lockdowns?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That is a very specific question. I am happy to take that on notice, or I can ask the commissioner to further provide advice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is there a strategy, then, to replace or to prioritise mental health and therapeutic units so that they are the last unit to be locked down?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: All lockdowns are operational matters done by the department. Certainly, the work of Justice Health, which—I also might add all health services at our facilities are actually run

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by the department of health, working closely in collaboration with Corrections. So the resourcing and the administration of those are actually with the department of health.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might ask in the afternoon session, since they're operational matters. I might ask the staff in the afternoon session, if that is all right. I will move on now. What is the maximum number of remand places in the New South Wales correctional system?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The correctional facilities have a maximum bed capacity of about 15,475, if I'm not mistaken.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Of that, how many are set aside for remand?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think I might defer that to the commissioner.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you not know?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We have about 43 per cent of inmates that are currently on remand, and they are allocated according to risk. Certainly, in specific, I will ask the commissioner to further elaborate.

GARY McCAGON: Before I hand over to Deputy Taylor, I have been advised that the remand population in New South Wales has risen significantly in the last 12 months, making up approximately 44 per cent of our current population. In October 2023 the remand population was just over 4,800 inmates, and in June 2025 that number has risen by approximately 1,000, which is now almost around 5,800 inmates on remand.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's a 59 per cent increase in 10 years. I'll go back to the Minister. Have your Government's bail laws contributed to this blowout in remand numbers?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government will always keep our community safe, and we will have tough bail laws to keep our community safe. Corrections doesn't determine the number of inmates that come into our facility. That is a matter for the court. But the Government will not take a backward step when it comes to keeping our community safe.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What is the annual budgeted cost of housing almost 6,000 people on remand?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The budget for Corrections is about \$2.4 billion annually, and that includes for both centres and remand inmates and the operations of the department.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But you don't have a separate allocated item for those on remand?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think our budgets are allocated according to the need.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How much does it cost the people of New South Wales for each person on remand?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am advised that inmates cost—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: My question was how much does it cost the people of New South Wales—that is, taxpayers—for each prisoner on remand?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Whether you are on remand or a sentenced inmate, the average cost for having an inmate in our facilities is about \$110,000 a year. If an inmate is there for a year, then that would be the approximate cost.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: And that is whether they are on remand or sentenced.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it is just by unit for an inmate for an annual cost to the system.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I did note, in your budget allocation, \$100.5 million for Communities and Justice on 2 June to address rising demand in correctional system. Do you think that is enough to meet projected need?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly the increase in the budget reflects the increasing demand on the corrective services system, and appropriate resources will be allocated as needs arise.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How much of this is earmarked for actually building more prison beds as opposed to rehabilitation or diversion programs?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, they're capital expenditures. I'm happy to defer to the commissioner on the budget deployment.

CORRECTED

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll ask that this afternoon, then. Is it correct that remand prisoners have virtually no access to rehabilitation drug and alcohol programs, and they're just simply locked in their cells, awaiting trial?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, that's not correct.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What do they have access to, then, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Each inmate that is sent to remand is clinically assessed, ensuring their safety, whether they need any further service or support, whether it's through Justice Health, and also about programs, depending on their offence.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How long would you say is the median time that a person on remand is held in custody?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'd have to take that on notice. That is depending on the courts and when their trial can be actually set up.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: BOCSAR would say that it's over 930 days if it's the Supreme Court, and 560 days in the District Court. Do you think it's acceptable that people are held without being sentenced for 18 months to three years, without being convicted?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The tenure of remandees in a correctional sense is a matter for the Attorney General, and it's a matter for the courts. It's not a matter for the Minister for Corrections.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But you're the one that's footing the bill.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, they're matters for the courts. Inmates that are sent or offenders who are sent to corrections will be managed appropriately, according to the circumstances.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, of those that are on remand, we have to remember that some of those, when they finally do have their day in court, are not sentenced; they're actually deemed innocent. Do you know how many are held when they're later found not guilty of charges?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's beyond my portfolio. That's a matter for the courts in terms of an alleged offender's trial and their subsequent conviction or non-conviction.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How do you justify imprisoning innocent people at the expense of the taxpayer?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, Corrections does not determine alleged offenders as they come into the system. That's a matter for the courts. Those who are sent to our facilities will be managed and risk-allocated appropriately.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll move on to electronic monitoring. Knowing that your Government recently introduced legislation to prohibit private provision of electronic monitoring, do you think this decision will result in more people awaiting trial being held in correctional centres on remand?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Regarding bail, I gather you're referring to Bail Safe and the private electronic monitoring. Is that correct?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's a matter for the Attorney General, not a matter for the Minister for Corrections.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But have you done any figures on, if they no longer have that ability to be on bail, what that would mean to the remand population?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Those vendors who are on Bail Safe, the private electronic monitoring, they have to go before a magistrate, and the magistrate will determine whether those inmates will have other conditions on their bail conditions or they're actually sent into custody.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is this being included in the extra \$100.5 million that you've put aside in your budget?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, we'll continue to make sure our resources are adequate.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What is your current policy for classification and placement of transgender and intersex inmates?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: All inmates are risk-allocated appropriately. All risk allocations and assessments are actually a matter for the commissioner, who will delegate to his appropriate officers.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What is the current policy, though, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The current policy is that all transgender inmates will be allocated according to their biological gender. Currently all inmates of that nature are allocated and housed in that fashion, and then there will be a further assessment on a case-by-case basis.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are you aware that the website states that the policy and procedures manual is currently under review?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The which, sorry? I missed that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The website that has the custodial operations policy and procedures—if you go on to that website, it says that the policy for transgender and intersex inmates is currently under review.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The former policy was out of date. It is currently being updated to reflect the Government's policy position on this issue.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What is the current policy? If you refer to it now, you'll just get, "It's under review."

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've just said what our current policy is: Transgender inmates, at first instance, will be allocated according to their biological gender. Any other further submissions or cases will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. That's essentially the policy that is being updated and will be uploaded at the appropriate time.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I wanted to move to DCJ. It's about the safer men, safer families program. Are you aware of that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: All programs have administration in their programs. It's a matter for the secretary. I might ask the secretary if he has further information on this particular program.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might ask in the afternoon, if that's okay. I now turn to the Junee Correctional Centre. Can you provide the current staff to inmate ratio at the Junee Correctional Centre?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll take that on notice because it's a very specific number. All our frontline officers who were employed prior to coming into Corrections were offered positions. I understand that the vast majority have taken up that offer.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What is the department's benchmark or standard for safe staff to inmate ratios?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's about keeping the facility and the inmates safe. In terms of the operational specifics, I might ask the commissioner if he has any further information on that front.

GARY McCAHON: Thank you, Minister. Thank you for the question. We do not have a ratio in relation to the inmate numbers. We manage the inmates and the circumstances of their behaviour in relation to risks. We ensure that there's sufficient staff to manage that risk, wherever that is throughout the facility.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So you don't have a ratio. How many inmates are currently housed at the Junee Correctional Centre?

GARY McCAHON: I don't have that information. I might hand over to Mr Taylor. Mr Taylor will be able to provide that information in detail.

LEON TAYLOR: Good morning. It's 676, as of midnight last night, at Junee Correctional Centre.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, with this building bill, what expectation do you have that it will lower the cost of building in New South Wales for easing the housing affordability crisis?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, Mr Latham, our building bill is not aimed at increasing the cost for the sector. It's aimed at improving efficiency and reducing costs where we can, but also maintaining that level of trust and confidence. People need to be assured that the dwelling that they're buying or investing in is built to a high quality.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When you say "decreasing costs wherever you can", what do you mean by that?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It could be a case of having faster approval, faster assessments and the licensing regimes. They're things that have been considered as part of the building reforms bill.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What about the actual onsite costs to builders?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What aspect of the onsite costs?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: The cost of materials, the cost of certification and the cost of trades.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certification is certainly where the building bill can work towards improving that. But in terms of the cost of materials, that's obviously beyond the control of government to determine the price of all materials that go into the construction phase.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Would you describe a primary objective of the bill as being to lower the cost of building in New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Where the building legislation is responsible for it. We all know that the residential construction sector has experienced significant cost headwinds. They're mainly due to financing, skill shortage and material costs.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware of feedback from medium-sized builders in New South Wales that compliance costs with old mate the Building Commissioner, particularly on detached housing construction—there's one example of having to put five extra staff on at \$100,000. It's half a million dollars extra per year because of this. Can't we get rid of that to assist with housing affordability?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government will always consider ways to improve housing affordability. That's why the work of the building bill is aimed at improving efficiency and trying to reduce the costs where we can. That's related to the Building portfolio. Some of these costs are actually beyond my portfolio.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: They're beyond affordability too.

The CHAIR: We now go to questions from the Government.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: No questions. We're very happy with the Minister's responses.

The CHAIR: In that case, we now go to a morning tea break. We will be back at 11.15 a.m. I ask everyone in the gallery to leave as quickly as possible because Committee members need to stay back for a quick deliberative meeting.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Thank you and welcome back. I will pass to Ms Sue Higginson for five minutes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, when do the contracts for services providing telecommunications with ViaPath and Telstra run out, and will these contracts be renewed or some other process?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Are you referring to the cost of phone calls for inmates? Is that where we're going?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm happy to discuss that, but if you could just answer the question, I'd be grateful.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: All contractual arrangements with any service provider is a matter for the commissioner and the department. I'm happy to ask the commissioner to provide further details on this particular contract.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I can come back to the commissioner. So you're not aware at this point when those—it's not a trick question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Specifically, no.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Okay.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Specifically, I don't know, but all contractual matters appropriately should be managed by the department and not by myself.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Did Corrective Services agree for domestic violence counselling through external services, and do the tablets provide for those?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Tablets are available to inmates. In terms of specific domestic violence counselling services, I do know we run a number—or corrections runs a number of programs as part of

CORRECTED

the rehabilitation for inmates. But in terms of that specific program, would you like me to ask the commissioner to elaborate?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I will go to the commissioner later, if that's okay. I'll come back this afternoon. Minister, do you think 15 minutes is enough to relay the details of an incident of sexual assault?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think those allegations are very serious. Any ones that are made should be appropriately managed, and time should be taken.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is 15 minutes enough?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: If more is needed, more should be provided, I suppose is what I would say because these are very serious allegations.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So why is the sexual misconduct reporting line currently capped at 15 minutes?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the sexual misconduct reporting line is available for inmates to make allegations of that nature.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Why is it capped at 15 minutes, do you think?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think they're operational matters. I can ask the commissioner to provide further details, but if an inmate—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It was in response to the special commission.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'll go to the commissioner later. Do you have a view on that, though? Do you think if there is a case to extend it, it should be extended?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly. These are very serious allegations. It's part of the rollout of the Astill inquiry's reforms. The SMRL has been established. It has been established since late December 2023. Certainly, Ms Higginson, if changes are needed to respond to the serious allegations of this nature, of course we'd consider them.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, there was an article in *The Daily Telegraph* that suggested that someone in Corrective Services or a number of people in Corrective Services have grave concerns because "baby killer" Keli Lane has been granted day release telephone—a phone. How has this happened? How are people out there saying things, as Corrective Services NSW staff, saying such false things about Keli Lane and putting these opinions into a rag like *The Daily Telegraph* about Keli Lane?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: First of all, obviously, I can't control every comment that is made that is not my own. The second point, I would just say that regarding Ms Lane—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have you asked who did it, who said it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. They're staffing matters, and they're best managed by the commissioner.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is it a staffing matter when it's actually in *The Daily Telegraph* about a woman who is currently being held as a political prisoner under a "no body, no parole" retrospective, cruel law that she simply can't satisfy, and has done her time, and now she's being vilified by people in *The Daily Telegraph*?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'd say regarding Ms Lane, I'm advised that there is a court case before involving Ms Lane. I'm reluctant to provide a running commentary on—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But what does a court case have to do with Corrective Services NSW people slandering, defaming and lying about her in the media in New South Wales? Surely that's a matter for you, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Regarding Ms Lane, I want to be very circumspect and sensitive to the court case that's currently before us. In terms of actions by corrections officers, that's a staffing management issue, and that's—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, will you undertake to do something to help this woman, please, who right now is actually being lied about and defamed in a newspaper circulating around this State?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think all matters regarding staff are matter for the commissioner. I am really reluctant—I want to be really circumspect about commentary about Ms Lane given there is a court case before us and I wouldn't want to jeopardise—

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: This has got nothing to do with a court case, Minister. This is about people telling lies that she has access to a phone, which she doesn't, and people lying that there's grave concerns about her. They are people that you're responsible for, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, Ms Higginson, you'd be well aware that, as part of the reforms that corrections is undertaking, all staffing misconduct matters now, major ones, will be investigated by the professional standards investigation branch which is now—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is this being investigated?

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: All allegations of staffing matters can be referred to the PSI for investigation and will be triaged appropriately.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The Hon. Rod Roberts.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Good morning, Minister. I want to take you to the Strata Schemes Management Act. As you know, I've got some interest in this. You and I have had a number of discussions over this. There's over a million lots in the strata schemes at the moment and, obviously, it's going to continue to grow. As you know, it's compulsory for owners corporations to have a 10-year capital works fund plan, but there are owners that have reasons for not wanting to grow the capital works fund plan—budgetary reasons, perhaps. Does Fair Trading have any plans to recommend a change to the Strata Schemes Management Act to make it compulsory for professional consultants to prepare a capital works fund plan?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Our reforms are ongoing, Mr Roberts. As Committee members are well aware, the Government has made significant inroads into strata reform. We've done three tranches and we're currently consulting on another tranche, and also work is being done regarding the strata commission. This specific suggestion that you're making, that's something that the department can consider as part of its ongoing process.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Other things for them to consider, then: Would you consider that it should be compulsory for strata corporations to raise funds in line with the recommended annual amount for the capital works program going forward? As you know, they are under no obligation to raise that money and this could end up with an intergenerational type of situation where buildings get old, and people move in as other people pass away or move out, and they're going to inherit a scheme which won't be able to fund the required repairs going forward.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, and fundamentally, I would say that owners corporations, strata residents, need to continue to reinvest in the main structures of the building. Also it's their most valuable asset, so it's actually in their interests to maintain the structural integrity of the building. Our reforms address some of these issues; for example, at the start, their levies now have to be independently certified so that owners, residents, actually know what they are up for in terms of the capital requirements to maintain the structural integrity of the building.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: You didn't answer my question. Would you recommend changes to the Strata Schemes Management Act that says that you must raise funds in the capital works funding, in the sinking fund, to match what the projected go-forward is from the capital works 10-year plan?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, those sort of reforms will require consultation with the sector. No doubt there will be varying views as to how it should be done and under what mechanisms it should be done. But any reforms that I think improve strata living for so many people who are living in this space, it just needs to be properly considered and consulted, but also balancing the different cost factors for everybody involved.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: I don't expect you to make policy decisions here today. That's not the intention of this, but would you recommend, then, that this is something that's looked at?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That is something the department can consider as part of its ongoing reform process. Whether it leads to legislation, though, will be based the feedback that we get as well.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: I'm not asking you to do legislation. I am asking you to do the consultation with the industry and stakeholders that this may well be a good thing going forward to secure strata living in the future.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, any ideas or proposals that actually improve strata living will be appropriately considered.

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Given the unintended consequences from your recent amendments to section 86 of the Strata Schemes Management Act, what specific actions do you intend to take to reverse or mitigate some of these unintended consequences such as the NCAT case loads and stuff like that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, we will continue on the road to reform. If there are significant or a thematic view of unintended consequences of our reforms, then the Government will continue to consider changes that need to be made. I'm happy to ask the Strata and Property Services Commissioner whether he could provide specific actions or potential changes we will make as a result of the legislative changes.

ANGUS ABADEE: With respect to the changes to 86A, we're still going through the implementation process and we're working with stakeholders to understand how to operationalise that change so that there aren't any unintended additional impacts on the tribunal, and that we're supporting owners corporations whilst also protecting those owners who are going through strata debt issues.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: You may as well stay at the table, then. Strata Community Association have spoken to me, and they will now be independently audited every other year. You're aware of that?

ANGUS ABADEE: Is the SCA the organisation?

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Yes. Their members were going to be now independently audited every other year. Bearing in mind then that they're going to be independently audited, do you think there is some leeway in place that you might be able to remove them from the Fair Trading audit system to save duplication of work? Is that something you would consider?

ANGUS ABADEE: The professional standards scheme that the SCA runs is obviously a fantastic initiative. It's about lifting standards, but it doesn't replace the need for Fair Trading's oversight of the sector, and that's why the Government has brought forward a number of reforms for tightening up controls around strata managers.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Yes, we understand that, and there is a need for Fair Trading to oversight it. But what I'm saying is if they're going to be independently audited—and we're looking at saving Fair Trading both resources and money—is there a need for Fair Trading to also then audit them?

ANGUS ABADEE: Fair Trading doesn't audit every strata manager every year. We take a risk-based approach to regulation.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Yes, but if one is on the system that is being audited, is there potential then to say, "Rod Roberts Strata is being independently audited every second year. There are his audit reports. There is perhaps no need for us, as Fair Trading, to then go in and double down and double dip"?

ANGUS ABADEE: It's definitely worth consideration, but, as far as what we do, it is obviously based on individual circumstances.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Exactly, and rightly so.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Good morning, Minister. I only have a couple of quick questions, so nothing too daunting. You may have already answered this; I've been in the other hearing. The Pafburn case, the High Court decision there, which I'm sure you're across—is that going to significantly now alter, as you finalise, building legislation? Are you concerned that you really need to revisit quite a few issues now within your legislative framework?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In short, yes, I am aware of the Pafburn case, and it does have significant repercussions for the sector, and certainly any reforms that we do will take those into consideration.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You can actually address the issue itself legislatively, right? You can correct what was determined by the High Court.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think we're still analysing the outcomes of that. It's a significant case, and I'm not doubting that at all. Certainly, as we continue to reform the building legislation, these sorts of instances will be taken into account.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You would have been listening to the inquiry last week into the design practitioners Act.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: And you appreciate that Tom Forrest raised concerns from Urban Taskforce. You'll recall his concerns that if this isn't corrected by the Government—and I'm paraphrasing him—

CORRECTED

it will have dire consequences for the capability of the building sector to really meet any of your housing targets. Do you accept that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm aware of the repercussions of the outcome of that particular High Court case. I certainly will continue to examine that and how we might best manage the repercussions that that may have on any building legislation we finalise.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You're in the process now of finalising this legislation, right?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct. We're currently going through the finalisation of the building legislation.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Is the delay of you finalising that a result of going through the repercussions of this Pafburn decision?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: First of all, I'd say there's absolutely no delay. It's just a thorough consultation process that we're going through, and the feedback we've had from a number of stakeholders is to ask us to obviously make sure that we take the appropriate time to finalise the legislation. But whether it's this case or other cases, that has an impact on the building reforms and they'll be considered appropriately.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But you're pretty familiar with the inquiry last week?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I'm aware of it.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Did you watch it or did you read the transcript?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You mean the PAWC inquiry?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes, the inquiry that is looking at your Act. It's not just Tom Forrest; you had Katie Stevenson from the Property Council. You had quite significant stakeholders provide lots of evidence that I thought would be pretty critical for you as a Minister and your department to be across.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: On another side issue, if I can just ask you about rental bonds as well. You must keep some data on the number of rental bonds in the past three years, four years. Do you keep up-to-date data?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, is the short answer.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How many have been lodged?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The number of rental bonds?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think there are about close to a million bonds—940,000 or thereabouts, give or take. Obviously people come in and out of the system.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm just wanting to know, of the percentage of new dwellings that are entering—and it may be something you take on notice—what percentage of new dwellings are entering the rental market rather than owner occupation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll have to take that on notice. That's a very specific question.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Despite rising rents, is renting, in your view, Minister, still more affordable than actually servicing a mortgage in Sydney? Would you accept that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It depends on the size of the mortgage, for one. If you have a very significant mortgage, then the rent could be a comparison.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You must accept that it's still more affordable to rent than to have a mortgage in Sydney.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Renting is difficult, and that's why the Government is working very hard to ensure that there is a more efficient and quicker approval process so that more houses can be built sooner to put downward pressure on supply because rental affordability and rental accessibility is based on rental availability.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: And the rental availability is based on investors prepared and willing to invest, right?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Both. It's a supply and demand issue and also about other—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: With the no-fault evictions and your most recent legislation—I appreciate that came into effect, what, 19 May?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Are you and your office and department going to keep some data on the implications on the rental market and the supply?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, of course.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How and when will that become publicly available?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Rental Commissioner has been tasked to monitor the implementation of the Government's rental reforms, particularly to determine whether there are any unintended consequences, and we will continue to monitor that. My expectation is that the Rental Commissioner will brief me accordingly if there are issues that need to be addressed.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What are the unintended consequences that you're worried about?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sometimes you theoretically might have a piece of legislation but in practice they might not have been foreseen. In this sense, it's about monitoring the effectiveness of the reforms and ensuring that it's working as intended.

The CHAIR: Minister, are you aware of the findings of the Coroner in relation to the death in custody of Aboriginal man Lathan Brown, which was reported on 7 August?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. I understand all deaths in custody are briefed to me by the commissioner.

The CHAIR: Mr Brown died while in custody at Wellington Correctional Centre in January last year, but poor communication between Corrective Services NSW and his family meant that they missed the opportunity to say goodbye. The Coroner recommended that Corrective Services NSW review its systems to ensure families are kept informed when a person in custody was critically ill or transferred to hospital. Minister, have you directed Corrective Services NSW to undertake that review that was recommended?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, I don't want to necessarily speak on any specific case, but in general after a death in custody occurs, there is an appropriate investigation that takes place by the Coroner, and recommendations by the Coroner to corrections will be appropriately considered and implemented where possible.

The CHAIR: You have the Coroner's report back. One of the recommendations from that Coroner's report is that Corrective Services NSW undertake a review. My question to you is, as the Minister, have you asked Corrective Services NSW to undertake that review?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, a thematic review of, in particular, Indigenous deaths in custody is currently occurring and is due to be finalised early next year.

The CHAIR: Early next year?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

The CHAIR: Will that include concerns around what was raised in this particular coroner's report to ensure that families are kept informed when an inmate is critically ill?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I expect that to be part of the case.

The CHAIR: Minister, I thank you for attending my event in Parliament with Magic Valley. I understand that's probably not the first time that you've had cellular-based meat. I believe you've met and worked with other organisations working in that space, but thank you for your interest. Can you advise if any funding has been allocated in the most recent budget to actually support cell-based meat start-ups?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the Government, through the Innovation Blueprint, has allocated \$80 million to a range of programs. All applications for support through the different programs will be based on the criteria, and they will be assessed in competition with other submissions that the department receives.

The CHAIR: Have you assured that that criteria incorporates and allows for these cellular-based meat start-ups to apply for those grants?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, depending on the program that an applicant is applying for. Certainly, there are different criteria for different programs.

The CHAIR: But are there any programs that have the criteria that would ensure that cellular-based meat startups can apply for funding?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government's approach is more rather than being agnostic about this, we want to support tech companies and innovation companies to seek government support where possible. There are a range of different programs that are available, and each application is assessed in accordance, in comparison and in competition with other applicants as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, a package of residential tenancy reforms passed Parliament last year in October. It included an end to no-grounds evictions. Under the changes, landlords may only terminate a lease for specific reasons, and the reforms commenced on 19 May this year. Then a regulation was published on 2 April that established significant renovations or repairs as a valid grounds for termination, provided the landlord supplied a written statement explaining why they were significant and required and will require the premises to be vacant; or one form of supporting evidence, such as a builder's quote, contract or development consent. Then on 20 June this year the requirement for supporting documentation was removed and an eviction on the grounds of significant renovation now requires only a landlord's statement. The Opposition have moved disallowances in both Houses. You have so far not provided reasons for these ongoing changes. Could you explain how these changes accord with your original government promise to end no-grounds evictions?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government has passed no-grounds evictions reform.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I've just explained how it's been changed. I'm asking for your explanation as to the changes. Why?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government has implemented the biggest no-grounds eviction rental reforms in decades. The specific rental regulation amendment that you're referring to in terms of renovations has been fully debated in the lower House. There was 15 minutes worth of debate. I made my reasons extremely clear in *Hansard*, and I refer you to those comments.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: On Ben Fordham on 19 August the Premier suggested that these changes would require landlords to go to the tribunal with their evidence to seek approval for an eviction. Is that your understanding of what the regulation does?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Are you talking about the renovations?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes. People can essentially be evicted on no grounds now.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, that's not true. There is a list of grounds for which people can be evicted. They're clearly stated. Also a piece of written evidence is still evidence in itself, and not all property owners are going to cheat the system. I don't believe that. These are the points I made very clearly in the debate in the lower House for 15 minutes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you're just relying on the goodwill of people—landlords—to treat their tenants with respect, and that's the basis of your explanation for the changes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. My explanations are clearly detailed in *Hansard*. I refer you to them. We had a 15-minute debate about it. There was a disallowance motion that was moved, and that was rejected by the lower House.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How is removing all evidence requirements for an eviction ground minor?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: But not all evidence has been removed.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I can go online now and request a building quote in five minutes. How is that sufficient evidence to demonstrate that a landlord is going to undertake significant works and can therefore just kick a tenant out?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the rules around no-grounds evictions are very clear. There are a number of reasons, and each one of those reasons requires a form of evidence.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So why have they changed over the last year?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the evidence is clear. It's clearly stated in my comments in the debate around the disallowance motion as to why the changes were made, and I refer you to them.

CORRECTED

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did you receive any advice warning you that these changes could undermine no-grounds eviction reforms?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I refer you to my comments in *Hansard*.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The Premier has said that this was based on confidential feedback. Who provided this feedback that resulted in these changes?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the Government is always open to hearing feedback. I made my comments in the debate in the lower House.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you abandoning renters by these changes, allowing landlords to literally in five minutes get a quote and then use that as a grounds for eviction?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What would you say to a renter who's just been kicked out of their place because their landlord has said, "Sorry, I just got a quote and this is now grounds for me to kick you out." Then you find out a couple of months later that that property is on the market for \$200 more a week. What do you say to those renters?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I say to renters that you've got no better friend than this Minns Labor Government. The rental reforms that the Government has moved have been significant. Let's also not forget that in moving the rental reforms, the Opposition moved an amendment to ensure that they didn't apply to both a fixed and a periodic contract.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can I clarify—you don't even need a quote anymore. Isn't that right?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You still need written evidence, and that's referred to in my comments in the lower House.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Where does that written evidence come from?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, written evidence from the property owner is required to evict a tenant as part of the no-grounds evictions reforms.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Does that written evidence require any kind of external third-party involvement?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It requires written evidence, as is stated in the regulations.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So the written evidence can simply be from the landlord themselves?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's written evidence from the landlord, which is evidence in itself.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I can't believe that you're saying that this is no-grounds eviction, when a landlord who may have a very clear motivation to kick out a tenant can simply write their own statement of evidence without any need for a third party and then the renter is kicked out. And you say that you're the best friend of renters.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Absolutely. Because of the reforms that the Government has moved around rental reform—including no-grounds evictions, pets in rentals, limiting rent increases to once per year, no fee for background checks and the free Rent Check website—the renters of New South Wales have never had a better friend than the Minns Labor Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did renters ask for this change? If you're the best friend of renters, was it renters who said to you, "You know what, I want it to be easier for my landlord to kick me out. I want them to just be able to write a letter to me to say that they're doing some works, and then I'm happy to be kicked out." Is that what renters are saying?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I refer you to my comments in the debate that was had in the lower House.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Who has asked for this change? Not renters, I presume.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I made those comments clear as to the changes and why they were needed. They are in the lower House. I refer you to them.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's like Orwellian doublespeak in here.

CORRECTED

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: Chair, that's obviously not courteous to the witness. I would ask that the procedural fairness resolution be upheld.

The CHAIR: I offer the member the chance to withdraw the comment, and then we can move on.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Honestly, I don't want to withdraw the comment. It's not about the Minister. It is simply a comment about the answers provided.

The CHAIR: I did not request the member to do so. I offered the member the opportunity to withdraw the comment. I uphold the point of order. The member may continue.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, when will the Portable Rental Bonds Scheme be operational?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government has signed up a vendor to the portable bond scheme. IT development is progressing, the rules are being finalised, and we want to get there as soon as we can.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you please provide me with a timeline?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: This is the biggest nation-leading reform when it comes to portable bond schemes. You're talking \$2 billion worth of renters' bonds on top of almost a million bondholders in there.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not denying its significance. I'm asking when it will be implemented.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, it will be done carefully and in a considered way. I want this system to work and work well. It will continue to progress, as vendors have been selected.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you given a deadline to your secretary?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I want to do is make sure that the system is developed in a manner that works and is clearly communicated to the sector. This is a big system. This is a big reform.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you tell me how much money has been allocated in the 2025-26 budget for this scheme to be finalised?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The portable bond scheme has been allocated \$6.6 million. That is my recollection.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In this budget?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It was provided in the 2024-25 budget.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And the 2025-26 budget?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: So \$6.6 million has been allocated to develop the portable bond scheme.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sorry, was that in the 2024-25 budget, as you just said, or the 2025-26 budget?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's the 2024-25 budget, and that budget will be allocated accordingly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How long will that \$6.6 million be reflected in the budget?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The \$6.6 million has been allocated in 2024, but that'll actually be spent in different financial years.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you expect that this bond scheme will be implemented by the end of this year?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We're working very hard to ensure that the system is up and running but, given the significance of the system and the amount of money that it holds, we'll continue to work in the fastest time possible to ensure—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not suggesting that it shouldn't be done carefully and in a considered manner. Surely there is a timeline, there is a document that you have seen and that you have asked your department to abide by that gives you an idea of when this will be delivered. Do you have a document that says, "This is the target date for the implementation of this scheme"?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly in principle we want to get—

CORRECTED

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So what is that?

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: There are two parts to it. The first is that repetition is becoming extremely discourteous. The Minister has been asked the same question several times and has answered. The second part of it was, upon asking the question—potentially the same question again—Ms Munro did not let the Minister finish. If we could abide by the courtesy requirements.

The CHAIR: I understand the frustration of the member if the question is not being answered. I do not uphold that part of the point order. The member can continue to look into the same topic. However, I remind the member to give the Minister an opportunity to answer the question before jumping in.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just to be clear, I think you're about to give some information. You've said that there is a target deadline to implement this project in principle. Could you give the Committee the details about that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I don't want to put a specific date on it because this is a significant system development—both IT and financial. We have to do it in a considered way, in a measured way, to ensure that it operates well, and the amount of user testing that we'll have to do will be a part of it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But are those carefully and considered steps that have to be undertaken to undertake this policy built in to your in-principle timeline?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Simply the principle is trying to get through these things as soon as possible. It's not an easy system to develop. You're talking significant numbers of bond holders, significant amounts of money and nation-leading reform to ensure that we can save renters money as they move from property to property.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes, but that's presumably why you have huge departments at your disposal, to help you undertake this work. The Premier made a post on 2 August that seems to indicate that this was an imminent rollout. I'm just trying to understand on behalf of the people of New South Wales when they can possibly expect this election commitment to be delivered.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: This election commitment, the Government will deliver on it. It's currently going through the development phase and the testing phase. It will be deployed at the appropriate time.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I would like to return to underquoting, if I may. The Herald's investigation of 36,000 auctions found that nine out of 10 of Sydney homes sell above the quoted price, with an average gap of, say, \$165,000. Do you accept that underquoting has become systemic and that your Government has done nothing about it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes to the first question and no to the second bit. What I would say is that, one, underquoting is a significant issue. The Government has made this a top priority for the Strata and Property Services Commissioner to investigate. We are currently going through legislative reform, which will be tabled in the Parliament at an appropriate time. I'd also say that, in terms of industry standards and behaviour, there's a role here for the associations and for the practitioners to ensure that they don't engage in this sort of conduct.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I will go on—you've said complaints. With more than, say, 7,000 buyer complaints flooding in, why has the Government failed to strengthen laws or enforcement powers on underquoting in the past two years?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: There are current laws already in place regarding underquoting. Certainly I think a number—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, what about enforcement of these? You're getting complaints in. Have you had any prosecutions?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly we have. You would have seen the story on Mr Josh Tesolin who has engaged in serious misconduct and the department of fair trading has taken significant enforcement action against him. We'll continue to prosecute cases once all the evidence builds up. As I said, I'm not denying underquoting is an issue. Whilst there is legislation already currently in place around the practice, we do need to strengthen it. That's why the Government is currently finalising, as part of the consultation that it's had from stakeholders.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many prosecutions for underquoting has NSW Fair Trading undertaken in the past 12 months.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll defer that to the NSW Fair Trading Commissioner.

CORRECTED

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are you going to take that on notice?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I can ask the NSW Fair Trading Commissioner. She might have it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll ask in the afternoon. I understand that there has been a round table and it produced a 12-point action plan endorsed by industry, regulators and consumers. Can you name a single one of those 12 recommendations that your Government has implemented?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government is currently going through the finalisation—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can you name any of them, though?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government is currently finalising its legislative reform when it comes to underquoting. It is a significant issue. There is a three-pronged approach to this: One, legislative reform; two, continual investigations by the Strata and Property Services Commissioner, who I've tasked to investigate; and, three, improvements in industry standards and industry behaviour.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But why is it taking so long? That was May 2024; you say you're committed to it. Why is everything taking so long?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I disagree with that assessment. It's about making sure you identify the problem.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Then can I reframe the question, Minister, because there were 10 urgent concerns identified at the round table. Has your Government prioritised which of those 10 urgent concerns will be put into action? And, can you show any measurable progress on those?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly. We are considering those options that have been presented as part of the stakeholder reform. We'll continue to—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Sorry, did you say ongoing consultation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. So, for one, some of the action plans that have been proposed to the Government include obviously making it a regulatory priority, which I've said at the start is something I've tasked the Strata and Property Services Commissioner to build on. It's about building some intelligence and data a risk-based approach—we'll continue to do that—stronger enforcement of the rules, and greater collaboration between NSW Fair Trading and the industry. As I said, there are already regulations in place around underquoting. There's a role here for practitioners and for the association, and the industry to also lift their game as well. We've got to look at every single aspect of underquoting to ensure that these things are not systemic.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Last year you told the Committee that there are significant financial penalties for underquoting. The maximum is \$22,000 but it has never once been imposed. How can that be a deterrent?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Penalties are obviously an option for those who are found guilty of this particular practice. You have to gather up all of your evidence as part of the prosecution process. The outcomes of that is obviously a matter for the tribunal or the appropriate court level. Certainly, in terms of looking at ways to have a greater deterrent for underquoting, that's something the Government is considering at the moment.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you have the number of say—I know there are none for prosecutions, but have you got the number on how many have been suspended? Wouldn't you say that most agents would see underquoting fines as the cost of doing business because your Government refuses to strengthen the law?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, there are current laws in place and they're being improved as part of the legislative reform the Government is considering.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But how long, Minister? You've had 14 months.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Underquoting didn't just happen in the last 14 months, Ms MacDonald. It's been around for some time preceding this Government. But it's this Government that's actually taken the actions to investigate, to make it a regulatory priority, to consider legislative reform, and that will be tabled before the Parliament in due course.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'd say, respectfully, Minister, the public wants to know what you've delivered not what you have promised. When will we see delivery of this?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, once the legislation is finalised, we will take the appropriate consultation with stakeholders and table it before the Parliament in due course.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Why are you being so secretive about this bill, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm not.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Why won't you give it to the Legislative Council committee?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Because we are finalising the legislation.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's why I'm asking why you are being so secretive. Isn't that keeping it a secret? You are keeping it a secret from people.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think you might be confused. Are you referring to the bill that Ms Faehrmann was talking about or are you talking about the underquoting legislative reform that the Government is currently finalising? Which one are you talking about here?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm talking about the building bill. What are you talking about?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We're talking about underquoting.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm talking about your Government's approach, and your approach as a Minister, to consulting with stakeholders.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Isn't this Aileen's turn to ask questions? I'm slightly confused.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Excuse me, but we are allowed to ask questions.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order —

The CHAIR: A point of order has been taken.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: In order to keep the exchange respectful, it might be a good idea to make sure we are talking about the same thing, particularly when jumping in to accuse the Minister of something. I believe Ms MacDonald was talking about a different legislative reform than the building Act that Ms Munro is talking about.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Actually, I was talking about the roundtable report. I wondered why that hasn't been published. That's what my colleague was referring to when she said, "Why are you keeping it so secretive?" She was talking about the round table. If it's not made public, how can we hold you accountable?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Can we go back to clarify? Are you are talking at the building bill or the underquoting reform?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You had a round table back in May—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: For which bill?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: For underquoting, sorry.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I just want to make sure we're on the same page.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You had a round table for underquoting and yet it hasn't been made public. We had this round table and nobody knows anything about it. It's a secret. You are not being accountable and you are not being transparent. Everything you said this Government was supposed to be, you are doing the exact opposite.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That is an assessment I disagree with.

The CHAIR: The time for Opposition questions has finished. I'm sure we will get back to some of those topics in a moment. Minister, I would like to ask you some questions about Closing the Gap. While I appreciate that the Attorney General is leading this work as part of the whole-of-government response, do you accept that you as the Minister for Corrections, and Corrective Services NSW, have responsibility to work in partnership with Aboriginal peak bodies and community in closing the gap as per the New South Wales Government's commitment as signatory to the National Agreement?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly Closing the Gap is a whole-of-government priority, with different departments working together to address some of the embedded disadvantages we have with our Indigenous Australians.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Of the \$100.5 million in your funding allocated to Corrective Services NSW under the recent State budget, how much of this will be spent on efforts working in partnership with Aboriginal organisations to reduce the number of Aboriginal people in and returning to custody?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The first point I would make, Chair, is that Corrections does not determine the number of inmates or the backgrounds of the inmates that come to our facilities. That is a matter for the courts.

The CHAIR: I'm not asking how many people. I'm asking how much funding from the budget will be going to working in partnership with Aboriginal organisations to reduce the number.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The increase of \$100 million that was allocated in the budget for Corrections is about matching the increase of demand that we have had in Corrections as a result of the increase in the remand population. A number of inmates are Indigenous Australians, and they will continue to be supported in the various programs we currently have.

The CHAIR: So none of that funding will be going towards reducing the number of Aboriginal people in custody?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think that funding will be allocated according to the needs of Corrections, some of which I suspect will be targeted towards our Indigenous inmates.

The CHAIR: Will any of it be specifically allocated to meeting the rehabilitation needs of people in custody?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I might refer that to the commissioner, because that's a very specific budget allocation question.

The CHAIR: That's all right. I will ask him this afternoon. Minister, have you implemented any policy changes to address the rising number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons on remand in your facilities?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, Chair, Corrections does not determine the number of inmates or the type of inmates.

The CHAIR: I'm not talking about the number of people who end up there. I'm asking if you have implemented any policy changes to address the rising number.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, in short, we do. Corrections has a number of programs regarding our Indigenous inmates. There are a couple of programs, which I'm happy to share with the committee. For example, we have the cultural safety framework and the Yarning Circle program, which I visited out in Parramatta early this year. There is involvement of Indigenous Australians in cultural connections with organisations. We work with CAPO.

The CHAIR: Minister, in regard to any of the resourcing and investment, if we talk about Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver CSNSW-funded partnership initiatives, are there plans to expand those specific programs as per the commitments under Closing the Gap?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly we will continue to allocate resources to ensure that all programs—particularly towards our Indigenous Australians, given their overrepresentation in the Corrective Services system—will continue to be utilised as required.

The CHAIR: Can you give me any examples of culturally appropriate health and therapeutic services that Aboriginal people have access to and what you're doing to ensure equitable access across the State in those programs?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In short, yes, Chair, I can say, for example, we have the Aboriginal throughcare strategy, we have a community consultation framework, we have cultural strengthening programs, and we also have culturally responsive training packages for new and existing Corrections officers to ensure that our Indigenous inmates are managed appropriately.

The CHAIR: Given the rising rates of Aboriginal people who are in custody on remand, what steps are being taken to ensure that those people who are on remand are provided access to culturally appropriate programs and services?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think my expectation is certainly that those programs should be made available for those on remand or where it is considered appropriate for them to utilise.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Given the numbers are rising of Aboriginal people on remand, are you ensuring that every single one of those people has equal access to those programs and services? Are you expanding those programs and services, given that the number of people are increasing?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In short, yes. We have \$20 million towards the throughcare program, which I have mentioned and which talks about support, health and wellbeing for Indigenous inmates that is culturally appropriate. That also includes post-release programs as well.

The CHAIR: Minister, have you been briefed on which prisons will actually receive the money from that \$100 million allocation and which community programs that is going into?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government has allocated \$100 million towards Corrections. The commissioner is probably in a better position than I—

The CHAIR: My question was: Have you been briefed on where that breakdown will go to?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In due course I expect the commissioner to provide me with the appropriate briefing as to where that budget will be allocated. But in terms of budget deployment, given these are fundamentally operational matters, I think the commissioner's department would probably be in a better position than I would be to determine how best to utilise those funds.

The CHAIR: I am sure he will give me a breakdown of that. But at this point in time you yourself haven't been briefed on the breakdown of what that will go to?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Not at this stage, no.

The CHAIR: I have one more question in regard to cellular-based agriculture. Can you give me any insight into how the Government may be able to support the growth of cellular agriculture through policy initiatives to position New South Wales as a global leader in the future? Are you doing any work in that space to make sure New South Wales doesn't miss out on this opportunity?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly. That's why the Innovation Blueprint policy, which was released earlier—on top of \$80 million that was provided to support the implementation of the Innovation Blueprint with its various programs—is aimed at supporting startups and scaleups which also meet the Government's policy framework in terms of its industry policy and Innovation Blueprint. I think that having clear policy alignment and clear policy ensures that limited and valuable government funds are deployed appropriately.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Minister, we'll continue in the strata industry space. I'm going to talk a little bit about Federal legislation. I'm the first to say that you are not responsible for it—let's understand that—but there is an interplay here. On 9 July the Federal changes introduced informed consent in the Delivering Better Financial Outcomes reforms. Everybody in strata congratulates you and encourages you to continue work around transparency and conflict disclosure. But will the Federal changes duplicate work that you have already done in relation to disclosure here in New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think the conflict disclosures that the Government has moved in reforms has been significant. It was certainly aimed at including transparency in terms of how it interacts with the Federal reforms. That's obviously, as you mentioned accurately, a matter for the Commonwealth, but we'll continue our march of reform. If there are interactions, or where there are duplications, that is something we would obviously examine as part of the implementation process.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: That's what I mean. Have you conducted any work yet to determine the impacts of these changes and whether they are consistent with the requirements in New South Wales at the moment?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I suppose we'll let the reform actually go through the process, but I can ask the Strata and Property Services Commissioner to provide more specific advice in terms of its interaction with the Commonwealth legislation.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Don't bother. We can do that later.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: You're on the clock here and we want to get to you. You're the man. Let's go to digital self-service in strata. Everybody recognises that digital self-service would improve compliance, efficiency, cost-effectiveness et cetera. What is the Government doing to support and encourage owners to get involved in digital self-service?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think part of the Government's recent reforms, Mr Roberts, as you'd be well aware, was support for strata committee members to actually improve their skill levels, so this is part of it. We also have allocated, I think from memory, close to maybe \$5 million towards the Strata Hub development, which is the IT space that strata plans actually work in. There are some specific examples as to how we're moving towards digitisation, but I can ask the Strata and Property Services Commissioner as well to provide more details.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Same response as last time. Has your department undertaken any financial modelling to see what the cost savings would be if you used a digital self-service platform?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That would be part of the analysis that the department would undertake as part of the reform process that we will do.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: They will be undertaking that analysis?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: With all reform, analysis is undertaken. The Government wants to make sure that the changes that it proposes are based on evidence and based on good analysis.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Do you accept that your recent amendments or legislative changes, such as the Strata Schemes Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, impact strata managers and owners and put a financial cost on both? Have you modelled in any way what the increased cost will be as a result of these changes to both strata managers and owners?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, we'll continue to monitor the impact of the legislative reforms in strata. But, fundamentally, the Government wants to do reform in strata that is fit for purpose, given there are over 87,000 schemes, which you'd be well aware of, and over a million people—and more will be living in strata. I think front-footing reform is important. In terms of implementation, that is something the department, through the Strata and Property Services Commissioner, will be tasked with monitoring and whether any changes will be required if there are unintended consequences.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Yes, all well and good. You've already introduced this legislation, though. Did you do any modelling before you introduced it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That would be part of the assessment and the consultation process.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: It won't be part of it. You've either done it before you've introduced it or you haven't. It's a very simple question, Minister. Did you do any modelling on the impact to strata managers and owners before you introduced the amendment bill in 2024? It is not about what you're going to be doing ongoing. Sure, you'll be monitoring. I encourage you and implore you to continue to monitor. Did you do anything in relation to financial impact before you introduced it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In specific of the reforms in the owners corporation—

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Yes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think that would certainly have been part of the analysis process. I'm happy to ask—

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Did you do it or not?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, I might defer to the—

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: No, I don't want to listen to him. You're the Minister. Have you looked at the Westminster system? You're in charge. Everybody else is under you. Did you do any financial modelling on the impacts that this will have before you introduced it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As part of the legislation that the Government approves, the regulatory impact statement would have been analysed as part of the decision-making process. That includes the cost of regulation.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: So you did?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I would have thought so, but I'm happy to take that on notice and get back to you if you like.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: What communication, then have you passed on to owners in strata complexes about the cost to them and why this cost will be incurred? Nobody says your legislation was bad. You've tightened some things up, but incoming with that is cost. Have you written to strata owners and said,

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"Listen, there is going to be some increase in your fees here that your strata managers are going to charge you because they've had to implement new processes"? Have you explained that to anybody anywhere?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's why we allocated \$8.4 million to the property and strata taskforce to implement the Government's reforms. This would include communication with the stakeholders that are involved in the Government's reforms.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: How about you take it on notice, then, and show me communication you've had with strata owners about the increasing cost.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure. Happy to do that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, a 10 June investigation by *The Sydney Morning Herald*, which had the title "Fury as Sydneysiders build their mansions, then 'ask for forgiveness later'", reveals a growing number of people are gaming the planning system by using building information certificates for noncompliant works. There is a whole industry essentially around this. What steps are you taking to ensure that people can have faith in the planning system and that these developers and building owners aren't just building bad and asking for forgiveness later?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Ms Faehrmann, all matters of planning are best directed to the planning Minister. That's beyond my portfolio responsibilities. I think the planning Minister would be in a better position to provide the appropriate advice on that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In terms of strata, then, at the last budget estimates, I was asking for an update as well around the taskforce. Is that the strata—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Which taskforce? Do you mean the property and strata taskforce?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes. Where is that up to?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We've allocated \$8.4 million to the property taskforce and it has, I'm advised, 18 inspectors, 20 investigators and it's a priority for the Government to implement its reforms.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In terms of all of the recommendations from the strata reform—they haven't all been implemented.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You have said multiple times, I think, when I've asked you this in various forums that they'll be coming. When can we expect the next round? I'm particularly interested, for example, in how the work is going on dealing with the issue of embedded networks.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government is currently consulting on the next tranche of its reforms. We hope to finalise that before year end. As you'd also be well aware, the Government has tasked the Productivity and Equality Commissioner to examine the role of commissions in the strata industry.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So the legislation will be before the Parliament before the end of the year?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We're currently consulting on the remaining tranche based on the stat review in terms of strata reform.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is the expectation that all of the last remaining reforms in terms of the strata reform process—that they will be coming?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's the intention, yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I understand that New South Wales doesn't have—in terms of rentals, unlike Victoria—minimum rental energy efficiency and cooling standards. Is that something that you are responsible for?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Do you mean rental minimum standards or standards in rental—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Essentially, what the rental properties should have in terms of its minimum standards—is that what you're referring to?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes. I understand there is a Residential Tenancies Regulation 2019 and within that schedule 2 is the closest thing, for example, that deals with ventilation standards. There has been a campaign, given it's getting hotter—I understand there is a campaign to increase our standards, make them better, bring them into line at least with Victoria. Is there any movement on that from your Government?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. This work is being led by Minister Sharpe in terms of the consumer energy strategy. Certainly, the aim is to try to wait for the outcomes of that strategy to be finalised and then the Government can consider its options.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: For rentals?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: A broader consumer energy strategy, for which the rentals will be a part of that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So you're working with Minister Sharpe, I assume, to ensure that—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Because I think that's the frustration that has been experienced—is that, obviously, tenants, people who rent are left out often. So people can expect something?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We're working through that process—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Before next summer?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll wait until the work with Minister Sharpe is finalised, but we do collaborate together to ensure that any policy positions that are taken by the Government are considered appropriately.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I think it was at the last budget estimates—it may have been in August last year—I asked you about fireproof self-locking doors, the issue with that in terms of safety. I think you said that the Building Commissioner was looking into that and you were going to speak with them. What has been the response since the time I spoke with you about that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: This has been a topic of discussion between the Building Commissioner and I. I'm happy to defer to the Building Commissioner, because we spoke about this as recently as in the last few weeks, I think. Commissioner?

JAMES SHERRARD: Yes. What's the question?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The bolts in the fire doors.

JAMES SHERRARD: I understand. We did a workshop, which is what we raised at the last estimates, with a range of different stakeholders. It's not actually for our jurisdictional responsibility. It's for the ABCB to make a determination. But we have now worked with them, and they have been holding their own workshops in relation to the compliance or otherwise. We're looking forward to hearing what their determination is.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I think the rest can be for the officials in the afternoon.

The CHAIR: I will throw to the Opposition.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, how does your Building Commission start issuing thousands of licences without even a routine police criminal history check in place? Who signed off on that failure?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I don't agree with that assessment. All applications for licences are assessed accurately and appropriately. I'm happy to ask the Building Commissioner to provide further details of how that assessment process evolves.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll come back to it in the afternoon session. I understand it was because the MOU with police had lapsed. Who was accountable for letting that MOU lapse in July 2024? Was it the—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Which? Sorry, my apologies.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The MOU that you have with police—it lapsed in July 2024. So I'm wanting to know who is accountable for letting that lapse. Was it the commission, was it the department, or was it you as the Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly I'm aware of the agreement you are referring to in terms of the background checks for those licensed—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's not the question, Minister. I asked who was accountable.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think in this situation it may have lapsed. It's not deliberate. But certainly once that was identified it was addressed appropriately.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are you aware, then, how many contractor licences have been issued without any direct police criminal check?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I will have to take that on notice. That's a very specific question.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Okay. If they can't have a police criminal check, what alternative probity checks were put in place in that period, and how many applicants were refused?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On notice?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to take that on notice, because that's an assessment process by the department.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What WHS risk assessments were undertaken for investigators, forced to enter sites blind to applicants' criminal records, particularly after one of your officers has been assaulted?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think I will defer that to the Building Commissioner, because it's a very specific question.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No. It's okay. I'll ask in the afternoon. Thank you.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: It assists the Committee and is in order for a Minister to refer a question to an officer to elucidate an answer, as per longstanding convention in budget estimates. I haven't taken this point of order before, but I feel the need to now because it has happened on a regular occurrence.

The CHAIR: And it is totally acceptable for the Minister to refer it on, but I also recognise that we have the opportunity to ask questions of other witnesses in the afternoon. Obviously the time of the Minister is precious, so I will not uphold the point of order. I will remind the member to remain respectful in her communication regarding that and say, "I've got a question very specifically for the Minister around this."

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Okay. I'll move on to a different line of questioning but still with the Building Commission. Minister, why did it take 16 months to decide whether the agency would be called "NSW Building Commission" or "Building Commission NSW", while defective buildings went unmonitored?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I don't agree with your last assessment, that defective buildings were not being monitored, because they were. I think we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that the Building Commission was established in late 2023. It's now got a permanency within the regulatory framework as a standalone regulator, with \$145 million allocated over the forwards, with over 400 full-time staff.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: My question then, without the second part, is: Why did it take 16 months to decide whether it would be called one or the other? Isn't it the case your Government spent more time debating logos and letterheads?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, that's an incorrect assessment. The Government came into government at the March 2023 election. The Building Commission was established in December. The mathematics tells me that's actually not the number of months you are referring to.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll move on then. Whilst you were deciding on a name, investigators were forced to work for over a year without proper ID badges because of this decision. Did that compromise their ability to act?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I would've thought not.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No compromise there? Were there legal risks or cases where investigators couldn't act because they lacked valid ID badges?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's a very specific legal question. I'm happy to defer that to the commissioner, but he is signalling to me that that's not the case.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is not the case, you say?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes—your question about whether there were any legal shortfalls.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll change to a different question then. How much taxpayer money was spent on brand consultants, name workshops and stationery redesigns instead of strengthening compliance?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We've been strengthening compliance through the establishment of the Building Commission. As I said, \$145 million is allocated to the commission. In terms of contractual

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arrangements, as you would appreciate, all matters of contract are best and always handled by the department, not by the Minister.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You've trumpeted the \$145 million for the Building Commission, to be spent over four years. Isn't it the case that most of this is not new money at all but simply a transfer of funds from Fair Trading and the Office of the Building Commission?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can you tell the Committee today exactly how much of that \$145 million is genuinely new investment in building regulation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm advised all of it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: All of it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Let's just go back here. The Building Commission is a new regulatory commission. It was provided \$145 million in the latest budget, over the forwards, to ensure that it has permanency. It's all new money. I have to say I'm not sure where you are getting your line of questions from.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just to make it clear, so you can understand, I'm now asking the questions. Minister, in April *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the Government was quietly moving to rip up a crucial part of Sydney Central station's precinct rezoning. Can you tell me what's happening with those plans, please?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure. All matters of rezoning are a matter for the planning Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But it's directly related to Tech Central, which, I presume, you're responsible for. Is that right?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. I'm responsible for development of the Tech Central strategy, but all matters of planning or rezoning are a matter for the planning Minister. I think he's next door.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes. I'm aware. And he's being asked these questions too. But surely, as the Minister that is responsible for the Tech Central strategy, which I'd love to get a timeline on—but I suspect you won't give me one—you are advocating for those precinct rezonings to remain in place.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: All precinct plannings, all rezonings are a matter for the planning Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But are you talking to the planning Minister to ensure that the rezoning plans aren't scrapped?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: All planning changes are a matter for the planning Minister. Do I speak to the planning Minister? The short answer is yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But do you speak to him about this?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Of course.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you trying to fight for the rezoning for Tech Central to remain?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, Tech Central will remain. All planning matters are matters for the planning Minister, and I will continue to have discussions with him.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you worried that, if the Central station rezoning is scrapped, that puts at risk any favourable terms for the Tech Central strategy?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, not really. I think you've got to wait for those decisions to be made. Let's not make assessments based on hypotheticals.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you're not concerned that, if the Central station rezoning is scrapped, that will impact Tech Central's operation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll wait until those decisions are made by the planning Minister, and we'll continue—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But don't you have an opinion about the valuable rezoning of the area, as the Minister for Industry and Trade?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, all changes to rezoning are matters for the planning Minister, and I'll continue to have conversations with him.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you don't have an opinion?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, I'm not going to disclose conversations I have with my colleagues in a public hearing.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not asking for that now. I'm asking for your opinion on what the rezoning of Central station means for Tech Central.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, my opinion is that I'll continue to have those conversations with my colleague, and that all matters of changes to the planning and the rezonings are matters for the planning Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How are you building a Tech Central strategy if you don't know what the zoning around Central station will be?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We'll continue to collaborate between government departments.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So when will the Tech Central strategy be announced?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: At the appropriate juncture, in the fullness of time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm so sorry to ask this, because I don't want it to be rude, but I just have to ask—I feel like I'm offering more detail about your portfolio area than you are to this Committee. I just have to understand if you're being deliberately woolly in your answers, to put it politely, or if you genuinely don't know the answers to these questions.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I disagree with both assessments.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I encourage you to look back at the transcript, because I don't believe that you've answered any of my questions in real detail to actually understand what's happening in this portfolio area.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: I think Ms Munro is very much veering into territory of being discourteous to the Minister, who is answering the questions—in fact, the same question multiple times—and I'd ask that she does abide by the courtesy provisions that we require in budget estimates.

The CHAIR: The Minister is allowed to answer the questions in any way he sees fit. I'd just ask the member to keep personal commentary to a minimum.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, why was \$1 billion chosen as a threshold for the Investment Delivery Authority?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, they're the discussions that we're having. We want to make sure that major investments of that threshold are considered and shepherded through the assessment process.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you done modelling that points to the \$1 billion relating to a particular set of projects? How was that \$1 billion—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It has been based on assessment of the number of projects that are expected to come through, and we'll continue to, as I said, monitor the effectiveness of the IDA.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is that Investment NSW modelling?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, that's with the work of Investment NSW and other government departments working together.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Will the IDA override the normal environmental and planning provisions for new developments?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The IDA is predominantly based on non-housing projects. The EPA projects will mainly be done through the HDA, which is the Housing Delivery Authority.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But mining projects and data centre projects still have to go through environmental assessment and planning approvals. Will the IDA's process override those existing approval processes?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think all applications, regardless of size, would go through the normal regulatory assessment anyway.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So it won't override those existing—

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It has to meet all of the regulatory requirements. This is about shepherding major investment through the system.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When will the regulatory requirements be made public?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: About—regulatory requirements for what?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: About how the IDA is undertaking its work and making recommendations to the Ministers.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Announcements will be made in the near future.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How do you think it should operate?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As effectively as it can.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm going to move on. Minister, will the New South Wales Government be abandoning the Sydney Science Park in favour of a new housing estate?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Which one is this one, sorry?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Near the Western Sydney Aerotropolis. Are you familiar with the Western Sydney Science Park?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I was there a few days ago.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can you guarantee that the development approval will be maintained only for science- and industry-related employment purposes?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, all development approvals are matters for the planning Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Why were you at the science park, then, if you're not involved with it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, I was at the Bradfield Development Authority, around the AMRF.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you think it's your responsibility to ensure that the Sydney Science Park is approved and built in accordance with its original aims?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, all assessments regarding planning and rezoning are matters for the planning Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you're totally washing your hands of any responsibility related to the Western Sydney Science Park?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What is your responsibility, then?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, I'll continue to advocate for science, and, as I said, all matters regarding planning and approvals are matters for the planning Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay. You'll advocate for science, I'm very pleased to hear, but will you specifically be ensuring that the development approval will be maintained for only science- and industry-related purposes?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's a matter for the planning Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you have any influence on the planning Minister's decision-making?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The planning Minister conducts his work effectively, and he's a very good Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The PAWC recommendations that were made recently included this recommendation:

That the NSW Government progress plans for freight rail infrastructure in Western Sydney to be developed, to facilitate the transportation of goods to and from the Western Sydney International Airport ...

Do you think that this is an important part of your advocacy to the Minister, to ensure that this recommendation is maintained?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, all matters regarding freights are matters for the Minister for Transport.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, earlier in the year a request was made that I attend the RNA manufacturing facility in Macquarie Park. From your office, the request was declined, and I wanted to ask why that was.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, all requests for meetings are appropriately considered.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you please explain why you decided that I am not allowed to go to the RNA manufacturing facility?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You're welcome to visit it any time. It's still under construction.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So this is against the advice that your office provided me, which said that—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you want me to produce the email?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: If you want—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I was told that I couldn't go.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I suggest you go up to the RNA. I know I was up there with the chief scientist, and it's still under construction. It's making great progress.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So can you apologise for saying that I couldn't go and now you're saying I can go?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Why not?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Because it's not required.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you're telling me that I can't go to things, and then when I ask you in person, it's okay now?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm saying you're welcome to visit the RNA facility in your own free time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Am I welcome to visit any of the facilities related to your Industry and Trade, Innovation, Science and Technology portfolios?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, all requests will be considered appropriately.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But why was it considered appropriate that I don't attend?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: My office provided you with the advice, and that advice still stands.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Wait, so the advice still stands that I can't go?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, all requests are considered appropriately.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Wait, so can I go or can I not go?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, you're welcome to make that request, and my office will provide you with the appropriate advice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But, Minister, you're the Minister responsible for allowing other parliamentarians to engage in your portfolio. So I just want to be very clear, because your office gave me advice that I couldn't attend. You just said that I could, but then you said your original advice still stands.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think you're misunderstanding my responses.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay. So I can visit or not?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, in your own free time, you can do whatever you want.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But it requires your approval as Minister, so I'm asking for your approval.

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, I'll consider requests as they are made.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, on page 34 of the Trade and Investment Strategy, there's a table that shows the bilateral trade between countries. I see that you've got the bilateral trade. Could you just explain to me what that represents?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As in the bilateral trade?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: This is imports and exports to the countries that are outlined.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So they're combined?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Does it concern you that New South Wales has got a growing trade deficit with all—I mean, not all of these individual countries but overall that New South Wales has a growing trade deficit?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's why we're expanding our diversification of trade and investment strategy to ensure that we take advantage, in particular, of rising markets in South-East Asia. You're talking an estimated 200 million people who will get into the middle class in the next decade. That represents huge opportunities for us to export our goods and services.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I agree, Minister, but merchandise exports from New South Wales to South-East Asian nations fell by over \$2.5 billion in the time that you've been Minister. How are you actually maintaining those relationships to the benefit of the people of New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, we are. We've spoken to a number of our industry stakeholders. We've got the Going Global Export Program to support businesses to reach into those markets. We've had inbound missions from our colleagues in Singapore and Vietnam recently, and also in China, to ensure that—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand you've got these meetings, but I'm just actually talking about the raw figures, because the exports from New South Wales to those South-East Asian nations fell by over \$2.5 billion since you've become Minister. Would you say that your efforts are not working?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How else would you characterise the loss of \$2.5 billion to your so-called target area?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, you'd have to go through the specific details. Certainly the Government, through Investment NSW, has a dedicated focus in a 10-year strategy to grow our markets. Building relationships does take time. We'll continue to pursue those.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You noted that the numbers aren't in the Trade and Investment Strategy. I have to ask why that is. Why is there no detail, charts or figures related specifically to the export and import of our goods and services with either individual nations or more broadly? Why have you chosen only to represent this bilateral trade?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it's obviously the easiest to understand for readers. I'd also say that in the past year we've had a significant decline in coal prices, which has reduced the aggregate value of our exports but not necessarily the volume of our exports.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We had a \$20 billion trade reduction in exports for goods. That's not represented here. I'm just wondering, with the lack of detail in this document, how investors are supposed to get a clear picture of the New South Wales economy.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: They can, through our clear policy development and announcements. The Industry Policy makes it very clear about where the Government's strategic priorities are. The Trade and Investment Strategy focuses on particular markets, which will all be different, and where our goods and services are best directed.

The CHAIR: Minister, I'd like to ask a few questions related to your Corrective Services portfolio. There has been some concern about a recent three-month trial at Macquarie Correctional Centre where in-person visits were replaced with video calls on Sundays. This has sparked concerns that this might be a broader trend of

CORRECTED

replacing physical visits with video calls across correctional centres in New South Wales. Can you assure us today that this will not be the case?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Corrections tries to provide all avenues for contact between inmates and their family and their friends. In terms of the operations of Wellington, I might ask the commissioner to provide further details.

The CHAIR: I will speak with him this afternoon. Thank you for your attendance. My question to you, Minister, really is specifically just asking: Can you assure us that it won't be the case across New South Wales correctional services that you, as Minister, will allow there to be a replacement of video calls in comparison to in-person visits?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm advised that the trial on this is now complete and there is no intention to make this the standard.

The CHAIR: Do you agree that video calls and phone calls should only be used to supplement physical visits between inmates and their families, not replace them?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As a general principle, yes.

The CHAIR: Can I ask if physical visits have been restored for John Morony and Dillwynia centres for both Saturdays and Sundays? I understand there has been some concern about the reduction of in-person visits at those facilities.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Can I defer those specific visits through to the commissioner or the deputy commissioners?

The CHAIR: Again, I might come back in the afternoon if the Minister is unsure of that specific detail. While I've got you, I want to ask about the incident that occurred at Maitland Community Corrections Office on 3 July. Two staff decided to conduct a fake armed hold-up with balaclavas and mock firearms as part of an unauthorised training scenario. Can I get an update on the Government's and your response, as the Minister, to this incident? I know that staff were seriously affected by not having warning of this mock scenario. Could I get a response from you, as the Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have been briefed about this. I had a discussion with the commissioner about this. It is not acceptable for that event to have taken place. I understand that staff involved in that are being managed about their behaviour and that standard. In short, it's not acceptable. I expect the department to take appropriate action against those employees who were undertaking this action.

The CHAIR: Are you looking into providing any support for the staff that were particularly distressed by this incident?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Absolutely. We'll provide all the support that's required for those who had negative experiences from this particular incident.

The CHAIR: Could I get an understanding on what progress has been made in establishing an advocacy service, particularly for female inmates? I understand that it was announced in September 2024. Can you give us an update as to where that's coming along?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: At the moment, in terms of our broader strategy around women in our corrective services system, I've actually tasked, through the secretary, Dr Hannah Tonkin, to develop the Corrective Services policy regarding women in our facilities to ensure that it's independent of Corrections and provides the Government with the appropriate advice to ensure that our strategies and our practices support both female inmates and our female officers as well.

The CHAIR: Have you directed the department to ensure that the work on the women's strategy or female inmate advocacy services is partnering with Aboriginal peak services and community-controlled organisations to work together?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly. We've also established the advocacy services for women as well. Chair, I think it's important. We'll continue to implement reform, particularly—

The CHAIR: And they'll be working together under your direction?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's my expectation, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, is it correct that at least 60 per cent of rectification orders have not been complied with? And what's the updated figure for today?

CORRECTED

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Are you referring to rectification orders or building work rectification orders?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Rectification orders.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: They're two different things.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I know.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: At the moment, the latest, current stats that I've got around rectification orders are that there are 27. There are 123 building work rectification orders.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Isn't it true that despite clear breaches and despite noncompliance being a criminal offence, your Government has not issued a single fine? What's the point of a law that you refuse to enforce?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I disagree with that assessment. What I would say is that, with all building work rectification orders and also ROs, it's made sure that the Building Commission works closely with the builders to have these orders complied with as soon as possible.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Then why are home owners being forced to launch their own legal causes while your commission, with 400 staff and over \$145 million, goes missing in action?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It hasn't gone missing in action. As you'd appreciate, particularly with BWROs, there might be a lot more complex matters involving the building work rectification orders, and also the fact that there might be multiple parties involved. It's not a single individual party transaction. The nature of the buildings themselves makes it much more complicated to finalise. In short, with all BWROs—and ROs as well, but more BWROs, given the complexity of their nature—the commission works with the relevant parties to get these resolved as soon as possible, but there are various factors that may slow down its progress.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Isn't it the case, then, that rectification orders have become little more than a meaningless piece of paper?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How can a buyer have confidence in the housing market when the enforcement regime has zero bite?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Also, you'd be well aware that the Government passed significant legislation—on top of establishing the Building Commission—into anti-phoenixing, into the chain of responsibility, into our anywhere, anytime inspections and expanding the powers of class 1 inspections. I think that the enforcement powers of the Building Commission have been greatly expanded, with appropriate resources applied to it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, at the last budget estimates, I asked questions about funding for the Western Sydney Startup Hub, which you took on notice. You responded in those answers that we should refer to answers given to the supplementary questions. That answer directed me to the Investment NSW website, which provides no detail at all about the questions I asked. Could you please answer today: What funding commitments have you made to the Western Sydney Startup Hub in this budget?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly the \$80 million in the Innovation Blueprint forms a foundation for all organisations in the ecosystem to apply for these grants.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, are you scared of the start-up community?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Then why won't you commit to holding a public forum where they can ask you questions?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As requested, I had a discussion with the deputy secretary. If there is correspondence or communication that the sector, the community or individuals seek to communicate to the department, I'm happy for that to be considered.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The problem is that people are communicating with you and you're not giving them any answers. That's why I'm suggesting that you might be scared of them, which is why you won't appear in front of them publicly to answer totally reasonable questions about how you are implementing policies that are under your purview as Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I disagree with that assessment.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Are there questions from the Government? No. In that case, we will break for lunch. Thank you, Minister, for attending the hearing.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Thank you very much, colleagues.

The CHAIR: We are finished with your questioning this morning. The Committee will now break for lunch and return at 2.00 p.m. for further questions.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Thank you, and welcome back to the afternoon session of budget estimates. Thank you all for attending this afternoon. I'm just going to start with some questions from the crossbench. My questions are directed to the Commissioner of Corrective Services. I spoke a little bit this morning with the Minister about the three-month trial at Macquarie Correctional Centre and the concerns that this could actually replace in-person visits. Can I just get a bit more information around that trial, and what is happening going forward?

GARY McCAHON: Thank you for your question. Before I hand over to Deputy Commissioner Taylor, who's responsible for that inquiry, there are a number of reasons why we do utilise every system available to us to make sure that there is the contact with the family. That trial in particular, to give you the detail around that question, I'll refer now to Deputy Commissioner Taylor.

LEON TAYLOR: Thanks for the question, Chair. Macquarie Correctional Centre out at Wellington recently changed its views. It's not unusual. Across the State, different correctional centres have different profiles of how they visit. That's often informed by inmates through the Inmate Development Committee—that is the group of representative inmates that meets with management around the routine of the jail. In Macquarie, they recently did a trial where they had in-person visits on one day on the weekend—Saturday, I think—and then they had tablet visits, which are a video visit for inmates, on the Sunday. After that trial, they've made a subsequent change. What happens now out at Macquarie is tablet visits are available on a Saturday morning, in-person visits are available on a Saturday afternoon and then the opposite on Sunday—in-person visits occur on Sunday morning and tablet visits occur in the afternoon. That was arranged so that people—feedback from that trial was that families that travel out to Wellington from Sydney and other places can travel in the morning on Saturday, have an in-person visit on Saturday afternoon, stay overnight, have another in-person visit with family on Sunday morning and travel home. That's why there was a trial. The feedback was responded to, and there's a pretty acceptable visits regime to the inmates out there now. I can speak to the other centres that you mentioned, but there's slight variations across the State where we have local arrangements.

The CHAIR: Is that John Morony and Dillwynia?

LEON TAYLOR: Yes, so John Morony, for example, has video visits on Saturday morning, in-person visits on Saturday afternoon, and then Sunday it is in-person visits all day. At Dillwynia they have tablet visits on a Saturday and in-person visits on a Sunday, and many variations across the State to meet local needs.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Have any visitor information materials been updated to accurately reflect those changing in-visitor arrangements?

LEON TAYLOR: The local procedures and local communications would be updated, and those inmates who have families that want to come, that have visits at those centres, would have certainly been—those changes would have certainly been communicated to them.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I'd also like to get an update regarding inmate access to tablets. I believe at the last budget estimates I was told that Parklea Correctional Centre still didn't have tablets for their inmates. Can I get an update on that?

LEON TAYLOR: It's definitely Commissioner Grant's area, but the quick answer to your question is we have coverage across the entire State of a tablet or a similar device other than Parklea. That's a key addition that will occur from October next year when that centre transitions to the State. The installation of tablets at Parklea is a feature of the State-run model, but for all other inmates in correctional centres across the State, they are covered by the existing tablets—which are over 12,000. Our rapid-build prisons have a slightly different system, and Serco up at Clarence, they have a different tablet system as well. It's only Parklea at the moment that's the outlier.

The CHAIR: In regard to Parklea, is there any interim measures in place to try to allow those inmates greater access to things like video calls and other benefits, given they don't currently have those tablets rolled out?

CORRECTED

LEON TAYLOR: There's a whole infrastructure piece that needs to follow that—put wires through the whole correctional centre to put in wi-fi and enabling technology, so it's challenging for the State to go into that centre now and do that work in the transition period.

The CHAIR: Even in regard to, say, computers that are already set up? I'm just saying, are there interim measures to account for the fact? I understand that the tablets aren't there.

LEON TAYLOR: Yes. I'll look to my colleague. I don't think they have an interim measure. We have the AVL equipment, but that's available for courts and professional visits. Doesn't have the capability nor the capacity to extend that to families, which is why the top of our priority list, in terms of moving into Parklea, is to fix the deficiency that you're question points to.

The CHAIR: Thank you. At the last budget estimates, we talked about the Astill inquiry and specifically the women's strategy that was developed as a result of that inquiry. I was informed at the time that a decision was yet to be made about whether the women's strategy would be made public. Can I get an update on that and what's happening in that space?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Can I just say, so I think, Chair, in respect of matters pertaining to Astill, the Hon. Peter McClellan in his report didn't recommend, but commented, that there should be a separation, an independence of oversight which resides with the Secretary. However, all of the administration of the system and the practicalities to which the women's strategy very much speaks—consistent with recommendation 30 of the special commission of inquiry—is being overseen by the Commissioner.

GARY McCAHON: I'll just add to that before I hand over to Deputy Commissioner Grant. The women's strategy has been developed and it's in its final stages for approval. The strategy was developed in consultation with over 480 stakeholders, including women in the system with lived experience, frontline staff, service delivery partners and advocacy organisations and other key stakeholder partners. The strategy identifies key priorities for system reform and commits to achieving improved outcomes for women. Importantly, the strategy responds directly to the recommendations just referred to by the Secretary. Mr Grant, is there anything further that you would want to add?

LUKE GRANT: No.

GARY McCAHON: I don't think there is anything further, Chair.

The CHAIR: Has there been any progress made specifically in establishing an advocacy service for female inmates? I know that was announced on 24 September, I believe.

GARY McCAHON: Yes. I'll just refer to Deputy Taylor who's got an update on that for you.

LEON TAYLOR: It was recommendation 20 of Commissioner McClellan's report that is relevant to that. A service provider is about to be appointed. There's been a tender that has finalised just recently and will be announced in a few weeks, but it'll be a legal service provider that will provide the service that responds to recommendation 20 of the special commission recommendations.

The CHAIR: I'd also like to ask some questions about Aboriginal women in custody. What steps are being taken to address the growing rates of Aboriginal women specifically in custody on remand.

GARY McCAHON: I'll just ask Deputy Commissioner Grant to come forward because there's been a lot of work done in that space, and I'll ask him to speak specifically about the Aboriginal women in our care.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

LUKE GRANT: As the Minister said, as your question is specifically in relation to people on remand, we don't have very much influence over those people who come into custody on remand. There's very limited capacity for us to divert people. We do have one narrow provision that enables us to divert people who are sentenced under section 26. For that, over the last couple of years, we've been diverting women to the community care for their children while they're serving a sentence. That's been a really effective strategy. I think we've had 14 or 15 women who've been involved in that arrangement at the moment. That same provision doesn't apply to people who are on remand, so the court is able to vary those arrangements. We've got no discretion directly to allow people to be in the community on remand.

The CHAIR: But is there anything being done in regard to addressing the growing number specifically of women in remand?

LUKE GRANT: As I said, that's fundamentally the court's decision, so we don't have any capacity over who comes into our care on remand. Once they're with us, we can do things with people. I know there were some questions earlier about the number of people who are on remand and the types of programs and things that are

CORRECTED

done for people on remand. There's quite a bit of misinformation around suggesting we don't do much for people under those circumstances.

There are a few significant practical considerations. I think one of the members earlier gave some figures about the time that people spend on remand. For Aboriginal women in custody on remand, the median amount of time they spend in custody is 33 days, so half of the women are in custody for less than 33 days, which makes it quite hard, given that during that process they are undergoing court appointments and other things, to do an enormous amount with them during that period of time. For the people who are there for a bit longer, there is capacity to provide interventions for people during that time. We do provide some interventions for people. I don't actually have the breakdown for women on remand, but I have the breakdown for Aboriginal people on remand and the types of programs that they engage in. But in general, Aboriginal people are represented slightly above the representation rate in custody in all the programs that we offer, and then we have specific additional activities and things that we provide.

The CHAIR: Your department doesn't work with any other departments looking at preventative measures in any way; you're just dealing with it at the other end of it.

LUKE GRANT: We really basically operate at the end of the process rather than the beginning. In that respect, you did ask before a question specifically about the allocation of funds for Aboriginal people at the end of custody. There is actually a reasonable allocation, which I'm happy to go through to explain to you what's happening in that space.

The CHAIR: Yes please.

LUKE GRANT: Bear with me for a second. In this year's budget, I think the Minister mentioned a figure of \$100.5 million plus \$110 million, if you added it all up. As part of that process, there's \$9.5 million that has been allocated to Aboriginal through-care initiatives. This is trying to stop people from coming back as opposed to trying to deal with them when we don't actually have any capacity to, prior to them coming into custody. The first one of those is a project that will enhance the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people in custody who have experienced substance abuse, and that program will be delivered by an Aboriginal community controlled organisation yet to be determined. This money has just become available and there is \$1.19 million that has been allocated for that function.

Separately, there's a project focusing on men, not women, we're doing in partnership with a group led by an Aboriginal academic at the University of Sydney. We were trying to develop a best practice social and emotional wellbeing program for people by speaking to Aboriginal people on what they think would work best. That's really well advanced, and so this money will help us to deliver that program. In addition to that, we have \$2.9 million for an Aboriginal place-based support centre to also work with an Aboriginal community controlled organisation to deliver post-release place-based accommodation and support, and that could even include building and constructing modular accommodation, using our modular accommodation capacity.

Then we have a capacity to expand our Aboriginal Elders program. We have an Aboriginal Elders program that already runs in a number of correctional centres across the State. We have \$300,000 to increase the allocation to part-time Aboriginal Elders visiting centres. There's a very big investment specifically in a domestic and family violence program for Aboriginal men who use violence. There is \$5 million that has been made available to that to roll out and deliver a much more specific program for treating Aboriginal men who engage in domestic violence offending, so that's all wrapped up in an additional budget supplementation we received this year.

The CHAIR: Maybe not in this package, but has there ever been funding or anything done to ensure that Aboriginal women who are survivors of domestic and family violence have access to culturally safe support and advocacy in custody and upon release?

LUKE GRANT: We have a range of programs for dealing with trauma and experiences of trauma for Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal women, and those programs exist. We don't have a specific program for Aboriginal women that I'm aware of. There are some very specific programs for women.

The CHAIR: I'd be keen to hear what kind of culturally safe health services are available to Aboriginal women in custody in particular.

LUKE GRANT: Yes, I understand. I do have a list here of programs where we're working with other Aboriginal community organisations, for instance, Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre. I'm sorry, I have to take that question on notice, unless I find it before I can come back to it.

The CHAIR: That's alright. We can come back to it.

CORRECTED

LUKE GRANT: There are a range of services where we're engaging with Aboriginal community organisations for the delivery of programs, like for preferences to work with those organisations and the delivery of those services.

The CHAIR: I'm wondering as well what kind of consultation is undertaken with women in custody to address their needs and ensure the investments made by the Government are focused on ultimately reducing incarceration in the long term, particularly around recidivism. I'm just wondering what sort of consultation you've done.

LUKE GRANT: I think the commissioner mentioned earlier that there was a significant consultation around the development of the women's strategy, and there were 400 people I think who were involved in that.

GARY McCAHON: There were 480.

LUKE GRANT: One of the people who conducted that work was a very experienced Aboriginal community worker who works in our organisation as a lawyer and social worker. She led those consultations with Aboriginal women in custody to try and understand what they thought would make a difference. That has been incorporated into the strategy. In addition to that, last year we brought over an organisation that started in the United Kingdom called Lived Expert to develop an Aboriginal research democratisation of decision-making around Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who are in custody using lived experience. That process oversampled Aboriginal people. This team went out and interviewed hundreds of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in custody and came up with a series of ideas that they thought we needed to address. It's part of a new sort of commitment we have to working with lived experience.

We haven't done a lot of that in the past. We have had, however, for a considerable period of time Aboriginal delegate committees in all of our correctional centres, including Aboriginal women delegates committees in Aboriginal women's jails. That's a regular process where the governor of the jail meets on a regular basis with people to understand what their issues might be. But that doesn't actually inform, necessarily, broader organisational strategies, but we've taken that to heart quite a lot recently. There's much more of that type of communication going on with people in custody.

GARY McCAHON: There was also a meeting that myself, the Minister and the secretary had with Ms Higginson just in relation to a number of matters, and one of them was around that she had given us some advice in relation to a Yung Prodigy group. As part of the strategy, we incorporated that in there because one of the things within my understanding across other jurisdictions, the Yung Prodigy, there are about 40,000 young members of the family, children, that have been impacted by incarceration. That gave us an opportunity to have a look at that and make sure that we had representation as part of the considerations for the women's strategy.

LUKE GRANT: Might I just return to that question? I've found my missing page.

The CHAIR: Yes. That way you don't have to take it on notice.

LUKE GRANT: These are just some examples of people who are assisting Aboriginal people leaving custody, relying upon Aboriginal community controlled organisations: one of them is actually Legal Aid with the Aboriginal Women Leaving Custody Legal Aid program at Broken Hill; the Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre delivering domestic violence, sexual assault and legal education at the Mid North Coast Correctional Centre; and the Muru Mittigar healing program to educate Aboriginal inmates on emotional self-regulation, risk prevention and healing, which comes out of Parklea Correctional Centre. There are a range of organisations we are trying to work with now. That is a significant improvement on what we've done in previous years.

The CHAIR: How many women in custody right now are pregnant and how many of those pregnant women are Aboriginal?

LUKE GRANT: I don't know how many are Aboriginal, but I do have the number for the number of pregnant women in custody. As of last week, there were seven pregnant women in custody. I don't know how many of them were Aboriginal. I'll have to get back to you in relation to that.

The CHAIR: How many correctional centres holding women have antenatal units in them?

LUKE GRANT: That would be a question for Justice Health. We don't provide those services. I don't have that information before me, but Justice Health is responsible for the provision of health services to prisoners and not Corrective Services.

The CHAIR: Do you know if there are any support programs offered to those women in custody outside of the specific sort of medical health?

CORRECTED

LUKE GRANT: There is a working group currently working called the Pregnant Women in Custody Working Group, which is a multidisciplinary team that involves the governors, Justice Health and service integration managers. They've been asked to develop and implement dignity-focused strategies which support and improve the custodial environment. I'd have to get an update from them on their progress, but it's something that we're interested in. Primarily, the health component is a Justice Health component, but we have shared responsibilities for the care of those people.

The CHAIR: As you mentioned, programs like the Antenatal Care in Prison projects are managed by Justice Health and delivered within NSW Corrective Services facilities. I'm just wondering if Corrective Services actually meets with Justice Health in relation to this program and have any sort of oversight or say or correspondence in relation to how that functions.

LUKE GRANT: In relation to Justice Health's functioning generally?

The CHAIR: No, in relation specifically to the Antenatal Care in Prison project that is run by Justice Health.

LUKE GRANT: I'd have to see whether they covered it, but I'd suspect that the Pregnant Women in Custody Working Group is the forum where that would occur. It involves both of our agencies meeting together.

The CHAIR: So it does involve—

LUKE GRANT: Justice Health and Corrective Services, and it also has the DCJ child protection people attending as well.

The CHAIR: The website states that it aims to deliver a model of care which is women centred and culturally appropriate. Given that you're working with them on this project, can you explain how this model of care is being implemented in correctional services that house women in New South Wales?

LUKE GRANT: Are you talking about a model of care for pregnant women?

The CHAIR: The ACIP website states that it aims to deliver a model of care which is women centred and culturally appropriate.

LUKE GRANT: I would have to get back to you with details about that. I don't have that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Ms McPhee, how often do you brief the Minister?

REBECCA MCPHEE: I have a fortnightly briefing with the Minister and then ad hoc on top of that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you discussed the Investment Delivery Authority?

REBECCA MCPHEE: Yes, on multiple occasions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When did you, as Investment NSW, start work on that policy?

REBECCA MCPHEE: I'll start by saying that in terms of different potential policies for supporting investment attraction, I've been having those conversations with the Minister since I started this role, which is about a year ago now. In respect to the IDA itself, the first conversation we had was with the Minister's office, the Treasurer's office and the office of the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces back in April.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was this an idea that originated from Investment NSW?

REBECCA MCPHEE: We've had policy proposals put forward that incorporated elements of the IDA.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: As in, you've put forward policy proposals?

REBECCA MCPHEE: Yes, absolutely, through the last year. This specific version came to being around April, in collaboration with those three Ministers' offices.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You said you met with the planning Minister, Minister Chanthivong and the Treasurer to brief them.

REBECCA MCPHEE: Their offices.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When did you brief the Minister on this proposal?

REBECCA MCPHEE: The Minister, to my understanding, had been briefed prior to that meeting, but I don't know when.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Who briefed him?

CORRECTED

REBECCA McPHEE: I believe it was an origin of a conversation between the Ministers and the Treasurer. I learnt about it in April, from that briefing.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was your understanding that the planning Minister, the Minister for Industry and Trade and the Treasurer had a conversation, and then Minister Chanthivong spoke to you to develop a proposal that then went to the offices?

REBECCA McPHEE: The Treasurer's office and the two Ministers' offices briefed us—so Investment NSW, Treasury and the department of planning. Treasury led, but in consultation with the other two departments, the early policy development.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And that happened in April?

REBECCA McPHEE: Correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The \$1 billion that was chosen is quite a significant amount. I was looking at some of the other projects that have been delivered in New South Wales. Even such a large project as the Sydney Fish Market falls under \$1 billion. What are the intended types of projects that would be over \$1 billion?

REBECCA McPHEE: That \$1 billion threshold was set having regard to the last couple of years of Planning Portal data. The types of investments and how many investments at that scale the department of planning have seen come through are typically State significant development applications. Over the last couple of years, we've seen about 40 of those each year on average. That threshold was set to ensure that the team responding to these IDA proposals could maximise their impact on any one given project. But the IDA also has a remit to implement systemic reform so that it's not just the biggest proponents who are receiving the benefit.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It sounds like the exact mechanisms for this project are being worked out. Are the 40 a year that are already in the Planning Portal intended to be looked at through the new framework?

REBECCA McPHEE: The intent would be that we would run an expression of interest process. We may get expressions of interest from projects that are already in the planning process and we would consider them, but we anticipate that we will get incremental ones that are considering investment decisions, and even potentially in the future stimulate additional proposals to come forward. That's certainly what the Housing Delivery Authority saw. They actually saw an increase in the number of applications coming through as a result.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Why wasn't this included in the Trade and Investment Strategy?

REBECCA McPHEE: There's a recommendation in there which speaks to this type of policy proposal. There's a recommendation around driving strategic investment support and collaboration across government. The first of those is to develop whole-of-government actions to accelerate major investment projects aligned to the Government's industry policy missions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So the IDA falls within that?

REBECCA McPHEE: This absolutely sits as a response to that. We were a little bit more generic in the descriptions here because it is a 10-year strategy. This is one policy proposal that has now been announced, but there may be others over the next decade that support that particular ambition.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I would've thought that updates to the strategy would be made within that 10-year time frame to ensure that it was up to date. Is that the intention?

REBECCA McPHEE: We've planned in a review every year or two, but we haven't yet made a commitment as to whether there'll be another publication or an update. We will do a review to see how we're going against the targets and what policies and programs are in place and the impacts they're having, but not necessarily fully update a substantial document like this.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I referenced that Business Connect has now been cut as a program, yet it is also part of the strategy. That's the kind of update I would have presumed would be very important—if not additions then subtractions. Is that something that would be changed?

REBECCA McPHEE: On Business Connect, it's probably worth noting that we continue to work with Service NSW to support small businesses, and they will continue to pass referrals to us where they see our services can help those small businesses. As I say, we've committed to an internal review every couple of years as to what types of changes or updates might be made. I'm not going to suggest I know that yet.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Back to the IDA specifically, the media release said that the IDA will be able to "offer government assistance to support a proponent if their project is chosen". Are you aware if that includes financial assistance?

CORRECTED

REBECCA McPHEE: The budget commitment was for us to design, develop and launch this financial year. As I'm sure you'll be aware, we're doing a lot of detailed design work at the moment, and I'm not going to make any specific announcements until those final decisions have been made and government decide to announce. In terms of the policy intent, though, it is about supporting private investment rather than government expenditure or government grants. Of course, these major projects may get support otherwise, either from the State or the Commonwealth governments, but it's predominantly about facilitating private sector investors who, through the stakeholder engagement we've had with them, say that New South Wales is an incredibly attractive place to do business but sometimes things take too long to get through approvals.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The IDA has been allocated \$17.7 million to set up, which sounds like quite a lot of money, to be honest, especially for one year. Are you responsible for that budget?

REBECCA McPHEE: The \$17.7 million is over the forwards—so over the next four years. That's the funding for that period of time. The funding is split between Investment NSW, which will provide the support to the IDA directly—that's those four named secretaries. It will also house a cross-governmental taskforce to help with the actions that will actually support these projects, and some of the funding will also go to the department of planning, because some of the support that will be provided will be in facilitating with those planning processes. So the funding is split across those two organisations.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is it the intention that projects that are recommended to the Government from the IDA be made public? Is there a public consultation process?

REBECCA McPHEE: Again, I'm going to leave the details to—in terms of consultation, there will be some consultation prior to finalising and announcing. However, I won't speak to what will be in that final announcement.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: On Tech Central, there was \$5 million allocated for transition from the Wynyard Sydney Startup Hub to whatever Tech Central is going to be. What is that \$5 million to be spent on?

REBECCA McPHEE: There's, overall, \$38.5 million allocated in the budget to the broader outcomes of Tech Central. That includes the move. It includes the activities that will support the Tech Central strategy, when it's announced, and there's other broader support within that ecosystem. We don't have the breakdown yet of what will be spent on which of those activities.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I think there was quite a lot of reporting on the \$5 million being allocated. I think it's even in the budget papers that \$5 million is for the transition. I'm just trying to understand what that is.

REBECCA McPHEE: I thought that the \$5 million was the amount announced—can I take that on notice, to give you a bit more of a breakdown, when it's available?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes. I can also find the reference in the papers.

REBECCA McPHEE: We can come back to it, if that's helpful.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Let's come back to Tech Central then, or at least let's come back to the move later. The actual \$38.5 million and the Tech Central strategy—when is that Tech Central strategy going to be released? I understand that a consultation paper went out in June.

REBECCA McPHEE: Yes. We've done two rounds of consultation on that to date—one to inform the development of the strategy and then a subsequent round to kind of test some of the findings and the proposals coming forward. That is now being finalised, and it's obviously a matter for Government to decide when that will be launched.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How were the stakeholders chosen, in terms of the engagement?

REBECCA McPHEE: It was quite an extensive list of stakeholders that were engaged across the different parts of the ecosystem. Obviously we've got tech businesses, everything from startups right through to the big unicorns in the area—Atlassian, Canva et cetera—as well as the universities and research organisations. So we have consulted across that spectrum of businesses.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many stakeholders were in that list?

REBECCA McPHEE: The discovery phase was 50 industry and government stakeholders across 16 interviews. That was in March and early April. The validation phase—I don't have a list of those spoken to directly but there was also an anonymous survey, to which we received 23 full responses, and that was open to many.

CORRECTED

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Were those 23 responses from the 50 stakeholders or was it wider than that?

REBECCA McPHEE: I think it was wider than that, but let me take that on notice to confirm.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I was asking the Minister about whether he would conduct a public hearing, given there has been a lot of consternation about the transition. I know that he has recommended that people sign up to an e-newsletter to find out more information. I've signed up to that e-newsletter; I'm not sure that I've received anything. Is there capacity for Investment NSW to run a public briefing where people can ask questions about what's happening?

REBECCA McPHEE: What I would recommend as a way forward is that we have individual meetings with any business who are looking for more information. What I find is that gives us more of an opportunity to really understand specific business needs, which may be commercial in confidence, and allow a proper one-on-one conversation about whether the Tech Central innovation hub will meet their needs, what opportunities are there and across the rest of our program. I would absolutely be very happy for any individual organisations to come and meet with us directly—and personally as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you for that offer. I will pass that on, of course. While that is good and welcome, the onus on individuals to engage in that process rather than a proactive approach to communicating makes it difficult for founders, who I know you know are very busy and have really limited resources, in general, to do their own thing. I just give that piece of feedback. I don't know whether the Minister didn't know the answer or he just didn't want to answer, but I understand that the rezoning around Central station occurred about four or so weeks ago.

REBECCA McPHEE: Correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know the details of that rezoning?

REBECCA McPHEE: Yes, I have some of the details here. Essentially that rezoning is around Central station. It's different from the previous rezoning because it takes out the over-station development for this round. Essentially what it does is it unlocks the potential—of course, subject to development—of 950 new homes with 30 per cent designated as affordable housing, 2,400 new jobs and 13½ thousand metre square of new open space.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you briefed the Minister on that?

REBECCA McPHEE: No, not since it was announced. The last conversation the Minister and I had was prior to the rezoning occurring—actually, prior to my finding out that the rezoning had occurred.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand. I asked the Minister about the Western Sydney Startup Hub. Does that have automatic funding or do organisations within the hub or the tenant have to apply for funding?

REBECCA McPHEE: There's funding and a contractual agreement in place until the end of 2027.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you conducting any work on the Sydney Science Park?

REBECCA McPHEE: No, we're not actively conducting any work on that. My understanding is that's a privately led science park rather than a government-led approach.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you haven't met with anybody?

REBECCA McPHEE: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That is good to know. Do you use findings from the Startup Muster survey and report in creating policies or gaining insights into the startup sector?

REBECCA McPHEE: It's a sentiment-based survey, as I'm sure you know, so we absolutely keep track of it and it informs our thinking. But in terms of the specific policy design that went into the Innovation Blueprint, we actually leant on the quantitative assessment that was undertaken by Kate Pounder and her associate for that. That digs more into some of the much more detailed company-level datasets that we have available to us as government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I referenced the Trade and Investment Strategy and some of the data that was included—or, actually, not included. I'm wondering how those decisions are made. I gave the example of bilateral trade, but what is not in there are details around trends in exports, whether it's services or goods, or imports as well, and how the trade relationships with countries and through different sectors are going in industries. I'm just wonder how those decisions are made to include or not include that data.

CORRECTED

REBECCA McPHEE: As you note, we only have some fairly high-level historic data in the report itself. That information is available publicly. To a very detailed level—both from the ABS and from DFAT; they both publish that statistic—you can look up specific goods, two-way trade in, say, coal with Japan and get a figure, historically. The Trade and Investment Strategy is already quite a lengthy document. We did have to make decisions—it was even longer—about what to keep. We determined to focus on that 10-year period or look ahead, rather than recent annual historical trends, because it is meant to be in place for that 10-year period.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We've got the IDA, which is supposed to be bringing in \$50 billion a year, and the foreign direct investment. The foreign direct investment target was at \$25 billion over the next 10 years. That is half the value of the previous five years in foreign direct investment. I'm trying to understand how it interacts with the IDA's work and how those calculations have been made in the strategy that don't seem very ambitious, to be honest, but also don't seem to relate to the IDA policy.

REBECCA McPHEE: Yes, understood. It's a bit apples and pears. I'm happy to talk through the two different things. The \$25 billion target investment attraction into New South Wales relates specifically to investment that has been facilitated by the New South Wales government—by ourselves, by Bradfield Development Authority and by regional development within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. I think about investment attraction as a bit like a funnel. This is around engaging with investors, local and foreign. When they are looking to make an investment decision, will they build that plant factory here in New South Wales, in Victoria or in Singapore?

This \$25 billion is around directly facilitated investment attraction support into the State. At the IDA, you start to get to the point where you get to the funnel. A decision has been made to invest in New South Wales and the applicants, typically at the development application, have really well detailed plans and they are going to invest in New South Wales. The IDA targets that phase. How can we facilitate and make that quicker and easier for those private investors? Those are not included. The money that will come and be facilitated by the IDA isn't included in that \$25 billion. Of course, over time we may get investors that we attract over here and end up being supported by the IDA at a later stage. That \$50 billion target is on top of the \$25 billion.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How do you determine what has been facilitated, then?

REBECCA McPHEE: We track those really carefully with our interactions with clients. The team, using Salesforce, basically logs the engagement they have had and then there is, essentially, a validation process as to whether that's an investment, when it lands, that we can claim we genuinely facilitated. There are criteria to support that.

The CHAIR: I have some more questions for representatives from Corrective Services NSW. I am wondering how Corrective Services specifically considers and caters for the experiences of pregnant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and if there is any work done in that space.

GARY McCAHON: I might ask Deputy Commissioner Grant to come forward on that.

LUKE GRANT: Sorry, I'm not trying to deflect the question. Since you last asked the question, I had a look what ACIP stands for, because I wasn't familiar with it. I said I'd take that on notice. That's actually a NSW Health program as well. That's a program that Corrective Services is involved in, in managing and improving antenatal care for Aboriginal women. In the same way, anything to do with health is a NSW Health activity. We work very closely with Justice Health in that respect, but we are not responsible for planning Health delivery.

The main issue that we do is we provide access to people to make sure that people can actually see the patients when they need to see them. Another thing I omitted before about pregnant women that I also subsequently realised I didn't mention was that there has been work done specifically in the Corrective Services industry space around diets for pregnant women, to try and improve their diets. We control their diets. Things that we can have an impact on, we are thinking about. That was an outcome of this committee that is working on trying to improve the experiences of pregnant women in custody.

The CHAIR: Do you have any data around the number of children that have been removed from Aboriginal women in custody in the last 12 months?

LUKE GRANT: No, I'd have to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Can you find out if that's a statistics that is recorded and kept?

LUKE GRANT: Are you talking about women who are in custody who have had a child removed?

The CHAIR: Yes, Aboriginal women.

LUKE GRANT: Or women once they have been in custody?

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Aboriginal women in custody in the past 12 months—how many of them have had children removed? Is that statistic available and kept?

LUKE GRANT: That, I believe, would reside with my statutory responsibility. I am happy to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: I'm just wondering what additional psychological support is made available to women who may have had their children removed while incarcerated.

LUKE GRANT: I'm not sure if we count that sort of measure. We have quite a lot of psychological support provided to people who are in custody. I'm not sure if we actually would keep a record that I could pull that suggests there has been a certain number of hours on that process.

The CHAIR: So there is no specific psychological support for those women?

LUKE GRANT: There isn't any, no.

The CHAIR: Is there anything that is done to ensure that those women can maintain contact and connection, specifically with infant children if they are removed from care?

LUKE GRANT: Absolutely. One of the things that was a great benefit from the machinery-of-government changes that brought FACS and Corrective Services together into the one agency was an agreement to pilot—and now it's running in all women's correctional centres—an inReach program for child protection workers. All correctional centres have child protection workers embedded in the centres. Contrary to people's fears that people might be alienated from that because of their general association with child protection workers, it has been an incredible success. There has been an evaluation done of it by Eileen Baldry. That was very positive and showed a significant benefit in terms of the type of support they were provided in relation to maintaining contact with children. The idea is to try to create relationships. We have the Mother and Children's Program in custody that would potentially allow that to occur. For people who have had their child removed at some earlier stage, the in-house inReach service from child protection workers actually works on that program.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Commission McCahon, can I go to you about the questions I was asking the Minister about the newspaper article about Keli Lane? It's not normal practice that we would be talking about newspaper articles, but it raised a centrally concerning point that people from, apparently, within Corrective Services NSW are speaking to the media and telling untruths. It is my understanding that Ms Lane does not have a phone and has no device, and yet here somebody is making up stories as if there is some sort of legitimate source of authority on the matter. Does that concern you?

GARY McCAHON: It always concerns me when people go running to the media when they don't have the facts, but I'm not sure who is responsible for going to the media. Whilst they may have said that it was a correctional officer or somebody from Corrective Services, it could be anybody that could be providing that information. I will correct the record. I won't talk about specific individuals. With inmates that are on work release, they are able and do have access to a phone. That's part of their agreement in relation to the employment. As you are aware now, mobile phones are the commodity; we don't have landlines now. That's a part of their work release program. For the individual who was responsible for the information, that happens every day.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I know you said you don't want to talk about specifics, but are you saying that Ms Lane has been given a phone by Corrective Services?

GARY McCAHON: Yes, that's correct. Not from Corrective Services, from the employer.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And you are certain about that?

GARY McCAHON: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: When you say you are certain about that, you are absolutely certain about that? I have been told otherwise. I have been told that Keli Lane is currently entering data into systems manually because she is not having any communications devices in her possession.

GARY McCAHON: I am absolutely certain that she has access to a phone.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you doing anything to look into or ask anyone in terms of your senior management about who might have said these things or who might have been in possession of that knowledge or who might have spoken about it? Are you doing anything about that?

GARY McCAHON: No. It would be impossible for me to track down *The Daily Telegraph* sources, whether they come from Corrective Services or—if we are aware that a staff member has engaged in some conversations with *The Daily Telegraph* without approval, then we would take appropriate action.

CORRECTED

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you doing anything in terms of the workplace culture and sending a memorandum and talking about reminding people how cruel it is and that it is just not the thing to do?

GARY McCAHON: Not specifically over that matter, no.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Notwithstanding the fact that Keli has been subjected to some really awful behaviour from Corrective Services officers and staff, and yet she's assisted the system in so many ways to try to right wrongs that have been perpetrated within the system—we wouldn't think that it's appropriate to try to correct some really foul behaviour that's happening about her?

GARY McCAHON: Again, I won't talk about individual cases; however, it's part of the code of conduct, which all of the officers have to go through. They are fully aware that they're not to engage with the media without approval. If they do so, then we will take appropriate action.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I asked the Minister earlier about when the contract for services providing telecommunications with ViaPath and Telstra will run out. Is that something you can inform the Committee about?

GARY McCAHON: Yes, we have had an update. I'll ask Deputy Commissioner Grant to come forward and give you that advice.

LUKE GRANT: The question is in relation to how long the current contract extends to?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes.

LUKE GRANT: It's until 30 September 2027.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: At this point do you have any preliminary plans or intentions to renew those?

LUKE GRANT: We've got plans not to renew it all but to establish a proper procurement process. The kick-off meeting was only in the last couple of weeks with a group of people—with our IDS colleagues, actually—to start that process. We will be going out to tender, or we're looking at what's on the market, going through all those processes. That project has just commenced.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have you got a timeline for that procurement process?

LUKE GRANT: It's just started now. I'd have to get back to you on the time. There was a timeline for it. I just don't have it in my mind.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is that something that can be provided to the Committee?

LUKE GRANT: Of course, yes. No problems.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If I said to you, Commissioner, that an inmate was recently released from Kempsey correctional centre and that person had gone to bed for the night, or it was past dark, then somebody knocked on their door and said, "You're being released tonight," and they were dropped off at Kempsey train station at 10.00 p.m. at night and told, "Your train comes to Central Station at 12.30 a.m. Here's a ticket to Central Station," notwithstanding the person has nobody at Kempsey nor Central Station, is that an appropriate release?

GARY McCAHON: I think I would find that quite disappointing that we would have to do that. But I know that has happened on occasions. That's something that I would like to look at to see how we can improve in that area, for sure.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What would compel those circumstances? Why do you think somebody would think that that is the best thing to do for an inmate's release?

GARY McCAHON: We cannot lawfully detain the persons once they've been released. There's a lot of effort that goes in with the staff, prior to people being released, to see if there is a contact out there so that they can have that engagement, particularly within—that first 72 hours is quite critical to make sure that there is some support out there. But it does happen.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I thought we passed laws recently to say that you can detain somebody overnight or that little bit longer until they have reasonable and safe transport. Is that not the case? Is that not your understanding?

GARY McCAHON: Well, that may be the case. I'd need to take that on notice.

LUKE GRANT: If I might assist, Commissioner, it does involve consent. The person has to consent to that arrangement. A person who has been granted bail or otherwise can stay in custody for a little bit longer to make those arrangements.

CORRECTED

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: My understanding from the account I'd been given, the person was very confused they were leaving at that time of night with such short notice. Have physical visits been restored for John Morony and Dillwynia on Saturdays and Sundays?

LUKE GRANT: Yes, I answered earlier.

GARY McCAHON: Yes, that was answered earlier.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I apologise. This is the two-committee dilemma. I'm sorry. I've got people upstairs feeding me messages about what has been asked and what hasn't, so I must have missed that. Have all the visitor information materials—is everyone aware that would need to be aware that those visitor rights have been recommenced?

GARY McCAHON: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm just curious about the phone calls. Is it your intention to be advocating for inmates to receive free access to communications with loved ones, whether it be from their tablets or from telephones?

GARY McCAHON: I might refer to Deputy Grant in relation to the work that is being done in that space.

LUKE GRANT: We'd like to give free telephone calls to people, but it's very cost prohibitive. But we are really pleased to say we've successfully negotiated, as part of the extension of the contract with Telstra, a significant improvement in call costs.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I ask what they are?

LUKE GRANT: About 30 per cent of calls made to inmates are done to landlines. This will take effect at the end of September by the way, so it hasn't commenced immediately. The landline costs, if they were a local call—STD calls are slightly different—will be now a flat rate of 25¢. They used to be \$1.55 for a 10-minute call. That will go to a flat rate of 25¢, which is a fantastic outcome. In addition to that, we will be providing one free mobile telephone call per week to every inmate, which is also a fantastic thing. We provided already local calls so that was helping a lot of people, particularly if their family were living—and they have to use an STD call. So it's corrected through the STD call, through the call rate, but there's a free call for everyone. We were very pleased with that outcome and Telstra agreed to a significant reduction in their revenue to achieve that, which was pretty strong bargaining on our behalf and we're really happy with it. We can't do it for everyone. We also provide a lot of free calls, by the way which might address that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm aware.

LUKE GRANT: There are about 13½ million calls made by prisoners per year. At the moment one million of those calls are done at our expense, at Corrective Services' expense. But 7½ million of them are done from the tablets in people's cells at night. The introduction of the tablets has significantly increased not just the time span but the uptake in telephone calls for people in custody as well, which has significantly improved. Plus we continue to provide the AVL visits for free as well. I think we had about 125,000 free AVL visits to prisoners in the last 12 months.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: The numbers sound like they're definitely getting better. But this is the primary and pivotal requirement for an inmate to stay connected, to have any hope of rehabilitation and care and reduced recidivism rates. They're definitely numbers that are getting better, but the goal should be that it is free and accessible communication once somebody's liberty is totally taken. With that, when you say 30 per cent of calls are landline calls, how quickly have you seen that decrease in terms of the numbers from obviously 100 per cent a long time ago to 30 per cent? Are we still on a downward trajectory?

LUKE GRANT: I imagine it's very similar to what has occurred in the community. However, most VoIP systems provide a very cheap landline telephone. I know that prisoners' families are really trying to improve that contact. I think just the example of the number of calls that are made, the number of free AVL visits and so on is indicative of our commitment to trying to improve those outcomes. But the calls to the landlines—there is a possibility that people can use VoIP phones and things for that as well, which would improve their opportunities to make those calls.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: With the one free mobile call per week that is being offered, is that a time—how does that work?

LUKE GRANT: It's 10 minutes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So they're all basically—10 minutes is the increment that you work through?

CORRECTED

LUKE GRANT: That's right.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Unless you're reporting on the sexual assault line and then you get a 15-minute cap, I hear.

LUKE GRANT: I know you asked a question or someone asked about the 15-minute cap earlier.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I did.

LUKE GRANT: Part of the reason for capping it at that level is just to ensure that other people can call that number. When someone makes the call, there is actually an alarm system built into it that sends an alert when 15 minutes is approaching. Under those circumstances, they're still engaged in a conversation. The person on our end of the call encourages the person to ring back straightaway and they can continue it for another 15 minutes or for another 15 minutes. But the point of those calls is to make complaints and to refer those to other people for investigation, so you shouldn't conceptualise that as an investigation. It's someone who will listen to the call, provide some advice about what could be done and then, if they need more time than 15 minutes, encourage the person to call back straightaway.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I understand that, but the assumption is that that person is somebody who's very capable and able to make the complaint. Sometimes it takes more than that.

LUKE GRANT: Yes. It is a very simple system, however. It's on the CADL system. You just press one number on your tablet to get through to that line. It's as easy as we could possibly make it.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Then, in the lead-up to 15 minutes, you get told that your calls are going to end, and then you have to ring back again.

LUKE GRANT: Yes. That's right.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have we had advice that that is a sensible kind of trauma-informed way of taking calls about sexual violence and assault and—

LUKE GRANT: I think it's just a pragmatic thing. If there are two or three people waiting to get on and if the person was on the call for 30 minutes or an hour, then they probably wouldn't get through with the current levels of staffing available on that system.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I don't think I've ever heard of anyone making an allegation of sexual assault and violence that goes for less than 15 minutes, not in my entire life and having practised in criminal law where people aren't incarcerated. But, anyway, there—

LUKE GRANT: In relation to that, though, taking on board your comments, we can review the downtime. We don't set that to be punitive or to be arbitrary. It was just based on—it's longer than the calls observed for general telephone calls. If there's downtime between that space, we can extend. The system's modifiable. So we're happy to take that on board to consider whether or not we can expand it without actually denying other people access to the call.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you—very limited time, but, yes, that would be great. I think it would be good to review is it working, is it appropriate, is it right, is it having the effect that Commissioner McClellan intended.

LUKE GRANT: There's a lot of time also with people calling the wrong number or calling and hanging up and so on. So there's a lot of wasted time in that system, as well. There might be opportunities to try to improve on that, to create more time. We'd give more time if we thought that was available and wasn't going to interfere with other people's access.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. Have the computer tablets been given access to AustLII or the AEC websites?

LUKE GRANT: No, they haven't.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there any reason?

LUKE GRANT: I've got a 40-page document somewhere that explains the reasons why. But I think that there are problems with the website. One of the problems we've had consistently with accessing web-based services is it's quite hard to contain the capacity for people to use that to get out from that particular website to another one. And almost every application we've put in, including things you might think are quite benign, like the triple J website—people have found workarounds that enable them to use it as a communications tool and engaged in behaviours that, potentially, undermine the whole integrity of the system and could result in it being removed because people have tried to engage in criminal activities and so on through those.

CORRECTED

In protecting against that we have had to be very cautious about whitelisted websites. I think there's some work underway, in terms of a legal information access portal, that actually is already done in conjunction with Legal Aid, that contains a lot of the information. But I'm happy to provide you with more information. It's something I didn't read up on. But there's an enormous amount of information about why that's not available at this stage.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'd still like to do Corrections if that's okay. I asked the Minister, with regard to lockdowns, whether he's provided briefings on that. Could you advise how often the Minister is briefed with regard to the Corrections portfolio?

GARY McCAHON: I have fortnightly meetings with the Minister. Because of the current WorkCover and the impacts of WorkCover, the lockdowns are occurring primarily because—it's certainly got to be able to make sure that I've got safe operations of the facility with the staff that I have. So the lockdowns are regular. If there is an irregular pattern, I would advise the Minister of that. But the Minister hasn't had any advice of any of that at the moment.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: If I may supplement that, it is the case that, of course, the commissioner briefs the Minister fortnightly. I brief the Minister separately and fortnightly in respect of the special commission of inquiry—the Astill commission of inquiry—and reforms arising from that process.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Would you be able to provide on notice, then, for each prison in, say, 2024 and up to date to 2025, the number of days they've had either full or partial lockdown—whether it be insufficient staff or training. If you could categorise that for each of the prisons, because I understand, as you said, it's not just Silverwater. Mid North Coast, from what I can gather, has had over 60 days this calendar year where they've had lockdowns. I don't know whether it's been because of staffing. But that's quite a significant amount, when you think about it. I'm thinking about the other implications, so if I could have that on notice.

GARY McCAHON: Certainly.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On that, in terms of the unintended consequences or things that can happen, I believe, say, in Silverwater, in the 34-hour period between 17 and 19 August—actually, it might not be Silverwater; it might be overall—Corrective Services recorded 54 incidents of self-harm, 29 inmate-on-inmate assaults, four assaults on staff and 37 uses of force. Are you able to confirm whether that is the case—perhaps on notice as well?

GARY McCAHON: Yes, I'll take that on notice. Could I just confirm the Silverwater you're talking about? Is that MRRC, you're talking about? Silverwater Women's? Which facility are you talking about?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: All of them.

GARY McCAHON: You're talking, across the complex?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

GARY McCAHON: Okay. Thank you.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Actually, it might be across New South Wales, all the prisons. I wouldn't think that there would be 54 self-harms in just one prison. It would be across the whole network of prisons.

GARY McCAHON: The State?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Statewide. What oversight systems are in place to ensure that use of force does not escalate during times when staff are stretched thin?

GARY McCAHON: We'll provide that back as a part of one.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The Minister did mention workers comp. I'm wondering how many workers compensation claims have been lodged by Corrective Services staff in, say, the past year, due to injuries sustained from inmate assaults but also psychological injury.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Can I undertake to provide a response? I would like to give it now. I'm just looking through the figures. If I'm able, through the course of the afternoon, to provide that, I will. If I can't, I'm happy to provide it on notice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Okay. In providing that information, if you could provide—you've got it?

CORRECTED

MICHAEL TIDBALL: If I can just contextualise it. As at 30 June 2025, for the preceding 12 months, the injury claim frequency rate across Corrective Services was 15.8 per cent, a decrease of 4 per cent from 2023-24. The decrease in the injury rate was driven by a significant reduction in COVID-19 claims, obviously, but the total number of compensable injuries across Corrections in 2024 to 30 June 2025 was 1,475. Of that—and I can break it down further if it would assist the Committee—34 per cent of all injuries are psychological in nature. That, obviously, is a challenge for us. And 57 per cent of the cost of all claims are attributable to psychological injuries.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On those types of claims, are you able to say what the typical length of somebody being on workers compensation leave is—or claim?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: The return to work rate for psychological claims is 12 weeks, and the return rate for physical claims at 12 weeks is decreased slightly to—sorry, if I can just give you that 12-week benchmark. The return to work rate for psychological claims at 12 weeks is low. However, it has increased from 27 per cent in 2023-24 to 38 per cent as at 30 June 2025, and the return to work rate for physical claims at 12 weeks has decreased slightly to 83 per cent.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Did you say 83?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I did, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Prior to that, you said 34 per cent was psychological?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: It was 38 per cent.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The retention rate for staff—how many staff are leaving Corrective Services, say, in the last financial year? I know you're doing recruiting as well, but is it the case that you're losing more staff than you're able to recruit?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I could not confirm that, but I would prefer to take that on notice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When you say "insufficient staff"—say, as an instance, if 13 staff are off sick and 27 are on workers compensation, as occurred recently at SWCC, what does that mean for the ability of the remaining staff to manage inmates safely? That's where you'd use lockdown?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: That's an operational issue that I wouldn't be able to comment on.

GARY McCAHON: We have varied operational operating routines that happen across the centre. One of the things that we're very good at doing is managing risk within the centre. We actually make sure that we've got sufficient staff, despite the shortages, to carry out that activity that's relevant at the time. I might just ask Deputy Commissioner Taylor to come forward, because there is a lot of work that we are engaging in around the workers comp, in particular. We've got a new insurer now. I'll let Mr Taylor talk about that, because we're starting to see some positive results. Because the workers comp has a long tail, it creates sick leave because of burnout and such like that. We had a trial go across 12 sites, and I'll just let Mr Taylor talk a little bit about that.

LEON TAYLOR: I can probably also assist the Committee on some of the data that you asked for around uses of force. The program that the commissioner refers to—about 18 months ago, when our workers comp really continued to spike and the implications, like lockdown and other operational implications that occur on the system for our daily shortages of staff to fill our roster, led us to really roll our sleeves up as an agency and get more involved in injury management, which is a DCJ function and, as an agency, really put some skin in the game in terms of us managing our staff who are off on workers comp.

We have employed a bunch of staff across the State and employed those in correctional centres. We had a pilot. We rolled it out at a number of centres. It was so successful, we didn't wait for the pilot to be evaluated before we rolled it out across the State. At the Mid North Coast Correctional Centre, for example, from June last year when we started the pilot, we had 69 new claims of staff that went off on workers comp, and only three of those staff are now still out of the workplace. In terms of the normal approach to returning people to work, that is just an order of magnitude of success—far greater than anything we've done before—which is why we've rolled that out across the State. We are being far more innovative in terms of how we're returning people to work on suitable duties.

We're a uniformed agency, and we had practices before. If someone couldn't come back and fill a five-day shift or an eight-hour post on a roster, we'd leave them at home. Some of those practices were around for a long time, and the simple changes we made have had a real effect on getting people back to work. That pilot also gets uniformed staff who are colleagues alongside staff who go off and are injured, rather than someone in injury management or someone from the insurer who is a less known person, to really personalise the response that we have for staff who find themselves injured through their work.

CORRECTED

Assisting workers comp and getting people back to work really is kind of "turning the Queen Mary around". Our numbers are still of concern, but some of the responses we're getting out of some of our efforts, for the first time, is really starting to bear fruit. It's early days, but it's really encouraging that we're starting to get a much better response from our efforts. I am happy to talk a few numbers around some of the matters that the commissioner took on notice a minute ago, if you'd like, around uses of force and other matters.

In the six months to June this calendar year, there were 1,581 uses of force across Corrections. It's about the same as the 12-month period, if we extrapolate that out for the year. Inmate on inmate assaults for that same six-month period is 1,928 and for the same period of six months, January to 30 June, there were 170 assaults on staff. The numbers went up about a year ago, and then they've kind of plateaued in the last 12 months. They're still too high, higher than we'd like to them to be, but we expect the function—a lot of that's a function of the increase of remand that has been a topic of the Committee.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That was going to be my question. Are there particular prisons where it's more prevalent than, say, others?

LEON TAYLOR: Not that has come to my attention.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It's across the board.

LEON TAYLOR: We have higher rates of assault with remand inmates. We have higher rates of assault in our maximum security centres. But there are not particular spikes that I'm aware of in particular centres, all other things being equal.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The numbers with the assaults on staff—what happens with the staff? What sort of counselling or safety concerns are then taken into consideration so that the staff can, if they feel, return to work?

LEON TAYLOR: We have a number of interventions for those injured staff. Obviously their initial safety and their wellbeing is what we look to first. Staff who are assaulted—a lot of staff get spat on, which is an assault on staff. There was a terrible assault at Long Bay yesterday where an inmate was punched and headbutted by an inmate and also spat on. A staff member like that is well supported on the day by their colleagues there. Most staff, with that type of assault, would go to their own doctor. That would happen within work time, and they'd be transported there and assisted there. Ultimately, someone like that might end up on a time of workers compensation. A serious assault is obviously far less frequent, but ambulance response and all the rest of it.

We have a new wellbeing directorate. We have a fabulous director in there that we've recruited, and we've been resourcing up that team in the last 12 months—similar to our workers comp response but quite different where that team does intensive follow-up with staff, particularly those that are injured, either workers comp or inmate-on-staff assault, and they follow up intensively with those staff. For different people, they need different levels of support, and we certainly tailor that support depending on the circumstances. I meet with, and so does the commissioner or other deputies, staff that are injured. Staff that are particularly seriously injured—it's usual that the commissioner or one of the deputies will contact that staff. We meet with injured staff from time to time to provide senior executive support to staff that are injured in the consequence, which is an unfortunate nature of some of our work, but it doesn't mean that—no-one should come to work and expect to be injured. It's a priority for all the executive that we do everything we can to support those staff who have an awful experience working in one of our centres.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With centres that are private, are you provided numbers with regards to their workers compensation claims or if they have lockdowns as well?

LEON TAYLOR: All of that data that relates to the normal measures around prisons, we certainly record like for like for a private centre and a public centre. With employee-related issues around workers compensation, we have less visibility and oversight. Our measure for them is if they have the staff complement to resource their centre. Misconduct is a little bit different. We take a greater interest in staff misconduct, and the contract enables us to have greater oversight of misconduct. Workers comp is a little less, given there's a different insurance arrangement.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When I asked for those figures on notice, would you be able to provide for the private operators for lockdowns as well?

LEON TAYLOR: We can give you lockdown data.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You also do Community Corrections, not just Corrective Services. With Community Corrections, I understand that a lot of staff would also be on workers comp. Do you have the number for Community Corrections staff on workers comp?

CORRECTED

LEON TAYLOR: The secretary would.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: We would do. We could provide that on notice. I don't have it with me.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If you can break it down too, because even though they're in the community, they would still have interactions with offenders that could lead to—

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Of course, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Thank you. I did also ask the Minister before about Junee with regard to staffing ratios. Are you able to provide me more information than the Minister was in terms of inmate to staff ratios? He didn't seem to know or there didn't appear to be—

GARY McCAHON: I'll hand over to Mr Taylor shortly, but I thought I answered that question. We don't actually have staffing ratios to inmates. We man the facility in accordance with the level of the operation and what's required in there. That's worked out under a formula. Staff ratios, we don't have. If you're talking around the current staffing numbers—and the recruitment, I think, was another part of the question that you were asking—Mr Taylor has that information. He could provide you with a bit of detail around that.

LEON TAYLOR: If you're happy for me to continue answering the question through the lens of Junee, Junee has a full staffing complement of 332. That's to operate the centre at its current approved inmate capacity of 944 inmates. We're about 50 staff short of that 332 at the moment, so we have 282 staff, I guess—it's simple maths but difficult in public. We have, in the next month, recruitment strategies in Junee to address that shortfall. On 13 September we're attending the Country Change Expo at Wagga Beach. On 25 September is the Henty Machinery Field Day, where we will also attend. On 27 September we're at Junee RSL, and on 28 September we're at Wagga Wagga RSL. That's getting into the community and trying to attract people to join Corrective Services to fill classes that are planned for Junee to address that shortage. We have proven to ourselves that we need to be out and about in the community a lot more than we might have been in the past to attract people to join us.

The police are very active in the employment market to fill their vacancies. We had an advantage over the police until recent years with people that might've had an interest in a law enforcement background but couldn't afford to become a police officer, because until about a year or two ago, recruits for the police in Goulburn had to fund themselves. A government change was now to fund that training in Goulburn, which is terrific for police. It did divert a lot of candidates that used to come to Corrections because we have a nine-week course and it was always paid. That made life a little bit more difficult for us, which isn't a problem; we've just got to work harder to get the right candidates.

Given the history of Astill, we don't just want to recruit any old candidate to fill our rosters. We've got to work harder in the community, particularly in regional New South Wales, where the job market is particularly buoyant. There's lots of work around renewable energy down in Junee. There's a big rail investment project. The police are recruiting in those areas as well. We're not complaining about the environment, but we've certainly got to be far more in the community and promote the career opportunities within Corrections at a greater level than we have in the past to fill our vacancies. The strategies that I mentioned at Junee, we're doing across the State.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I would like to ask some questions about the *Inspector of Custodial Services: Inspection Standards for Aboriginal People in Custody in New South Wales* dated March 2025. Standard 2.2 states that, "Culturally appropriate criteria for leave to attend family funerals should be established and implemented for Aboriginal people." This includes a requirement that, "Correctional centres must give recognition to the kinship structures and family obligations of Aboriginal people which extend beyond the immediate family, and give favourable consideration to requests for permission to attend funeral services and burials and other occasions of family significance." There is also meant to be a presumption in favour of the approval. Can I get some information on how many Aboriginal adults in custody have applied for leave to attend family funerals and other occasions of family significance in 2024?

LUKE GRANT: Chair, can I just confirm: are you referring to the Inspector of Custodial Services for Aboriginal inmates? Just to be clear, I know at some point the inspector did prepare a standard. It wasn't a Corrections standard so it doesn't form part of our standards, if that's what you're referring to. But to your question around attending funerals, we can certainly answer on notice requests versus approvals.

LEON TAYLOR: Yes. It's our policy anyway.

LUKE GRANT: It is our policy, anyway, for a presumption in favour of. In a security sense, it's often particularly—funerals are very uncontrolled environments, so there are a number, from a security sense, that are ultimately not approved. Our presumption is to approve them but, ultimately, serious offenders, maximum security offenders in an uncontained funeral-type environment often has particular security concerns. It means that those

CORRECTED

external escorts are not approved. What we do have an increasing availability for is for video visits and funeral attendance, so that's certainly often an option as well. But we'll give the data that we can on notice.

The CHAIR: I have got a few questions around this that I will put to you and I'm assuming they will all be taken on notice. The first one is: How many have applied? How many applications have been refused? Of those refused applications, a breakdown of the reasons why the applications were refused? And the same information for each year from 2020—the number of applications that were approved, refused and reasons given for refusal.

LEON TAYLOR: Yes, we can do that on notice. That includes the COVID period, but we'll probably point that out in the response.

The CHAIR: That's fine. I note that, under the current standard 2.2, applications must not be "disallowed simply on the grounds of security, cost, or that to do so would unreasonably drain the resources of the correctional centre." Can you clarify if correctional facilities cover or supplement the costs of all required to actually attend funerals, if that's in fact required?

LEON TAYLOR: We pay for our staff costs and supervision.

GARY McCAHON: We do provide those resources if those resources are available and we do accept if the families pay for the resources, if we have to bring them in on that, so it's a shared arrangement. But where we've got the staff available to do that, and they have gone through the normal vetting and risk assessment processes, then we'll provide the resources.

LEON TAYLOR: We never charge for the cost—which can be significant—of our escorting staff to go out and escort an inmate to a funeral.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I might come back to this. We will now have an afternoon tea break for 15 minutes, then we'll start up again.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back to budget estimates for the last session this afternoon. Continuing in regard to the applications around funerals, can I just get a better understanding of what the actual process is when somebody's making an application to attend a funeral?

LEON TAYLOR: I'm happy to give fuller details on notice, but there are a number of ways that we might be informed. It would be normally through an inmate application form, which is the process that inmates use to inform us around anything. We also have a number of ways our services and programs officers, who meet with staff, might become aware of an inmate's family member passing. They may be responsible for passing that information onto the inmate, so we become aware through the process of informing the inmate of a death in their family and then what flows from that are funeral arrangements that may be asked for.¹

For our Aboriginal inmates, we have our regional Aboriginal programs officers, so for Aboriginal inmates, those staff, who are Aboriginal people, engage with those inmates and are particularly versed in cultural sensitivities around Aboriginal people that pass away in the community. What flows from that is also assisting with funeral arrangements, and where we're able to facilitate an inmate to attend a funeral, often that will come through and the RAPO will assist in that information ultimately coming to the governor of the correctional centre, who will make a determination around the attendance of that inmate at a funeral either in person or via video or other means.

The CHAIR: In regard to that, is there a form that they are required to fill in to apply for this?

LEON TAYLOR: Let me answer that on notice. I'm not aware of a specific form, but there's a good chance there is one. If it's okay, I will respond in detail on notice.

The CHAIR: If there is a form, assuming there is one, if you could also take it on notice about what measures are taken to ensure people always have access to either paperwork or the digital form and where needed are given assistance in actually completing and submitting that form.

¹ In [correspondence](#) to the committee dated 12 September 2025, Mr Leon Taylor, Deputy Commissioner, Security and Custody, Corrective Services NSW, provided clarification of his evidence.

CORRECTED

LEON TAYLOR: There'll be part of our internal process which has a security element, which I probably won't provide, but the inmate-facing document I should be able to provide on notice if there's something more than just an application.

The CHAIR: I know you mentioned a couple of times about a video link to call in to some of these funerals. Could you also take on notice how many people were actually provided the video link participation for funerals in 2024?

LEON TAYLOR: Sure. We'll do our best. Some of that we may not capture or be able to capture because a lot of funeral places now provide access to family to view online. So where we do that, we may gather inmates, allow them to sit in the visits or other area and set up a connection through a staff computer for a funeral to be viewed. There's probably some informality around that process, but whatever records we have, we will provide. I suspect there's also an element of access that we provide for funerals that may not necessarily be captured, but we'll provide what we can.

The CHAIR: Is there any cost involved to the adults in custody to have that live streamed to them that they have to cover?

LEON TAYLOR: I wouldn't think so. I think it's pretty routine for some funerals now to be live streamed by the funeral provider. We'll respond on notice, but I would think it remarkable if we're charging inmates to have access to a video thing. We don't go and send a video out to film a funeral. That's not something that we do. But where there's a publicly accessible video facility set up by the family that's available for people in the community to view, we'll make that available for inmates to view in custody where we're able to do so.

The CHAIR: If the family is unable to do that but the application has been refused for them to attend in person, is there anything else that's provided to provide support or some kind of access to ensure that those people in custody can somehow be involved?

LEON TAYLOR: That's really a case-by-case answer to that question. On notice, we can talk to particularly our Aboriginal directorate in terms of if there are particular interventions or access that we provide to family where the inmate, for whatever reason, we're not able to facilitate an escort to a funeral. There may be other culturally specific interventions or access that we provide. But rather than make it up, I'll answer on notice.

The CHAIR: I also have a couple of questions similarly around the sorry business ceremonies, and I'm just wondering what work is being undertaken by Corrective Services NSW in relation to organising and facilitating sorry business leave and access to adults in custody.

LEON TAYLOR: Is that in relation to staff or inmates?

The CHAIR: Access to adults in custody.

LEON TAYLOR: To attend sorry business?

The CHAIR: Yes.

LEON TAYLOR: We might need to take that on notice. I'm looking at Deputy Grant. Can we take that on notice, Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, sure, and I have some other questions around that which may need to be taken on notice then in that respect. I'm wondering how many times sorry business ceremonies have been facilitated in custodial facilities in New South Wales just in the past 12 months and if that is actually recorded; if it's not recorded or we don't have any data around that, why there's no data; and confirming that there's no time restrictions imposed on sorry business ceremonies. How many incarcerated Aboriginal persons have been involved in the review and development of policies and procedures that provide for leave to participate in important cultural practices such as sorry business? Is any of this work being undertaken in partnership with any external Aboriginal community organisations or representations?

LEON TAYLOR: We'll take it on notice, thank you.

The CHAIR: I have some questions about the Corrective Services NSW Women's Advisory Council that we spoke about at last estimates. Can I ask how many people are on the council and what kind of experience, qualifications and background the members on that council have?

LUKE GRANT: I'm very happy to provide the details of the membership and where they come from on notice, if that's okay.

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The CHAIR: Yes, sure. I'd also be interested to know—and if it needs to be on notice or if you've got the information now, that'd be great—if any of those individuals has lived experience in corrections, such as a former inmate or even a staff member that are on that council. Are you aware?

LUKE GRANT: There has been in the past. I'd have to check if there are any current members.

GARY McCAHON: Chair, we'll take that on notice because all of that is incorporated into the women's strategy. That's in its final stages, as I reported before, for approval, and then we'll be able to have all of that information and we'll be able to provide that to you.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for that. I'd also like to know as well how often the Women's Advisory Council meets and how often they are actually consulted with more broadly.

GARY McCAHON: Yes.

The CHAIR: The Corrective Services NSW webpage says that the last report released by the Women's Advisory Council was in 2014. Is that correct or is that outdated?

LUKE GRANT: The Women's Advisory Council doesn't routinely produce reports, so they have a work program. I think the commissioner has indicated that the whole process around the Women's Advisory Council is about to be updated to coincide and align with the Women's Strategy, but historically they can commission work, and they have done that. I think the 2014 one was in relation to trauma, as I recall. They commissioned some work in relation to the experience of trauma in custody. It's not a routine thing that they provide a report, but they produce a working program of things they are occupying and they provide advice to us. We ask them for advice about things from time to time, but they have a program of their own work that's pretty self-perpetuating.

It's been a fantastic committee. Of all of our many committees, it's been one of the most effective ones. Some very strong advocates for women have been on that committee over time. The likes of Eileen Baldry have been on it. The woman who runs Legal Aid at the moment, Monique Hitter, was the chair for some time. The current chair is a doctor who's a professor of epidemiology at the University of Newcastle. So they've had really high-calibre people on the committee who are really committed to women. They hold us to account and also make suggestions about things we need to improve.

The CHAIR: I know Ms MacDonald already asked some questions about lockdowns and lock-ins in correctional facilities. I have a few more specific questions around those. Do we know if any correctional facilities are using those much more frequently than others? Is that sort of data collected?

LEON TAYLOR: Chair, we do collect the data. We've committed to provide that detailed data on notice. There are a few centres that have stood out in the last 12 months. For a while, Lithgow was a centre that had a higher rate of lockdown than others. That was a consequence of particular shortages at that centre, which we've since addressed, around some recruitment. That's a live dashboard, so in my role I can see where our pressures are. The High Risk Management Correctional Centre, the supermax in Goulburn—and Goulburn more broadly—is a centre that also features further up that list of centres. As you might imagine, as soon as we're short of staff there it locks down, given the routine that's run down there. It's at the top of the list as well. It's normally around staff shortages. Depending on the different centre, we have a different threshold around the number of shortages on our roster before we'd need to have a partial or full centre lock-in.

The CHAIR: Are there any particular policies or procedures set up to help make sure that where there are those lockdowns, there are legitimate reasons?

LEON TAYLOR: Yes. The commissioner referred earlier to what we call the variable operating routine. In the morning at the start of the day shift, the governor and the managers at the centre will understand the staff they've got available. Often that's staff that haven't come through sick leave and other absences. Then, depending on the staff that are there that day, there are different functions within the jail. Everyone is different based on the routine that says when we're short by this many people, this function will turn off but other functions will run. Or it might be that we'll do a split routine, where particular areas will be locked in in the morning and then they'll be released in the afternoon and we'll lock in early in another area. So every centre has a different routine to respond to daily shortages in the roster.

The CHAIR: The NSW Inmate Census didn't include any information about mental health and disability of individuals in New South Wales prisons. Is that information collected elsewhere or is that something we are considering looking at further?

LUKE GRANT: Is it correct that you're asking about the prevalence of disability amongst the prison population primarily?

The CHAIR: Yes. I noticed it wasn't part of the census. Is that data kept separately?

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LUKE GRANT: We have a disabilities dataset that we collect, and we have that data available. I'm not sure if you want any of that information.

The CHAIR: No, I don't need any of that information, other than some more top-line aspects around it. I'm wondering if you know how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarcerated individuals have a mental health diagnosis or disability and if that's data that you track specifically.

LUKE GRANT: We certainly have information on mental health and cognitive impairment and so on. It could be disaggregated for Aboriginal people. I don't have that information with me at the moment. I've got total numbers.

The CHAIR: How does Corrective Services define disability within the organisation? Is that documented in a policy, for example?

LUKE GRANT: We certainly collect information on a variety of categories of disability. I imagine we use national standards in terms of cognitive impairment and so on, but I'd have to get back to you about the standard that we use. I'm not sure how that's defined, but I'm very confident we would have that. We have a group of people who totally focus on the disabled cohort—providing support to, advocating for, and so on—and they produce the data that I rely upon. They disaggregate it and they provide information on acquired brain injury, autistic spectrum disorder—I've got the total number of people. Of the 2,171 inmates in custody with a disability, 1,270 of those identify as Aboriginal.

The CHAIR: And that's just mental health rather than disability?

LUKE GRANT: That's disability broadly. That includes—these are the most common ones—intellectual disability, acquired brain injury, psychosocial disabilities, mobility, deafness, autism, blind or visually impaired, aged and frail, communication and speech, and dementia. That number doesn't include serious mental illness.

The CHAIR: Has Corrective Services done any reviews of the custodial operations policy and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and accessible for incarcerated individuals living with disability or mental health?

LUKE GRANT: I don't understand the question. I'm sorry.

The CHAIR: Have you done any reviews on the current policies around custodial operations and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive of incarcerated individuals living with disability and mental health diagnosis?

LUKE GRANT: Because those definitions are so broad, we've applied certain policies that clearly have specific reference to people with disabilities, including, for instance, the inmate disciplinary process and the requirement for people to have someone who can support them through a disciplinary process if they are at a certain cognitive level. Our OIM data system has alerts in relation to disability so that staff, when they're managing people, are aware who has a disability and can apply these specific provisions to people at various points in time. But all of those things wouldn't apply. For aged people, there would be different provisions, and so on. I don't think there's one single section of the COPP that relates to disabilities, but it'd be scattered throughout where there might be a particular provision where that needs to be taken into consideration.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My questions are for the Rental Commissioner regarding no-grounds evictions. Commissioner, when did the commission first consider removing the evidence requirements for the eviction grounds?

TRINA JONES: The request to remove the evidence requirements was a direction from the Minister's office. That was considered when the direction was received.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you have a date on that?

TRINA JONES: Yes. It was 11 June.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did the Minister's office give you reasons about why the request was made?

TRINA JONES: No, other than to say that it was to simplify things for landlords, which they've discussed.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was any formal consultation undertaken with tenant groups, landlord organisations or industry stakeholders before the changes were made?

TRINA JONES: There was extensive consultation done for these reforms. We met with over 150 organisations. I had round tables with landlords and engaged with agents individually and as groups. I also met with renters in their own communities right across New South Wales and met with a series of thought leaders in industry. All throughout that process, we had really diverse views on evidentiary requirements, particularly

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across reasons to end the tenancies and then what evidence would be considered. We packaged that all up and made those recommendations to government, but also provided them with options. There was extensive consultation and feedback. It's worth noting that it was contentious throughout.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was there additional consultation undertaken between the original changes and the changes that you were requested to make around removing the requirements?

TRINA JONES: No, I didn't undertake additional consultation at that time, given it was a directive of government to make that change.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The Premier referred to confidential feedback as part of the reasons for the change. Were you aware of the confidential feedback?

TRINA JONES: I wouldn't be privy to that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did you provide advice back to the Minister's office about what you thought about those requested changes?

TRINA JONES: In the development of the reforms, we gave extensive advice to the Minister's office from multiple options and perspectives. So, comprehensively, yes, we gave advice throughout the whole process.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But not when the Minister's office specifically came to you with those requests to remove?

TRINA JONES: Yes, because that was a directive at the time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This may be a question for Fair Trading about how monitoring happens now that these most recent changes have taken place. What kind of monitoring occurs now?

TRINA JONES: I work within Fair Trading, so I can talk to that. We've developed some really sophisticated monitoring technology within Fair Trading. Essentially what we're able to do is take all of the bond data that tells us about what properties are held—most properties collect a bond—and then we also collect all of the listing data. We purchase that data. So we understand every single rental property that's available. We then sort of triangulate that with our re-letting/change of circumstance program, so you're aware that you can't re-let properties under certain circumstances. Taking those different data points—plus complaints data, of course—and any feedback that we get from tenants, agents and otherwise, we're actually able to identify what might be properties that are flagged and properties that need to be investigated. Since this has commenced, we've already been able to identify 2,000 properties that have been flagged and 21 that are under review for investigation. This enables us to closely monitor compliance with the reforms, but also to prevent and act on breaches of the law.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you also holding to account not just the re-letting aspect but—say a landlord has said, "I need to do this building work," and then it is just up to them to do the building work or not. Is there any mechanism to maintain a record of whether a property has got a DA associated with it, for example, that is related to the reason that a landlord gave for evicting a tenant?

TRINA JONES: As it relates to a DA or building compliance, that might be a matter for the local government or for the Building Commission. But if the tenant has been given a reason to end the tenancy because of significant renovations or repairs and say, for example, the landlord tries to re-let that property within a four-week period, we'll get a flag about that. We'll be asking questions about that straightaway. But also, say it's not re-let but it's re-let in five weeks' time, but the tenant says, "I've seen the property online, and it looks like nothing has happened," we would absolutely inquire and review that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In that circumstance, it would require an individual to make that approach to you to say, "This is something that's happened to me"?

TRINA JONES: Yes, because of the volume of tenancy turnover. You're talking about over 330,000-plus tenancies turning in the market. But we are very sophisticated in our ability to identify breaches of re-letting, which I think is a major factor. And obviously we strongly encourage renters to contact us if they've got concerns. As a consumer protection agency, we do rely on consumers letting us know if there's an issue too.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you keep a record of the reasons that landlords have given?

TRINA JONES: Yes. We've built into the bond system, for ease of use, a mandatory termination survey. Essentially the landlord has a mandatory requirement to tell us why the tenancy ended, or the agent on their behalf. The tenant then has a voluntary option to contribute. One of the things we do as part of that data analysis is we say, "Why did the landlord say the tenancy has ended? Has the tenant agreed?" And we'll start to see this data come through. We'll take a selection of those and say, "Well, why are these different? Is there anything that we need to be concerned about? Will we flag or will we contact?" We're using that to inform our work and make sure

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that we're putting our resources where they're absolutely going to be most effective and that we're not burdening compliant, law-abiding citizens.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many people have come to you proactively with complaints, following this legislation?

TRINA JONES: Specifically on no grounds, I might have to take that on notice. We get about 300,000 customer contacts per year. Of those—most of them are dealt with by Service NSW and then furthermore we get some that come through to Fair Trading. Specifically on no grounds, I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That would be helpful, thank you. Just to clarify, have you briefed the Minister on all of the information that you've just given me?

TRINA JONES: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Going to the Portable Rental Bonds Scheme, what is the current status of that?

TRINA JONES: The project is in development. We have a series of streams in that development, as part of that project. We're working through that at the moment. It's a big challenge, as I know you know. More than a thousand homes a day are at stake. Making sure that we get that right is really important. But also we're making enhancements to an existing system, so that comes with its own challenges too.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Has the Minister requested that you have a deadline for that project?

TRINA JONES: The Minister has asked us to get it done as soon as we can. Right now we're just working to meet that expectation.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you given him a deadline?

TRINA JONES: It's not possible to give a deadline as of today, just with some of the complexities with the build, but we are working through that really diligently and working to bring that project online as soon as possible.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In terms of the consultation that's been undertaken to design the scheme in the first place, as well as the rollout, have you met with tenants, landlords and industry stakeholders to finalise this?

TRINA JONES: With the Portable Rental Bonds Scheme, it actually came from the rental sector. It was an idea borne from the Tenants' Union, who raised this with the department and the Minister based on concerns that were brought about from tenants. I have also heard this directly from tenants myself, who say that they're paying up to \$4,000 when they move house. Many of them who are on low incomes end up going to payday loan schemes, having to pay very high interest on those loans, so it's a major detriment to them. Many people are really excited about the idea of us doing this. Once we started working out how we might approach it, we certainly spoke to targeted stakeholders, I would say, in the industry. But when I've been out at renter forums and speaking more broadly, people are very interested in this. I'm talking to them about it all the time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Going back to Ms McPhee and the Sydney Startup Hub/Tech Central situation—I'm not sure whether you've had time to look at the budget papers. *Budget Paper No. 03* is where that \$5 million is found. It says that the Sydney Startup Hub transition to Sydney Tech Central will have a \$5-million cost associated with it that starts in 2025, completing in 2026. I want to understand what that \$5 million is for.

REBECCA MCPHEE: Yes, I did find that. That is the capital expenditure element; it's the capex only element. The \$38.5 million is the operating expenditure for the broader suite of Tech Central measures over the next four years.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What does the capex include?

REBECCA MCPHEE: It will include, for instance, the upgrade and fit-out of the new Tech Central innovation hub, which is currently a scale-up hub. That includes work that's already been completed, which includes refitting a whole floor to be more suitable for smaller startup businesses and other upgrades that are ongoing at the moment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many desks do you anticipate will be available?

REBECCA MCPHEE: For more detailed questions, if you don't mind, I might ask Ms Noonan, who is executive director of the innovation branch. While she comes up here, I can say I do know there are 100 new desks already available to the startups who are starting to transition from York Street. A number of those organisations have already booked into those desks. But in terms of total number, Ms Noonan?

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LIZA NOONAN: There are at least 100 new desks.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And that's in addition to Stone & Chalk?

LIZA NOONAN: Correct. Level 13 has been completely refurbished. We believe there is vacancy. I would have to take on notice the exact amount of vacancy within the Stone & Chalk floors. I should say, we know it's not at full capacity.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My understanding is that Fishburners, for example, have remodelled their approach and they have started partnering with WeWork. Is that because they haven't been able to come to an agreement that allows them to move into Tech Central?

LIZA NOONAN: My understanding is that, first and foremost, we have been engaging closely with Fishburners throughout this entire process. My understanding with Fishburners is that they have had a fairly significant look at their business model, looking at the needs of startups that they serve. They have actually had feedback from residents that they prefer a more networked approach, including residency here in Sydney but also in locations around the world, which the partnership with WeWork will accommodate.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Were you offering them desks and space at the same price as Wynyard Sydney Startup Hub?

LIZA NOONAN: We are in negotiations currently with the anchor operator, which is currently the scaleup hub which is becoming the innovation hub. As you would expect, we are at a fairly active stage of negotiation. I wouldn't want any statement I make here to impact the outcome of those negotiations for both Fishburners, other operators in the ecosystem and obviously for startups themselves.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This announcement was made at the end of last year. It was originally said that Wynyard wouldn't be closing until 1 October. That has now changed to the end of this month.

LIZA NOONAN: I would have to take that on notice. I understood that it was communicated that it would be the end of August.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It was definitely communicated that it would be 1 October. It has been nine months or so. Why haven't these agreements been made already?

REBECCA McPHEE: To start—and then I'll let Liza answer the specific question—a space is available. If there are startup businesses that are currently operating on York Street who want to move to the new innovation hub in Tech Central, they can. There is space available and they can contact Stone & Chalk to do that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And it's an equivalent price?

LIZA NOONAN: We have benchmarked the pricing and we believe it is equivalent and within the affordable range.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So it is equivalent?

LIZA NOONAN: Again, based on where we are with the negotiations, I wouldn't want to—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But that suggests that space isn't available yet if startups can't know what the rate is.

LIZA NOONAN: I'll take it on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can startups go in there now with a particular rate or not?

LIZA NOONAN: They can go in there now with a particular rate. We understand that at least 60 have already moved from the startup hub to what will be the future Tech Central innovation hub.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just to confirm, you are going to take on notice whether they are leasing desks at the equivalent price that was available in Wynyard?

LIZA NOONAN: The leasing arrangement is between the operator and the resident themselves. That is commercial in confidence. In terms of the equivalency, I will take it on notice to see what we are able to share.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: At the moment, startups can go to Stone & Chalk and arrange a desk.

LIZA NOONAN: That's correct. That has been clear from the very beginning of this year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I think the feedback has been also clear that people were interested in a startup hub and not a scaleup space. Is that something that you have heard?

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LIZA NOONAN: Yes, but I would say that there is a range of accommodation options which are also suitable for startups and their needs.

REBECCA McPHEE: And that has been part of the refurb.

LIZA NOONAN: Correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My understanding is that Wynyard had about 600 desks available and now there might be 250 desks available, approximately, in Tech Central.

LIZA NOONAN: Potentially, but I would also say that our evidence from numerous engagements over many months with the anchor operators of Wynyard is that we have been operating at something like 50 per cent occupancy at the startup hub. Levels 11, 9, 6 and half of 2 have been vacant for some time. We lost anchor tenants, corporate tenants like Optus and Caltex, a couple of years ago. We have been actively trying to fill that space and haven't had the market demand. I think we go back to the point—and the reason the decision was made—that the commercial models of the anchor operators in the Sydney Startup Hub was no longer viable, based on post-COVID working habits of startups and also the fact that there is a very competitive co-working market in the Sydney CBD, and the product that the Sydney Startup Hub was offering was no longer competitive.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was there any cost associated with breaking the lease with the Wynyard property?

LIZA NOONAN: That is part of a tenancy agreement with the landlord, yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What was that cost?

LIZA NOONAN: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was there any modelling done around the potential loss of startup activity with the closure of Wynyard Sydney Startup Hub?

LIZA NOONAN: I would say that there has been, as part of the Innovation Blueprint development, recognition that place-based intervention is really important for the startup community. We looked at the market demand at the hub and we looked at the current occupancy of the scaleup hub and we thought that there was a real opportunity to consolidate services and programming for startups at all stages of their journey within Tech Central—Australia's largest innovation precinct, huge concentration of venture capital, density of universities, IP, research talent and access to innovation infrastructure. Around innovation precincts, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that that sort of agglomeration and that networking effect is really important and positive for startups. Our view and our modelling was that that was the best course of action.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Obviously you want people to be working together. That's why the Sydney Startup Hub was so successful as a model. It just seems like there is a lot of public commentary around the fact that Tech Central has not been developed in the optimistic terms that you describe, which would be ideal but haven't been made a reality.

REBECCA McPHEE: I think that there is evidence that demonstrates that Tech Central has the highest concentration of tech startups as well as receives the lion's share of venture capital investment. I think there is a lot of evidence that Tech Central is an important space for our innovators.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I have some questions around the Emerging Technology Commercialisation Fund and whether it's a consolidation of the Physical Sciences Fund and the Biosciences Fund, maybe to the chief scientist.

REBECCA McPHEE: That's for the chief scientist, yes.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: Yes, we actually have funding for the next two years of \$3.5 million for the biosciences and physical sciences funds, and they are basically alternating at this point. The new Emerging Technology Commercialisation Fund will combine the PSF and Biosciences Fund but, as you can see, it will actually expand it as well with more funding. It will also likely be—I'll try to put this the right way. We are looking to basically expand its scope because there is more funding.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When does that fund come into operation?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: It will come into operation this financial year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I think you have just answered my three questions in that answer.

The CHAIR: I might call up Ms Jones again, if that's okay. This morning I was asking the Minister some questions about the new Residential Tenancies Amendment (Protection of Personal Information) Bill that is still

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being considered by the Parliament. I have some concerns about the fact that eventually people will be allowed to apply to a rental property without declaring that they have an animal. I understand that animal groups and domestic violence services were calling for this, but in combination with pet-friendly rentals rather than the laws which have actually passed in the previous bill that has gone through Parliament. Has there been any consideration for, should this pass, what impact it will actually have on tenants with animals that haven't necessarily put in their application that they have an animal and they are refused to be allowed to keep that animal within that seven days?

TRINA JONES: Yes. This is a difficult balance to strike, as you've rightly summarised, Chair. Under the laws, a landlord and property owner must be given the right of response and there are reasons that they can say no. What we know is lots of tenants move into rental homes with secret pets, for want of a better word. And the minute you do that, you're technically in breach of your rental agreement. That creates a lot of risk for tenants as well. The idea of the grace period is to say, "Well, you've got seven days to make the application." That also means that—perhaps you've had a death in the family or you've had someone come and stay with you. They might continue to stay with you as a co-tenant and they've got an animal, and your circumstances of your living arrangements might change. So it gives you that grace period to put the application in without being in breach—and I know you understand that.

One of the options with that is that, if the landlord says no, the tenant obviously can then apply to NCAT to challenge that decision. Technically, they could also apply for an interim order to keep the animal in the home until the decision is made. That would be a decision for NCAT and it wouldn't be appropriate for me to pre-empt that. But that's one circumstance. NCAT might consider that because—and we only have largely anecdotal evidence on this so far because we don't have access to really strong data from NCAT, but I'm trying to get as much information as I can. What we're seeing with the pet applications is, when they do go to NCAT, NCAT are retaining the pet.

I know there was one example of a dachshund in a two-bedroom villa that got rejected, saying the property wasn't suitable, and NCAT did not withstand that. There was another one with a border collie. There are examples of that. That's not to pre-empt the outcome, but it's just to state that, perhaps if they did have an animal with them and the grace period applies, they can actually apply lawfully to keep the animal. As long as it's not a horse in a studio apartment—what would be the reasons potentially that they could say no and that would be considered. It is a challenge, I appreciate, to get the balance right on this one, but we have considered the alternative and the alternative is that you're immediately in breach.

The CHAIR: Obviously there are other alternatives in regard to amending the legislation to make it more flexible for tenants. Did you get any feedback at any point that this process of this seven-day countdown, with the risk of NCAT saying, "No, you'd now be in breach", or even just on the tenant to actually have to go to NCAT within seven days of moving into a new property and the burden on particularly somebody who's leaving a violent situation, for example, to then have to take their new landlord to NCAT to try to fight to be able to keep their animals and not knowing if there's anywhere to take those animals—did you receive any feedback, any consultation around this that this could actually increase the number of secret pets because people just can't bear the idea of going through that process and then being in breach? Obviously the bill talks about anyone having an animal, but I'm specifically considering people who are just entering into a rental agreement or finding a rental property and they've only just moved in.

TRINA JONES: This is one of the reasons that this was brought into this bill, because the feedback that we got on the rental reforms was, "This won't work without a grace period." People were concerned that, in the current state, you move into the property and you're immediately in breach if you move in with a pet. That's why it's in the privacy and transparency bill, because we've recognised that this is something that we wish for the Parliament to consider—to better suit how it works in practice. But we do get lots of diverse views on this. People have asked for extended periods beyond the seven days. They've asked for unlimited access to pets in their homes but they've also asked for an immediate ability to say no with no reason. As you're aware, it's highly contested in the community. People bring a lot of their experiences and their values to this discussion. Our role really is to make sure that it's as fair a process as possible within the confines of the law, unless that law is changed.

The CHAIR: My question is more—and I understand the reason for the seven days. But I think in practice, if I was moving into a rental property and I was given seven days to declare the animal, with a very long list of reasons why the landlord could say no, and then I'd be potentially in breach within days of that, and then I'd have to go to NCAT and it's up to NCAT and we don't know necessarily where NCAT will go—I think that that almost encourages people to be more secretive. I'm just wondering where you got that feedback or which organisations may have given feedback that seven days would deal with the secrecy rather than create more secrecy.

TRINA JONES: It was really a range from many organisations that were seeking an outcome where we could improve the way to move into a rental property with a pet, because the previous reforms—the reforms that

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are in place now were really about applying for a pet in your rental home. Everyone really raised that, when you're applying for a property, it's very competitive. They ask for a lot of information, which is the intent of the privacy bill—to limit that information. People were concerned they'd be discriminated against if they say they have a pet. They wanted to move in in the first instance, but then you're left with the dilemma of the breach. It is a challenge to get this one right. We would welcome any feedback that people have, particularly while the bill is in Parliament.

The CHAIR: While the bill was being considered, were there considerations around ensuring that once a tenant goes to NCAT, they get an automatic increase in that seven days during the NCAT process? Or were there considerations in the bill around landlords having to actually advertise the properties as not suitable for animals so that people who are potentially moving and not necessarily declaring straight up that they've got animals don't end up in these situations and we end up with a lot of cases going to NCAT?

TRINA JONES: On the no-pet ads, that's another interesting challenge in this work because—

The CHAIR: Sorry, just to clarify, not so much no-pet ads but rather a declaration that they don't believe that the property is suitable for animals because there's no fencing—linked to some of the reasons in the previous bill, so that the advertising would say, "We don't believe that this is"—rather than a solid no-pets because I don't think that that can be done anymore.

The CHAIR: Yes, because each pet would have to be taken on its own merit. It would depend on what the circumstances are. For example, in the example you've given on the fence, what if it's an aquarium? It does depend on what the consideration is and we wouldn't want to inadvertently limit the ability for a pet to be in a home based on a landlord's assumption that they, one, just would not accept them. It's also a concern that that might be abused and it's very difficult to monitor compliance with that. We've gotten really good already at monitoring the compliance with the no-pet ads. In fact, we recently did a proactive compliance campaign and identified a series of noncompliant no-pet ads. We essentially contacted those agencies, issued over 200 warnings and issued a number of PINs valued at over \$3,000. We're taking action because we're sending a message to say, "Each pet must be considered on its own merit." It would be really difficult to manage compliance if the landlord says, for example, "It's not suitable." What pets? In what circumstances? Why?

The CHAIR: I'm thinking more along the lines of, "Note: For people with pets, there is no fencing." Then at least the tenant has some information. Or, "Note: We don't think that this property is suitable for all animals given the landlord lives on the property"—some sort of declaration in regard to allowing the tenants to at least be able to assess, "Okay, this could be a risky property for me to move into," or, "Hang on. I've only got some goldfish and fencing and other things are not actually something I need to consider."

TRINA JONES: I understand—so information about the particulars of that property for the consumer, the tenant to understand better if it's fit for their purposes.

The CHAIR: Yes,

TRINA JONES: I understand that.

The CHAIR: Has there been any feedback around that?

TRINA JONES: We did hear from a couple of stakeholders about making tweaks to the advertising. That was sort of a theme that came up—not quite as articulate as that, but there was a theme certainly around what could be considered to make it clearer for people what was in and what was out.

The CHAIR: What about, for example, if somebody enters into a new lease and they are refused within that seven days or refused through that NCAT process but they had no idea that that would be the outcome? Has there been any consideration for tenants being able to terminate their lease without a financial penalty given they've entered into a lease and have been obviously allowed to not declare the animal in that first instance?

TRINA JONES: This is a challenge. In those circumstances—let's call it the worst case scenario, where you've gone through, the landlord said no, it has been sustained by NCAT in the example you're describing but you're still in the infancy of your tenancy and it's a fixed agreement, for example. Then you could try to negotiate with the landlord to be released from the tenancy. That could be an option. But if they said no to that and you wanted to move out, you could have a break lease fee of up to four weeks depending on the period of time essentially or there may be a decision around the care of the animal and the tenant, again, will be in a difficult position there. So it isn't very straightforward. Unfortunately, it's a challenge.

The CHAIR: And have you briefed the Minister on these concerns that are, obviously, coming up? I understand the issues around the seven days and the idea that they don't have to declare they have an animal. But I almost feel like, with the previous bill, it actually could make the situation a lot worse. I know, obviously, this is slightly outside the portfolio. But in regards to the consideration that our pounds are over capacity with the

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idea that a whole lot of people could be moving into rental agreements, get rejected in those seven days to have animals, have nowhere for those animals to potentially go—I think it's a one-year wait list for most rescues to take animals in. Do we just risk a whole lot of tenants being in breach, a whole lot of tenants having secret pets, a whole lot of tenants arguing and fighting with their landlords or animals being, potentially, dumped in bushland areas and things like that because there's absolutely nowhere for those animals to go?

TRINA JONES: There's a lot to consider in that situation. Responsible pet ownership is important, regardless of your home status, tenure status. And we have partnered with the RSPCA. We've funded them to do responsible pet ownership in rental homes, which is all about having regard and consideration to rental laws in New South Wales, including what that might mean if you need to move. So we would ask pet owners in those circumstances to consider what considerations they might have as a pet owner. That's why that education campaign is really important.

We also have a lot of detailed information on our website about our current pet laws, which could have a similar outcome, depending on the circumstances of whether they're retaining a pet and moving homes. And we know that people have taken a strong interest in this. We've had over 13,150 pet form downloads, with over 50,000 website visits to that detailed guidance. So it is something that people are seeking to educate themselves about. And I would hope that, by reading those education materials, which are very accessible, in plain English and available in different languages through funded organisations that we supported, they would be able to make decisions about their own pet ownership and ensure that that's responsible, as well.

The CHAIR: Sure, but I imagine those are more about how do we make sure the proper welfare for those animals, rather than the complications with this legislation, that mean that you can enter into a new property agreement, you've got seven days to declare the animal, you might be refused, and there's a sort of a dead end there in regards to what people could potentially do. I'm assuming that the RSPCA's guidelines don't have any recommendations for tenants of how to deal with that situation. I imagine, if somebody has entered an agreement, they're in a cost-of-living crisis, they've left a violent situation with their animals, they didn't declare the animals so they could get out of that violent situation, they've now been refused by the landlord to have the animals, they can't bear an NCAT process, they don't have the finances to break a lease—they're cornered. I can't imagine the RSPCA materials would help somebody with that situation. It's that the legislation and the way the legislation has been written and put together has created a situation where people can be cornered. How do those people then deal with a very real situation like that, which, I suspect, if this most recent bill passes, will be a very common occurrence?

TRINA JONES: I think I would say that the situation that you're describing there is for people who would be in the most vulnerable situations. And we're absolutely committed to supporting people to protect people in the rental market, particularly the most vulnerable. That challenge already exists, though, because if you leave a situation now and you move into a rental home and you don't tell them that you have a pet, you're actually at risk of straightaway being in breach. And, if you seek to make a home in that rental home, it becomes increasingly more difficult to keep the pet in secrecy. What this does is create an opportunity to have that conversation with your landlord and, at least, a fair process to consider it. I absolutely hear that it's not perfect, and there's work to do to consider how it might be practical, particularly for very vulnerable people. And I really appreciate the feedback.

The CHAIR: I guess what I'm also getting at there is that it almost makes the situation worse for people who are trying to leave violence, because if they take an animal and they keep the animal secret—and, as you know, most people are able to keep that animal secret for a long period of time. And we know that that's happening. And then they can hide that animal when there's inspections et cetera going on. But once they declare that animal and then they've got seven days, it's a gamble as to whether or not the landlord will agree. And, if the landlord says no, it's much more difficult for them to keep that animal secret because the landlord is now aware. To be completely honest, if somebody leaving violence asked me the best thing to do, I would say, "Don't declare the animal because, if you get a no, then you're in breach of your tenancy", and they've got literally nowhere to go. Has there been advice to the Minister that this would create a more difficult situation for people who do the right thing, declare that animal and are told no and then have nowhere else to go?

TRINA JONES: I think that, because the laws state that the landlord must be given the right to refuse based on the reasons that are outlined, it's important that we create the conditions to enable the landlord to have a decision. In terms of transparency around that, it is sensitive and it's precarious when you're moving into a rental home. That's why we want to limit the information that's collected on the application form, because people can be discriminated against for what can be quite unfair things—whether they have children or pets and what type of job they have. So these are absolutely all considerations that we are actively looking at, talking to people about.

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We've spoken to the Minister about pets at length, not only through this reform but previous reforms. What we're trying to do now is strike the right balance. The example that you used there—consumers have choice, and they could choose not to tell about the pet. I wouldn't encourage that, because it does put them at risk. But that's something that they could sustain even with the change, now or in the future. I think it does make it better because it helps you to air it out. If you can air it out, then you can, hopefully, get a resolution. But we can't control the response of everything in landlords and we don't know the circumstances of what types of pets people have.

The CHAIR: In regards to the form, are you expecting the form itself will change so that, when people are actually applying to be a tenant at a particular property, nobody declares an animal? Or will it still be optional to allow some people to say, "I don't want to go into a rental property and then get rejected after seven days and deal with that mess"? Can they still declare that early on so they know they're in a pet-friendly rental?

TRINA JONES: The specifics of what exactly will be in the application form will be determined through the regulations. I think that's an important point of feedback, and others will have an opportunity to give feedback as we develop those regulations. We've stood up an industry reference group for this work. It's quite technical, particularly with the intersections with the Commonwealth Privacy Principles and the big change to industry. That industry reference group is made up of advocates, academics—leading academics in this field, in fact—real estate agents, property managers and property technology platforms. They will also support us to develop those regulations as a sort of working group. We've had day-long workshops with them as we work through things, and they've surfaced issues and helped us to refine. So I can imagine this is something that will be discussed.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'd like to direct the questions to the Fair Trading Commission if I could. When I was asking the Minister with regard to funding for the Building Commission, he indicated \$145 million has been committed to the Building Commission. Has that impacted the Fair Trading budget? Has your budget allocation now been reduced?

NATASHA MANN: At the time the Building Commission was established, Fair Trading transferred a staffing component across to the Building Commission, with funding to fund those roles.

GRAEME HEAD: It's probably important to clarify there that those roles were transferred not out of Fair Trading but out of the Better Regulation Division of the department, I think, which included—Fair Trading and the Building Commission had always been together, even prior to the Better Regulation Division being set up. SafeWork was swept into that. It is correct, what Ms Mann said, but I think it's helpful to think of the most recent changes as changes from the Better Regulation Division. But what Ms Mann was technically accurate.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Maybe I'll rephrase the question. With those roles that were transferred, how much funding was with those roles?

NATASHA MANN: That happened in December 2023, so I don't have those figures at hand, but we can probably review and provide them on notice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll move on, then. In the March budget estimates, you said that prosecutions were in the pipeline; this is with regard to underquoting. How many matters have now been filed with the courts?

NATASHA MANN: We have one rather prominent disciplinary action matter with Mr Joshua Tesolin, which turns on underquoting, and then we have a number that are in the pipeline related to underquoting as well. We understand the frustration that consumers feel when they're spending money and don't have a chance to purchase the property, and we understand the frustration that real estate agents feel when they can't quote accurately because they're competing against people who are underquoting. We know this, and we have made it a regulatory priority. We have a taskforce set up to deal with it. There is no magic bullet. It's a multi-pronged approach, and, unfortunately, it's not a legislative change that will improve things on its own. It's not a compliance and enforcement change. It's not an industry change. It's all those things coming together. Perhaps Mr Abadee, as the Strata and Property Services Commissioner, might like to talk in more detail about some of the work there.

ANGUS ABADEE: Were there any specific questions to follow on from Ms Mann's answer?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You mentioned Tesolin and Tesolin Consulting. That licence has been suspended. Will you now go on to commence court proceedings?

NATASHA MANN: Yes, we have put the evidence and concerns to Mr Tesolin, and he now has an opportunity to respond to that. Once Fair Trading receives Mr Tesolin's response, we will then assess that response and determine next action. There are multiple actions that we can take. We may decide to prosecute. We may decide to pursue a disciplinary action path, which may look like conditions on licence or licence removal for specific periods of time. We haven't determined that yet. We will await Mr Tesolin's response before we determine what action we take next.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So at the moment there has only been one suspension and no prosecutions?

NATASHA MANN: There was a prosecution some years ago for underquoting, which was ultimately unsuccessful because the link between the agent and the action was unable to be—the court determined that it wasn't established fully enough. So we had commenced proceedings once before. As I said, this is something that we know is an issue. It's not easily fixed, and prosecution is part of our strategy to addressing it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You said there were others in the pipeline. Can you say how many are in the pipeline?

NATASHA MANN: Mr Abadee, do you have that number?

ANGUS ABADEE: We're in the final stages of a number of investigations into some high-risk behaviour. We're not at the point yet where we determine which pathway we'll take. As Ms Mann indicated, some will go through disciplinary action and others down prosecution. I think it's important to reflect that we're not looking at underquoting; it's usually emblematic of other conduct issues. So we're making sure we're bringing all those issues to the forefront when we're making regulatory decisions.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When you're deciding whether to proceed so that it leads to court action, what concerns are you taking—sorry, I'll rephrase. You said prior you have tried but you were unsuccessful. What strategies would you now put in place so that you're more likely to succeed in a prosecution?

NATASHA MANN: The issue in the previous court case went to whether or not the conduct could be attached to the agent themselves. What we would look at in future prosecutions, for example, is making sure that the evidence that we have clearly establishes that the agent themselves has engaged in that conduct in the conduct of underquoting. But I am pleased to say we're building out our team. We now have 21 investigators, 21 inspectors, and they're building up their experience as well. This is at a force that we have not been at before, and we are certainly hopeful that you will start to see more results in this space going forward.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Again, from last budget estimates, you said that Fair Trading usually responds within, say, seven days when there is a complaint about underquoting. Is that still the case, within seven days?

NATASHA MANN: I don't recall giving that evidence at the last hearing.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Well, then what would be the average current response time?

NATASHA MANN: To a complaint about underquoting?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

NATASHA MANN: It would very much depend on the complaint type, the complexity of the complaint, the number of instances and so forth.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Therefore, probably seven days wouldn't be a sufficient time frame?

NATASHA MANN: No, seven days would certainly not be the norm.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You said there are 21 investigators on that?

ANGUS ABADEE: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On average, how many complaints are you receiving?

NATASHA MANN: In the last financial year we received 448 underquoting complaints.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How long would you put aside for each of those complaints? Again, I know it's under the complexity, but on average—

NATASHA MANN: Some of the complaints relate to quite straightforward breaches. It may be something like the price hasn't been revised in the ad, notwithstanding that an offer was made. That's a rather straightforward breach that Mr Abadee's team would be able to assess relatively quickly and issue a fine relatively quickly. The sorts of more complex underquoting complaints relating to the types of Mr Tesolin and others like him, it's a method and way of working. It's difficult to establish and to gain the evidence. I am very pleased that the strata and property taskforce has worked very diligently to obtain a great deal of evidence, but that can take some time, as you can appreciate. That can take months to properly collect and establish.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Would this have been feedback that you would have taken on during the May 2024 taskforce that you had? Prior to having that round table, most people would have said Fair Trading's

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response to their complaint wasn't satisfactory. Have you changed how you respond, or has anything changed in your processes to how you respond to—

NATASHA MANN: Yes, it absolutely has. First of all, we've bolstered our workforce, as I mentioned. We have doubled the number of frontline staff, who can deploy more quickly and with more expertise to investigate these matters. We have a taskforce that is established under Mr Abadee as Strata and Property Services Commissioner. What we do now is we, effectively, case manage those matters so that we have a team looking very closely at how we approach them, what regulatory action we take and what is the best way of protecting consumers. It would definitely uplift our expertise in that space and our responses in that response. As I said, at the next budget estimates you will see that more action has been taken and more outcomes we will be able to talk to.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What are you saying that would look like, when you say "more action"?

NATASHA MANN: There are a couple of things. The first thing is that you will see us issuing notices to show cause to more agents. You will see us probably making some announcements about some of those matters in the pipeline, as Mr Abadee mentioned. As I said, it's a multipronged approach that we need to take. You referenced the 2024 round table, but Mr Abadee has held a number of round tables with stakeholders since that time, really trying to tackle what is the solution. It's not a straightforward solution. Regulatory action is part of it. Legislative change to increase penalties is another part. There has been talk about legislative change for vendors to have to disclose their reserve price ahead of the auction. That's another thing that's being explored.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Isn't this what you said, say, 12 months ago? Why hasn't anything changed?

NATASHA MANN: No, I don't think that's what I was saying 12 months ago. I think I was starting to talk about the green shoots at the last budget estimates session. That has now consolidated and we're really getting a lot of momentum and traction.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So next budget estimates, when I ask that question—possibly there won't be a need to ask that question because the action you will have taken from this budget estimates will be bearing fruit.

NATASHA MANN: We are absolutely building the momentum there. What I will say is that, as the regulator and the Government, it's not just our role to do this. If real estate agents want to uplift their professional credibility, they need to be doing something. Mr Abadee and I have been very pleased with some leadership now being shown in the sector. Agents know that underquoting is ruining their reputation, and they are now, for one of the first times, really coming together and giving some concrete solutions to go forward. Would you agree with that?

ANGUS ABADEE: Absolutely.

GRAEME HEAD: The other thing to add briefly, Ms MacDonald, is that in addition to the work that Ms Mann and Mr Abadee have been leading in Fair Trading, some of the other work that we've done in the department—in particular, reorganising the legal function and looking at how legal support is provided to the regulators—is also designed to support that momentum with more action being able to be taken more quickly.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So a dog that bites instead of barks.

GRAEME HEAD: Your words, not mine.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Last estimates, you said *Property Matters* updates would be issued every couple of months. I think there hasn't really been an issue since March. When will the next update be forthcoming?

NATASHA MANN: We issue those *Property Matters* newsletters four times a year.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So it's a quarterly.

NATASHA MANN: There should've been one since March. I can check that. It's four times a year. We're also getting a lot more active on social media. We're trying to let consumers and industry know about our work via that channel as well.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: For this calendar year, to date, how many real estate licences have been suspended, temporarily disqualified or perhaps even permanently disqualified for underquoting specifically?

ANGUS ABADEE: For underquoting specifically, none at this stage.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is there a reason? Is it just because you don't have enough evidence?

ANGUS ABADEE: It's about making sure that we're building a strong case. With the disciplinary action, it's critical that we're able to put that evidence to the person to respond and take into consideration their submissions before we make a decision. As Ms Mann has indicated, we're increasingly going to be using the disciplinary action process in lieu of on-the-spot fines.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I believe that the last issue of *Property Matters* was March this year. You also mentioned, I think, that you do a year in review. Will this be released on a calendar year or a financial year basis? When will the 2024-25 issue be released?

NATASHA MANN: There are two responses to that. The first part is that we contribute to the department's annual report. I've just reviewed a draft for Fair Trading in relation to that. That will be included in the DCS annual report. But, yes, for the first time, we are going to do a Fair Trading year in review. I'm expecting that to be issued in October.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: This one might be to you, Mr Abadee. Again, on underquoting, is the taskforce developing proposals to strengthen the law or is it limited to just enforcement?

ANGUS ABADEE: It's definitely both. We've provided advice to government based on the workings of the round table. That was built off iteratively, and the round table has been able to put some quite substantive reforms forward that we think will really improve the law. As Ms Mann said, it's not just enough to change the law; it's actually about getting out there and enforcing. The other side is education. That's a key part of any change process.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With the round table, is that information publicly available?

ANGUS ABADEE: No, it's not at the moment. It's not because of anything other than it has allowed really candid conversations with people around the table. As Ms Mann indicated, sector leaders have been willing to participate in that process and call out bad behaviour. It would be about striking that right balance. We're very comfortable sharing the action plan and the key takeaways that we will be focusing on.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are you able to provide that information on notice?

ANGUS ABADEE: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I think at the last budget estimates we were advised that there were 40 full-time equivalent employees working within the taskforce. Are there plans to recruit a further 25 frontline roles? Has that recruitment commenced or been completed? What is the current headcount by role?

ANGUS ABADEE: There's 69 in the taskforce at the moment. There are 21 investigators, 21 inspectors and 13 mediators. The remainder are strategy and leadership positions and some admin support. There are an additional three inspectors and three investigators that are currently in the market to take us up to full capacity.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What performance metrics are the taskforce using, say, from point of contact to resolution?

ANGUS ABADEE: We definitely have engagement and focuses around the regulatory priorities. That's where we're very much focused on shifting the needle as far as outcomes. Whilst we do try to expeditiously deal with complaints, as Ms Mann has indicated, it's really about getting the right outcome. We could absolutely close matters very quickly and move on with a very low-end intervention, but that hasn't changed behaviours. That's, again, the reason we've got the taskforce: to have those more meaningful interventions in the market. Whilst we do want to turn around matters quicker than we have in the past, and the additional resourcing is definitely helping, that won't be at the expense of making the right regulatory intervention that shifts behaviour and protects consumers.

The CHAIR: I have some more questions for Corrective Services. In regards to human rights for incarcerated workers, I'm just wondering how you're ensuring that those rights are being upheld within New South Wales correctional centres.

GARY McCAHON: In regards to their employment, you're talking about?

The CHAIR: Yes.

GARY McCAHON: I'll ask Deputy Commissioner Martin to come forward to talk about their employment and the employment model that we currently have for Corrective Services.

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: We currently have 86 per cent of our eligible inmate population employed across our prisons in New South Wales. I want to acknowledge around 6,800 people employed across our service

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and business industries. It's a real valuable part of the work that we do. I want to call out the particular publication by BOCSAR in 2021 which really looks at the vocational training area and the participation in traineeships associated with significant reductions in recidivism across personal property and violent offences. Our industry staff work alongside BSI Learning as well as TAFE as our contract partners, and as well as our education and teaching staff provide a valuable job alongside our employment area because it's a prime time for us to engage with people in custody to address those with high learning needs. What I mean by that is that there's a number of people in custody that can't read or write. We make no apology that we invest our resources in the people with high learning needs and then taper down as their learning needs reduce.

Across the portfolio, I've already mentioned how many people are engaged in work. We also have a significant partnership involved in producing housing. In that regard, we have built across this last financial year 16 houses—we're targeting another 21. That helps across different communities going forward and is connected to our employment program. We also have 153 approved employment partners that assist people as they're reintegrating into the community to maintain work. That's also a critical part because not only does employment in custody build skills and keep people busy, but once they engage in employment as part of works release, they can have an award wage, which really assists in not only ongoing employment, but housing and supporting the people that they love and care for.

The CHAIR: What award are they paid under? I understand, obviously, there's going to be different types of work that's done but are they under the same award schemes as anybody that's in the community?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: Yes. Whether that's in relation to—we have a lot of service industries like laundry, so dry cleaning and laundry-type awards, whether it's in the building and construction award. But they're all paid the appropriate award wage per hour when they're part of the work release program.

The CHAIR: What's the average number of hours that would be worked by some of these people?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: Are we talking in prison or when they're a part of work release?

The CHAIR: In prison, sorry.

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: Okay. In prison generally they're paid either according to a 30-hour week or a 40-hour week. We have our Correctional Industries Consultative Council that Deputy Commissioner Luke Grant chairs, actually, that also oversees our industries across the board there. The wages in prison vary depending on the type of work that a person is engaged in and can be anywhere between \$18.54 up to \$83.97 for a 30-hour week. That's per week.²

The CHAIR: Do you have any statistics around how many Aboriginal adults are engaged in work while they're actually incarcerated?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: I can take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Just in regard to the number and the percentage of labourers. You've given me a little bit of an outline around some of the jobs. What are some of the sort of higher level jobs that people who are incarcerated can get involved with?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: I have to acknowledge that at our Metropolitan Remand and Reception facility we have trialled an initiative for people in long-term remand engaging in traineeships. When people can engage in traineeships, you then start to see skills along the electrician- and plumbing-type lines, and they do tend to earn the higher wages once they attain those sorts of qualifications in the system.

The CHAIR: How many of the Aboriginal persons that are involved in these programs are in vocational training based employment?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: Again, I'll take that one on notice.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The Opposition.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is possibly to Ms Noonan again, or Ms McPhee, around who is going to deliver the kind of services that organisations like Fishburners and Tank Stream Labs offered in Wynyard, Sydney Startup Hub in Tech Central?

² In [correspondence](#) to the committee dated 11 September 2025, Dr Anne-Marie Martin, Deputy Commissioner, Community, Industry and Capacity, Corrective Services NSW, provided clarification of her evidence.

CORRECTED

REBECCA McPHEE: Thank you very much for the question. We're in final stages of negotiation in relation to that, so there isn't very much I can say due to the commercial-in-confidence nature of those discussions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: A private operator is going to be contracted to offer a range of services?

REBECCA McPHEE: Yes. In the same way that has happened at the Startup Hub and the Scaleup Hub to date.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When you say in the same way, as in, there will be separate incubators that have their own programs that they run that are subsidised by the Government?

REBECCA McPHEE: Sorry, I thought you were referring in relation to the hub itself. You're talking more broadly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I guess what is the hub, to start with.

REBECCA McPHEE: Yes, sure. I will get Ms Noonan to join me. So, the Tech Central innovation hub will operate in a similar way to the way the scaleup hub, for instance, has been operating with an anchor tenant subleasing, providing services that include activations, space for engagement between startups and space for us to run broader programs.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay. So, you're not going to tell me when. Okay, but I guess just to go back to what we were talking about before: what's available right now. Just to be really clear, what startups can do right now is go to Stone & Chalk and say, "Hey, I want some desks. Can you help me out?" That's basically all that's available for startups at the moment in the Tech Central innovation hub.

LIZA NOONAN: There are desks. There's also event space that can be booked. Just referring to the experience of Stone & Chalk as the anchor operator, there are a number of third parties who have come in to run event—whether it's their own programming, their capacity building programs or launch of reports like climate tech. There is that openness. Stone & Chalk have been a fantastic anchor operator, really collaborating with the Tech Central ecosystem and the broader Sydney Startup ecosystem.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I've got a question about—I don't know if this is the Building Commission or Fair Trading. There's a situation that's happening in Lightning Ridge with the Opal Museum project. There's been over \$30 million spent on this project, \$19 million from the Government. There are concerns that subcontractors, builders, businesses are not being paid for work that they've undertaken. There's one business that hasn't been paid about \$200,000 for work that they've undertaken to supply building materials. What is the process for that business to ensure that they are paid, or how a businesses and subcontractors protected under those types of contracts that obviously rely on government funds to be undertaken?

JAMES SHERRARD: The Building Commission regulates in the residential sector, so this particular building is not one of ours. But typically within the construction sector, if people put in their claim that it's made under the Security of Payments Act, that is the provision that's there to ensure payment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I will pass that information on. Thank you. There was a question before about funding for new roles. I don't think we've got more detail on that, do we?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, was it just like with the Fair Trading—so the \$145 million that you say is new funding, how can you say it's new funding when Fair Trading has transferred roles to the Building Commission?

GRAEME HEAD: As Ms Mann said, there was a transfer to the Building Commission in late 2023. Is that right? I think the Building Commission started in 2023, and this year's budget provides additional new funding across the forwards for the Building Commission.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How much is that actually new? How much of that is not just transferred from an existing entity to undertake functions?

GRAEME HEAD: We'd probably need to break that down on notice, so I'm happy to come back to you on that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That would be helpful.

The CHAIR: Are there any Government questions?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: No.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: The Committee thanks the Government officers for their attendance today. We very much appreciate your time. Some questions were taken on notice. The secretariat will be in contact regarding those questions as well as any supplementary questions.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.