

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 1 – PREMIER AND FINANCE

Tuesday 26 August 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND TREATY, GAMING AND RACING, VETERANS, MEDICAL RESEARCH, AND THE CENTRAL COAST

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham (Chair)
The Hon. Scott Barrett
The Hon. Robert Borsak (Deputy Chair)
Ms Abigail Boyd
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
The Hon. Greg Donnelly
Ms Cate Faehrmann
The Hon. Scott Farlow
Ms Sue Higginson
The Hon. Emma Hurst
The Hon. Mark Latham
The Hon. Bob Nanva
The Hon. John Ruddick

PRESENT

The Hon. David Harris, *Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, Minister for Gaming and Racing, Minister for Veterans, Minister for Medical Research, and Minister for the Central Coast*

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, Minister and officials, to the third hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance 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 acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Jeremy Buckingham. I am the Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Harris and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, Gaming and Racing, Veterans, the Central Coast and Medical Research.

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 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 these procedures. Again, welcome, and thank you for making the time to give evidence. Witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. Mr Draper and Ms Meagher, I will remind you that you have already sworn before this Committee during this inquiry, and therefore do not need to be sworn.

CORRECTED

Ms ELIZABETH MILDWATER, Secretary, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport, affirmed and examined

Mr SIMON DRAPER, PSM, Secretary, Premier's Department, on former affirmation

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

Mr SHANE HAMILTON, Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Affairs, Premier's Department, affirmed and examined

Ms KATE MEAGHER, Deputy Secretary, Delivery and Engagement Group, Premier's Department, on former affirmation

Dr JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE, Deputy Secretary, Clinical Innovation and Research, NSW Health, affirmed and examined

Mr CHRIS HONEY, Deputy Chairperson, Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority, sworn and examined

Mr MATTHEW TUTT, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission, sworn and examined

Ms LEA DRAKE, Acting Commissioner, Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission, affirmed and examined

Mr PHILIP CRAWFORD, Chief Commissioner, NSW Independent Casino Commission, sworn and examined

Ms CAROLINE MACKANESS, Director, Office for Veterans Affairs, Department of Communities and Justice, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 11 a.m. In the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 until 5.30 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, why hasn't your Government responded to the Independent Panel on Gaming Reform's *Roadmap for Gaming Reform* report?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Excellent question. I want to say from the outset that the independent panel did an amazing job in preparing that report. There's a myriad of issues contained within it. We, of course, released the report so that people could have a look at it themselves. There are a number of issues which we're still going through fine detail talking to industry in developing our plan for the pathway forward. It's important. This is a major reform. It's a reform that, if you like, has been 30 years in the making. It's really important that Government gets it correct, that we pull the right levers at the right time, for two reasons. One is that we need to minimise harm, in terms of people who experience gambling issues.

We have to look at how technology can help us deal with money laundering and criminal activities in venues. We also have to be very understanding of the economic issues, particularly in regional New South Wales, of impacts of regulation. This is incredibly complex. We don't want to get it wrong. We found with other legislation that Government's done in the past, there are a range of unintended consequences. We don't want unintended consequences. We want to make sure, when we make decisions and we go out to industry, that they're going to invest in the right places, with the right technology, to get the best outcomes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, in terms of those consultations, which direction are you heading?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a final decision for Cabinet to make. But what we're doing—myself as the Minister, and as the department—is the groundwork: the economic modelling; looking at technology' talking to stakeholders, both in harm min and industry; also talking to other States and the Federal Government to understand the direction that they're heading. Because we could go down a pathway, and then the Federal Government could make decisions which would impact that. This is not an easy reform. I'd say it's a fair reason why it wasn't accepted for 12 years, but we have, at the same time, already put in a range of reforms, particularly in the harm minimisation area, that are already out there working through the industry.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I'll come to those in a minute, Minister. When you're consulting—when you're talking to industry stakeholders, when you're talking to the Federal Government—what are you asking them? What are the propositions that you're putting to them?

CORRECTED

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We had election commitments around harm minimisation. We're talking about how those commitments might be implemented. We're also looking at—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: You're still wedded to your election commitments?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: At the moment we're absolutely going to deliver on our election commitments to—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Wasn't one of those commitments a reduction of 9,500 gaming machines?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Are you still committed to that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. That's why we have the forfeiture scheme still in place. What the report showed us and told us—today, the number of gaming entitlements is being reduced. That's happening through the current system.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What are the number of gaming entitlements as of today?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: In the State?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Yes.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll have to take that on notice, to be exactly right.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: You don't know that figure?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It changes on a daily basis.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, you might know this one: Since you've come to government, how many poker machines have been reduced in New South Wales?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's not the number of machines. It's the gaming machine entitlements because for every entitlement that a venue owns, they can have a machine. What happened during COVID, a lot of machines were put into storage because of the distance requirements. Some of those machines are now being brought back because people have those entitlements. One of the first things we did in coming to government was reduce those entitlements by 3,000. There are less entitlements in New South Wales now than there was when we came to government. Those entitlements are continuing to reduce through the forfeiture scheme. What the report clearly told us—and we wanted to be honest, forthright and we went straight out—was that buying back 2,000 entitlements, which was the original commitment, would cost \$60 million and virtually make no difference in terms of harm reduction.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But that was your policy, wasn't it, Minister?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We said we would have an independent panel to advise government. They gave us the advice that if you've got \$60 million to spend, there are better ways to spend it to reduce harm than spending \$60 million, which would have removed less than one machine from each venue.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: One of those better ways to reduce harm would be cashless gaming, wouldn't it, Minister?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's still out for debate. We know from looking at the other States—we're watching Victoria, which is about to undertake a trial as well. Part of our consultation has been talking to them, particularly around cross-border issues et cetera and understanding where things are moving and how technology is changing. We could say we're going to go and do a carded account system. That could be redundant in a year, given the changes in technology.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But that's the answer to absolutely everything, isn't it, Minister—given the changes in technology, something might be superseded?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The difference is we're actually seeing that technology now. Internationally and in venues already in New South Wales, that technology is already seriously being looked at. That technology, which is biometrics and facial recognition built into machines, would make a carded system redundant. Do you want government to spend time and taxpayers' money developing a system that we can already see would be redundant before that system was put in place?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of you doing biometrics and facial recognition, how long will New South Wales be waiting for that technology to be implemented?

CORRECTED

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, I was only at an expo last week or the week before looking at how biometrics and AI would be a massive game changer in terms of harm minimisation and minimising crime in venues. That technology is being developed now. I won't give a definitive timeline on that because people love to tie governments to timelines to say, "You haven't met your timeline." As I said, this is about using evidence, getting it right. It's not about artificial timelines that can't be delivered on.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It seems like it's about sitting on your hands, Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You have a look. Tasmania made a commitment and has now dropped that commitment. Victoria made a commitment and is now winding back on that commitment. It's easy to go out and make commitments. We want to get it right.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: You were just saying a minute ago that Victoria is rolling it out. Minister, you're looking at this in the context that the Audit Office—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Victoria is doing a trial. They're not rolling it out.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, you're doing this in the context of the Audit Office having said that this Government is not supporting harm minimisation outcomes effectively. It said:

... the Department's strategy for regulating gaming machines is not based on a clear understanding of current levels of gambling harm ...

While you're sitting on your hands and you're not acting, we see more problems with both gambling harm and money laundering through the system, don't we?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I'd like to see those stats because the number of people experiencing harm is about the same as it was under the previous Government. Whilst there are issues around the perception of money laundering et cetera, it's more about policies and procedures than incidents. We have to be really careful in analysing this.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, to that figure, the Auditor-General's report also calls out there's an 8.5 per cent increase in terms of the GambleAware help which was provided in 2023-24. Isn't that a case of where gambling harm is occurring more under your watch?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You could draw that conclusion, but the other conclusion is that we've done a really good job advertising that counselling service as well as venues and that more people are accessing it, not that more people are having problems.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, what are the figures that you rely on to substantiate your claim that gambling harm has not increased since you've come to power?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Office of Responsible Gambling does research into this. They have released their most recent figures. The variances are quite small, but we can take that on notice and get you the exact figures, particularly in terms of usage when it comes to poker machines in New South Wales, which is reducing.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, when it comes to your road map forward, what should we be expecting? You're talking to industry. You're asking them what they can do, I take it, but what's the direction in which you're taking gaming in New South Wales?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We need a system that supports venues and communities economically but, at the same time, helps those people who need help. So we're looking for a system that, using technology, has interventions that people can set themselves or, through self-exclusion or third party exclusion, can have them removed from gambling overall. They're huge reforms. I have to say that it's really interesting coming from the Opposition who signed a memorandum of understanding back in the day committing to do many of these things and never did it. We're working through the processes now to make these things happen, but we have to get it right.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, it seems like getting it right is an excuse for not doing anything when it comes to your portfolio.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I totally reject that. This will impact economically, financially, on communities right across the State. Do you want us to rush out with a back-of-the-envelope strategy? Is that what you're suggesting? Is that what you're saying the Government should do?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, it's impacting communities.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You did that with taxi licences.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Gambling harm is impacting communities at the moment, Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You did that with taxi licences and you sent people broke overnight.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It's causing economic damage to communities all across New South Wales.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You sent people to the wall. You destroyed their superannuation.

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, please come to order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: It would assist with the orderly conduct of this inquiry if this were a question-and-answer session, not a talk-over-the-top-of-each-other session. It would assist Hansard as well if the courtesy requirements were upheld.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order but remind the Minister to answer questions and not direct questions back to members. That would assist in having a free flow of information at this inquiry. Mr Farlow, a question, please.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, to that economic harm across New South Wales that you're referring to, we've seen \$140 million go through from 10 punters within the Mounties group. AUSTRAC of course have picked it up. One of the things that AUSTRAC said, with respect, was:

... BetSafe's anti-money laundering program did not enable Mounties to understand, recognise, identify, mitigate or manage the money laundering and terrorism financing risks ...

What have you done since learning of this?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I've spoken just recently at a conference to AUSTRAC and raised some issues. I've also spoken to ClubsNSW to find out what advice they're giving to their members. I point out that these procedures were in place under the former Government for a number of years.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: And we had plans to fix it.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Actually, you didn't—not these particular issues.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We did.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: These are issues around policy. It's not the fact there weren't policies; it's about the perception of how those policies were being implemented. This is a really difficult area, particularly for venues who have hundreds, if not thousands, of people walking through the door as to how they identify those people. That's why one of the technologies we're looking at is facial recognition to help venues. At the moment, they've got pictures of people on the wall in the back office and they're supposed to identify people. They put in reports on a regular basis when they see suspicious activity. They don't get feedback on what happens with those reports. Systemically, we need to sit down as an industry with government and with AUSTRAC and work out how this looks on the ground. It's great having great policies, but it's how it works in the venue with human beings trying to monitor these things.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: This technology is available today, Minister, when it comes to cashless gaming. AUSTRAC have said that:

[Electronic gambling machines] constitute a money laundering risk because they primarily accept cash and because cash continues to be the primary method by which criminals obtain wealth from dealing in illicit commodities.

Minister, under your watch, aren't criminals running rampant?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Absolutely there's no evidence of that. The evidence is that as the Federal Government increases regulation in this area—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So there's no evidence of money laundering through poker machines?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I didn't say that. Please don't put words in my mouth. You said "running rampant"; I said, "There's no evidence of that."

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So what's your definition of running rampant, then?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's your comment. It's not my definition. I'm not saying it is running rampant.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: No, what's your definition of running rampant, Minister? What—\$140 million's all right, is it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: If you have a look at the dates when that actually occurred, that was actually under the previous Government, not under the current Government.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I understand that, Minister. We had plans in place that were actually going to target and correct that situation, Minister, but 2½ years in, there's been no action from you.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: So your assertion is that we should implement things without proper planning. You're saying you had plans that you never implemented. Do you see the irony in that?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, I think there was a very clear direction at the last election as to what the people of New South Wales could expect. What you're delivering now is sitting on your hands waiting for technology to come. Minister, when it comes to cashless gaming, is your Government still committed to delivering cashless gaming in New South Wales?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We committed to a cashless gaming trial.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Yes, indeed, Minister. So that is it? We're not going to see cashless gaming, because—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We never made an election commitment to introduce cashless gaming. We're looking at the best system that can be implemented in New South Wales.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, again, we come to a situation where you are saying, "There's all this technology that might catch up and will have facial recognition and the like," but you won't take action to actually arrest gambling harm and criminal money laundering.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's blatantly false. That's false, because we've already put in a range of strategies, which the previous Government didn't do, to address harm minimisation and money laundering in venues.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Strategies that the Auditor-General says are not actually correcting the problem.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Have a look at the dates where the Auditor-General assessed—the majority was when the previous Government was in office.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, you are the Minister now and—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct, and we're taking steps now to address the issues that the previous Government did not address.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, you've turned your back on harm minimisation, haven't you?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That is absolute rubbish—absolute rubbish.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, outline the harm minimisation measures that you and your Government have put in place.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We've got the list. I go through them ad nauseam on every press release. We have to make sure that the strategies that are being put in place are ones that have time to be implemented properly in—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, I think that if you were putting them on every press release, you'd be able to just start stating them straightaway.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We've reduced the cash input from \$5,000 to \$500 for all new gaming machines, and the latest figure I had was that 43 per cent of machines in New South Wales now comply with that. That's moving along really well. We continue to reduce the statewide cap on gaming machine entitlements so that every year the number of machines reduce based on forfeiture rates. We've banned political donations from clubs with electronic gaming machines; banned external gaming-related signage and internal gaming-related signage that can be seen from outside the venue; introduced Responsible Gambling Officers in venues with more than 20 machine entitlements; mandated that all machines with gaming machines must keep a gaming plan of management and gambling incident register; banned gambling advertising on public transport, ferries and the terminals people catch them from; and consulted with the community on the third-party exclusion scheme and use of mandatory facial recognition technology to support a statewide exclusion register for New South Wales hotels and clubs with gaming machines.

CORRECTED

I have to say that part of what we've been doing since the report is, we actually went out and consulted on both the exclusion register and facial recognition, so the assertion that we're doing nothing's just not true. We've now got the results back from that consultation and the department's working through that. That will eventually go to Cabinet and we will make decisions that will address those issues.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: The Premier has said in his estimates hearing that he has other proposals to address problem gambling. What are they?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a matter for the Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Isn't it a matter for you? Aren't you the Minister for Gaming and Racing?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I have discussions with the Premier but they're discussions that will eventually go to Cabinet for consideration.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So who's running the show here? Is it you or the Premier?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Obviously the Premier's the boss.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Okay, at least we know the hierarchy here.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm assuming that's the same in every government.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What's the challenge?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, we heard that you had consultations with Crown about the introduction of poker machines inside—I think it was reported in the papers—and that they were—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, Crown wrote to us, and we said that that's not being considered.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Okay, the reporting in the paper was that they had fairly positive discussions with you but then the Premier came out and kiboshed it the next day. Is the Premier running this portfolio?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My job is to implement government policy. Policy is developed through the Cabinet on recommendations that I make to Cabinet.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So you're making recommendations to Cabinet? It's not the other way round—that you're getting your riding instructions from the Premier's office?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It is normal practice that I develop in consultation with my colleagues—because this goes across a range of different portfolios—submissions that go to Cabinet in order to have Cabinet make decisions on these issues.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, your Government campaigned on this mandatory 12-month cashless gaming trial from 1 July. The Premier said that that was a failure. Sorry, the Premier conceded in estimates that that was a failure, but the reality of it was that only 243 patrons signed up and just 14 were classed as genuine active users. This is a tiny, simple, inconclusive sample for drawing broad conclusions. Can you base anything off of this trial at all?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, absolutely. The trial was a trial of technology, so that's why we actually were oversubscribed with venues that wanted to participate in the trial. Our original commitment was 500 machines; we ended up close to 2½ thousand machines across more venues than we thought testing out the technology and some of the implications of how it would be implemented in the real world. What the Premier refers to—and he's correct—is that the uptake from the public was low. It was low for a whole range of reasons. It was low because fundamentally the punters don't trust governments in general, they don't trust people having possession of their personal details, and that's what makes this complex. Whatever system we put in place, we have to address those issues. That was really valuable information from the trial. The Premier's right: In terms of uptake it showed that this is a difficult question.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Welcome, Minister. I want to ask you a few questions about greyhounds. You'd expect me to ask questions about greyhounds.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Earlier this year in a question without notice I asked about the \$30 million allocated in 2018 for upgrading greyhound tracks across the State to new minimum standards. At that point I understood that \$18.2 million remained unallocated, with \$11.9 million before the new budget in July.

CORRECTED

I asked then if you could assure the industry that all of the upgrade funding would be allocated for the last financial year, and if not, if the unallocated money would be rolled over to this financial year. Will it be rolled over?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The good news is that the industry has moved forward with many of their business cases and so a lot of that funding has now actually rolled out to start work on those important upgrades. I might hand over to Tarek to give you specific figures about the rollover. My preference is that it is rolled over. The industry's shown now that they're in a position where they can actually do the work that needs to be done. That is certainly my preference. I'll hand over to Tarek to tell you how much is left.

TAREK BARAKAT: Thanks, Minister. In June the Minister approved funding for a number of projects—being Temora, the Gardens, Dubbo and Gosford—and funding agreements are now in place between the department and Greyhound Racing NSW for those projects. There are business cases under consideration in relation to Richmond, Grafton and Goulburn. As to where the funds are rolled over, that's a question for the Treasurer, but I can tell you that, to date, \$18,677,387 has been allocated to fund a range of projects—I think, in total, 36 across the life of the program—and there's about \$11,000,492 left to be allocated to future projects that Greyhound Racing NSW submits to us.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Of that \$11 million, how much has been allocated? Or is that still to be allocated?

TAREK BARAKAT: Of that \$11 million, there's \$6.794 million allocated for this financial year. For the balance, whether that's rolled forward is really a question for the Treasurer.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Maybe you need to take it on notice, but can you actually give us the dollar allocation for Lithgow, Temora, the Gardens, Dubbo and Gosford tracks?

TAREK BARAKAT: I can do that now. Lithgow was \$3,272,150, Temora was \$1,039,500, the Gardens was \$1,128,000, Dubbo was \$1,363,000 and Gosford was \$168,000.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: How much has been allocated for the straight track in Goulburn?

TAREK BARAKAT: To the best of my knowledge, that's still under consideration, the Goulburn business case. Nothing has been allocated at this point is my understanding, but if that's incorrect I'll come back and correct it for you.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Yes, if you could do that, please, that'd be great. We were told the Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport continues to liaise with GRNSW on its other proposed grants program applications, as well as with NSW Treasury on allocation of funding of about a \$30 million capital grants program. Can you tell me which stakeholders the department is liaising with and how the department is working with them to achieve their outcomes?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, I think the process is that Greyhound Racing NSW is the responsible body for developing the business cases. They are doing that in consultation with clubs is my understanding. We can take that on notice and get that specifically for you. They then submit their business case for—I don't know if it's the right word—concurrence with GWIC. After that occurs, then it comes to the department for consideration and sign-off, and a deed is then signed for delivery of that particular project.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Thanks for that; I'd be keen to get that when you can make it available. Finally, there have been continuous egregious claims made against the greyhound industry by individuals and organisations within New South Wales, and at least one other State now, Tasmania, is facing a ban. In the past, you and the Premier have shown your support for the Greyhound Racing NSW breeders, owners and trainers. The industry creates almost 11,000 jobs and contributes \$809 million in value to the State annually. GWIC is the most rigorous greyhound welfare organisation in the country. The sport is clean and its participants treasure their animals. Minister, could you confirm your support for the industry now?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It is the clear policy of this Government that greyhound racing will continue in New South Wales. Our job is to make it as safe for the animals as we possibly can, and that's what we're absolutely committed to doing.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Can you give us an update on the current status in relation to the movement of greyhounds from New South Wales overseas?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I might hand over to Mr Tutt to do that.

MATTHEW TUTT: For a greyhound to move overseas, there has to be a passport issued through Greyhounds Australasia. We at GWIC receive notifications from the Federal agency, DAFF, in relation to greyhounds that are exported. We receive those on a regular basis, and we assess those when they come in to

CORRECTED

confirm that they're not exported to what is a prohibited country. We get those, as I said, on a regular basis. Most of them are part of the USA rehoming program.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Is the USA still currently the only country they're going to?

MATTHEW TUTT: No, there's Canada, there's the USA, and a couple of others that are part of the countries that GA permits passports. That, just off the top of my head, would be the UK and those—a very limited number of countries.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Can you tell me how many greyhounds have been migrated in this fashion in the last 12 months, and to what countries they went?

MATTHEW TUTT: No, not off the top of my head. They're figures and data that are really held by DAFF, the Federal agency. GRNSW are responsible for the rehoming program in the USA, so they obviously keep data in relation to that. We do receive data from GRNSW but, as far as the precise number, I don't have that. As I said, that'd be—

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Yes, you're not really responsible for that. But there's no-one representing GRNSW here, Minister. Could you take that on notice, please?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, for sure.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: I'm particularly keen to know how many are going and where they're going. Minister, turning to Aboriginal Affairs now, Aboriginal land councils are deeply concerned that your Government is allowing people to self-declare as Aboriginal for cultural heritage assessments. By ignoring the legal three-part test under the Aboriginal Lands Right Act and the Native Title Act, you're undermining traditional owners and risking cultural exploitation and appropriation. Minister, why has your department allowed people to self-declare as Aboriginals for cultural heritage assessments instead of enforcing the three-part test required under law?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My understanding is that's not the case. The three-part test is a requirement. I'm not sure if you've got specific examples, but I'd be surprised.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: I can supply examples.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We're happy to look into that. It is the Government's policy under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act that the three-part test, which is actually a Federal requirement under native title, is adhered to. I'm not sure of any individual cases where people have done that, specifically.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: I've had representations directly from Aboriginal people actually acting in those capacities.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think you're probably right, but the assertion in your question is that the Government is allowing it. That's what we'd need to test.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: All right, let's get away from the term "allowing it" and say "letting it slip through".

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not sure. The policing—there is a wider discussion with community and land councils and Aboriginal people generally about identification. It's something that's a national issue. Really, without wanting to put the Federal Government in it, it's something where probably we all need to sit down with the States and the Federal Government and work out a better system than the current one. It is full of holes, if you like. We acknowledge that. But the basic tenet is the third part, which is that the individual is accepted by the Aboriginal community, and that's the tricky part. If the person is accepted by the Aboriginal community then they qualify. We have to be really careful about how we intervene into that process without really clear guidelines to do so, because one of the problems—and I could talk about this for three hours—is that ORIC, where Aboriginal organisations can register, are making some of these determinations, and some of those registrations may be questionable. This needs a Federal approach; the State can't intervene at that level. But it's certainly an issue that's being experienced right across the country.

The CHAIR: Ms Hurst.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Good morning, Minister. I don't have much time, so I'm going to jump straight in.

The CHAIR: You've got five minutes.

CORRECTED

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, when did you first become aware of sexual harassment allegations against Steve Griffin, the former CEO of GWIC and the current CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW?¹

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I would have to take on notice the exact date, but I was informed by my staff only very recently.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So while he was the CEO of GWIC, you hadn't heard about these allegations?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, the upper House passed an SO 52 regarding physical and sexual abuse, assault and harassment within the greyhound racing industry, including within GWIC. Documents are missing from that return, as you're aware, including several documents about the allegations made against Mr Griffin. What has your office done in regard to GWIC's failure to comply with an order of the House, particularly given the documents that are missing are of a senior executive within Greyhound Racing NSW?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My understanding is that GWIC maintains they have complied with the order. We did check and they had the same answer.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You can see, though, Minister—I've been through the documents that have come from this order. Both of our offices have heard from whistleblowers that have told us that the documents and complaints that they had made against Mr Steve Griffin are missing. In a situation where GWIC is any kind of regulator, if they have any kind of oversight within the greyhound racing industry, and it now seems that they're acting to protect the CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW by excluding those documents and failing to comply with an order of the upper House, you must admit that this looks problematic.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The information I have is that GWIC has complied with the order.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The information that I have is that it has not. If there are whistleblowers coming forward, are you suggesting that the documents those whistleblowers say are missing don't exist?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My advice is they complied with the order.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But do you understand what I'm asking you? You've heard from whistleblowers. I've heard from whistleblowers. Do you agree that there are documents that must be missing?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I can't say whether that is correct or not. GWIC has maintained that they have applied with the order.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, have you taken any action or done any other investigation, other than accepted GWIC's position on this?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I have no investigative powers, so in all of these cases, when things of this nature are referred to us, we refer it to the appropriate body for investigation. My understanding would be that that would have happened in this case as well, but the individual also can do that too.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you had any discussions with the CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW after hearing about the allegations of sexual harassment?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you ensured that there's any kind of debrief with female members of GWIC to ensure their safety and make sure, if they have to have any continued contact with the CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW, that they have some kind of level of protection within GWIC?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a matter for GWIC, so whether Matthew—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'll come back to Mr Tutt this afternoon. I'm sure you're well prepared for these questions. Minister, it's well known that staff referred to Mr Griffin as "Handsy", a nickname that was given to him because of his behaviour while he was the CEO of GWIC. Can you confirm on record that you've never heard, even in passing, or in an email, text or meeting or whatever, that he had been referred to as "Handsy"?²

¹ The committee received [correspondence](#) from Mr Steve Griffin, Chief Executive Officer, Greyhound Racing NSW, dated 8 October 2025.

² The committee received [correspondence](#) from Mr Steve Griffin, Chief Executive Officer, Greyhound Racing NSW, dated 8 October 2025.

CORRECTED

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, there was an inquiry in Victoria about sexual harassment and assault within greyhound racing which had some very damning outcomes. I was given the response by GWIC that there were so many documents with my call for papers that they couldn't possibly comply with the call for papers because it was so extensive. Will we see the same inquiry now here in New South Wales to look into this issue, given that there are so many documents that GWIC couldn't comply with the call for papers? Or are you open to considering that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I understand that the period that you asked for was an extensive period of time. I don't have any direct knowledge. I can't answer your question definitively.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you willing to look into it further?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm happy to talk to GWIC about it but, as I said, the information I have is that they complied with the order as it was given.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you willing, though, as some sort of level of responsibility, if there is an enormous number of allegations of sexual assault and harassment within this industry, to take a look into that? I understand that was outside of the terms of reference for the Drake inquiry, but are you at least willing to look into this if there are extreme numbers of accusations, which is what we're hearing from the call for papers?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We'd have to take that under advisement. I can't give you an answer here today.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I don't know if you are aware, Minister, that there's an art exhibition from the artist Elliott Fox that has been running in Surry Hills, which captures this duality between greyhounds as sentient animals and the cruelty and corruption of the racing industry. There's a painting that has got you on it. Are you aware of this?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Absolutely not, no. I do see a lot of memes on Facebook, though.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: By leave, I'm happy to table it so that you can see.

Document tabled.

The CHAIR: If we could all see, that would be very good.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I've got lots of papers, so you can all see. The picture is called *History Won't Be Kind / Minister*, and it's asking what your legacy is. In the context of the last two years that you've been responsible for the greyhound racing industry, given the number of scandals—we're now seeing live baiting allegations. We're seeing all sorts of things coming back. The head of GWIC has now hopped to the commercial arm of the industry. We've seen so many dogs dying, and everything else is happening. What is your legacy when it comes to greyhounds in this State?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I understand those people who want to see the industry closed down. Other than closing down the industry, nothing will ever be enough. But what I can say is that—

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Then it will be horses.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I've said many times, the Government's policy is that greyhound racing will continue in New South Wales. My job as the Minister is to make that as safe as we possibly can. That means that, in certain cases, I have to take action. I have been taking that action. I have not been sitting back and just accepting things. I have put forward high standards, and where those standards aren't being met, we've had interventions such as the Drake inquiry.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: When will you release the Drake report?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Our aim is to release the Drake report as quickly as we possibly can. There are a number of issues that need to be considered by Cabinet. As soon as they are considered, that report will be released in full.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: When will that be?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I will point out that the transcripts and the submissions are already publicly available online.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, we know. But, in terms of the Drake report, how many versions of that report did you receive?

CORRECTED

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I only received the one—the final version. But I would like to congratulate Ms Drake, while she's here at the back.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We will be talking with Ms Drake later.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: She has done an amazing job. It is very, very thorough. It is a large document with many, many good recommendations.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If we could all see it, we would be able to comment on that as well.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We've committed that we'll do that as quickly as we can.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are we talking a month, three months, a year? What are we talking?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It has to go through the Cabinet process.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So a month?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Hopefully it will be sooner rather than later.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We talked last time about the conflict of interest of Steve Griffin being appointed CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW after being GWIC CEO for so long. I understand that you did actually raise those concerns with Greyhound Racing NSW yourself.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Earlier this month, after the Tasmanian Government made its announcement about effectively ending greyhound racing, Griffin was quoted in the media as saying:

We are pretty disgusted and quite sick of politicians treating our sport as a political football ... Here's just another example of politicians playing around with our sport.

The lesson from the past is if you kick a sport like ours, you'll get something back ...

He then said, at the Greyhound Racing NSW Industry Future Summit in May 2025, that he'd been working along the industry for years and "I've got a fair bit of insight into how it operates." He also said, of the Drake inquiry, "It will come out with some recommendations but, at the end of the day, the industry knows best what it needs to do." Did that sound like the sort of comments you would expect from somebody who was for so long supposed to be upholding regulation in the greyhound industry?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Mr Griffin, since he has taken his new role, has acted to address many of the problems that I have perceived the industry was suffering from. He has worked very hard, for example, making sure there are correct policies and procedures in place.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But do you think that attitude—that's leadership from the top. It's the commercial arm of Greyhound Racing NSW saying, "When politicians come for us, we kick back. If you try to regulate us, we know what's best." Do you think that is setting the standard that you would expect in the racing industry? Is that your legacy?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: In his current role, he's representing his stakeholders, and I know that's an opinion that is held by many of those stakeholders.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And presumably by him when he was GWIC CEO.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not saying it's a correct opinion, but, as the CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW, his job is to put forward the views of his stakeholders.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, before the last election the Treasurer came out and said you were going to remove 9½ thousand pokies out of venues. Last budget estimates you told us that wasn't going to happen. This morning, you've told us—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, what I said was we weren't doing buybacks. We didn't say we weren't removing machines.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When can we turn around and see the commitment that the Treasurer made that there are 9½ thousand less pokies in clubs?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: If you remember, the commitment didn't have a timeline on it. Under the current regime, the number of machine entitlements will continue to reduce over time.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So there is no indication of when you think it will hit that 9½ thousand target that he committed to?

CORRECTED

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, and in the election campaign we made no commitment on a timeline for that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Back to the gambling reform plans, would you say the bulk of industry and relevant stakeholders support these plans?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Which plans are you talking about? We haven't released our final plans yet.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The way you're tracking with gambling reform.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We have a lot of consultation with stakeholders. We test a lot of ideas with them, and that's appropriate. That's what governments should do.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The Auditor-General said your department was not supporting harm minimisation outcomes effectively. Wesley Mission is saying that you have done next to nothing to reduce gambling harm. One of the most complimentary things I've heard was from Cate Faehrmann, who said that you were tinkering around the edges. Do you know more about the impacts of gambling than these groups and people?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We have committed to a firm road map for gambling reform in New South Wales moving forward. I have spoken at length about the process we're going through to develop that plan. When that plan comes out, then I'm happy for people to be critical or otherwise. But as we go through the process, we have to understand how this actually works in the real world. I'll point back to the fact that the previous Government made an intervention into taxi licences, for example. In doing so, they sent people broke. One of our commitments is that we will continue to have a vibrant industry in New South Wales. I suggest there are two or three people in your own party that know a lot about this issue, who talk to me about it at length and agree with the Government's approach. People who actually understand how these things work are actually supportive of our approach.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, when the chair of ILGA said that gaming venues had no social licence to rape and pillage communities, did she provide you with examples of where this was happening?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No. I have to say that when I was made aware of that comment, I did express concern that it was a generalisation that was probably not appropriate. I have written to the chair of ILGA expressing those thoughts.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What was the response?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We got back that they'd taken it on board. I don't want to speak for the chair. She's reached out to a number of groups, is my understanding. This is an area where emotive language doesn't solve the problems. What solves the problems is good policy decisions. That's what I want to see. I also want to see that where there's either government policy or legislation, that that legislation is followed.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is that policy and legislation being followed, particularly by ILGA?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I have written—I think it's quite public—a direction to ILGA to say that they need to take into account all the objectives of the Act. Harm minimisation, of course, is a very important part of that. ILGA does incredibly difficult work, but one of the objectives is the vibrancy of the industry to make sure that it survives economically. That has to be taken into account as well. As Minister, all I expect is that all of the objectives are taken into account when decisions are being made.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You're referring there to your statement of expectations that you sent.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Why was that needed?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We have been having discussions since I became Minister about industry concerns and other concerns around some of the decision-making. I thought that it was necessary to make sure and reaffirm that the Act has a number of objectives. Those objectives aren't hierarchical. They're all equal, and they should all be applied equally.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are you confident, since that statement of expectations was sent out in February 2024, that that has happened, that it has been followed?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No. That's why I had to put out the second statement of expectations. Following further discussion, and looking at some of the issues, I thought that that needed to be reaffirmed, particularly in light of the comment that was made.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What's your next step if they continue to flout your authority?

CORRECTED

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They're not flouting. They're an independent authority, so I don't have authority over them. All I can ask, as Minister, is that they apply all parts of the Act in a fair way. That's what the industry asks. That's what, I think, all people in the community would expect, that it's applied equally. I know that my comments are taken on board and that processes are looked at. We just need a balanced approach to this in New South Wales because, if the situation is that when people put in an application they're having their hours reduced, for example, and then the venues around them don't suffer the same outcome, then you're actually creating a competitive disadvantage. When people put in an application to improve their premises or move their premises or those sorts of things, we have a situation where they're preparing to spend money and making a commitment. Then if that impacts their hours that they're able to operate, that has an economic impact on them.

All I'm saying is that when you make decisions they need to be—I've been very clear with the chair and ILGA about this. If people are doing the wrong thing, throw the book at them. If people are breaking the law or they're not fulfilling their responsibilities, throw the book at them. But if there's no evidence of that, the question then is why are they being penalised when they're putting in an application, and people who don't put in an application have no impact on them? That dissuades people from making an investment. That's why I've said you've got to look at all the parts of the Act, not just selectively.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What are you going to do to make sure that that doesn't happen? You sent two letters off. What are you going to do to make sure that doesn't happen but, more importantly, to restore confidence in the industry, or to restore the relationship between the Government, ILGA and industry.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: All we can do, as Minister—because, as I said, they're an independent authority, I have no authority over their decision-making—is encourage them to follow the legislation as the legislation is. If there's a perception or there's a factual base that that's not continuing, we would have to look at that at the time in the context of a range of strategies.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What does that mean to look at it? As you've implied, this is damaging industry. That's stopping people from expanding. What are you actually going to do about it other than look at it and maybe write another letter?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They're an independent authority. The Minister's reach is limited. We would have to look at any other options other than that. The best way is that we continue to talk with ILGA. We need to understand where their decision-making is coming from, but one of my roles is to also put the views of stakeholders if they think that some of these things aren't being applied fairly. In some cases, maybe in many cases, there's really good decision-making. But there are the odd outliers where questions have been asked. I believe one's in NCAT at the moment. As Minister, I can't ignore that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Would you say the views of stakeholders are complimentary about the processes that are happening?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think there's frustration from stakeholders. Certainly, that's been expressed to me in exactly the terms I have just said: If you put in an application to actually invest and do something, there's a consequence; if you sit back and do nothing, make no investment, then you're pretty much left alone.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are you going to fix this, Minister?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We're working through the processes as they've been outlined to me, and we will continue to do that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Who holds the cards—you or ILGA?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: ILGA's an independent authority. Every person who puts in an application who doesn't like the outcome has the right to go to NCAT and ask for that to be reviewed. That process is underway, particularly in one case that I'm aware of. Those decisions will obviously impact on how ILGA does their work.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, another commitment you made before the election was for facial recognition. Where are we at with that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We've gone out to public consultation on that. The department has received all the responses to that call for a comment. They're assessing that, and that will help us develop our policy in terms of how facial recognition might be rolled out in New South Wales.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Submissions for that closed in March, I understand. We are now in August. That's a long time to have still not seen anything from that.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: These aren't easy issues, because facial recognition is an obvious way to help industry do a range of things. Many people, though, have a great problem with facial recognition. That means that

CORRECTED

the guidelines, the requirements, the data storage—all of those complex issues—have to be addressed. You can't just say, "We're going to do facial recognition, and we're going to do it next Thursday." You actually have to make sure that when you put forward your strategy, you've covered all the bases to ensure that actually it can be rolled out. What it might cost individual premises, what sized premises you're going to do it in, and all those sorts of things—there is a range of really complex issues.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: It sounds like a range of excuses while things are moving at a glacial pace.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I go back to some of your decision-making in the previous Government with greyhounds and taxis, where you make decisions and then you fall flat on your face. I'm not someone who wants to fall flat on my face.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, before you were saying that we couldn't have cashless gaming because we had biometrics coming and facial recognition, and that would all do the job—this would make it all outdated technology. Now you are saying this is all too difficult with facial recognition as well.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not saying that at all. What I'm saying is it's complex and we want to get it right. There is a difference between complex and wanting to get it right, and saying it's all too hard.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, you've outlined that you're going to have a road map when it comes to harm reduction and the like. Will that be implemented before the next election?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: This will take a number of years to roll out.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So it's not going to be implemented before the next election?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We made no commitment to totally roll these things out.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What have you been elected for?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Have you just been elected to sit in that seat? Is that it?

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, you guys made unrealistic commitments that, when we now look at it, could never have been delivered.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Vote Labor: Get nothing—is that the pitch?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You're the party of empty promises; we're the party of actually doing what we can do.

The CHAIR: Order! A point of order has been taken.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: You've had 2½ years and you've still admitted you've done nothing.

The CHAIR: Mr Farlow will come to order.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll just keep referring to your record in government.

The CHAIR: Mr Barrett will come to order. Minister, please.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Sorry, Chair. He is deliberately trying to antagonise me.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Restore some decorum, please.

The CHAIR: Order! I'm ruling on a point of order, Mr Barrett.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry. I do apologise. I didn't hear that.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Paragraph 19 of the procedural fairness resolution requires courtesy to be extended to the witness. I suggest Mr Farlow is being aggressive and personal. I ask that he be called to order.

The CHAIR: Certainly he was interjecting, which was disorderly.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I apologise to the Minister for any discourtesy I may have shown, and to Mr Nanva as well.

The CHAIR: There you go—he has withdrawn.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Further to the point of order: If the member wishes to engage in a polemical debate on what they did versus what we're doing—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: No, he brought that up.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: —then it is fair enough for the Minister to be able to respond with silence.

The CHAIR: I'm not sure that's a point of order. But certainly the interjections were disorderly. Interjections are disorderly at all times. I remind all members of that. It does not assist the inquiry or Hansard. I can't remember what we were up to.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I missed the point of order, and I apologise for speaking over that. Minister, we haven't yet seen any real action on facial recognition, and same with cashless gaming. The Wesley Mission and the Auditor-General and Cate Faehrmann are right in being critical of this Government as far as its lack of action on gambling reform.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What I've said is we're working—we haven't done nothing; we're working through a process. That may be alien to people. I don't think you were in the previous Government so I don't apply this to you, but it may be alien to some in the Opposition that we actually want to do things the right way. We have to do that in the context of looking at the whole environment that this sits in. It's not just a matter of doing one thing, because that then impacts on a whole range of other things. This is a complex issue. Our approach is to test the whole range of things to see how it would work, how it won't work, how it would be paid for, who would be most impacted. For example, what we've just seen from Victoria is evidence that carded play has problems because people swap cards. That was the model that the previous Government was holding up, and it had flaws. Excuse me for saying that we actually want to make sure that we are going to make the biggest reform in the gambling industry in 30 years and we want to get it right.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In 30 years time, perhaps.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So your message to communities that have been hurt by this—to families that have been hurt by this—is, "We'll probably do something, someday"?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, my message is we have put in a range of harm minimisation strategies already that will take time to embed and that have already cost the industry hundreds of thousands of dollars to implement in individual venues. Let's just put this in context. You're saying that in 30 years an industry has developed, and in two years you want us to fix the whole problem, which includes a whole lot of societal problems. Excuse me for saying fantasy, fantasy, fantasy, but this is what the problem is. It's easy in opposition to sit back and throw bombs. You, in government, actually have to get it right. That's what I'll be responsible for. If I put out a plan that has no probability of success, then I'm responsible for that. That's not how I do business.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, how have you gone in making it easier for kids of defence personnel to enrol in schools?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I met with the education Minister's office and with the Minister, Minister Car, and raised this issue. They are very supportive of doing it, and they made a commitment that in the next cycle, when the enrolment form is next updated, that they will be putting that in place.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is that for enrolment for next year?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You'll have to ask the question to the education department.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So we don't know how often they—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not sure of how often they revise their enrolment form, but they did agree that it's something that should be done.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Last year we learnt that 29 out of 128 councils had signed up to be part of the Veterans Employment Program. It seems—I had a quick look on the website—it's more than that now.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, I believe so.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I was going through this webpage and it actually shut down on me. I wonder if someone can check if that was a problem at my end and not the other end.

CORRECTED

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Okay, we can take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Just check it's not a common issue. The bulk of what I found as far as the councils that signed up on that was a link back to their council webpage—sometimes the employment page, sometimes the council home page. What do you expect of a council that becomes part of the Veterans Employment Program?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think the main thing is that they have policies and procedures both to attract veterans to roles but also, if a veteran applies for a role, that their skills are properly assessed because veterans—sometimes their CV doesn't necessarily show their full range of skills. Whether you want to do it now or this afternoon—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Afternoon.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —I can ask Ms Mackaness to go into more detail about that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: One of the things that came up last time was that 55 veterans were hired by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development between April and September 2024. How many of those 55 are still employed by DPIRD and were any of them affected with the recent job cuts?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you track what happens to these people after they get the job, or is it just that they get the job and that's the stat?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think that will be a question for Ms Mackaness.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You don't track it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not me, personally, no.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Where did you get to with the transport subsidies for regional veterans to travel to medical appointments?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: This has been looked at broadly by government. When we got the royal commission report into suicide for veterans, we convened a whole-of-government group to look at all of these issues. We're working through the responses from across government and in due course we will release the whole-of-government response to that report.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When did that whole-of-government group last meet?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We will have to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: We will now turn to some questions from the crossbench. Mr Lecter—I mean, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Thank you, Chair.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Is that an internal joke?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's very much an in-joke. Minister, thank you for your attendance today, and your officials and the witnesses. I want to ask you about the ethical standards you apply in your portfolio to questions of conflict of interest. Would you expect that the head of the Liquor and Gaming authority would not act as a referee—that is, a commercial advocate—for a poker machine company in New South Wales competing for entitlements in our pubs and clubs?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not aware of the case. I'm happy to take it on notice and have a closer look at it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But as an ethical standard, you'd expect the regulator to be separate from commercial dealings over which the regulator has some authority?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I wouldn't like to comment without actually knowing the specifics.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, do you agree with the Premier that Sydney needs 10 more Peter V'landys?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Peter V'landys is a bit of a force of nature. I have to say—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That turns out to be a pun, as I'll come to.

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Mr DAVID HARRIS: In my role, I have to say that I haven't met many people with his drive and understanding of what he does, his breadth of knowledge and certainly his drive of purpose. I think, across a whole range of things, having people with those particular skills—it doesn't mean that—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So, you're with the Premier? You're with your boss on that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You're not going to contradict him, are you?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I think he's 100 per cent right.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Okay. Good. Minister, are you aware that Evergreen Turf, owned by Graeme Colless, has a new monopoly on the provision of racecourse turf to Randwick, Rosehill, Warwick Farm, Hawkesbury and many country tracks around New South Wales?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not specifically.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, on probity and ethical grounds, should the racing regulator, Racing NSW, act as a referee for Evergreen in winning these contracts for turf supplies?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, I have no personal knowledge of that, so I wouldn't like to comment without having more detail.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why do Peter V'landys, as CEO of Racing NSW, and Graeme Hinton, as its chief operating officer, act as referees for Evergreen in these turf supply tender contracts for racetracks in New South Wales?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, I have no knowledge of it. I'm happy to take that on notice and check into it, as I do with everything that you raise, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, and it's all accurate, Minister, as you know, and it can all be verified.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: And there's often a reason—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: They've all got reasons, haven't they? Would you expect race clubs, in this circumstance, to think, "If V'landys and Hinton are referees for Evergreen and we have to check the credentials of this turf supplier with them, then obviously Racing NSW, as the regulator, wants us to give the contracts and tenders to Evergreen, otherwise we'll probably be in trouble with the regulator"?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't know. I think you'd have to ask the individual committees what their motivation is for choosing different things.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But if the regulator is the referee for a certain company that has a broad monopoly in New South Wales, don't you think that the race clubs, who are generally scared of the regulator and are not wanting to get in trouble and risk track upgrades, racing sponsorship and funding, would think, "We better do what the regulator says. They're the referee, the commercial advocate, for Evergreen. If we don't go that way, we could be in some strife"?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, I don't want to comment without knowing full details, but I would assume that the number of companies that would supply turf for that sort of outcome wouldn't be huge—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —and I am assuming that they require a certain standard. But, again, I can't really comment without knowing the full details. As I said, I'm happy to look into it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Would you regard this as a clear conflict of interest? And what, as Minister, would you be doing—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Well, I can't regard it until I actually know more detail on it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, are you aware of the close personal and financial relationship between Peter V'landys and Graeme Colless, the general manager and owner of Evergreen Turf?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware of a DA approval by Hunters Hill Council in 2021 for major renovation and landscaping work at Peter V'landys' home at [EVIDENCE OMITTED BY RESOLUTION

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OF THE COMMITTEE 26 AUGUST 2025] and the free work that Evergreen undertook for V'landys on that project and other work at his personal residence?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Would you regard that as unacceptable in every circumstance—ethically, probity?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, it's not something I can comment on.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Given the large interest Evergreen has in racetrack turf supplies in New South Wales, would you expect Mr V'landys to have declared this Evergreen freebie at his own home under the Racing NSW conflict of interest declarations?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't know if he has or he hasn't.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you check and ensure that it's happened?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, we can look into that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And also check whether he has declared the fact that he's a referee for these commercial contracts for turf supplies at racetracks right around New South Wales, on behalf of Evergreen, owned by his mate Colless. And would you also do it for Mr Hinton, the chief operating officer? There is not just one of them at the regulator doing this. V'landys' offsider, this Hinton character, is also into it as well. Can you check his conflict of interest declarations accordingly?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Sure.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Given that Mr V'landys is engaged in this improper activity, do we really need 10 more of this kind of character in Sydney?

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There's an assertion that it's improper. As I said, I'll check into it.

The CHAIR: I remind Mr Latham that adverse mention of third parties at these inquiries is to be avoided unless absolutely necessary. I don't think it adds to the conduct of the inquiry, so if we can avoid that, please.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I'm asking if we need 10 more Peter V'landys, given what's happened.

The CHAIR: You weren't.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, I was. Well, I'll ask that now. Minister?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I said that the character—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You gave him a pretty big rap.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I said the characteristics are something that we would desire in anyone, particularly in sports administration.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: He's got plenty of characteristics, that's for sure. When did you first learn that Racing NSW intended to cancel the ATC ballot for the sale of Rosehill set down for 3 April?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It might have been a day or so before, I think. It would have been around the time that it was going public.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: The day or so before they cancelled it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, no.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Under what circumstances did you get that knowledge?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, before it went public. I don't recall exactly.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Your evidence is a day before it went public. It went public on 28 March—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. I can't recall exactly.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How did you learn about it a day or two before that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I was made aware. I can't tell you the exact day or time that I was made aware.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Who made you aware?

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Mr DAVID HARRIS: My staff.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Who made them aware?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't know.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You had prior knowledge that the racing regulator was going to cancel the ballot. That's your evidence?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, I'm not sure if it was on the day or before that. I'd have to check. But, yes, I was made aware that it had been cancelled. I cannot tell you the exact time.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you check the details with your staff, and who made them aware?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Sure.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In your experience in politics and racing, how many organisations call off a ballot six days out when the online voting tally tells them that they're winning?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I have no experience of that to give you a particular answer.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Come on. You've had a few Labor Party ballots in your time. Do you ever call one off when you're in front?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No? No-one does. Okay.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I've never actually gone to a ballot.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Haven't you?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No. I've been elected unopposed.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Okay. We need to arrange that in Wyong, if that's the case. I know a bloke, Brett Partelle, who'll have a crack. Minister, calling off the ballot allowed the ATC and Racing NSW to regroup, didn't it, offering an \$8,000 bribe to ATC members to try to turn around the negative vote that would have occurred on 3 April?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: My point of order goes to paragraph 9 of the procedural fairness resolution; that goes to relevance.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Don't read those rules; they're just a nuisance.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: This is an inquiry into the estimated expenditure from the Consolidated Fund and related budget papers for the coming financial year. I'd suggest that this questioning is not relevant under the terms of reference.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To the point of order: Obviously the Minister's portfolio would have spent a huge amount of money—a huge amount—if the Rosehill proposal had gone ahead with a positive vote to sell it. The fact that the vote got knocked over by the rorted calling off on 3 April and then was defeated anyway is integral to this inquiry.

The CHAIR: I do not uphold the point of order. I ask the Minister to answer the question.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Sorry, what was the question?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, are you aware that calling off the ballot allowed the ATC and Racing NSW to regroup, offering the \$8,000 bribe to ATC members to try and turn around the negative vote that would have occurred on 3 April—the ballot that was called off?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I had no intervention—I was not involved in any decision-making in terms of that happening. All I got was that it had been called off.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware that on 19 March, two weeks out from the ballot, Graeme Hinton at Racing NSW rang industry leaders to tell them the no vote on Rosehill was winning 80 per cent to 20 per cent, and he urged them to join a campaign to try to promote the yes vote?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I'm not aware of that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware that briefings on the supposed benefits of the Rosehill sale were offered from Steve McMahon, Garry Charny and Barrenjoey, and, when these briefings couldn't generate

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any kind of yes campaign from industry leaders, Graeme Hinton told his allies that Racing NSW had no choice but to cancel the ballot?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: These are operational matters which I can have no knowledge of. I know you want to get all this on the record, but it's pointless asking me about it, because I played no part in any of that decision-making.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You're not worried about the perversion of democracy inside the racing industry?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Well, that's a matter—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: We hear a lot about Putin and Trump and everyone says they're anti-democratic. What about the mob under your nose?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They're operational matters that I have no jurisdiction over.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How can you allow Racing NSW to continue in its current state, given that these powers have produced such a disgraceful, anti-democratic outcome in calling off the 3 April ballot? In particular, you had one maverick vet report and you called a whole inquiry into greyhounds. Why don't we have one into these matters at Racing NSW, the conflict of interest about Evergreen and the calling off of the 3 April ballot?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You've made a lot of assertions there, Mr Latham. Can I tell you that the Drake inquiry was called not just because of the report from the former chief vet. There were a number of issues that I had personally undertaken prior to that. It was the culmination of all those things, including me having already written to the board saying that they needed to show cause. So they're two totally different, unrelated things. You've got your view and assertion. Democracy played out. The ATC membership voted not to do it. The operational part of how that happened is a matter for the ATC and Racing NSW.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You are very well aware of the report into the regulation of gaming machines that the Audit Office released on 12 June this year, which found that the department was not acting in accordance with harm minimisation. You're aware of what was contained in the report and you issued a ministerial media release on 12 June, which said:

The Government notes that while many of our reforms have only been in place for under 12 months, we acknowledge and welcome that both the Department ... and Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority have accepted the recommendations made in the report.

So what happened between the time that you issued that media release and the time that you issued the ministerial direction on 1 July?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The first media release was acknowledgement that ILGA and the department had accepted the recommendations of the Auditor-General. The ministerial direction that was later put out was unrelated to that. It was about a series of other issues.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The welcoming of the report, though, suggests that—so you're 100 per cent supportive of the Auditor-General's report and the recommendations contained in it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think the department accepts that they need to look at different ways of implementing regulation. I will point out, though, that one of the things—and this goes back to the Act again—that the Auditor-General didn't look at was the vibrancy of the industry as one of the factors in the objectives. The Auditor-General looked at harm minimisation. Unfortunately, too—and this is no criticism of the Auditor-General—it was very narrow. It didn't look at the Office of Responsible Gambling, which is actually responsible for research and delivering harm minimisation strategies.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What's your view of the Auditor-General's findings and recommendations around the fact that there are a hell of a lot of clubs that have had exemptions to the shutdown period? Some haven't had their licences looked at for 20 years. Some of these clubs are, in fact, earning many millions of dollars—many, many millions of dollars—in revenue. What's your view on the recommendations around reviewing those licences and the shutdown exemptions?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Prior to the Auditor-General's report, the department was already undertaking review of those issues.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, and I'll get to that. That was released in January this year. The department had it since August. What's your view? Do you agree with the Auditor-General's recommendations around that? Are you concerned at just how many venues haven't had their shutdown exemptions reviewed in such a long time?

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Mr DAVID HARRIS: Both the department and I were concerned about that: that they hadn't been reviewed for so long. That's why I asked the department to undertake that review. But, in terms of the results of that review, it's being considered in the total context of the road map moving forward, which is looking at all these. That's why I said it's complex. We're not just looking at cashless gaming; we're looking at the regulation of the industry overall. All of that information has been fed into those considerations.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I think stakeholders are getting a little bit concerned that it has been 2½ years. This was kicked off to a review and the independent panel has reported back, but there's still no indication at all. All we're hearing is that it's "very complex", "very complex", "very complex". There are parts of this, though, that aren't that complex. I would suggest that the exemption, the shutdown hours where the Act says six hours—and you know the data around gambling harm. The worst harm occurs in those early hours of the morning. It's not that hard to have a look at the review—at least have a look at those exemptions.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: And we are.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, but no other State and Territory does this. So when can we expect any indication from your Government about what it's going to do? It's just review, review, review, review, "complex", "complex" and no action.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's not just review; it's develop. After you have reviewed something, you then have to develop the strategy for what you do next. As I've said, that's a complex issue that touches a whole broad range of issues. That's what we're putting together in terms of what we take to Cabinet. Then there'll be a whole-of-government response to how we're going to tackle many of these issues that have built up over 30 years, where they weren't reviewed. We're trying to fix something that had very little attention for a long, long time, which puts us at this point.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, just going back to those allegations, if I can just try and get a bit of an understanding around what actions were taken. When your office received those allegations, what actions did you or your office take in that immediate instance?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Specifically I'll take that on notice exactly what we did, but with all of these issues we go to the relevant body to ask for an explanation, or a report, about what they did or didn't do, how they handled it, and then make a judgement based on that, with departmental advice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You're still in the process of waiting to get that response?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. My understanding on that particular case was that GWIC had dealt with it through their processes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: My understanding is that there's more than one case. I assume you're aware of that, that there are multiple women that have made allegations³.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not aware of it specifically. I'm aware that there have been complaints, and I understand that those complaints were dealt with under the appropriate processes and there were outcomes on them. If that's the case, I'm not sure that we can go back and review every case.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm just curious as to what actions your office has taken. You've written to GWIC?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We made inquiries. GWIC provided us with a response. At this stage there was nothing more for us to do.⁴

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Would it normally be the case that you would expect a CEO of GWIC, or another major department that you work with—if somebody in an executive role like a CEO had sexual harassment allegations made against them that that would be brought to your attention as the Minister? Are you surprised that at the time that these occurred, or at any point while you've been the Minister, that it wasn't raised with you?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I can't say that they did occur while I've been the Minister. I don't know.

³ The committee received [correspondence](#) from Mr Steve Griffin, Chief Executive Officer, Greyhound Racing NSW, dated 8 October 2025.

⁴ In [correspondence](#) to the committee dated 15 September 2025, Hon David Harris MP, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, Minister for Gaming and racing, Minister for Veterans, Minister for Medical Research and Minister for the Central Coast, clarified their evidence.

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The Hon. EMMA HURST: But this individual was the CEO of GWIC while you were the Minister. Are you concerned that these issues were never brought to your attention?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I would assume that if they followed through the correct workplace procedures then it wouldn't necessarily come to me.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You're not surprised that this was never brought to your attention?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No. If it occurred tomorrow, then I would have an expectation that I'd be informed.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, can you confirm for the record if you or your staff, or anyone within your department, ever received a copy or a draft copy or parts of the Drake report prior to 31 July 2025?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You don't recall seeing an earlier version of the report prior to 31 July?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think procedurally these are questions for Commissioner Drake about how she undertook her work. We certainly had conversations around specific issues, but in terms of seeing another report before the final report, no, that wasn't the case.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But there were discussions around the content of the report?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think the Commissioner had questions. There were also questions around procedural fairness, which she raised with me, that had been raised by the industry. We discussed how that might be addressed.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Can you take on notice that other question in regard to whether you or anyone at the department saw a copy or a draft copy or parts of a draft copy of the Drake report prior to 31 July?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Sure.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I also want to ask about the second extension. We saw a first extension come from the Commissioner. From memory, it was related to a whole lot of fiscal mismanagement issues that had come forward. The Commissioner requested an extension; you approved that. At the last budget estimates I asked the Commissioner if she expected that she would need another extension. She indicated that she was ready to go, that another extension wouldn't probably be needed. However, then there was another extension from 11 April until 31 July. What was the reason for that extension and who asked for that extension?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I just alluded to it in the previous answer. There were representations from industry and some individuals around procedural fairness. In order to make sure that the report maintained its integrity, then it was agreed there would be an extension to give those people the opportunity to put forward their issues and have the Commissioner consider those before the final report was completed.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Just before we break and return at 11.15 a.m., in the absence of Government questions, I'd like to inform the Committee that during that session the home address of a person was read onto the record. I'm getting some advice from the secretariat on how best to deal with that at a later date, and probably at a deliberative.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone, to the hearing for Portfolio Committee No. 1. We will return to questions from the Opposition.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Chair, before we start, can I give answer to two questions that were taken on notice.

The CHAIR: Yes, please, Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I earlier took on notice a question about rates of gambling harm under the former Government compared to now. I can confirm that in 2019 high-risk gambling was 1 per cent. In comparison, in 2024, the rate of high-risk gambling is slightly less, at 0.9 per cent. In relation to seeing a copy or draft of the Drake report, I can confirm that neither my office nor I received a draft of the report.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for those answers, Minister.

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The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, closer to home now—the Central Coast. Tonight before the Central Coast Council there's a motion with respect to the erection of a toe wall that council will be considering. What's the Government's position with respect to the development of a toe wall at Wamberal?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Essentially, it's a council decision. The process that's been undertaken is that the council, the mayor and the general manager met with Ministers and departmental representatives and asked for the Reconstruction Authority and DCCEEW to assist them. It was determined through Minister Saffin's office that under the Reconstruction Authority Act they could declare the two areas at North Entrance and Wamberal as emergency areas. That gave the opportunity for council to work with residents to develop a strategy for immediate emergency work. That work was undertaken at North Entrance. The plan was returned to the authority and ticked off by the different government departments.

Unfortunately, no work has been undertaken because the residents and council haven't reached final agreement on what should be done, so a final deed hasn't been signed in that case. In Wamberal there is a motion tonight. Unfortunately, council took the view that they then did not want to submit a report developed with the residents for emergency works to the Government. We haven't been able to assess any report because that was never done. Instead they took the view that more longer-term work was required. Unfortunately, under the Reconstruction Authority Act, that becomes more difficult, so it moves into Minister Sharpe's domain.

Council has out on public display their coastal management plan for public consultation. Any longer-term work has to be done in consultation with that plan. That has not yet been submitted or ratified by government. Therefore, it's very, very tricky. I was sent the motion by councillors and the general manager's response to that. I think the motion as it stands is problematic, which was pointed out by the general manager. I'm assuming that tonight in council, in a democratic way, there'll be a large amount of discussion and, whether it's amended or not, we'll have to wait and see. There is a process. It's a clear process. Council is aware of the process and the Government's done everything it can to support them through that process.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: On 1 April at Community Cabinet, which I'm sure you were present for, the Premier said there'd be no sea wall at Wamberal.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: On public land.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: There's a disclaimer, is there, that it's on public land so you're not impeding on the private development applications?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Let's be clear. Under planning laws, any resident can put in a DA for work on their own property. That is a decision for the independent planning authorities. Government has to abide by that. If the residents aren't happy with the decision of the planning authority, they have the right to go to the Land and Environment Court and seek a decision there. What the Premier was talking about is that public land wouldn't be included and that the preferred strategy on public land was sand nourishment.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to that, the motion before council tonight, if it was implemented, that would include public land, would it not?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Not at all? It would all be on private land?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Government said that the land it owns cannot be included.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What about any council-held land in that area?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a matter for council.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of your distinction, it's only State Government land, not council land.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct, yes. That's a matter for council and I believe that council, under the current DA that has been submitted, has included their land in that DA process.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, you've outlined that the Premier had a stated preference for a sand nourishment program at Wamberal Beach. What work has been done with respect to sand nourishment at Wamberal Beach since that statement from the Premier?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As has been publicly described, there is a trial of sand nourishment currently going on at Stockton Beach in the electorate of Newcastle, I think in the Newcastle council area. The results of that trial will feed into not just a strategy for sand nourishment for the Central Coast but a wider view of the whole coastline. Obviously, these two places aren't the only areas in the coast that are under a risk of erosion. I know Lismore,

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Ballina and a few other places have similar issues. Then that will feed into the review and development of the State's coastal management strategy, which will then outline the opportunities for councils to apply for funding to do certain works. That is my understanding.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: When can the people of Wamberal expect to see a sand nourishment program occur at Wamberal Beach?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There's no timeline on that, but they have an opportunity now to work with council, which they have been doing, to develop a plan for emergency works. They will have to talk to council about progressing that because we can't approve anything until council submits something to the Government for consideration, which hasn't happened.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In recent months we've seen more and more challenges at Wamberal. We saw on 2 April or 3 April, just a day after the Premier's announcement, the coastal erosion notice from the Central Coast Council. We saw the storms of late May and the reconstruction order that was made for Wamberal, and we saw on 1 July an evacuation order by the SES. Minister, Wamberal residents and landholders have a lot of concerns about their properties and their future. What's the Government doing today to assist those landowners?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I've just walked you through the whole process of what the Government's doing.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It seems like, from what you were saying, you're waiting.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No. The Minister has declared it an emergency area and there's a process that's undertaken when that occurs. The council's aware of that process. The council itself has chosen not to progress that at this time so there is nothing for the Government to assess until they put forward a proposition.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: The Government's not planning on stepping in and doing anything to support Wamberal at this stage? You're just waiting on the council to come forward with a proposal?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Government has been fully supportive in putting in place the current process.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How much money is on the table for sand nourishment at Wamberal?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, that's part of a wider strategy which hasn't been developed yet, following on from the trial that's happening at Stockton Beach. I understand the Stockton Beach trial cost about \$21 million and has been undertaken. There has been no further commitment on that until the results of that trial come back. I think it started under the previous Government. Minister Barilaro started that process. We've continued that process. That will be evaluated and that will feed into any strategies, but it's probably more appropriate to ask Minister Sharpe specific questions. It's well outside my range of portfolios because this is about the whole State.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to the issues at North Entrance, your member for The Entrance said that his personal view was that buybacks should be entered into.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What's the Government's position with respect to buybacks along coastal areas that face potential challenges?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Government's policy is the current policy. That, at this stage, doesn't include buybacks but, as I said, the Minister—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Are you contemplating buybacks at all in—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Minister is looking at this issue along the whole coastline. There will be a range of strategies which will have to go out for public consultation. That's Minister Sharpe's domain—certainly not my domain—and I'm sure there'll be a wide range of views on that issue.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So the member for The Entrance, and Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, has indicated his preference for buybacks. Are buybacks part of your preference as well?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's not in my electorate.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But you are the Minister for the Central Coast.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, but the Central Coast is a huge place. It goes from the Hawkesbury River all the way up to Catherine Hill Bay and out to the council areas of Hawkesbury and Cessnock in the west.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: And you're the Minister for it.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's right.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Has he heard of Wamberal?

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Mr DAVID HARRIS: I have been very supportive and helping to organise the meetings that've taken place between council and government departments. We've put in place a clear strategy. We've actually enacted, for the first time, the provisions under the Reconstruction Authority Act—never been used before. Minister Saffin has been very supportive of putting in place the emergency situation. Coastal erosion as a whole is a whole-of-coastline issue. There are issues right along the coastline and it's not my role to be discussing what Government's policy may or may not be in terms of any consultation that is undertaken in the future.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But you've got a member for The Entrance who's advocated buybacks, whose position—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Every local member is entitled to have a view of particular issues in their electorate, but that doesn't mean that that will end up being Government policy. It may be Government policy, but you're asking me to actually form a view that precedes all of the other work I've just talked about.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But, Minister, I'm asking you as the Minister for the Central Coast—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You can ask me, but I've given you my answer.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: —and I agree that it's a large area but it's also got two areas such as North Entrance and Wamberal that are facing these issues.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I told you that's not in the provision under the current Act. What might happen in the future is for public consultation. It's not my role. If you understand the role of regional Minister, you've got to be very careful you don't tread too deeply into other Ministers' portfolios. You can represent your area and you can put forward views, but the ultimate decision-making is with the Minister that has control.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I appreciate that, Minister, and that's why I'm asking what your view is on this.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't have a view.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: You don't have a view?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, because in some cases, maybe it's something that could happen. In other cases, it may not be. That's why the public has to be consulted on this.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But with respect to The Entrance and the views of the member for The Entrance there, do you support his views that there should be buybacks at North Entrance?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I support the member for The Entrance being able to have a view.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: As do we all, Minister, as do we all. We all support the member for The Entrance having a view. But in government, as the Minister for the Central Coast, I would have thought that you would have formed your own view with respect to these very pertinent issues for the electorate.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, my role has been facilitating the current process that's underway. I've been totally focused on that. I've been talking to the general manager, the mayor and local councillors. I've been totally focused on that. I'm not going to delve into hypotheticals. I'll talk about what I have done and what I can do, not what I might be able to do in—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It's not a hypothetical; it's a view that the member for The Entrance has outlined.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Of course it's a hypothetical. The current—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: No, it isn't! The member for The Entrance has said that it's his view.

The CHAIR: Order! A point of order has been taken.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I just said, the current Act said you can't do it.

The CHAIR: Order, Minister! The Minister will come to order. I will hear the point of order from the Hon. Mark Buttigieg.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: It's on repetition, Chair. This is probably the third or fourth iteration of the same question, which the Minister's directly answered. The member mightn't like the answer, but the Minister's entitled to answer it as he sees fit, and he's done that.

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The CHAIR: I don't uphold the point of order. The Minister is entitled to answer as he sees fit. The honourable member can continue to ask various iterations of a similar question if he wants. But what doesn't help is yelling over the top of each other and interjections. I remind everyone of that.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, in terms of these meetings that you've had with council and the like, have you met with residents who are impacted either at North Entrance or Wamberal?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I haven't met directly with them because my role has been in working with council to work through a process. Council's role is to work directly with the residents.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So you don't see your role as advocating the views of the residents who are impacted by these challenges?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, because there's a range of views on these issues. There are the views of the residents, there are the views of the wider community. It's very controversial. My role is to make sure that I'm focused on making sure the structures are in place to, in emergency situations, support those properties and those landholders. My meeting with them and getting their views is neither here nor there. My role is to focus on the specifics of what needs to be done by government and council in order to hopefully achieve an outcome.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Of course, you respect the views of the member for The Entrance. One of those views is that the member for The Entrance has lodged a formal objection against additional retirement living at Mingara. What are your views when it comes to the addition of housing on the Central Coast?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I support housing but that doesn't mean, as a local member, you can't have a view. The Government's clear position is we need more housing. This is a process that's decided independently of government. It will go through and be assessed on its merits. It may be passed as is; it may be scaled back—that's a matter for the authorities. Certainly, I did receive representations from some of the groups that have concerns, particularly around parking. I related to them that it is an independent planning process and that they've put forward their views, and their views will be taken into account in terms of that ongoing assessment.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It's a great thing that every everybody gets to have all these views, I must say, Minister.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Procedural fairness.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Which is very good. Minister, one of the other highlights for the Central Coast is the Gosford waterfront precinct. What is happening in terms of the Gosford waterfront precinct?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We committed, I think it was, \$8½ million to do a review of all the proposals that had been put forward for Gosford waterfront to find out what was actually possible. Over the years there's been great dreams, great pictures drawn, architectural images and a whole lot of stuff. Only one has ever gone to start assessment, in 2014. That was from Lendlease, and they withdrew from that process. We've undertaken that review, including going out to stakeholders including the development industry to say to the development industry that if the land was available, is it economically viable to proceed with what council had put on the table most recently, I think, in 2022 to 2023. The feedback from the industry was that, given the amount of building that's going on in Gosford at the moment—that's construction of units; there's \$2.3 billion of units under construction—that overwater construction of units is not economically viable in the short term, that it would be the medium to longer term where that would actually come into a price range where they could actually build and sell.

As you know, in the industry they have to have, I think, about 80 per cent to 85 per cent sold off the plan to actually finance their projects. We went out to 20 different firms and the clear feedback was that that's not viable. So what we've done is we've said, "Okay, that's not going to happen." We've been honest with people. In the short term, industry is not going to go and build on the waterfront, so what can we do in the meantime to make the amenity better. That's what we're focused on now. We looking at things like open public spaces, safety, provision of small retail commercial et cetera. We've got that survey out; people have their chance to put feedback into that, and from that we will actually develop a short-term approach. We're about to trial a couple of things in the next few months to make sure that the waterfront is accessible, that it is more attractive for people as a place to visit and that, in the longer term, the opportunity still exists for those larger scale developments when they're economically more viable.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: This is a bit of a walk-back, isn't it, from your pre-election commitment for the Gosford waterfront?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, that was our commitment. Our commitment was to find out what actually could be done, and that's exactly what we've done. Sometimes those on the other side interpret the commitment. If you actually go and look at the commitment, \$8.5 million was not going to build what is alleged was going to

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happen. It was a study into—I asked for this personally. We've had a lot of talk about this. It goes nowhere, goes around and around in circles, people get excited and then they get dashed, and they get excited and they get dashed.

Let's actually be honest and say, "We can do this; we can't do that", and let's get on with doing something. That's what we're doing. We're currently costing the shared pathway from Point Clare to Gosford, which will finish the link from the peninsula into the Gosford CBD. We'll look at a range of other things that will allow families to come to the waterfront to be able to look at that magnificent view and be engaged in some of the new construction. The new ALAND building is about to finish, so Voco, the new five-star hotel, is about to open. People who stay there will want to be able to go and have a beautiful place to visit. That's our current focus. When the units are all built out and it becomes economically viable to do these other projects then, in the future, we will look at that.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, will your works be completed before the next election?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Some of them will be. As I said, some of them will be small. Some of them will be undertaken as commitments, because they all have to be funded. As I said, \$8½ million—if anyone was under any illusion that our commitment was other than I just described, then they were living in as much fantasy as some of the proposals that have been put forward in the past.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, for what you're going to deliver, how much is it going to cost? What's the budgetary commitment?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's currently being costed.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Will that be within the next budget, the funding envelope?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's being costed and then, obviously, we will release what we're going to do in the stages we're going to do it.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How many development companies did the Hunter and Central Coast Development Corporation engage with in respect of this project?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My memory says 20, but I'll take that on notice and get the exact number.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Minister, in relation to funding for programs to manage land and heritage for Aboriginals, at the recent conservation hunting inquiry, Metro Local Aboriginal Land Council CEO Nathan Moran spoke about their constant struggle to manage native title land, both in terms of removing feral species preying on native animals to the point of local extinction and also the destruction of important cultural sites by animals like pigs, for example. Minister, why have there been no serious State programs to address this ongoing issue?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Currently, that falls under Minister Sharpe and Minister Moriarty. It actually falls outside of Aboriginal Affairs directly.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: I realise it's a shared thing. Are you saying that the local land councils should make representations to them alone, when you're carrying the portfolio of Aboriginal Affairs?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Certainly we advocate on a number of these issues, but the decision—

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Can you advocate on this one, please?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, we're well aware that it's an issue. One of the things the general community doesn't understand when they see Aboriginal land councils get custodianship over parcels of land is that that land comes with an inherent cost. It's not just pests; it's weeds, bushfire control—a whole lot of things. Unless they can develop some of that land, they're actually left with liability. We're trying to—

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: You're moving into a very interesting area.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, and we're trying to balance that. We've got some legislation that will come to the Parliament soon that will look at some pathways to dealing better with those issues. I'm not saying that it will solve all the issues, because the intersection between native title and the Aboriginal Land Rights Act is quite complex and gives people different rights of entitlement. We're trying to tackle those issues because people like Nathan rightly have raised them with us.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: What programs are currently funded by the State to provide for native rangers and other suited persons to help manage that situation on native land?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Most of the rangers in New South Wales are actually funded through the Federal Government, so the rangers program is actually a Federal program. But I might hand over to Mr Hamilton. There

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may be some cases where there are State ones, but usually it's custodians. There's joint management of national parks and things like that, but they're not specifically rangers.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: I'm not talking about national park land; I'm talking about native title land. The program he has just started and managed—I think he's got six or seven.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, that's federally funded.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: It's far from an adequate amount of funding. Yes, he can train them, but he doesn't actually have any money to run the program. At least, that's what he's told us.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We'd have to take that on notice because the Federal Government has just spent a large amount of money putting more rangers in place, and my understanding was that was operational funding. I would have to look specifically. I would hate to tell you the wrong thing.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Could you take that on notice?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: I'm just going by what he's told us; that's all. Maybe I've got it wrong.

SHANE HAMILTON: Aboriginal Affairs doesn't fund any program like that.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Federal Aboriginal Affairs?

SHANE HAMILTON: No, our department.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: How much money is allocated?

SHANE HAMILTON: I'm not sure what the Federal Government allocate, but what I'm saying is Aboriginal Affairs don't provide any funding in relation to that.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: I couldn't quite hear you, sorry.

SHANE HAMILTON: I said Aboriginal Affairs don't provide any funding in relation to the issue that you're talking about.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Going into the future, what steps will you take to cut unnecessary red tape, lift irrelevant environmental orders and help local land councils effectively manage their land? Maybe you want to tell us what is in this upcoming bill.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I can't. It's still in the final stages of negotiation before we provide it to all of you to have a look at, but it's been under development for a while. What the previous Government put in place, which we support, is the Aboriginal SEPP. That was an attempt to try to speed up some of the processes. It's still really complex because heritage and environment are incredibly important as well, and we can't just push that to one side. What we can do is try for government departments to work more in sync and to look at these developments more quickly. Some of these things have been in the pipeline for five or six years, and constantly. Aboriginal land councils are having to spend money on reports that, really, they should be spending on delivering services, and so we're looking at that overall to see how we can address that better, with Minister Kamper, and try to get better outcomes. It's a difficult one.

My view is—and I've got Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council. They have been required to jump through a million hoops for some of their developments, and that's not reasonable. Yes, we agree there should be due diligence in terms of having a look at some of these projects, but some of it, to be honest, is racially motivated. We can tell that by the number of objections. A similar project might be put up and get 200 objections, and they put something in and it gets 2½ thousand objections. The only conclusion you can draw from that is that, because it's an Aboriginal land council putting it up, people are opposing it. They're all things, as a community, we have to have a serious think about because, as I said, that opportunity for local Aboriginal land councils to fund programs is being impacted by these processes, which are just bogging everything down.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Minister, Aboriginal land councils have raised serious concerns about the growing backlog of land claims. The Crown's internal cap is blocking the transfer of claims, leaving communities waiting years—even decades—for land they are legally entitled to under the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Why is your department maintaining an internal cap?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, that's done by Minister Kamper's office under Crown Lands; it's not something that Aboriginal Affairs directly has any oversight of or involvement in.

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The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: That's done under Crown Lands, is it? Okay, I'll send him a question on notice. My next question was how many are stuck in the backlog, but you can't answer that one.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No. I know generally it's increasing. A larger number are being assessed, but a large number are being put in.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: So the pipe is not emptying.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, and a lot of them are held up, too, because there may be similar native title claims over the same areas. There's a big legal process that has to be taken and research on every claim. It is a complex piece of work.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Minister, in relation to Aboriginal land council funding for compliance, local Aboriginal land councils are under severe financial pressure. You've alluded to that already. Current annual allocations, sometimes less than \$170,000 per annum, are insufficient for councils to meet their responsibilities under the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Rights Act—particularly for large councils like the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, for example, which covers 23 local government areas. Minister, why has the Government failed to provide adequate funding to allow Aboriginal land councils to fully comply with the land rights Act?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Local Aboriginal land councils are funded through NSWALC. If people think back to when the Aboriginal Land Rights Act was brought in, in 1983, at the time, the then Government put a 10-year process in place where—I think it was 1 per cent of land tax. I can get you the exact figure, but 1 per cent of land tax was diverted into a generational fund. That's managed by the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. It sits at around—I can get you the exact total—\$650 million. NSWALC itself makes decisions about how land councils are funded. The State Government does not directly have any role in that.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Shouldn't you be reviewing that process?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I've had discussions with the senior people in NSWALC and talked about viability of land councils and particularly the mental health and support of CEOs. NSWALC is starting to put in place processes to address those issues. It's a very difficult one. There are 121 land councils in New South Wales, from quite large ones to some very, very small ones. It has historically had issues for a range of reasons. We're really focused on making sure the network can be strong. We're having those discussions with NSWALC, and they are open to looking at those issues.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: When do you think we can get an outcome?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a matter for NSWALC. We would certainly continue to encourage and work with them to make sure that the network is adequately supported.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: Minister, the New South Wales Auditor-General released a report in May this year called *Governance of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in NSW*. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, on 29 May, shortly after the publication of that report, said:

NSW taxpayers spent \$222 million on measures to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians but less than half led to tangible outcomes for First Nations people, a damning audit has found.

It went on:

... Auditor-General ... found the premier's department had inadequate oversight and a "passive approach" to monitoring how state funding for Closing the Gap measures were being spent.

I have two questions at this stage. Who has oversight of Closing the Gap? Is it yourself or the Premier? Secondly, how active have been the efforts since this Auditor-General's report to stop the waste and bring some efficiency to this program?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a really good question. There has been a lot of happening in this space. Part of the agreement of Closing the Gap is Priority Reform 1, which is changing the way that government does business. Since coming to government—it started under the previous Government and was continued by us—we've put in a more rigorous process of development of programs and also evaluation. That's done through joint committees. What's the actual name of the working groups?

SHANE HAMILTON: Sector committees.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, sector committees. They now jointly develop the policy and the programs going forward, including evaluation. For the first time ever in New South Wales, and probably in Australia, CAPO—which is the coalition of Aboriginal peaks—and government departments jointly put projects to Treasury

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through the ERC project to be considered in the budget. Part of that was a very rigorous evaluation of those particular programs, and I have to say that some of the programs were knocked back because there wasn't sufficient evaluation to support the money being spent. Exactly what the Auditor-General talked about is what we're undertaking. We're making sure that there is that accountability, not just with government departments but also once the licences or deeds are given out to Aboriginal controlled organisations, and there is still ongoing evaluation of that.

We were concerned ourselves that this is a lot of money, and is it getting the results we need? In the new agreement that was signed by the Premier, local government and the coalition of Aboriginal peaks, there's a whole lot of reform involved, and that is being undertaken as we speak. There are some confronting conversations that are had in terms of this, but we're making it clear that there's a clear expectation, from the wider community but also from the Aboriginal community, that money that is spent is actually making a difference and that if it isn't, should we continue to do it?

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: That is an encouraging response, Minister. I'm pleased to hear that the Auditor-General's report has not been ignored. I'd like to move on to the issue of a State-based Voice and a State-based treaty. The Victorian Labor Government has announced plans to adopt both a State-based Voice and a treaty via legislation. Premier Minns, soon after the referendum loss of the Voice in 2023, said on 2GB, "For any substantial or major changes to our arrangements in New South Wales, we would have to take it to an election." He was indicating that he would require voter approval. Has the Government decided whether to take an issue of a State-based Voice or a State-based treaty to the voters at the next election? If not, when will that decision be made?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There are no plans afoot to create a State-based Voice. New South Wales is an interesting jurisdiction because we have a very long history. The NSW Aboriginal Land Council, for example, has just celebrated its fortieth birthday a year or so ago, and they've been a voice for Aboriginal people in New South Wales. We now have the coalition of Aboriginal peaks, who are sitting in partnership with government, so they are a voice. There are also a number of other organisations that we deal with in a different way. The New South Wales jurisdiction is different from Victoria. They have nine distinct nations, and New South Wales has many, many more than that, because we're very much based on language groups.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: It sounds like you won't be taking it to the next election.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No. Our approach is very, very different than in some other jurisdictions on that issue.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Good morning, Minister. Following on from the previous questions, are you aware of the Jumbunna review of Closing the Gap that was dropped in June?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What do you say to recommendations 6 and 10? Recommendation 6 states that governments have yet to commence any genuine transformation work. I acknowledge what you're saying, and I absolutely acknowledge the work of CAPO and can see that is significant work that's happening in relation to the sector committees. But read in the context of recommendation 10, that racism is not being addressed—that it's a core foundational issue that sits across every aspect of Closing the Gap and any potential long-term sustainable success, and mentions racism in its myriad forms. They're talking about the internal workings of governments. What do you say to those two recommendations?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The previous Government did a lot of work setting up the current direction that things are heading. They are addressing both of those issues. We have continued and strengthened it. We've moved to the next step of actually working in closer partnership, and that means that government departments are having to give up a lot of power, in true partnerships, to make decisions. The budget process is an amazing example of that, where government departments—including Mr Hamilton's—put up programs that were not supported and so didn't go forward. Right across the board, government is transforming—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Sorry, are you saying the CAPO projects didn't get supported?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, the joint—government departments have programs. Through the process, they all put it into the mix.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So some of those government programs didn't get supported?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct. I acknowledge what you say about racism, but I think a lot of work is being done here to make sure that Aboriginal people, on their issues, have an equal voice. They're not just an advisory committee that's set up to make decisions and then be ignored.

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I ask how the Treaty Commissioners have started and how that's going?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, they've just been out in western New South Wales, in Broken Hill. They have started their public consultations, so that's progressing. They have spent a large amount of time so far, since their appointment, in understanding the lay of the land, what people's general views are, the views of both government departments and Aboriginal community controlled organisations and peaks.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have they provided you advice on what their time frame is for their consultation?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They've given us a schedule of where they're going to be appearing. They have a website. It's on the website, isn't it, where they're going?

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes, the first three months is.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there a time frame that they've provided to you about when New South Wales will be in a position to engage in a treaty process?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Let's be clear. This is asking two fundamental questions: whether Aboriginal people actually want a treaty; and the second one is that, if they do, what should that process look like? We have committed as a Government, as the Premier said, that we would take any major decision-making around that to an election. We wouldn't be making a decision prior to the election. They have 12 months to provide a report.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is that different to the commitment you took to the election—this election?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, it's the same commitment. We made a commitment to consult. We said specifically we didn't want to rush the process because Aboriginal people have consultation fatigue.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is the intention of the Treaty Commissioners to advise you about whether there is a desire to have a treaty?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. In saying that, we've got to understand the context. Again, in New South Wales, I think we counted over a hundred different negotiations that currently are undertaken. All of those are different. It may be that there's a desire to rationalise those processes so that Aboriginal people can come to the table as equals.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there nothing, at this point, on the table in relation to truth telling and a truth-telling process?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not specifically, but we understood that when the public consultations are undertaken, people may either put in a submission or may publicly do their own truth-telling.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If the Commissioners advise you that there should be a truth-telling process that takes place in New South Wales, perhaps similar to Victoria, is that something that you will be—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We would have to consider any recommendations they put to us, and Government would have to make a decision. But there's nothing on the table to do that at the moment.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, at last budget estimates, on behalf of veterans west of the Blue Mountains, I asked whether we could have a veterans' forum in that area. I just wondered where that was at. I wrote you a letter and suggested maybe Molong, which, I understand, might be too small, and said perhaps then in Orange we could do it.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, we're going to Orange.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Okay.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, great suggestion. The date is 30 October. Yes, we followed up on your suggestion, thought it was a great idea, and we're doing it.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Thank you very much. Minister, how have you gone getting veterans carrying gold cards aligned with concessions with other pension card carriers, specifically in relation to council rates and charges?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's part of the wider whole-of-government response to the royal commission, so there'll be discussion about that. I can't say definitively there's any proposal being put forward at the moment. That's a matter for the Minister for Local Government. I do think that councils also have a role in deciding what they give concessions for et cetera. Also, we'll be in discussions with the Commonwealth about how the State can assist them in delivering some services. We would have an expectation that they would be wanting to contribute financially to help support some of those things.

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The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: There's a number of things you've mentioned this morning that you said the whole-of-government committee is looking at. That mirrors a response we got last time. I did ask before, how often is that group meeting?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They're different. They're not the same body. The department talks with their colleagues on a regular basis. When we say "whole of government", secretaries and EDs and what not broach these issues. Where we did say specifically there was a special committee, we thought that the report into veteran suicide was so important there should be a whole-of-government response, so the secretary of DCJ talked to his colleagues and set up a group to specifically develop that overall approach, which has been completed. I think that's going to Cabinet very shortly. That will then feed into—well, it did feed into—we released our next iteration of the veterans' strategy. It already recognised some of the recommendations that have been made, but we thought that was important for veterans to see that the whole government considered these issues serious and that we should do a whole-of-government response.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, are veterans recognised as a distinct priority group in social housing in New South Wales?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'd have to take that on notice. I am not sure.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You're not aware of that as the Minister for Veterans?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not specifically, no.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are First Nations people recognised as a distinct group when it comes to social housing?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not aware. Social housing, you'd have to get the specifics off—Minister Jackson has priority lists. The priority lists take a whole range of things into consideration and those factors may be factors that they employ.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Homeless veterans: what's their avenue to housing? Sorry, can I just add to that to narrow it down? What's the avenue to housing specific to veterans?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's one of the reasons the Federal Government's setting up the veteran hubs, so that the ESOs can work together to look at these sorts of issues.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: ESOs being?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They're the different veterans' groups that support veteran-based, not for profits in many cases. RSL LifeCare has a role in that, particularly in the homelessness space through its Veteran Services. They all combine to work through these issues. I have to say—and she'll hate me saying it—but Ms Mackaness received a phone call out in Western Sydney and personally went and helped a veteran that was experiencing homelessness. We're very committed, where we can, to intervene. The department, when its made aware of things, makes representations, and it tries to case manage these things with both the Government and the not-for-profit sectors.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, in the last estimates there was some discussion with respect to the Commonwealth potentially seeking State Government to take on more responsibility regarding veterans' services and support. Was housing and homelessness one of those areas?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Those discussions haven't begun. Obviously there was a Federal election. They're just re-finding their feet. Minister Keogh has written to all the veterans Ministers, calling us together for a discussion on these issues.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What actions are the New South Wales Government planning to take to that meeting? Have you got any priorities that you want to outline to the Federal Government?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Basically we have to hear from the Commonwealth, because DVA has all the responsibility for veterans. States traditionally, whilst we provide services, don't specifically directly provide services. This is going to be, if you like, a renegotiation of how that will work. It's certainly one of the recommendations of the report that jurisdictions work more closely together. What that looks like at that stage I can't say. We do have some ideas. But I won't go into specifics, because once we hear the broader view they may or may not change or be relevant or not relevant. But certainly in the whole-of-government response, everyone's had a look at their particular portfolio areas about what they may or may not be able to do. With all these things, there's some short-term easy stuff, there's some medium-term, then there's some longer term things that are more difficult that would require submissions to ERC for budget consideration et cetera. We're only at the very beginning of that process, but I think it's key to say that the fact that we work hard on getting a

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whole-of-government response, it's actually sent a signal to all the departments that this has to be a focus of business.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I'm sure, Minister, that a basic assumption of that would be that any additional services you took on from the Federal Government—that you'd seek full and commensurate funding from the Federal Government to provide those services?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think it's fair to say that that would be well and truly on the table, unless billions of our GST money miraculously reappears in the budget column. Money has to come from somewhere. The Commonwealth has the key responsibility, and so we would be looking at them to be efficient providers of services that may not be efficiently provided at the moment.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, the Ombudsman's report at the end of 2024 made some reflections on Opportunity Hubs, somewhat critically, in terms of the 25 per cent to 30 per cent of participants who face significant barriers to full engagement in school. Of course, part of these were the OCHRE initiatives. Are you committed to ensuring that those OCHRE initiatives are funded and delivered?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Deputy Ombudsman has provided a report to me on OCHRE. We're currently working our way through that and doing initiatives. The interesting thing about the Opportunity Hubs, for example, they're actually undertaken by the Department of Education, not by Aboriginal Affairs. The short answer is that we're committed to continuing with OCHRE. We think it's a good framework for government. That has instigated some spirited debate with CAPO, for example. But we think that the Government should continue to have a role in some of these areas through government services, and so we're committed to that. What that finally looks like, we'll be bringing to people shortly.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So no funding comes out of your department for these initiatives? It comes out of education?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Some of them do. We do Local Decision Making, and that has been funded. Is it in the threes?

SHANE HAMILTON: It's \$4.9 million over four years.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, \$4.9 million over four years. We're trying to lock in, with a lot of these, funding over a period of years so that we don't have to keep going back year on year with our fingers crossed that they'll continue to be funded. That makes it a bit more complex because the Government has to make longer term decisions.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But with respect to the Opportunity Hubs, they're funded fully out of education?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, through education.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: When do you expect to have a decision in terms of that funding envelope from education?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a matter totally for them. It would be a question for the acting education Minister.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mr Barrett was asking some questions about veteran housing. Similarly, with Indigenous housing, what is the Government's commitment to supporting Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver housing and services independently?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, we could talk for an hour about this. It's a really complex area. Self-determination means that a lot of responsibility was actually given out to Aboriginal communities for Aboriginal housing. There is an issue. I don't think it's any great secret that, with the best of intentions, many local organisations and land councils undertook housing—either delivery or maintenance et cetera. As you would imagine, people living in these houses have very limited incomes, and so that impacts on their ability to pay rent. When they have a deficit in rent, then that impacts on the organisation to undertake maintenance. You get this terrible situation where people aren't paying rent and people aren't maintaining the premises.

NSWALC had looked at this issue a couple of years ago and was encouraging or looking at maybe a larger statewide body to look at this. That got a lot of pushback from the community. Of course, the previous Government did the Roads to Home Program, which looked at 20 communities and put government funding in those. That program is still being rolled out. But we need to do better. I've just recently been talking to Minister Jackson and Minister Scully's office about the Government having a look at this. The current model is not sustainable. To be

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able to do it properly, you need a base number of houses both to borrow but also to collect enough rent to do the work that you need to do.

Because over the years it had been sort of a scattergun approach, it has created a really inefficient system that is just not working. That is no great secret. It is happening in communities right across New South Wales. It creates a lot of conflict, for obvious reasons. I am really keen that that is something that we, as a government, need to address. That's what we're going to start having a look at. I'm a big supporter of self-determination, but people also still have basic human rights, and one of those rights is to quality housing. Some of the conditions that people are living in are just not acceptable. We can't say it's not our problem. However, we have to be very careful about how we intervene. It's not directly in government control.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: To that point, Minister, in better equipping and enabling communities, has the Government allocated any dedicated funding to Aboriginal land councils or corporations for employment and training initiatives tied to housing construction?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Aboriginal Housing Office, which is the statutory government body, they receive funding each year. There are a number of projects being looked at in terms of that training and development. I would have to take on notice specific ones, because some of them are quite local and I don't know that there's anyone other than the Aboriginal Housing Office looking specifically. Maybe they'll be here when Minister Jackson appears and you might be able to ask them questions directly around that.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We had Minister Jackson last week.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Last week? Sorry. I was too focused on mine.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: We can bring them back.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, are you familiar with the Stronger Places, Stronger People funding, specifically any funding that might have gone to the Dhina Durruti group and Learning the Macleay?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'd have to take that on notice unless—

SHANE HAMILTON: I think it's a Commonwealth—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's not a State one.

KATE MEAGHER: It is co-funded. We do co-fund it.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Okay, there is some co-funding. We'd have to check specifically. If you provide us the details, we'd be happy to—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'd like to know what outcomes are tied to that funding.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We'd have to look specifically at what it is.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I can come back to that one this afternoon.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: One of the complications, which I have expressed to the new Federal Minister, is that there is not great communication between the Feds and the States when it comes to Aboriginal Affairs. We're all busy doing what we do, and there is a lot of crossover, and that is not efficient. Now the Ministers around Australia have raised that as well. There is a lot of Commonwealth money coming into New South Wales that we don't necessarily have any vision over. I don't think that is right. I raised it with the Minister at the last ministerial Closing the Gap meetings. We've got a link-up coming up in the next week to look a bit more broadly at that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I might come back to that this afternoon. Earlier this year there was a trial in Armidale where BackTrack, in partnership with Neighbourhood Watch, local council and the police, co-designed the Night Crew program. It was a 12-week trial that cost \$100,000. The Premier's Department and DCJ kicked in to that. Do you know where that trial is up to?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It doesn't directly come under my jurisdiction, if I can hand over?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I will come back. So you don't track these? As Indigenous affairs Minister, you don't monitor or have any oversight or awareness of these intervention programs?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We have a broad view, and Aboriginal Affairs is involved in a lot of the negotiation and whatnot. But, as you can imagine, across government there are literally thousands of programs that are running at any one time. It would be impossible to track every single project. However, it doesn't mean that they're not being tracked, just because I may not be personally aware of it. Aboriginal Affairs has a role, but these programs are delivered across the whole of government. The department has a role in monitoring and looking at those

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different projects. The Premier's Department sometimes will be involved if it goes across several departments. But because they don't report to me directly, it may be that if someone asks a question, I can look into it, but I won't have individual knowledge about every single program operating in New South Wales. I'll just say that up-front and be honest.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: With so many different streams and columns and windows to look through here, wouldn't a key part of your role be that oversight to make sure things aren't falling through the gaps on that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Our role is Closing the Gap and that broad policy level at the top. That then filters through the working groups and back into government, across all different areas. So, broadly, yes, but specifically it would come back through the data that we see through reports that we have at joint council. Joint council is an opportunity for the Aboriginal community to raise issues directly with Ministers if something's not working right. I chair that, but it's between the CAPO leads and the Ministers themselves. The idea is that this is a whole-of-government response. We are trying to get away from where this is an Aboriginal Affairs issue. We are actually wanting to make it the responsibility of government, and you don't do that if they all say someone else is responsible. So we want to make them responsible.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You've said that a number of times today.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's the truth.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: A number of times today you've said, "That's someone else's job."

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, it is. That's the truth.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That is contradictory to what you just said you're trying to get away from.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, what I'm saying is that the old notion that any Aboriginal issue is the domain of Aboriginal Affairs is what we're trying to get away from. Aboriginal affairs are everybody's business, and we have an expectation that every department is doing what they need to do, monitoring that and then, through their annual reports, reporting back. The Treasury and the Auditor-General both check on these things. The productivity commission check on it as well. There are a lot of checking mechanisms. CAPO want another independent mechanism. We've got the Deputy Ombudsman. We've got all these people watching and checking on all the different projects. The fact that I can't tell you about one individual project isn't necessarily an issue. I'm looking at how the system is operating overall. That's my role, and if I find that a government department or someone isn't doing what they have to do under Closing the Gap, well, then I go and talk to my colleague Minister and raise that particular issue. That's my role.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Looking at the system overall then, what measures are being used to judge the success of programs like BackTrack's Night Crew or Stronger Places, Stronger People? What are the KPIs tied to the funding for those programs?

KATE MEAGHER: There's a range of measures that are available to look at the interventions and if they're working. For example, we look at the BOCSAR data; we work with police and Education—things like retention at school is a really good way of tracking if interventions are being successful; if there are no new entrants into the risk-offending cohorts that we have been seeing in some of these communities; and then, just more broadly, we have been doing really intensive work, as you're probably aware, in Moree, for example. We spent about eight months doing a service review which looked across all of the different programs that are available to the community there. There are about 70-odd programs, a significant investment, and now our work is to deliver an action plan across all government agencies in response to those findings.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I would say have a look at that BackTrack program. They got some real tangible results in their area.

KATE MEAGHER: Yes, we're looking at BackTrack as well, just so you know.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, earlier on the Hon. Emma Hurst raised an issue about gaps in an SO 52 return. Can I bring you to a similar problem in relation to the return for your reappointment of Garry Charny and Michael Crismale to the board of Racing NSW at the end of last year. The return tells us who was on the appointments recommendation panel and then takes us straight to your announcement of the temporary reappointment of Charny and Crismale, with nothing in between. Where are the rest of the documents?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My understanding is the department returned all the documents they were required to return. As they always do, they worked through that process diligently, with legal advice, and they provided the documents that are authorised to be returned.

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The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That doesn't answer the question. Where are the documents—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They obviously weren't authorised to be returned. We put appointments through the Cabinet process, and those documents can't be released.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: This is a statutory appointment. It's never been done through Cabinet. So you're taking these appointments to Cabinet now to hide your decision-making from the SO 52 process?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, the decision of the Government is that appointments go to Cabinet.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Even a statutory appointment like this for Racing NSW?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, I'm pretty sure.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It was never done this way by Minister Anderson or any of your predecessors.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Well, that's the Government's policy overall. So it happens—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's the Government's policy: to deliberately take it to Cabinet, solely as a way to hide it from SO 52s?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No. Cabinet looks at a range of issues, including gender, ethnic background and a whole lot of things.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You looked at gender, yes. The appointments panel recommended two women, didn't it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's Cabinet in confidence.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You're kidding me.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It is.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You just mentioned gender. It recommended two women, didn't it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's Cabinet in confidence.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Then your office got a call from the de facto racing Minister Steve McMahon that vetoed the two women. That's correct, isn't it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not that I'm aware of.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Who were the recommendations of the panel?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's Cabinet in confidence. I, seriously, can't answer you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why did you, as Minister, overturn the appointment panel's recommendation of those two women, to give Charny and Crismale probationary one- and two-year terms only?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I've got to be really careful talking about this because it is Cabinet in confidence.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No, it's not.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Well, it is.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's not. It's only because you've chosen that as a secrecy provision.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Isn't it great that Chris Minns told us about integrity in government, for you guys to be the most secretive Government since Robert Askin.

The CHAIR: Order! A point of order has been taken. The Hon. Bob Nanva on a point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Chair, the witness can only be asked to answer a lawful question. He has already advised the Committee that the matter is Cabinet in confidence, which would mean it's not a lawful question to be asking the witness. I ask that you rule the question out of order.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. The Minister has answered and now the honourable member is making a debating point. It would assist the inquiry if you would ask a question, Mr Latham.

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The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, why did you take the appointments to Cabinet when it has never been done that way and it doesn't have to be done that way for a statutory appointment, which is within your power?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My understanding is that, across all portfolios, appointments are being taken to Cabinet.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: All portfolios of government? Ministers can no longer make a statutory appointment within their own powers; everything has to go to Cabinet?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They do, on the approval of Cabinet.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You mentioned gender earlier on. Why did you veto the two women?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I put a recommendation, and the recommendation went through Cabinet.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why is the Government so secretive in the racing portfolio?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We're not secretive. If we were only doing it in that portfolio, then maybe you've got an argument. When we are doing it broadly, that appointments go to Cabinet for all sorts of—I've seen all sorts of committees and things go to Cabinet for approval. That's the process that we've got in place.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why did you give Charny and Crismale only one and two years respectively, when the standard appointment to the board of Racing NSW can be up to four or five years? Why were they on, what looks like, probation?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, that's subject again to Cabinet.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Isn't the true reason that Steve McMahon rang up and vetoed the two women—so you did this probation as a holding pattern until he can tell you what to do in the future?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: He didn't call me.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: He spoke to your office, though, didn't he?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't know.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What briefings did you get from your chief of staff about the McMahon conversation?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't recall getting briefed on a McMahon conversation. We look at this in consultation with the department. We look at a range of factors. We take a recommendation to Cabinet, Cabinet agrees or doesn't agree with it and then it is ratified through that process.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why has Racing NSW got such a hold on you?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They don't have a hold on me.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why have you appointed old mate Brad Hazzard to do the review of the Thoroughbred Racing Act?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Minister Hazzard has a very good history in government. He understands legislation. He understands the interaction between legislation and government processes. I discussed it with him broadly and I was confident that he will do a good job, and I think he will do a good job.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When you were last here you said the review would be broad. Why have you carved out the question of ministerial oversight, which is accountability for this illicit outfit, Racing NSW, and why have you also carved out the funding model?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The terms of reference apply specifically to a review of the legislation. People are entitled to put in other views and other submissions, and they will be considered by Mr Hazzard. That's the normal process in doing reviews of legislation. I specifically gave the writing orders to the department that this needs to be done the same as we would do any other statutory review of legislation.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So it's a review of legislation, but why is that part of the legislation—carving out ministerial oversight, SO 52, budget estimates, ICAC, Auditor-General accountability for Racing NSW—not on the table, particularly after the many dozens of items of concern about the ethics and conduct of

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Racing NSW, which clearly, in the absence of 25 years of accountability, is a rogue organisation where many people in the racing industry—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: In your opinion.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Well, I got to the races, unlike Brad Hazzard. It might be temporary until they kick me out.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Maybe it's good that someone who doesn't go to the races is reviewing the Act, because there are a lot of people with a lot of opinions in racing, and it may be better that someone that's not going to be influenced and actually wants to do a good job to make legislation better—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Well, I have seen him at the races once and I'll raise it in a different forum as to the thing that he said to me—which, in terms of gender, you won't be real happy with.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I'm allowed to make commentary.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't think it helps the process by slanging off at people who haven't got the right to defend themselves. He's not here now.

The CHAIR: I don't think it helps to make adverse mention and reflect on persons, under privilege.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Well, he's been here in the past.

The CHAIR: Order, Mr Latham! Order!

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: He's a world-class slagger.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: He had a folder on me like this—things I'd forgotten.

The CHAIR: Order! Mr Latham, I remind you that it's disorderly and against the procedural fairness resolution to make adverse mention, under privilege, of third parties who are not here to defend themselves.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I haven't said anything adverse about Brad Hazzard. I just said, in relation to gender, I'll be raising matters elsewhere. Can I just say, Minister Harris, we had meeting in relation to the postponement of my private member's bill, which goes to all these questions of accountability. My recollection is—and you gave me an assurance that that couldn't be considered until the review of the Act was conducted. Now that the review of the Act carves out exactly the items that are in my private member's bill, you'd agree that it's quite legitimate for me to bring it forward to the upper House.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not sure it carves it out because the terms of reference give anyone the option to raise any issue.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But the terms of reference clearly say that the question of ministerial oversight for Racing NSW is not a consideration for Brad Hazzard.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, because the current legislation—ministerial oversight, in an industry where they are making commercial decisions, is very, very dangerous. If Ministers are intervening in commercial decision-making et cetera—and he took great advice on this from a range of stakeholders that that's a problem, including some of my colleagues in other States. So it may be that Mr Hazzard makes recommendations in terms of oversight. However, the Minister should always be independent of that because the Minister is required to make certain decisions under the Act, which are sort of the endgame. If they start getting involved before the endgame, then it actually isn't very productive.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In terms of the advice, you talked about the terms of reference, but what advice did you get from Mr V'landys?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I didn't speak specifically to Mr V'landys about the terms of reference.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: "Specifically"? What does that mean, you "didn't speak specifically" to him? What conversation did you have?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The department developed the terms of reference. I spoke to Mr Hazzard about it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Your evidence is the department carved out the question of ministerial oversight.

CORRECTED

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, you keep trying to put words into my mouth. What I said was—it wasn't a matter of carving it out. The terms of reference were developed, and I agreed with them.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: How did *The Daily Telegraph* know three days before your ministerial direction was issued that you were going to issue that ministerial direction—or, in their words, that they "could reveal that Mr Harris will publicly rebuke Ms Lamb for her comments about pokies" and "that the industry had no social licence to rape and pillage the community"?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't think it was any great secret that—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: They revealed it. So no-one else knew?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't know. I didn't speak to any reporters.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: *The Daily Telegraph* said they can reveal that a spokesman told the Telegraph that "the Minister will be issuing a ministerial direction making clear the Government's expectations of the statutory decision-maker." It added:

ILGA is required to undertake its statutory functions in a manner that promotes public confidence in its decision-making and the conduct of its members.

You would have authorised that spokesperson to speak to the Telegraph, I assume?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not that I recall directly.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Did that come from your office or the department?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It didn't come from the department.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So your office?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not necessarily.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Did it come from your office, Minister? This is a question in a budget estimates hearing.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'd have to take that on notice. I don't know.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So when you saw this, a significant story in *The Daily Telegraph*—and it said "a spokesman"—about a ministerial direction that you were going to issue, you don't know whether that came from your office or not? I think something is wrong if you don't know whether that came from your office or not.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It went through Cabinet!

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, maybe that's Cabinet. You don't know?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't recall. I really don't.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Can you take it on notice to have a look at it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I can take it on notice, yes. But I don't recall.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You don't recall?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: If you could take it on notice and look at that.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I just said I'll take it on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In your ministerial direction to ILGA, then, why did you not include all of the objects of the Gaming Machines Act when you mentioned the objects?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The issue was that ILGA was, correctly, applying the harm minimisation objectives. My view was that they weren't applying equally the objective about the viability of the industry. So that was what I was pointing out: all of the objectives apply. There was no hierarchical level; they are all equal, and that some were being applied and some not so much.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Your ministerial direction does not include all the objects.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I just told you why.

CORRECTED

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: No, you've said—the ministerial direction says "the objects of the GM Act as provided for in section 3, are—" Then you don't list all of them, and there is no explanation saying why you haven't listed all of them. For example, you don't list (2) and (3), which clearly say:

The Authority, the Minister, the Secretary, Commissioner of Police and all other persons having functions under this Act are required to have due regard to the need for gambling harm minimisation and the fostering of responsible conduct in relation to gambling when exercising functions under this Act.

That's not in your ministerial direction. You've left that out. The third object underneath those—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, I know the objectives.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: —you also left that out as well. Why?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Because the issue was that they were being applied, as I said—other objectives. The feeling is that then it's not being applied equally. So we were pointing that out.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So it's very clearly there. This is misleading, frankly, in terms of what the objects of the Acts are.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Well, unless you understand the context. I'm sure ILGA understood.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So the context—you're saying there is no provision in either Act that indicates a hierarchy of the objects?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But you don't include all the objects. Why did you deliberately leave out two of the objects that state that everything is listed here.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Because I took it as read the harming ones were being applied, but we were saying that they had equal value to the other objective. My feeling is—and I explained earlier in my answers—that I didn't think was being applied equally to decision-making.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So you've conveniently left out—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I didn't conveniently leave them out. I'm telling you why.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: —objects (2) and (3) because objects (2) and (3), as even the Supreme Court has also found—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, because they're doing it. ILGA's doing it.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: No, that doesn't explain why you've left out (2) and (3).

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Okay, you don't have to accept my answer, but I'm telling you that's why we did it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Before, you said that you confirmed that you and your office haven't received any drafts prior to 31 July. Could I also get you to confirm—I'm happy for you to take it on notice—whether you or anyone in your office received any interim reports, any parts of reports, any notes or any sections of the report as well?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, I'm happy if you could take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you aware if there was any part of the report at any stage that the Commissioner Drake was told was outside the terms of reference and shouldn't be included, or should be edited in some way?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, and I don't think Commissioner Drake would have taken that advice anyway. She's very good at her job and she knew what her job was. As I've said, we met and discussed issues. She made me aware of certain things.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That were in the report?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That she was considering. I don't know if they were in the report or not at that stage.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Did they end up in the report?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It was still being formulated.

CORRECTED

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Now that you've read the report, were the things that you discussed that she had raised concerns with—are they all in the report?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, that's Cabinet in confidence.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm not asking you what they are. I'm just asking—you said you had conversations and she raised some things.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not surprised by the report.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What she had raised with you is in the report?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As far as I can remember.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you aware if Commissioner Drake was requested to remove any part of the report as part of that procedural fairness procedure that you mentioned earlier—or was requested to?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's not a question I could answer.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's all right; I can ask her later. Do you know who saw the report as part of that procedural fairness? Was that something that all witnesses, as far as you're aware, were given the opportunity to do?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My understanding is that the sections relevant to people were sent to them. At no stage was the whole report—it was only sections relevant to them, to provide—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Is that every single witness?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a question for Commissioner Drake.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: With that in mind, would that have included the former CEO of GWIC, Mr Steve Griffin? Would sections of the report that applied to him, as far as you're aware, have been sent to him?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a question for Commissioner Drake.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, I'm just wondering if you've heard about some of the rumours that I've heard in regard to what actually happened with the Alex Brittan report. As you know, I put forward a SO 52. You supported that SO 52. The day before the SO 52 was due, the report was tabled and it was tabled publicly by Steve Griffin, who was the CEO of GWIC at the time. That was later retracted but that was after the media had already seen the report and there was media articles on that report. That evening, Rob Macaulay, who was the CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW, resigned. There was linkages within the media in regard to that report being exposed. Mr Steve Griffin has then—after being the person that accidentally released the report publicly—doubled his salary and then moved over to the position that he accidentally sort of knocked out by releasing that report publicly. Have you heard rumours that this was all done intentionally?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, what's been the total cost in running the Drake inquiry and the report following that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Now that Commissioner Drake's role in preparing the report has concluded, will the role of commissioner continue? Is that your plan?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It was a temporary position for the inquiry. What happens going forward will form part of the Government's response. I can't pre-empt that here today.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: At this point in time, is she still appointed as the Acting Commissioner of GWIC?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, moving on to horseracing, can you provide an update on what's happening with respect to the promised Thoroughbred Racing Act review which you committed to after the Rosehill inquiry?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, the Hon. Brad Hazzard has been appointed to carry out that review. My understanding is he's begun that process, supported by the department as the secretariat.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What's the timeline on that report?

CORRECTED

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We haven't set one.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What can you tell us in regard to the terms of reference of that inquiry and what you are looking to get out of it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Just so people understand the history, in 2019, the provision of the Act for a statutory review was removed. So there was no provision for a statutory review of the Act after that occurred. I have thought that's not a reasonable proposition—that the Act should be reviewed on a regular basis. That's where the terms of reference came from. It's the same as it would be in a statutory review. That's the work that the Hon. Brad Hazzard will undertake in his role.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. In the remaining six minutes I propose to allocate it half to the Opposition and half to the crossbench. You've got three minutes, Mr Farlow.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, the Veterans' and Families' Hubs that are being provided—I believe that's in concert with yourself and the Federal Government. Is that correct?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No. It's in concert with the Federal Government and RSL LifeCare in most cases. They've been given the licence to operate the facilities. Where we've been assisting is finding places for them to be, which we've done—particularly most recently at Richmond—then also helping facilitate any consultation with RSL sub-branches et cetera.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of your identification of sites, you've outlined the one at Richmond. Are there any other sites that you've got in the pipeline?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. We can take that on notice specifically. Did you want—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I might come back to—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There's one other one, yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is there likely to be continuing financial support for these hubs, once establishment has occurred?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a matter for the Federal Government.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: There's no State Government support whatsoever?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Apart from the identification of sites, are there any other works that the State Government is doing to support these Veterans' and Families' Hubs?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. As I said, the department works closely with them, particularly in terms of wider support. Sometimes the hubs will apply for other State Government grants. They are eligible for that; they're a charity. We make them aware of those sorts of things. Certainly I've been and supported a number of activities, particularly at the Wyong one, which was placed there because the census indicated the Central Coast had the highest number of veterans in New South Wales, in every age category. So that seems to be an appropriate place for them to be.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I will say that my brother-in-law is a veteran who lives on the Central Coast and would add to that number.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Very good. Hopefully he's been there and done one of the yoga classes or does the morning walks.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, just with respect to those directions that you provided to ILGA, have you seen any changes made following those directions?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It basically has to be a case-by-case basis. As I said, this wasn't a direct criticism of ILGA. They have a very important role. Again, you have to take it in context. In New South Wales, we have zones where there are different levels of perceived harm. ILGA has to take all of that information into account. My directive was about ensuring that as well as the harm minimisation issues, they were also giving equal weight to the impact of hours being cut, for example, in terms of those venues being able to continue in a viable way. It was also a question around fairness in terms of if you put in an application. Again, this is a historical thing. ILGA basically has made their decision-making when they receive an application. It's not a criticism, but it's just the reality that if you don't put in an application and keep your head down, nothing happens to you; but if you put in an application, you stick your head up and you risk losing hours, for example. All I'm saying is that should be applied equally across all the decision-making.

CORRECTED

I'll give you an example. Burwood RSL moved down the road 500 metres because they had their hours reduced. I asked the question, "So they had a poor record?" The answer I got was "Ah, no." I said, "Okay. I want to understand how you arrived at that decision." "We think it's harmful." I said, "But what happens to all of the other venues around that same area? What happens to them?" "Well, we only can do it at the application stage." That's what the direction's about. It's saying let's have a look at this holistically when you're making your decisions. Again, it's not a criticism. It's a historical thing. ILGA gets applications and they make decisions, but in terms of harm minimisation that's answering the question about other venues. It wasn't just directed at having a go. It was also saying, "This is a broader issue."

But it is a fact that if you're going to do significant investment, you do it based on your turnover. You go to the banks and do all those sorts of things. If your hours are being cut, that could have a negative effect, so a lot of these places are pulling their applications. That's not looking at that other objective of making sure that venues are staying viable. All I said was, and the direction was aimed at, let's be equal across all the objectives and not just concentrate on one particular area. I think that's reasonable.

The CHAIR: It is reasonable, Minister. Thank you for that comprehensive answer.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I said that we had mentioned 20 groups had been engaged regarding the Gosford Waterfront. I can correct that and confirm that 19 groups were identified and eight chose to participate in the market sounding sessions. They were eight of the biggest ones. In relation to the media comment, I can confirm that once the ministerial direction was live on the website my office provided comment to *The Daily Telegraph*, so that answers that question. For absolute clarity, my office did not receive any excerpts of the report or any recommendations from Commissioner Drake.

The CHAIR: Thank you. For fairness, we'll have one quick question each from the crossbench. Mr Latham?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, in Aboriginal Affairs, 30 per cent of our national parks in New South Wales are now under Indigenous control. Why do we need a third stream of land rights in this State, given we've got the Federal Mabo stream and we've got NSWALC, as you mentioned, since 1983. Shouldn't the national parks be for everyone in New South Wales?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They remain for everyone. A lot of this is joint management of a national park. It's probably a question more specific to Minister Sharpe at the moment. But there's been a long history of joint management of national parks in terms of New South Wales. That's happened over not just our Government, but the previous Government as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Hurst?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, I've got a clarification of my call for papers in regards to the SO 52 around sexual harassment and assault in the greyhound industry. The Government objected to it on formal business and that was to ensure that GWIC obliges with the production of all the documents that are sought in the SO 52. Can I ask why the Government objected to that further order?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You have to understand—and it's the upper House's right to put in SO 52s—it has considerable work and there are timelines. On occasion, the Government generally will not necessarily agree with every SO 52 thing. I don't think there's anything sinister. It's just in that particular case, I disagreed with that. As I said, GWIC have said they complied with the order.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Faehrmann?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, the Auditor-General stated in one of its recommendations that by June 2026, ILGA should commence the periodic reviews of licence conditions for venues operating gaming machines in high-risk locations and make amendments to these where required to ensure that licence conditions align with current evidence on gambling harm minimisation. I'm just wondering with respect to your ministerial direction whether under 1.16—"ILGA must consult the Minister prior to implementing any program which intends to assess conditions already imposed on a licence"—whether that is directly in relation to anything with regards to shutdown hours?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, not specifically. Generally what happens is ILGA may change one of their objectives, and it just reminds it to just let me know that that's happened.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: To consult the Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. Can I make clear that they're an independent authority. I cannot tell them what to do, but I do appreciate if I'm kept up to date with what they're doing.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, for attending the hearing. We are finished with your questioning. The secretariat will be in contact in due course.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What about the Government? Perhaps the Government's got some questions.

The CHAIR: They have declined to ask Dorothy Dixers. In the absence of Government questions, we thank you for your attendance. The secretariat will be in contact in due course with any matters that you took on notice. The Committee will resume at 2.00 p.m.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. We will recommence. Just before we do, I would just like to let everyone know that the Committee has resolved to redact certain evidence given in the morning session from the transcript of evidence and broadcast of proceedings. Therefore any publication of this information may constitute an unauthorised disclosure and potential contempt of Parliament. We will now return to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I have a Liquor and Gaming question to Mr Barakat with respect to the report that was done by Liquor and Gaming NSW—the *Review of Gaming Machine Shutdown Hours Framework*. Part of that report highlighted:

Between 1st June and 30 November 2023, the highest ranked club for profits that had a hardship variation was 2nd ...

Why would a club with the second highest profits have a hardship variation?

TAREK BARAKAT: That's a fair question. That was part of the purpose of the review. Those exemptions have been in place since as early as 1997, I think. The hardship exemptions possibly came in a bit later, in the early 2000s. I can take on notice when that particular exemption was granted, but it wouldn't have been something done recently under our remit.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to those variations, they're not something which are updated on a continual basis in terms of—

TAREK BARAKAT: No. That was part of the Government's request for us to undertake this review. I don't think they've been looked at since they were first initiated in the late 90s and early 2000s.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Following that review, what actions have been undertaken by the Government?

TAREK BARAKAT: The purpose of the review was for us to inform the independent panel for it to consider this issue as part of its road map. We undertook the review, and we provided that to the panel. The panel, as part of its recommendations to Government, made recommendations in this space. That recommendation for the shutdown hours was to maintain the existing six-hour shutdown from 4.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m., but to repeal all existing exemptions over a transition period. As the Minister said this morning, the Government is yet to respond to that report. That is the recommendation that the panel has put to Government.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I wouldn't expect you to have it now, but would you be able to take on notice which venues do have hardship exemptions in place?

TAREK BARAKAT: Absolutely, yes. I can take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to the Minister's directions to ILGA that were made on 1 July this year, following those directions from the Minister, what changes have been instituted, if any, at ILGA to that statement of expectations?

CHRIS HONEY: Since we've received the directions—as the Minister explained, the directions were just setting out and clarifying what was already in the legislation. As far as ILGA is concerned, obviously we look at each determination on a case-by-case basis. We look equally at the various provisions within the Act. As it is done on a case-by-case basis, we apply those which are relevant to that particular determination, setting it within the overarching determination of section 48 of the Liquor Act, which is that there is no overarching harm to the community locally or in general. Since that determination, ILGA has done nothing differently that it wasn't already doing before. We treat the determination as a clarification of the way we were operating previously.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Contrary to the Minister's view, you believe that ILGA were having adherence to every part of the Act and your responsibilities under it prior to the Minister's letter of July?

CHRIS HONEY: As the Minister explained, the concerns had been raised with him. He mentioned those concerns previously to us. Obviously he set out the ministerial direction which clarified that. We feel that we've been acting in that way. You're never going to please everybody, but we feel that we're treating everybody fairly and we're working in line with the provisions of the Act.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mr Honey, with respect to some of the commentary the Minister made about where people would, effectively, not put applications through the system and would just hope that nothing was discovered, rather than going through the process of applications being put into the system for changes and the like, is that something that you're aware of—people are making changes which should go through ILGA for permission but are not actually filing those with the Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority?

CHRIS HONEY: It's not something we're aware of, no.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Following the Minister's statements here, and assertions, is that something you'll investigate?

CHRIS HONEY: Obviously if there are venues and clubs out there that feel that they may have issues with the determinations, we are very happy for them to raise those issues. Certainly as part of the audit office report, communication with stakeholders and our reasoning was raised as an issue, and it's one we will address.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But, Mr Honey, the Minister has outlined today cases where he believes that people are not going to your authority, effectively just hoping that a blind eye is turned because it's too difficult. Have you sought any clarification from the Minister of examples or incidents that he is aware that he could refer to you?

CHRIS HONEY: We haven't, since our last meeting with the Minister.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Given his evidence today, will you seek that from the Minister?

CHRIS HONEY: Certainly we will discuss that with the Minister. We consult with him regularly, and it's an issue that we will deal with.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mr Honey, with respect to that Auditor General's report as well, and the issue of exemptions, I think one of the recommendations was that ILGA review those exemptions. Is that something that ILGA's undertaking?

CHRIS HONEY: That's something we'll undertake. The report obviously came out in June. It's been a relatively short period of time since then. Certainly it's something we're beginning to work on. We'll scope, we'll clearly work closely with our colleagues in Hospitality and Racing and we'll consult with the Minister and, I might add, with industry.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mr Barakat, I think this probably comes to you. With respect to some of the new and emerging technologies that the Minister outlined in terms of facial recognition and biometrics, what work is Liquor and Gaming doing to investigate those technologies?

TAREK BARAKAT: In relation to facial recognition and some other government commitments—the establishment of the statewide exclusion register and a third-party exclusion scheme—we've undertaken consultation broadly with the general public and key experts in relation to those. We put out a discussion paper, which you may have seen. We've now received that feedback and we're in the process of providing advice to government about how these things could work. For the statewide exclusion register, we've actually gone to tender and are in the midst of a tender procurement process to appoint an expert third-party provider to look at how we could establish a whole-State exclusion scheme.

One of the things that I think the Minister touched on was the complexity of all of these things. We're not looking at these in isolation. We're not saying facial recognition then exclusion then a third-party exclusion scheme. Ideally the statewide exclusion register would be supported by facial recognition to make it really robust across the State, and that will, equally, help support a third-party exclusion scheme. We have commenced a fair bit of consultation on this and we're providing that advice to government now.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I might call up Mr Crawford at this stage. I'm interested, in terms of this technology outlined with respect to facial recognition, biometrics and cashless gaming as well, I take it that much of this technology is already deployed across the casinos operating in Sydney?

CORRECTED

PHILIP CRAWFORD: It is. It's improving all the time, though. We recently had a paper from our colleagues in Victoria, and they've had huge success at Crown in Victoria. It's like CCTV: It's on the improve all the time. If you get the latest tech—in fact the more it's developed, the price keeps dropping and it becomes very effective.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Do you have any figures on the terms of that price and how much it costs to roll out at venues?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: No, I don't have specifics about price but it's not uber expensive, and the latest developments are not incrementally more expensive.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to The Star and playing of poker machines and payment at The Star, is it only cashless gaming involved at The Star?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: No. At both casinos in New South Wales, there are cash limits.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I mean in terms of poker machines. Is it cashless, in terms of The Star's operation? I've got to say I'm not a frequenter of the casinos, but can you still put coins in the slot machines?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: I don't know about coins. I don't play poker machines but, no, it's got to be notes these days.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Okay, so it's notes, but there is no requirement for cashless gaming or membership at The Star to be able to play on the poker machines?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: No. Recently there have been developments in terms of reducing the amount of cash that any one person can put through machines at both casinos in Sydney. That, for the next two years, will be—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is that \$5,000?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: —a limit of \$5,000.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How is that regulated?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: There is a certain amount of technology already in place, but it's improving all the time. The Star has not been a model citizen when it comes to getting on top of its tech. We've had a lot of problems over the last couple of years with The Star moving towards a cashless regime.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to that \$5,000, is that limited through a membership card or the like, or is it using facial recognition and biometrics?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: It's through a card.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So you need to have a membership card in order to play at The Star?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: And that's where your limit is effectively set at \$5,000.

PHILIP CRAWFORD: Per day, per person.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I might turn to some of the other measures that were outlined by the Minister with respect to harm reduction and that road map. What work is the office doing with respect to that harm minimisation road map?

TAREK BARAKAT: The road map is an independent report to Government from its independent panel. We have provided advice to Government in relation to the recommendations in that road map. In terms of the other harm minimisation measures the Minister indicated had been implemented—the removal of gaming signage, the implementation of Responsible Gambling Officers, mandatory gaming incident registers and mandatory gaming plans of management—we as the department have implemented those reforms, and now our regulatory arm will assess the compliance of the industry against those reforms. For example, if you talk about Responsible Gambling Officers, which became mandatory in venues with over 20 gaming machine entitlements from 1 July last year, we inspected about 945 venues in the four months after that becoming a mandatory requirement and found a 98 per cent compliance rate with that requirement. Now that we've implemented these reforms, it's about going out there and working with the industry to make sure that they understand these new obligations and are adhering to them appropriately.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What is that process in terms of going out to industry? Is that one-on-one consultations, or is that in—

CORRECTED

TAREK BARAKAT: There are a range of different methods we use to communicate with the industry. Myself and my executive meet with the peak bodies once a month. We have regular newsletters that go out through the peak bodies to all licensed venues in New South Wales. Myself and the executive team go to regional areas five times a year and meet with all licensees, venue owners and operators from that area. Our compliance and operations team—our inspectors and investigators—are out on the ground on a regular basis, both in metropolitan areas and out in the regions as well. We also host a series of webinars so, if people can't get to those regional roadshows, we host online webinars to explain to people what their obligations are under these new laws.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mr Honey, you previously outlined some of the Auditor-General's concerns with respect to the Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority. One of those was with respect to inconsistency in the publication of reasons for the decision. What actions has ILGA taken in response to that report in that regard?

CHRIS HONEY: Certainly, under legislation, we're not required in all instances to publish reasons. However, ILGA has taken the decision that, most certainly, where the decision is against the application—so there's a negative decision—we will supply written reasons for the decision that's made. Obviously, if a request is made, even when a decision is positive, we will make every attempt to provide the reasoning behind it. But certainly, whenever there is a refusal of an application, there will be a written reason provided.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: One of the other findings of that report was with respect to ILGA's understanding of the effectiveness of harm minimisation measures. Has ILGA done any work in terms of the effectiveness of the measures that are imposed?

TAREK BARAKAT: I think that recommendation was actually directed to Liquor and Gaming. We do have a good understanding of levels of harm in the community. I think the Minister spoke today about the NSW Gambling Survey. There's one that has just been released from last year. The previous one was in 2019. We understand where levels of gambling are going, and the Minister made the point that high-risk—formerly problem—gambling has remained about stable. About 1 per cent of the population suffered from high-risk gambling in 2019. The most recent survey indicates that's about 0.9 per cent of the population. In terms of the impact of these reforms that we've spoken about on minimising harm further, we're starting that process now. We've actually engaged Central Queensland University, off the back of the Auditor-General's report, to conduct an evaluation on our behalf of some of the reforms we've spoken about, particularly Responsible Gambling Officers, gaming plans and management, and gambling incident registers. We will have that evaluation done, and we will build that into our processes going forward to make sure we're acquitting the recommendations of the Audit Office.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Mr Honey, the Minister talked about, when decisions of ILGA are made, the ability for the venue to then appeal those decisions. What's that process?

CHRIS HONEY: Depending on the type of decision, there will be an ability to appeal to NCAT. In the instances where there's no right of appeal to NCAT, I believe that under common law an appeal can be made to the Supreme Court.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is there a clear difference that I'd understand between what does have right to appeal and what doesn't?

CHRIS HONEY: I will have to take that on notice, unless Mr Barakat can explain the difference between the decisions.

TAREK BARAKAT: The types of applications that are appealable to NCAT are set out in section 4 of the Gaming and Liquor Administration Regulation. We can provide that to give you some information about what sorts of applications can actually be appealed.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Would you be able to provide some examples in that as well?

TAREK BARAKAT: Assuming that's appropriate, yes, I'm happy to provide that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can I move back to the Stronger Places, Stronger People program? We talked specifically—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: While we're here, Mr Barakat, in the budget, gambling and betting taxes are shown to increase from \$3.6 billion in 2024-25 to \$4.3 billion by the end of the forward estimates. Is that based on tax increases, or is that based on an expectation of higher turnover and proceeds and profit?

TAREK BARAKAT: Any questions in relation to the amounts of tax revenue the Government receives are really a question for Treasury and the Treasurer. It's not something we're involved in.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I presume Stronger Places, Stronger People is a wider program than just the one facility in the Macleay Valley.

KATE MEAGHER: Yes. It's a Federal program and in New South Wales there are two: one called Maranguka out in Bourke and then the Learning the Macleay in Kempsey.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What are the outcomes of the—what is success measured under?

KATE MEAGHER: The first round of funding for the Kempsey program was back in 2022. That was a \$1.5 million investment between New South Wales and the Australian Government. The way I understand this program works is that it's very focused on schoolchildren. In the first years of its funding, it has really been about running events to raise aspiration and get kids interested and engaged in science, arts, culture et cetera. I actually visited an event up there in April this year, and they had about 50 kids from year 5 to year 12. What they were really trying to do with that cohort was hear from them about what made them feel safe or not in their community. It was a really interesting forum.

Since then, we have committed another \$2.75 million along with the Commonwealth—another reinvestment in Learning the Macleay. We're currently just reviewing the governance arrangements for that now. With regard to your question around outcomes and evaluation, that's actually that next piece of work we need to get done. We're looking for the development of a community strategy. We want to check where the membership of the Learning the Macleay group is at—the community reference group, if you like. All these things are being looked at now with regard to this new round of funding. We want to develop the evaluation process and build out the datasets as well. It's a bit of a work in progress and under review at the moment.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So the money's been allocated, but we're not yet sure what we want that money to achieve?

KATE MEAGHER: There is an opportunity for us to plan out how that money gets spent, so it's not necessarily—I might take on notice exactly how the governance arrangements work, if that's okay, with regard to the specific allocation. But the money is identified to be spent through Stronger People, Stronger Places in the Kempsey community. Exactly how and what the criteria are around how that's spent, I'll come back to you, if that's okay.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What about the criteria about how those two programs were selected?

KATE MEAGHER: I might have to take that one on notice too. When it was originally designed, I wasn't looking after this program. We've definitely responded to interest by the Federal Government with regard to extending that funding this time round. The initial criteria—as I say, I'm happy to take that on notice and come back to you. We were obviously keen to take up the opportunity to match, to co-fund with the Federal Government when they were ready to go back out with more funding.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Was that money that the Federal Government put on the table for the State Government to match?

KATE MEAGHER: Correct.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Or did the State Government go to the Federal?

KATE MEAGHER: No. I'll double check, but my understanding is the Federal Government made that commitment and then we co-funded. As I say, it's been a long-term partnership, since 2022, in that community, and then the new round of funding was February this year. Happy to come back with more info, though.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Good afternoon, Mr Tutt. Thank you for coming today. I have the same question for you as for the Minister this morning. When did you first become aware of sexual harassment allegations made against Steve Griffin, the former CEO of GWIC and current CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'm not aware of any. I'm not aware of any of those allegations.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mr Tutt, just pull the microphone around there. Can you repeat that, Mr Tutt, for the benefit of the *Hansard*?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'm not aware of any sexual allegations or harassment claims against Mr Griffin.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Today is the first day you've heard about it?

MATTHEW TUTT: When you mentioned it, that was the first I've heard of those. I'm not aware of any complaints.

CORRECTED

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Okay. So today's the first day you've heard of any complaints at all in regard to sexual harassment of female staff members when he was performing his roles at GWIC?

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Obviously, then, you weren't part of any of the complaints process. The Minister said this morning that once allegations came through to his office a few weeks ago, he launched a process with GWIC in regard to getting a response to those allegations. If you weren't part of that process, who within GWIC would have taken control of that? I know the Minister was referring to that process this morning.

MATTHEW TUTT: Nothing formally was put to me in my capacity as acting CEO at GWIC. I would expect that I would be the person that would take carriage of those sorts of discussions between the commission and the Minister's office.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What was your interpretation, then, of what the Minister was saying this morning when he said that he went through the usual process of contacting GWIC about those allegations? He also said that he understood that there had been internal investigations with GWIC during the time of those complaints. Where did he get all that information from?

MATTHEW TUTT: There were some general discussions with the Minister's office in relation to compliance with the SO 52 and I explained to them that we—that's the commission—complied with the SO 52 and returned all documents that we said were part of that SO 52.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The Minister or the Minister's office didn't bring up the specific allegations in regard to Steve Griffin?

MATTHEW TUTT: No. I've received nothing formal in relation to that from the Minister's office. As I said, there were discussions about compliance, general compliance with the SO 52, and information was provided that I've already outlined.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You said nothing formal was received. Was there anything informal discussed in regard to the allegations?

MATTHEW TUTT: There were certainly discussions about general compliance with the SO 52. As I said, we made it very clear that, in our return, we complied with what was called for by the call for papers.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Just putting the SO 52 itself to the side—I have some questions and I'm sure you're well prepared for that—what I'm trying to understand is whether there were any informal discussions in regard to the allegations specifically against Steve Griffin. I'm just trying to marry up what you're saying with what the Minister said this morning when I asked him what process he took after he heard those allegations. He said on the record that he had contacted GWIC about those—not the allegations about the SO 52, but the allegations about Steve Griffin. Were there any informal discussions within GWIC about it?

MATTHEW TUTT: Internally, within GWIC?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Yes.

MATTHEW TUTT: No, they haven't had any of those internal discussions. There were certainly some general discussions about the SO 52 and documentation that was returned. As I said, what I explained in those discussions was that we said that we've complied. There were certainly no allegations that have been made today, of sexual harassment or otherwise, that were part of our SO 52 return. We undertook that—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But external to the SO 52 return, were there any informal discussions from the Minister's office in regard to the accusations against Steve Griffin?

MATTHEW TUTT: The specific allegations, I'm unclear of. There were certainly no allegations put to the commission by the Minister's office along the nature of what you're describing. As I said, we explained as part of that process that when we returned the documents, we did so in accordance with our requirements.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You also said, in regard to the return to the SO 52, that there was a large number of documents—that it was such a large number of documents that you couldn't possibly comply with the SO 52. Do you have any understanding of exactly what number of documents we're looking at that may have been missing from that return?

MATTHEW TUTT: The commission did comply with the SO 52 to the full extent. The SO 52 was quite prescriptive as to what it sought, and the commission took the SO 52 quite seriously and literally, as it does with all its SO 52 returns, and provided the documents as part of our certification. There was a large number—it was probably in the hundreds—and we provided those documents, which we say were all captured as part of the SO 52.

CORRECTED

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The advice that I've had internally within Parliament is that it wasn't complied with because there was such a narrow view taken—every document had to have those exact words within it. If somebody had claimed that they were raped, for example, that would be missing from a document around sexual assault because they didn't use the exact terminology of "sexual assault". We can go back and forth and argue about that, but part of the letter from you was that there would be so many documents, if you were to go and search for every document that related to sexual harassment or assault, that you couldn't possibly comply with it. If you were to take that broader view, which is what the upper House tends to consider in regard to SO 52s, do you have any understanding of how many documents would be received within that?

MATTHEW TUTT: The document that you're referring to was my response to your request in relation to our compliance with the SO 52. In that correspondence, as I outlined, we stated that we complied with the SO 52 as it was made, and that the additional information that was contained in your correspondence was outside of the SO 52 as it was made. I want to make it clear that we weren't in any way trying to circumvent those processes. We took it very literally and complied according to what was contained within the SO 52. I provided that information to your office in relation to the subsequent communication that we'd received. If the SO 52, as I said in that correspondence to you, contained a broader scope—well, that would have been a more significant body of work for us to undertake.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm still a bit confused in regard to how you weren't aware of these allegations, when we were told this morning that GWIC was informed of the allegations and asked to go through that process. My question to you is, even if you have only found out for the very first time today about those specific allegations, will you be doing anything to support female staff at GWIC, who may still be working within GWIC, who may have been affected by the former CEO's behaviour?

MATTHEW TUTT: The commission supports all staff. The commission adheres to the New South Wales public sector guidelines. The commission supports all its staff, including all its female staff and, as it has in the past, it will continue and maintain its full support for all its staff.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The Minister said this morning that he understood that the complaints had been investigated at the time and had been dealt with internally. Where do you think he would have got that information from?

MATTHEW TUTT: I don't know. As I said, I just want to make it clear, in relation to my communications with the Minister's office, there was no communication that went into any of the detail that you're talking about and that you raised this morning to the Minister. So without more information, I can't really provide any further response.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Will you be taking any action now within GWIC following these allegations? I know you talked about supporting staff, but given that you're now aware that these allegations have come forward, will you be taking any action as the acting CEO?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'm not really aware of specific examples or the particular matters that you're referring to. But of course, if there were complaints or information that was provided to us, the Commission would undertake its usual processes; it'd undertake an investigation and take appropriate action.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The point I'm trying to make is now that there are allegations—I understand you may not necessarily know the names of the individuals and the details—will you, as acting CEO, be taking any action within the organisation in response to those allegations to provide appropriate support for staff that may or may not have been affected?

MATTHEW TUTT: As the CEO of the commission, as I said, we would take all of those sorts of matters very seriously. We provide support to all our staff. If any of our staff felt that they were subjected to the matters that were covered in your SO 52, of course we would take the relevant action to support our staff.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I might just pick up where my colleague left off, Mr Tutt. My understanding is it was a bit of a poorly kept secret within GWIC that this was the behaviour of Mr Griffin. Are you saying that you had no idea that any of these things had been alleged over the past however many years you've been at GWIC?

MATTHEW TUTT: I've been at GWIC now for 7½ years. The sorts of matters that have been raised I know were part of the evidence that came out of the select committee, and it was certainly raised by a member that's on the estimates Committee here this morning who is no longer present this afternoon. But those matters are, of course, a matter of public record. They were raised, they were responded to, as I recall, back in the select committee processes and, clearly, they were ventilated in that forum. So I am aware, in a general sense, of the sorts of allegations that were raised, as I said, by Mr Latham in that process. But otherwise, as I've outlined previously, I'm not aware of any—

CORRECTED

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That doesn't answer my question, though. I appreciate all of that context. One of the incidents that has been raised by my colleague was at the end of December 2020, I believe. Is that right, Ms Hurst?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Yes, one of them.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You were the Director of Legal Services at that point?

MATTHEW TUTT: Yes, or another term. I was certainly in charge of the legal section, in the main.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Did that come to your attention in any way?

MATTHEW TUTT: No.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Any detail of any kind?

MATTHEW TUTT: No. As I said, the allegations were raised in the select committee. There was a matter of evidence that was given. But those matters haven't been raised with me.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And no-one in GWIC has ever raised that with you?

MATTHEW TUTT: As I said, the actual allegations, it was clear, as part of the select committee processes, that those were made—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: No, outside of the select committee.

MATTHEW TUTT: Outside of that process—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'm asking about your recollection. If that incident happened some time around the end of 2020 or early 2021, did anyone raise any of the facts or any of the assertions in relation to Mr Griffin with you during that time?

MATTHEW TUTT: Nothing was raised formally with me about that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: No, not formally. At all?

MATTHEW TUTT: No. As I said, I'm aware of the allegations that were made very plain before the select committee. I haven't been involved in an investigation or otherwise of those processes, and it hasn't been my responsibility to deal with any of those matters or allegations.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: How long have you personally referred to Mr Griffin as "Handsy"?

MATTHEW TUTT: I have not.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You've never referred to him as "Handsy"?

MATTHEW TUTT: I have not referred to him as "Handsy". I've not referred to Mr Griffin as "Handsy", no.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Never?

MATTHEW TUTT: No.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Were you aware that that was a nickname?

MATTHEW TUTT: As I said, I believe that Mr Latham may have mentioned a number of names as part of the processes, going back some time in the select committee. That particular name may have been mentioned, amongst others.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Have you ever referred to Mr Griffin as "Handsy"?

MATTHEW TUTT: No.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You've never used that nickname?

MATTHEW TUTT: No.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If we were to do a search of any documents or any messages you've ever sent, we would not find on there you referring to him as "Handsy"?

MATTHEW TUTT: As I said, I don't have—apart from the matters in the select committee, I've got no recollection of ever using that term about Mr Griffin.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So it was a surprise to you when you heard it today?

CORRECTED

MATTHEW TUTT: It was—well, I think it was part of the select committee, so the actual terminology itself isn't a great surprise, because Mr Latham, I think, used that very term. As I said, I don't have any recollection of having used that term in relation to Mr Griffin.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You didn't make that term up, then? You didn't coin that nickname?

MATTHEW TUTT: No, I didn't coin that nickname.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'll move on to other issues. Thank you for allowing me to ask. I was just getting curious about—

MATTHEW TUTT: As I said, that terminology and the matters that were investigated as part of the select committee, I understand that Commissioner Wheeler may have investigated matters that came out of the select committee in relation to that. But that particular terminology, certainly, I've never referred to him directly of that, but it seems that that was part of the select committee commentary by others.

The CHAIR: Have you ever referred to him indirectly in that manner?

MATTHEW TUTT: I don't recall that.

The CHAIR: You can't rule it out?

MATTHEW TUTT: Look, Chair—

The CHAIR: What do you mean by "directly"?

MATTHEW TUTT: To Mr Griffin.

The CHAIR: What about to someone else?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, that's a very good point.

MATTHEW TUTT: It's unlikely. It's very unlikely.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But that's a very good point. At no point was I asking you if you'd referred directly to the person that everyone is sniggering about behind their backs, calling him "Handsy", as this great, very poorly kept secret about Mr Griffin. Have you referred to him as "Handsy" to other people?

MATTHEW TUTT: Ms Boyd, I cannot recall ever referring to Mr Griffin as that, directly or indirectly. I honestly cannot recall.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That was a good pick-up, thank you, Chair. Okay. I'm obliged to ask other questions. Let's talk about animal cruelty. I understand in relation to greyhound check-ins that retired greyhounds must be checked in every 12 months, whereas racing greyhounds are checked in every six months. Can you tell me what proportion of greyhounds that were subject to check-in requests in the last 12 months were actually checked in within the specified time frame?

MATTHEW TUTT: No, I'd have to take that on notice. But, as you say, the requirements do require every retired greyhound to check in at least once every 12 months, and greyhounds that have a status other than retired to check in every six months.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If you could take that on notice and also tell me how many greyhounds are currently overdue for check-in, unless you've got that now.

MATTHEW TUTT: No. I'll take on notice how many are currently overdue.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand the number of greyhounds reported as euthanised by private vet after sustaining injury at race meetings increased from 16 in the financial year 2023-24 to 44 in the financial year 2024-25, which seems like a 175 per cent increase. What is the reason for that increase? Do you know?

MATTHEW TUTT: There were 22 in the last quarter and it's down to 16 in the most recent reporting quarter. In the reporting year—and the financial year's results have only recently been compiled—there were 44. In relation to the increase, could you just repeat the question?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It's gone up from 16 to 44 year on year. What do you put that down to?

MATTHEW TUTT: Sixteen was the quarterly result.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: No, I have 16 for the full year 2023-24. It may also have been the last quarter, but I'm talking about year on year.

CORRECTED

MATTHEW TUTT: Category E—that's euthanasia at track—has declined in 2024-25 by 29 per cent on the previous year.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'll take your word for it. I'll come back and check that in the next round if I've got something different. The rate of greyhounds euthanised for behavioural reasons appears to still be quite significant. I think we're looking at 3 per cent for behavioural reasons. Does GWIC investigate that instance of vet euthanasia for behavioural reasons? I know we've talked about this before, and we did talk about it at the select inquiry, but are you keeping track of how many are being euthanised, by which vets and that sort of thing?

MATTHEW TUTT: Yes, all greyhounds that are euthanised for behavioural reasons, which is part of the rehoming policy, we keep records of those.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'd like to come back again to BackTrack, if we may, please. We talked about this program, the 12-week trial that kicked off at the start of this year. Where's that trial up to?

KATE MEAGHER: I believe they've completed that trial and they've come back to us with some encouraging results both from Neighbourhood Watch and also from the BOCSAR data that I referred to earlier. We're in discussions with BackTrack around whether there's an option for us to assist with further extending that trial as they look at a more sustainable footing for the program. It is relatively new. It's in our grants assessment process at the moment. The Premier has asked for it to be looked at under his discretionary fund.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When did that trial begin?

KATE MEAGHER: Can I take that on notice? I'm sorry. I think it was a 12-week trial and it has probably only just finished, so I would be working backwards. But, yes, I'm happy to take that question on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: My actual question is, if that 12 weeks is up, is that program still running or does the program have to wrap up?

KATE MEAGHER: My understanding is that the CEO has done a workaround in terms of the funding arrangements for now so that they can continue. We're talking to them about what options we have for further funding.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The principle of the Night Crew program is they're alumni of BackTrack themselves. They're community members patrolling around the community at night and diverting people away from high-risk areas or potential issues. Is that a model that we can see in other communities?

KATE MEAGHER: Yes, we can, and we have been doing that in Moree as well. We've funded Miyay Birray to run a night bus service. In the 12 months that we've been funding that, they've had thousands of pick-ups of young people, diverting them to other activities, giving them food and just ensuring that they're safe. That is definitely a very worthwhile activity. Ultimately we'd like to get to a situation where young people aren't on the street needing that sort of support—in fact, that they're engaged in other activities that mean they're not out on the street. That's a big part of that early intervention work that we need to put our heads down on and really get going on. That's definitely a priority of the cross-government work, if you like, in this space.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When we're looking at these programs, are we looking at similar but different programs in different communities that would allow them to be community run and set up specifically for that community, or is it a government rollout as to what it's going to look like?

KATE MEAGHER: My personal view, and what we've heard from community organisations working in this space alongside the local police, who are very engaged, and Youth Justice workers, is that it's bespoke for local communities. They know what works best for their communities. There are some common themes, however, around things that work—depending on the age group, for example, and things like diverting young people into trades and skills. Really trying to give people a leg up in terms of employment opportunities is a common theme. If you can get that right, you can go a long way to solving a lot of issues. As I say, the things that work best are when they're grassroots led. If government can take a consistent approach to joining the dots between what works, I think that's where we can really add value. Then there's that evaluation piece that you've been talking about as well.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: On the practicalities of this, if they're picking kids up off the streets, where are they taking them?

KATE MEAGHER: It varies. Sometimes it's a matter of making sure that they've had a good feed. It depends on their situation. In communities, people know where there are safe options for family members or with friends to go to. I couldn't be specific about that, but it's certainly the intention to have a safe outcome in relation to those activities.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So this money went more to the actual program than any infrastructure that might've been a safe house or—

KATE MEAGHER: Yes, but there are models for that. I don't have the details in front of me. I'd be more than happy to come back, or with Minister Dib, in the Youth Justice portfolio, we might be able to provide more information through that. There's definitely work through Youth Justice around different models of accommodation. It's a big need with regard to having safe places for people to go. There are things like a PCYC that we fund to stay open after hours. In Moree, again, there's the SHAE Academy, which runs programs late into the evening. Definitely, young people can be taken to those venues. In terms of more widespread accommodation and safe options, there's a big need.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You may or may not be across this scenario, but in Orange, the police play that role. I understand it's the only district that does have that ability to do that.

KATE MEAGHER: I'm not entirely across that, but historically I've heard that police have a very big role in those activities.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, I should have done this before. Ms Mackaness, would you be able to come up and take a couple of questions? As you're getting ready, the relationship between Indigenous affairs and Reconciliation NSW—

KATE MEAGHER: Maybe for Shane Hamilton.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can you very briefly explain for me what that relationship is?

SHANE HAMILTON: We've been funding them for quite some time. We've also been saying to them that they need to broaden their funding source and not rely entirely on us. They've worked towards that, and we've now said to them, "We'll fund you for not a full year. We'll fund you for six months. We'll keep working with you on other alternative funding sources." But we've had a relationship with them for quite some time.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What level is that funding traditionally?

SHANE HAMILTON: It's a bit over \$200,000 a year.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: And now you're just doing six months at a time.

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes. I think it's about 136 that we'll give them in the next six months.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Ms Mackaness, how many veterans are currently on the New South Wales social housing waitlist?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: The data is quite tricky, as you know. I noted that you asked questions about homelessness and housing earlier. We have three specific actions in the NSW Veterans Strategy for homelessness. One is Rent Choice Veterans. That's partnering with RSL LifeCare to support eligible veterans and their families who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness to find or retain a lease on a private rental property, to pay a subsidy towards the rent for up to three years, gain skills and work opportunities to help sustain a tenancy and achieve housing independence on the private rental market. Then there's Link2home Veterans and Ex-Service. It provides veterans and ex-service personnel who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless with a dedicated 24/7 statewide information and telephone referral service providing information about local services and assessment to determine what kind of help is needed, and a referral to a service including a homelessness service, support service, veterans services and temporary accommodation or community housing provider.

The other things that are probably pertinent to the space are the actions being taken by the Commonwealth. There is an action in the defence and veterans suicide royal commission. There is a piece of work happening at the moment by DVA looking at pathways to all the different service and housing providers for veterans to access. There was also the Veterans' Acute Housing Program. There were two New South Wales programs that received funding from that program. There was Coffs Harbour Legacy Welfare Fund. They received \$4.1 million and RSL LifeCare was awarded \$1.5 million. There's a range of things that come to play between the State Government, the ex-service organisations and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Specific data on how many people have accessed the New South Wales government programs, I would have to take on notice. I don't have an up-to-date figure.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I presume you have a number of how many veterans we have in New South Wales?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes, and I think—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How many of them connect directly with OVA?

CORRECTED

CAROLINE MACKANESS: We have different programs. The whole-of-government response—our Homes people run the homes programs. They keep that data. Corrections keeps their data. We do have people interfacing with us. Anyone who writes to the Minister, we usually prepare the response. The Minister referenced we do take phone calls from veterans who are distressed or wanting help. We try and refer them—or help them if we can—to the appropriate support services that will be able to best support them.

I've had a couple of Vietnam veterans reach in to me that have needed facilitation into aged-care facilities that they're looking for in their particular area. We leverage and network. I'll ring LifeCare and ask if they can facilitate a particular request. It's very much a collegiate environment. Quite often we reach in to the Department of Veterans' Affairs and ask them specifically to help. We are very committed—a small team, but we took your question last time and we're organising the forum in Orange. I think the Minister wrote and said we were looking into that. That has now been confirmed. I'm happy to talk to you about that, too.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Not for one second am I questioning the commitment of you or the team. I note the Minister's acknowledgement of your efforts earlier, and that didn't surprise me, given what I picked up from last budget estimates. Those veterans who do not connect with the Office for Veterans Affairs, some of them no doubt feel they perhaps don't need that support. Are there others that don't connect because they are more socially isolated? What efforts do we make to bring them into the tent?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: I guess the hub network that we referenced—and I'm really proud that the State Government has contributed a site towards that hub network. It is a Commonwealth initiative. It is being delivered by RSL LifeCare. In Richmond we had an opportunity to contribute an underutilised site. It's just gone into DA. That's really exciting. So we are reaching in and trying to collaborate really strongly with the Commonwealth, with ex-service organisations and with local government. You asked a question about local government. There are now 34 that have established veteran employment programs. That's amazing. I think it's a whole-of-community effort that builds the best results. We work with sub-branches as well. The veteran that I helped out in Windsor, I reached into RSL NSW and they reached their local president there, who helped us to help a local veteran that was in need. The hub-and-spoke network with RSL LifeCare—the hubs work with the sub-branches.

Out in Orange, we've written to the RSL district president out there, who's coordinating all the sub-branches. We've written to the president of Legacy. We've talked to Families of Veterans Guild. We try to bring the communities together to ensure that veterans who might approach via different paths are captured. They might approach via a sub-branch. They might approach via a hub or just via a mate, so there are multiple pathways that people come from, and they won't be comfortable with all of them, if that makes sense. We're trying to increase awareness that there are support networks there that they can come to.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: There was a commitment made before the Federal election that a hub would be put in the Central West through Federal funding. Has there been any engagement with you as far as the location of that is concerned?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: I think it was the Liberal member or candidate that made a commitment, potentially.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The Independent member, I think, as well also made one somehow.

CAROLINE MACKANESS: I know that Minister Keogh has committed to going out to Orange to look at the needs. There is slightly less population out there than some other areas, but I think our Orange forum is honestly an opportunity to see how we can group up Legacy and LifeCare and RSL and see what might be possible.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I might turn to Dr Levesque. I'm just having a look at health and medical research. Given the most recent implementation of the NSW Health Research and Innovation Strategy 2025-2030, have the responsibilities under the Ministry of Health and Medical Research changed at all?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: No. The new strategy does cover both innovation as well as research; therefore, it relates to both Ministers. There are things in the strategy that relate to precincts, for example, that we develop with Minister Park and then, of course, directions that relate to research funding, research grants, which relates to Minister Harris's portfolio.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What is the project funding allocation for the office of medical research and innovation in this budget year of 2025-2026?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: The funding for this financial year is yet to be finalised, but it's stable compared to last year, according to the discussions that I've had with finance. We just have a few research programs to determine and finalise before the full budget will be available.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I understand last year it was \$104.7 million. Is that correct?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: That's correct.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: You expect it to be more or the same than that figure?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: Yes. That's the discussions that we've had with finance and according to the planning of the different grants programs that we administer.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I understand that several medical research successes have occurred across the State and nation, assisting researchers in developing and tweaking strategic plans to improve early identification and treatment of serious illnesses, such as cancer, with the hope to even eradicate them entirely one day. Could you outline for the Committee some of the advances that your office has been watching and maybe supporting as well?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: Obviously, the office is scanning what's happening in research in general. We've been particularly paying attention to areas that relate to genomics and proteomics where research would support more personalised treatments in the future. We've also paid a lot of attention to rare diseases, both in the cancer space as well as non-cancer rare diseases, which I know individually are rare but collectively do affect a fair proportion of the population. Because of recent advances in research, there are going to be new treatments available in future years, and therefore we're paying close attention to that so that we can, through the funding available, stimulate areas that we know need to get ready for generating the evidence, harnessing those opportunities in the future. That's one key area that we've explored.

As you know, we also have a significant investment in cardiovascular disease where there are also advances in terms of personalising medicine, and we've also looked into investments in specific populations where we know we need to stimulate research. For example, in Aboriginal health we have been working with communities to generate research around genomics in Aboriginal populations as well as in cardiovascular disease where there was a specific call for proposals as well.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is all of this grant funding or are there other funding arrangements that you undertake?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: It's mostly grant funding that we allocate to academic centres, research teams and medical research institutes. At times, we do partner with local districts when we feel that there's capability development that needs to happen and also so that the clinical side of research is also supported, and in this case its allocation to local districts or hospitals that we provide.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Does the office of medical research and innovation have any role in determining successful applicants for clinical trial funding?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: We do have some programs. What we do is that we facilitate the establishment of peer review committees because we adopt similar kinds of approaches as what's conducted nationally to support research. We do receive advice from those independent peer review committees and then allocate funding based on the recommendations and based on specific priorities that we may have as well that we want to progress, understanding that our funding is complementary to the NHMRC and MRFF funding available nationally as well.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Are there any changes to this that are envisaged under the Health Research and Innovation Strategy at all for the future?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: One key dimension of the strategy is what we call the matrix for strategic investment. We do want to consolidate what we call our horizon scanning, making sure that we combine both a good understanding of where science is going, where our research capability needs to be enhanced, and tailor the funding according to whether we need to support commercialisation within our system or we need to support more early-phase trials and in this way use our envelope and portfolio of funding in a more strategic way. But that's something that is coming out of the new strategy.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Barakat, I wanted to look at some of the Audit Office's findings in a little bit more detail just to ask about whether there have been any changes since it has reported within Liquor and Gaming. One of the concerns was the low number of gaming machine venue inspectors. Is it the case that there is still just 12?

TAREK BARAKAT: I have got the number of inspectors here. I think there is sort of some confusion around exactly what the term "inspector" means. We have appointed inspectors in hospitality and racing that aren't actually titled inspectors but have the same ability to conduct inspections as our normal inspectors. Appointed

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inspectors this year is 154. We have 17 investigators, which might be where that confusion lies, and we have 55 actual people entitled as inspectors. There is a large number of people on the ground going out to venues on a regular basis.

I think part of the concern the Audit Office had too was about our presence in regional areas, which we've sought to address as well. I was talking before in response to Mr Farlow that we as an executive team now go out to regional areas, or have been going out to regional areas, about five times a year now to meet with licensees but also police and council and Aboriginal health groups as well. In addition to that, our compliance and enforcement team would historically go out to a region, do an inspection there and then come back. What we've started to do now is base ourselves in a regional area for a period of time and then go out to areas around that—kind of like a hub-and-spoke model. It's not to say that we've completely addressed some of the findings of the Audit Office, but we're working towards doing some of those things a bit better.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You mentioned the number of inspectors at the beginning. You said they had a different name.

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is that because they're generalists, if you like, and they're looking at everything at each particular venue.

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, that's right. They're appointed as inspectors under the relevant section of the Gaming and Liquor Administration Act, but they're not necessarily assigned to a position entitled "inspector".

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So you're saying that there are 17 gaming machine—

TAREK BARAKAT: There are 17 special investigators.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Why is there the need to have specific gaming machine venue inspectors? Do they do things that the general inspectors can't? I'm trying to work out why you would have this defined.

TAREK BARAKAT: I can take on notice the specifics. But when our investigators go out to venues, they will look at a range of different factors. It might just be that the focus of that particular inspection is gaming machine activity, it might be that it's the responsible service of alcohol or it might be the signage. They'll look at all sorts of different things when they're out there. If you want a more detailed breakdown of how our inspections work, I'm happy to take that on notice and provide it to you.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. That would be useful. Moving along from that, one of the other concerns raised was the Responsible Conduct of Gambling training. Of course, there was the review which found that the training had little positive impact on harm prevention or reduction. That was in 2022. Regarding the new training, which was updated in 2023 and received funding from ClubsNSW and Bankstown Sports Club, the Audit Office says:

The revised course content does not encourage venue staff to proactively address potentially harmful gambling behaviour.

Is that going to be looked at as well?

TAREK BARAKAT: We're consistently reviewing both our RSA and RCG training. In response to that particular recommendation, we started a very proactive campaign to make sure that venues are proactively engaging. The Government introduced the requirement to have Responsible Gambling Officers in venues from 1 July last year. Those positions are specifically there to proactively engage with people identified as at risk of or experiencing gambling harm. I think I said this in response to a question when you were out of the room. When that reform came into place last year, we conducted inspections of approximately 945 venues to get a better understanding of whether or not those people who had been tasked with those roles and had taken on additional training understood their responsibilities, and we found a 98 per cent compliance rate. We will continue to look at those things. But we do take this very seriously, and when we are out in venues we are making sure that people with those responsibilities understand that they are there to proactively engage.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is the course content being changed? The skill level of the Responsible Gambling Officers you were just referring to in terms of the training they need to undertake is this course. Is that correct?

TAREK BARAKAT: They have to undertake Responsible Conduct of Gambling training and Advanced Responsible Conduct of Gambling training. I can take on notice whether we're reviewing those. I know we've just updated our Responsible Service of Alcohol training to include training around sexual violence and domestic violence prevention. We may well be looking at our RCG training as well, but I'm happy to take that on notice and confirm for you.

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Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The report says—this is in the revised course content; I don't know about the advanced one you're referring to, but that would be good to know—that it "only requires staff to speak to a patron directly about their gambling or to offer referrals to gambling counselling services if extreme gambling behaviour is observed." Do you know what "extreme" means?

TAREK BARAKAT: I can take that on notice. But the RGOs that I've described have a positive obligation to interact when they see someone at risk of experiencing gambling harm or actually experiencing gambling harm.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's not what the Auditor-General's report says, though.

TAREK BARAKAT: That's talking about the training and the RCG component. Responsible Gambling Officers have to undertake an additional level of training that will provide them with additional skills in that regard.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is there a reason that this report shows that just 2 per cent of people who are accessing the New South Wales Government's counselling service were referred by venues in 2023-24?

TAREK BARAKAT: I can take that on notice. I don't know.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It kind of implies that maybe the intervention isn't happening.

TAREK BARAKAT: It may imply that. It may also imply that people haven't then decided to be—the Responsible Gambling Officers would provide advice about counselling services available. It would then be incumbent upon the individual to take that advice or not. They're not forcing people into counselling. They are making them aware of the options available to them, to help them deal with what they're experiencing.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I look forward to getting a bunch of that on notice. We've heard this morning, and from the Premier last week, that it's very unclear when any response is going to be made public from the Independent Panel on Gambling Reform report, what the response is going to be to the road map. Has the department prepared anything, or are there any targets that the Government has set in relation to harm reduction? It's that whole thing about measuring harm reduction. As has already been stated today, the budget papers predict an increase in losses; it's hard to see how harm is being reduced when the losses are increasing. How is the Government doing that? Even with the reduction of poker machines, for example, is there a target to see a reduction of poker machines every year, for a start? Are there targets or KPIs in terms of harm reduction?

TAREK BARAKAT: I think that's another recommendation that came out of the Audit Office report. Whether the Government has set its own targets is not something I can speak to. It's probably a question for the Government. What we're doing is actually starting—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But they would ask your unit to prepare that, surely.

TAREK BARAKAT: What we're doing in response to the recommendation of the Audit Office report is we've engaged Central Queensland University to start to undertake an evaluation of some of these reforms, specifically into Responsible Gambling Officers, mandatory gambling incident registers and mandatory gaming plans of management for venues. That evaluation will provide us with an assessment as to whether any of this has had an impact on harm reduction. In line with the Audit Office's report, we sort of have until June next year to develop some of this stuff. I think it is going to be an iterative process. We'll probably start with the levels of harm identified in the New South Wales problem gambling survey, which the Minister spoke to this morning, as a sort of a baseline and then move from there. This first evaluation process that we've engaged CQU to do with us will hopefully embed within our organisational structure and the way we do things, these evaluations going forward, so that can do them for all the reforms that we put in place.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Where is the Office of Responsible Gambling situated?

TAREK BARAKAT: The director of that office reports to me.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is there anything going on within that unit? It would be good to know how many people are in there as well. Do they have anything that's similar to what the Victorian responsible gambling fund did a few years ago now, which was to calculate the social costs of gambling? We can come back to it. I'm just curious to know some of the work that they're doing.

TAREK BARAKAT: Sure.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Just to indicate, I've got a couple of questions left for Mr Tutt but I will be going to Commissioner Drake soon. Mr Tutt, I just want to remind you that you swore an oath when you came in

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this morning. We take those very seriously. Obviously, if anybody knowingly gives evidence that they know isn't correct, we do consider that perjury. I just want to make it absolutely clear that outside—

The CHAIR: Ms Hurst, it's not perjury; it's contempt of Parliament.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Apologies. Thank you, Chair. I just want to put the question again very clearly. Outside of any accusations that Mr Latham may have made at an inquiry, have you ever before today, formally or informally, directly or indirectly, heard about inappropriate behaviour by Mr Steve Griffin towards female staff working at GWIC?

MATTHEW TUTT: There's been certainly no formal or informal complaints that I've been made aware of. So if there were matters that occurred before my time as acting CEO that were investigated or dealt with by the commission, I certainly wasn't involved in those matters.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And you hadn't heard anything about them?

MATTHEW TUTT: In relation to specific examples?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You didn't hear anything about any accusations about inappropriate behaviour by Mr Steve Griffin towards female staff within GWIC?

MATTHEW TUTT: As I said, the original question was about sexual harassment, which was part of your SO 52. My response to that was there was nothing that the commission was aware of that it returned as part of that SO 52.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's not my question. I'm not asking about the SO 52. I'm asking whether you, as an individual that works at GWIC, had heard about any complaints about inappropriate behaviour by Mr Steve Griffin towards female staff within GWIC.

MATTHEW TUTT: If there was inappropriate conduct, that would be properly dealt with.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Had you heard about them before today?

MATTHEW TUTT: As I said, it came up as part of the previous select committee. I appreciate you have said outside of that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Yes, outside of that.

MATTHEW TUTT: No-one has directly come to me. Have I heard in a general sense? Clearly, there were matters that were raised in the select committee inquiry, which was well known.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: If we put that to the side, internally within GWIC, had you heard about complaints?

MATTHEW TUTT: No-one has made complaints to me. Have I heard in a general sense? As I said, I don't recall anyone making those complaints. Had I heard in a general sense? Clearly, I am well aware of the evidence that was part of the select committee. Those matters were raised. They were investigated, as I understand it, by Commissioner Wheeler. As far as anything beyond that, really, it would be—I'm not in a position to start providing any other information than what was part of what was generally known as the select committee.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: As I said, I wanted to put the select committee aside. My question was very simple. It could just be a yes or no answer, really. I don't expect you to give details. I don't want to put you in that situation. My question is, very simply, had you heard about inappropriate behaviour by Mr Steve Griffin towards female staff within GWIC prior to today, outside of that committee?

MATTHEW TUTT: In other words, matters that weren't part of that select committee. As I said, I have heard the general comments made and certainly comments that you have made here today before the Minister.

The CHAIR: What does "the general comments" mean, Mr Tutt?

MATTHEW TUTT: Ms Hurst was making commentary about Mr Griffin and that there were some harassment claims. As I said, I haven't been a part of it. I'm not aware of any direct matters where Mr Griffin has been subject to any action from the commission.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But had you heard about the fact that there had been complaints?

MATTHEW TUTT: In a general sense, that's right. I had heard that there had been matters, but I don't know any of the details. I can only infer that they were part of the matters that were covered as part of the select committee. Again, I've not been made aware of any details of any matters relating to Mr Griffin.

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The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you been in any contact with Mr Griffin today—emails, texts, phone calls—during the inquiry or during the break at all?

MATTHEW TUTT: Mr Griffin has sent me some texts messages, yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And you have been replying to those in regard to some of these matters?

MATTHEW TUTT: No, only one text message I received from Mr Griffin that I provided a very brief response to.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: In regard to the matters that have been raised today?

MATTHEW TUTT: In regard to one of the matters that was raised today, yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Was it in regard to this matter around accusations of harassment?

MATTHEW TUTT: Mr Griffin did send me a text message. That is clear. But I haven't responded to those messages directly to Mr Griffin.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you responded to the messages indirectly?

MATTHEW TUTT: No, not in relation to those matters that have been raised. Mr Griffin did send me a text in relation to what occurred as part of the SO 52 in relation to what was known as the Brittan communiqué. I made a brief response to him in relation to that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Commissioner Drake, thank you for your time today. When one of the whistleblowers contacted the Minister, the Minister's office actually recommended that they contact your office with the complaints.

LEA DRAKE: I'm sorry, which whistleblowers?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Around the sexual harassment allegations in regard to Steve Griffin. My concern is that it was only very recently that that person had contacted the Minister and my own office. Did you receive that email? Or would that have probably come through when you'd already finished?

LEA DRAKE: I've never heard of these allegations until today, but I did ask my ex-staff member if there had been any communication and I was told that, after submissions to the inquiry had closed, a notification went to the website. I've never seen it. I've never dealt with it. It's not within my terms of reference so, even if I had, I wouldn't have dealt with it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I know it was outside of the terms of reference. I found it odd that the Minister had recommended that they email you and I think it was even very close to when the report was being tabled. But I just wanted to clarify.

LEA DRAKE: I've got no idea. I didn't bother looking.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Commissioner Drake, at our budget estimates hearing on 4 March, you said you didn't anticipate needing any further extensions in time to complete the report. Then there was a further extension in time. Did you supply a copy of the report or a draft version of that report in or around that April deadline internally within GWIC?

LEA DRAKE: No. I've never given a copy of the report or a draft of the report or any extract of the report to any person outside the staff of the inquiry.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The Minister was talking this morning about the procedural fairness, where information from the report that mentioned certain witnesses did go to them for feedback. Did that include every witness?

LEA DRAKE: No, that's not really accurate.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Can I get your version of what—

LEA DRAKE: I'm sure that that's the Minister's recollection because procedural fairness issues were notified to the Minister. The inquiry was subject—which no doubt you'll get to read about when you see the report—to constant complaint about procedural fairness issues, which I didn't consider had any merit. We had a process that I considered provided procedural fairness to all of the parties. That was part of giving potential findings, letters to each of the parties against whom a finding might be made to give them an opportunity to be heard. Those things went out in due course. But there were constant complaints about fairness or a lack of it, including a very late—I think it was a 10-page summary of my manifest sins and wickednesses, which I briefed the Minister with. I gave it to him. Whenever there was such a complaint or correspondence—it's hard to describe

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it, really; it was quite constant—I just gave it to the Minister so that the department and the Minister would be aware of those matters and could answer them.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister Drake, you mentioned that—

LEA DRAKE: I haven't been promoted to Minister yet.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Sorry.

LEA DRAKE: And I don't want the job.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: One day. You never know!

LEA DRAKE: No, no, no.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You don't live in Kiama?

LEA DRAKE: Absolutely not.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Commissioner, you mentioned that the report was seen by just the staff that were specifically involved in the actual inquiry. How many people were part of that team?

LEA DRAKE: I have the number here. Wait one minute.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'd also love if I could get the names of the people on that team—either today or on notice; whatever is easiest.

LEA DRAKE: They're in fact included in a list in the report.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Great.

LEA DRAKE: I wanted to give credit to the team for all the hard work they did and I listed them for that purpose. There was a director, five solicitors, two paralegals, a senior project officer and an administrative officer. I think that's it—small but hard working.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Great, thank you. Would there have been any chance that a copy of the report could have made it to Mr Griffin at any point in the stage, given that he was still within GWIC at the time?

LEA DRAKE: None. I didn't give it to GWIC. I kept myself entirely separate from the rest of GWIC. I was really a one-off appointment to a particular vacant role to do the inquiry, and I met the chief commissioner and, I think, Mr Wheeler, maybe Mr Griffin, in a first meeting, when I was appointed, just to introduce myself, and I didn't have any other contact, and I did that deliberately to separate the inquiry from GWIC.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Thank you. Do you know what the total cost was of running the inquiry?

LEA DRAKE: I think it was just under \$5.5 million. Cheap at twice the price, if you ask me.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: This was something that was just brought to our attention: The webpage information seemed to be hosted by the New South Wales Office of Racing, rather than the GWIC website. I'm just wondering where those sort of lines sat.

LEA DRAKE: I've got no idea. Me and websites are not very familiar. I don't know that. And I can't put it on notice, since I'm no longer employed there.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Ms Hurst, I can probably help with that. The commissioner was based in our offices as a department, and so she was using our systems, rather than GWIC's. That's probably the explanation.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And was that set up to be able to create that separation from GWIC?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Crawford, I just wanted to get your thoughts on the Government's delaying the restricted cash use on the gaming floor at Star for another two years, I think, out to August 2027. Was that justified in your view?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: I think it was a good decision.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Why was that?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: Balancing a whole range of issues. I was consulted, and there were a number of other agencies consulted, but I think it was the right decision by the Government. That's my personal view.

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Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: And why was that? Can you put your view onto the record, in terms of why?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: I think the risks to the community, in terms of organised crime and money laundering, have been heavily reduced, particularly since junkets were banned three years ago. I think there was a real risk—existential risk—to the Star casino's business, because they've not been good, as I said before, managing their technology. I think, like a lot of businesses, these casinos are very much subject to the cost-of-living problems that people have. Timing-wise, I didn't think it would help. Systems are in place to reduce risks, and they're very much being watched very closely at the moment. So I thought it was a good decision.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: When you're saying "not good in terms of managing the technology", does that mean difficulties in terms of the cards, when you're saying "technology"? Or is it more?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: Across the board, I think. This particular business started out when where we were headed was identified, back in 2022, and I think they approached it on the basis of a response to particular legislation rather than that this was a digital transformation of these businesses, and they've really struggled with it for a number of reasons. A lot of their tech was old. It's built on, built on, built on. So it needed a fresh set of eyes. And only recently have they appointed someone new to run it.

The CHAIR: Thank you, everyone, for your evidence. We're going to have a 15-minute break and be back at 3.45.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Thank you, officials, for returning.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I might start with you, Dr Levesque, if that's okay. What specific funding is allocated into research into rare ovarian cancers such as granulosa cell tumours? How is the Government supporting innovation in early detection and treatment pathways in these under-represented subtypes?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: We don't have a specific program in that area. I can take on notice to see if there has been any applications that relate to that condition as part of our programs.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you or will you support grassroots operations like ROC Inc. to deliver these sorts of programs?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: Again, I would have to take that question on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can you provide an update on the use of AI within medical research, with particular regard to the recent implementation of the *NSW Health Research and Innovation Strategy 2025-2030*?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: We do have our artificial intelligence taskforce that I co-chair with the chief executive of eHealth in NSW Health. We discuss different aspects that relate to the use of AI in different parts of health. More specifically, we do have work happening at the moment with the medical research institutes association—AAMRI of New South Wales—where we're exploring what would be a good use of AI to accelerate research, especially in job development or in data analysis that relates to research. Specifically with regards to research, it's early work in partnership with the various medical research institutes that we're progressing.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That will continue to roll out as part of that strategy?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: Yes. The strategy doesn't identify AI in particular with regards to a specific program, but it's definitely part of the new technologies that we're exploring to harness to reduce the indirect cost of research and support our research institutes at progressing those to, again, accelerate research. There is a lot of potential application of AI in research, as I said, especially in drug discovery because it can really accelerate the identification of new candidate drugs and, therefore, accelerate the process of then getting them to clinical trials afterwards.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Moving away from that a bit, is there any intersection between what you do, as far as your medical research, and what might happen around ag research as far as FMD vaccines and other vaccines?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: Sorry, can you repeat the question?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is there any intersection between what you do and what happens in the space of things like foot-and-mouth disease vaccines?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: Not specifically as part of my area, no.

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The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Ms Mackaness, thanks for coming back up. I understand there is a research project going on aimed at improving support services for women veterans that is a partnership with OVA, RSL and Monash University. I just wondered if you could touch on that for us, including some time frames on when that might be rolled out.

CAROLINE MACKANESS: At the moment, they're calling for participation in that program. It has been a slow boil in terms of the ethics, approvals and the working group. It's been advertised widely. I think they've done the survey work. I might have to take the exact timeline on notice, but it is progressing positively. I know that they've had a good response to the request for participants.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When we say a partnership, do we have OVA staff working on that?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes, in the sense that my team has worked consistently with RSL NSW, originally RSL LifeCare, and with Monash University. It's a PhD student who has proposed the study so it's being done in a very cost-effective way with the staff resources. We've helped with the administration and coordination but Monash University is leading the research.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can we go back to the council's involvement in the Veterans Employment Program, please? As I say, I have seen the links on the page. Some of them merely are a link to the council's home page. Do we expect more than that from councils, to be part of the Veterans Employment Program?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes, I went in and checked one particular council. It's usually under their employment section. Each local government has developed its own form of participation but they have some standard requirements. So Dallas—Craig Delaney—and our team is very passionate about this. He meets regularly with council groups—I think there's WSROC, NSROC and various forums where councils get together—and he advocates and he meets with councils and explains the Veterans Employment Program. We've got the *Rank to Grade Guide* that was developed for local government for the transferability of skills from the Commonwealth to local government, so that exists. Then we have the data on our website for all the local government areas. Craig can refer local governments to that data and point out how big the veteran population is and the opportunities to employ veterans.

I think the basics of the program are that they commit to employing veterans and to acknowledging the skills and attributes that they can bring to council on their website. They have a veteran indicator question. We collect the data with the local governments—that's building—for how many veterans apply for roles and how many are getting roles in local government. And then there is a commitment to provide feedback. I've got some notes from Craig. Some councils have gone beyond that. They've organised local forums. Parramatta recently set up a veteran roundtable and they aim to become a DVA Veteran Employer of Choice. You have to satisfy a number of things with the Commonwealth to become a gold veteran employer. It's building and joining the blocks. There are basic requirements. I think they're always on their website but where on the website? It might be under employment one group down. Does that answer? There are 34 to date.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That's the work with councils. Last time we chatted about perhaps opportunities in other industries that might be great transitions—great transferable skills for veterans—in mining and in agriculture. Are there any steps we're able to take to open doors up into those industries?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: The Commonwealth has been the greater player in that space, I guess, given that our Veterans Employment Program team is 1.8, so not quite two full-time staff members. I think our focus on the whole of government and all of the things that we're doing across government and local government has been a big factor. We have held some specific ministerial veteran roundtables where we've brought in industry to talk about the opportunities, such as the housing industry. The building industry we brought in for one roundtable. Some of those big players were already bringing in their own veterans employment programs. A lot of the defence industries already do, so there is a building awareness. We do what we can, but we don't have a remit to extend extensively into the private, corporate economy.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You do have that connection with other government departments, though?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes, we do. We do work with the various departments—you mentioned DPHI. We do work with them and encourage them to promote opportunities to veterans. There are grant programs that we promote as well that come through various government departments.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Once a veteran is placed into a job or has managed to secure to a job, is that where that relationship ends?

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CAROLINE MACKANESS: Again, what we've been working on is a veteran network. Various departments have set up their own networks. Corrections has a veterans strategy that they're working on. They employ a lot of veterans. The Transport group has a big number of veterans. They're setting up their own networks and buddy systems and support networks within those groups, so we've been encouraging those to roll out as well. We've set up a DCJ—Department of Communities and Justice—veterans network. We meet a couple of times a year and keep people in touch with newsletters and event opportunities.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I think the Minister took this on notice before, but you might have it since then. Last time we talked about 55 veterans employed by DPIRD between April and September 2024. How many of those 55 are still employed at DPIRD? Have any been affected by the delimiting, or whatever they call it, of jobs in the last month?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: We track the number of veterans applying for jobs, and we've got that data. The longitudinal is more difficult for us. We do get some data through the PMES, but not all members of the public service answer the PMES—it varies per department—and not all veterans might answer the question "Are you a veteran?" in that PMES. That said, we did get some data that, of the veteran respondents, 24 per cent had worked in the public sector for 10 to 20 years and 31 per cent had been employed for more than 20 years. So we're getting that sort of data, but that specific number at DPI—we don't track them specifically to monitor whether they've stayed there or moved on. We're starting to get some of that longitudinal data.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are you able to provide numbers for the percentage of veterans that somehow touch OVA?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes, in the sense that—Craig and Meg have been in Nowra and they're at the transition seminar. We commit to attending all of the ADF transition seminars so that we can capture people leaving the military and talk to them about the job opportunities in the State government. They will keep track of—they will talk to 30 or 50 or 100 people at that seminar. All of the forums that we hold—at the one in Orange, we'll clock the number of veterans that participate and the number that we write to. We meet with groups of veterans regularly, so we do collect all of that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Mr Hamilton, if I can come to you, what value do you place, from a department perspective, on the importance of our clubs, community groups et cetera in our predominantly Indigenous communities? I'm thinking of places like Menindee and Wilcannia, where the footy club or the basketball team play such an important role, in my view. From a department perspective, how much value do you place on that?

SHANE HAMILTON: A huge value, yes—a huge value in grassroots Aboriginal organisations in communities, whether they might be connected to football clubs or other services. Yes, we place a big emphasis on that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Football is obviously an easy one for me to come back to. I've seen the same thing with cricket. Basketball, I understand, is a big one as well. Is there enough support provided to those? I think they had the Yabbies out at Menindee at one point, which have now folded. Is there enough support for those clubs? How can we help them play their role, almost that covert diversion role that they can play?

SHANE HAMILTON: The avenues that we have are generally through grant programs that we run, whether they're NAIDOC Week or our cultural grants. A lot of them are the Community and Place Grants that we ran through Closing the Gap, which cover a whole range of different things, from new buses to fixing up office space or community halls so they can run more activities and get more people access to services. I think they have great benefit because they have an immediate impact. A \$50,000 grant can make a massive difference in a local community.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: To give you a proper half-volley now, do you want to give me an example of where you have seen one make a real difference, and do we have the evidence that suggests the difference that it makes?

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes, I can give you a couple. We have a medical centre down in the Riverina which had a huge shed at the back of their office space that was full of basically lots of other equipment and stuff where they were storing things. Our grant allowed them to fully refurbish that space and open it up to community, to be able to run before-school and after-school care programs. That organisation also got a bus because they were a health service, so they were able to broaden their service to provide that across the district. It's a really good example of the difference it can make in a small town, broadening the service that that organisation provides.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Why do we think it's so effective?

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SHANE HAMILTON: Because they get more people engaged. If there's no space for people to hold events or activities, it creates the opportunity for community to get more involved. If you don't have that space and if you don't have access to transport, people that live further away in some of the remote parts of the State aren't able to actually get access to things like fundamental basic medical services.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Mr Tutt, I think I have now worked out where we were talking across each other before. I was asking a question about the number of greyhounds reported as euthanised by private vet after sustaining injury at a race meeting. That's not the on-track deaths, which I think is the category E that you were referring to.

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What we see in the data is, as you say, a decrease in on-track deaths but then this massive increase, 175 per cent year on year, in the numbers of dogs who have sustained a critical injury on track but then are taken away and euthanised there. The question to you is do those two together mean that really there hasn't been a reduction in the number of deaths; it's just whether or not we're tracking them on track or off track?

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right. The commission now undertakes its reporting where it does deal with the category E—the euthanasias on track by the on-track veterinarians. But also it has the mortality greyhounds that are related to the injury that they sustained at the track, which can be any time from when they go to a private veterinarian. It can be one day; it can be two days. It can be really any day. We do that for transparency reasons. We're a jurisdiction that, regardless of the time limit that has passed since the injury has been sustained to the greyhound, still reports on that as a track-related mortality. That does provide a more complete and accurate data setting.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: In the life cycle reporting, GWIC says that the continued trend of those on-track euthanasias—the category E ones—going downwards is likely to be due to improved track conditions. But given that when you put all of the track-related mortalities together we're actually not seeing a decrease, do you think that it's true to say that we have improved track conditions?

MATTHEW TUTT: For the off-track euthanasias that occur as a result of the injuries, they occur in the setting where those greyhounds are provided with additional diagnostics and better care. They're also going through, where possible, rehabilitation programs. Obviously there will be those greyhounds that are euthanised at some point after the injury. It's really how we interpret the data that you're referring to. It can be open to some different interpretations, but it is clear that there are certain measures that have come into existence which do lead to a reduction in injuries.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just coming back to the data, though, we have data that shows that those category E—the deaths on track, where they were euthanised on track—have come down. GWIC has then said that that is likely due to improved track conditions. But if you've still got the same number of, or more, dogs who are being killed, whether they're euthanised on the track or off the track, they've still got an injury through the race. They're still being injured on track, so the mortalities coming from injuries on track aren't going down. How can we then say that there's somehow an improvement in track conditions?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'm not sure that the figures are, in fact, an increase, although I can take that on notice and provide that data. What is clear is that the on-track euthanasias that would have occurred in the past are now significantly less due to those other measures that we've put in place whereby as part of the Greyhound Care Scheme—which is a scheme run by Greyhound Racing NSW—a greyhound that does sustain an injury at a race meeting will, wherever possible, go off to one of those veterinary clinics to be assessed and hopefully rehabilitated so that they don't form part of—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Which is fine but the stats are still showing—I mean, if we've got from 16 to 44 in the 2023-24 financial year to the 2024-25 financial year being euthanised off track, I'd be interested to know how that adds up with those category E deaths then to see if—I just don't know how we can then conclude that there's been some big reduction in deaths when it looks to any sort of thinking individual that perhaps we're just categorising them differently.

MATTHEW TUTT: As I said, there's also improved data gathering and better reporting systems. To our knowledge, we're the only jurisdiction that does do track-related mortalities as a result of injuries that are sustained beyond what might be a seven-day limit that is set by Greyhounds Australasia, and really—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'm not comparing us to other jurisdictions; I'm comparing us to us.

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right, but it's important that it's known that the commission is, as far as other jurisdictions go, a greyhound regulator that does exceed reporting of those other jurisdictions.

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Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Okay, but GWIC is a greyhound regulator, or a regulator of the greyhound racing industry, in order to—I would hope—make it safer and improve things. We're talking about actual numbers of dogs dying. That seems to not be improving over time, but then we're getting comments from GWIC saying, "Oh, here we go, it's due to improved track conditions that we've got this reduction in this one measure." But that doesn't actually stand up in the context of—you're just shifting things from one category to another.

MATTHEW TUTT: There can be primary and secondary causes. So the greyhounds that might be—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: They're still dying because they raced. The dog wouldn't have died had it not been in that race.

MATTHEW TUTT: No.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand that Mr Griffin in his new role is talking about setting up a 10-dog racetrack. Do you know about this?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'm aware of the proposal, yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I thought we had got to the point where we well understood that six dogs was dangerous but not as dangerous as 10. Now we've got these proposals for a 10-greyhound race, with Mr Griffin saying this is really good for the betting agencies and for people who want to gamble on the dogs. Will GWIC be stepping in to stop that happening?

MATTHEW TUTT: As I understand, what the proposal is, it's for straight racing.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But 10 dogs.

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right, and straight racing, the data shows, is far safer as far as racing injuries go. The reason being, of course, amongst other things, that the greyhounds don't have to navigate corners. As I said, as I understand, that proposal is one that's also either occurring or will occur in Queensland, as I believe. It's not a new concept to have 10 dogs racing in straight racing.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'm glad you said that, because I had a memorable budget estimates a while back with former Minister Anderson, where I was asking him whether a straight track was safer than a round track. We went round and round in circles—puns intended—over that. It's great that we're acknowledging that the straight track is safer than a curved track, but we also know that the fewer number of dogs racing, the safer. Are we netting out the benefits of both of those and now saying, "Yes, but we don't have to worry about there being six dogs—there can be more than six if we've got a straight track"? Doesn't that just net off the safety, or is there some data showing that that's actually completely fine?

MATTHEW TUTT: We compile data in relation to both straight track racing and circle track.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: On a straight track, are 10 dogs safer or the same or riskier than six dogs?

MATTHEW TUTT: We haven't commenced in New South Wales with 10 dogs, so that data is not available at this point.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But based on the studies that were done a few years back, where we first took on board the evidence that a straight track was safer, even though we continued to build the curved ones, was anything in that research indicating that you could have an unlimited number of dogs running on a straight track, and it would be fine—that it would be just as safe as six?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'd have to take that on notice as to what the actual reports say in relation to that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I asked previously about GWIC's reticence to actually use its power to lay charges and prosecute under POCTAA in the same way that RSPCA NSW and the Animal Welfare League does. I think I was told in July 2024 that GWIC had commenced prosecutions on only three occasions. Were any prosecutions commenced by GWIC subsequent to July 2024?

MATTHEW TUTT: Yes. There was a matter that was dealt with in the Local Court at Wagga, which was a breach of the code of practice. There's at least that matter, and there's another matter which we've commenced very recently in—I think it's the Windsor Local Court.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So five prosecutions. I understand that a Mr Glenn Powell was sentenced in the Newcastle Local Court for animal cruelty in August this year. That case was pursued by the RSPCA rather than GWIC because GWIC didn't do it. I understand that Powell was already under suspension. Is there a reason why GWIC didn't pursue that?

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MATTHEW TUTT: GWIC obviously took regulatory action in relation to that matter. In that particular matter, a disqualification was imposed and that particular participant is still subject to a disqualification. At the time the decision was made not to prosecute and information was given to the complainant in that matter. That information led to a complaint being made to the RSPCA, and they prosecuted the matter.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Will his licence now be permanently revoked?

MATTHEW TUTT: That will be subject to some further disciplinary action, and that will be a matter for the decision-makers. But what is clear is that the greyhound racing rules provide that where a person has been convicted in a court of those sorts of offences, that disciplinary action can occur. With that, it would be likely that upon a finding by the decision-makers, that person's licence would be dealt with, with a severe penalty.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You can imagine that from a bystander's perspective, looking at this, you've got GWIC, which is tasked with overseeing the industry and ensuring that we don't get animal cruelty of that kind, we have the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League, which are incredibly poorly funded and have all of the other animals to deal with—you've just said that this person's chances of being disqualified permanently are reliant on them getting this finding of animal cruelty, which has now been given. We'll come back—clearly, you want to clarify that. That's fine. But we've also heard that GWIC has zero tolerance to animal cruelty. Wouldn't an ordinary person want to know why GWIC is not prosecuting more of these people itself in order to get them out of the industry, if they are committing animal cruelty offences?

MATTHEW TUTT: There are other ways that we can take disciplinary action to ensure that those participants are prohibited from the industry. The commission takes disciplinary action to disqualify, for life, many participants. Those matters are all subject to our disciplinary processes and published on our website. We do impose lifetime disqualifications from the industry, which prohibits those participants from having anything to do with greyhound racing, and we do that without having to go through the court processes for many of those matters. But, of course, when the particular circumstances of those matters require, we do consider taking action.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you think that five prosecutions, that we're aware of, that GWIC has undertaken in its lifetime is sufficient?

MATTHEW TUTT: If there are other matters that we need to, in the future, consider to go down the prosecution path, we will. But right now we're satisfied with the regulatory action that we've taken in relation to those matters.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Tutt, can you provide an update on how many dogs have died as part of the Aussie Mates in the States program in the US?

MATTHEW TUTT: I don't have that data before me, but the commission doesn't have any oversight role in relation to the USA program. That is a program run by GRNSW, who would hold that information.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So you don't have any way of monitoring that program and the deaths that are occurring in it?

MATTHEW TUTT: No, no formal role. No, we don't have a formal role in that program.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: My understanding is that originally GWIC visited the US as part of that program. Is that right?

MATTHEW TUTT: We did.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have there been further visits to the US to ensure those dogs are being rehomed?

MATTHEW TUTT: No, the only audit of that program was done in October 2023, and there hasn't been any further audit of the program by GWIC.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The last I heard, on 3 June 2025, was that there have been eight deaths. Are you aware whether there have been any more?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'm not aware.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Does Greyhound Racing NSW report to you in regard to how many dogs it is rehoming through that program?

MATTHEW TUTT: Yes, we do receive data from GRNSW.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Do they tell you how many dogs are actually rehomed once they arrive in the US?

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MATTHEW TUTT: I don't know what the level of detail is in relation to the information provided to us by GRNSW, but they certainly provide us with information of greyhounds that they rehome generally.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But they may not be including any rehoming statistics from the US?

MATTHEW TUTT: I believe they are. I can confirm that and provide the precise answer. But I believe it does contain information about greyhounds that are sent as part of the USA program.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Sorry, not just sent as part of the US program, but actually rehomed once they arrive in the US—that's the stats I'm trying to find. There have been, obviously, accusations that some of those dogs are ending up in kennels and that they're not rehomed, or that they are euthanised sometime after they've arrived in the US. And so, rather than getting the data as to how many greyhounds they've sent off, I'm wondering if you get data in regard to how many are actually rehomed once they arrive in other countries?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'd have to take that on notice. I'm not sure that we get data that goes to the homes once they arrive in the US. I know we certainly get information as part of the program. But what happens beyond that, I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Has GWIC consulted with RSPCA NSW or RSPCA Australia about the Wyee report or the Drake report—in particular, the findings and recommendations in those reports?

MATTHEW TUTT: That would be a matter for Commissioner Drake as to what's happened in relation to the Drake report.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So GWIC wouldn't meet at any point in the future to discuss the findings also of the Wyee report?

MATTHEW TUTT: If there's a need for us to do that at some point, we would certainly give that consideration.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you assessed that at this point there is no need?

MATTHEW TUTT: At this point the Wyee report has been provided to the Minister. It was part of, as we understand it, the evidence in Acting Commissioner Drake's inquiry. At this point, it's a matter that's under consideration by government. Should we have to consider that further after the Government has made a decision in relation to it, we would.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you seen the Drake report yourself as part of GWIC? Not yet?

MATTHEW TUTT: No.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The industry's Race Well app system is promoted by GWIC to protect GRNSW participants. I understand it was designed to educate participants and protect greyhounds from the harmful risks and impacts of drugging. I wonder how this app is really working, given the ongoing high volume of GWIC investigation cases and guilty findings relating to drugs. Have you found that the app has made any difference in those statistics?

MATTHEW TUTT: It's a bit hard for us to assess exactly the correlation between the Race Well app and prohibited substance matters. The Race Well app is designed to provide GWIC participants with information in relation to certain substances that will be registered. It is difficult to find a correlation between the efficacy of the app and our prohibited substances.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Why would that be difficult?

MATTHEW TUTT: How the participants might use the Race Well app and whether they use it, in fact, and then return a positive to a prohibited substance really is not part of our data capturing set.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So you have no idea if the app is effective at all?

MATTHEW TUTT: No, we anecdotally know that participants use the app to assess certain usages of medications such as withholding periods and the like. But as far as whether the app itself is correlated to prohibited substances, we don't capture that particular data.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You might want to take this one on notice: I'm wondering about the number of cases of prohibited substances that were found in the last 12 months.

MATTHEW TUTT: I'd have to take on notice the ones that relate to prohibited substance matters. I know in the last 12 months we've had a total of 113 disciplinary matters, but that of course includes things other than prohibited substances.

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The Hon. EMMA HURST: GWIC is a largely publicly funded agency which is required to undertake a statutory role in a transparent and accountable manner. My office understands that GWIC has refused to respond to questions from members of the public around animal welfare or from animal welfare or animal rights organisations, and I've cited many of these communications where questions have been denied. Why is it that GWIC is requiring organisations or members of the public to apply for formal GIPAA's in order to be able to obtain basic transparent information?

MATTHEW TUTT: GWIC will deal with information that is sought by members of the public. Certainly, it considers doing it within an informal way, but there will be certain instances where it will require a formal process through the GIPAA processes like you've mentioned. There are also processes where GWIC engages with stakeholders and organisations in a way where we conduct regular scheduled meetings and provide agendas. We do that, and we find that that's a meaningful way for us to engage with stakeholders. We've offered other organisations that same engagement service, but they've not availed themselves of that opportunity in some instances—but some do.

I know we do it in relation to organisations like, for instance, the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds. We meet on a regular basis. We have meetings with agendas, minutes are taken and preparations are done in relation to those meetings. We find that that's a good way for us to engage with that organisation. But, again, we've offered that to other similar organisations to engage in the same way, but that hasn't always been taken up.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: When you push back on an organisation that's seeking basic animal welfare information about the industry, how do you decide that they will need to apply and pay for a GIPAA process compared to providing the information that these organisations are requesting?

MATTHEW TUTT: We receive a lot of requests as part of our day-to-day operations. We like to have a formal process where we can engage with particular organisations so that there's a proper record and it's transparent. Of course, if anyone—organisations or individuals—wishes to make certain complaints or provide us with information, then we do undertake an assessment of that and investigate wherever appropriate.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: It's not about providing you information; it's about asking questions in regard to animal welfare matters.

MATTHEW TUTT: We will respond where appropriate, but we find that a meaningful way to do that is—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm just wondering where that boundary is in regard to "where appropriate". I understand that many organisations that may be in regional or rural areas may not be able to actually come in person or they may feel like the information that they need is detailed statistics, for example. It might not be suitable to have an informal online meeting and have a discussion or to come into the offices and have those kinds of meetings. If somebody is saying, "I just need some quick information about this," how do you make that decision process where those organisations have to go off and apply for a GIPAA?

MATTHEW TUTT: Where we get particular organisations requesting a lot of information on multiple occasions, we find that to engage meaningfully with those organisations, rather than provide information on an ad hoc basis whenever it might come in, is to formalise it through the structured and scheduled meetings. As I said, we do that already. We've offered to do that with other organisations. The other point to make in relation to our data is that we do put out our quarterly life cycle and injury reports. They're available for everyone—organisations and the public in general. We do provide those opportunities and those forums for those organisations.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Tutt. As this juncture, before I hand to Ms Faehrmann, Mr Draper and Ms Meagher are leaving us. Thank you very much for your attendance today and the work you do for the people of New South Wales.

(Simon Draper and Kate Meagher withdrew.)

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Barakat, I wanted to ask about the \$100 million harm minimisation fund, which is essentially the fine that was slapped on The Star casino back in 2022, I think. What has happened with that? What is that being spent on?

TAREK BARAKAT: It's still there. It's earmarked for expenditure in the gambling harm minimisation by government. There was \$3.4 million provided to support the work of the independent panel. There was another 6.4 provided to look into the statewide exclusion register, and then \$10 million each financial year for the last three financial years has been provided to the Responsible Gambling Fund. In all, I think there's about \$70.2 million left over that the Government will need to determine how to use, likely as part of its response to the

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panel report. That might include the implementation of statewide exclusion registers, facial recognition and things like that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Could you take on notice the details of the statewide exclusion register—I think you said \$6.4 million or something—and what that money has gone to in terms of if it's consultants, for what report and what it's being spent on?

TAREK BARAKAT: At the moment it hasn't all been spent. It's likely we will need to seek approval for more funds to actually develop the scheme. We're at a tender process at the moment, looking for a third party with the relevant technical expertise to appoint to construct this statewide exclusion register to link venues at the back end through a technical process to allow people to be excluded across the State. Yes, I can definitely take on notice how much of the 6.4 has been spent and on what.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: At this point, the Government has said it's not responding to the road map. We don't know where that's up to. It's sitting with the Government. It has been more than six months. There has been no commitment. In the *Roadmap for Gaming Reform*, it states very clearly about the \$100 million harm minimisation fund and says:

The Executive Committee supports use of the Fund to implement the account-based gaming system including communication and marketing, change management activities, evaluation and monitoring and any appropriate industry support and transitional requirements.

So it's being spent on other things in terms of what the Government would prefer to do other than account-based gaming?

TAREK BARAKAT: No. The remaining I think \$70-odd million—I can get you the exact figure on notice—is still sitting there and available. What was allocated by the Government for the independent panel and the \$6.4 million I spoke about in relation to exploring options for exclusion was allocated before the panel made the recommendation. The \$3.4 million obviously was there to support the panel's deliberations. The remainder is still there. As you said, the Government has yet to respond to that report, so it's a matter for the Government to determine how it wants to spend that remaining money.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Was the rest of it just quarantined until the Government makes up its mind about whether it's going to do anything that the roadmap has recommended?

TAREK BARAKAT: My understanding is it's quarantined to be used on gambling harm minimisation. Exactly how it's used will be a decision for the Government.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The \$10 million for the Office of Responsible Gambling—how much of a percentage of the office's total budget is that?

TAREK BARAKAT: The office's total budget for this financial year, 2025-2026, is \$34.5 million. That would include that \$10 million.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The office has been around for three or four years, is that right?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'd have to take it on notice. I think it's longer than that, though.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'd be keen to know if the \$10 million is additional to their usual budget and has provided a \$10 million boost, or whether it has been replacing, if you like, a shift—

TAREK BARAKAT: I can take that on notice. I see where you're going. I think the \$10 million is an additional \$10 million that would not have been provided, but in terms of whether or not that's increased the budget by \$10 million, it's a bit more complicated than that, given the fact that a large portion of the office's funding comes from the Responsible Gambling Levy on the two casinos. There's obviously been significant issues in the casino space, so the percentage of revenue that's derived from that, that goes back to the office, has actually been reducing. I can get you some detail on that on notice, but it's not as simple as topping it up by \$10 million. There's other factors at play.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Does the office get any money from pubs and clubs?

TAREK BARAKAT: They get a small portion through what's called the Community Benefit Payment Scheme, whereby if ILGA approves an application from a venue to increase its gaming machine threshold, so increase the amount of gaming machines it can have, ILGA can stipulate that venue then has to pay a lump sum payment to the Office of Responsible Gambling, or a payment over time, so it could be three years or five years, to the Office of Responsible Gambling. That money is then used to fund services in that local community where the gaming machine increase has occurred. The office also gets a hypothecation of \$5 million plus CPI from the point of consumption tax each year.

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Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: With the research projects that the Office of Responsible Gambling is funding, is there a requirement that harm reduction must be one of the aims of that research?

TAREK BARAKAT: The overall remit of the Office of Responsible Gambling is harm reduction. I think the vision—and I can take on notice the specific wording—is moving towards zero gambling harm. Everything they do is about trying to minimise harm in the community from poker machines. They've done research about the risks associated with live streaming and gambling; risks about gambling amongst secondary school students; links between gambling and domestic violence; the identification of gambling comorbidity in hospital settings; and obviously there's the New South Wales responsible gambling survey, which is the key piece of research they do on a regular basis.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Some of the research could be used that's being funded by this \$100 million fine, for example, that was supposed to go to harm reduction, to just research gambling. For example, cultural influences in terms of what influences people to gamble, *In it to win it: an interdisciplinary investigation of sports betting*—none of that mentions gambling harm. The effects of gambling advertisements on young people is about—it basically says, "Studying the effects of gambling advertisements on young people's perceptions of gambling and their gambling-related decision-making." That could actually be used by industry.

TAREK BARAKAT: I think every piece of research can be taken in a different way, I suppose, yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The reason I'm asking is I looked at the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, which is similar, and it does seem to have a lot more of a bent and leaning much more heavily towards gambling harm reduction in the research that they're funding. It was just a genuine question as to whether that was a requirement?

TAREK BARAKAT: As to whether it's a requirement of any kind, there's a responsible gambling trust deed and they have—whether that's set out in there as a requirement I can take on notice, but I can say that the focus of that organisation and the Responsible Gambling Fund trust—so the board that oversees it—is moving towards zero gambling harm. That is their driving force.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It would be great if you could take it on notice.

TAREK BARAKAT: Can I clarify two things I said earlier, if you have time?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Let me ask just one more question and you can maybe clarify soon-ish. I want to get an update about the ClubGRANTS review, which went to the Minister in October last year. I can't see any update except for the fact everything has just been advertised like there's no issue. What's happening with that?

TAREK BARAKAT: Again, it's a question for Government. At this stage, nothing has changed. The program will continue to run as it normally would. We have, as you said, undertaken a review and provided a report to Government. The Government is now considering that report. It will need to make a determination as to how it wishes to proceed.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The Independent Panel on Gaming Reform was also looking at ClubGRANTS in parallel. That's what it says.

TAREK BARAKAT: No. They were doing their work concurrently to the review.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's the word I'm looking for.

TAREK BARAKAT: They were separate processes. We did a review of the ClubGRANTS scheme and we consulted with industry, we consulted with community groups and we consulted with the public. It's just that these things were happening concurrently. The panel did its thing on developing its road map; at the same time we looked at ClubGRANTS. Both of those reports have now been provided to Government for it to consider.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I believe the Minister at some point may have said that the ClubGRANTS was an issue that the independent panel would be looking at in one of the budget estimates. I remember asking about a range of different things, and every single issue about pokies was going to that panel.

TAREK BARAKAT: I'll take it on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Now, we don't know what's happening with any of it.

TAREK BARAKAT: I can clarify that on notice for you, Ms Faehrmann, if that's all right.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I certainly hope we don't come back here in another six months and have to ask the same questions, and you can't tell me anything because everything's still sitting with this Government and

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they haven't acted on any of the reviews. Mr Barakat, can you provide on notice the staff organisational chart of Liquor and Gaming in terms of who does what—gambling is what I'm particularly interested in, but you can do liquor as well—and the Office of Responsible Gambling, in terms of the staff structure for that as well?

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes. I can do that, absolutely.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you have work to do with the Government not coming back?

TAREK BARAKAT: Quite a lot, yes. I was explaining previously some of the things that we've been doing.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I take that back. I do take that back. I know public officials and public servants are working very hard. I actually take that back.

TAREK BARAKAT: I appreciate that, thank you.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It's the Minister who is not doing as much as he should be.

The CHAIR: Do you have any more, crossbench?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We do.

The CHAIR: You've got more. It's never ending.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Mr Tutt, how many kennel premises has GWIC inspected in the last 12 months?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'd have to take that on notice, the exact number.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That would be very useful.

MATTHEW TUTT: I can come back to you in relation to one that I took on notice about prohibited substances. There were 40 charges related to breach of prohibited substances in the last financial year, 2024-25, of which eight related to permanently banned prohibited substances.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If you could take on notice how many kennel premises GWIC inspected in the last 12 months and also in each of the previous three financial years, that would be very useful.

MATTHEW TUTT: I'll take that on notice. They form part of our annual report, I believe. I'll do that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I think I've asked you about the 10-dog straight track. Apparently, it's already killed 12 greyhounds in Queensland, their 10-dog straight track. That doesn't sound particularly safe.

MATTHEW TUTT: I'm not aware of the stats from Queensland.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: In the financial year 2023-24, the total mortality figures show 455 greyhounds having illness recorded as the cause of death. Does GWIC record the types of illness to track things like blood lines, cancers and bone cancers—things like that?

MATTHEW TUTT: We don't go into that level of detail as part of our reports. But if there are details provided to us by participants with certifications from veterinarians, we would have some documentation about that, but we don't report on the particular types of illness.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Looking at greyhound retirements, the number of greyhounds retired under the category of "retained by industry participant as pet or for breeding" continues increasing. For 2024-2025 financial year, 1,359 or 41 per cent of them were apparently retained as a pet. Is GWIC concerned that over 1,000 dogs a year are being kept by participants with no oversight except for that 12-month check-in without any further socialisation requirements or any sort of obligation to report their deaths?

MATTHEW TUTT: Every greyhound that's with a participant that dies is required to be reported to us, and it's not just the—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sorry, even when it's a greyhound that is no longer registered with GWIC?

MATTHEW TUTT: If it's with a participant, it's still on our register. Every greyhound that is with a participant is on our register, and there are reporting obligations in relation to those. But it's not just the 12-month check-in in relation to retired greyhounds. There will be kennel inspections at participants' premises that might have a number of racing greyhounds but also retired greyhounds. They're still subject to inspections. There are requirements within the code of practice that pertain to retired greyhounds as they do to other greyhounds. It's not just the check-in that's part of a requirement for a retired greyhound.

CORRECTED

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If they need to be checked in to eTrac every 12 months, presumably you could go into eTrac right now and be able to tell me how many retired greyhounds retained by participants are missing or have outdated information.

MATTHEW TUTT: Yes, that data would be available in our system. That's right.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are you able to maybe on notice—

MATTHEW TUTT: I'll provide the precise number on notice, but that's data that we do capture.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are you aware or do you track how many greyhounds GWIC has approved to be transferred to an unregistered person who resides at the same address as the participant?

MATTHEW TUTT: We do track greyhounds that are rehomed by a participant to a third-party non-participant, so that data is available. In relation to whether it goes to the same premises, we would know that data by virtue of the fact that it goes to a third-party non-participant at the same address, so that would be data that we would be able to capture.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Could you provide on notice how many there are at the moment?

MATTHEW TUTT: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Taking into account you saying that if the greyhound is retired, even if they're off book, they're with a participant and so they are sort of subject to that extra level of check. Presumably, though, if you're retiring them at your home but with someone else who happens to live there—that seems like a loophole.

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right, and this is certainly a matter that the commission's aware of that we will be looking at. If there are loopholes that need closing, then the commission would certainly look at those.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand Greyhound Racing NSW has the highest injury rate in Australasia and possibly globally, with a rate of 37.8 injuries per thousand starts. Is that your understanding?

MATTHEW TUTT: The precise figures, I'd have to take on notice. I don't have that to hand.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If you could confirm that, that would be very useful. Also if you could detail the injury rates for each of the New South Wales greyhound tracks for the last financial year and then also comparing to the three years prior, that would be very useful.

MATTHEW TUTT: We'll take that on notice. What I can say, to go back to the euthanasia or sudden deaths at racetracks, is that it has declined since GWIC's commencement from 1.2 per 1,000 starts in 2018-19 to 0.15 in 2024-25, which represents a decline of about 88 per cent.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I've got here that total track-related deaths have increased by 58 per cent.

MATTHEW TUTT: That's in relation to the category E that I was referring to.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That's just category E?

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Which is my point. You can say that they're reducing off-track when they're all being shepherded off and killed off-track. But when you put that together and you look at the total number of deaths relating to injuries on the track, they're increasing.

MATTHEW TUTT: I take your point. But, as I said previously, the off-track related mortalities are ones that go through a process where those greyhounds—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'm sure it's a nicer death for them, but it's still a death related to their injury on the track, and yet GWIC is drawing this analysis and saying that somehow that means that we've got safer tracks than we used to. Clearly that's just pushing data from one thing to another. Is GWIC aware of Greyhound Racing NSW telling advocates, journalists and members of the public to stop sharing their race videos due to copyright issues? Does it concern you if they were?

MATTHEW TUTT: That would be a matter for GRNSW. The commission is not responsible for the race footage.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Who owns and controls footage of greyhound racing in New South Wales?

MATTHEW TUTT: As I understand it, Greyhound Racing NSW. Certainly not the commission.

CORRECTED

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is GWIC aware of any arrangements that Greyhound Racing NSW has with Sky Racing that might impact on the copyright and the ability to use that footage?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'm not aware of those relationships.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is GWIC still able to request that footage from Greyhound Racing NSW?

MATTHEW TUTT: If the commission requires footage, we're in a position to receive that and make that request.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And there are no restrictions—your legal people haven't identified a restriction coming out of some arrangement with Sky?

MATTHEW TUTT: No. If the commission required footage from GRNSW in relation to matters that we officiate, including race meetings, there wouldn't, to my understanding, be any impediment to that being provided.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: On 22 May this year, racing proceeded at Wentworth Park despite severe weather which had killed at least three people to the north and generated multiple weather warnings. Racing was abandoned at Dapto and Richmond. The stewards report mentioned showers in the weather status but persistent heavy rainfall during kennelling. The BOM radar showed heavy rainfall persisting throughout the race meeting. Did the Wentworth Park GWIC stewards authorise that race meeting to proceed?

MATTHEW TUTT: Yes. Every race meeting that proceeds does so under the supervision of GWIC stewards.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What is GWIC's policy for abandoning racing in extreme weather like that?

MATTHEW TUTT: If there is extreme weather and there's an imminent risk to greyhounds or participants, the commission stewards will make a decision to not proceed. Not knowing the specifics of the race meeting that you're referring to, what I can say is that our stewards don't proceed with race meetings in circumstances where the track might be unsafe.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is that at their discretion though? Is it reviewable? Did they make the wrong decision?

MATTHEW TUTT: It's the decision of the stewards, but they take into account some scientific tools that they use to assess the stability or the water content on the tracks.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Tutt, it's my understanding that when Greyhound Racing NSW participant numbers are quoted by the industry, there may be some double counting. A participant could be an owner, a breeder or a trainer, or potentially even all three. I'm wondering if you have any oversight into that and whether there's any double or triple counting, or whether you've heard of that.

MATTHEW TUTT: Of participants having multiple registration types?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Yes. In regard to the number of participants quoted as being involved in the industry, if we add them all up and people are in more than one category, that inflates the number of people actually involved within the industry.

MATTHEW TUTT: In our annual report we outline the total number of registrations held. We make it clear that that may include multiple registrations held by participants, but we also break it down to individual registrations held, such as trainer or breeder, which is a relatively common combination of registration types.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you heard, though, that the industry then uses those total figures to say that this is the number of people involved in the industry?

MATTHEW TUTT: No, I'm not aware of that. We put that in our annual report. It's there for everyone to see.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I know that you were alerted to a greyhound that was being forced to race with terminal cancer. Can I get an update on the investigation into that case?

MATTHEW TUTT: Yes. That's still ongoing. That greyhound has been prohibited from racing until such time as we obtain veterinary information, which will be reviewed by the commission's chief veterinary officer before a decision is made in relation to that greyhound's racing future.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Do you have a rough timeline in regard to that investigation?

CORRECTED

MATTHEW TUTT: I don't, although I believe that there's going to be an assessment this week or next week by a specialist veterinarian.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What's the current process? Is there a process underway to appoint a permanent CEO of GWIC? I notice that you've been acting in the role now for some time. Is there a process currently underway to have that position filled permanently?

MATTHEW TUTT: That's really a matter for the commissioners. That hasn't commenced at this point.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: It hasn't commenced, to your awareness?

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right, and I'm still only acting. There's been no recruitment commenced.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: We asked some questions before in regard to Mr Steve Griffin being referred to as "Handsy". I'm wondering if you've heard of the term "octopus" used to describe Mr Griffin?

MATTHEW TUTT: Yes, I have. Again—and I want to be clear on this—that also was a term, I believe, that was referred to at the select committee. As I said, that term—I believe, the term "Handsy" was also used, but they're matters that are part of the public record at the time.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: They were raised because, I believe, Mr Latham had heard from staff and other people involved in the organisation that these were nicknames that had been given to Mr Griffin. Had you heard those terms being used within the context of GWIC as a workplace outside of that inquiry?

MATTHEW TUTT: That's really testing the memory from when the select committee occurred. I'm familiar with the terms, but—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So you haven't heard them being used within the workplace context after the inquiry?

MATTHEW TUTT: They may have been used after the inquiry, with reference—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But did you hear them being used?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'd heard them being used only—I recall from when they were used at the select committee, but—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But not outside that?

MATTHEW TUTT: It could have been, Ms Hurst. It could have been used.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Commissioner Drake, I have one more question for you. Apologies, I thought I had finished my questions to you, but I got a bit—

LEA DRAKE: If I could just correct something from before. I was worried after I'd finished giving my evidence that I told you that it was only the members of my team internally that had copies of the report. But there were also five counsel who appeared at various times who would have had access to that material—barristers.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And they were people representing different witnesses?

LEA DRAKE: No, me—counsel assisting—just at different times. I only mentioned the team and I forgot the barristers—don't tell them I said that—but it was them too, sorry.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's all right. You may have answered this, but I think I got distracted with the issues that you've been experiencing around accusations around procedural fairness and what the Minister had said this morning. Could I just clarify what the reason was for that second extension?

LEA DRAKE: Just the workload. I was having trouble getting it done. I thought it was possible but, given the time we had to spend on operational matters, involving not issues, really, about welfare or the future viability of Greyhound Racing NSW but more about the operational issues within GRNSW, that took up a lot of time and writing that became a bigger and bigger task. In the end, if I wanted to finish it and do it properly, it just took that extra time. In fact, we pressed the button at midnight and all of us, the team together, had a group photo and went home. That's all. It was just, in the end, workload.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: On the hardship exemptions and the shutdown period a little while ago, I asked you about the data for that. Since then, the review has happened. Does Liquor and Gaming or does ILGA, potentially, have all of that data now in terms of what is being granted to which club? Is that transparent now? Forget about transparency. Do you have the data, to begin with?

TAREK BARAKAT: The data as to which clubs or which venues are accessing which exemptions?

CORRECTED

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

TAREK BARAKAT: I think Mr Farlow or Mr Barrett asked me the same question, so I'll take it on notice. If it's appropriate for us to provide that specific breakdown, then I'm happy to provide that on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: We don't know whether some of the clubs that may have been granted a hardship exemption, for example, ages ago—years and years ago—could technically be in the top 20 of the most profitable—

TAREK BARAKAT: I think that's the fundamental problem that this review was looking at. That's why it has gone to the panel and the panel has said that the six-hour shutdown period should be maintained and the existing exemptions should be rescinded. The Government is obviously considering that, but that is the panel's recommendation, I think partly for that reason—the hardship exemption granted in 2003 or something that still applies, and there's a possibility that there no longer is any kind of hardship.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: My office actually did a bit of research into the top 30 most profitable clubs and was quite surprised that only about five of them didn't have an exemption, including one which is quite extraordinary—the Cabra-Vale Diggers. They are saying in their most recent annual report that they will be the premier club resort in New South Wales and that they are planning a 140-room Novotel hotel plus two world-class restaurants. That's Cabra-Vale and then the other one they have is Campbelltown. They are also planning a hotel that will be built above the club. Is what we are seeing—and maybe Mr Crawford may also want to answer this—a move from patrons away from the casinos, not being able to do what they want at the casinos, and heading to the clubs, with all the clubs now wanting to build hotels as well in their facilities?

TAREK BARAKAT: I don't know if that's the reason the clubs are building hotels and whatnot in the facilities, but I think that is something that we are keeping an eye on. I know the commission is also keeping an eye on whether there is a transition from casino play to pubs and clubs. I think, to be frank, the casinos have both said publicly that they believe that this is occurring, so it may well be happening. I don't necessarily know if that's why clubs are transitioning to things like building hotels, though.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you know whether there are many clubs that have got hotels?

TAREK BARAKAT: Not off the top of my head, but I'm sure if that's of interest we can look into it.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It looks like an emerging trend, I'd have to say, which would seem to suggest that they are not being taxed enough and people are losing way too much on their pokies, plus maybe that road map needs to come into effect. Mr Honey, do you have anything to say on that?

CHRIS HONEY: No, nothing more to add on that, other than anecdotally one or two of the clubs have told us that they are investing in property as a means of diversifying their income streams.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Mr Honey, a couple of years back Aristocrat Leisure was found to have been offering club managers some form of inducements, it looked like, in the form of free travel. In the media reports at the time, it said that ILGA was going to be looking into that and investigating the issue. Did it do that?

CHRIS HONEY: There is an investigation underway. I will pass that across to Mr Barakat because he can clarify.

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, there's actually an investigation by Liquor and Gaming NSW into that issue, which we would then provide to ILGA. I can check on the exact status of it, but I think our investigation into the manufacturers has now concluded. But the process is that we refer that to ILGA for ILGA to consider and make a determination around whether or not there is a disciplinary complaint to be seen here. That's where things are at the moment.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Because that was a couple of years ago.

TAREK BARAKAT: It's a pretty complex investigation, to be honest. It's not unusual for investigations of this nature to take some time. There are a large number of manufacturers and there are a large number of clubs and a large number of documentations to be sorted through. But part of that investigation in relation to the manufacturers has now been closed off and we will now provide that to ILGA. ILGA will need to consider it.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: How many club managers did you catch?

TAREK BARAKAT: We haven't "caught" anyone and it's not appropriate for me to talk about it any further, other than to say our part of that aspect of this is now complete and it's now up to ILGA to make a decision as to what penalty, if any, should be applied.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Did you always anticipate it was going to take that long?

CORRECTED

TAREK BARAKAT: I didn't anticipate one way or another. But I don't necessarily think it's unusual for complex investigations to take some time.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But, from a public accountability perspective, if quite serious allegations get flagged in the media and then we have a government department saying they're going to look into it and do something about it but then we're over two years later and we still haven't got any news of what's happened, do you think that's quick enough, really?

TAREK BARAKAT: I think, from a public accountability perspective, people would expect us to be undertaking an appropriate investigation, and that will take as long as it takes and it's not appropriate for us to be commenting publicly or in the media about the ins and outs of that investigation while it's underway.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But you would expect Parliament to ask, wouldn't you, where it's—we can't just trust a department to take two years and not ask questions.

TAREK BARAKAT: Of course. I'm happy for you to ask the questions. I'm just saying that I can't give you any detail given it's still under consideration.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But is there an estimated time when that might be—

TAREK BARAKAT: Like I've explained, our role in this—our investigation of the manufacturers has been completed. We'll now provide that to ILGA and ILGA will need to consider the evidence that we provide.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You said you'd completed it and now it will be provided, but it sounds like—

TAREK BARAKAT: ILGA is the decision-making—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: —it hasn't yet been provided to ILGA.

TAREK BARAKAT: It hasn't yet. It's either in the process of or very close to being provided. I don't think ILGA would have been—the board itself would not have considered it yet. It may take some time, too, for ILGA to make a decision as to what the appropriate next steps are.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But it's still sitting with you, then? You're saying that it has been investigated; you've done that bit.

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Why hasn't it already been handed over? When was that investigation concluded?

TAREK BARAKAT: There's just a process that needs to be gone through. The investigation might be complete but we don't just hand a whole lot of documents over to ILGA. We need to collate that into an appropriate disciplinary complaint so that ILGA can then assess that complaint and make a determination.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But it's still sitting with you, then—

TAREK BARAKAT: No, it's just going through that process.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It's to go through that process. You have not provided it. It's not a hard question. When was the investigation finalised?

TAREK BARAKAT: Very recently.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What does that mean?

TAREK BARAKAT: I can take on notice the exact date. I don't have that off the top of my head.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Does very recently mean yesterday or does it mean a few months ago?

TAREK BARAKAT: I would say in the last couple of months, last month.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But then it takes a period of time, does it, to actually put that into a form where it can go to ILGA?

TAREK BARAKAT: The investigation, the evidence, our findings, our recommendations need to be collated into what is called a disciplinary complaint. That is then provided to ILGA, which ILGA assesses and considers and makes a determination.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: When you said the investigation was completed a couple of months ago, not that bit of it.

CORRECTED

TAREK BARAKAT: That's not really the investigation. That's the collation of our findings, recommendations and evidence to be in a format to provide to the authority. These are complex investigations, Ms Boyd.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: The actual writing of the report is not part of the investigation, then? The actual findings from the investigation is not part of the investigation?

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, I guess you could classify the whole process as being part of the investigation. What I'm saying is our investigative activities were completed. We then collated that into a disciplinary complaint and we'll provide that to the Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority. It will then consider it.

The CHAIR: I've got a couple of questions on behalf of the member for Murray. I suppose they're to you, Mr Barakat. Can you confirm whether gambling companies operating in New South Wales are legally entitled to retain stolen money even after a court has found that those funds are the proceeds of crime?

TAREK BARAKAT: I would be surprised if they were able to hold onto stolen money if that was proven, but I can take that on notice. It's not something that has come across my desk before, but I'm happy to take that on notice for you.

The CHAIR: Given that 50 per cent of problem gamblers admit to committing crimes to fund their gambling, what work has the Government undertaken to quantify the scale of gambling-related crime in New South Wales?

TAREK BARAKAT: Gambling-related crime in New South Wales? I don't know that we have done anything in that space. I know there was a Crime Commission report in 2022, Project Islington, which looked at the amount of proceeds of crime that were put through poker machines. Off the back of that, this Government committed to doing things like establishing an independent panel and trialling cashless gaming.

The CHAIR: But that's a different issue to whether or not people are committing crimes to fund problem gambling. You don't know if—

TAREK BARAKAT: I don't know the answer to that question, but Project Islington identified that people who had made money from committing crimes were gambling that money through poker machines.

The CHAIR: I think we're talking at cross-purposes, but I appreciate that. The last question I have is for Dr Levesque. Can you give us an update on the progress of the projects funded through the motor neurone disease research grants? What milestones have been achieved so far?

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC LEVESQUE: Yes. There are three grants that were awarded as part of that call for proposal: a project at Macquarie University, at University of Sydney and also Sydney Local Health District. Those projects are still ongoing so I've not received reports yet from those grants. I think that the money was allocated in the previous financial year, in 2023-24, so it's still recent. Usually, research projects take two to three years, depending. So really this funding is ongoing, but the money has been allocated.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just two follow-up questions on that, Mr Barakat. At what point is the Minister involved in that process between—

TAREK BARAKAT: He's not.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You don't have to pass it to the Minister, who then passes it to ILGA?

TAREK BARAKAT: No. Under the relevant legislation, New South Wales police and Liquor and Gaming NSW can refer disciplinary complaints to ILGA for its consideration.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And is that what's happening here?

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So it's not stuck on the Minister's desk.

TAREK BARAKAT: No.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And the other question is, I know that the *ClubGRANTS Guidelines* were updated to clarify whether that money could be spent on overseas trips and things. Did that come out of this investigation?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'd have to take on notice whether the investigation was the genesis of that. I think they are separate issues. There's a question from clubs of whether they can fund—one example is young people from the local community going and walking the Kokoda Trail, for example. So I think it is a separate issue.

CORRECTED

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand, in the *ClubGRANTS Guidelines*, there's specific reference to club managers going and using ClubGRANTS money for educational trips. I'm just wondering if that came out of a general investigation into when clubs' managers were going overseas, whether it was paid for by someone like Aristocrat or by the ClubGRANTS scheme.

TAREK BARAKAT: No. That's what the investigation is about. The *ClubGRANTS Guidelines* update was separate. My recollection is it was more in relation to the—because usually the funding from ClubGRANTS is about funding something in your local area, that gives back to the community. So the question is, "Is sending someone or anyone overseas an appropriate use of those funds?" That's why the guidelines were updated. But that is a separate thing to the investigation.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: They do refer to executives. So they are talking about the managers being sent over.

TAREK BARAKAT: But that would be with ClubGRANTS money, as opposed to funded by Aristocrat under the guidelines or Aristocrat or anyone else.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I know. I'm just wondering if, when you were looking into it generally, if you were looking at 40, 50 different clubs, whether you were looking at when they had gone overseas and what that was funded by, whether some of that ended up being attributable to ClubGRANTS instead.

TAREK BARAKAT: I can't tell you at this point whether the investigation, which is still underway on the clubs' side of things—what that's found. It's an ongoing investigation. So it's not appropriate to talk about it.

CHRIS HONEY: Ms Boyd, can I just clarify on behalf of Mr Barakat? When we have a case put to us for consideration for disciplinary action, we need a brief of evidence that is very, very strong because clearly it could be appealed. So obviously it's very important that we get it in the right form, the right format, such that, when we make a decision, if it is appealed, there's not an awful lot of expense then taken to turn it into documentation that's appropriate to go to the relevant body.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So this is a standard amount of time? This is a normal amount of time for when these things would come to you?

CHRIS HONEY: Not considered unusual.

The CHAIR: Thank you to all our officials. I don't think there are any questions from the Government. That concludes today's hearing and our inquiry. We very much appreciate you coming today, all our public officials. There were a few matters taken on notice. The secretariat will be in contact in due course. Again, thank you all for coming and giving evidence today. We appreciate that and your work for the people of New South Wales. Thank you very much, and we'll see you next time.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.