

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 8 - CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wednesday 3 September 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND DIGITAL GOVERNMENT, EMERGENCY SERVICES, YOUTH JUSTICE

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Emma Hurst (Chair)

The Hon. Scott Barrett

Ms Abigail Boyd

The Hon. Mark Buttigieg

Dr Amanda Cohn

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

The Hon. Wes Fang

Ms Sue Higginson

The Hon. Aileen MacDonald

The Hon. John Ruddick

The Hon. Emily Suvaal

PRESENT

The Hon. Jihad Dib, *Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Youth Justice*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Welcome to the third hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service for the inquiry into budget estimates 2025-2026. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Emma Hurst, and I am the Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Dib and accompanying officials to this hearing.

Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Customer Service and Digital Government, Emergency Services, and Youth Justice. I ask everyone in the room to turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence that they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing, so I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures. Welcome and thank you for giving time to give evidence today. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. I also remind Mr Head and Mr Tidball that they do not need to be sworn since they have already been sworn before the Committee during this inquiry.

CORRECTED

Mr GRAEME HEAD, AO, Secretary, Department of Customer Service, on former affirmation

Ms LEIGH SANDERSON, Deputy Secretary, Policy, Strategy and Governance, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Ms LAURA CHRISTIE, Government Chief Information and Digital Officer, and Deputy Secretary, Digital NSW, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Mr GREG WELLS, Managing Director, Service NSW, Department of Customer Service, sworn and examined

Ms MANDY YOUNG, Chief Executive, State Insurance Regulatory Authority, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Ms KYLIE DE COURTENEY, Managing Director, NSW Telco Authority, sworn and examined

Ms DANUSIA CAMERON, Registrar General, Department of Customer Service, sworn and examined

Mr MICHAEL TZIMOULAS, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Customer Service, sworn and examined

Mr SAM TOOHEY, Executive Director, Emergency Management, NSW Premier's Department, affirmed and examined

Commissioner JEREMY FEWTRELL, AFSM, Commissioner, Fire and Rescue NSW, sworn and examined

Commissioner MIKE WASSING, AFSM, Commissioner, NSW State Emergency Service, affirmed and examined

Commissioner TRENT CURTIN, Commissioner, NSW Rural Fire Service, affirmed and examined

Mr MICHAEL TIDBALL, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, on former oath

Mr PAUL O'REILLY, Acting Deputy Secretary, System Reform, Department of Communities and Justice, affirmed and examined

Ms KELLY-ANNE STEWART, Acting Executive Director, Youth Justice, Department of Communities and Justice, affirmed 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 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon, we will hear from the departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions, there will be questions from Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 15 minutes allocated to 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. AILEEN MacDONALD: Thank you, Minister, for attending today. You would be aware of the Business Connect program and what it does for small businesses in New South Wales, including multicultural and First Nations—you are?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When did you become aware that the program would not receive funding in the 2025-26 budget?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Good morning to everybody. Thanks, Ms MacDonald. You may be aware that the Business Connect program actually falls under the purview of Minister Saffin. In Service NSW, we've got "Service for Business New South Wales", which is, effectively, a concierge service. That's the one that I take responsibility for.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When Business Connect finishes, it will be the concierge service, then, that takes on that role?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It will be continuing, Ms MacDonald. This is a service that has been operating for a while. What it does is it runs like a concierge service in terms of the service that—let's say, for example, I want to open a business, and I need a little bit of support; I don't know what to do in terms of regulations, in terms of how to apply for licensing and things like that. That's still available, and that's part of Service NSW, and that's something that I've got the responsibility for. But the Business Connect program actually falls under the small business Minister. We're hosting them in Service NSW.

CORRECTED

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Because it comes under that purview of Customer Service, were you consulted or aware when Business Connect was being—whether it was going to continue?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I remember it really came out as one of those budget issues within Minister Saffin's portfolio, and I am aware of it. But in terms of the consultation, we've got over 100 concierges across our service centres, spread pretty much right across the State.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I know.

Mr JIHAD DIB: As you can appreciate, I have to look at the things that I'm responsible for. We work collaboratively with all colleagues. In terms of the decision about the exact timing, frankly, I don't know of the exact date that I was told or whatever—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You were not consulted?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It was not really a consultation process for me, because it's not part of my portfolio. We play, as we do, a role of support right across Service. We see that with the emergency management, we see that with the grants distribution, we see that with other responsibilities that we have, and we play that supporting role. We're happy to host them, and I know that Minister Saffin later this week will speak more to it, I imagine. There are a range of things that we do to support businesses, like the business charter. Service for business, really, is a great way of supporting businesses and people who want to start up a business but just don't know how and don't know what requirements they might have or frameworks they've got to work in.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is the business concierge service going to be able to fulfil that role if it's just a phone call to—really all they're going to do is refer that person on to a website.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think it's more than a phone call, Ms MacDonald. I've been in service centres where I've actually seen firsthand people actually have an appointment. You can make an appointment to meet with a concierge; you can ask for different advice. They help you get to where you need to go. If I was to start, for example, a window tinting service in Bankstown for cars—which wouldn't be too much of a surprise, but let's say I was going to do that—and I didn't really know how to set up the business, I would go to them and I'd be asking, "Look, what are the things that I need to do? How do I get my ABN? How do I need to register this? What are the compliance issues?" That's the role that they'll play. You can do that in person. You can make an appointment and you can meet with somebody who will help you. They may be able to help you in doing some of the work, but ideally what we want to do is make sure that we direct people to the right place. We've also got business tools that we provide online. The support service is there, and that's what we do through service for business.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Would the business concierge service provide specialist business advice on, say, marketing, sales, financial planning, business strategy, like Business Connect did?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't know in terms of—and I don't want to say something that I'm not 100 per cent sure of, Ms MacDonald. They would provide support and ways that they can support you. Whether they'll actually do the digital stuff for you, that I don't know. But, certainly, if it's a meeting with somebody who effectively is a concierge who can help you get to where you need to go and give you some advice on things that you need to do, then I imagine that's part of the whole big picture. There are some things online that we can then direct somebody to, and even help them with. One of the things about Service NSW, and certainly part of our Digital Inclusion Strategy, is that whole sense of inclusion. So if we need to help somebody who can't access it, we'll provide that support to them; we'll help guide them through that. That's the kind of role that the business concierge can do.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Have you spoken to any of the business concierge to understand their concerns about replacing Business Connect? Because Business Connect is a specialist service, whereas a concierge is almost like a doorman.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'd like to think they're a little bit more than that, Ms MacDonald. As I said, I've actually seen them in operation. One of the things that I love doing is actually visiting all of the agencies. The number of service centres that I visit, as it is with fire stations or the RFS or the SES or Youth Justice Centres—I actually love getting out and about and meeting the people who are there on the front lines.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So you've spoken on the front lines. Where will they be based?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've spoken to people in—most recently I was up in Tweed Heads. We were there for an opening, a relocation of a service centre. I spoke to the team up there. I can't remember the name of the manager, but she was absolutely fantastic. They were fantastic. I had a chat with them. I've been out to, obviously, Bankstown is my local one—I go to Roselands when I need to renew something. I've been out Penrith way.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: They're all over.

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, there's 116 across the State. In addition to that we've also got what we might call kiosks in really small say rural or remote areas.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Like hubs, yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Then we've got the outreach bus, which is our, for want of a better word, Kangaroo Bus.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What qualifications and experience do the concierges have compared with, say, the independent business advisers who delivered the Business Connect services?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Probably when it comes to that, Ms MacDonald, I might, if it's okay with you, refer to the managing director, because it's about the specifics, in terms of the employment. I don't want to lead you down a path that I'm not sure of.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If I can—I'm just marking that—I'll come back in the afternoon to ask that question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure, and Mr Wells can probably give you a lot more information about the sorts of skills. There's also a range of soft skills that we expect in people. Part of that is interpersonal skills, the EQ, but obviously they've got to have a good understanding of what happens in the whole business ecosystem. These aren't also big businesses; some of these are microbusinesses, like a mum or a dad who is just trying to make a start somewhere.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, I understand. Will you commit that the business concierge will provide the same level of service that is currently undertaken by Business Connect? I think it's amazing that the Business Connect program will finish on 30 September, right before Small Business Month—but anyway.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms MacDonald, and I'm not trying to be tricky here, but, as you can imagine, this is an area that's in somebody else's portfolio, and they're best placed to speak about it. What I can tell you is that we will continue with our concierge service—our Service NSW business stuff. We will continue with that, and we will continue providing the best service that we possibly can. That's what I can commit to. As for the other stuff, you can appreciate that it's not really my place or the right thing for me to comment about something in somebody else's portfolio.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So next budget estimates when I ask you about the business concierge service, I'll be able to draw down deeper about how many people it's helped in comparison to, say, Business Connect.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm happy to keep having these conversations, as you know. We'll keep doing what we can do, but what I will also say is let's also be realistic about what the role is and what it isn't. We'll continue with those conversations but, most significantly, Mr Wells will be able to go through a little bit more of that detail with you this afternoon.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, can I just get you to creep a bit closer to that microphone or pull it closer to you, please.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is that better? Sorry, I'm a little bit croaky today. I don't know how everyone else goes, but the pollen really gets up my nose.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: If it helps, we're happy with short succinct answers so you don't have to speak so much, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No worries. Don't ask me an open-ended question.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, on 12 July you announced a 10-year contract with Coulson Aviation. Did you have ultimate sign-off on that tender?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The 12th of July—that was a tender that went through a proper procurement process, and I think we answered that in the last thing. I was aware of it. Obviously it was done at an arm's length from me, in terms of open to tender, people were able to apply, Coulson was chosen as the successful tenderer and I ended up signing on that recommendation.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You'd have ultimate sign-off on it, though?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, were you aware when the tender was awarded that Coulson was being investigated by the ATSB?

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I wasn't aware of that. I think one of the things that we need to be really clear about is that the tender process, therefore, was open to everybody. They were part of that. I accepted the recommendations of that process. I've spoken about it before, in terms of the decision to try and secure aerial support for a long period of time was based on a number of things. One is the overlapping fire seasons that we're seeing—I think I've spoken about that before in here. The other one is also the availability of aircraft that's there for us, literally at any given time. We're the only State that owns the Chinook; we're the State that owns the LAT. We've got some really good assets, but the truth is that when the fires are raging all over the place, we need as many as we can. That's why we've looked to make sure that we can at least secure aerial assets that can help us with our firefighting efforts.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Coming back to the tender process, are you aware of how many applicants you had for that tender?

Mr JIHAD DIB: They would all be commercial in confidence.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The number of applications that were made?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It would all be commercial in confidence at this stage.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Were you aware of how long the application process was open for?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Barrett, I accepted the recommendations of the process. Off the top of my head, I can't tell you. I'm happy to refer to the RFS commissioner. He might have more specific details about the length of the thing. But it was all within our procurement guidelines, and it worked within the State procurement guidelines. In terms of that specific detail, I can ask the commissioner.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can I just get the commissioner to confirm. Was it a six-week period over December-January?

TRENT CURTIN: I don't have the period that the tender was open for. I know that it was compliant with the New South Wales procurement framework, and all the legislative requirements, but I don't have the details here as to how long the tender was open.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Would you be able to provide that for us on notice?

TRENT CURTIN: We'd have to take it on notice.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Barrett, I also just want to note that Coulson was actually a provider of services at the time, as well. It wasn't that they'd just come in and had nothing to do with government or with the RFS beforehand.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: No problem with Coulson, Minister. Would it not be part of your oversight to look into those sorts of things: how many people applied for this, what was the period that it was open. Because my intel is it was open for a very short period—over bushfire season, mind you—which would make it very difficult for a lot of these applicants to actually pull together a tender that saw a significant change in the way that we delivered aerial support during fires, and would have been almost prohibitive to others applying.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm sure that the RFS will be able to verify that information for you down the track—later this afternoon. But I will also say that it wasn't a hidden process. People were well aware of it. It had been advertised. People in the industry were well aware that we were looking for something. It was within the guidelines of our State procurement. I'm comfortable with all of that. Some of the things that you're referring to maybe could have been done differently. I'll accept that and look into it a bit further. I think you've got a commitment from the commissioner that later this afternoon he can go through some more of those details with you.

People in the industry—industry operators—were aware that there was a tender out. In the end, the process was that recommendations were made. The recommendation to me was that Coulson was successful—the best of the tenderers and I signed off on that. As I said, the express idea was that I wanted to make sure that we, as a State, were well protected. We saw with the fires in LA—I think late last year—that they sucked up a lot of the resources, and it meant that those planes were not available. Planes aren't the only way to fight a fire, but they make a really big difference in terms of early intervention and coverage of big spaces.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, when was it decided that you would shift to the 10-year contract? Before that I think it was a season-by-season approach.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That was the impetus, I suppose you might say, for looking for a longer term contract. Once we started seeing the cost of the aerial fleet growing exponentially—because, effectively, you hire them from other places—and once we started to see more places hold them for a longer period of time, and also seeing the Northern Hemisphere summer period—or the bushfire danger period, as we would call it—extend into ours.

CORRECTED

What we are now starting to see is that there could be a chance that we couldn't guarantee an aerial fleet, we couldn't guarantee the support that was required, and we also couldn't guarantee the price. Part of that is reading the tea leaves: This is where we see this heading. Let's get in and make sure that we effectively ring fence ourselves.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, my question was not why. When was that decision made to shift to a 10-year contract?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'd have to take that one on notice or refer that to the RFS.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: If you could.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Off the top of my head, I could not tell you the date.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: My follow-up question would be when that was communicated to industry. You said the community was well aware of this process. Could you advise when that decision was made to go to a 10-year contract and when that was communicated to industry?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let's keep in mind that it's a five-year contract with an option to renew. It's actually a five-year contract and then there's a five-year option for both parties. So potentially it could be 10 years, but it's actually a five-year option.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, in budget estimates last time I believe former Commissioner Rogers said that the RFS was looking into mobile water tanks. Are you aware if they have been or how many of these water tanks have been procured?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I couldn't answer that one specifically. The commissioner can. But I will take the opportunity to say that I have been really pleased to see, over the past 12 months, 291 new and refurbished tanks. On the water tanks specifically, Commissioner, have you got a number? Obviously we're constantly looking at upgrading our resources.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We can come back to those numbers this afternoon, Commissioner. Or if you can pull them together for us this morning and let us know, that would be fine.

Mr JIHAD DIB: They were the mobile ones, right, not the actual water tanks? You're talking about a truck?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: No, tanks that we can put in place. I'll come to examples.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can tell you. We've got tanks installed at Bell, Mount Wilson, Mount Banks and on Skyline Road at Mount Tomah to be used for firefighting purposes. I just got that note.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So you do have tanks?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. We have water tanks installed at Bell and Mount Wilson stations, Mount Banks and Skyline Road at Mount Tomah.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do they make up what the community have now dubbed the "Greater Sydney Water Curtain Project"?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The local community up there, and I've met with that community on a number of occasions—I remember dealing with the Mount Wilson fires in 2019-20. One of the things that came out of that was accessibility to water in terms of the tanks being able to—think of it like a servo. You pull up, fill up the tank and then off you go with your truck. That's where we've been working with the community. The RFS has taken a bit of time, but we got there. Effectively, it is about trying to make sure that there is a good supply of water available to those communities, particularly when it comes to firefighting purposes. We hope we never have to use them, but chances are we will.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Fewtrell, you've written a letter of support for the Greater Sydney water curtain project.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I did.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you think the tanks that the Minister has said are in place meet the requirements that you were hoping for to overcome the impacts that you have referred to? You wrote in the letter:

... strike teams were depleted of their trucks for extensive periods of time while they went to refill, making the firefighting operations more challenging.

Having been part of some of that in the past, I can understand why that's so important. Do the tanks that the Minister referred to fully meet what you were hoping for out of this project?

CORRECTED

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'm not fully across the ones that the Minister has just outlined. But certainly any water tanks along those areas support and assist any firefighting efforts.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: With that in mind, Minister, can we look at putting more along that line? Because this isn't just protection for those communities; it's also, as it's referred to, the Greater Sydney water curtain project.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Of course, Mr Barrett. We'll continue working not only within our communities but also within every parameter that we've potentially got. I think it's been pretty clear. I think we're about 99 per cent of the way to closing off the recommendations from the bushfire inquiry, but when they're closed that doesn't mean we stop. We continuously look at improving. Part of that process would potentially be around water tanks. It's what different communities need. If we can set up a system where we make it safer for communities and make it easier for firefighters to access the water, then of course we'll continue working on that. This is not an exhaustive list, but I'm also more than happy to look at any specific proposals that you may have and work on a programme for how we can continue implementing that. The point that I would make is that there's going to come a time when I won't be the Minister. Somebody else will be the Minister, and I would hope that they and the person after them will continue that project. The one thing we share in common—whatever side we may be on—is the fact that we have community safety at the very heart. This is a good example of practical solutions, and we'll continue looking at that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Given the timing of this estimates hearing, as the weather starts to warm up, I have a lot of questions about fire preparedness. I'll come to the commissioners this afternoon, but I want to put two key risks to you, Minister. The first one is obviously climate change, and the frequency and intensity of natural disasters that comes with that. The second risk I want to put to you is the United States potentially becoming a less reliable partner for us, noting that we've been quite reliant on our relationship with Northern Hemisphere emergency services as part of our responses. What are the key adaptations that are being made to prepare us locally for the fire season?

Mr JIHAD DIB: If it's okay, I've written down the two things: climate change and then the US emergency services. If I go off on the wrong track, correct me to where you want me to go. I think the first thing is that we accept that climate change is real. There's no argument about it. We can talk about net zero and how we need to approach it, but the fact of the matter is that we're seeing that. We have had an enormous year this year. If I think about just the SES and the sheer number—the thousands—of incidents that they've dealt with—poor Commissioner Wassing got appointed commissioner and he hasn't really stopped since his first week. I want to take the opportunity to thank and acknowledge our SES. I know that you're a big supporter of them as well. I think you're a part of them.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I was.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I thank them. They've been going non-stop, and that's really due to—we can see the impact of the climate. I had a really surreal day earlier this year. At the same time as I was receiving messages from Commissioner Wassing about flooding, we were dealing with bushfires. I just thought, "This is a completely surreal situation." We're also seeing an overlap. We saw a grassfire on the M5, I think, last week or the week before. Two weeks before that when we were still dealing with flooding in the northern part of New South Wales, we've got drought in the south. So an acceptance of climate change is a given for us. We are looking at how we adapt to that, how we better prepare for that and how we work to make sure that our emergency services—be they the paid ones or the volunteers—not only have the right equipment but also use the preventative measures as much as they possibly can.

The commitment to trying to stop or maybe reverse the impact of climate change is in our policies around the net zero. I don't need to talk about that, but that's the one bit. But our preparation has really been focused on understanding that there's no on season or off season anymore. It used to be that we had storms in April; well, we had flooding all the way through this year. It used to be that we had the bushfire season start pretty much on 1 October; we've already had some, but we've got also a situation at the moment where we talk about the reductions, where we can't necessarily meet our target for hazard reduction because we actually can't do the physical stuff in terms of burning. We can only do it through manual reduction because the ground is just not in a state to be at. That's the acceptance there—having the right equipment, training people and being better prepared. But it's a really interesting dynamic to look at, because we go from a snowstorm to a bit of a heat thing, to a bit of rain, to a bit of flooding. It's just constant. I think that's the real impact that we're seeing from climate change.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Minister, it's heartening to hear you articulate really well the problem that I'm trying to ask about. I appreciate that you've got a real awareness of the issue and some of the challenges that that poses. You haven't answered my question yet of what are those key changes and adaptations that you're making, because obviously a business-as-usual—

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: Within my emergency services?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Yes. From the emergency services' point of view, a business-as-usual approach is obviously not going to cut it in the face of those challenges.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The first one—and one I'm super proud of and proud all of the agencies—is the interoperability, and I've spoken about that a number of times, but that ability to work together. The thing that really lifted our spirits—especially when I was up in the northern part of New South Wales for Cyclone Alfred with the Premier. It was great to see the community, but what was really incredibly uplifting was standing side by side with the SES, Fire and Rescue, RFS, Marine Rescue, Surf Life Saving, the VRA, the coppers, ambos—everyone was in it together. Those things didn't use to happen, that sense of interoperability, and it just works so well together. It's not necessarily a "business as usual" but activating a switch to say, "Guys and girls, we're all in this together. We all need to help", so that interoperability. The shared training is really important. We're doing some multi-agency unit stuff.

In Collarenebri two weeks ago they had a multi-agency meeting, and I've seen the different agencies together. The reason that's important, Dr Cohn, is because Collarenebri might have one stronger agency than another, and if you're the lead agency for, say, bushfires, you're the RFS. But the RFS is smaller, potentially, than the SES. These are sometimes the same people, but we have these, like, almost silos operating. That's something that I've got to say is hashtag humble but I'm really proud of that and proud of the fact that everybody across the emergency services is doing it. That's a really important step. We're looking at how we can share, then, the resources. Look at Maria, for example, where we're building a co-located emergency service there between SES and RFS, and then next door to us—it's still pretty much part of the same parcel—are the ambos. So just building that relationship and making sure that when we, say, buy products that we buy products that every single person can do.

The use of drones is a new development for us, and this is where it's interesting. A group like Surf Life Saving, for example, can operate the drones, and that's a way that they can contribute. But then we have drone operators and there was this amazing footage. There are two things where we use drones to not only give us situational awareness so that we can put people in the right places to get to it early and quickly try to deal with the situation, but there were some really inspiring things. There was the use of a drone by the SES during one of the floods where they actually delivered cancer therapy treatment to somebody who was isolated, and another one where Fire and Rescue actually did a rescue through the waters. They used the drone to provide the light to kind of guide the way.

We're embracing new technology constantly. We're using AI. We're using—everything that we're finding that could help, we're doing it. The interoperability also means that the agencies are sharing what they know and they're looking to help each other and to say, "Look, this is a good product. Can it work for you?" Even the CAD system—that's the communication system—has been interoperable. Telco, with Kylie De Courteney, is doing real great work on vehicle as a node. They're looking at how we can share that so that we can get better communications with everyone. Does that kind of answer it?

Dr AMANDA COHN: You've answered it in part. The bit that's missing is the risk of our dependence on the US, particularly for firefighting efforts.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I haven't got to that. That was just the climate change bit.

Dr AMANDA COHN: The Audit Office, I understand, has identified a planned audit about emergency services and aerial assets. Historically our approach has really favoured large aircraft and international procurement. In light of the challenges you've already identified and the work that the Audit Office is doing, what work are you doing to assess the effectiveness of that aerial approach?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think part of that was that Coulson contract, so making sure we had that. We also have in New South Wales 13 of our own aircraft that we use. They range in size. We have little Bell helicopters—well, they're not little. They carry about 1,500 litres of water or retardant that can be dropped. Then we've got the Chinook, which can carry about 10,000 litres. The good thing about the Chinook is an in-built tank means that it can also do night water bombing, because you can't have a basket swinging around at night but because it's an in-built tank we can do it. We've got the LAT.

We're looking, ideally—we want to make sure that we've got our own. We would love to be self-dependent as much as possible. That's why there's been a really big investment in that. That's why there's been an investment in the aerals and investment in making sure that we've got the trucks. But you don't have any of that if you don't also have the volunteers. We're doing a lot of work around volunteering. We hosted a national summit in Sydney last year. The Premier's department lead a really good body of work looking at the notion of volunteering. It's a great Australian thing that we volunteer. I think it speaks to the people that we are.

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Dr AMANDA COHN: Just in my last few seconds—and I'll come back to the services in the afternoon about volunteer numbers and other things.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, come back later.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Can I ask specifically, coming into this summer, are we still dependent on assets from the US? If so, what's the order of magnitude?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The commissioner might correct me if I'm wrong. We have our assets. Other assets that come in are more complementary. Ironically, we actually send our assets over to the US more than they send assets over here. We've been really focused on making sure that we've got our resources that can help us. Of course, when it comes to a massive fire, it's pretty much all hands on deck and the international community supports each other. I wouldn't say that if the US thing doesn't come through then we've real problems. We've got 60,000-odd members of the RFS. A number of those can be on the ground at any given time. We've got the assets. We've got over 4,000 trucks. We're not dependent on others, but they can help complement us if we need them. Would that be about the best way to put it, Commissioner?

TRENT CURTIN: Accurate, Minister. We've got the 13 State-owned aerial assets, 22 on contract dedicated to the Rural Fire Service for this season and then there's another 230 aircraft available on call when needed. So there's a substantial fleet of aircraft available for this year to supplement the volunteers on the ground.

The CHAIR: I've got some questions to start off with in regard to your Youth Justice portfolio. According to BOCSAR, as of June 2025, 234 young people were in custody, marking a 34 per cent increase compared to June 2023. As the Minister for Youth Justice, are you comfortable with such a large number of children currently in custody?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I'm not. I'm not going to try and beat around the bush with that one. I'd love to see no young people in custody, but the reality of it is we do have people in custody. An interesting fact, though, is that of the number of young people in youth detention at any given time, nearly 70 per cent of those are there, effectively, on remand. They're actually there without a sentence. Just a reminder that we as Youth Justice get them after a court has determined and after, say, the police have determined—but I think, if there's anything positive that I can take out of that number, it's the fact that the overwhelming majority are there for short periods of time, where remand could be anywhere between 24 hours to a little bit longer. I think the average stay is about one week. You know my position on this.

The CHAIR: You're right, Minister, that most of them are on remand. BOCSAR said:

The rise in young people in custody is being driven primarily by an increase in the number of young people held on remand.

It's not surprising that this increase in young people in custody is obviously linked to the harsh bail laws passed by the Labor Government. Have you met with the Premier and the Attorney General given this significant increase in young people held on remand?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think at the time the Premier acknowledged that this change in the law would have an impact on young people and disproportionately on Aboriginal young people. He acknowledged that. Obviously, there are lots of discussions that happen around that. We continue to have our conversations. But, in the same way that I answered one of your colleagues a bit earlier, I also look at the things that I can do. The thing that I can do in Youth Justice is really focus on how we support young people, ideally before they get to that point. We're looking at investment in diversion. I think there's \$80-odd million in diversion programs in the forwards, which has never happened before. Massive investment there—massive investment around how do we support young people and stop them getting down that wrong path and, when they potentially do start going down that path, how we can help them in that and give better outcomes.

I was in Wagga about a month ago visiting—it was a group called Wollundry Dreaming. I think the shadow Minister would be aware of them—an absolutely fantastic group focused very much on wraparound support for young people, not only community but also government agencies, non-government agencies, schools and, at the very centre of that, a young person, to say, "How can we make sure that we support the young person?" I know Ms Stewart was there last week with the Premier. We're investing heavily in things that might stop them from getting to that point where we've got to deal with them in the Youth Justice system. Very much place-based led—

The CHAIR: Minister, I agree with you that that's obviously important, and yet the numbers have increased so dramatically. We're talking about a 34 per cent increase compared to June 2023. Outside of the work that you're doing to try to stop that number from increasing even further, what kind of additional programming and supports are being implemented by Youth Justice to provide for the needs of this growing group of children who have been denied bail and are being held on remand? Is there any additional funding going into that support

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from Youth Justice? I'm particularly interested in support that might be given to children once they're actually released.

Mr JIHAD DIB: In the system—and I hate to use that phrase. Once they're in the Youth Justice system—and it could be any one of our six centres—the goal is to try to support that young person. I've used the phrase and I've heard others say, "We love you but we don't want to see you again." How do we make sure that this young person doesn't get seen again? What do we do while they're with us, whether it's for 24 hours or whether it's for a week or, unfortunately, if it's a bit longer because they've been sentenced? Our goal—and it's a shared goal from everyone in the Youth Justice system—is to try to help them make the change, not only help them in developing a better sense of self-worth, help them if they need the education and help them with their health, but also help them get on the right track.

That is things like whether we have our trade training days, whether we have relationships with outsiders outside, like—I call them companies or businesses or organisations. We've seen situations where young people have worked with somebody while they've been in a youth detention centre and then they actually go out and they work for that person. That's one of the things that we're really, really working hard on. We've got kids at the moment—sorry, I keep saying kids. We've got young people at the moment who are actually doing their HSC. We're still trying to inspire them to be able to make the change and to do that support.

The CHAIR: Minister, are there any specific supports available around NDIS support, housing support or culturally safe health care when these children are released?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We've got the short-term remand programs that we're also running, say, in the Riverina, which are about how do we support a young person who maybe is not in that remand. But the post-release—there's a lot of work that's going on there now. Let's assume a young person is about to conclude with their sentence. Youth Justice will work with them in terms of preparing them for what happens when they leave, in terms of setting them up with the right people, setting them up with school options, with health options. We work, obviously, with the local health districts. The really great program out at Broadmeadow is about that—really terrific in terms of getting everybody involved. I think this is a shared social problem. A society solution is what we actually need.

I might say that a young person comes into our responsibility once somebody else has made a decision, but that doesn't mean that we don't think about that young person before or we don't try to stop them from getting themselves into trouble—and also post. It's not like we close the door and say, "See you later; you're out on your own". We genuinely do not want to see a young person come back in, and we try to do the very best that we can across the entire system—really amazing, above and beyond, from what I see from the staff—so that we can help this young person transition back into a life that's much more successful.

The CHAIR: Minister, you mentioned First Nations children earlier and you recognised the significant increase there.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, Ms Hurst, I missed the first bit.

The CHAIR: You mentioned earlier First Nations children and the fact that we continue to see an increase there. In fact, they continue to make up 60 per cent of the youth detention population. What is being done by Youth Justice NSW to address the rising number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people on remand in New South Wales youth detention centres?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We accept that it's a disproportionate number. I think that's the first thing—actually accepting the reality of the situation. Are we happy with it? No, we'd prefer that not to be the case. I talked about the over \$100 million in the forwards for diversion programs, but we also have made a very conscious decision—that Youth on Track program. We're looking specifically at working with the ACCOs, so Aboriginal community controlled organisations. I believe that of the partnerships—and maybe Mr O'Reilly might correct me—seven out of the nine are actually ACCOs. Sorry, six out of the nine are ACCOs. We also recognise that target 11 is that representation, and we're working hard to reduce that.

The CHAIR: I understand you've got some good programs running, but do you really feel that these programs are doing enough to overcome these really harsh bail laws given we're seeing such massive increases in the number of children on remand? We've got these programs being funded, but they're obviously not overcoming the impact of these harsh laws. What else can be done? Is anything being planned to overcome that and actually drive those numbers down instead of continuing to drive them up?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're constantly looking at how we can make things better. The Safe Aboriginal Youth program is being expanded to Coffs Harbour, Tamworth, Orange, Kempsey—looking to expand those programs in terms of providing support for young people, trying to get to the root cause of the problem before we actually

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deal with it. I accept that our numbers in terms of youth detention, particularly for Aboriginal young people, are disproportionate. I accept that.

The CHAIR: Is anything going to change in the next 12 months, going forward, other than the same programs that clearly—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think it has.

The CHAIR: What is the plan for the next 12 months to change these numbers?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It starts with the single biggest investment ever made in Youth Justice, ongoing, guaranteed funding for youth diversion; a change in attitude in terms of making sure that we're working with local communities, understanding that what might work in Bankstown is not going to work in Brewarrina; working about what those communities want, specifically; having the ACCOs at the heart of it, Aboriginal statements; but also trying to say, "How do we help connect a young person to their 60,000 years of history and culture that would actually bring in their Elders and say, 'This is not who we are; we're better than this'"; but also looking at how, across government, I and my colleagues can say, "We're looking at the problem here in terms of the young person and where they end up. But what's happening in terms of their education? What's happening in terms of their health? What's happening in terms of their job opportunity?"

That's the work that we're doing. I know that it may seem like this is a long way away but, without that investment and without that attitude and without those commitments, we actually don't get there. I see those kids on remand. I visit them regularly. It hurts when you see the same kids. We have to change the circumstance to which they go back, and that is where things like our Cockatoo unit and My Path is about changing everything for that young person so that the circumstances don't put them in that position.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, can you tell me what the \$400 million Coulson contract entails? What is expected from them for that \$400 million?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, in a second. I have a note that I can give you about the tender process. Do you want me to give you the answer about the tender process?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We can come back to that one. Can you tell me what the contract actually entails?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I understand that it provides for aviation as well as for, obviously, the pilots that come with that and also training opportunities for your young people.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: It does provide for pilot contracts?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It comes with the pilot.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: And the aircraft?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: And the maintenance and repairs on that aircraft?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm pretty sure, yes. It comes as a whole service. But the other part that I was impressed with is that there is an element here that is about not only improving the skills of local people but also making sure that they are engaged so that, as we move forward, we've actually got these resources and these capabilities.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Does Coulson own those aircraft?

TRENT CURTIN: They are owned by the New South Wales Government—the RFS. Coulson is the operator and maintainer of the fleet.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The New South Wales Government owns the aircraft?

TRENT CURTIN: Correct.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: And yet we are then paying Coulson to manage the aircraft?

TRENT CURTIN: To maintain, manage and operate the aircraft for the bushfire season, yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The pilots, for instance, will they then work for Coulson or for the New South Wales Government?

TRENT CURTIN: Coulson.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So we are outsourcing the management of the New South Wales government fleet with this \$400 million contract?

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TRENT CURTIN: Correct.

Mr JIHAD DIB: They are overseen primarily by Australian crews. It bolsters our local workforce. We are trying, as I said a bit earlier, to make sure that we are able to guarantee our ability to have aircraft in the air, notwithstanding some of the different challenges from across the globe.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So they will be on hand throughout the year just here in New South Wales?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, they are.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Will that mean we have access to the same classes and the same number of aircraft as under the previous regime?

Mr JIHAD DIB: What was the previous regime?

TRENT CURTIN: We have increased the number of aircraft in the contract and we still have the contract arrangements through the National Aerial Firefighting Centre arrangements, and then we have the call when needed as well. We are continuing to operate a fleet of New South Wales-owned aircraft as well as the contract arrangements that give us dedicated access to those aircraft through the bushfire season, as well as call-when-needed arrangements so we can call for additional surge capacity when needed.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are those New South Wales government vehicles available for overseas deployment if requested?

TRENT CURTIN: We have done that, yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We have done that. We have actually helped out in the northern season. I think we had the last of our crews arrive from Canada about a month ago. That was, again, a multi-agency thing, led by the RFS. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think we had four waves of people going through and supporting them. The previous contract that RFS had was with CareFlight, just for a bit of context there. Can I give you that answer about the tender so that we don't have to come back? I will just read from this document, if that is all right for you.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: If it's short.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mate, it's only six lines. Do you want me to read it with emotion?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Please.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The aviation tender was open to market for a period of six weeks, which is in line with the New South Wales Government tender procurement guidelines. The tender was released on 12 January 2024 and closed on 23 February 2024, post the Christmas period and back when everything starts again. Online market briefing was held to ensure wide global market engagement. Many local and international suppliers attended. The National Aerial Firefighting Centre sent notice of the tender to 806 registered operators across the aviation industry, and the RFS also advertised a tender. When I said to you that it was not hidden, 806-odd people found it.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You said when everybody comes back online again. Can you think of a worse—

Mr JIHAD DIB: In terms of January?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes. Can you think of a worse time for firefighting organisations to have to apply for a tender than January or February?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In terms of that context about everyone being online, as you know, the Christmas shutdown happens and pretty much everything comes back.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Not for firefighters, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, it's an ongoing thing. But also these operators and these companies are well aware. They are not just a single-person operation. What we are looking for is someone who could fulfil a contract that was required. I will accept that you're saying it could have been at a different time. I will take your point. But I wouldn't accept that it was done with people not knowing about it or people excluded. I don't accept that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, I go back to the Bells Line of Road and the water curtain project that was mentioned. Their request is for 12 of those tanks to be available to refuel firefighting trucks. As I say, this isn't just about the communities up there but the curtain for Western Sydney. You said you would take on any advice or suggestions. This is a strong suggestion from that community, supported by the commissioner, to support

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not just the Blue Mountains but the entirety of Western Sydney. Is this something that you can look into providing, additional tanks to provide this water curtain?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We will continue on with that work. I have also had representations a while ago from down on the South Coast as well with that same sort of issue. I am more than happy to look into it. I can even talk to you about it outside of estimates and where we are at with it. I am more than happy to catch up with you outside of this period. But I'm happy to look into it. We have that and we are working with the Neighbourhood Safer Places. I can give you an update specifically on that. There is no doubt that this is something that, if we can make it happen, we should make happen. We just have to work out how.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, do you personally support expanding the presumptive rights to compensation for firefighters to include additional cancers, including three specific to female fighters?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I have been on the record as saying that we will explore the opportunities and the options around presumptive cancers for firefighters.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Will this translate into support for the workers compensation amendment bill coming up in Parliament?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Tudehope bill?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We will look into that. As you may know, there would be a process. A bill gets put up and then goes through a process. Obviously, I have had a look at the bill. It makes sense that I would have a look at the proposed legislation. We will make some decisions. We will go through our processes as we normally would. I will make the point, though—and I know that Minister Cotsis made the same one—that it would have been nice that this bill would have come in whilst he was the industrial relations Minister.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: There are lots of things you could have done over the past two years as well, Minister, including doing this already.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I have done plenty. I have done the whole person impairment for the Rural Fire Service volunteers that was left off the cards back in 2012. That is just a little comment. We will have a look at it, as we always will, and we will go through that process.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, something I have spoken a lot about is farm firefighting vehicles. I know that the registration of such would sit within Transport. We are less than a month away from the fire season and we are still waiting for something that has been talked about for more than two years. How strongly are you urging your Transport colleagues to have something in place immediately for this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We have had this conversation, and I think there are a lot of practical elements to it and a lot of it makes sense. I thank you for your advocacy on that. I have had conversations with Minister Aitchison about this. I think the last time we met was with the NSW Farmers president as well. I think you may have been aware of that. There is obviously a trial that is going on. I see a lot of merit. I think what the issue is at the moment is trying to find that landing part between what would be the most appropriate thing in terms of, say, what type of registration and how do you also make sure that someone who is trying to do the right thing and they have goodwill doesn't inadvertently find themselves in any trouble.

Things that I hadn't thought about, for example, were if that person drives an unregistered vehicle or doesn't have any form of registration on a road and—hopefully it never happens—they have an accident and somebody is hurt, where the liability? There is that work that is going on, which, to some people, may seem like paperwork and bureaucracy, but we have to get it right. Somebody could be trying to do the right thing and, without any intention, actually find themselves in a bit of trouble.

That is the stuff that we are working on at the moment. I know the Minister is keen on it and I am keen on it. We have just got to try and make sure that the registration solution is one that complies with expectations within road rules but also one that offers protection, even in terms of what that means for CTPs. It's quite complex, but there's no go-slow on this. We are trying to do it, but it's just about making sure that we cross every "t" and dot every "i". The last thing I want is a farmer who's got a firefighting vehicle, sees a fire 10 kilometres down the road and, out of the goodness of their heart, wants to go and help but then ends up getting in trouble because something goes wrong and there was no protection. I want them to be protected as well.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Absolutely, Minister. You say there's a trial underway. There have been two trials occur for this. The last one finished in February or March this year, I think. Are you confident we will have a system in place for this year's fire season, as was committed to this season and the season before?

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Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, Mr Barrett. I'm hopeful, but I'm also conscious that it's not necessarily within my space to make that call. I work with my colleague, I work with the farmers and I obviously work with the service and across the CTP. I think at the trial we had about 140-odd vehicles.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The first one?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, and about half of them had problems. I saw some really terrific firefighting vehicles and some that I thought, "Oh my gosh, that is a bit of a deathtrap." That's what we're working through. But the most important thing is we're working with New South Wales farmers as well because we need them to be part of that partnership. I would be hopeful that we can get it going. But, to be honest with you, I was a little bit surprised and maybe a little bit disappointed when I saw that about half of them had some problems that could potentially be dangerous. As I said, it's finding that balance between people trying to do the right thing and help and saying thank you and not making it difficult for them but, in the same way, protecting them so that, in trying to do the right thing, they don't find themselves in serious trouble or potentially, worse still, in financial ruin because what they had did some damage.

In a worst-case scenario, let's assume it kills somebody. That's feasible if somebody is on a road and a car or vehicle is not necessarily up to scratch or doesn't have safety things. We are talking about things like what's the expectation for brakes and how do we make sure that, if there is an inspection, it's not going to be onerous on the person who lives 30 kilometres out of town and has to drive into a mechanic to get a pink slip? That's the stuff that we're working on. But I'm hopeful. I hope that what you see, in response to that answer, is that the commitment to get there is still alive.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How well do you know Morris Iemma?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Morris Iemma?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Pretty alright, I suppose. Morris Iemma was the member for Lakemba before I was—no, Robert Furolo was.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Would you consider him a friend?

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I see him in the street, I say g'day and have a chat to him. Put it this way, I've never been to his home for a coffee and he hasn't been to my house for a coffee. That, to me, would be what friends do.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When was the last time you would have seen him or spoken to him?

Mr JIHAD DIB: A while. Incidentally, I may have seen him around, but it's not like—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It's not a weekly catch-up?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No. Sorry, I hope he's not watching. No offence, Morris, that it's not weekly. I've got to tell you, when I first ran into him it was a bit difficult.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Has he ever contacted you about issues in government particular to your portfolio?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Via telephone or something?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We've had meetings where his company has requested a meeting. That has been on the record, but I don't think he was in that specific meeting. But it's not like a direct phone call. My office is very conscious that, if something's got to be done, it is done through the regular channels, and it doesn't matter if you are—unless it's my mum, who can ring me any time, or my family. But you can't just ring me. If anybody does who I may be familiar with, it would be, "Could you please send it as an email to the office?" and then it goes through that process. It doesn't even come to me before a decision is made.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So he has never contacted you outside of any official meetings that are disclosed? Any text messages or calls?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't think so. I can't think of anything off the top of my head. I think the last time I had a conversation with him, I rang him up maybe about three months ago.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Three months ago?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I rang him up. It wasn't even to ask for advice but to ask for his view on something.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Not to do with eConveyancing?

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: No. But I know that he's involved in PEXA, for example. As you'll see in my declarations, I have meetings with PEXA, as I have meetings with Simply. My personal thing is to make sure that, if I meet with one, I meet with the other, just to make sure that it's balanced. I don't want to be in the position where someone might think I'm favouring one over the other.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You would be aware of *The Daily Telegraph* report in July that PEXA has had 95 outages since early 2024, basically leaving families stranded in the street during settlements. What has your Government done since March 2023 to address this risk to New South Wales home buyers?

Mr JIHAD DIB: With those outages, my office is briefed by the Registrar General, and I meet with the Registrar General fairly regularly. Their office will contact my office to keep me updated with that. It was also part of the conversation that I had with PEXA in my last meeting with them, looking at making sure that we also improve the reporting on incidents. One of the things that was said very clearly to PEXA is that not all of those outages are the result of PEXA. There are sometimes third parties. We go, "We need some really clear reporting and quick reporting, so tighten it up," and they accepted that. There is currently an inquiry or a review into—is it called the functional review? There's a functional requirements review and a cross-benefit analysis, and we're expecting that to be completed by October.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might ask about that this afternoon. When your office is informed about the briefs—you've confirmed that, yes, you're aware of them, but you haven't actually done anything or taken any direct regulatory action?

Mr JIHAD DIB: On these reviews that we're doing at the moment—the functional review, for example—there has been a direction that both ELNOs need to participate in that from the Registrar General. The Registrar General is also looking at licensing conditions. The functional review isn't the be-all and end-all. It's one part. But tightening the licensing conditions—I've just said to you that in conversations and in meetings I've made it clear to the Registrar General and the ELNOs that the issues of outages should be made a lot clearer in terms of, as you said, the 90-odd—is it 90 that are the result of this, how long were the outages for, what was the reason behind the outages, and can they be sorted out?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With the review that you've got at the moment, when did it commence and when do you expect a result from that review so that you can take action?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's going to be reporting later this year. I think I said October. It's led by ARNECC as well, which is all the Registrars General nationally working on that together. It's going to be reported, as I said. It'll be on that. I would like to think that once I get that review, then it can also help in terms of informing a really clear line of exactly where we are at. This has obviously been an ongoing thing. I've spoken about the fact that the whole process has been difficult because part of it is the way that the market conditions are. I won't go into that because you haven't gone down that path, but that's what we're dealing with at the moment.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, when you get that review—industry has been calling for a national ministerial forum—will you take that review, take the leadership role and convene such a forum this year, or at least lead the push for one?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I have made a commitment, and I stand by the fact that New South Wales—while part of ARNECC—has played a really big leadership role. We've had ministerial forums in the past where, effectively, New South Wales has been the driver for those. I think there will be time for a ministerial forum. But if I get the report, like I'm saying to you, in October—I don't know, it may come within October. But if it comes at the end of October—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But will you commit to convening—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll probably have a conversation with some of my colleagues around that, but I think there should be a ministerial forum. But I can't guarantee to you that it will be this year. I would like to, but I don't want to give that commitment that it will be this year because I just don't know that I can.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But you'll take a leadership role and commit to convening it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll continue to take a leadership role, yes. I've been doing that. This is a national reform; I know that the Queenslanders are also playing a role and Tasmania's literally just come on to digital conveyancing. We're working on this at a national level. We've been pretty clear we also expect the Feds to step it up a bit.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: Good morning, Minister. I'd like to follow on from what Mr Barrett was asking about: Coulson Aviation. I understand that in 2019 the previous Government entered into a 10-year contract with Coulson, and that involved them maintaining three aircraft. Five years into that 10-year contract in July 2024, you extended that by a further 10 years.

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: Five years—five years with an option for another five.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: That was one of the things I wanted to get to. The media reports were certainly indicating it was likely to be a 10-year contract, but they were now managing 11 aircraft. The details do say in the fine print that it is a five by five contract. I asked a question on notice: Have we paid them one times \$400 million or are we going to be paying them \$200 million for the first five years and then, if it's renewed, a further \$200 million in the second five years? You wrote back and said that this is commercial-in-confidence.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: This is a big public contract. I don't understand why that would be—the taxpayers of New South Wales paid these Canadians already \$400 million or \$200 million, but we're saying we're not going to disclose that. Can you explain the rationale behind that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The commercial-in-confidence is the element about the details of the contract. What's public is the value of the contract, which is, as you said, around the \$400 million mark. That's what the contract is worth.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: But that's assuming it does go through the full 10 years?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's what the value of the contract is. As I said, there is five years plus a five-year option. The contract itself is worth about the \$400 million mark. Is it exactly \$400 million? It's around that mark. But that's the whole contract.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: Does it mean that after five years there will be some form of a review?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The option to extend is based on where both parties are at. But that would be the reviewing point. The RFS can talk more to this, but I don't imagine it will be a massive review. It's about where are we at, has this worked out and what are the things we need to improve? But, also, where are we at in terms of the fire season? But that five-year point was an important point so it's effectively five and, if we need to, here's another five. The whole contract is worth \$400 million.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: You mentioned earlier there was a tender process in the January period, which, as Mr Barrett pointed out, was a busy time for firefighters. How many tenders did you receive?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm not going to disclose that information at the moment. There was a process, and I went on the recommendations.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: I've heard a rumour it was only one. Only one had the time to prepare for it.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If you heard that rumour, then who am I to say whether it's a rumour or not? Other than—I said the same thing to Mr Barrett—I don't think it's appropriate and it's certainly not appropriate for me to be talking about that. A recommendation came to me after that process, and I signed off on that recommendation.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: My next question is for Commissioner Curtin. Prior to this contract, the Government would engage with local helicopter providers and aircraft providers which were stationed across New South Wales. These were successful small businesses which were employing lots of local people. My understanding is they were quite nimble and efficient. If someone was lost or there was a bushfire, they could get out there quite quickly. Could you tell us what was wrong with those prior arrangements and why did we need to bring in a Canadian company to take over this work?

TRENT CURTIN: Those arrangements are still effective today. Those arrangements are still in place for local providers to provide those services across New South Wales under contract arrangements. The challenge, as the Minister's—

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: But is it fair to say that the level of revenue going to them has reduced significantly because of the arrival of Coulson?

TRENT CURTIN: No, that's not fair to say at all. Coulson and the operation of a sovereign fleet in Australia has been well established as being an important part of the capability requirements for bushfire fighting. The challenges of having aircraft being tied up in the Northern Hemisphere for longer and the challenges of needing to have an available fleet that we can use across New South Wales for various hazard types, including floods and other things, is important. The contract arrangements have not diminished as a result of NSW Rural Fire Service having its own fleet as we've continued to increase the use of aircraft during the bushfire season and in other periods.

CORRECTED

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: I know that Canada does have pretty serious wildfires—maybe not quite in the league of the Australian bushfires, but they can be a big deal every few years. But the Canadian geography, topography and types of plants are very different to Australia. It just does seem odd that we've sort of pushed aside generations of Australian knowledge of people who do know how to fight Australian fires in favour of Canadians. Is that a concern that you have?

TRENT CURTIN: I don't believe we've pushed aside the experience of the Australian operators; we continue to work with them very closely. We had a forum out in Dubbo recently with our providers in Australia to make sure that we're coordinating and collaborating with them and sharing knowledge. You can imagine that these aircraft sometimes don't do a significant amount of drops during a particular fire season, particularly here in New South Wales, so it's important that air operators and pilots get the opportunity to work on an international scale or across the country to continue to build and maintain those skills. So there's an international relationship with the capability that we need here in Australia.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: So that's one of the upsides—that we've been plugged into an international company and we get to learn best practice from other countries? Is that what we're saying?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think we share it. I think a really good point made there is that we share best practice works across the board. The relationship between nations—particularly around supporting each other during bushfires or grassfires, or brushfires, as they call them in other places—is to bring people together to say, "What do you do?" After the Los Angeles fires, for example, there was a request for RFS to go over and provide some expertise and support. It's something that we should be proud of, that our RFS is seen as world leading. But, in the same way, we also learn from other people. I think that's the relationship that we need to do and, if we can help our locals develop better skills with international contacts, then I think that's a good thing.

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: My final question is again to Commissioner Curtin. If this Canadian company decides to exit Australia for whatever reason, is there some risk that we've put all of our eggs in the one basket and, if they depart, then we're going to be left without the management skill at least to operate these aircraft?

TRENT CURTIN: I just remind you that it's Coulson Aviation Australia that has the contract. They're an Australian company, they have a base here in Australia and we're sharing that relationship—

The Hon. JOHN RUDDICK: They're fully owned by the Canadian company, though.

TRENT CURTIN: Yes, but they're an Australian outfit, so we expect to see some of that remain in Australia.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I could just add to that—sorry, Commissioner—that's why also part of that contract was about building up the skills of locals here. The commissioner also talked about relationships that we have with other on-call aeroplanes or aerial fleet that we may need at different times. We don't expect them to break the contract. It's a long-term contract with a company that's well established. We can't go into hypotheticals, but of course we think about what we would do. That's why we still maintain those skills that we have, and that's why part of that contract was so important in terms of how can we train up local Australian people who can use and maintain these planes as well so that, ideally, we don't have to rely on anybody else?

The CHAIR: Minister, you were talking about meeting with young people in custody regularly. I noticed at an inquiry earlier this year, Ms Zoë Robinson, the New South Wales Advocate for Children and Young People, say that policymakers and legislators need to consistently sit with children and young people, not just when they're incarcerated, but in the lead-up to incarceration. Is that something that you're also directly involved in—working and meeting with these young people in the lead-up? If so, can you tell me a little bit about what you're doing in that space?

Mr JIHAD DIB: A hundred per cent. Only as late as last week, I was doing something in Parramatta with a bunch of young people that the local MP had organised. Maybe Ms Stewart can correct me—my last visit to a Youth Justice centre, we were literally driving down from Newcastle, and I popped in and joined them for dinner. Nothing official, nothing formal; I just wanted to be there with them. We do a lot of those visits, and it's a great opportunity to just stop and have a chat with them. Sometimes if I go in and it's too formal—which I actually don't like to do—it can also be restrictive in what they say.

But I also need to see the kids where they're at. There's a lot of work with Youth Off The Streets, as well as the other local groups and my local groups or anybody else. I'm always open when any member of Parliament or any colleague—subject to, of course, the time and stuff that we've got—just says, "Can you come and do things with young people?" Also, hear from them. The solution, in the end, can't just be a punitive solution. It's got to be a solution that's grounded in what is it that's needed, what is it that's going to work and where the investments

CORRECTED

need to be made, but also the voice. I think that's a really important thing that young people—not only that they feel that they're going to have a voice but that something happens as a result of that, because they can read through the BS. Something needs to happen out of that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good morning, Minister. Are you aware that SIRA is undertaking a restructure at the moment?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I am.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you know how many jobs are going to be lost?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No. I think that part of that restructure—maybe it may be worth asking Ms Young to detail more about that. But part of that is also looking at how they can do things better. It's in a consultation phase at the moment. As you know, we've had lots of conversations about issues related to SIRA before, and I think part of that is looking at are there things that need to happen in a different potential way? But it's in a consultation phase, as I understand, at the moment, that Ms Young is undertaking. I don't know that there has actually been a number that's been determined. It's about what we need to do in relation to SIRA.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: My understanding—and perhaps you can answer this, Ms Young—is that in January this year, at a town hall meeting, around 400 SIRA staff were told that there were consultants looking into the idea of a restructure but that it would be "a no-impact restructure". But then, after waiting eight months with no information being given to those staff, they're now being told that there could be up to 160 staff being lost. Is that correct?

MANDY YOUNG: No, not exactly correct. We have consistently worked with the staff around the functional review which kicked off, as you say, earlier this year, around January or February, where we started to look at what is the best way to structure SIRA, moving forward, to meet its policy and legislative functions. Through that process, we also talked about the fact that we aren't actually looking at reducing budget. There is no overall budget reduction that we are looking for, but we're looking for what does that look like, moving forward. We've been through the functional review process, and that has taken a lot of work and a lot of time and a lot of engagement with staff right through. I have consistent communications with staff through town halls monthly. I also have a fortnightly drop-in session where this has been consistently discussed.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just to clarify, because I'm being told that staff heard nothing for eight months about this restructure—

MANDY YOUNG: No. We've spoken on numerous occasions right through those processes and given them updates—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Could you provide, on notice, a list of when it was noted?

MANDY YOUNG: Sure. Just to say in relation to the restructure itself, the consultation process closed, actually—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yesterday.

MANDY YOUNG: —yesterday at 5.00 p.m. We went through our standard government consultation process where we put out a proposed restructure management plan. What's in that proposed restructure management plan actually isn't a reduction in the number of staff. There is a reduction of nine overall, but that reduction isn't a reduction of people, because that reduction is actually transferring our inspectorate work to SafeWork.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I was going to ask you about that, because that's the return to work inspectorate.

MANDY YOUNG: It's some of what the return to work inspectorate does. We're working through that at the moment to understand which component parts will go to SafeWork and which would stay in SIRA to help inform SafeWork on the work that they do.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And how was that decision made? Was it made at a government level that you would move the return to work inspectorate from SIRA to SafeWork?

MANDY YOUNG: We've talked to government about that through the relevant processes we've been going through around workers compensation reforms. But primarily this has been about what makes sense for delivering those, because SafeWork are out with employers consistently. The majority of what that inspectorate does is work with employers on their compensation accountabilities.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is there a reason why you didn't mention this restructure in our workers compensation inquiry hearing on 29 July?

CORRECTED

MANDY YOUNG: I didn't think it was relevant to the reforms of—this is more broadly for all of SIRA. When I say it's not relevant to the reforms, of course it will deliver on the reforms. But it's also about how we set up to deliver any reforms and future work.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, because the effectiveness of the return to work inspectorate is pretty critical in terms of getting people back to work early and relieving pressures off the system, which is directly what our inquiry was looking into. You didn't think it relevant to mention?

MANDY YOUNG: We're still working through what does that look like and how does that occur and what does that mean. Just back to your point in terms of staff cuts, there aren't any. The ultimate number of staff that we will retain in SIRA will be neutral, except for the inspectorate, which we will—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: How many are moving to SafeWork?

MANDY YOUNG: It will be nine.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'll come back in the afternoon to the rest of that. Minister, the Robertson report that was released recently found that the inquiry that PwC was appointed to conduct on behalf of SIRA was defective management. What have you done to identify who caused that defective management, and who was responsible within SIRA for instigating that process and mismanaging it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I appreciate your interest in the Robertson review, and I'm glad that that has been done. It was one of those first things I commissioned when I picked up SIRA, I think about halfway through last year. I appreciate everybody being involved in it. It did find things—I think it was around the issue primarily around the PwC review specifically and adverse findings in specific people in SIRA. Having seen that report, though, we have—obviously there will be a Government response. We've taken on some of those recommendations. Part of the work Ms Young is doing around SIRA is also making sure that we put ourselves in a better position so that we don't have similar scenarios such as this again and have better practices.

The PricewaterhouseCoopers review, I think, was 2022, so it preceded this Government. It's one of those things that I just wanted to make sure we drew a line under and make sure that we not only supported people who had been through those very difficult, traumatic times but also look at it in terms of how could SIRA, as an independent statutory authority, be better in terms of supporting others. I think that's what some of that review really picked up on, which quantified some of the things that maybe you anecdotally would have heard. I've got to say, Mr Robertson did a thorough task of it, which is excellent.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I will come to some of the other findings in the Robertson review, particularly around surveillance and other issues. Coming back to this PwC engagement, who determined the terms of reference for the PwC review within SIRA?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That was before my time.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you know, Ms Young?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I think that was in 2022. It was before, actually, our Government.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Perhaps Mr Head knows?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That was before your time, wasn't it?

GRAEME HEAD: The Minister is correct: The review was commissioned in 2022. It was a different chief executive of SIRA then, a different departmental secretary and, indeed, a different government. My understanding is that SIRA advised the department of the need for the review and that officers in DCS worked with the then management of SIRA on the development of the terms of reference.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Who was it at DCS—

GRAEME HEAD: We have not been able to identify exactly who signed off on the terms of reference, and Mr Robertson was—

Mr JIHAD DIB: It was before all of us. It was before Mandy, before Mr Head and before myself.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Ms Young, you don't know? It wasn't when you were at DCS?

MANDY YOUNG: It was when I was at DCS.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Were you the deputy secretary involved at the time?

MANDY YOUNG: I was the chief operating officer. However, when it came to investigation processes, I would sign off on the expenditure but not necessarily the terms of reference.

CORRECTED

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So you didn't look at the terms of reference? You weren't involved?

MANDY YOUNG: I can't recall.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are you able to take that on notice and have a look to see?

MANDY YOUNG: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: To have a look to see—do you mean who set up the terms of reference? Just to be clear about that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'm interested specifically whether Ms Young was actually involved in the terms of reference or had any review function or looked at the terms of reference at all.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'd like to think she knew if she was involved in it.

MANDY YOUNG: I wasn't involved in the investigation process at all.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Okay. Minister, you received the Robertson review report in December 2024. Who other than yourself was authorised to see the report before it was tabled in Parliament?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It'd be SIRA, the head of DCS, myself, I think my chief of staff—it wasn't a public document; obviously it was held quite tightly—and people who needed to work on the response as well as the deputy secretary, Ms Sanderson, who was driving a lot of that and going through it. I think it's about a 400-odd-page report. It was quite detailed, but it wasn't—it was held very tightly.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Ms Young, you told us that you would be releasing the performance review of claims managers for 2024. At our 29 July hearing, you said it will be released within the next month. It has not been released. When will it be released?

MANDY YOUNG: As I said then, we were going through the fact-checking process. There are some things that we needed to amend. It's in the very final design processes. We would, again, hope that it is imminent in the next week or two. It's in that very end stage, but we needed to do a little work to refine a few things.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: All right. We'll come back to that.

The CHAIR: We now go to Government time.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Nothing from us, Chair.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: We're very happy with the responses.

The CHAIR: We're now breaking for morning tea. We will be back at 11.15 a.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back after morning tea. I'm throwing straight to the Opposition.

The CHAIR: I'll throw straight to the Opposition, and the Hon. Aileen MacDonald.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, according to the BOCSAR figures for 2024-25, for the whole year there were 3,456 receptions into youth custody in New South Wales. Do you accept that figure?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'd accept the BOCSAR figures, yes. Did you say it was three thousand—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's 3,456 receptions, so that's—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Entries into, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Entries, yes. Of those receptions, 3,437 were remand. That means only 19 were sentenced, which is only just 0.5 per cent. Why are almost all the children who enter into custody unsentenced?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mrs MacDonald, I think that really is a question for the Attorney General, in terms of the courts. As I said a bit earlier and I've said before, the issues around Youth Justice are that we get them after a court has made a determination or after the police have made a determination. Our goal is to do the very best that we can in trying to make sure that we can help that young person get onto the right track, but that question really is—we don't determine the court process.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I will do that. When they come into a Youth Justice facility, usually the average stay is nine days. What, realistically, do you hope to achieve with a young person in that nine days?

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: This is the conundrum, isn't it? You'll get a short period of time and you try to make that change, but in the first instance, obviously, what we want to do is make sure the young person is okay. It might sound not that serious, but we want to make sure they're getting some decent meals, making sure that we can try to get some sort of routine into them and see if there's any assessment that they need to have, particularly in relation to a health assessment. We're really focused on making sure that we engage with them when they're in the system but, as I said a little bit earlier, really developing what happens outside of the system. My work with colleagues across the board is also about making sure we could provide whole-of-government, wraparound services. It's one of those things where you kind of go, "Well, if they were for longer you could do more", but in that time you do more. That's also why we're really working hard on developing other things as well, like trying to find some other forms of things. Is there bail accommodation service? Is there more that we can do? It's all grounded in the principle of trying to just help the young person.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Given the research is clear that custody is criminogenic and it increases the likelihood of reoffending—and you mentioned bail support before—what bail support options are available to provide alternatives to remand?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might just go specifically to the note here. As you know, we're working in Moree, and I'm happy to talk about where we're at.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, I'll ask some questions about Moree in a moment.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's one of the bail support—but also just the bail support services that we provide, particularly within Indigenous communities, specifically within local communities, having those wraparound services. I can give you a—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: My question is what have you actually got on the ground. How many bail accommodation beds are available in New South Wales for children who have no safe place to stay? What's the number?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'd have to take that on notice, but I can tell you that we've got the Bail and Accommodation Support Service, which is a service specifically trying to assist young people. We've also got Youth on Track. We've got A Place to Go, which I think is where you and I have both been out.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, I've been there.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That was the one out near the Riff somewhere—Penrith, I should say.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So you'll take that one on notice about how many actual beds there are?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Paul, is there a way that we can get an answer for that?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Perhaps you'll also take on notice the total funding for the bail support programs, and how does it compare to the demand?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We can say that with the funding this year—and I talked about it—Youth Justice has received more funding than it's ever received before, particularly a great deal focused around diversion and support strategies. I'm happy that we've been able to secure funding that is not based on a fiscal cliff. This is funding that's going to be ongoing into the forward estimates. But I'm happy to get a little bit more info for you around that—more than happy to. Unless, Mr O'Reilly, do you—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, I'll ask Mr O'Reilly in the afternoon, if that's okay.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Maybe if Mr O'Reilly answers it, then I don't have to get it to you.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You were talking about support services for young people. Given the rates of alcohol and drug use among children in custody, what is the number of youth-specific alcohol and other drug treatment services that exist in New South Wales?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In New South Wales or in the New South Wales youth justice system?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In the New South Wales youth justice system. Because you won't know the answer to the other part, because that's not in your portfolio.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I wouldn't know, but what we do have is we've got clinical psychologists that work within our youth justice system. We've got health professionals who work within our—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But do you have programs specifically addressed to alcohol and other drug treatment?

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: We've got two rural residential adolescent alcohol and rehabilitation services. There are two, specifically, that offer 24-hour staff and residential treatment for young people. One of them is in Coffs Harbour. I visited that a while ago—probably last year, I think.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you know how many children or young people have accessed those services?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It would vary, Mrs MacDonald, depending on the situation and the circumstances.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Availability?

Mr JIHAD DIB: But the fact that we've got those two in Coffs Harbour—and a rural rehab, as well, that runs with Mission Australia. But it would vary. I'm pleased that we've got those supports outside the youth justice system that are working in tandem with the youth justice system. But inside a Youth Justice centre, we also have not only people who visit but also people who are part of our youth justice system for clinical psychology, drug and alcohol dependency. Unfortunately, it is a problem that we do face. If we go back to that question about what can we do with young people in a few days, one thing is at least trying to just help them get it out of their system—whatever they've got in their system, to try to get it out of their system—so when they leave, at least their system is clear of drugs and alcohol.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I mentioned the figure, which was in the three thousands. There are 3,468 discharges from youth in custody. Of those, 2,985 are bail discharges. What post-release supports are available to those children when they leave custody on bail?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr O'Reilly can speak more specifically to that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Okay, I'll ask Mr O'Reilly this afternoon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But just so that I'm not being considered that I'm avoiding the question, what I would add is that we've got a very strong sense of making sure that we support young people after their release. And it doesn't start after their release. It actually starts before their release, when we start lining them up with local community groups, such as education providers, such as community groups, such as having a community connection and making sure that a young person—where possible, too, having them near their local community when they're in the youth justice system. Those are those things that we work on before release, and then we follow it up. As I said a bit earlier, we don't just—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Perhaps on notice, Minister, because I've only got 50 seconds, would you be able to supply the return-to-detention rates for children released from sentenced detention and children released from remand, or would it be better if I asked that in the afternoon?

PAUL O'REILLY: We can give you some of that in the afternoon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Off the top of my head, you can imagine I can't give you that answer.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll hand over to my colleague.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Good to see you, Mr Fang. I'll make sure that I say it properly.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you, Minister. Much appreciated.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Kamper gives his regards.

The Hon. WES FANG: I've circulated a document, and I'll ask that we pass one to the Minister first.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on a second.

The Hon. WES FANG: Is it a bit hard to read?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm sorry, I'm really—

The Hon. WES FANG: You're struggling to read it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's in six font, is it? Can I borrow your glasses?

The Hon. WES FANG: The first thing I'll say is that this is a GIPAA, and this is how it was given to us from the Treasurer's office. So if you've got a problem with it, you might want to raise that with the Treasurer, because that's how it was provided to us.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What are you shouting for?

CORRECTED

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm not shouting. I'm frustrated because this is how the GIPAA arrived to us. Generally, GIPAA's should be provided in a better format, but that's okay. We were still able to decipher it, Minister. Have you seen this page before?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's not ringing a bell to me, Mr Fang, honestly.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you struggling to read it? I know.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I could hold it up for the camera so that all the viewers, including my mum, can see what I'm talking about. Try and read that, Mum—because my mum watches.

The Hon. WES FANG: Like I said, that's how it was provided to us. Helpfully, Minister, what we've done is we've highlighted a few items on the page. If you look at the left-hand side of the page halfway down, you'll see that it's effectively got "Fire and Rescue NSW" and underneath that it's got "Rural Fire Service". If you go across that column, you'll see that there are three numbers underlined in red. Can you see that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can see the red underline. But I'm serious, I actually cannot see—

The Hon. WES FANG: I appreciate the difficulty. As I said, this is what the Treasurer gave us as a GIPAA.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Maybe you should have asked that of the Treasurer.

The Hon. WES FANG: We'll get there later. You might want to raise that with your colleagues. Minister, in effect, this shows that the rural fire brigade's funding targets are decreasing every year on the way to the 2028-29 financial year. Did the Treasurer consult you before cutting your budget?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let's go back one step, because, seriously, I actually cannot read the numbers. I can see the red line and I can see—

The Hon. WES FANG: I've got to take my glasses off to see it.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I borrow them?

The Hon. WES FANG: It demonstrates 563, then 552, then 545. So there are decreases year upon year upon year. Did the Treasurer consult you before making cuts to your budget for the RFS?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think we've had these questions about the RFS. Seriously, I can't comment on this because I just cannot read it, but I'm happy to talk about budgets.

The Hon. WES FANG: Have you seen this document before?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Not in this form.

The Hon. WES FANG: Did the Treasurer consult with you in relation to cutting the RFS budget?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I thought you talked about emergency services in general.

The Hon. WES FANG: For the RFS, as I said, you go to the RFS column—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Which is?

The Hon. WES FANG: —which is on the left-hand side—and you go across. Year upon year upon year it goes from 563 to 552 to 545—reductions every year. Did the Treasurer consult with you in relation to these cuts? They're underlined in red.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's a process that we undertake for budgets and a budget process every year, and I'll talk to that in a second. But in relation to the emergency services levy, as you know, this has been ongoing. The Treasurer is actually leading a body of work at the moment around the emergency services levy. Like every Minister, I approached the Expenditure Review Committee with budget proposals. That's the budget process that we undertake. We've also had, and I said this in question time a while ago, changes to the budget. Part of that was impacted by the bushfire inquiry, for which we're almost at 100 per cent. So the things that are being delivered are no longer required.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I don't disagree with you. It's quite clearly written at the top of the page in the top left-hand corner, "Assumptions and Drivers - Emergency Services Levy". It clearly shows a decrease year upon year upon year for the Rural Fire Service. I was listening earlier when you were talking about the increased ferocity of the bushfires that we face. How is your Government allowing a cut year upon year upon year to the funding for the Rural Fire Service in New South Wales?

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll make the point that since we've come to government, we've actually increased the Emergency Services budget by 10.8 per cent to over \$2 billion. That's something that's factual. The other point that I'd make, as I made earlier, Mr Fang, is that some of those things that were part of the bushfire inquiry—we're nearly at 100 per cent; I think we're at about 99 per cent implementation of that—that were delivered that have cost money are actually not required anymore.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, I understand that. These figures quite clearly show that there are reductions year upon year upon year. You've got a note. What does that tell you about the cuts?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's just a clearer version of the budget paper than what you sent me. There's no note. I've got the budget books. Have you got yours?

The Hon. WES FANG: I did. Scott Farlow has my copy. He borrowed them, and that's okay. I'll get them back from him soon. Minister, this GIPAA clearly shows that the funding is falling.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Actually, the paper that I've got here, which is the actual operating statement of the budget paper itself, shows you—you know there's a budget and then there's a revised budget. You've got that?

The Hon. WES FANG: I understand. I'm not one of my other colleagues. I'm well aware of it.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's also why sometimes budgets change, because things happen over time. Funding distribution from the department has actually increased to \$638 million here. This is in the 2025-26 budget.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, why is it that when we GIPAA this document from the Treasurer, it demonstrates cuts year upon year upon year? What is the Treasurer doing to the numbers that you aren't aware of?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll tell you what, I'm looking at these budget papers and I can see the budget figures here.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, there's something very amiss here because this table from Treasury, provided by the Treasurer, clearly shows that there are going to be cuts.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I reckon you're making some pretty wild assumptions out there, Mr Fang. I would suggest that if you've got a specific question, you're in the Legislative Council; ask the Treasurer about it. But from what I'm going off, which is our budget paper, it's actually pretty clear.

The Hon. WES FANG: So you're denying that there are cuts in New South Wales to the RFS budget moving forward and we'll see increases—

Mr JIHAD DIB: What I'm saying, Mr Fang, is that part of the bushfire inquiry had made some recommendations, and those recommendations are nearly complete. Some of those recommendations cost money. I had said a bit earlier about the 291 new and refurbished trucks. We're building new fire stations; we're building control centres. They were budgeted for.

The Hon. WES FANG: I appreciate that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You would imagine that if they'd been budgeted for and they'd been built, then you don't need that money again.

The Hon. WES FANG: Minister, these papers from inside Treasury show a different story. We're trying to get to the bottom of why there are differences. But I'll move on to another point—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, I'm explaining to you—

The Hon. WES FANG: —because I've got limited time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: How long have we got? How would I know?

The Hon. WES FANG: I want to pass over a little bit of time to my colleague. Recently, the PSA took the RFS to the Supreme Court. Is that the case?

Mr JIHAD DIB: How recent?

The Hon. WES FANG: Very recently.

Mr JIHAD DIB: How recent?

The Hon. WES FANG: I believe it's just been resolved, so it was in the last few months. Was that the case?

Mr JIHAD DIB: What was it about?

CORRECTED

The Hon. WES FANG: Let me rephrase, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I'm asking you.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you aware that the PSA took the RFS to court?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm aware that there was an issue, but not recently. There was an issue around overtime and stuff, but that was not recent. I don't know how long ago your "recent" is.

The Hon. WES FANG: What was the result of that court case?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The result of that—you would have read the court case. There was a finding that there were some disparities with overtime pay.

The Hon. WES FANG: What's the net loss to the New South Wales budget in relation to the remedies?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's no net loss to the budget. I believe it's been absorbed within the RFS budget.

The Hon. WES FANG: What was the settlement fee to the PSA and their members?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't think that's public.

The Hon. WES FANG: It isn't? Was it \$5 million?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't know. Was it?

The Hon. WES FANG: I don't know. I'm asking you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Are you just guessing?

The Hon. WES FANG: No. I'm asking you, Minister. This is budget estimates. There's been an impact to the budget from a court case.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let me estimate—

The Hon. WES FANG: I'm just trying to understand where the impact has come in relation to this.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let me say to you that it was around the \$5 million mark.

The Hon. WES FANG: How did you divide that amongst the people that were eligible to receive the funding?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let's go back a step and talk about how we got to this point. We got to this point, again, while I was not the Minister and while we were not in government, and the practice had been to ask people to do work and they weren't being paid for it. Again, I was having to clean up a bit of a mess that was left behind for me. The result of that is that people had been chronically underpaid for services that they had rendered. I understand that we wanted a resolution to this. That's how we ended up in the court. There was an agreement, and the RFS and the PSA have worked together on that. The real key to this is the fact that under the previous Government, it was considered okay not to pay people.

The Hon. WES FANG: What was the cost of this legal case to the Government, Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm not 100 per cent. I could not tell you off the top of my head.

The Hon. WES FANG: So you won't tell me the settlement and you won't tell me the cost.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I just said to you—

The Hon. WES FANG: What's the budgetary impact moving forward of the decision to now pay—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, I've told you that it's been absorbed within the RFS budget.

The Hon. WES FANG: If it's been absorbed in the RFS budget, Minister, what are you cutting in order to fund the additional overtime?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're actually not cutting anything, Mr Fang.

The Hon. WES FANG: You can't produce money out of nowhere, Minister. If it's got to be absorbed in the budget, it's got to come from somewhere else, right?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, the details are also—it's not \$5 million in one go. It could be spread over a period of time.

The Hon. WES FANG: Is it spread over a period of time, Minister?

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is maybe better to be asking the commissioner a little bit later in the afternoon.

The Hon. WES FANG: I might ask a bit later. I just wanted to see what you knew about it, Minister, before asking.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mate, I know a bit. But, obviously, what I do know is that under the previous Government, there was this expectation—

The Hon. WES FANG: It has been handled badly under you, Minister. I'll hand over to my colleague.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on a second, mate.

The Hon. WES FANG: I'll hand over to my colleague. It's his time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, that was a cheap shot so let me have one of my own.

The Hon. WES FANG: I know it was, but it was a fair one too.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It wasn't, actually. Under the previous Government people who were part of the RFS were not paid. We fixed that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, what additional resources from either the RFS or Fire and Rescue will be sent to the Mid North Coast when we see this announcement on the Great Koala National Park?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In terms of to be permanently stationed there or—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: To manage the additional risk that would come with the declaration of a national park there.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Fire and Rescue and RFS will work as part of the committee that's putting things together. We've already got resources that are there; it's about whether they're getting deployed to undertake certain things. Obviously, the Great Koala National Park covers a large area. That level of detail hasn't been determined yet.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I want to ask some questions about tablets in cells. Can you provide an update on what progress has been made towards providing access to tablets or computers to young people in their cells across the six Youth Justice NSW centres?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We continue to explore some of that. What we've also been able to work out is retrospectively fitting some of the infrastructure that's around the tablets, which is difficult. What I mean by that is, if we give somebody an iPad—let's call it an iPad—there needs to be the infrastructure around, like the modems, the connecting cable and all of those sorts of things, so they can access the internet. The costs are massive, in terms of retrospective stuff. We're doing some work that is about making sure that not only it will be safe, but that kids can have—I'll make the point that young people do have access to communication devices as it currently stands. We do use tablets, as I was saying, to facilitate family visits and medical services where face-to-face is not possible. But in every room, it's going to require an investment that, to be honest with you, at the moment we just don't have and is not sustainable. We're continuing to explore different options in terms of what would be a safe, possible way of doing it. Of course, it's very difficult, retrospectively, to install these things.

The CHAIR: At previous estimates I've heard the same sort of answers about infrastructure problems and security problems being too expensive. Is what I'm hearing correct, which is there's no plan at this point in time to allow tablets to young people?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The scoping work has made it quite prohibitive, given the context and given the budget, as well. It's really expensive and it's really complex. We haven't given up, if there are other ways of trying to do it. But in terms of individual rooms, I don't see it.

The CHAIR: Obviously tablets in cells are available to adults in prisons. What's the additional challenge that has blocked the use of tablets specifically for young people?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I probably would be better off asking either Mr O'Reilly or Ms Stewart to answer about the specifics in relation to that. What I can tell you—and it's sincere—is the implementation of the infrastructure to support it is very complex, but it's also very cost prohibitive. We're also talking about things like security and so forth. We've got screens in young people's room, and we're really focused on making sure that every young person, where possible, has their own room. But even those screens are encased in something that is a protective case. That sometimes can also act as a stopper, as a blocker of not the wi-fi reception but connectivity. So it's not just as simple as saying, "Here's an iPad and off you go."

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: I'm just wondering why adults—and I might speak to Mr O'Reilly more about that in the afternoon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Maybe Mr Tidball would be—

The CHAIR: As I said, I'm happy to speak to him this afternoon. I'm sure I can get some more information there. Minister, have you been advocating to the Treasurer for that funding to overcome those barriers so that this is something that can be given to young people?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've been advocating hard for Youth Justice funding—

The CHAIR: I'm sure you've been advocating for the whole space, but have you been advocating specifically for tablets?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm proud because we've been able to get that additional funding that I talked about. I would be disingenuous if I said to you that I advocated as hard for this as I advocated for, say—if the priority for me was about diversion. This was part of the mix of things that I advocate for but being able to secure diversion funding, so that young people don't end up in a youth detention centre, for me was the priority. I'll advocate, but I don't want to be disingenuous and say foremost.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that, but you have been advocating for funding for this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, and funding for a lot of things.

The CHAIR: The recidivism rate is about 85 per cent for young people in custody. Do you see that access to tablets could help reduce that recidivism rate, given that they can be used for things like education, counselling and vital communication? Can you see that tablets can provide a lot that could reduce that recidivism rate?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think that could help, but they're not the panacea. They're one part of a lot of things. For me the recidivism rate is a worry. It should be a worry to all of us in society that young people end up being in a youth detention centre and then come back. We have to try to get to what the root cause of the problem is and how do we rectify that. It takes a whole-of-society approach to try and fix that, for want of a better phrase. It would play a part, but I couldn't say it's the only thing that's going stop a young person coming back.

The CHAIR: It's more than just the recidivism rate in regard to the importance of tablets in cells. Former Attorney General John Dowd said to a Senate inquiry earlier this year:

Young people are more likely to use computers than adults; the majority are more used to them. The use of computers will help them with skills for later on in life. The use of computers will allow mental health functioning.

Do you agree that there's a multitude of important factors for young people to have access to technology, possibly even more so than the adults that already have access to these tablets in prisons?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I agree. I think we're up to the millennials now. I think with that particular generation, their comfort levels around technology are probably much more advanced than some other earlier generations. We do have digital technology in there. We've got the schools that operate within our Youth Justice centres. We've got access to the tablets. What we're talking about here is about having tablet accessibility in individual rooms, which is where we're not.

The CHAIR: Yes, which is where they spend a significant amount of time. They spend significant hours of the day in those cells—or a significant number of hours, I should say, because I understand those are night-time hours as well.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We do try to have them out most of the time. There are the school programs and those skills programs that we run—

The CHAIR: I understand that. That's not the point of my question. The point of my question was they spend a significant amount of time in cells, so the importance of having access to tablets in cells is extremely important, rather than just via programs. Do you see that, Minister? Are you willing to commit to investigating this tablet issue further and seeing what can be done? I continue to bring it up at each budget estimates, and it seems like it's at a bit of a standstill. Can I get your commitment to look further into it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll continue, as I do, but I also want to set realistic expectations. I may not get the outcome that we all want straightaway; it may take a bit of time. We've done the scoping work. We've looked at different ways it can happen. There are constant changes in technology as well. Other agencies that I have are also looking at ways that technology can be made more accessible. My commitment to you is I will continue to do everything that I can—and I know I have an outstanding agency in Youth Justice who believe in the things that I believe in—to try to make things better for young people. The technology access is one part of that, but I can't

CORRECTED

promise you that I'll be able to be here the next time and say to you, "I have done it." We're going to continue doing the best that we can.

The CHAIR: I've got some questions in regard to the Closing the Gap commitments. How is Youth Justice NSW meeting the priority reforms under Closing the Gap?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Primarily the priority is around number 11. Closing the Gap number 11 is, as I said a bit earlier, difficult. It's difficult because, as the Premier has acknowledged, some of the changes to the bail laws will have a disproportionate impact on young people, Aboriginal young people in particular, and we've seen that. What we're really doing is making sure that we can try to find a way of stopping young people, particularly Aboriginal youth, getting into this system. That was that commitment that we made about the diversion programs. The \$100-odd million over four years never happened before. It was really strong work. I think six of the nine partners that we have with Youth on Track are ACCOs, so really asking what the Aboriginal local community is saying would work. The work that we're doing up in Moree around—I think the partners there were Miyay Birray, Pius X and the SHAE Academy, local ACCOs working with the community, working with government agencies trying to really understand how we can support young people. But using it from a community-led, place-based approach is really the key thing for us. The expansion of the SAY program to include new places was very important.

The CHAIR: There was the \$20 million and then there was a \$13.4 million specific allocation towards Closing the Gap. Are they some of the programs that the money will spent on? Can you give me a detailed breakdown of where that \$20 million and \$13.4 million will be spent?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, the 20 being—

The CHAIR: The \$20 million for programs supporting Aboriginal adults and children leaving custody and the \$13.4 million for reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the criminal justice system.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's the funding that we're using. That's the ongoing funding, which we haven't had before. I'm actually really grateful that we've had this ongoing funding. I don't have to go to the community and say, "Look, I've got funding for you for one year." This is now ongoing funding. This thing doesn't change overnight, but it really helps a great deal in terms of not only self-determination but capacity building and leadership building. That has been the approach. If I can get as much money as possible and say, "This is how we should use it"—but I also need to be really conscious that I'm a person from Sydney who lives a very privileged life. I can't tell people what to do in their local community. What I can do is help enable and help understand, but a local place-led solution is really what we're trying to achieve here.

The CHAIR: I will come back to the question later on, but it was about details of how that money would be spent. I'll throw now—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Maybe in the meantime we might get together some stuff so when we do get back to it—

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you. Ms Sue Higginson?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm not sure if anyone has asked you yet about this. I've been in the other hearing room so, if they have, forgive me. The State of New South Wales recently settled the case involving a young person who was in detention and who was imposed with a punitive detainee risk management plan, a DRMP, including being denied access to social interaction, schooling, phone calls, visits, as well as excessively handcuffed and stripsearched. Are you aware of DRMPs being used in breach of the legislation?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I get briefed on a lot of different things, Ms Higginson, particularly around what we're doing in terms of supporting young people. Obviously, there are some instances where we've also made changes, for example, the introduction of X-ray machines to try to mitigate the stripsearching and things like that. There would be situations, of course, where young people might need to be isolated, but I don't have the specifics of that case. I don't have it on me.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: My understanding is that there are several civil claims and cases that have been made and a number of settlements have taken place. Are you aware of this allegation that the DRMPs are being used in ways that they weren't designed to be used?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let me just double-check for you but I'm pretty confident that those things were replaced a couple of years ago. I think that, since I've been the Minister, they haven't been used.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have we got rid of those management plans?

PAUL O'REILLY: Do you want me to respond?

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: Would you mind if Mr O'Reilly—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Mr O'Reilly, I'm coming back for you this afternoon—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm pretty sure they are but I don't want to give you the wrong info.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: —but yes, if you wouldn't mind.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, there has been litigation in relation to the use of DRMPs, particularly a period of practice back around 2015 to 2016. After that period of time there was a change in the policy and the application of DRMPs, but in the last two years we have replaced that policy with a different policy and a different behaviour support plan, which has been informed by our Aboriginal practice officers and has a lot more consultation with children and families in the development of plans to support their behaviour issues.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are there any cases still in the pipeline that haven't been resolved that you might be aware of from the former—

PAUL O'REILLY: Litigation matters?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: There may be. The litigation portfolio shifts all the time. There could be.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If they have changed, are you satisfied now that that punitive use of those plans has not seeped into the new system?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. I'm certainly satisfied that the new policy is far safer for children and much more culturally responsive for Aboriginal children in particular. But there must be safeguards, and there are safeguards, for making sure that it is safe. That includes having the right people in the meetings and the conversations when those plans are developed, having them reviewed on a regular basis, having the right senior oversight, providing transparency to the Ombudsman, the Inspector for Custodial Services, and making sure that young people's lawyers have visibility as needed and as they want to. It is about openness and transparency and making sure that the focus is on support and safety.

Mr JIHAD DIB: This happened, I'm advised, in 2023. Once we've come into government, making those changes—but I know that the work had been undertaken. Because they are worrying practices.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Terribly worrying. Minister, with the 34 per cent increase of young people in Youth Justice prisons over the past two years, are there any particular centres at the moment that are causing you more concern than other ones? Or the converse—are there some that you're more satisfied with their performance than some of the others?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We've got six Youth Justice centres right across the State. They're staffed by incredible people. Things change; it's a dynamic situation. We've talked about that number, particularly the number for remand—things can change really quickly. One day you may have an influx of five people. The next day you might lose seven people because their remand is over. They're prepared for that. What the youth agency has been working on really well is constantly monitoring where things are at, given that the numbers have increased, as you have said.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Dramatically.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're also satisfied—or I'm advised that there aren't occasions where we're overcrowded, so we're within capacity. But, as I said, there is a little bit of that changing dynamic every day given the nature of so many people who are on remand.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What about the centres? Are there some that are performing better than others in terms of your—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't necessarily do a report card in that sense. I've visited all the centres and each one of them is unique and they kind of specialise in some things. When I visited Acmena up in Grafton, it had a different feel to it, but also that was part of that environment there. It was a slightly different one. I go to, say, Cobham out at St Marys. Again, it's a slightly different one. Dubbo—they're all slightly different. They're all very good but then they've also got their own little unique things. I don't look at it and say—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But that is what I'm trying to get at. I know that all centres, whether they're adult or—what we're learning is they're all very unique, and places clearly influence the culture. Are there any, since you've been responsible, that you look at and you go, "Wow, this one is much more impressive"?

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: I went to the one at Riverina. One of the things that really stood out for me was their work with the local community and bringing back some of the—sadly, there was an occasion where somebody who had been a former detainee was coming back and actually served as a mentor for some of the young people. But also the connection to country—the one thing that I remembered from there was the use of Indigenous art, where young people were being taught that. But then I look at Cobham. I was out there a while ago. They did—not a greenhouse, but like a hothouse. They're doing an agricultural program or horticultural program that is really giving them those skills. They don't have that in another place but they've got something else. So every place has got something different. Out at Reiby, meeting up with a young person, who—they moved them. I think it was called the Waratah unit—a unit just before they were leaving. It was designed almost like a home. It was very different in the set-up. Every one of them is excellent. They've all got different things. They don't all have the same things because physically maybe it is not possible to have everything in every place.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: In your former capacity when you were heading up the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation, can you explain why you committed to transparency—and that was the whole program about the Northern Rivers flood recovery—but you made a deal with the Prime Minister to cut \$100 million in funding for at least 1,000 house raises and retrofits to pay for more buybacks? Do you remember making that decision?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't remember making a deal with the Prime Minister. I think last time I saw the Prime Minister—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You wrote to Minister Watt on 14 June and it was actually the Prime Minister who wrote back to you, saying—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Did he write to me?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: How cool is that!

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Sorry, he actually wrote to Chris Minns. It was in response to your letter. I want to know about that \$100 million. Why did you take the \$100 million away from the 1,000 house raises and retrofits?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I would probably have to go back into it. In the first instance, I was the joint Minister with Minister Scully. We both had responsibility for the Reconstruction Authority. That has now moved towards Minister Saffin and the Premier. I think that is on the public record in terms of why—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I found this through an SO 52—buried very deep. Nobody knew that you did this, other than this document that we found.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I'm not mistaken—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It was \$100 million and 1,000 houses.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Was that to move money from one—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It was. It was literally the old Peter-Paul thing.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It wasn't to cut money from within the Resilient Homes Program?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: No. You took money and put it into buybacks. There is no dispute; we needed more buybacks. But why did you take the money? Because right now—and I'll take this to Minister Saffin—we don't have any raises or retrofits happening at the scale that we need them. I'm curious. It comes back to this decision that you made in a letter in the dead of night.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It wasn't in the dead of night. That sounds dramatic, Ms Higginson.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Nobody knew about this.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The community was pretty clear. I know you're a member of that community. You would acknowledge that Minister Scully and I—me, in particular—spent a lot of time up there. Coming back to what is it that the community wants, at the time, their advice to us was, "We want retrofits." We can only work within a certain envelope. There was no money that was cut. It was a request, if I'm not mistaken, to be able to say, "From within this envelope, can we use some of this money from this bucket—the buybacks into the retros?"

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: The other way around. But now there are no raises or retros. This is the problem. This is what we are struggling with. I don't understand how this was an authorised deal or request that was made.

CORRECTED

Mr JIHAD DIB: We did that community reset when we first came in. We also established the community leaders forum, which included not only the local MPs but also councillors. One of the criticisms that we heard was that people were making decisions for the community that really didn't know what the community wanted. There is nothing untoward in this. It's within the funding envelope. The community said, "This is what we want. Can we have some more money for this?" We knew there was no more money coming. That was the funding envelope. That is where that would be coming from. It doesn't come from a bad place. It comes from what the community wanted.

The Hon. WES FANG: Murkier and murkier.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's actually not murky at all, Wes.

The CHAIR: Order!

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Wes just says things like that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's offensive that you would say that.

The Hon. WES FANG: It's a Walt Secord thing.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, the people of the Mid North Coast have been through so much as far as disaster recently. You are about to make a massive change to their risk profile up there when it comes to disasters, particularly fires.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm going to make a massive what?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Your Government is about to make a massive change to the risk profile up there by declaring the Great Koala National Park. You have been talking about this for 2½ years, yet we have just found out you don't have a plan for how you are going to manage that risk as far as resourcing for the firefighting agencies up there. How can you not have a plan or at least had discussions about this yet?

Mr JIHAD DIB: National Parks have their own firefighters. We've got RFS, Fire and Rescue, National Parks and Forestry Corp. We will continue working with them. It's not like there is no plan. These discussions are still being worked out. These decisions are still being made. Do we need additional resources? Do we use our resources in different ways? National Parks falls under Minister Sharpe. They also have firefighters as part of their agency. They are not part of RFS and they are not part of the fire brigade, but they do have their firefighters.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You are confident that having a national park in that area won't increase the fire risk?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's a national park. It's actually a national park and there are national parks that already exist. The fire risk is the fire risk. We know there are fire risks. We will assess that and we will work across government to make sure that we can try and mitigate and minimise wherever possible. In terms of National Parks, they have got their own mitigation strategies and their own hazard reduction strategies. When, for example, the RFS does mitigation, they don't do it all by themselves. They work really closely with Fire and Rescue and they need to work with the forestry groups or they need to work farmers or landowners. We work with whoever needs to be worked with and we share our expertise.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The fact that those conversations haven't happened yet, does that mean that this declaration is still some time off?

Mr JIHAD DIB: If they're in the embryonic stages—the discussions are happening. But the agencies talk amongst themselves. My two fire commissioners here are regularly having conversations about things. They are working with Forestry and with others. It really is a matter for Minister Sharpe. I don't know if you want the commissioners to add where they are up to and what their thoughts are. I'm more than happy for them to take this question.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We can come back and find out specifically. It concerns me that you are about to make this massive call. We all know that fires in national parks are far more severe than other areas, and yet you don't seem to have a plan in place as far as extra resources to manage that risk. In other forums, we have been told that this announcement is quite imminent. It seems like they would have to go hand in hand to protect the people and the assets in the Mid North Coast that have been through so much of late.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That would all be part of the development of the plan. This is the normal thing that would happen. We've actually got some existing things before it happens. We ask what is it that we need? Where are we short? What is our advantage or disadvantage? You are asking me that question from my perspective and I have given you an answer, but it really is Minister Sharpe's answer to give.

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The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You don't think that an announcement should be made or will be made until those discussions have been had and those plans have been adopted?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I really think it's a question for Minister Sharpe. I can tell you that National Parks has got hundreds of firefighters. They are not just some small crew.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I think 1,200. Does that sound right?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, I implore you to sit down with your commissioners and, more importantly, the local brigades up there to discuss with them and then deliver the extra resources they are going to need to manage this risk.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I am sure my great commissioners—I have to welcome Commissioner Curtin; this is his first budget estimates—will let me know everything that they do. They often do, and that's what I like. We have very good robust conversations about things that are required. They are also working across their different agencies, working together. Emergency service is about community safety. This is their bread and butter every day.

TRENT CURTIN: These arrangements will be discussed in our bushfire management committee arrangements and in our local emergency management committee arrangements.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can we come back to that this afternoon?

TRENT CURTIN: I would need to confirm that that is happening at the moment, but I have no doubt they have been considering these risk profile changes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, what is the planning process and how do we get to the point that you determine a community or a town or a small city needs a second fire station or additional resources such as trucks? If you want to use an example like Orange, which has 40,000-odd people. What projection planning is going ahead to say that in three years time we are going to need a second fire station in that town or we need to get two more trucks in there? What is the formal process for that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There is a joint standing fire committee that meets—is it monthly? It meets regularly, let's say.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Quarterly.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There you go. That's pretty regular.

The Hon. WES FANG: You don't go. That's why you don't know.

Mr JIHAD DIB: They meet. Obviously they are having a look at the constant changes. We are also seeing the changing nature of communities. We are starting to see peri-urban areas that are changing. Look at Badgerys Creek. We were able to secure some funding for Badgerys Creek airport. Everyone has known that Badgerys Creek is going to—I think it's out at Luddenham, but it's called Badgerys Creek. Everybody knows that there was going to be a big increase there, but there was never any funding for it. We've got the funding and we've also got the fireys now budgeted so that that will open in time. The joint standing fire committee always looks at the changing nature of things. It's also looking at what's possible and what's down the horizon. Of course we try and be head of the curve when we possibly can.

These are operational requirements and the commissioners are entrusted to do this. I will support them where I can. We are seeing a lot of upgrades to stations at the moment, but we are also seeing where the RFS needs things. I'm really interested in those crossover areas where the city is growing and encroaching into areas that might have been old RFS. Then there are areas for Fire and Rescue where there are challenges. I'll give you a really good example about some of the challenges in our small communities. For example, it's becoming more and more difficult to have retained firefighters because the communities are shrinking and there are not enough people who are joining up. But they have the review committee.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can I use that as a good segue, Minister, to your tanker strategy, which I presume was developed to try to address that issue. That will see minimum crews change from four to two in some regional areas. What do you expect when a crew of two rocks up to a structural fire? Would you expect them to enter that structure?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's some consultation opening up about the tiered response, which you've referred to as the "tanker strategy". It was almost like the perfect segue into it. The challenge that we've got—I suppose this is a thing I'm putting out to communities, and a plea to all of my colleagues, particularly in regional spaces—

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is, when it comes to some of the retained stations in smaller communities with populations of less than a thousand and with very few incidents, we are trying to do everything we can to get people to join up to the retained ranks. For the retained ranks to be on line, you need four people. Four people is becoming difficult to have all of the time. If I use Bingara—and I'm only saying it because I'm so familiar with it—I went up there with the Fire and Rescue leadership. We had a community meeting, pleading with the community to say, "We need people to join up, working with the local council."

We're exploring some different options. There's a consultation phase that's going on. In my ideal scenario, we've got plenty of people who are available to be on-call firefighters, so that we've got this situation where we can constantly have at least four. But the consultation that's happening and the work that's going on, we will continue doing that. But I know that Fire and Rescue is working with communities—and also, of course, the industrial side of it.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You said there's consultation going on. When do you think you'll have this strategy locked in?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's the consultation. The consultation may bring up some different findings. The consultation may say, "Here's another option. Let's try this. Let's try another recruitment drive." We're hoping that the recent decision by the IRC for a pay rise for firefighters might also be a little bit of an incentive for people to become retained firefighters. We're constantly looking at things so we can have more retained firefighters join up. It's not necessarily an incentive. We don't want to make it difficult for them.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, Minister. I was just after a time frame.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't have a time frame. There's still consultation ongoing. Is that right, Commissioner?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I can come back to you on that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's happening in Peak Hill.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: The current model in Peak Hill?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, I want to acknowledge that, yes, the Government has recognised the challenges in Moree and has made repeated announcements about that investment, but there is a disparity. In March 2024 the Government promised an \$8.75 million bail accommodation and support service along with an action plan within six months. In February 2025, nearly a year later, your media release was still saying the bail centre was expected to be opened later this year. Minister, how can the community have confidence in these announcements when a facility promised in 2024 still has not been delivered in late 2025?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms MacDonald, I'm as disappointed as you are, so I'm not going to pretend that this is something that I would have liked to have seen. But what I can say to you is that it's not for a lack of trying. I want to talk about the bail accommodation service and then I'm going to talk about some other things that are happening. There have now been a number of times when Youth Justice has got within a whisker of signing the contract, and it has been pulled by the vendor. What we're looking for in a facility is very specific. We're trying to obviously not have it in the centre of town. As you saw that time at Penrith, it needs to have multiple rooms and it needs to be fairly secure. Youth Justice are obviously willing to put in the investment and enhanced security—to do what needs to be done—but I think it has been at least three times now when things have been pulled.

I don't want to get too excited, but we are again in that process. There was a community meeting that was held where we have been pretty up-front. We said, "We need your help as a community." I spoke to the local MP and worked with the local MP. I even said, "Mate, I need your assistance. You've got a better connection to the community than I do. If somebody has got potentially something like a building that's on a block that they have—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, how many children since March 2024 have been bail refused because this facility is not there, and where are they being housed?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There is a day program that's also running at the moment in Moree. We're trying to get this. We're hopeful. Maybe in the afternoon we can give you more information. I've been let down so many times that I don't want to say to you that we're over the line, because we're not.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You don't have a timeline yet because it keeps changing?

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Mr JIHAD DIB: We're deep in one at the moment but, Ms MacDonald, we've been there before. I've almost become a little bit superstitious of it now. I don't want to say, but I can tell you we're deep in it and hopefully the person doesn't change their mind.

The Hon. WES FANG: Deeper than you know.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, Wes. Did you say something?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, don't acknowledge him.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I want to.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Don't do that, please. Answer my questions.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Great advice, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've been really clear with you.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I know, and I know you care.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, but we have even gone to the point of looking at potential government buildings and we looked at if there was any Crown land.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So you'll keep us updated, not by media release, once you have—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Do you know what, Ms MacDonald? I might even give you a call personally.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That would be great. Do you know what is really great? You have these initiatives or bespoke models like you talked about before, like the Cockatoo Initiative in the Riverina and My Path in Western Sydney. They're fantastic. You're also talking about diversion and intervention. I acknowledge that, yes, they're important community-based early intervention programs, but these regions already have Youth Justice centres there. Moree, by contrast, does not have a Youth Justice centre. I'm not saying they need one. Please, don't take that as—

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I'm not going to. If it was Mr Fang, I would have taken it completely out of context. But, no, you're not advocating to build a new Youth Justice facility in Moree.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, I'm not, but I would like consistency in delivery. Why should children in Moree still be waiting for supports that have been promised when other regions are up and running with programs?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think that's a really fair question, Ms Macdonald, and I would say, as I often do, that you ask them with sincerity and good intention. There are other supports that are operating at the moment within Moree. The bail accommodation service is one part of the proposal.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But it's very important, so I really want you to focus on that one.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Do you know what? You and I are going to go doorknocking.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll go and find someone up there.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Kiama tomorrow! I'll drive you down.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, not Kiama.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I'm only joking. I probably couldn't press upon the Committee hard enough that this is not something that is set and forget. It's being worked on every single day. I'm confident, but I've just been burnt too many times on this one, and Youth Justice has been burnt. I promise you that when we've got something—that's a commitment—I will speak to you and let you know. But I also want to make the other point—the bail accommodation service is one point—that there are a lot of other things that are happening. I talked about the partnerships between the Miyay Birray, Pius and SHAE, but we also work with the police and the PCYC there.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The Clontarf Foundation—all of them, yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's so good. I know that, from your heart, that's something that you really support.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Now, Minister—

Mr JIHAD DIB: You keep looking at the time.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I want to ask you some more questions, and it's to do with the expenses in your office. Your office has \$2.29 million in 2024-25. That's one of the higher figures across the Ministers. Can you explain why your office expenditure has grown compared to previous years?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't think it's one of the highest.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I said "higher", not "highest".

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't know; the budget's not set by me. They're on the record. But obviously it's money that's used to run our office, including staffing.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Would you be able to say what your catering expenses are?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think off the top of my head—I saw that there was about \$160 or something, and I think it might've been for—I'd just have to have a look. But the catering expenses that would've been used are for like if we get a special guest that comes in. I think we had the digital government Minister from Papua New Guinea come in. Just to let you know—we don't spend money extravagantly; I think someone went down to the cake shop and bought just a few little cakes. That's what the catering thing is. It's not so that we can—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With other expenses, it totals \$14,174. But what does "other" cover?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm just trying to see—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: While you're looking for that, \$73,000 on travel.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I just want to go back and say I do buy my own biscuits, usually from Punchbowl. I get a good deal and bring fruit and veggies in—shout-out to them. Sorry, what was the other one?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The \$14,174 on other, and then you've got \$75,000 on travel. I'm wanting to know have you chartered aircraft or—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've never chartered an aircraft. I've been on a charter, but I've never chartered an aircraft. You can imagine with my portfolio, given the number of natural disasters I'm dealing with—the travel expenses include if you've got a driver and you've got to do an overnight accommodation, that's the accommodation, that's everything associated with that. I think if you had a look at our expenses—

The Hon. WES FANG: A caravan?

Mr JIHAD DIB: What was that?

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: A caravan.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't have a caravan.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Don't acknowledge Mr Fang, please! Your office expenditure in labour was—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr Fang, I've got caravan envy. I've got a camper trailer. I'm telling you my office keeps telling me that I'm spartan. We do not—we bring staff in.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, that's fine.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If the Treasurer's watching, give us some more.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I don't understand, Minister. You bring staff in and yet your expenditure is higher. You've got \$1.7 million in labour.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think that would be staff.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many other staff do you have?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's a matter for the public record, but I'll tell you what; I've got less—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Has it increased in the last—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't think my staffing number has increased.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you accept that at a time of cost-of-living crisis, taxpayers expect Ministers to account for every dollar spent?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms MacDonald, I know that there was a declaration. I'm very comfortable with the money and spending it well within the guidelines. I have actually said we are certainly very conscious of every single dollar that we spend. We run a ministerial office with a massive amount of portfolios. We do our job to the

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best of our ability. We don't spend money for the sake of spending money. There's a very strong culture in my office—as there is across government—that you pay for your own stuff. We often talk about the specials that are on sale that week so that we can bring them in ourselves. The money that's being used are things like—are we buying newspapers? Are there subscriptions? It all can be accounted for.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Go digital!

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, but you've got to buy the subscription.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I know.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We do have the digital subscription as well.

The CHAIR: New South Wales is currently the only jurisdiction that does not have a commissioner for children and young people. I'm sure you're aware of the advocacy of Aboriginal peak bodies for an independent New South Wales commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people. They are looking for a broad mandate for the role, including youth justice. Do you support the establishment and appointment of an independent commissioner in New South Wales?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Just recently Minister Jackson launched the Office for Youth. That will work with young people. There was an advocate for youth, Zoë Robinson. Can I just take the opportunity to thank her for her work as well? I think she's finishing up.

The CHAIR: This is calling for a commissioner for children and young people that would work specifically on youth justice, as well as other areas. Is that something that you support?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Premier was asked on this one, and he gave an answer. It's really a decision for the Premier, this one.

The CHAIR: Minister, are you familiar with the Family is Culture Review Report recommendations 69 and 70? I don't expect you to have memorised those, so I've got them here to read if you're not familiar with them. Recommendation 69 talks about the developing of a system for the collection, analysis and reporting of data to ensure that information about children in out-of-home care who are also in contact with the criminal justice system is recorded and readily available to inform strategic planning and monitor outcomes for this group of children. Recommendation 70 talks about conducting further research regarding the involvement of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in the juvenile justice system, including around outcomes for those Aboriginal children. Have you or Youth Justice had any involvement in responses to those specific recommendations or has any action that you're aware of been taken?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know Secretary Tidball has oversight not only of Youth Justice, but also the role for Minister Washington where there's a big intersection between the two. But in terms of my personal thing, Minister Washington and I are of the same view. We will work together to support—one of the sad things is not only the number of young people in out-of-home care—and she's done some outstanding work with that, particularly in stopping that practice of having young people in motels. It just speaks to the kind of government that we are, but also the kind of Minister that she is, and congrats to the department for making it happen. But there's also that very strong link between young people in out-of-home care and the youth justice system. Trying to find what we can do to break that link is really important. That's the context of Minister Washington and I; we work incredibly well together, but we're also very ably supported by Secretary Tidball, who oversees everything within the Department of Communities and Justice. It's a hundred per cent for us.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. I might get some more details from Mr Tidball this afternoon.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: We can get you the Family is Culture recommendations this afternoon.

The CHAIR: Yes, thank you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If you could. I think you'll be not only pleasantly surprised, but pretty happy with—we're all focused in that one direction: What can we do to support young people and particularly the most vulnerable?

The CHAIR: I've got some questions as well about Service NSW services in Moama. I'm sure you're aware that Moama has experienced rapid population growth over the last few years. However, the Service NSW centre is run out of the council and has only very minimal services that are run through that council. Have you had a look at whether or not there needs to be a committed, dedicated Service NSW centre in that area? Because at the moment a lot of those locals are having to drive an hour to be able to access most of those services.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Could I just check—is that the mayor that I met with? Okay, that was a different one. Sorry, I was checking because I just met with a mayor from down in that south-west part recently. I thought it

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might have been about Moama, but it was somewhere else. Theirs was an issue around the council one as well. You're right: unbelievable growth in Moama. Just as a little aside—not necessarily to eat up time—I went there many years ago as Australia Day ambassador, and I went there again a couple of years ago.

The CHAIR: Given that there's only a few minutes left, if we could focus on the issue.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Service NSW continues working on that. We've got 119 centres, so we've actually increased the number of centres. A lot of those are also determined by things like you've said, Ms Hurst, including population growth and changes in demographics. We'll continue working with the local government, as we have with the local government that I referred to a little bit earlier in terms of the meeting. It's got to meet certain criteria, but things can be staged in different ways as well.

The CHAIR: Do you agree, though, that many of these local community members having to drive an hour to Deniliquin to be able to access most of these services—is it appropriate for a town that's now grown to the size of something like Moama?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ideally, I'd love for them not to have to drive. The council services offer most of the services because it's effectively a kiosk. We've put a lot of services online—notwithstanding I constantly speak about digital inclusion, so online is not the be-all and end-all. But we'll continue working with that local community. Maybe Service will have a look at the footprint, work with the two local communities. Maybe there's a place in the middle. Maybe there's something else; I don't know. But, ideally, we don't want people travelling further than they need to. Correct me if I'm wrong, Mr Wells; I think most of the services you can do at council. Most of the services, you can. It might be for things like driving tests, or whatever, that you can't.

The CHAIR: I think there's fitness-to-drive testing services three days a month in Moama. The other issue—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is that for the people who are over 80? I'm assuming fitness to drive is that one.

The CHAIR: Yes. There's another problem currently. I'm not sure if you've been briefed on this, Minister, but I'd be keen to get your thoughts on this. There have been some concerns that Victorian residents are coming into New South Wales and to border towns like Moama and they're accessing earlier P-plate access. So they're coming into New South Wales to take advantage of that earlier access. But, of course, then they're draining these very limited resources that are in Moama by doing so and it's very hard for people in the local area to actually book in to get these tests done. Is that something you've been briefed on?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Hurst, not that one specifically. I know that in border towns a lot of work happens between the two towns themselves. It can be explored by Service, but it's not something that has come up to me. I get a lot of pieces of correspondence and briefings—not necessarily that one, that I can think of. We can look into that. But I think more significantly is the idea that we look constantly at Service across the board, even looking at where we need to open new stores, where we need to relocate new centres—not stores. We'll continue doing that, but most of the services are online. I also recognise that the community in Moama is a community demographic that means not everybody is going to be online. That works really well with my Digital Inclusion Strategy that we've been working on together to recognise that. I'm happy, Mr Wells, if you can—we'll organise a briefing for Ms Hurst, if you like, maybe in a couple of weeks or so. Mr Wells, if you wouldn't mind. Would that be okay?

The CHAIR: Yes, that would be great. Thank you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We'll find out some info for you and have a chat with you. We'll talk a little bit about it anyway.

The CHAIR: Do you know if there are any statistics collected around people having to travel to access Service NSW services? You've been talking about making sure that there are Service NSW centres in the right places where people can access them. Is that something that's collected as a data point?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm not sure about the specifics. Mr Wells can, but what I can say to you is when we do look at service centres, we look at different features like how far it is away from another one, and how long it will take in terms of road travel and public transport. We try to strategically place them. That's why sometimes you'll see them move around from one place to another without reducing the number at all. Mr Wells, you're nodding your head. Does that mean we do keep statistics or we don't?

GREG WELLS: We don't, Ms Hurst, keep statistics on travel to do transactions. But, as the Minister said, we do really keep a good record of the number of transactions—a monitoring of the footprint of the geography—to plan where a service centre is, where a council agency is and also, importantly, where a mobile service centre travels to as well. I know there are some stops close to Moama for the mobile service centre as well.

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The CHAIR: Minister, can you also look at tightening any of those proof-of-address rules if that is something that, when you look into it, is an issue?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I was going to say, if you've got some examples, before we have that catch-up or that briefing, let us know so that we can explore that for you as well. I'm happy for you just to send something to me. Let me know what it is that you're saying has happened and we can check it out for you. Specifically about the number of people who maybe have got licenses or—we're more than happy to. Just give us where you'd like us to explore.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Minister, coming back to the Robertson review, one of the other issues that we've spoken about is in relation to the surveillance and the use of covert surveillance and the impact that has on individuals, particularly those suffering psychological injury. I had a frustrating conversation with icare in estimates the other day about whether or not they had to get approval or whether icare has to approve surveillance. We've had the claims managers coming back to our inquiry in relation to the workers compensation bill saying they can't tell us how much surveillance they do. Given that in the Robertson review there are clear recommendations around mistakes that have been made on surveillance, what is your Government doing to correct that situation and change the approach of the whole system to surveillance?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thanks, Ms Boyd. In that first instance, what the Robertson review also really clearly highlighted is that things do need to change; there were certain practices that were not acceptable. Again, I highlight that it reflected on something that was before my time as the Minister and certainly before Ms Young's time as the head of it. Our government response said that we're going to look at those and what we can do in terms of improving the issues and implementing the recommendations around surveillance. We've accepted that there needs to be a change around the surveillance.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Given the really quite horrific impact that that surveillance has had on people—not just the case that's raised in the Robertson review. We have a lot of people coming to us with their experiences of surveillance. In paragraph 58, Robertson comments on it being a missed opportunity to consider, as a regulator, necessary or appropriate reform when the complainant—in this case, complainant 19—actually wrote to Ms Young, saying, as a regulator, this was the perfect opportunity to then look more into this. I guess I'll ask you, Ms Young. What does that finding show you and what will you do to reform the use of surveillance across the system?

MANDY YOUNG: Just to be clear around the surveillance that we're talking about here, I think there are two things that get confused sometimes—one being factual investigations and the other being optical surveillance. A factual investigation is to establish the facts and the circumstances surrounding the injury, and the surveillance is where there's doubt that they're affected by the injury in a certain way.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are you still making a distinction between optical surveillance and social media surveillance here?

MANDY YOUNG: No, no.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Okay, good.

MANDY YOUNG: I think it's just being clear around the difference in that, because I think sometimes there is a confusion with some of the techniques that might be used in that process.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I agree. I think the claims managers are confused.

MANDY YOUNG: In terms of the surveillance itself, we have received complaints about that. We had received—through that period, also, and in my time in the role—those complaints, as highlighted by Judge Robertson. We are in the process right now of reviewing our standard practice around that, to get the clarity that we need so that we can be really clear about the expectations around the use of surveillance. So that's happening at the moment.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand, for example, that Fire and Rescue have a policy that requires the use of covert surveillance for all psych claims over a certain threshold. And we certainly have seen in the data SIRA has provided to us and the data that icare has provided to us as part of our SO 52 that there are certain departments, certain agencies—like Health, for instance—that have a much higher level of so-called factual investigation, whether or not they want to call it surveillance or identify how much of that is there or not. In the long-awaited 2024 claims management review, do you look into this issue of surveillance? Will we find out some more information when that gets released?

MANDY YOUNG: It would touch on surveillance as a broader issue. It doesn't necessarily go into the detail around surveillance. We've been working through the surveillance issue more in relation to the complaints

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and what has been raised. We will, through that review process of the standard practice, take into account and get more information together around what's happening so that we can then come up with the right set of standards.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Minister, does it concern you that Fire and Rescue are using covert surveillance in relation to when their employees are making workers compensation claims?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think we're going to look at those recommendations and implement them. I recognise that there would be times when there may need to be surveillance, but it's also being done in the right way.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Mr Robertson makes it clear that it's not actually permitted.

Mr JIHAD DIB: This is where we'll be looking at those recommendations, as I said. That was the government response. We'll be looking at those recommendations around surveillance and how we'd implement them.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Thanks, Minister. We've discussed fires and floods this morning, but I don't think anybody has asked about heatwaves. As I'm sure you know, heatwaves kill more Australians than any other kind of disaster. There was some really good work that went into the development of the new Heatwave Sub Plan. What's happening, moving forward, in terms of implementation of that plan in this financial year?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's now looking at that implementation, and it will be implemented as quickly as we possibly can in different places. Also, with that, part of it is those cool spaces. You've been a champion for this, and I want to acknowledge that. With some of the funding around the cool spaces, so that we can get some cool spaces up and running fairly quickly, there's already a body of work that's happening. We've talked about the heat plan, then actually made it part of the emergency management planning, and now the cool spaces is the next progression of how it's happening. That's where we're at at the moment.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I understand the Premier's Department is leading the work on the cooler spaces framework. My key question is if there's any funding attached to that work.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I'm not mistaken, Mr Toohey, I think there is some funding attached to it, isn't there? There is some. I've got Mr Toohey from the Premier's Department, and cheerio to everyone from the Premier's Department who is watching. He can actually give you the dollar—the stuff exactly.

SAM TOOHEY: I may not be able to give you the dollar figure exactly, but there are two key bodies of work, one of which is we've engaged Natural Hazards Research Australia to help develop a Cooler Places guide. I don't want to mislead you, but I believe we have the first draft of that back from the NHRA, and that's a subject of significant consultation to provide ongoing guidance to councils about they can help manage the risk of heatwaves. Separately, last year heatwave was identified as a priority area for exercising across local and regional emergency management committees, and the Premier's Department provided—or funded the development of, I guess—"off-the-shelf" exercise resources to assist local communities and regional communities to run exercises for emergency response arrangements.

Last year we spent about \$100,000 supporting around 24 exercises at the local and regional level—not all on heatwaves, sorry; that's inclusive of other priorities, including rescue exercises. This year we have new priorities, but the funding available this year is in the order of \$250,000 and is available for new priorities, including disability-inclusive response, disability-inclusive recovery and major evacuation centres. But that funding is available for—if committees didn't have a chance to run an exercise last financial year, they can back-capture it this financial year as well through that same funding stream.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That work in terms of guidance and resources for exercises is certainly welcome. I'm not about to criticise that. Coming back to the Minister, the problem that I'm seeing is that while this work is happening within the Premier's Department and within Emergency Services, within the local government sector, things are unintentionally going backwards because of the financial sustainability of councils. They are making decisions like reducing opening hours of public libraries, community centres and swimming pools because they can't afford to staff them. We're actually losing the cool spaces we already have, while the Premier's Department is trying to provide support and guidance to councils to provide cool spaces. My key question here is whether you will advocate for funding to local councils to actually make available the cool spaces we already have, while this really important work is happening.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We'll continue the advocacy. To let you know, I've just been advised that the budget has \$1.36 million towards the strategy, and it's shared between the Commonwealth and the State, and we'll continue to advocate. That might be for things like, I suppose, potentially where councils—and we've done that with one of the regional councils up in the northern part of New South Wales, in the north-west area, where the pool was closed at a certain time because it was a small country town. They were funded to be able to provide the payment for lifeguards and people to be there at the pool. Little things like that make a big difference. I said to

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you I could probably get you a dollar figure. That's the attached dollar figure at the moment. I imagine, given that it has been acknowledged as a priority, then there will be some additional funding that will flow with that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That example you've just given of a swimming pool is exactly the kind of work I'm talking about. Is the Disaster Ready Fund money available to councils, moving forward? How can people access funding for that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I just check that one. That's an example that I use and it's an example that, obviously, you're very familiar with, but it really makes a lot of sense. That money there is available. I'm assuming that's what it is, but maybe let me just double-check. We can get back to you on that one as well.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'd appreciate an answer on notice with the detail.

The CHAIR: We've got a couple of short rounds. The Opposition first.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, I know you're aware of the BackTrack Night Crew program that was run recently up in Armidale. You've met with the local member up there, Brendan Moylan, and spoke very positively on this.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: It was a 12-week trial, and I understand what the trial was about and what it was for. My question is, specifically, why we haven't yet extended this to a longer term program.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The funding for that was from police. We'll continue working with them. Can I say BackTrack do fabulous work, and I'm not saying that to ingratiate myself. I've seen the work that they've done. Across government, we all see the work that they do. Police are the ones who funded that particular thing. We'll continue working on how we can support BackTrack in different ways.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Would you like to see that program go longer?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Whilst this is not the SAY program, part of this is similar to the SAY program. Part of it is about making sure that we've got the funding. Part of it is about making sure that we support the community. If police want to pay for that, I'd be happy for them to do it. I'd actually be very grateful for them to do it. What I've got is, thankfully, for the first time in a long time, Youth Justice has actually got some ongoing funding, and we'll be looking at how that funding is distributed. The work that—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can you put some of your funding into it, then?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Those decisions are yet to be made, but I've just said pretty clearly that I think the work that they do is good. I visited them with Mr Moylan, but I've also visited them in other areas. In this portfolio, you get to see some amazing groups doing some incredible things with kids that really need a champion.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, what's your understanding of the role that RFS plays in assessing DAs? Are you confident that they have the resources they need to make sure there are no hold-ups in that space?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The RFS is an authorising authority, particularly around the bushfire-prone areas. They've got their resources, I think—if I'm not mistaken, there's actually a directorate, specifically, that deals with this. They're part of a working group as well. The commissioner hasn't approached me about additional resources for it, and I'm comfortable with where they're at.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Just finally, Minister, how often are we seeing tip fires occur in regional New South Wales? Are you concerned about the increase of tip fires as a result of lithium batteries?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Tip fires?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Fires in the regional tips.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can't give you that figure but, obviously, we're seeing more fires in garbage trucks. But the issue around lithium—and I'd encourage you later to ask Commissioner Fewtrell, because it's a passion project of his and because of his leadership on it. We're doing a lot of work around lithium ion batteries, around safety around lithium ion. I can't give you that specific number, but I know that Commissioner Fewtrell is leading work across the country on this. We're working with the EPA. We're trying to get a better education program as well for communities in terms of the dangers of lithium ion batteries and buying reputable products. I also know that Minister Sharpe is doing a lot of work around the recycling or the safe disposal of the lithium ion batteries. I don't know, though. That's not within my space, but if I can encourage you to ask the commissioner later about lithium ion batteries, he's got plenty to do, including a new standard.

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Dr AMANDA COHN: Minister, you made an election commitment to increase Fire and Rescue personnel by 600. Where's that up to?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I haven't got the latest number, but it's ongoing. I think just recently there are 52 that have been committed to the Badgerys Creek fire station. There were the ones that were for Oran Park as well.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Twenty relievers as well.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Twenty relievers as well in Oran Park that actually had the fire station but no fires. We actually have also spent the last couple of years—or a lot of time last year—building the capacity within our training academy. The training academy out at Orchard Hills that, effectively, is where you go to become a firey or a Fire and Rescue person—we're building that capacity so that we can also move through the numbers fairly quickly. But we're progressing it.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Have you got further detail of those capacity upgrades for training, in terms of what it was and what it is now?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, so two years ago we were putting through about 100 to 120 recruits a year. We've scaled that up to be more than double that now. From the start of next year we'll be at a 300 per year rate, moving to 400 per year rate—a very significant increase in effort. That's for permanent firefighters. Retained firefighters, we're training consistently about 400 new retained firefighters each year in the regional training centres.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Is that increased training capacity now sufficient for the need moving forward?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: That's exactly why we've increased that training capacity, so that we are well positioned to be able to add the additional firefighters from that Government election promise, and also deal with our own internal, normal replacement requirements as well.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It was about making sure we've got the capacity to be able to do the training. Also, we had to find funding. Unfortunately, one in 12 permanent firefighters had not been funded—286-odd firefighters. That's been sorted out now. Most importantly, when I spoke to the commissioner about this, it was that we've got that commitment, but we actually didn't have the capacity to get them through. Don't forget, this is additional firefighters. You've got ones who are retiring or are leaving the services, so to say we're training 300 doesn't mean it's 300 and it'll be done within two years. It's also that there's a lot who are retiring. It's been good to build that capacity.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Is there anything you would like to clarify, Minister, arising from this morning's very articulate session?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I really want to thank you for—sorry you had to work so hard today.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: We've been at it, mate, don't worry.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's a couple of things I might go back to. Ms MacDonald, specifically some of the questions I've got answers for now. Coming back to the question about Bail and Accommodation Support Service. Youth Justice has contracts with 11 providers for bail and accommodation services around New South Wales. There are 11 BAS.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So 11 providers?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, 11 providers. Sydney, Bathurst, Orange, Tamworth, Kempsey, Lismore and the 'Gong, and 124 placements last year secured. Also the one about the recidivism: The latest I have are—I'm not sure if that was you, or whether it was—

The CHAIR: We may have both asked about recidivism.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Maybe, Ms Higginson, I think—but 68.1 per cent who completed custodial supervision orders in the 12 months ending June 2024 did not receive a subsequent custodial sentence within 12 months of release for a new offence. I suppose, conversely, it would be 30.9 per cent. So 68 didn't come back within 12 months, which is great. And 50.2 per cent who commenced a supervised community order in the 12 months ending December 2023 had no further contact with the justice system within 12 months. Custodial services—68 per cent didn't come back within 12 months. Community orders—50 per cent didn't come back within 12 months. It's actually a little bit more positive, but we want to even get that better than that. That's the goal. Is there anything else that I need to add, Commissioner?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I can correct some information. Chair, if I may, earlier Ms Boyd made a statement that indicated Fire and Rescue had a policy around surveillance of people that were on mental health

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related workers compensation. I can categorically deny that and say that's incorrect. I'm happy to follow up with her about the veracity of that information. We don't do—and neither does EML, our provider—any covert or physical surveillance at all. The only thing that does happen is when there's a litigated matter, they'll do a desktop review of things, but that's guided by the recommendations around insurance and care guidelines, so we're consistent with that. I think probably in support of the claim that Ms Boyd was raising is the fact that there's a lot of sensitivities around people's concerns about surveillance, and probably a lot of misapprehensions or paranoia at times, where people report they are being surveilled. We've had recent cases of people saying, "We're being surveilled," when there's absolutely nothing being done by us or any of our insurance providers.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Madam Chair, if it's okay, I have just a couple of concluding comments. Can I thank the Committee for what we did today. I really appreciate the way that it was conducted in a respectful way. Even I thought Wes was pretty good. I really do appreciate it. Can I thank you, as well, for the questions specifically about—I think the intention is so good, and this is when you see government at its best, and all parts of government. Parliament is at their best when everyone is actually trying to achieve the same thing. We've got different ways of doing it. It's a really, really big task to get to budget estimates, and I want to thank the people who have worked so hard to get me prepared for this—all of the notes I've received, all of the preparation, people who answered emails.

I'm just really appreciative, not only of who's here at this desk, but just around the corner as well; you see departments across all three portfolios are absolutely fantastic. I've got every confidence in them and know that what they do is really for the best for the people of New South Wales. Whether that's in the inclusion space, whether it's in the emergency services, whether it's for the young person who just wants a better chance at a life, I think they're all inspired to do the very same thing. I really want to give a special shout-out to the emergency services. It's been a really difficult probably six months, and they're tired, but they front up every single time we ask them to. Our volunteers, our paid fireys—everybody just works together. I think they really need to be acknowledged.

Of course, I want to thank the team in my office, the ministerial office, and the EA for getting me to this point, and to everybody in the Committee. Can I also thank the attendants and the secretariat for really looking after us. I appreciate it. You're the unseen heroes. Thank you for the work that you do. To the Committee, more than happy to get back to you about all of the stuff. I think, Ms Hurst, we'll get back to you about that service stuff, and Ms Cohn, I'll get back to you as well about the stuff around the heat thing specifically. Mr Barrett, I'll see you on the footy field fairly soon. Thanks, everyone. Have a wonderful afternoon.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, how could I forget? To all the dads: Happy father's day on Sunday. And to my kids, who I know will be watching, make sure I get a sleep in, put on a barbecue, and let me watch the footy on Sunday. Happy father's day to the dads and all the dad figures as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We all love your acceptance speech at the end of budget estimates. Thank you for that. Unfortunately, our time with you this morning has finished, but we will now break for lunch and we'll be back at 2.00 p.m.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back after the lunch break. We will go straight to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Curtin, can I come to you first? I touched on the approving of DAs within the RFS with the Minister. Can you explain for me what the role of the RFS is in that process?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes. The RFS has a very important role to make sure that when consent authorities, usually councils, require further advice on compliance with the bushfire protection policy, we provide advice to councils on providing consent. We do a range of risk modelling and use our operational expertise and a network of people within the RFS to undertake those assessments to determine whether those usually high-risk assessments are suitable for development so that the communities will be safe, both now and into the future.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are they done based on individual DAs or do you map out areas and put ratings over areas?

TRENT CURTIN: DAs that fall into the bushfire-prone areas would usually go through the council process and they would refer them to us where they don't believe that the risk assessment that's been undertaken by accredited bushfire consultants meets the requirements of the bushfire protection policies. We would then do

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a further assessment to provide advice to those consent authorities. We also have a mechanism under the Rural Fires Act where we provide certification for developments to go ahead.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are the fire-prone zones something you've previously mapped out?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes. Councils prepare those and we certify those in consultation with councils.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: For me to put in a DA if I live in one of those areas, I need to get an assessment done by a bushfire assessment agency. Is that what you referred to?

TRENT CURTIN: As best as I understand. Forgive me. In the few weeks I've been there—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You put in that DA, and then that comes to RFS as an individual application to be assessed.

TRENT CURTIN: As I understand, the council can assess that as the consent authority. Or, if it's State significant, it's assessed by the department. But where the consent authority is unable to determine compliance with the planning for bushfire protection, they will refer that to the Rural Fire Service for advice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How long does an application like that sit with RFS?

TRENT CURTIN: There are a number of mechanisms that provide mostly 21 days for us to process those applications. But, given that they are usually the highest risk applications or the most complex applications, it's not unusual for RFS to require further information from the proponent. That further information process then requires them to do further work and come back to RFS on the matter.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Further work on top of the 21 days?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes. Based on the mechanism, that 21 days sometimes stops. Sometimes the 21 days keeps going.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is it a desktop assessment or are we going out to the locations?

TRENT CURTIN: We do risk modelling. We use the latest technologies in undertaking bushfire modelling. We use operational assessments on access and egress and on the availability of water. I understand that, at times, we do field visits as well.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Who is doing these assessments?

TRENT CURTIN: There's a specialist team within the RFS that's integrated into our predictive modelling teams—people with planning skill sets and people with bushfire protection skill sets.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is that a centralised team or does each area have their own teams?

TRENT CURTIN: It's a centralised directorate, where we have teams spread out across the State who undertake those activities.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Have these people come to RFS as planners or are they RFS people that have become planners?

TRENT CURTIN: It's both of those, as I understand. You get the expertise of people with a planning background, but, importantly, you need to bring in the operational experience of people who have worked bushfires who understand our operational capabilities and capacities and can make decisions about availability of water, access and egress, and bushfire modelling.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can you give me a general indication of how many are sitting with RFS at any one time?

TRENT CURTIN: At any one time, I can't. I should be able to provide you with the number that we've processed in the last 12 months, if you want me to find that for you.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you have time frames for them as well?

TRENT CURTIN: For the ones in the last 12 months?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes.

TRENT CURTIN: What I can say is that I understand that our performance in terms of meeting those time frames has improved over the last couple of years. We've met that time frame 83 per cent of the time in the last year, with our target being 90 per cent. So we've come up quite significantly. We received some funding from the department to increase our capacity to move some of the backlog. We've been working closely with the department on the housing targets and trying to progress matters as quickly as possible. But we understand that

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these are very complex matters, and that for bushfire risk and planning, both now and the future, with the increase in bushfire risk and the discussion we had previously about climate change and the impacts on communities in the future, we need to be very serious about the way in which we assess these projects.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The concern would be that this process is taking expertise away from firefighting to admin. Is that a concern within the brigade?

TRENT CURTIN: My understanding is that, under the current arrangement, it costs about \$5 million a year for us to run that function. We receive about \$216,000 in income per year for the section under the Rural Fires Act, but we don't get any cost recovery or income mechanism from the referrals that come in from consent authorities. That is a reappportionment of resources that would otherwise be used for volunteer training, volunteer equipment and supporting our volunteers to be ready for bushfires. We are using it for these development processes. We've been trying to provide as much resource as we possibly can. We accept that with more resources we can process things more quickly, but it is a reappportionment from other parts of the organisation.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can I revisit that? To play this role, it costs you about \$5 million a year.

TRENT CURTIN: Yes. I can send you something on notice, if that would be useful. But it's around \$5 million a year in salaries, as I understand.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: And what you get as far as income on cost recovery is \$216,000?

TRENT CURTIN: I believe it is \$616,000.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That's a big gap.

TRENT CURTIN: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Under what authority do you play this role? Is this within the RFS Act?

TRENT CURTIN: Section 100B of the Rural Fires Act provides for the certification process. Under section 4.14 and 4.15 of the EP&A Act is where we undertake the consultation work with consent authorities.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I presume then that you'd be quite happy to have some more resources added towards that, if that was ever on the table.

TRENT CURTIN: Yes. Every department would want more resources, but it's a matter for the Government how that's to be apportioned. If I could add, yesterday and last week I met with Fire Chief Tony Marrone from the LA County Fire Department. He's in Australia at the moment. He's at the RFS headquarters today giving a presentation on the fires that they experienced last year. With the change in climatic conditions, he's experiencing the most unusual fire season they've ever seen over in California. He's coined a term, "wildfire-induced community conflagration", which is the house-to-house impact of fires, where you've got the inability of firefighters to undertake property protection.

Because they're so overwhelmed with the number of people exposed to those fires, they're undertaking as an initial attack the evacuation of people and life protection. You've got weather conditions where they're unable to fly their aircraft. So you've got these house-to-house contacted ember attacks that, as I understand, over in the US in the last year they've lost around 18,000 houses and properties to. If we continue to see changes in climatic conditions, these conflagrations are going to be a thing we're going to have to be dealing with on and on in the future. The planning arrangements, and the integration of those planning arrangements into the operational expertise of the Rural Fire Service, are integral to making sure we're setting ourselves up for success, both now and into the future.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How closely are you aligned with the planning department?

TRENT CURTIN: Very closely aligned. We've had some people on secondment, as I understand, in the housing arrangements. I'm joining a steering committee tomorrow to make sure that we're very closely aligned with the department to make sure we're progressing things as necessary. I'd like to do a review of our resourcing. As you propose, there could be mechanisms where we could make sure we've got the perfectly efficient number of people who are processing those applications so that we can keep the housing moving, but also make sure we're doing these proper risk assessments so that we can protect our communities now and in the future.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Fewtrell, we were talking before about the water curtain for the Blue Mountains. Can you explain the experience you've had with that and why you think this is such a good thing to add to the list of firefighting tools that we have?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I was approached by the Bells Line of Road Business Council, representing the local community up in the Bells Line of Road Bilpin area. They were putting an application together for a Disaster

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Ready Fund grant and they approached me to see if I'd be willing to support that. I considered what they were putting together—the model that they proposed—with the series of water tanks along both Bells Line of Road and Putty Road. Based on our experience in 2019-20 with the bushfires in that area, and my local knowledge of that area as well, there was a clear shortcoming through that season where firefighting efforts were certainly more challenging because of the lack of readily available water supplies.

As agencies, both Fire and Rescue and RFS, we spend a lot of time putting bulk water tankers up there to support the strike teams that were working in those areas, but that was a continual extra logistical element that needed to be maintained. The opportunity to support their grant application to then, if they were successful, get the outcome of being a series or a network of water tanks that were connected to a bore supply would provide very significant improvement to firefighting operations there, and I based that on my firsthand experience. Early in December 2019, the Mount Wilson back-burn broke containment lines very quickly over the course of the afternoon and started impacting the area west of Bilpin.

At that point, Fire and Rescue was asked to send up a number of strike teams. I was the deputy commissioner at the time. I deployed, initially, to meet the strike teams in Bilpin, where they were going to be in a staging area. But conditions were deteriorating quickly, so we all ended up in the midst of the firefight for several hours. Working with those crews it became evident, because this was such a rapidly evolving situation, either ourselves or RFS hadn't had the chance to bring up those additional resources of large water tankers, so the time lost of cycling trucks back further afield to where they could refill was quite significant. It was a drain away from the firefighting operations. So there's that efficiency perspective.

Also, from a health and safety perspective, the challenge is for our crews to find suitable water. Remember that we were at the end of a fairly substantial drought, so other storage tanks, because they weren't connected to a bore supply, were dry and not able to be used. Water and farm dams were fairly limited and a little bit more difficult. There was one example where single-handedly one of our firefighters took the truck, found a farm dam, accessed the dam, brought down the large heavy suction hoses, connected three of them up, draughted the water out of the dam, and had to repeat all that to pack all the equipment away. That's a task that would normally be done by a crew of four. Because of the circumstances, that person was doing it on their own. From a health and safety perspective as well, if we had a more readily available network of tanks to draw on in areas like Bells Line of Road and Putty Road, from the health and safety perspective for our firefighters, it's a much quicker, safer and easier thing for them to refill the trucks as well.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How big are these tanks that we're talking about? How does that correlate to the number of truck trips to another location?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I don't recall the exact details of what that group was proposing for that grant submission, but the tanks were certainly in the capacity of several tens of thousands of litres, if not hundreds of thousands of litres, and the ability to be able to have them refilled so, from a practical sense, there'd be plenty of opportunities for fire trucks coming in and taking 2,000 or 3,000 litres of water at a time.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The other point that they make in here is this isn't just about the communities in the Blue Mountains. This is the front line, as far as fires coming into Western Sydney, isn't it?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, that was the other factor that I considered when I was approached to consider any support by way of the letter for the grant application. It is the fact that, yes, significant north-westerly winds are typically when we have our worst fire conditions. That area to the north-west of Sydney encompasses that area of Bells Line of Road and Putty Road. Historically, that has been a pathway for fire to get deeper into the suburbs on the edge of Sydney.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Curtin, are you familiar with this initial issue that was brought up by Commissioner Rogers before you?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes, I've got some awareness but only limited awareness of what I've been briefed on.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Would that include the proposed cost that would come with this?

TRENT CURTIN: My understanding is a proposal was put forward to the bushfire management committee, which has representation from a number of different agencies. In its current state, my understanding is the bushfire management committee didn't support that moving forward at the time. Separate from that, RFS has been investing pretty heavily in bulk water tankers and bulk water in ways that we can help in a mobile kind of way in lots of communities to provide water access. We're just about to acquire a 75,000-litre mobile storage tank which we can move around the sites. We've just invested in those Tatra appliances, which are 8,000-litre appliances each. We've got some 41 bulk tankers across the State, as well as other mobile and flexible bulk water

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arrangements. I'm really supportive of community groups coming together and providing proposals to bushfire management committees, for them to consider how that might work in that local community and how we might be able to improve fire safety conditions in those areas. I propose to continue to have those discussions with the bushfire management committee.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I might have more on that a bit later on, but I am conscious that you're leaving early, Commissioner Wassing, aren't you?

MIKE WASSING: I am, at five o'clock.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Right. I'll come to you now anyhow. I'd like to talk about the community volunteers program, the community response volunteers, that played out up on the Mid North Coast. Firstly, very briefly, can I have a quick assessment of how that worked?

MIKE WASSING: The SES have what we call a spontaneous volunteer model. Effectively what that model is is we work with local community leaders to help facilitate and coordinate what I would call community mobilisation. In the case of the Mid North Coast, that was based primarily out of Taree. We were fortunate to partner up with both a key community leader, but also a key community leader from the traditional owners, which was very important in the context of the community as well. What we did around that was we framed a model around using our SES volunteers and some of our staff to help coordinate that, as well as other community members, which effectively was a call to arms, if you will, in terms of for clean-up operations—a coordinated mud army, for want of a better term.

Not only did it give very meaningful work in the context of local community members themselves, particularly obviously those that were not impacted, but also surrounding people that really fundamentally want to give, but it's a great part of our Australian culture. Certainly in New South Wales we've seen that as well. It puts it into a coordinated arrangement. We're able to provide briefings. We're able to provide protective clothing. We're able to provide coordinated tasking. It was supplementing other volunteer groups. We knew that already. It always occurs, which is that wonderful parts of communities mobilise themselves through local sports clubs, the local gym and other local businesses that were already doing some of this work. It supplements that. It speeds up the relief and the clean-up operations.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We were lucky with the community leaders that were selected there. My concern is—and I don't know how to frame this as a question—that there's no guarantee that the people that come forward for this are an elected body. I think in this case it was an individual that came forward, so there's no actual governance or structure behind that person. Moving forward, how do we go about identifying who these community leaders are to ensure that they are the community leaders?

MIKE WASSING: Yes. The first bit for us is to acknowledge that every community is fundamentally different, which I think goes to your point. What was done at Taree wouldn't necessarily fit in some of the other communities that were impacted, so Kempsey or even down the road at Maitland. It has to be fit for purpose in that local community. It can't be forced upon the community either. The model is very much framed around a wraparound, if you will, in terms of us providing volunteers and staff that are trained in engaging with community members and mobilising them in a coordinated and safe manner. Because it also gives the benefit, in many cases—and we've certainly seen this in Taree and other places; I've seen this work also in other jurisdictions where I've operated—in that it leaves legacy skill sets for many community members that are either better connected or they've walked away with certain skills.

There is always a certain aspect that ultimately, from a work health and safety perspective, it's our workplace. We're responsible from a work health and safety perspective. The full intent around that is to continue to explore better models. We're able to leverage some of the national research around that, which continues to evolve in the volunteering space more broadly. From my personal experience in the past, we've had volunteers that volunteer for community services or other organisations in a very structured approach, but there are many volunteers in many other ways and particularly in this emergent, informal volunteering model that are often the first responders. Because we often see it also in the response phase, where people rightfully and meaningfully will contribute to the local community; it might be their neighbour, it might be a family member, or even broader.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How did we go with the transition from SES being the response agency to that through to—and RA taking over. How did that spontaneous volunteer program transition in that period? Is that something we need to look at moving forward?

MIKE WASSING: It's probably something we need to make smoother. It worked but—that's effectively because, ultimately, when you build these models, you build a trust model very quickly. As a result of building that trust model that's based on individuals and the organisations—certainly in Taree, that's what I saw. When we're getting ready for the next event and handing that over in terms of the recovery process through Disaster

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Relief Australia, who was operating initially with us but then transitioning under the Reconstruction Authority for longer term recovery—effectively, that was having to rebuild that trust network in terms of who they were, the model itself. There are some areas that we've identified through some of the discussions at the time that were fixed, but I think that's part of the model that we would see as part of their improvement going forward.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I've got questions for both fire commissioners this afternoon, starting with Fire and Rescue. There was a discussion this morning about some of the issues around recruitment for retained firefighters. I understand there has been a quite well-received Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy. What is the funding allocation to that strategy for this year? Are you looking at expanding it?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: We have been running that Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy, or IFARES, as we call it, for over 10 years now. It has been a very successful program. We've now got over 5 per cent—I think we're at 5.3 per cent—of our staff are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, so significantly over the Government targets in that. That is starting to pay some really big dividends for our people. You're seeing a lot of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander firefighters being very comfortable and proud talking about their culture, sharing their insights and starting to better inform the way we engage with the communities, not only in the response but in the prevention and preparedness type work that we do and even something we're working on at the moment leading into the recovery space and connecting communities with other parts of government through that emergency response. I can take on notice the costs that we have for that program.

But, certainly from a value perspective, it has been an immense value and the payback has been much greater. We currently have one of the classes going through that process at the moment. They're in the last couple of weeks of the program. The program runs for about six or seven months and they undertake a certificate III through TAFE NSW. Recently we have just reviewed all the arrangements supporting that program and renewed the arrangement with TAFE as the education provider. Prior to that, we do get a lot of applicants and we run a selection course as well called Tracks to IFARES. That's a chance for us to select the strongest of the candidates, who are the most suitable and bring the most to the table, I guess. Given the competitiveness and the numbers, we need to do that.

We would look to consider expanding. It has been a very successful one. I think the renewed partnership with TAFE will show significant dividends over the coming years. That new partnership has only just been finalised and locked in earlier this year. This course that we're running now is the first one under the new arrangements. Certainly, as part of that process, they're exploring a few other options that might come with it. They're looking at the moment about what type of certificate III that they do provide—up until now, that certificate III has been in fitness leadership—and looking to broaden it to provide a more diverse skills and job readiness type qualification. I know there is some work that will happen as part of an after-action review after this current program to see what we do there.

Then there are some initial conceptual discussions happening around how that might be able to be—build upon the IFARES program and the success of the IFARES program to put in the context more of a retained firefighter employment pathway. That is very early stages. As I say, it's just at the conceptual process now. But, given the success of the IFARES program, we'll be able to demonstrate that type of model can work. I'll use the example of Brewarrina. I think the crew at Brewarrina there now is probably, if not two-thirds, very close to two-thirds Aboriginal in a community with a very high Aboriginal population. I used to work out in that area. Previously they had no Aboriginal firefighters. Then we had one and we've built it up since then. It's very heartening to see the difference, to have a really sustainable crew out there because of the connections and the efforts that have gone into building those pathways but also the trust with the local community. We'll take those learnings from that sort of case study of the towns like Bre, where it has worked well before, and the learnings from the broader IFARES program, which has been primarily a pathway to permanent employment, and see what we can do with a retained model.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's very helpful. I appreciate you might need to take the numerical questions on notice, but you mentioned the competitiveness of the program in your answer. How many applicants did you have for that last round of IFARES versus how many people are accepted into the program and then complete it?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'll just double-check. We took 20 on to the IFARES course. Tracks had—we had 150 applicants, and 24 participants went on to the full program. From memory, I think there were about 50 to 60 participants in the Tracks program.

Dr AMANDA COHN: There's obviously very strong interest in it.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes.

Dr AMANDA COHN: There was a lot of discussion today around planning the need for future fire stations. I don't want to go back over what has already been discussed. But I'm specifically interested in the

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question of strategic land acquisition, particularly in growth areas or areas that are being urbanised very quickly. I used to be on local council. I know how hard it is to go backwards, once a subdivision is approved, to try to find space for public services. At what point in that planning process would it trigger the Government to consider strategic land acquisition in growth areas?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: That's probably more a question for somewhere else or someone else in government. But, from a Fire and Rescue perspective, we're certainly looking regularly. We have a senior planning officer who is looking at what the future plans are for urban development across the State and where our future needs are likely to be. We're at the moment doing a piece of work really mapping out what our forecast infrastructure needs are over the next five to 10 years and further ahead. Where possible, we'll be often putting up applications in the pool for the developer contribution type process as well.

We'll work across all different parts of the process to either get an opportunity to acquire land in those identified areas through the developer contribution pathway or make purchases ourselves. We work with government at the stage where, if one doesn't work, we'll take the other pathway and see when we can—our position is to try to do it as early as possible. While we're looking for opportunities to purchase locations prior to that, we're also working with our colleagues in Planning to identify that there will be a need for an emergency services precinct in an area, for example, so that at least some land might be earmarked early as well.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Is there currently a review of safety incidents and safety processes at Fire and Rescue?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Not a particular review, as far as I'm aware. Any serious safety incident, we do do a safety review on. We have a well-established process called ICAM, which is Incident Cause Analysis Methodology. It's looking at the full pathway of how the set of circumstances came to be from every perspective that that particular safety event happened. Then, depending on the significance or the seriousness of the safety incident—the extent and the detail and the size of that review or report is obviously greater for something of more seriousness.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I've got a copy of a document that came from a GIPAA. The topic was an unrelated issue but the document, which is an agenda for a meeting, mentions a briefing on the internal audit of safety incidents. This is where my question has come from. The rest of the document is subsequently redacted, so I have no detail about what that might involve.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: As part of our regular internal audit program, one of the topics that we looked at was the safety incidents. It was in the sense of how we've dealt with them and how we've addressed the recommendations from those.

Dr AMANDA COHN: In terms of the recommendations arising out of the safety incidents, what sort of framework have you got in place to check off that all of those recommendations are considered seriously or completed?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: The key part of that is our work health and safety steering committee, which is the peak health and safety committee for the organisation. We receive updates on the progress of those investigations. Once those investigations are completed and reports are prepared, they're submitted for consideration and endorsement by the steering committee and then we track the progress of the delivery of the recommendations.

The CHAIR: I'm going to go back to some of the questions I was asking the Minister this morning. I know I was coming back to people this afternoon—there you are, Mr O'Reilly. I was asking the Minister about tablets in cells in regard to young people. I think we were talking about the fact that this is available for adults but not for young people. I was trying to get some more information. I know we've heard about infrastructure problems, security issues and cost barriers, but I'm just trying to understand why adults have access but young people, specifically, don't.

PAUL O'REILLY: Those barriers are real barriers. As I've said in this place previously, we accept the proposition and the benefits of that proposal, absolutely. Without question, we accept the proposition. But implementation is challenging for all of those reasons. One of the reasons why it's different to Corrective Services is economies of scale. That's one of the bits of feedback we got when we started scoping the costs with the market. Economies of scale in Youth Justice is challenging, so costs are going to be higher.

We also have other pressures. One of the pressures that was discussed this morning was the increase in the number of kids coming into detention on remand. We have some investment in diversion programs in the community. We would like to be able to do much more of that, and so we have to prioritise funding. There is no

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avoiding that because there is no possibility of unlimited funding, obviously. When children come into detention, our urgent priority is safety and access to legal services to seek bail consideration. That's the priority.

Some 60 per cent of children are in there for less than 24 hours. Those numbers tell us that we have to think carefully about how we prioritise our investment. Having the right staff in the sense of culturally responsive staff and well-trained staff, the appropriate staffing ratios to keep kids safe, investing in diversion, and making sure the assets are at a reasonable standard so children can have their own room and have privacy and safety—those are the urgent priorities. Implementing the internet in every cell would be great, but I couldn't support it being a top priority because of the other urgent priorities in terms of keeping kids out of detention.

The CHAIR: I think this might be to Mr Tidball. We were talking about the Family is Culture review report this morning and what action has specifically been taken in that space.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Your questions, I believe, Ms Hurst, pertain to recommendations 69 and 70, as I recall it.

The CHAIR: Correct, yes.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Both relate to information sharing regarding children and young people who cross that very difficult boundary between Youth Justice and out-of-home care. I will deal with recommendation 69, firstly. In 2019 the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research commenced building an internal linked data asset, connecting data across DCJ services. This database now allows the monitoring and analysis of the intersections between DCJ services, including justice system contacts among Aboriginal people in out-of-home care. There has been meaningful progress on that.

Similarly, with recommendation 70, DCJ is using two large linked assets—the linked data asset and the human services dataset—to understand the number of Aboriginal children that are involved in the criminal justice system and the factors that are associated with involvement in the criminal justice system. The way I would characterise it is this being meaningful progress. It's not my place to speak for the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations. There is, importantly, ongoing dialogue, as there should be, around data questions. But, as I've said, there is significant progress to report.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that. I've got some further questions around Closing the Gap as well. I asked the Minister a few questions this morning and I've just got a few follow-up questions. I was asking this morning about the \$20 million for programs supporting Aboriginal adults and children leaving custody, and there was \$13.4 million for reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the criminal justice system. I just wanted to get a bit of a breakdown on how that money will be spent in those two programs.

PAUL O'REILLY: The Government had a Closing the Gap budget process this year, where government agencies were required to work with the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations to develop proposals for Cabinet consideration to try and tackle Closing the Gap targets. DCJ was involved in that process, particularly in relation to targets 10, 11, 12 and 13. Today we're talking about target 11, obviously. We worked with our CAPO partners, the Aboriginal Legal Service, to develop two proposals. One was for a throughcare system, which is about supporting people as they are in detention and as they leave detention. That has been approved for funding to the tune of \$20 million. I think it's \$19.98 million, actually.

That will do some really good things. It will look at foetal alcohol syndrome diagnosis and care, which is a really important consideration for children in the system. It will look into establishing Aboriginal alcohol and other drug services, establishing place-based post-release supports in the community, domestic and family violence intervention in detention or in custody for adults, Elder and mentoring programs in the community to support people exiting custody or detention. This was announced—I think it was in June that the announcement happened.

The second program is the \$13 million for Therapeutic Pathways for Children. This is targeting children under the age of 14 who come to the attention of the police or the courts and is looking at ways of supporting them differently and providing an alternative response. It's exploring a community-led alternative responder model so that police are not always the first agency to be called when children are engaged in risky behaviour, and also setting up an ACCO-led youth participation mechanism to give Aboriginal children more of a voice in the justice system. They're very practical, detailed things that come from a whole heap of research that the Aboriginal Legal Service has led with DCJ. We're currently in the establishment and early design stages for implementing that funding.

The CHAIR: I know the Government previously announced an expansion of the Youth Justice NSW Safe Aboriginal Youth—SAY—program to additional locations across the State. I'm just wondering if I could get an update on that expansion.

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PAUL O'REILLY: Absolutely. There are four new locations—Coffs Harbour, Orange, Moree and Tamworth. There has been a tender process. Aboriginal organisations have been chosen to run those services in those locations.

The CHAIR: Last week the Government announced an investment of \$4.2 million over two years to extend the pilot program for young people in the Riverina and Western Sydney at risk of interacting with the youth justice system. That's the Cockatoo Initiative and My Path in Penrith. Are you able to advise how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have actually accessed these programs?

PAUL O'REILLY: We can give you that on notice.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that. I understand from previous questions on notice that Youth Justice NSW provides at least nine other services targeting reducing offender risk, including the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Safe Aboriginal Youth program, the Aboriginal reintegration program and Aboriginal cultural mentoring program. Did any of those programs receive additional funding in this year's budget?

PAUL O'REILLY: Some of them are funded through the base budget for Youth Justice, so a lot of that work is part of our normal business.

The CHAIR: So all of those programs are ongoing?

PAUL O'REILLY: Can you give me the list again, please?

The CHAIR: Sorry, the list that I've got here is the visiting Aboriginal Legal Service, the Safe Aboriginal Youth Program, the Aboriginal reintegration program and the Aboriginal cultural mentoring program.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, they all have funding this year in the budget.

The CHAIR: I've got some questions about counselling services as well in regard to Youth Justice. Concerns have been raised with my office about the internal mental health counselling services provided by Youth Justice. As I understand it, a lot of young people mistrust the service itself due to fears about confidentiality. Has Youth Justice looked at engaging an external counselling service that young people may be able to access and feel more comfortable with? Is this a concern that you're aware is happening?

PAUL O'REILLY: I've heard it raised in this place previously. At previous hearings it has come up, but I'm not aware of any evidence of it being a widespread issue in the system. We provide a diverse range of counselling options, including psychologists who work in the centres. We have caseworkers with counselling training and qualifications. We have visiting psychiatrists through the justice health system that come into the centre as well. We have other supports through Elders and mentors who visit the centre, and we have other programs who come in and work in the centres. There are numerous different ways of providing those services. As people leave detention, they are connected with caseworkers in the community and community health based counselling services as well. It is a very broad range, but I'm not aware of any case where people did not want to engage in our counselling services because of privacy issues. There are ethical standards in relation to privacy and counselling, of course, which apply everywhere, including in our system. But I'm not aware of that issue.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Mr Wells, if I may—or do I go through you, Mr Head? I'll ask the question and then you can say.

GRAEME HEAD: Ask the question and we'll work it out.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I just want to confirm that the Business Bureau or the concierge service is funded under the Customer Service portfolio, which Minister Dib is responsible for.

GREG WELLS: Yes, that's correct. As the Minister said this morning, the business concierge roles and the frontline roles that go with that service—the Business Bureau—are part of Service NSW.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I understand Business Connect is not with Minister Dib anymore, but do you administer that until 30 September, or is it completely—

GREG WELLS: Our business concierges would refer customers to that program until 30 September. That's correct.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: But where in the budget does it sit? Does it sit under that Customer Service portfolio?

GREG WELLS: I suppose the easiest way to describe it is, in terms of the Act and the overall budget for Customer Service and specifically for Service NSW, that's Minister Dib. But, as the Minister talked about this morning, the Business Connect program has been the responsibility of Minister Saffin.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Will the business concierge service be able to assist businesses that are—I know it can assist new startups with ABNs. But for businesses that are already established that may be facing cashflow pressures or are feeling overwhelmed, in the past they would have gone to Business Connect. Will the business concierge service be able to offer that same guidance or advice?

GREG WELLS: What the business concierges can do is play a really important role in helping businesses generally to understand regulatory or licensing or permit processes. They can help them understand procurement processes with government, or refer to other services or agencies across government, if they're looking to expand locally or internationally et cetera. They obviously play a very important role in disaster recovery, as they're doing at the moment on the North Coast. In terms of specific support across the life cycle of business, though, yes, there are templates and there are online resources and other things that those business concierges could direct businesses to, because they do have a personal relationship and a case management relationship with each of the businesses they look after.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: My understanding at the moment is that there are over a hundred Business Connect advisers out in the field, but there are only 44 business concierge—I don't know what you call them—consultants.

GREG WELLS: I'll clarify the numbers exactly for you on notice, but it's closer to about 70 or 80 frontline business concierges, and then there would be a number of people that team-lead some of those organisations or help with content for businesses or coordinate rostering and support across those front lines.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'm just wondering how they will cover the same number of LGAs with a lesser number and be expected to have the same level of service—or are you anticipating that there'll be a reduction in the support available to businesses?

GREG WELLS: The business concierges were funded in this year's budget, and we still have coverage across all LGAs across New South Wales.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can you confirm how many LGAs will be covered by the business concierge service?

GREG WELLS: There's representation in all LGAs across the State.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When you were making a decision, I don't know whether you were asked to model Business Connect as opposed to the business concierge service to see what the impact would be. Was any modelling done?

GREG WELLS: The best way to think about that is they're complementary services. There's not one that replaces the other. One, as I said, helps navigate and understand government and connects people and supports in disaster et cetera; the other was quite specialised financial planning or marketing advice in that space. They're quite complementary, different things. There's not a model against one or the other.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's the model, but after 30 September you won't have that complementary role, so what happens then?

GREG WELLS: Then we'll do the best we can to refer businesses with all the templates, tools, resources and other things we have. I think the other thing to note is that all the collateral and resources that were generated through the Business Connect program are our IP, and we can refer businesses to those as well.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can you give any assurances that businesses in regional and remote LGAs will receive the same level of service that they currently do?

GREG WELLS: For what they're receiving now from our business concierge, from the Business Bureau, yes, that's correct. That hasn't changed. In fact, what was clarified in this year's budget was ongoing funding for those roles.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Before the decision was made not to continue funding for Business Connect after 30 September, was any consultation done with local government or business chambers, or even the Business Connect advisers themselves?

GREG WELLS: I don't think consultation. I don't think in that sense, no.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I think I did ask the Minister before and then I was going to come to you this afternoon. What qualifications and experience do the business concierge staff have, compared to a Business Connect adviser?

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GREG WELLS: The sorts of skills we look for in a business concierge is obviously someone that understands government but also has some business experience as well. Most of the business concierges that work for us have run small businesses or have been in business themselves previously. There's that combined set of customer service experience and business experience. We look for people, obviously, that are great with stakeholders and are good at analytical thinking and planning, and that understand the core systems and processes of what running a business looks like. Our team does have that experience and does help businesses in that regard already. We refer to lots of places, as I said, across government, and we will continue to support businesses in disaster as well.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You also acknowledged before that at the moment the Business Connect services are helping businesses on the Mid North Coast. What will happen post 30 September should another natural disaster hit? What kind of services can businesses expect?

GREG WELLS: From a disaster recovery perspective?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

GREG WELLS: I would say exactly the same as businesses expect now. Those business concierges right now for that grant that is open until December will remain.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: They'll have the same capability and track record of what Business Connect do?

GREG WELLS: Absolutely. Part of the Business Bureau are our digital solutions. There's a business account. There's a mobile app as well. Business grants are administered through that team. All of that was funded and confirmed through the budget process.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you know how many businesses the business concierge service assisted in the previous financial year? And how does that compare with the over 60,000 businesses that Business Connect advisers have done since—

GREG WELLS: I will get that for you today. I will have that somewhere.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You'll come back to me on notice. I want to ask a question about eConveyancing. Who would I ask?

GREG WELLS: Ms Cameron.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Has the department done any modelling on—I have two examples—if nothing changes, as opposed to if there was competition, so if you had more than one actor in the field?

DANUSIA CAMERON: The work that's been done to date is the Productivity and Equality Commission work last year out of Treasury. Currently the ARNECC, the Australian Registrars' National Electronic Conveyancing Council, has commissioned a cost-benefit analysis that would touch on some of those issues to enable decision-making by governments.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is that modelling in the public field or just to your department and the Minister?

DANUSIA CAMERON: The PEC review from last year is publicly available. Our next cost-benefit analysis will be delivered to ARNECC, and then decisions will be made about what's published after that once the report's been received.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That was the only question I had about eConveyancing.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Curtin, can I just turn you to the actual budget. I'm only new to this, but my reading of the budget and the 2024-25 operating statement suggests you spent \$807 million. That sounds about right?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Then 2025-26 budgeted for \$685 million?

TRENT CURTIN: Correct.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Getting away from the \$120 million shortfall in that, is that sort of where you need to sit? These are non-fire years as well, aren't they?

TRENT CURTIN: Over previous years, as a result of the bushfire inquiry and other inquiries, like the flood inquiry, RFS has received a substantial uplift in funding to purchase new vehicles and equipment and a

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whole range of things, including stations and fire control centres. We're seeing the tail end of those projects and that additional funding. That is, in part, the reason why the budget is smaller this year than it has been in previous years.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That's why it was at \$800 million? So that \$684 million, that's about BAU, I guess, as far as a non-fire year is concerned?

TRENT CURTIN: It's the current apportioned budget, yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You work around that, but there are certain things that you are required to do—that's sort of the budget that you need to complete those tasks?

TRENT CURTIN: Correct. There are mechanisms for us to obtain further funding in the event that we have large-scale emergencies.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'll just say to all those people behind you—there's lots of strapping young people there—that they should think about joining one of these agencies as soon as they get a chance. I'm sure you'd be a great asset to what we're trying to achieve in here. Commissioner Curtin, do I understand that the fire access and fire trail plans were due to be released October last year, but they've been extended to 2025?

TRENT CURTIN: I understand we've been doing a lot of work on the fire access and fire trails, but in terms of a document due in October last year, I'll probably have to take on notice the question that you're asking.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Have you got any idea what your budget is for the RFS-managed fire trails and what that has been for the last financial year and this coming financial year?

TRENT CURTIN: This year it is \$1 million. I understand we did have some top-up funding in prior years, but it is this year \$1 million in addition to the funding that Parks and Crown Lands have for their fire trail funding as well.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So the \$1 million is for the trails that RFS manage, which are predominantly on private land, I understand?

TRENT CURTIN: RFS and other landholders on behalf of the community more broadly. RFS has \$1 million to allocate for fire trails, yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: And that is to be spread across the seven areas?

TRENT CURTIN: Well, across the entire State. We've allocated 14 maintenance projects this year for that \$1 million of funding. Last year we did 21 maintenance projects.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: And that's just for maintenance and repair? There's no upgrades in that?

TRENT CURTIN: I think that's just maintenance projects this year, given it's \$1 million. Over the last four years, we had \$44.9 million for the fire trails.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Over the four years combined?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is that \$1 million distributed equally amongst the seven areas or based on priorities under those?

TRENT CURTIN: I don't think it's distributed equally. It's based on priority work, yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: There's been some pretty wet and trying years as far as major roads are concerned. What is the state of the fire trails across the State, and how close does that \$1 million go to bring them up to the standard required?

TRENT CURTIN: It's best to understand there's a lot of work to be done across fire trails across the State. We've done a substantial amount of work with the \$44.9 million. We've had challenges with the damage caused obviously from the 2019-20 bushfires and then from floods and significant rain since that has delayed some of the works that we've needed to do. There will always be more work to be done with fire trails.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: As far as the trails within national parks and on Crown lands you referred to, those agencies are responsible for the upkeep of them from their own budgets?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: RFS is then responsible for assessing the standard of them?

TRENT CURTIN: Correct, yes. It's a standard set out by RFS that's published.

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The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is this done through regular checks, aerial checks or a combination of both?

TRENT CURTIN: I might have to come back to you on notice to make sure I get that accurate.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes, that'd be great if I could get that update and the breakdown of the spending on those over those last couple of years.

TRENT CURTIN: Over the last four years, yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How do you prioritise—you obviously selected 14 maintenance projects. How do you nominate those?

TRENT CURTIN: I'll come back to you on notice just so that I get that right. But I understand that's undertaken within the RFS and then it's approved by the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Fewtrell, the tanker strategy—what is the operational implications of moving to two-person managed vehicles as opposed to the four?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: A bit of background first, if I may. We talked earlier about some reasons for the tanker strategy. Key to that is it's a sign to tell us that the existing model was not quite working in that town, or that crew's not able to support that existing model, because at the moment it's quite a binary one of it's either four on a pump or nothing. In a lot of towns we don't have the option of nothing, so then it's bringing people in from other locations. Really the tanker strategy is about trying to find some other mechanisms, giving us a range of options and ways that we can provide an appropriate response and still meet the need in the community that's proportionate to the risk that's in that community and balancing that with the demands on our people as well. In that essence, it's trying to make a more sustainable option. From a operational response, to have an offensive attack, where firefighters are fighting a fire internally, we would require four.

We've had well-established and long-established staffing levels around the different types of trucks: four on a pumper, which is sort of a fire engine as people might know it, designed for fighting fires in towns in particular, and then two on a tanker. The tankers today are quite versatile. In fact, there's not much of a difference in the capability the vehicles provide. In some areas it's an enhancement, because the locations where we're proposing to put this other option in are places where they're seeing the predominant number of calls being outside a fire district or being off-road and requiring off-road capability, which the pumpers don't have. Also, they're given more water on the tanker, so they've got 3,000 litres of water instead of 1,800. So there are some options there. But certainly, to answer your question more directly, the biggest factor that comes into play is the tactical decisions that one has with a crew of two. Internal offensive firefighting requires four to be able to do that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: If this comes into play, does that mean then we lower the target of retained firefighters that we want in those communities? Or do we still keep pushing to have more there? There's a small step from four to two, and then there's another small step from two to none.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: We've been really clear in everything we've said around this proposal. There's no lack of commitment for us to keep working on those staffing numbers, so we're not proposing to reduce the staffing establishments at any of those stations. If anything, we're increasing the efforts for recruitment to do what we can to bring those staffing numbers up in those stations. In some of these stations, we only have two or three firefighters in the crew. The Minister talked earlier about Bingara as an example. We've spent a lot of time in that community over several years, working with the local member, working with the local council, engaging with community groups, attending community meetings, trying to recruit, raise awareness and attract additional firefighters in, with mixed results.

So we'll continue that. We've put recruitment officers and recruitment coordinators in the regional commands to have a direct and deliberate focus, a sole focus, on retained recruitment. That will all continue. Ideally, if we get the stations to the point where they do come back up in numbers, then we've got options again to reconsider whether we leave a tanker or whether we think a pumper might be an option we can go back to. So it's not a one-way street, but it certainly is about giving us more options in those communities within the retain model.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Commissioner Fewtrell, I heard you answer my question earlier. I asked whether Fire and Rescue NSW had a policy to conduct surveillance of injured workers with psychological injury over a certain amount—specifically over, I think, 15 per cent whole person impairment. Your response referred to desktop surveys or something. Can you just clarify?

CORRECTED

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes. When you made that statement in the session earlier, that was the first I was aware of such a policy in Fire and Rescue, so obviously I've sought advice on that. Then that enabled me to provide some clarification just before the lunch break.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you know that a desktop review is surveillance?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: And that was only in relation to the matters that are going to litigation as well.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So what you're saying is that there's not a policy for if there's an injured worker with a whole person impairment over 15 per cent, or there has never been a policy that you then conduct surveillance on that person?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'll take that on notice, Ms Boyd, obviously to get as much clarification and make sure I give you the right answer.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you know what a desktop review is?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'm not fully across all the details, and obviously you're suggesting that there's a bit more to it.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are you aware that a private investigator is employed to do desktop review?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: No. As I said, I'm not across all those details. But I was going off the advice that I was provided immediately before the break.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Mr Head, you've read the Robertson review. Given what Mr Robertson found and what you've seen, and having spoken to the people that I've spoken to, what's your understanding of Fire and Rescue NSW's policy when it comes to surveillance?

GRAEME HEAD: I haven't seen their policy or reviewed it. I'm happy to offer a view after I've done that in relation to the Robertson review, but I'm not going to speculate about the implications of the content of something I haven't seen.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But Mr Robertson did refer specifically to a case of social media surveillance that was desktop surveillance and was conducted by email, potentially for an agency that's present here. Would you, for instance, think that the comments by Mr Fewtrell that perhaps these people are paranoid were appropriate in those circumstances, given what you know about Fire and Rescue NSW?

GRAEME HEAD: I know about what Mr Robertson observed in relation to the complainants he was examining. I'm not going to evaluate Commissioner Fewtrell's evidence. But, as the Minister indicated this morning, in respect of his portfolio responsibilities, mine as the head of the department and Ms Young's as the head of SIRA, we're taking Mr Robertson's critique of all of the issues where he found problems very seriously and looking at how they can be addressed. I think Ms Young gave an account this morning of how she is advancing that in relation to surveillance.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Given, though, the findings of unlawful covert surveillance occurring and the impact that has had on people who have been unlawfully covertly surveilled, do you think that they would appreciate being lumped in with a bunch of people who presumably—I'd love you to correct yourself, Commissioner Fewtrell—have some sort of paranoia, when we know that people have been surveilled by Fire and Rescue NSW?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Ms Boyd, I am happy to correct and clarify things. As I said, I was not aware that there was a position of Fire and Rescue about surveillance until you mentioned that earlier. I sought advice and provided a response based on that advice. My comments around paranoia, though, were in a general sense. I use that term very carefully because I'm acutely aware of the sensitivities about that, particularly what people have been through as they go through those processes. I've dealt directly with some of those, and I've seen the impacts that people suffer as they're going through these things, coming to it already potentially damaged from whatever experience they've had that's triggered them into this process.

The point I was referencing there was that we had a recent matter where someone suggested to Fire and Rescue that they were under surveillance but that was in no way at all happening. It wasn't anything of a seriousness that would have triggered the thresholds you talked about earlier, and I was making it in the general sense that things have happened in the past. Perceptions around what may or may not go on create that sense where people do feel that they're questioning things. If that helps clarify my use of the term "paranoia"—I certainly didn't use it to marginalise anyone, and I'm happy to apologise if that was the case.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you. I'll take that on good faith and leave you, perhaps, to come back on notice with more details around exactly what the policy is.

CORRECTED

That would be very useful, thank you. Ms Young, the law and justice committee recommended SIRA increase the dust diseases contribution levy to employers for workers involved in tunnelling and tasked SIRA with going and having a look at how it could do that. Has that work commenced?

MANDY YOUNG: We have been in initial conversations with icare, who manage the dust diseases scheme, to work through what is the most appropriate way to advance that recommendation. We've started those conversations, but we're in the very early phases of that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand that men's clothing manufacturers pay a higher levy than site preparation services, and there's a little bit of disconnect there between—

MANDY YOUNG: There's definitely some work for us to do, particularly with tunnelling and other WIC codes that sit around that. So, yes, there is work to do.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So it's ongoing. When do we think that there's going to be a conclusion of that?

MANDY YOUNG: I'd have to come back to you on notice on that one.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you. We talked earlier about the restructure. I put it to you that it would have been useful information for us to have in the context of our workers compensation inquiry. I've got a document that was released by Treasury that's entitled SIRA's *2025 workers compensation reforms*. It looks at the approximated cost to establish and fund SIRA's permanent impairment assessment service model. This is on the assumption that the bill as drafted would go through. Within that document it anticipates a resource requirement and what looks to be like a restructure. There are 11 different new roles coming on. Would you not agree that that brings this restructure directly into our discussions about what the workers compensation bill will do?

MANDY YOUNG: I would say that the inquiry that we've had has been primarily around the reform in the legislation. The restructure and the functional review that we've been talking of is for all of SIRA for all of our functions to set us up to move forward. As I indicated earlier, there is a relationship but it's not necessarily that pertinent. What I would say about that part is that was just us considering what funding we might need to set up that particular reform.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: The terms of reference for our inquiry on the Public Accountability and Works Committee is not just in relation to the terms of the bill; it's also in relation to the economic impacts. The purpose of that is so that we could put forward alternative suggestions, other than cutting people with injury, in order to make savings within the scheme. Were you aware that that was the broader terms of reference?

MANDY YOUNG: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Can I ask about these reports that, again, would be incredibly helpful for our work on PAWC, which we have not yet received? I'm looking at the one that was prepared by Urbis that was just released, I think, a couple of weeks ago, *Workplace Rehabilitation Provider Evaluation*, which has been very useful. That was prepared by an external party and is dated 1 July 2025. Why did it take so long for SIRA to release it?

MANDY YOUNG: Again, we've worked through the reports that come back to us, and we go through a process where we do a fact check. Urbis would have released that report to us at that stage. We would have then gone through a process to make sure that it was—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Did they not give you a draft beforehand?

MANDY YOUNG: There would have been a series of drafts that came before that, but I'd have to be very clear with the team on what they were. There is a process that we undertake to make sure that everything in that is appropriate.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But this report is dated 1 July. Are you saying that there were no changes made to it?

MANDY YOUNG: I'd have to come back to you on notice. I think some of the recommendations were refined from that point. Let me come back to you with that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If you could, because otherwise it's quite curious that we have all that time. Again, the one in relation to claims management would be so incredibly useful to see sooner rather than later. As you know, the Government has persisted with yet another draft of this bill that they've put in. We're trying very hard to come up with sensible alternative solutions. When are we going to get that report?

CORRECTED

MANDY YOUNG: As I said this morning, I expect that we will get that in the next couple of weeks. That will be made public. I can, if you want, give you a bit of an overview of what's in it, as I did with the other one, if you just give me a moment to find that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, please.

MANDY YOUNG: Essentially it was a review conducted in response to the law and justice review, of which you are well aware. There are 14 recommendations in the report. Overall, it's telling us that there has not been a noticeable improvement in claims management, which, again, given all of the evidence that has been given to the inquiry, I think is also not necessarily surprising. The key findings were that effective claims management leads to improved outcomes; claims management performance in New South Wales requires improvement; modern work and workplaces have amplified the need for improved claims management; and compensable claims management models may not align with the needs of workers with psychological injuries. There are opportunities to reduce some regulatory complexity from administrative burden through the process, and there's some emerging evidence that supports a shift towards a more person-centred culture or model to improve return to work outcomes. Again, these are things that have, I think, been evident through.

The thematic summary of the recommendations is about how do we embed that person-centred approach and what does that mean, how do we get the right balance between that and the regulations and the legislation, and how do we help transition insurers to that approach and what are the funding models that might sit around that; enhancing support for workers and employers—so educating and supporting employers to engage more positively with injured workers and providing suitable duties; implementing some cohort-based management for psychological injuries, with some tailored protocols; and improving communication and literacy for workers and employers in support of return to work and recovery.

And then we've got another theme of streamlining regulation and reducing administrative burden—so reviewing and balancing the regulations to support that person-centred approach and principle-based approaches; simplifying and streamlining our policy instruments and any unnecessary prescription that might sit in that that might get in the way; aligning audit tools with all of those things that we've just talked about in terms of the regulation; reducing low-value administrative tasks around injury notification and claims processes; clarifying the role of medical practitioners in assessing capacity—that sits, for us, alongside another piece of work that we've already started around reviewing the certificate of capacity and the efficacy of GPs within the system; and driving system-wide cultural and strategic change, so leading that cultural shift towards focusing on people through the process and leveraging the emerging evidence on interventive claim management and scheme design. That's the nutshell version of what you'll see in the next couple of weeks.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That's really useful. Thank you. I appreciate that.

The CHAIR: Just heading back to Youth Justice again, Mr O'Reilly, you mentioned that there were several internal psychologists. I'm just wondering how many Youth Justice NSW currently employ.

PAUL O'REILLY: How many psychologists?

The CHAIR: Yes, internal psychologists.

PAUL O'REILLY: Fifty-eight psychologists and five clinical managers that oversee them.

The CHAIR: How are they spread across the six different facilities? Do they move between them? How does that work?

PAUL O'REILLY: They are spread across the six detention centres. They also work in our community offices around the State as well. So they're distributed all across the State.

The CHAIR: Are there culturally trusted external psychologists available for young Aboriginal people?

PAUL O'REILLY: Is this similar to your other question? I'm just trying to understand the question—external?

The CHAIR: Sorry, it's more about whether or not there are culturally trusted psychologists specifically for young Aboriginal people.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we do employ Aboriginal psychologists where we can. But, across the whole health and social services sector, there is a dramatic shortage of Aboriginal psychologists. We undertake a whole range of creative recruitment strategies, including creating internships. It is challenging. Two of our clinical managers are Aboriginal people, and we have another Aboriginal psychologist. We would like to have more, but it does depend on the supply in the market.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: I've just got some basic information-gathering questions. I'm happy for any of these to be taken on notice if they're too specific. I'm just wondering how many children are currently in youth detention in New South Wales as of today.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: It's 235, as of 6.00 a.m. this morning.

The CHAIR: How many of those children are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: That's 136.

The CHAIR: What's the total capacity of each of the six Youth Justice NSW facilities?

PAUL O'REILLY: The total capacity of the system is 260. I'd have to come back to you with a centre-by-centre breakdown.

The CHAIR: That's fine. What kind of data do you collect regarding children in the detention centres in terms of, for example, whether or not children in youth detention have experienced family violence? Is that data collected?

PAUL O'REILLY: It's collected on an individual basis as part of their medical assessment and case plan, and we have a sense that experience and exposure to violence in childhood is extremely common amongst children in the Youth Justice system—almost all children in the system; not entirely but almost all children have exposure.

The CHAIR: The disability royal commission identified that children with disability are overrepresented in youth detention. Do you collect data about how many children with disability are on remand in Youth Justice centres?

PAUL O'REILLY: We do try to. One of the challenges there, of course, is that often children—and particularly younger children—in our system have not been fully or properly diagnosed for a whole range of reasons. Sometimes their exposure to the detention system is their first opportunity for a thorough health and disability assessment. It's often also their first opportunity for a thorough education assessment. A lot of this contact with them is the discovery process, and part of that includes us connecting them with the NDIA to try and work out how we can put plans in place, if possible. That's if we have enough contact with them. Sometimes our contact ends before that process can be completed. Many children come in multiple times, and so we pick it up again and keep working on it. It's not possible to readily assess, as a child comes through the door, if they have a disability or not. There is a whole process.

We periodically do a deep dive to work out how many children have a clearly diagnosed disability. The most recent published dive is now nearly 10 years old, and at that stage it was around 16 per cent. We have more recently undertaken another deep dive to try and work out what the current rate is. That's still going through data validation but it has clearly increased, so we have more of an awareness of disability amongst the population at the moment. But it is pretty close to, I would say, the Australian population. Across Australia, almost one in five people have a disability of some kind. In youth detention it's similar to that.

The CHAIR: I know you talked about some of the work that you do to connect these young people with NDIS, is there extra supports available once it's suspected that a child is coming into detention with needs that haven't been diagnosed or previously supported?

PAUL O'REILLY: We absolutely have individual plans for each child, but that needs to be balanced with the routines of the centre. Risk of violence is a very real risk in detention centres all of the time—it's never not present. There has to be really clear routines. The challenge for children with disability is complying with those routines while still having their individual needs met. That is a daily challenge for our staff, for those children and for their families supporting them. It is a juggle all the time to get that right, but certainly we have Justice Health colleagues, our own caseworkers, psychologists and our management teams in the centres are very aware of the individual needs of each child. All of our six centre managers know all the children by name and what their issues are. But, again, it is balancing that with the importance of strict routines.

The CHAIR: Do you have data around the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that have current NDIS plans within youth detention facilities?

PAUL O'REILLY: Not with me. We might be able to get a version of that number. There might be some gaps.

The CHAIR: I want to ask some questions about the *Inspection of Six Youth Justice Centres*, the report from 2022. I know I've asked about this report previously. In questions on notice from the last estimates, it said that 51 recommendations have been fully or partially achieved, with the exception of six recommendations. Two

CORRECTED

recommendations were referred to Justice Health. Could I just get an understanding of which were the two that were referred on to Justice Health?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. I'll need a bit of time to shuffle and find that. I may not have it with me, but I'll have a look.

The CHAIR: That's all right. While you're looking for that, in case you can't find it, I'll put these questions so we can get them on notice as well. There was also four recommendations that were not accepted by Youth Justice, so I'm just wanting to know what those were, and the reasons why.

PAUL O'REILLY: I can answer those ones now—the second set of questions. There were four that were not supported. One of them was the expansion of the Enhanced Support Unit. The Enhanced Support Unit is the therapeutic unit at the Frank Baxter detention centre on the Central Coast. The recommendation was to expand that to other centres. We don't support that, for a few reasons, but one of the main reasons is it's a very specific therapeutic intervention for a very specific group of children, and is not relevant to children in all of the centres. It would not be an efficient use of therapeutic resources. But what we do with that unit is we make sure that the other five centres can access that unit with referrals, and the staff in that unit can support the other centres with therapeutic interventions as needed. It's a more efficient way of expanding the service.

There was also a recommendation about ceasing lockdowns during some of the client assessment meetings, which we can't support because it isn't practical. When staff need to get together to talk about client case plans and making sure they're meeting their individual needs, they need to have serious conversations about that. That means they can't be supervising the children—they can't be in two places at once. So there are times during the day when we do have to have short lockdowns to arrange staff meetings, so we can plan and keep the centres running smoothly and safely. Some of the recommendations we don't agree with for those practical reasons.

The other two recommendations relate to retiring two of the units at Cobham—is one of them. These are very old units. They're not in as good shape as some of the other units. The recommendation has been that we close them down. We have not agreed to that, because we need the room, basically. If we were to close them down, we would be forcing children to share cells. We know from talking to children—I know from talking to children—that the thing they're most frightened of, coming to detention, is sharing rooms with people they don't know who have a history of violence. We are really careful to make sure children don't share rooms. We don't agree with closing those rooms down, but we do have plans to undertake some refurbishments this year and next year to improve the standard of those rooms instead.

The last one was about ceasing use of the holding rooms at Cobham. Holding rooms are a cell in the admissions area of the centre which are used for holding children for short periods of time, to de-escalate them immediately following an incident of violence. We would rather do that in the person's own cell, but it's not always practical. We need to have holding rooms available as a backup, because the incident may occur close to the holding room, and sometimes, rarely, we do have incidents with multiple children, and we need as many rooms as possible to separate them while they are de-escalating. So we couldn't support those four recommendations for practical and safety reasons. The other 51 recommendations we do support. I don't have the detail of the two that I referred to Health—I can't remember them off the top of my head—but we'll come back to you.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Mr Wells, I think you were going to confirm the current number of business concierges on notice. Can you also tell me the dollar figure allocated in the budget to that business concierge service? I know you said that at the moment Business Connect and Business Concierge are complimentary. Is Business Connect also under your administration at the moment? Are you doing that?

GREG WELLS: I'll cover a couple of those. First of all, \$12.1 million is the number for the frontline Business Bureau resources confirmed as part of this budget. A couple of the other questions you had were around the four business concierges and the sorts of services they provide. Outside of some of the specific disaster events, the figure I have is 31,000 requests. We're case-managing 11,000 businesses. We've taken 10,000 calls. We've also made 27,000 outbound calls and responded to 4,000 live chats.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I have one final question. I know you talked through what the qualifications are, but could you perhaps provide a position description for the specific role of a business concierge?

GREG WELLS: Yes, we can provide that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Curtin, can I confirm whether the purchase of firefighting appliances is a capital expense or an operating expense?

TRENT CURTIN: Firefighting appliances are taken as a grant-based recurrent opex in RFS and then vested in councils to become capital in councils.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What about buildings?

TRENT CURTIN: Buildings broadly work in the same way. I can take on notice, if you want, the exact detail so that I can make sure we've got that accurate for you. A lot of our fleet comes from a capital program as well. Let me take on notice the capital or opex treatment of both the fleet and the property.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I appreciate it.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Ms Young, really quickly, I've raised with you previously Trinity Insurance wanting to expand its remit for specialised insurance. I understand they've previously been under a remediation plan as well. Do you have an update on where that's up to in terms of their application?

MANDY YOUNG: We're still considering the application at the moment.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I think it's been eight months now. There was a December consultation and I think you said last time that there was another consultation.

MANDY YOUNG: We had one the previous year and then we had the December. That's the consultation process that ran through to January. We have since been working on that application. We've been working on what they've been asking for, what that looks like, and doing the due diligence around assessing the application.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is the fact that they were previously under a remediation plan a factor that gets considered in that application?

MANDY YOUNG: We would always consider their performance more broadly. So, yes, it would be considered in the context of the whole licence. What I would say about remediation plans is that most insurers go through a remediation plan for something at some point. So that's not unusual.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What was their remediation plan about?

MANDY YOUNG: I'd have to come back to you on notice.

The CHAIR: It's now 3.30 p.m. We'll stop for a 15-minute afternoon tea break and be back at 3.45 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: I'll throw straight to the Opposition.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Ms Young, what is the average wait time between independent physiotherapist consultants receiving a referral for an assessment and the assessment being finalised?

MANDY YOUNG: I'd have to come back to you on notice on that. We don't necessarily keep the data in a way that might be helpful for that, but I will come back with what I can for you.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Did SIRA seek approval for recruitment of new IPCs prior to the October 2024 meeting with the IPCs?

MANDY YOUNG: Again, I'll have to come back to you on notice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Again on notice, if approval was sought, why was it not granted?

MANDY YOUNG: Can I just say that I think it would be SIRA that would give that approval, but I will have to come back to you on notice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Does SIRA believe that having half the number of IPCs compared with, say, 20 years ago is acceptable for supporting the needs of injured workers in the current workers compensation system?

MANDY YOUNG: I would say I understand that these questions have already been put to us on notice, so we will answer those through that process. But I would say that we are always seeking more medical practitioners for independent medical examinations and assessments. The more that we have, the better the system will run.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So you are actively trying to recruit?

MANDY YOUNG: I would have to come back to you notice around that as well, in terms of what actual activity is in place right now.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Those were all my questions in that section. Mr O'Reilly, this is with regard to the Child Safe Action Plan implementation.

CORRECTED

PAUL O'REILLY: For Youth Justice?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: We can have a go.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many Youth Justice staff and Youth Justice official visitors have completed the child safe training each financial year since its launch?

PAUL O'REILLY: That's a really detailed question. I'll have to come back to you on that, sorry.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's okay. Do you know what proportion of current staff and official visitors have completed the training?

PAUL O'REILLY: No.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you know how many training sessions have been delivered.

PAUL O'REILLY: No.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might put all of these on notice then.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, that would be great.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I have some Service NSW questions. It's probably obvious. Does Service NSW have a work from home policy?

GREG WELLS: It'd be part of what we do through the broader Department of Customer Service policy, in terms of working from home, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Have all three waves of the Service NSW restructure now been completed?

GREG WELLS: They have, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Now that that's completed, were staff made redundant? If so, how many?

GREG WELLS: The program did wrap up in June this year, as I just said. It's good to be through that process. Ms MacDonald, as you know, there was a range of attrition, temporary contracts ending and a range of mechanisms. Redundancies were used through that process. It might be easiest because—although the program has wrapped up, there are some people coming back from secondments, leave and other mechanisms. I might, just to make sure I've got you the correct figures, come back on notice with that figure.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: There was a planned integration between the Service NSW app and the myGov app, and it was paused earlier this year. Has it resumed yet? If it hasn't, why not?

GREG WELLS: I'm not sure whether there were active plans to integrate myGov and the Service NSW app distinctly. I think—and maybe Ms Christie can add to this—through the national Data and Digital Ministers Meeting, there is certainly alignment of strategies around identity, proofing, credentials and those other things. That's something that we continue to work on.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In the background?

GREG WELLS: In the background, of course, yes. But at the moment, we're pretty much focused on our agenda around identity and credentials.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Whilst you're working on it in the background, do you have a timeline?

GREG WELLS: I'd say the main thing—and, again, Ms Christie would probably like to add to this—is that each jurisdiction, through their own Minister, is progressing an agenda that is aligned to standards, so it will converge and there will be interoperability at a point. I don't think there are time frames yet for that integration.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: And that's probably out of your control because it's not all within your jurisdiction.

GREG WELLS: That's right, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The digital birth certificate—where is that up to?

CORRECTED

GREG WELLS: There was a trial as part of Births, Deaths and Marriages, as you know, probably about 18 months ago. That's finished, in terms of a pilot process. I think there were around 1,000 participants in that trial. Those customers are still using that credential in their wallets. That will be one of the credentials that we'll consider this year as part of that program I talked about before.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The Mobile Service Centres that go out had a target of visiting 36 rural and remote communities. Some of those communities weren't able to be visited. Do you know why?

GREG WELLS: I'd have to get the specifics, but in some context on Mobile Service Centres generally, it's actually 148 communities that those four services visit in cycle. Three of those services run a nine-week cycle across 100 of those communities. Last year we reconfigured one of those services just to focus on Aboriginal communities specifically, so that looks at the other 48 communities specifically and has just finished the first year of that cycle. I'd really have to take on notice if there were particular issues around some locations that we said we were going to visit that we didn't.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I think some of them were due to minimal connectivity.

GREG WELLS: The Mobile Service Centres are pretty self-sufficient in terms of connectivity. They take connectivity with them that the Telco Authority helps us procure and configure. It might be due to vehicle issues or rostering or staff availability issues but, again, if you can provide those details, I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'll go back to Mr O'Reilly. Is the Court Logistics Classifications and Placements unit under you?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: They're a fundamental driver of, say, when young people go to court, where they go from their placements, or transfers or risks. I understand that there was a review commissioned in collaboration with the PSA to implement changes. Is that correct?

PAUL O'REILLY: There was, yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What due diligence was undertaken to verify the consultant who undertook that review? What were their credentials, professional membership and industry experience?

PAUL O'REILLY: We went to our professional conduct standards team in DCJ. They're separate to Youth Justice, and they handle all of our misconduct inquiries and investigations. They identified an investigator from their panel of qualified investigators. We didn't choose the investigator; the independent conduct team chose someone from their panel.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So it was very independent. Do you know what was the total cost to engage that consultant?

PAUL O'REILLY: No.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's outside your remit?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I don't know the cost.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: It falls into mine. I'm happy to provide it on notice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I don't know what the recommendations were, but has the department accepted the key recommendations made by the consultant in that review?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. There are a number of recommendations in relation to culture in the team, in relation to placements of people in the team. Some of the recommendations included rotating people in different positions. Some of that has happened.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When that happened, what was the discussion with the people that were being rotated or moved?

PAUL O'REILLY: The GSE Act, the Government Sector Employment Act, has a requirement for consultation in relation to moving staff. So the director who oversaw the implementation of those recommendations worked with the HR team to make sure that the consultation was compliant with the requirements of the Act. So the person is consulted. They are asked to respond to the proposal of the move. We are required to assess and consider any impacts on the person before making a decision.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If they don't agree with the move because of the GSE Act, what happens then?

CORRECTED

PAUL O'REILLY: We are required to consider the impact of the move on them. But we are also required to consider the reason why we wanted to move them in the first place and balance those things and then make what is a reasonable decision in the circumstances.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Would the people subject to this review have been advised? I know they wouldn't be provided with a copy of the review, but are they given the reasons why such a review is happening?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. I'll explain how the process happened. A number of staff from the team and the PSA raised issues about the team—the unit—with me. We discussed those issues. We agreed to commission an independent review. The PSA and that group of staff were consulted on the scope of the review. It was agreed. The review commenced. At the end of the process, it would not have been appropriate to share the report with everybody, because people provided sensitive information in good faith to the investigator, and I was not willing to let them be identified. That would be appalling to do that. So I didn't do that. Instead, we provided summary findings and we provided information about the recommendations and the rationale for those recommendations. Some people in the team found that to be adequate and some people in the team wanted more information, but we had to draw a line because to provide more information would have identified people. There's a whole range of reasons why that would be inappropriate.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So each person who would have been part of the review was provided with maybe a change management plan as part of that?

PAUL O'REILLY: There was a plan to implement the recommendations. Some people were not affected by the recommendations, so they didn't really need much change management, but other people were affected and there was an individualised approach for each of those people.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Have you found now that whatever was happening before has settled?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. My judgement is that it is definitely settled. However, I am also aware that there are some people who still don't agree with the findings or the outcome—and that's normal. When we undertake a complex inquiry into a large team with conflict, it's normal that some people will agree and some won't. But overall the team is performing well.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The people that don't agree—they've got avenues where they can take that up with their managers or whoever they need to take it up with?

PAUL O'REILLY: Of course. But I think that it's important to be realistic. Disagreements will not always be resolved.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many people are in court logistics?

PAUL O'REILLY: I can't remember exactly. It's quite a large team in a number of locations, mainly Sydney, but I can't remember exactly.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many serious assault incidents on staff and detainees occurred in the last financial year?

PAUL O'REILLY: I can tell you how many assaults occurred. I have that information with me. In 2024-25 we had 193 assaults on staff and 159 of those were physical assaults.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many resulted in hospitalisation?

PAUL O'REILLY: Very few. I don't have the exact number. For those staff who did need hospital attention, it was very serious—like incredibly serious for those individual people. But the number was low. But we can come back to you with the exact number.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You said before sometimes you have to do lockdowns because you've got staff training or issues like that—sorry, I was going to ask about isolations. You haven't had anywhere they have been segregated or isolated for more than 24 hours?

PAUL O'REILLY: Can I just be really precise about this? Because there are different categories of restrictive practice that have different regulations. Do you want me to explain the data on all of those?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: It will take some time. I hope people don't mind if I—for confinement, the confinement regulations set out in the Act are clear. Children under 16 cannot be confined for more than 12 hours and children 16 or over cannot be confined for more than 24 hours. There were no incidents of that occurring.

CORRECTED

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No incidents?

PAUL O'REILLY: No—for confinement. There were 3,591 incidents of confinement this year, which is a reduction from last year. Segregation is a different restrictive practice. Confinement is a consequence of a behaviour. Confinement is the highest tariff amongst a range of punishments for behaviour. Segregation is not a punishment. Segregation is risk management. Segregation is putting someone in a separate area for their safety or the safety of others and that is set out in the regulation, once again. There are delegations in the system about the seniority required to approve longer periods of segregation.

When people are segregated, they still have access to the services they normally have, as they do in confinement, but they are away from other young people and they might have a higher staff supervision ratio to keep them safe and keep the staff safe. They are usually engaged in acute violence at that time, which is why they're segregated, or they've made a threat and we have reason to believe it is real. Most of the time when young people threaten to use violence, they will, in our system, so we take those risks and threats very seriously. Segregation is rarely over 24 hours. It can be if necessary. There's nothing in the regulation to prevent that, but we try and avoid it. In the last year there were 1,766 incidents of segregation and 174 of those, about 9 per cent, were over 24 hours, which is an increase on the previous year.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can I just go back to the assaults? You said 193 staff. Is that more than last year?

PAUL O'REILLY: No, it's a reduction. The number of assaults was 193. I think it was 210 or something in the previous year. Just bear with me for a moment.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Was it when they were supervising sentenced or children on remand or a mix?

PAUL O'REILLY: It is a mix. So 73 per cent of the children in detention are on remand. For Aboriginal children, it's 70 per cent and for non-Aboriginal children it's 78 per cent. In every centre there are children on remand and in every unit there are children on remand. There's not usually a difference in terms of risk of violence between those two groups.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you know how many young people were refused bail because of lack of suitable accommodation?

PAUL O'REILLY: No, that would be court information, I would think, or police information.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You said before that the number of young people in custody that have identified mental health conditions—how many have access to ongoing psychological treatment?

PAUL O'REILLY: Ongoing outside of detention, you mean?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: That's impossible to know because, if a young person has come to us on remand and they achieve bail and there are no other orders, we have no mandate to work with them or have any contact with them. If they are in remand for a day or two, it's not usually possible for us to set up a reliable connection with ongoing therapy. We have, often, a sense whether they have ongoing connection or not. If the young person is well known to us, where they are with us for other community orders—for example, where we have a case plan in place which includes therapy—we can be confident. But we can't be confident in all cases.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Say you're able to assess them and find that, yes, they have a mental health condition—and sometimes you don't know when they're leaving—are you able to then refer them or are they given that information so that they can access services themselves, or their family can?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we try to do that. The Justice Health team also has a community integration service with the local health district to support that as well. There are certainly efforts to do that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You can't follow up on that, though?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, but also, as I keep saying, if two-thirds of the kids are there for one day, there's really a limit to what we can achieve in one day.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'll continue my questions for the fire commissioners. My first question is relating to standards for flammability testing. I'm not sure whether that's the purview of Fire and Rescue NSW or the RFS.

TRENT CURTIN: It's product based.

CORRECTED

Dr AMANDA COHN: My specific question is around synthetic turf—plastic grass surfaces. The NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer's report was published a couple of years ago into synthetic turf. My understanding is that it's currently tested for flammability under the same sorts of standards for carpet or indoor flooring—as in, indoor materials. But synthetic turf, because it's installed outdoors, is vulnerable to wind, direct sun and potentially ember attack. I'm interested if either of the fire organisations have got a view on what would be the appropriate way to test that material.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I've certainly had no advice about Fire and Rescue's position or thoughts on testing synthetic turf. Anecdotally, though, I recall the fire that we had in Surry Hills in May 2023. We saw neighbouring properties affected by the radiant heat coming off that fire. There was at least one example where there was synthetic turf on one of the balconies catching fire. That's obviously a clear demonstration of how it can be impacted. But I would have to take advice and come back to you on notice with any position or approach that we would be suggesting.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm very happy for you to take it on notice. In having those conversations, I'm also interested to understand whether this is something that should be permitted in bushfire zones or not—I'm now looking at Commissioner Curtin—given its known flammability and that it's functionally plastic.

TRENT CURTIN: I understand we're in the process of updating our planning for bushfire protection, which includes landscaping. I can come back on notice on the status of that review and how that impacts things like synthetic turfs in landscaping.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'd be really keen to know if that includes synthetic turf and, if so, what the time frame is on that work. I'll stick with the RFS for a moment. What policies have you got in place to communicate changes with your volunteer base, noting how widely distributed and varied they are in terms of their engagement with the organisation?

TRENT CURTIN: There are a range of systems available. The One NSW RFS system is the primary place where we provide our communication systems for RFS volunteers. We also use Facebook member sites, email and other communication channels to communicate with volunteers.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Have you got any evaluation of those methods or a sense of how much or what proportion of your volunteer base is engaged with those communication tools?

TRENT CURTIN: No, I don't believe they've been evaluated.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I also have a few questions around the aspects of the SES's work where RFS members are also sometimes involved, things like height safety training and flood rescue training. When an RFS volunteer, for example, is involved in flood rescue, what is the training process that they go through?

TRENT CURTIN: For the RFS volunteers, I would have to take on notice the training requirements that we provide for them in flood rescue.

Dr AMANDA COHN: You have mentioned flood rescue. The other part of the question was if RFS members are being trained in height safety systems and then what that entails. I should clarify, the only reason I'm not asking the SES the same questions is because I did that training myself through the SES, so I'm quite across that. So for flood rescue and flood rescue boat operations, if an RFS member has a boat licence, is there any additional training that they go through to drive a boat under flood conditions?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes, I can take on notice the training package that we use for that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Staying with the RFS, I have a few questions about the white fleet—the non-firefighting vehicles. What is this year's budget allocation for the white fleet?

TRENT CURTIN: Budget allocation for procurement of white fleet, do you mean?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Yes.

TRENT CURTIN: I don't think I've got that disaggregated. I've got the same for the red fleet but not for the white fleet. I'd have to take that on notice.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Are you able to advise what is the planned replacement for the Guardian software system?

TRENT CURTIN: I understand that we've got two versions of the Guardian system. You're talking about an upgrade of Guardian 2 or a further replacement?

Dr AMANDA COHN: I've been advised that the Noggin software is at the end of its life and may not be serviceable within 12 to 18 months. What work are you doing in terms of considering a successor?

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TRENT CURTIN: I understand the transition process is underway for that. I can come back on notice with detail.

Dr AMANDA COHN: The detail I'm after is what alternatives are being considered and what is the time frame for that transition. There's obviously work being done in the Parliament regarding the red fleet and the accounting changes. I'm well aware of the demands of the local government sector to not have to account for the depreciation of your red fleet assets. Has the Government requested you do any work in anticipation of potential changes to section 119 of the Act?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes, we've been preparing some advice for the Government to consider in their response.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Can you provide us an insight into what the impact on the RFS may be of that change?

TRENT CURTIN: There would be a series of impacts. I think there needs to be some legislative change. There would be financial and budgetary impacts. We're providing that advice to government, and they'll consider it as part of the response to the report.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That advice is confidential at this stage. Is that what you're saying?

TRENT CURTIN: It's for the Government to consider, yes.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm advised that the mitigation crew and crew leader positions no longer require basic firefighting skills or training. Can you advise the rationale for that?

TRENT CURTIN: I'm not aware of any change in relation to the qualifications, so I would have to take on notice whether there has been a change in advice for those requirements. Mitigation crews obviously have a specialist piece of work in relation to mitigation work, but I can come back to you on the qualification requirements for our mitigation crews.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I understand there's also a budget allocation for the installation of mobile data terminals in all of your vehicles. Are you able to tell us what the current expenditure has been on the project?

TRENT CURTIN: As I understand, we've rolled out more than 3,000 mobile data terminals. In terms of the exact expenditure for the project up to date, it would be better I take it on notice so I can give you that figure exactly.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm also interested in either the number or the proportion of vehicles that have been fitted to date.

TRENT CURTIN: More than 3,000. I'll try and find the figure for you and come back to you on that. But it's a large proportion of the fleet, obviously. We've got a little bit more to go to roll out the remaining few districts.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Finally, there's a handful of individual incidents that have been brought to my attention where former volunteers have been asked to sign non-disclosure agreements. I'm not intending to prosecute any of those individual complaints here. But, more broadly, are you aware of how widespread that practice is? Are there potentially any limitations on system change or improvement that come from not having open disclosure—potentially any reasons for the non-disclosure?

TRENT CURTIN: I'm not aware of historical use of non-disclosure agreements, but we implemented a complaints management process last year, which we're currently reviewing, to see whether there are opportunities for improvement. It's important that everyone in RFS has an opportunity to raise concerns and have those concerns dealt with appropriately.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That complaint management system—I appreciate you're only new to the organisation; a lot of this will be legacy—does that include visibility on complaints that subsequently may have ended in people leaving the organisation or being removed from the organisation with non-disclosure?

TRENT CURTIN: I'm not sure there's a linkage between the non-disclosure and the current Workplace Complaints Resolution Framework, but the framework itself is under review at the moment. Outcomes of matters that have been dealt with through that framework will form part of the review, I would imagine, and we'll consider any opportunities to improve the framework in totality.

The CHAIR: I've just got a couple of questions for Commissioner Curtin or Commissioner Wassing. I'm sure you've seen *The Sydney Morning Herald* article that stated:

The NSW Planning Department would have the power to override advice from emergency services about housing applications in fire-prone land or flood zones under a proposed overhaul of the state's Environmental Planning and Assessment Act.

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I'm just wondering if either of you were consulted around this or involved in anything with the Minister in regard to what *The Sydney Morning Herald* is stating as "proposed changes"?

MIKE WASSING: I can say that our agency has been consulted and continues to be involved in any associated work around proposed changes.

The CHAIR: When was this first brought to your attention?

MIKE WASSING: I'd have to take the specific date on notice, but it was very early in the piece. It was what I would describe as the initiation of considered changes.

The CHAIR: Was it some months ago that these discussions first started?

MIKE WASSING: Yes.

The CHAIR: Are you aware of any proposal to permanently move SES and/or RFS flood and fire safety planning advisory staff to the planning department?

MIKE WASSING: It's my understanding that that's part of the conversation with the proposal. For SES, we also have a team of six personnel that also do multiple other roles. We're not a consent authority, so our arrangements for SES are somewhat different to the fire authorities. We provide advice, and those six personnel are also our risk intelligence personnel that operate in our flood modelling and our flood intelligence cells, and also during response operations and in our preparedness.

The CHAIR: Are there concerns that it might compromise the level of expertise that planning staff derive from being part of the relevant authority with ready access to subject matter experts? Is that something that has been discussed and considered?

MIKE WASSING: It's certainly something that has been discussed and considered. For our organisation, I'm one of those six personnel who's currently on a rotating secondment with the planning authorities. We have a very close working relationship with the planning authorities, the Reconstruction Authority and local councils. For us, in the last 12 months, with regard to the advice that we provide—as I say, we're not a consent authority in terms of approvals—we've provided 651 items of advice as part of that process. We consider it an important part of our legislative requirements, obviously, and do that in partnership.

The CHAIR: Are there concerns as to the level of safety advice provided for new developments over time, as staff turn over and lose connections with the emergency services? Is that a potential as well?

MIKE WASSING: I think it's important that any subject matter expertise in this area retains—not just currently has, but retains—a wealth of knowledge in that. It continues to be in the risk aspects that the approval processes and planning processes continue to change and evolve, as they should. Certainly from a flood perspective—and I'll leave it with Commissioner Curtin to speak from a fire perspective, but I imagine it's very similar in the context of the continued learnings and research that goes into projected modelling—there's lots of projected modelling now, to as far out as 2050 in terms of risks of flood and the like. We utilise that in our planning considerations and our advice.

The CHAIR: If this restructure were to occur—my understanding is that it's still being discussed; it hasn't been confirmed at this point—has your department identified any safety concerns? If so, are you able to tell us what they are at this point?

MIKE WASSING: There are no immediate safety concerns that I would identify, but certainly core to the conversations are capability going forward for our organisation and the importance of the continued advice that goes into land use planning and planning approvals generally.

The CHAIR: Commissioner Curtin, did you have anything to add in regard to the fire aspects of those questions? I'm happy to repeat any of them, but maybe if we start with any safety concerns that your department may have.

TRENT CURTIN: I'm happy to have a shot at it, and if you want to ask me the other questions, that's fine. I understand the RFS has been engaged with the department for a period of time. It's not entirely clear to us at the moment what the proposed model is and how that would work. I am joining a steering committee with the department tomorrow, for our first meeting, to understand what the proposal might look like and how that might work. I gave evidence this afternoon that the RFS, like the other emergency services, has a very important role to play when it comes to providing operational expertise, and expertise around predictive modelling and other parts of the planning system, to make sure that we protect both our firefighters who are responding to these emergencies and the community who are impacted by these. We'll need to find a way to work with the department to support

CORRECTED

the Government's push for increased housing, to make sure that we cut the red tape, to make sure that we've got the resources in place to help move those projects forward, and to make sure there are no blockages.

At the same time, we need to be cautious that we don't water down or filter any of the operational expertise or the expertise that you gain by integrating those sorts of expertise inside a system. From an RFS perspective, while we have people who work specifically on the planning arrangements or the predictive modelling arrangements, we also use that expertise throughout the bushfire period. It's an integrated model that works together. We draw in the operational expertise together with the other expertise. I'm looking forward to working with the department to help cut that red tape and make sure we've got the resources available to make sure we can support development applications but provide that really important role, as I described, with the changing climatic conditions—that we don't make any missteps and cut out any of the important expertise that's provided into the planning system to protect our community.

The CHAIR: Do you have some concerns that the subject matter experts that we've currently got might be being pulled in too many different directions and we would potentially need funding for more experts in this space to be able to handle a bigger workload?

TRENT CURTIN: I'll need to work through the department what the current proposal is, and I'm not aware of exactly what that is. I did read the media article which raised concerns about changes to the planning arrangements. But I'll be looking forward to working closely with the department, starting tomorrow.

The CHAIR: I'm going to go back now to Youth Justice. We were talking a little bit before about the 2022 report on six youth justice centres. Could I get an update on the recommendations that were partially achieved and the progress that's happening on those particular recommendations?

PAUL O'REILLY: I don't have a list in front of me of the ones that are partially achieved as opposed to completely achieved—unless my colleague does? No, my colleague doesn't have that either. We can give you a detailed response on notice.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that. Recommendation 31 stated:

Youth Justice NSW appoint an identified position at Frank Baxter Youth Justice Centre to support the Aboriginal practice officer and promote a cultural agenda at the centre.

Has that position now been created and filled?

PAUL O'REILLY: My understanding is that, yes, it has been.

The CHAIR: Is that going to be a permanent, ongoing position?

PAUL O'REILLY: I believe so.

The CHAIR: Also recommendation 39 was for "an identified Aboriginal caseworker position at Acmena Youth Justice Centre". Has that been created and filled?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, and there already was actually, before the recommendation arrived.

The CHAIR: Great. That's an ongoing position as well?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

The CHAIR: Great. How many days are young people spending in Youth Justice custody on section 28 bail?

PAUL O'REILLY: I don't have that information with me for 2024-2025.

The CHAIR: Is it not available or are you able to take that on notice?

PAUL O'REILLY: We can calculate it. I don't have it here, but we can probably calculate how many instances of section 28 bail. We can then try to calculate the duration of those.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I appreciate that. Could I also get some more information around Youth Justice strategy to combat racism within Youth Justice?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, certainly. Youth Justice has developed an anti-racism strategy. That's been in development for some time in consultation with our Aboriginal staff. There are a few elements to it. One element is training around anti-racism capability and awareness of racism. Another element is reporting racism and using appropriate HR policies to address racism and hold people accountable for racism. And, drawing on the reform priorities in Closing the Gap, priority reform three is about transforming institutions. The anti-racism strategy is heavily going to depend on more recruitment of Aboriginal people in the organisation, particularly in leadership

CORRECTED

and decision-making roles at every level of the organisation, to improve cultural awareness and reduce the likelihood of people experiencing racism.

One of the most challenging aspects of building anti-racism capability—in our institution anyway—is getting to a position where white people take racism seriously consistently. That is one of the biggest challenges. Quite often Aboriginal people report experiencing racism and it is not being taken seriously. One of the ways to combat that is to have a targeted recruitment strategy so that there are more Aboriginal people working in Youth Justice, particularly in supervisor and manager roles. That's been running for about a year now, and we've increased the proportion of Aboriginal staff from 14 per cent to 22 per cent just to try to make sure we have a workforce that better reflects our client group.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Wassing, the Minister earlier spoke quite highly of interoperability, but we've still got a fair way to go, I would suggest, in a lot of fronts on that. In the aftermath of the floods on the Mid North Coast, SES was the lead agency. How were jobs handed out to the other agencies working on the ground at that time?

MIKE WASSING: For flood operations, we established what we call a flood rescue area of operation.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, that was my fault. I'm talking about the clean-up jobs.

MIKE WASSING: Certainly. In terms of the clean-up job specifically, until such time as we've gone through a formal handover and transition to recovery, that remains the responsibility of the combat authority, in this case being the SES. The tasking or the receipt of those jobs comes in fundamentally through damage assessments, but also from local community input and the like. The tasking of those jobs is effectively through—we run what we call a deputy recovery officer or a deputy recovery controller at a tactical level to manage and have the oversight of both the transition and also some of those clean-up operations. We aim to have centralised hubs as part of our incident management teams. In terms of the tasking of those operations, the community mobilisation is embedded also as part of those operations, so we are very reliant on particularly the fire services, given that, in the case of mud, we certainly need water in many cases. I also take the opportunity to express my personal but also agency appreciation to particularly my colleagues here to my left in terms of the fire services, but also all the other services that have been involved in those clean-up operations.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The practicalities of handing jobs to other people—SES, RFS and Fire and Rescue are all on different systems, I understand, which often could lead to jobs being handed out on spreadsheets to be ticked off that way. Surely we can look for some improvements on that front?

MIKE WASSING: One of the aspects of our after-action review certainly highlights the tasking through our systems. We don't necessarily have common dispatch systems in terms of the tasking components. We use a system called Beacon, and that's certainly one of the main ways that we receive our 132 500 operations, but also clean-up operations. We use the command and control system to be able to best coordinate through local sectors and local areas of operation to do that. It's fair to say the after-action review certainly highlights we can do better in the systems approach to that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Curtin, do you do any reviews of those sort of responses to see the efficiency of the crews that you had on the ground? The crews travel a long way to be part of that recovery activity. How effective was their time spent while they were on the ground up there?

TRENT CURTIN: We do reviews and after-action reviews of many of the incidents that we respond to. We appreciate that crews come from a long way to help those communities in their time of need. I couldn't say that we've done a review of that particular incident, but we do have a review and lessons learned process where we undertake reviews of those sorts of incidents and feed that back into the process.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: To what detail do you do that? So this crew travelled and only did one job this day, two jobs that day and actually none on that day—have you got that sort of recording?

TRENT CURTIN: I can't say for this particular example you're talking about, but it would reveal itself very quickly if crews found themselves travelling a long way and not being utilised properly. That's one of the first things that crews raise with us. If that's come up through the process, then that's something we need to address.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do we look at the ROI on something like the base that we had at Port Macquarie? I'd imagine that was quite an extravagant cost for that.

TRENT CURTIN: We could do a review of that. I'm not sure that's been done.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Fewtrell, under the previous Government I remember programs targeted specifically at upgrading facilities for women in our facilities across the State. That's certainly

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been identified as one of the hurdles to recruitment. Are these programs continuing, and are they delivering results?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, there's an ongoing investment in upgrading our facilities. Tomorrow I'm attending the opening of Dungog Fire Station—we've been able to build a new fire station there. There is ongoing work with a lot of renovations and retrofits of stations to make them fit for purpose. That remains a very significant proportion of our efforts in terms of upgrading our properties. There are two focuses on those: as you said, suitable facilities for women, but also updating stations to reduce the risk of exposure to carcinogens. What we'll often do is combine those two funding sources that we've got allocated so that we get the maximum impact across our stations.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: It was Dungog on that list that I saw before of those affected by the tanker strategy?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: And will this change that?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: What I believe will happen is this will be of great assistance to the crew at the station at Dungog to attract more people. It certainly makes the prospect of contributing to Fire and Rescue for members of the local community much more appealing, to see a move from what was a very old and basic facility with primitive facilities for firefighters to a state-of-the-art modern fire service facility that has fit-for-purpose amenities for men and women, appropriate privacy arrangements and so forth. I think we'll see that that will help attract more people to the station. Certainly it's a big show of commitment from Fire and Rescue to the community of Dungog.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Curtin, back to you—possibly a high-level answer and then you might need to take some of this on notice. I believe out of the Bushfire Inquiry report there was a recommendation about the 13 fire control centres. I just wonder if you could give me a quick update on where that was up to more broadly and then perhaps on notice some of the specifics around those 13 locations.

TRENT CURTIN: I understand we got \$71.5 million for eight of the 13 fire control centres and emergency operations centres. Armidale and Cudgegong are complete. Six further FCCs are in development at the moment, and site construction work has started at Narrabri, Clarence Valley and Monaro.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: There are others at Tumut and Wagga that I could perhaps have some more detail, on notice?

TRENT CURTIN: Yes, they're in development. Work is continuing with local councils in those areas: Moruya, Hawkesbury, Tumut, Cooma, Clarence Valley and Narrabri.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner, the hazard reduction methods—have we seen any new developments of that in the last 12 months? Are there some things on the horizon that might help with our hazard reduction when it comes to new technologies and the like?

TRENT CURTIN: We're continuing to explore all opportunities. As you know, with the weather conditions, we've been challenged over the previous years in undertaking large-scale burn activities. We've been focusing on physical mitigation activities, particularly focusing on higher-risk areas around infrastructure and around housing. Predominantly we've been focusing on doing hazard reduction works that protect properties. This year we've protected 166,000 properties, but we've only been able to achieve 100,000 hectares of hazard reduction burning. We'd like to be able to do more than that. We've got the goat program, and we've got other works underway to try to make sure we can focus on improving our approach to hazard reduction burning, including cool burning and a whole range of other issues.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are there any other new technologies that we're hoping might come online shortly to help that, because reaching these targets seems to be a difficulty every year?

TRENT CURTIN: It's going to continue to be a challenge. At the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee, which I chair, I've promoted a conversation with the whole sector around how we can have a look at hazard reduction targets and how we can have a look at strategic opportunities to improve the way we do hazard reduction, and we'll be progressing that with the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What are our expectations on local councils as far as the fire capabilities on their local tips?

TRENT CURTIN: In relation to local tips, we want to make sure that they've got all the right risk mitigation processes in place. We were talking about lithium ion batteries earlier. I understand RFS had 27 tip

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fires last year. It's not possible always to say how many of those are caused by different reasons. Tip fires are very difficult to find the cause of a fire, but it's important that every landholder and everyone that carries a risk, like tips and other things, take all necessary steps to make sure they protect that from becoming an issue, in terms of community impact.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Would you be able to take that on notice and get those numbers over, say, the last 10 years, just so we can try to track that, if possible?

TRENT CURTIN: If we hold that data, then I'll take it on notice to get that for you.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Don't go to too much effort. I just wondered whether there's a chance that councils and tips could play a bigger role in the response to that, because my understanding is the response plan at the moment is to call the RFS. These seem to be events that happen quite regularly. It seems like maybe we could ask a bit more from them. The infrastructure is often there, as far as piping and water and the machinery, yet we're calling on volunteers to go out and play that role in something that could be done onsite.

TRENT CURTIN: I've spent many hours at tip fires, and they are very unpleasant things, but we can work with local councils. It's really important that our district management teams and our local stations get involved with tips and councils, or whoever owns the tip, to make sure that specific information gets around how we respond to those tips. Councils have a whole range of support in terms of doses and other things that we can use during those fires, but they are very challenging things to deal with. They take a long time, and they do distract a lot of time and effort from our volunteers to put them out. I would expect that our local district managers and district teams, where there are issues, are working really closely with councils or other proponents to make sure they've got the right systems in place.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Mr O'Reilly, you mentioned before child safety whilst in custody is paramount. I agree, but sometimes harm does occur. Could you say how many incidents of assault of resident on resident have occurred?

PAUL O'REILLY: I can. I do have that number. For 2024-25, young person on young person assault—287 incidents.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Of that, how many needed hospitalisation?

PAUL O'REILLY: Again, very few, but I don't have the number.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many incidents of self-harm occurred in the last financial year?

PAUL O'REILLY: There were 138.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How many incidents where there was use of force on a young person?

PAUL O'REILLY: There were 1,579 incidents of use of force.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When a young person has had a self-harm episode, what measures are put in place to ensure that they are safe afterwards?

PAUL O'REILLY: It depends on the incident. Self-harm is a very broad range of behaviours, and there are a whole range of drivers. Quite often the behaviour of other children around can be a trigger for self-harm, so quite often the response is just to change location. But it is really about getting the expert clinical advice instantly and then implementing a very individualised plan to keep that young person safe.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If it was a young person on young person, you would also assess that risk as well to see, "Do we need to separate"?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we would usually engage in some conflict resolution and restorative justice between the two. However, it does depend on the situation, the seriousness and the level of risk and safety, and intention.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I can imagine. With regard to the use of force, is that higher or lower than last year?

PAUL O'REILLY: It's almost identical. It's two more incidents.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Did any of those result in hospitalisation?

PAUL O'REILLY: Again, it would be very, very rare. But we'll find out.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Again, what do you do to try to get that number lower rather than—

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PAUL O'REILLY: It has fluctuated over the years, and we've also improved reporting and monitoring. One of the reasons why it has gone up is because we have improved reporting. A use-of-force data point is collected from every physical contact. It may be asking someone to go to their room and putting a hand on the top of their back to guide them. That should be recorded. It's not just about heavily physical—it's every contact. It has to be every contact where we are asking them to do something they may not want to do. Earlier I gave you the number of 287 assaults between young people. Every single one of those involves a number of use-of-force incidents to break the fight up and keep everybody safe. I think the number of use-of-force incidents is not necessarily—in fact, not at all—a good measure of performance of the system.

In 2019, before our safety reforms, we had appalling figures. One of the reasons for that was we had a lot of indecision in responding to violence, and we've worked very hard to introduce response teams in two of our centres and increased training to make sure that staff are much more decisive in using the powers they have to keep people safe, and they've been really effective at that. Incidents get resolved much quicker. They escalate much less frequently to big incidents, but, naturally, you get a higher data point of use of force as a consequence of that.

To make sure that we try to get the balance right, we've introduced a committee which reviews every single use-of-force incident. This is a committee that works centrally across all six centres so that we have consistency. They review the CCTV footage and the written reports and interview people to make sure that in every single incident it was compliant with the law, compliant with policy, people were safe, and whether there are areas for improvement or training that can be pointed out. Occasionally there'll be a breach of the policy, which is referred to the misconduct team for assessment. That increased reporting and monitoring and consequences is the safeguard to make sure that we don't overcorrect by directing our staff to be decisive.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you have a full complement of staff in all of the centres?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we do. We don't generally have staff shortages. There will be times when we might have a staff shortage if we have a run of illness, and we had a few incidents during the COVID period. But generally we have a full complement in most places. Our centre managers are directed to have a constant recruitment process and training process. There are always cohorts of new recruits coming through so that we always have a supply of staff if people can't come to their shift.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you have staff that are on workers comp at the moment?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I have some numbers. I'm sure you want numbers.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, please.

PAUL O'REILLY: There are currently 224 workers comp claims open at the moment.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What's the average length of time from when somebody commences the claim to when they return—if they return?

PAUL O'REILLY: We have that data, but not here. We can provide that separately, but we do have that data.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What's the full-time equivalent workforce that you have in the centres?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I have that number as well, if you'll bear with me for a moment. We have 2,108 staff.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Obviously they're in different categories. Does each person have a case load, or would it only be—

PAUL O'REILLY: The 2,108 staff include 210 central office staff. They don't work directly with clients usually; they work on things like programs, policy, commissioning, contract management, and those sort of things—strategy. Then we have 549 community staff. They do support clients in the community. Not all of them are caseworkers; sometimes they are managers or program people. Generally, our caseworkers in the community have a case load of around 10 to 12—or sometimes less—young people, depending on the area, because the volume of clients going to a caseworker in the community fluctuates a lot, and it is thankfully low in some areas. We have 1,349 staff who work in the detention centres. They are mainly youth officers who work in the units on shift. They don't typically have a case load; they work in a particular unit, supervising young people.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is there a ratio of how many staff are there with young people?

PAUL O'REILLY: In the centres?

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. In most units it's up to 15 young people with three staff, who then have a manager who oversees them. However, in our high-risk units the ratio is different. There are up to six young people with four staff.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: As an example, say in Spain they seem to have smaller units. What would be the average unit, or how many young people are in—is that how they—they're in a unit, and that's their, for want of a better word, family whilst they're there?

PAUL O'REILLY: I wouldn't say family. They all have a family at home. It's a unit of accommodation. The extent to which they become friendly is really up to them; it's not something that we would force. Generally it's up to 15 kids in each unit. That's the general standard. Except for those high-risk units, which is six.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When they go to lunch breaks, or dinner, do they go as a unit at separate times, or they all sort of go to the one area and everyone's there?

PAUL O'REILLY: There's a dining room in each unit. You should come and visit.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I have—

PAUL O'REILLY: There's a dining room in each unit where young people have meals together. Depending on the unit and what's happening in the unit they'll have chores to do and the staff will make sure they're safe eating their dinner. But they generally eat together.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Was that an invitation, by the way?

PAUL O'REILLY: It is an invitation.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I would love to come.

The CHAIR: A couple more questions in regard to Youth Justice. As I understand it, there used to be a program run by RSPCA in New South Wales that involved inspectors visiting the youth corrections facilities to teach young people about animal wellbeing, and how they can make a positive difference to the lives of animals. I'm just wondering if that program still exists in New South Wales?

PAUL O'REILLY: I'm not aware of an RSPCA program. My colleague might be aware. Kelly-Anne?

KELLY-ANNE STEWART: Not at the moment, no.

PAUL O'REILLY: Not at the moment.

The CHAIR: Can I bring Kelly up?

PAUL O'REILLY: Please do.

The CHAIR: Do you know when that program stopped existing?

KELLY-ANNE STEWART: No, I don't, but I do have a list of other animal-related projects and initiatives across the State, if you'd like me to run you through that.

The CHAIR: Yes.

KELLY-ANNE STEWART: I can also provide them as well. At Acmena, we have an equine program. A number of horses will attend the centre and young people have the opportunity to engage with them during school holidays and downtime. At Riverina, we have a sheep shearing program that's run in conjunction with the Shepherds Park Education and Training Unit and TAFE NSW. That comes in a couple of times a year, depending on availability of children who are interested in that program. At Urana, in our Far West, we have another sheep shearing program. Again, some of these programs are geared towards the regions and employment opportunities also in the community for young people transitioning back into the community. We also have the dingo rescue program, where young people can have an opportunity to interact with dingoes.

At Reiby, close to Campbelltown, we have some qualified professionals from Taronga Zoo and the reptile organisation that come in and give young people experiences with reptiles, and the experience to interact. I've seen that in practice myself during NAIDOC week at a number of locations across the State. At Cobham, we've got the Sydney Fox and Dingo Rescue program. That's been going for a number of years, where young people learn and interact with the animals. We've also got the Bushbred Horse Assisted Learning Program, which is a five-week program. Again, that's equine therapy, which has some research behind it in terms of its efficacy with working with young people as well, both internationally and across Australia. That's it.

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The CHAIR: When you say there's the dingo rescue program, is that with the Sydney Fox and Dingo Rescue? Is that the only organisation?

KELLY-ANNE STEWART: Yes, it is.

The CHAIR: How often are they coming into centres?

KELLY-ANNE STEWART: I haven't got the specific details. It's usually as part of our school holiday program. The timetable for young people during the week and on weekends is pretty jam-packed between school, education and interventions, so it's usually part of our school holiday program, I understand.

The CHAIR: Could I also ask you to take on notice that previous question about the RSPCA program, about when that program ceased to exist, but also why the program itself ended?

KELLY-ANNE STEWART: I can, yes.

The CHAIR: Are there plans to open up more animal wellbeing programs? I know that there was a real mix there. There was some that were sort of farming based and work opportunity based, rather than animal wellbeing, but there is a mix of some of these dingo programs and things like that which are wellbeing focused. Is there a plan to sort of broaden more, particularly with the RSPCA program finishing?

KELLY-ANNE STEWART: We're often approached by lots of community organisations. There's a process by which we have to assess the efficacy and the appropriateness of those programs. We're always open to new initiatives that have benefit for our young people. Particularly, as I said, as we run into the school holiday period where we use it as a dynamic security measure, as well. When we keep kids busy and engaged we see less incidents in our centres.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. I've got some additional questions for Fire and Rescue. I know last estimates we spoke about several thousand animals being rescued by Fire and Rescue in the previous year. I'm just wondering if I could get any update in regard to how many animal rescues there have been in this year.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: For 2025-26 year to date? Or 2024-25?

The CHAIR: I guess since the last estimates that I—

JEREMY FEWTRELL: The last estimates? I'll take that on notice and we'll provide that number for you.

The CHAIR: This one might be another one for on notice, but just what kind of animals we're talking about being rescued, and some of the breakdown of those species.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'm not sure to the extent we'll be able to extract that data, or have that data for you, but whatever we can do we'll provide. In general, though, I would say they do tend to be predominantly domestic pets that have had some sort of misadventure, followed then probably by Australian native animals, particularly possums getting caught in different locations, then other agricultural farm animals.

The CHAIR: What's the process? Where are those animals generally taken? If we're talking about companion animals, is there a policy in place in regard to where those animals get taken? Again, the same with wildlife?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Normally what will happen is the pet owner lives in close proximity and they're reunited immediately. Then the pet owner is able to take whatever sort of care steps are necessary to take them to a vet or otherwise. Likewise, with any sort of agricultural animals, they'll be under the care of the landowner or the farmer. If they're not able to be located, the crews on scene—either between our people, the police or others—will make arrangements to get them to a vet for appropriate care and treatment in the interim.

The CHAIR: Does Fire and Rescue have established networks with specific wildlife carers and specific vets that can help, or is it done on a case-by-case basis?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: To some extent they have local contacts. I wouldn't necessarily say they're extensively formalised. We have arrangements with WIRES for some animals as well. Our communication centre will make contact with WIRES, and at an appropriate hour a wildlife carer will come and collect the animal.

The CHAIR: Particularly when animals are ending up in veterinary facilities, is there any arrangement for those places to receive government funding for the rehabilitation they're doing through that process?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: No, not that I'm aware of.

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The CHAIR: In the last few minutes I have left, I have one more question in regard to Youth Justice. This might need to be taken on notice as well. I want to get, if I could, the number of complaints about staff that are recorded at each of the Youth Justice centres over the last financial year. Is that data collected?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. It might be helpful if I could clarify. Do you mean complaints from young people?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I will go to Fire and Rescue. I understand, Commissioner, that SafeWork issued Fire and Rescue NSW an improvement notice in relation to its failure to hold the health and safety committee meetings for a year. Why was that? I understand you're going to take action to make sure it doesn't happen again, but why did we not have any meetings for a year?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: There are some sensitivities around that with an individual. I'm not sure how best to handle this one, Ms Boyd. I'm happy to provide some advice on that out of session. But we've certainly been able to resolve that, and we've got a schedule for those meetings to be occurring.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: In the meantime, though, how were you communicating with workers in relation to health and safety issues?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: There's a well-established network of health and safety representatives. There was ongoing communication between the health and safety representatives and our health and safety team, and obviously with members of the workforce and the health and safety representatives as well. As far as I'm aware, there was also some other out-of-session consideration of issues that was done by correspondence. That relates to how those matters were being handled during that issue.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand you've been asked about the Grose Vale—

The CHAIR: I'm sorry. You will have another 10 minutes, but I want to let Commissioner Wassing know that if he needs to leave, it's nearly at five o'clock. Please leave when you're ready.

MIKE WASSING: Thank you very much, Chair.

(Mike Wassing withdrew.)

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I think you've already been asked questions about the Grose Vale incident. There has been concern raised with us from members of Fire and Rescue that they feel they've not been consulted with when it comes to the safety response or the safety measures put in place following that incident. I know that it has been discussed at meetings of the work health and safety steering committee, which you chair. How have those actions, and progress on those actions, taken into consideration consultation with workers in the absence of having those health and safety committee meetings up and running?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'll provide more detail to you on notice, but I'm very aware that there were meetings with all the crews involved in that Grose Vale incident to talk them through the recommendations that came out of the safety investigation relating to that matter. There were obviously a range of sensitivities with that to make sure that was done appropriately from a psychosocial safety perspective and where people were at, given that the incident involved the fatality of one of our firefighters. They've worked extensively with the local crews to explain to them what the investigation found and then how, as an organisation, we were responding to that. As I say, I'll provide further details on notice in terms of the broader consultation with the health and safety representatives and the health and safety committee.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That would be very useful. Also what these actions—I'm looking at some meeting papers, which are heavily redacted, of your work health and safety steering committee from 16 June. It's just entitled "Progress on Grose Vale actions". Has the nature of those Grose Vale actions been communicated to staff—if they involve systemic reforms or measures being put in place?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'm probably best to provide the detail for you on that in the response on notice.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you. I'm going to direct this to you, Mr Head, because I don't know who to direct it to—a thing called the NSW Digital Identity and Verifiable Credentials Lighthouse Program.

GRAEME HEAD: Ms Christie and/or Mr Wells.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Excellent. I'll direct it that way. I understand the program has now cost close to \$70 million. I am wondering what we've got to show for that. Where are we up to?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I think that number might be overstated. I think it's closer to \$50 million, but we'll take that on notice and provide you with a specific answer. In terms of the split in the program, at Digital NSW

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my responsibility is to look after the policy and strategy legislation that we are preparing for consideration. Mr Wells and Service NSW support the technical delivery of the program. I'll probably talk to the policy and strategy side of this work. We work really closely with international standards and the national rules that the Commonwealth sets in relation to digital ID and verifiable credentials. We've been pulling together a framework for how we can deliver a New South Wales digital ID and verifiable credentials in the Service NSW wallet that can be interoperable across States and Territories, and with the Commonwealth in terms of their wallet as well. Ms MacDonald was referring to that earlier.

We have prepared the Identity Protection and Recovery Bill as well, which relates to the protection of personal information in that regard. We've contributed to the national Digital Identity and Verifiable Credentials strategy as part of the Data and Digital Ministers Meeting. We have collectively worked together with the States and Territories. In terms of the practical, technical delivery, Mr Wells can talk to that in more detail. But we've issued a first aid certificate pilot in the Service NSW wallet, which is a verifiable credential to the international standards. We've released Working with Children Check—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sorry, is the St John first aid credential the one that was announced in June 2024?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is that actually being used in emergency services now?

LAURA CHRISTIE: It was as a test pilot to prove that we could work with St John's, as a non-government entity, to be able to issue that credential. It was a technical pilot.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Have we got the results of the pilot?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Mr Wells?

GREG WELLS: We do. That informed, I suppose, the things that we're now about to roll out. I'm happy to speak to that in a minute.

LAURA CHRISTIE: I'll just keep running through a few of the things that we've delivered. The Working with Children Check online renewals—people are now able to renew their Working with Children Check online without coming to a Service NSW centre. We have launched the Digital Photo Card pilot, which, again, is a digital version of a Photo Card.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That one has been in trial for a few years, right? When was that first—

LAURA CHRISTIE: No. It was launched in June last year—June 2024. We're continuing to learn from that pilot. Mr Wells might have the specific details of how many people have been involved. I'll just finish my list—and I might have missed a few—but we've also participated in an international summit to be able to prove that we can issue a driver licence in international standards as well, so a lot of technical proofs of concepts that we have also piloted with real customers to be able to test.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just to clarify, you didn't mention something called the credentials platform, I don't think. Is that—

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes, we have also embedded—I'll let Mr Wells speak to this. We have implemented a credentials platform in Service NSW to be able to scale more credentials when we learn from the pilots that we've participated in.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So it's in preparation for when those pilots are no longer pilots.

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It's all still in the pilot phase, though, or it's in the analysis of the pilot phase; it's not actually being used anywhere yet.

GREG WELLS: I'd say elements of the program are definitely being used broadly in the community. Ms Christie mentioned Working With Children Checks. There were 70,000 renewals of Working With Children Checks last year that utilised one of the platforms. It's part of the DIVC program, which is the way you biometrically match and prove who you are. That's been integrated into Service NSW wallet. With the credentials platform you mentioned, that's what the photo card is now based on. There was a previous photo card trial, a bespoke or a custom-built process that was trialled in the Blue Mountains and in Western Sydney. What Ms Christie talked about was the transition of that credential to a standards-based photo card that's able to be used across jurisdictions in a safe way. Ms Boyd, what I'd say is, in terms of digital identity and verifiable credentials, the real goal, first of all, from a digital identity perspective, is to decentralise that identity, to strengthen the proof and to give customers choice about what they share that doesn't exist at the moment. With credentials, we'll link

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that credential to your identity and do the same thing. It's really important that we get those things built in a way that can be scaled and be safer.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: How many people have used that? You said the Working with Children Check is using those verifiable digital credentials. Is that right?

GREG WELLS: The Working with Children Check at the moment is just using the component that strengthens the proof of who you are, and you're able to do that online. Previously, in order to renew your Working with Children Check, you had to come physically to a Service NSW centre to prove your identity. You can now do that online, and 70,000 people have done that with a biometric check.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I was going to ask you how many—70,000 people.

GREG WELLS: That's right. That's last year. That continues, obviously, so that's live.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Could you on notice tell me how much has been spent on labour, consultants, vendor technology et cetera in relation to this overall project? That would be really useful.

GREG WELLS: We can.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Ms Young, one of the documents we received from Treasury that talked about a restructure within SIRA mentioned that Ernst and Young were doing some of that work. It had a table that showed that Ernst and Young had incurred \$30 million last year in connection with the restructure, and that they were going to do another \$150 million or something. Are you able to tell me what Ernst and Young are doing?

MANDY YOUNG: No. I'm not quite sure of that. Ernst and Young, we have only used for our actuarial work. Our actuarial spend is much lower than that. It's \$6.1 million last year overall, and that's for all actuaries.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Could I maybe ask you then, Mr Head, because I think what they've done is combined SIRA and DCS legals into the workers comp reform implementation costs that they've provided to us. There is a bit on the back that talks about Ernst and Young support of \$30 million in 2024-25, and then an estimated \$150 million for 2025-26 in relation to those reforms.

GRAEME HEAD: I don't know what that refers to, but it certainly doesn't refer to DCS expenditure. I don't believe that we've engaged Ernst and Young for anything since I've been secretary.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Interesting.

GRAEME HEAD: And I don't know what the document is.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It's come out of one of the proactive releases of information by the Treasurer.

GRAEME HEAD: Do you know what it's headed?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'll give it to you afterwards if you like, or I can give it to you on supplementaries so that you can see.

The CHAIR: We've now got three minutes for the Opposition.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Commissioner Fewtrell, can you tell me the justification for the recent decision to remove the Yass-based CAFS tanker?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: That was in part the preparation for movement of trucks in relation to the tiered response. Those truck movements have all been put on hold, and trucks have gone back. We're in the midst of the consultation process in relation to that. As I say, they've been put back into location.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That vehicle is still in Yass?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: As far as I'm aware.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I understand it was to head to another station. Is that station now without a vehicle?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: No. There was a planned rotation of vehicles to match the types of vehicles we needed to enable the tanker stations to get the tankers, the right types. There are various different variants of tankers. It was moving those around and then moving the trucks, so it was a shuffling of vehicles rather than leaving anyone without one.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We've heard a lot about the consultation around this project. Is there an end date for that consultation that we'll know what is happening long term?

CORRECTED

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes. We're in the process of doing consultation with health and safety representatives at the moment and then, in addition to that, there's the industrial consultation with the Fire Brigade Employees Union. We had hoped to have concluded the consultation process with the union some time ago, and it has been quite a protracted one. It's obviously an issue of great interest to the FBEU, so trying to strike that balance of making a genuine demonstration to hear their perspectives, to work through that, it's taken a while for them to be able to come through and explain all of their different concerns. I don't have an exact timeline for you, but I'm obviously keen to move things forward at the earliest opportunity, giving due respect to the consultation process.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I can tell you it's also an issue for the local member down there as well, the member for Goulburn.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, I understand.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I have another local member issue. The Junee Correctional Centre, I understand—this is for you, Commissioner Fewtrell, believe it or not—has had a spike in call-outs for false alarms over the last little while. I'm told it is 40 this year. What does Fire and Rescue receive as far as compensation for those call-outs? Does that compensation, for want of a better term, end up being fed back into the local community?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I will provide you the charge that we have for automatic fire alarm activations on notice, just so we get the exact number for you, and correctly. That then is part of Fire and Rescue's revenue stream basically. It's directed back into the organisation.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: At a local level?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: No, not necessarily. We do have a team that works in our Fire Safety Branch that is focused on helping businesses or facilities to reduce the number of false alarm activations. I dare say, if that facility has had such a significant spike, the team there that works on the false alarm reduction will be working with the Junee correctional facility.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'm happy to be corrected if those numbers are wrong too.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes.

The CHAIR: Ms Boyd?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I just need to correct myself. It was 30,000, not 30 million. I've been getting my millions and my hundreds of thousands and my billions mixed up all day. Sorry about that. But I will provide you full details on notice.

MANDY YOUNG: Sorry, Ms Boyd, can I just correct myself there too?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes.

MANDY YOUNG: It wasn't 6.1 million last year; it was 3.1 million.

GRAEME HEAD: Sorry, Ms Boyd, can I ask one thing? Sorry to be annoying. That document relates to SIRA expenditure?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It says, "SIRA and DCS legals, WC reform implementation cost, 25 February 2025." I'll give you a copy. Commissioner Fewtrell, I understand that there was a tragic death in Queensland of a firefighter called Izzy Nash and now the Queensland fire brigade is being prosecuted by Queensland Workplace Health and Safety for failing to uphold safety standards. I understand Fire and Rescue NSW wants to reduce from four to two firefighters in 10 regional centres in New South Wales. That's an active proposal. Given the dangerous nature of firefighting, are you concerned that you could get sued in New South Wales in the same way that the Queensland fire brigade is currently being prosecuted?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Obviously the tragedy with Izzy Nash's passing is a different set of circumstances to some of the comparisons that are being made with the tiered response model that we're proposing. As I've just responded a few minutes ago, we're in the midst of the consultation process with that. But a clear part of that proposal with the tanker strategy is based on defensive firefighting operations so that we're not committing firefighters to internal firefighting where there's only a crew of two. That's very well established—that, without a minimum crew of four, there's no commitment of firefighters to an internal fire attack. That has been made very clear in our communications in relation to what we're putting forward through this model. It's also been the mechanism that's been in place for the last five or six years where that model has been in operation at Peak Hill.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Ms Stewart, can you tell me quickly how many of the—you talked about the shearing program out at Orana. How many of those people are working in sheds now?

KELLY-ANNE STEWART: I would have to take that on notice for you, because I'm not sure. Sometimes it's just a point of interest for young people. As I said, we do have a variety of programs. It doesn't necessarily guarantee that young people will exit and enter that trade, but it gives young people a taster.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: And that's why I asked "in sheds" rather than shearing, because it could lead to rouseabouts or wool pressers or anything.

KELLY-ANNE STEWART: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Government questions?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: We're all good, Chair, thank you.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you to—

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Sorry, Chair. Just a couple of quick points I can clarify, just so we wrap as many things up as we can. Dr Cohn asked earlier about the IFARES program. It's something that we fund internally. We've made an allocation of \$250,000 for that. Just more recently, to Mr. Barrett's question, \$1,600 for the AFA charge is the—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Each call-out?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes. It's not necessarily that straightforward. There is a grace period. The first charge isn't called. Then there's a grace period where we'll assess it. There's a range of things that can be a reason for an exclusion but, where a charge is levied, it's \$1,600.

MANDY YOUNG: Excuse me, Chair, could I just give another answer in relation to the question Ms Boyd asked around our restructure management? Just in terms of the proposed structure and the 160 staff losing jobs, I just wanted to clarify that it's 160 roles that are impacted on some level and people may be directly appointed. It might just depend on the amount that they are impacted, so it's not an impact in terms of people are definitely losing their jobs through the process. They may be likely to be appointed through that. Once the consultation has been gone through, because we've got a significant amount of that, we'll consider that and work through the final structure and then the consequent impacts. So that may change as well.

I just wanted to also add, in relation to the nine SIRA inspectorate roles that are moving across to SafeWork, I want to be clear that we're talking about the roles, not the people. We're aligning the two processes so that people who are in those roles may have the opportunity to either stay within SIRA or to move to SafeWork, dependent on what that looks like. I just wanted to be clear that it's the roles that would move, not necessarily the people. We're trying to make it the best opportunity for people, however that may be.

In terms of the amount of engagement we've had and the information that we have been giving, we announced that we were going to do the functional review in November. Since that time, we've had more than 114 touchpoints of that. So every town hall or every SIRA C-executive drop-in—so they have them kind of every two weeks; there is a town hall a month and then a drop-in session in between the next town hall—we have given an update. There has been 29 directly from me. We've had at least 21 touchpoints in our intranet and news. We have a functional review hub that has been in operation since February. It's consistently updated with any updates that we have going through the process. There's a significant amount more processes and workshops we've had with the teams through the whole of the process. I just wanted to be clear we've been working from end to end as transparently as we can be around this.

The CHAIR: Thank you to all of you for your attendance today. We much appreciate it. The Committee secretariat will be in touch in the very near future regarding any questions that were taken on notice, as well as any supplementary questions.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.