

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND WORKS COMMITTEE

**INQUIRY INTO THE INTEGRITY, EFFICACY, AND VALUE FOR
MONEY OF THE LOCAL SMALL COMMITMENTS ALLOCATION
PROCESS**

CORRECTED

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Friday 24 October 2025

The Committee met at 3:15 pm

PRESENT

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
The Hon. Mark Latham
The Hon. Sarah Mitchell
The Hon. Peter Primrose
The Hon. Chris Rath (Deputy Chair)

PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine

The CHAIR: Welcome to the fifth hearing of the Committee's inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of the Local Small Commitments Allocation process. 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 or watching today.

My name is Abigail Boyd. I am the Chair of the Committee. I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures.

Ms ALISON MORGAN, Executive Director, Grant Program Office, Corporate Services Group, Premier's Department, on former oath

The CHAIR: We now welcome our first witness. Thank you very much for making time to give evidence again. I note that you don't need to swear an oath or affirmation as you've already done so during this inquiry. There is an opportunity for you to make a short opening statement, should you wish.

ALISON MORGAN: I think you've heard more than enough from me over the last few hearings.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Thank you, Ms Morgan, for appearing today. On 14 June 2023 you emailed Ann Lewis a spreadsheet, which you described in that email as, "The original list that I received last week for the Local Small Commitment Allocation." We've got the documents; we'll provide them to you now as well. The spreadsheet contains election commitments against all 93 electorates, totalling \$400,000 per electorate. Each project has the name of a Labor organiser to whom approval was notified, and the date on which approval was notified, with dates ranging from 10 February 2023 and 24 March 2023. All of them were prior to the 2023 election. But then the second document, which the Committee staff will give to you as well, is the list as of 28 July 2023. According to previous testimony, you received this list from Cherie Burton, and Cherie Burton told you that it was an authentic list of election commitments. You referred to this document as the "source of truth" document. Why didn't you provide the original list document when first ordered by the House under SO 52?

ALISON MORGAN: Well, we provided the list that was the final list, the list that we worked on. I received a document from Paul Mills in the Premier's office on 14 February, which was called the first batch of confirmed projects.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: 14 June.

ALISON MORGAN: Sorry, I beg your pardon. No, 14 July—I received a document then. On 14 July I received a list called the first batch. On 21 July I received a similar email—and these have been provided—from Paul Mills telling me it was the second batch, and then I received the list on the 28th telling me that it was the final batch—confirmed commitments

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Also from Paul Mills?

ALISON MORGAN: Also from Paul Mills.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But what about the 14 June 2023 list? This is the first batch of documents.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The front page has the email.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Yes, the front page. It says 14 June and you referred to it as, "Here is the original list that I received last week for the Local Small Commitment Allocation."

ALISON MORGAN: I would have to go back and confirm that with my records. I don't recall receiving a list earlier to the ones in July. There was a lot of discussion around the fact the Premier's office was pulling together the list across all of the electorates. But, in my system, the records I have were the ones that came in in July. And then when we had a confirmed final list, that's the one that we worked from.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Okay, so the second list, the 28 July list—what you call the "source of truth"—we received that in an early SO 52, which we received I think in January this year. This more recent list from 14 June 2023, it took us three calls for papers before we ended up getting that. This list, which you have described as the original list, has all of the election commitments listed in there which were made prior to the March 2023 election. What we are trying to figure out is why this list was suppressed or not given to us until our third call for papers. Do you have any knowledge or recollection—

ALISON MORGAN: The list that we had worked from was the list that was confirmed for us as being the confirmed and final list, which was the one that I received on 28 July. When we were providing all the papers around the way we had operated and worked for the grant program, that was the list that we provided. It was the only list that we worked from.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: You started doing some work on this 14 June list, too. You said:

Jo Mason is doing some analysis on it now so we will have an updated version we can sort and manage a little better soon.

Can you please start investigating the questions of Electorates where projects have not been identified and how many LGAs are encompassed in the Electorate. Cheers AJM.

ALISON MORGAN: We certainly had started doing work on that on the first batch of lists that we received, because we were told it would take quite some weeks to pull together the complete lists. As they came

through to us on a rolling basis around projects, we started looking at them to identify what kinds of organisations were they and what kinds of projects were they in order to help us identify how we would put the guidelines together and how the program would be run.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just on that 14 June list, I know you say you have to check your records but, with respect, this has come from the call for papers. It's your email. It says so very clearly. The date is there. That list is fully complete. Every electorate is on there. When you say you started work on that, I don't understand how you say you had to wait for other batches to come in. That is the full list of every electorate and all data before the March election in 2023. Why was this not provided until the third call for papers? Why was it hidden? Why wasn't it given to the Committee at the very beginning?

ALISON MORGAN: I certainly don't recall having anything that early in June. I would have to go back and check my records around that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But isn't this the record? It's here.

ALISON MORGAN: I'm not sure that the attachment that's with it is the correct one. It has an "A" number. The very early versions of lists we had were not entered into the objective system because they were incomplete and unready. I would have to take that on notice and go back and check.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is a document that came from a call for papers, so how could it be inaccurate?

ALISON MORGAN: I would have to check that. It doesn't tally with the records I have about the advice I was given from the Premier's office.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Did anyone in the Premier's office or Minister's office direct you not to provide this 14 June list?

ALISON MORGAN: Definitely not.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Because it seems strange that it would take three calls for papers. I've got the original motion that the House passed, which basically called for all papers as part of the LSCA program. It took us some time before we managed to get what is called the original list. The reality is that there are discrepancies between what we call the original list and the "source of truth" list, which is the line of questioning that we are going to have to go down. It would be very helpful to know—

ALISON MORGAN: I certainly have a first version from 14 July called the first batch, I have a second version from 21 July called the second batch and then we have what was the confirmed and final batch on 28 July. I have no personal recollection, and I would have to go back and check to see where this has come from in the system. But I don't understand how this could be—I'll take your word that it's the full list; I haven't done a reconciliation of it—when the batches I received on 14 July and 21 July were incomplete.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Was any work done—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Chair, just by way of clarification, is this the June list that you're talking about in these documents?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Yes, the cover page of one of the batches has "14 June 2023" as the email attachment and then the spreadsheet is attached to that. Was any work done to compare the earlier versions, either the 14 June or 21 July, with the final "source of truth" document?

ALISON MORGAN: No.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: How do you know it wasn't doctored along the way? You've got various versions that were given to you by Paul Mills.

ALISON MORGAN: I didn't need to check that it had been doctored. I had no reason to consider that it would be doctored. What we were waiting for was confirmation from the Premier's office that this was the final, approved list of all election commitments that had been made prior to the election. It was not up to me to check whether that list that was accurate, inaccurate, had changed or was varied. When I was advised that I had been given a final list, that was the list that the Premier's office were telling me was the master list—

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Then you discounted all the other lists before that?

ALISON MORGAN: Yes.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: You didn't compare them or look at them?

ALISON MORGAN: No, we did not.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because this original list—which does exist, because we've got it—is different to the "source of truth" list. So we know that there have been changes between the original one and the source of truth, but at no point did you go and check that there had been—

ALISON MORGAN: No. We administered the program based on the list that we were given on 28 July—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you were given two lists.

ALISON MORGAN: —that told us that this was the final and approved list.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So, you ignored the first list with all the dates pre-election, and just went with the "source of truth" list which has all dates post-election, and you went for that?

ALISON MORGAN: I received a list on 14 July and I received a list on 21 July—one was called "first batch" and the other was called "second batch". Our understanding at the time was that the Premier's office were compiling the list from across all of the electorates, and they would bring us the final list and confirm for us that it was the final list that we would work on. That is what we did.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: And you also had a list from 14 June, which we now have. But how do you know that Cherie Burton wasn't deceiving you about what were election commitments?

ALISON MORGAN: I don't know that she was and I don't know that she wasn't. I have no reason to propose that any senior person operating in the Premier's office would want to deceive the department. I had no reason to suspect that and I took no action on that assumption.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: How would you explain wild differentiations between the 14 June list and the 28 July list? How are these massive discrepancies, electorate by electorate—do you have any explanation for that?

ALISON MORGAN: I don't. Compiling the list was not our responsibility. We ran the program based on the final and confirmed list that the Premier's office told us was the "source of truth" and was the document that we would work from, and that's what we did.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Thank you, Ms Morgan. Who is Jo Mason?

ALISON MORGAN: One of my staff.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Is she still with you?

ALISON MORGAN: She has resigned, as she is now living in Victoria.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When did she do that?

ALISON MORGAN: A couple of weeks ago—no, longer than that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Have you got any recollection of the work she was doing on this original list from 14 June? She emailed you on 15 June at 8.56 a.m. saying:

Hi Alison,

Breakdown of the Funding Allocation:

* 498 funding recommendations

...

* 34 seats with partial allocation ... for parks and playgrounds—

at council level—

I'm just working through the infrastructure types and will send to you shortly.

And then a minute later, you respond:

Amazing — thank you.

ALISON MORGAN: I had a team working on the background steps that have to be taken to get a grant program stood up, and that includes designing the guidelines against which we would assess the applications, and building the forms in the OneGMS SmartyGrants system. That was the work that she was working on.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So, you do recall this original Local Small Commitments Allocation list?

ALISON MORGAN: I don't recall this specific list. As I said, I don't remember that we had been given a preliminary list that early in the piece. From my recollection, I've told you about the batches and the forms that I believe we got. But we were certainly working at that time on trying to understand what were the projects that

had been nominated, how were the guidelines to be structured and how was the OneGMS SmartyGrants system to be established?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You had told Ann Lewis this was the original list, and Jo Mason was doing some work on it, but is your evidence that you've got no recollection of the work that Jo Mason did?

ALISON MORGAN: No, I have a good recollection of the work Jo Mason did. I don't recall receiving a very early, preliminary list as you've talked about—the original list—on 14 June. I accept that it's here and that we did receive it. We were receiving copies of the list, versions of the list in a rolling way as the Premier's office, it was described to me, were compiling them and checking them and getting them together. We accepted that the final list from which we were to work was the one that came in on 28 July.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But from what you've just said, is your evidence that you recall the work that Jo Mason was doing on 15 June but you don't recall the document a day earlier?

ALISON MORGAN: I don't recall receiving that document on that day. I definitely recall the work that the team was doing to try to understand—we had meetings with a number of people in the Premier's office, and we were asking for information and advice as soon as we could get it about what kind of projects were being nominated, were there any electorates where there were not projects that were nominated and all the funding needed to go to councils for parks and playgrounds. We were trying to structure that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When you emailed Ann Lewis on 14 June at six minutes past 11 at night, "Here is the original list I received last week for the Local Small Commitments Allocation," and you go on to say that Jo Mason's going to be doing some analysis on it, have you got any recollection who gave you the list described as the original list?

ALISON MORGAN: I don't. It would have to have come from the Premier's office. There was no other source of us being able to get advice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It would have to have come from Cherie Burton or Paul Mills.

ALISON MORGAN: Probably one of those, but someone in the Premier's office. Most of the advice we received in those early days came through Paul Mills.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If it was emailed to you by Cherie Burton or Paul Mills, where is it in the call for papers?

ALISON MORGAN: I gather you have it because I've just been given a copy of it.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Yes, after three calls. It wasn't in the original call for papers in January.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No, where's their email to provide this so-called original list?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Oh, from Paul or Cherie? We don't have that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Where's that?

ALISON MORGAN: You'd have to put the question to them.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But you received it.

ALISON MORGAN: I can't tell you where they have their version of it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Shouldn't it have been returned in the papers?

ALISON MORGAN: It did not come up in the search, clearly, when we did the search for papers.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So it's your evidence you received this hefty original list, hundreds of pages, and you told Ann Lewis about it on 14 June, but when it's searched for in the records, it doesn't exist. There's no record of Burton or Mills sending it to you.

ALISON MORGAN: There must be, because we returned it to you in the last call for papers, as the Deputy Chair has outlined, so it must be in the system. I don't have any personal recollection of that one particular email that time ago.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you take on notice a search for how you received this from Mills or Burton and where that email is?

ALISON MORGAN: I will accept at face value that I have received it via an email, but I'll have to—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you search for that at face value—

ALISON MORGAN: I can, and I can take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —and provide this parliamentary Committee with some accurate information to end our puzzlement?

The CHAIR: Coming back to this, looking at this email that you have sent, the one that starts "Here is the original list I received last week", you're not emailing this as a forward, you're attaching this as a separate thing by the looks of it.

ALISON MORGAN: It's possible that I was given it as a paper version, I suppose.

The CHAIR: That's my question to you.

ALISON MORGAN: I honestly can't remember.

The CHAIR: If you look at the top of that email, it's very clear it has been attached as an Excel spreadsheet of 5.51 megabytes, so this is not a PDF copy. This is an actual editable spreadsheet that you've emailed across. Do you have any recollection of accessing that spreadsheet and then going in and "file, send, share"?

ALISON MORGAN: I don't after this period of time. I would have sent 10,000 emails between those staff and myself over that time. I don't remember that one individual email. We certainly received a series of spreadsheets from the Premier's office with the advice that they were working on them, they were preparing the full list, they were working with all of the electorates, and so for us we were just trying to get the best sense that we could around what kinds of projects they were, how we would set up the guidelines, how we would set up the system. Once we had confirmation that we had the final list, that was the list that we worked from.

The CHAIR: I accept that you don't remember the email, but you can see this one that has been returned. You would take it from looking at this then that there was an attachment that was a spreadsheet that had this information in it.

ALISON MORGAN: I'd have to confirm that to see what system it came into, where it was received.

The CHAIR: But you can see that it says 5.51 megabytes in the attachment field—

ALISON MORGAN: Certainly I can see that.

The CHAIR: —and that in the attachment field it says ".xlsx", which is—

ALISON MORGAN: I'd have to check whether it came to me. Did it come to someone else? Has it been attached—

The CHAIR: This is sent by you.

ALISON MORGAN: But I could have attached it from somewhere else. I don't know. I cannot confirm exactly how or when I received that spreadsheet. I will take on notice that I can go and check it for you.

The CHAIR: But on the face of it, looking at that attachments field—

ALISON MORGAN: Somehow I have clearly received one of the spreadsheets,

The CHAIR: Yes, in electronic form.

ALISON MORGAN: —of which we received multiple versions.

The CHAIR: Are you aware that Ms Burton told this Committee that she only had a paper version of it?

ALISON MORGAN: No, I'm not.

The CHAIR: You don't remember that from one of our earlier hearings where—

ALISON MORGAN: I don't know that I've been in a room when she's given her evidence, and I haven't necessarily checked everything that she has said.

The CHAIR: I accept that. If you were to ask me if I'd received an email to my parliamentary address, I could do a search and find things that go back quite a few years. It's quite sophisticated.

ALISON MORGAN: So could I—

The CHAIR: Are you able to do that search and find out for us?

ALISON MORGAN: —which is why I'm surprised that it didn't come up, but certainly we will take on notice to confirm who, when and how we received that email.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I think I raised with you last time that my biggest sticking point on all of this is that it wouldn't matter so much except for the fact that we have a set of guidelines that refers to one of the core criteria for a project to be eligible is that it had to have been an election commitment prior to the election. We've talked before about the only evidence that has been provided has been this "source of truth" list in order to verify that. Does it concern you, knowing that there are multiple versions of the list and having now been told about the big differences between the different lists, that perhaps that those guidelines were not actually being met?

ALISON MORGAN: Well, we sought confirmation around the list of election commitments from the Government after they were elected. I was given a list on 28 July, where it was confirmed that this is the list of election commitments, and so that is the list that we have worked from. It is not our role—it is not my role to be advising political parties or doing any of the work on them around what their election commitments are.

The CHAIR: It's your role under those guidelines—for a project to be eligible, you needed to have checked that it was actually made as a commitment.

ALISON MORGAN: And the source for checking that was the list we were given on 28 July, and that is exactly what we did.

The CHAIR: So now that you have had it brought to your attention that there are discrepancies in the list between what was actually agreed during the election period, do you have concerns that some of those projects are not, in fact, eligible under the guidelines?

ALISON MORGAN: I always understood that the early versions of the list we had, which I had thought were only from 14 July and 21 July—I now accept that there were some in June—were preliminary versions of the list and that they were being checked and that was being collated. So I'm not surprised that there were some changes or there were some discrepancies in them, but it was not up to me to be able to verify them or to do anything to check them. We were relying on the Government to tell us what their election commitments had been, and that is what we did.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Just to reiterate, Ms Morgan—I think the question was asked by the Hon. Chris Rath—at no stage were you engaged in a conversation about changing lists or changing allocations? You simply got various iterations of what the Government said was promised and took that at face value, because it's your job to administer it rather than judge where that information came from?

ALISON MORGAN: The only time we got at all involved in changing things or requesting clarification was where we had either no contact details or where we had email addresses or phone numbers that didn't work for contacts, and so we were unable to reach out to an organisation in order to get them to put in an application so it could be assessed. And I believe all of these emails have been provided to you—the emails verifying people's addresses and names. There was probably 15 or 20 of them, and we've already provided documents and discussed—I'm thinking off the top of my head here, but there was at least one or two that I know of where the project description was inaccurate, and we sought clarification around that because an organisation came to us and said, "It's not an outdoor learning centre; it's a play garden in the school," or whatever it was. So if an applicant had said to us that's not the project that had been nominated as the election commitment, we went back to the Premier's office to get them to clarify that for us.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Yes, so administrative nature only. For the benefit of the Committee, can I just table a document from the Parliamentary Budget Office relating to a directly analogous program that was put forward by the then Government in March of 2023?

The CHAIR: Can I just clarify—because I do not believe there was any directly analogous program—which program are you referring to?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: It's called Investing in Local Communities, dated 16 March 2023, which I think was about a week before the election. It was referred by the Coalition to the Parliamentary Budget Office. It's a grant program which was—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Point of order: This is an inquiry into the Local Small Commitments Allocation, which is a Government-funded program, and whether or not it's within its guidelines. This isn't about election commitments of any party who are now not in government, so I don't see how this is relevant to the inquiry.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: To the point of order: Chair, with all due respect, it's directly related to election commitments.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: You've just been quizzing the witness about the reconciliation of election commitments with the delivery—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And the witness has said what happened pre-election is not their area to look after.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: —and this is a directly analogous program. I think the Government has a right to place on record a compare and contrast, which is exactly what I've done.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But this program doesn't exist, because it was an election commitment. We lost, and it wasn't implemented. How can you compare? That's not what we're here to do, Mark.

The CHAIR: Order! It is difficult to see how it's at all relevant, but I think we should allow the question and we will see where it takes us.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Further to the point of order: Chair, this has been raised by previous witnesses in the hearing, so I think it's well within the remit of the Committee for us to examine it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Which part of the terms of reference is it relevant to? Could you clarify?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: "And related matters."

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Long bow.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: You have been using this hearing—

The CHAIR: We don't need to have an argument across the table about it. Let's just allow the question. If this is where the Government wants to use their time, let's just allow it.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: If I could just read from the document, Ms Morgan:

The policy proposes to provide a total of \$298.6 million—

which I think is about 10 times the value of the program we are talking about now—

in grants to councils and non-government organisations to support local upgrades to sporting infrastructure across NSW, assist in delivering local projects through improving local amenities and expand local infrastructure and tourism.

The policy proposes to provide a total of \$160 million in grants for Sporting Infrastructure, \$95 million in grants for Local Projects, \$34.25 million in CAPEX grants and \$9 million in other smaller projects.

Have you heard of this program before?

ALISON MORGAN: No.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: So there was no policy or admin work done on this?

ALISON MORGAN: Certainly not prior to the election, no.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: We didn't win the election.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We didn't win. "Other related matters" has to relate to what we're here to do, Mark. It's not that broad.

The CHAIR: Just so we have a very clear record, is this a grants program with projects to be selected after the election?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: It's the Government's election promise.

The CHAIR: It's not a pre-election program?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Well, 16 March was pre-election.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It was an election commitment that was never implemented because we're not in government.

The CHAIR: But it's for projects that then get selected after the election.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Yes, exactly like our programs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, yours had to be beforehand.

The CHAIR: The guidelines were that it had to be before.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: This is a program to invest in local communities. It's sent to the Parliamentary Budget Office for costing so it could be delivered if the previous Government retained government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And we didn't.

The CHAIR: But it's not for pre-election commitments; it's for post-election commitments.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I'm sorry, but if a policy is submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office for costing, it's a policy to deliver money, isn't it?

The CHAIR: But the projects come after. The projects haven't been selected prior to the election.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Sure. How is that qualitatively different to the LSCA?

The CHAIR: Because that's the problem with this one.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Your guidelines said you had to say, pre-election, where you were going to spend the money.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: But isn't that the point? There were no guidelines for this.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You just ignored the guidelines. You guys wrote them and you still can't follow them.

The CHAIR: There weren't for yours either. Is there a question?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: You were in a similar role at the last election in terms of grant administration?

ALISON MORGAN: Correct.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Does it strike you as strange that you haven't heard anything about this particular program?

ALISON MORGAN: No.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's an election commitment, Mark.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: It's an election commitment. We lost.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Would Cabinet or Treasury have any information on this?

ALISON MORGAN: I can't answer that. I would only hear about it if I and my team were asked to administer it.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: So we've got a \$300 million grant program from the former Government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is embarrassing.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: You were in a similar role to what you are in now and you haven't heard of it.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Because we lost, Mark.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because it wasn't implemented because we lost.

ALISON MORGAN: Nobody had approached me asking me to implement this grant program.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: The future fund for kids didn't get implemented, either.

The CHAIR: Nor did any of The Greens policies.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: So, with regards to this so-called conspiracy theory about the list being changed, did anything strike you as particularly strange in terms of those three iterations of lists that subsequently came through from the original one, and the fact that the Government would say, "This is the final list"? Did anything strike you as strange at the time or raise any alarms with you?

ALISON MORGAN: No. I mean, it's an unusual way to structure a grant program, to nominate projects ahead of time, but all projects—we run targeted grant programs, so we certainly are used to calling applicants who are considered eligible and then assessing their applications. So that was how we treated this, as a targeted grant program, and that to be invited to lodge an application you had to have been nominated as part of the pre-election period as an election commitment. The fact that it wasn't particularly strange that it would take a couple of weeks to and we would get rolling series of lists as they were all pulled together from across 93 different electorates, that's not particularly unusual, especially immediately after an election where there's a new government coming in and there's a lot of things going on.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: And in your experience, had a grants programs displayed this level of equity across the electorate before?

ALISON MORGAN: You're asking for my opinion, which is not really something that I would do on a committee.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Well, you've got experience in this area. You've seen grant programs before.

ALISON MORGAN: We run the Community Building Partnership, and have since 2009. It's very similar and it runs right across all electorates. Certainly there are other programs that run across all electorates. Often they're targeted at specific types of infrastructure or specific projects or programs. Look, there are infinite ways that grant programs can be structured, without a doubt. But running something across all electorates isn't particularly unusual, no.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: The Special Minister of State has consistently said that he's relied upon the information that was provided to him from your office from the recommendations that you've made. You recommended projects that were in breach of the guidelines, didn't you?

ALISON MORGAN: I don't believe we did, no.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: What about in the case of Sydney?

ALISON MORGAN: What about in the case of Sydney?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: In the case of Sydney, there were "errors", I think was the word that was used previously, and then an updated brief was sent to the Minister's office correcting those errors. But the original brief that was sent to the Minister's office, tranche 7, was an error, meaning it was in error of the guidelines, wasn't it?

ALISON MORGAN: At the time it was sent to the Minister with that advice, it was not incorrect. It aligned completely with the master list we'd been given on 28 July.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: So the source document has the Sydney "error" in it.

ALISON MORGAN: Correct.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Then, when the error's corrected, it just so happens that the corrected version of Sydney is the original 14 June list?

ALISON MORGAN: We have not done that reconciliation, so I don't know that.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But the assumption that we're making, if Sydney is incorrect in the "source of truth" document but then correct in the original 14 June document, how many other errors are in the "source of truth" document that are actually correct in the original 14 June document? I would say that there are quite a few: Wollondilly, Orange, Charlestown, Canterbury and Heffron. There were many differences between the "source of truth" and the original. I suppose my question to you is has any work been done to compare the original list to the "source of truth"? And if not, would you be able to undertake that work for us?

ALISON MORGAN: No, and yes.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: So work hasn't been done?

ALISON MORGAN: No.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But you could look at those differences?

ALISON MORGAN: Of course we could, if we needed to, yes. I don't understand what the purpose of it would be, but I can. The grants have all been approved and more than half of them are now fully completed and acquitted. I don't know what action we could take.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'll give an example in one seat, and I'll pick Wollondilly. The original list says very clearly that it's \$400,000 to go to parks and playgrounds through local councils. There was a methodology around that, we understand. But on the "source of truth" list, suddenly there are all these different projects—money for the tennis club, the men's shed, the Rural Fire Service, a soccer club—and in the end I think it's only one council grant of about \$50,000. Somewhere between the June list and the one that you've worked off, what was just a \$400,000 generic spread across councils suddenly becomes all of these projects. This list is dated that it was determined prior to the election. This has dates on it post-election. Wouldn't that be an example of a breach of the guidelines?

ALISON MORGAN: Our guidelines were written assuming that we would have one "source of truth" document provided to us by the Premier's office—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you don't.

ALISON MORGAN: —which is what we did.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you didn't. That's the issue. You've had variations of the list.

ALISON MORGAN: We always understood that the earlier lists that we received were preliminary lists that were still being worked on and were still being confirmed. It was not our role to confirm whether projects on that list were election commitments or not. We were advised by the Premier's office that this was the list of election commitments, and that was the list that we worked from.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: I understand that, but the guidelines don't say that they must be on the list given to you by Cherie Burton. The guidelines say that they must be election commitments.

ALISON MORGAN: And that is the list of election commitments we were given.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: I would suggest that the 14 June original list is the election commitments, not the "source of truth" document that was since updated or, I would say, doctored by Cherie Burton that was given to you on 28 July. We know that because of Sydney.

ALISON MORGAN: I can't comment on that because I didn't prepare the list. I didn't prepare any of the early versions of the list. I didn't prepare the final version of the list. I was given a list that I was told was the list of election commitments, and that was the list that we worked from.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: If Sydney was in error on the "source of truth" document, why wasn't work done to ensure that there weren't other errors that were given to the Minister as recommended projects?

ALISON MORGAN: Nothing else was brought to our attention as having been incorrect.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: We would now say that Wollondilly, Orange, Charlestown, Canterbury, Heffron—there's a long list of other examples, differences between the two lists that could very well be errors that are essentially in breach of the guidelines just like Sydney was.

ALISON MORGAN: We would need advice from the Premier's office that there were other projects that were incorrect. It was not up to us to determine what are election commitments.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: The Minister has basically said that he was going off your advice from the program office—

ALISON MORGAN: To approve projects, yes?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: —to approve projects.

ALISON MORGAN: Correct.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: So he's basically taking no responsibility for the projects that he approved. He's saying, "I'm signing off on everything that's given to me by the program office." You're saying essentially that you're going off the list that was given to you by Cherie Burton and Paul Mills on 28 July, so the buck really stops with Cherie Burton and the Premier's office, doesn't it?

ALISON MORGAN: Certainly with the Premier's office around the advice that we were given, yes.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Does the Minister have any role in this process?

ALISON MORGAN: Of determining what were election commitments?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Yes.

ALISON MORGAN: I don't know. That would be a matter for the Labor Party to determine. Election commitments are decided by a party.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But he could be signing off on grants against the grant guidelines because you're using a faulty list that's given to him by you, which is given to you by his own party. Why doesn't the Minister just pick up the phone to his own party and say, "Is this the correct list that I'm going off?" Why are you being thrown under the bus in the program office by the Minister when he could just pick up the phone to Cherie Burton and the Labor Party and say, "Hey, are these the actual election commitments?" At the moment, the Minister is just blaming you.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I assume that's a question you'll be putting to the Minister.

ALISON MORGAN: Is that a question for me?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Yes. Is it unfair that you're being thrown under the bus by the Minister?

ALISON MORGAN: That's not how I would interpret it at all. We have administered the program in accordance with the *Grants Administration Guide*. We relied on the list that we were provided by the Premier's office. I don't see that we can have done anything else.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Don't you think it would be a more efficient and effective program, given these errors, that the Minister should just contact the Premier's office to make sure that he's actually signing off projects that were election commitments and that you're not using a faulty list?

ALISON MORGAN: That would be something you'd have to ask the Minister.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Did the Minister's chief of staff Damian O'Connor ever communicate with you to see the original list?

ALISON MORGAN: No.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Did you have any contact with him at all about the LSCA?

ALISON MORGAN: From memory, I had one briefing with him where we outlined the process that we would go through around contacting nominated organisations and how the assessment process would work. Other than that, I don't recall having had any direct contact with him around the LSCA program.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Do you accept that Cherie Burton lied to you?

ALISON MORGAN: I can't make a comment about that. I have no evidence that she's lied to me at all. I have no reason to suspect that anyone in the Premier's office has done anything other than try to assist us to administer this program properly.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But you do accept that she gave you a faulty list? The 28 July list was faulty?

ALISON MORGAN: It did have some errors in it, yes, that we were advised of later.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: What other errors besides Sydney have you picked up on and rectified?

ALISON MORGAN: Minor administrative errors. As I outlined before, things like incorrect email addresses for contacts in community organisations, which isn't at all unusual. Working with community organisations where volunteers are holding honorary roles, they would move around and resign and others would step in. Also, changes in phone numbers. And there were some minor changes to projects where the nominated organisation came forward and said to us, "This is actually not what was agreed as the election commitment. It's something different." In most cases, they were relatively minor changes.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Did you take any contemporaneous notes about your interactions with Cherie Burton?

ALISON MORGAN: All the notes from the meetings that I had with them around this have been already tabled. We met almost every Friday for the first five or six months, I think, after the election around this program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just on parks and playgrounds, my understanding is that it was broken up on a per capita basis, so it wasn't evenly spread. If an electorate had, say, four councils, you wouldn't automatically get the same amount across the four?

ALISON MORGAN: It was dependent on the proportion of the population in the electorate that lived in each LGA.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And if that didn't happen in a particular seat, would that be a breach of the guidelines?

ALISON MORGAN: It would be an error for us in not calculating it properly.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So in Orange, the money that's gone out, it's been evenly split across the four local government areas. But I can tell you that the city council area of Orange has a lot more residents than Cabonne. So why did each of the four council areas in Orange get \$100,000 each?

ALISON MORGAN: It depends—if it was nominated as an election commitment—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, it was nominated as \$400,000—

ALISON MORGAN: In the seat of Orange?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —across parks and playgrounds. But it's evenly split across each of the four local government areas, not on a per capita basis. Can you explain how that would have happened?

ALISON MORGAN: No, I'd have to—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because we asked the Minister and he said it was based on your advice. Did you give him the wrong advice?

ALISON MORGAN: I'd have to take it on notice. We'd have to go and check the calculations that were done for that particular electorate.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Just going back to Jo Mason, at this time where this original list comes through in the middle of June 2023, how many staff did you have working on the LSCA?

ALISON MORGAN: Probably three or four at that time.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did that include Ann Lewis?

ALISON MORGAN: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So you had Ann Lewis and Jo Mason and maybe one or two others working on it at that time. In the email to which you responded, "Amazing, thank you", where Jo Mason provided a breakdown of funding allocations into four different categories, she went on to say, "I'm just working through the infrastructure types and will send to you shortly." Do you ever remember receiving a breakdown of the infrastructure types sent to you by Jo Mason at this time?

ALISON MORGAN: Well, I certainly did at some stage because they're outlined in the guidelines.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Has that been part of the return of papers?

ALISON MORGAN: I would imagine so. But I can take it on notice and check.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If you can find that from Jo Mason, because it looks like she's done a fair bit of work. And then on 14 June, where you inform Ann Lewis that Jo Mason's doing this very important work off the original list, you write:

Can you please start investigating the questions of Electorates where projects have not been identified and how many LGAs are in encompassed in the Electorate. Cheers AJM

Do you remember Ann Lewis doing that work about the electorates where projects hadn't been—

ALISON MORGAN: Absolutely. It was a significant piece of work, yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So you recall that as well?

ALISON MORGAN: But it was done over a period of weeks. Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If it was done off this original document on 14 June, you've only got three or four staff. Two of them are working heavily to embed this document in the system with analysis of breakdowns of funding types, councils where they get the parks funding and questions where projects haven't been identified. In your normal work program and processes, once this 14 June document's been embedded, how could it be lost in the system and then supplanted by something that was supplied in July?

ALISON MORGAN: Because the final list of the organisations that had been nominated, for us, was the list of 28 July. What we were looking for in these early days of trying to analyse this was what types of projects had been nominated and what types of organisations had been nominated. We were trying to get a sense around how many of these electorates didn't have any nominated projects. They were to go into what we called tranche B, which was the allocation across the LGAs for parks and playground upgrades. But that work wasn't able to be completed until after 28 July because we didn't have a final answer as to how many electorates had nominated projects.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But you've got this original list from 14 June, which is every electorate with a comprehensive list of all the projects.

ALISON MORGAN: As I said to you at the beginning, I don't recall having a list with that level of detail quite so early in the process because it's quite different to what we received on the 14th, the 21st and the final one on the 28th.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It may be, but you've got two of your three or four staff working on it, with analysis and embedding it into the system. As the head of these grants schemes in the Premier's Department,

how can it disappear to the point that you're explaining to this Committee that it somehow became redundant and was replaced by something else that Cherie Burton gave you?

ALISON MORGAN: I don't recall receiving that form on 14 June. I accept that I did. There's evidence in front of me that I did.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Do you recall Ann Lewis and Jo Mason doing work on it?

ALISON MORGAN: Definitely—well, doing work.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Doing work on this list from 14 June?

ALISON MORGAN: Not specifically on that list.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You don't recall that?

ALISON MORGAN: But I accept that that's what they were doing. There is evidence here that they were. I can't remember back that far around exactly what everybody was working on on each individual day. But we had a team of people who were all working on pulling together guidelines, forms, assessment processes, probity plans—all of the things that we would normally need to prepare to stand up for a grant program.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You have a small team doing what looks like substantial work at this time, to be supplanted by the so-called "source of truth" document. The list of electorates that Mr Rath read out were all crossbench seats where these alterations had been made. I don't want to be unfair on our good friend Cherie Burton, but independent analysis might suggest that a minority government had an interest in keeping the crossbench in the lower House happy, and maybe allowing them to get in and fiddle some of these grants was a way of doing that. Did you ever have any suspicion that this is what Cherie Burton was doing?

ALISON MORGAN: No.

The CHAIR: Can I ask, just around the work that the team was doing and, as we've seen in this email, "Jo Mason is doing some analysis on it now so we will have an updated version we can sort and manage a little better soon." Given that we're talking about 93 different electorates—there's quite a lot of information here—and all of that work was being done, presumably when an updated list came in, you didn't just start again. You would have run a comparison against the new and the old so that you knew what new information you needed to update.

ALISON MORGAN: It depends on the information you're looking at. When we started doing the early work on the program, we knew that we did not have the full list with the actual details of the organisations themselves that had been nominated. We were still waiting for that. They had been told very clearly that any preliminary lists we got were still being collated. What it did tell us, though, looking across the whole program, was what kind of projects were being nominated and what kinds of infrastructure. That was what we needed for the guidelines. The list around who had been nominated—which individual organisation—in order to enter them into the system, none of that work commenced until we got the final list on 28 July.

The CHAIR: But when Jo Mason says on 15 June, "Here's the breakdown of the funding allocation," she says there's this many that go to community organisations and there's this many that go to local councils for parks and playgrounds et cetera. When that changed between the lists, those numbers would have changed, so you would have had to have done a comparison at some point to compare the work you had already done with this new work on this new list.

ALISON MORGAN: We picked up the list from 28 July and we knew that was the one to work to.

The CHAIR: Yes, but you'd already done work for a month. You wouldn't restart that work, would you?

ALISON MORGAN: In a general sense, around what kinds of projects were coming in. But we did not have to go back and do a cross-reconciliation about what we'd been told in earlier lists, because there were gaps in all sorts of the early lists that we had.

The CHAIR: So you started again? All of the work go started again?

ALISON MORGAN: No, we didn't need to start again. We still had the general overview. By the time we got the list on 28 July, we would have had—I'd have to check the exact timings of this—the guidelines fairly well written. The guidelines would have said things like, "These kinds of organisations will be eligible. These kinds of projects will be eligible."

The CHAIR: Sorry, just in the interest of time—you've done analysis. You've run analysis on a series of projects to work out how many are of what category. You then get a new list. Are you telling this Committee you then started that analysis again, or did you compare what was old and new?

ALISON MORGAN: We wouldn't have needed to start that analysis again because the analysis that we'd done didn't identify individual nominated projects. It just gave us the general information around the kinds of projects and the kinds of organisations.

The CHAIR: But you could only work that out from knowing what the projects were.

ALISON MORGAN: We could have a look at what they are—

The CHAIR: So you would have had to have compared.

ALISON MORGAN: You may say there are about 300 that would be upgrading sporting facilities, that kind of generic thing.

The CHAIR: You've said a few times that it's not your role to have gone past the "source of truth" document, when I've asked why you didn't get evidence to check. You've said it was not your role. Whose decision was it that it was not the role?

ALISON MORGAN: I'm not aware of any public servants who've been involved in telling a government what their election commitments are or were.

The CHAIR: No, listen very carefully to the question. I'm asking whether or not, if you've got a guideline that says these had to have been pre-election commitments, I think it would be a reasonable thing to assume there might be different ways of getting that evidence. One of the ways might have been to ask for the emails that were sent to the community organisations at the time before the election, check the date—yes, that's before the election—or you could rely on a document given to you by the Premier's office. The decision was made to just rely on that document from the Premier's office. Who made that decision?

ALISON MORGAN: Correct. I did.

The CHAIR: Did you document that decision?

ALISON MORGAN: Did I document that decision? I don't think I needed to document that decision. In discussions with the Premier's office, we were looking to understand what kinds of election commitments had been made, and we were told that they were pulling together the list, so we accepted that that was going to be the evidence around what the election commitments were.

The CHAIR: When you put the guidelines together after having received the list, the guidelines were published on 31 July, three days after you got that final, official list. In it, it says that one of the criteria that your office would be tasked with checking is that it was a pre-election commitment. At that point of publishing those guidelines, had you already made that decision, then, that you would only be looking at a list, whatever list came from the Premier's office?

ALISON MORGAN: Yes, we had.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: My question may be outside your purview, so please tell me. Given all of the questioning that's been raised in relation to this program after the last what seems like two years of an inquiry, are you aware of any concerns amongst councils or community groups who received grants that they may have to return them?

ALISON MORGAN: No.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Because there is some certainly some scuttlebutt out there and some concern in some groups that they're hearing that they may have not received these grants appropriately.

ALISON MORGAN: That hasn't been brought to my attention. I don't speak to most of those community organisations directly; my staff do. Generally, now, it's at the point of acquitting the projects as they're completed. So I haven't heard any of that. But we have legally binding contracts in place with those organisations, so if someone did flag any concern that questions being asked about the LSCA program—"Would I have to give the money back?"—we would reassure them that the State Government has entered into a contract with them, and they should get on and complete their project.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Could I ask that you take on notice and maybe ask your staff if they're experiencing any concern from those councils or community organisations?

ALISON MORGAN: Certainly.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That's certainly what I'm hearing amongst some groups, not all of them. Certainly some organisations are saying that they're worried about their reputation given the fact of the allegations that are being made by some members of this Committee—that they've received this information wrongly.

ALISON MORGAN: I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Ms Morgan, with regard to the question that I think was asked by the Hon. Sarah Mitchell with regard to Orange, is it your recollection that the \$400,000 was actually for different projects, not parks and playgrounds? That's the information I have. The implication was that it wasn't properly allocated because the proportionality of LGAs within the Orange electorate was different and you spread it over the three LGAs, but my information is that it was actually for different projects and wasn't for LGAs at all.

ALISON MORGAN: There were a number of park and playground projects that had been nominated as election commitments and were listed as specific nominations. They were a set amount of money allocated to a specific council for a park or a project upgrade. We treated those as a nominated project and that that nomination would stand according to the amount of money that had been nominated as the election commitment. Had there been no nominated projects provided and it was just open, then we used the formula that we had come up with, which was based on the per capita population across each of the LGAs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You might want to look at the original list, Mark. There's a name next to it. Talk to that person.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I think you might be confused.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I think you're confused.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: No, I think you are.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: The honourable member, who is not with us at the moment, asked for the Auditor-General to report on this. Have you read that report?

ALISON MORGAN: I have.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: What was your take-out from that?

ALISON MORGAN: The Auditor found that we had administered the grant program in accordance with the *Grants Administration Guide*.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: There was also some questioning of Mr Hatzistergos too from ICAC in budget estimates, I think. Are you aware of that testimony?

ALISON MORGAN: I am.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Any impressions from that?

ALISON MORGAN: He made it clear that it was not up to public servants to be involved in the formulation of election commitments.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If there has been a breach of the grant guidelines, what are the consequences of that?

ALISON MORGAN: If there has been a breach of the guidelines, I expect there would be advice to the grants team who had administered them that you've breached the guidelines. The contracts have all been let. As I said, the funding has been provided. I suppose there could be disciplinary action taken against me should that happen? I don't know. I've not thought about that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To go to the Auditor-General's report, do you accept that that work was done prior to this original list being provided to the Parliament, so that might not have been available to the Auditor-General at the time? Do you accept that?

ALISON MORGAN: The Auditor-General didn't look at any of the processes around the development of the list of nominated projects; they only looked at the processes that the public service had undertaken.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just going back to the issue of if there has been a breach of the grant guidelines, the Minister has said many times that he signs off on what you recommend. Every time we've asked him about these discrepancies that we've found, he says, "I go on the advice that I get given by you." That has been his answer many times. I note he's sitting behind you. We'll ask him about that in a minute—just a bit of a heads-up there, Minister Graham. What are the consequences to the Minister if he has breached the grant guidelines and if he has signed off on things that are actually in breach of the guidelines that have been written?

ALISON MORGAN: I can't answer. I don't know exactly, but if I were the Minister I would be relying on the advice that I'm given by my public servants. I would fully accept responsibility if I had provided incorrect advice to the Minister.

The CHAIR: When we were talking before about the emails with the Excel spreadsheet attached, if you could also take on notice just to do a little click in the properties of the spreadsheet that you received just to tell us who the author was and the date of creation of that document, that would be incredibly useful.

ALISON MORGAN: I will do so.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Coming back to this amazing, incongruous way in which the June documents seem to disappear from the work program, Ms Morgan, did you have a conversation with Cherie Burton along the lines where Ms Burton would have said, "We've got that original document from June, but this one here in July is the one we need to work off now. It's the one that suits us best."

ALISON MORGAN: I definitely had a conversation with them to say to me, "We've had multiple versions of these spreadsheets coming through." They had made very clear that early versions that we received were incomplete, were still being checked, that the full list was being collated and being verified, and that they would advise me when they had the full, final and complete list of the election commitments. And that was the list from which we would work.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When you say "they", who are you talking about?

ALISON MORGAN: There was Cherie I spoke to about it—Ms Burton. I spoke to Paul Mills about it. That was why we made it very clear when we received the list on the 28th, we went back and confirmed, "Is this the final master list?" The advice we received was, "Yes, this is the final master list." So that was always the list that we worked from.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How many times did that conversation take place, do you think? How many earlier iterations were there of what you now call the final list?

ALISON MORGAN: We definitely received one on 14 July. We definitely received one called the first batch. We received another one on 21 July called the second batch, and then we received a list on 28 July, which was the final one that was confirmed. I will accept at face value that there seems to be evidence that we've received something earlier.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Five different batches that have evolved?

ALISON MORGAN: Which was what we were told would happen—that they were out there working across all of the electorates with their officers to gather the information about the full details of the election commitments that had been made prior to the election.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But wouldn't anyone looking at this June list think it was very comprehensive and complete?

ALISON MORGAN: Possibly. I didn't ask any of my staff or I don't recall asking them about that June list. It was made very clear to us that they were working across all the electorates to bring all that information together into a formal, final list. We confirmed that the list from 28 July was the final and confirmed list, and that was the list we worked from.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But you had enough confidence in June to have Jo Mason and Ann Lewis working on analysis of this list?

ALISON MORGAN: Absolutely. There was no reason why we couldn't start analysing any early information that we got to give us some advice about what types of projects were being nominated and what kinds of organisations were being nominated. We needed that information to get the guidelines ready. We didn't need to know the details of the exact organisations themselves. We just needed to know some high-level, across-the-program sense about what sorts of projects these were and what sorts of organisations they were.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: At no stage did you do analysis of differences in the list that Ms Burton—

ALISON MORGAN: At no stage did we compare those lists because we understood that they were preliminary, and they had not been finalised.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Where's that advice?

ALISON MORGAN: I'm giving you that advice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But is that in writing from Cherie Burton and Paul Mills that these were preliminary lists? This one here is just described as the original list.

ALISON MORGAN: No, I received that advice face to face in the meetings that I had with them. We met every Friday—as we've said—and they were, "Yes, we're working on it. We're still working on different electorates"—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: She was working on them, all right—on the crossbench.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you take notes during those Friday meetings? Have you got a written record of them telling you it's a preliminary—

ALISON MORGAN: I have tabled those notes. I certainly did not take verbatim notes, but I did take notes of the meetings, and they have been tabled.

The CHAIR: That brings us to the end of this session with you. Thank you very much for coming and giving us evidence again. We do appreciate it. To the extent that there were questions taken on notice or supplementary questions, the Committee secretariat will be in touch. Thank you.

(The witness withdrew.)

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM, Special Minister of State, Minister for Transport, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Music and the Night-time Economy, before the Committee

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. Minister Graham, you do not need to swear an oath or affirmation as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. Would you like to commence by making a short opening statement?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No. Having appeared before, I'm happy to jump into questions.

The CHAIR: I'll start with the Opposition.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Minister, thank you for appearing today. It has become quite clear that the list of election commitments made by the Labor Party is significantly different from the list assessed by the LSCA program office. When did you become aware of the original list held by Alison Morgan on 14 June 2023?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept your first proposition, other than in respect of the errors that were identified in the Sydney list. I think that's clear, and that's something I've answered a number of questions about. As I've indicated to the House and, I think, to this Committee, I did develop some concerns about those commitments. I asked for those to be checked and errors were identified. Beyond that, I don't accept the position you're putting.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: I might just get the Committee staff to give you a copy of the 14 June list and then the 28 July list and the email correspondence as well. Minister, in the meantime, what errors were you made aware of?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In the Sydney list?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Any errors in the program.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In terms of errors—I think this has been well canvassed—I asked for the commitments in the Sydney list to be checked after I had a discussion with Jenny Leong, who indicated that there had been some consultation. Those are the errors that I'm aware of in the list. I'm not aware of errors beyond that. There were exemptions—

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: You're not aware of any errors beyond Sydney?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There were exemptions granted for what I would describe as a small number of projects that didn't meet the guidelines. But in each case where a project didn't meet the guidelines, that was identified by the program office. I've signed off on those, having weighed them up. In each of those cases, to my recollection, I followed the direction of the program office. I thought they were reasonably pragmatic ones. But they are for, for example, a project outside an electorate that benefited an electorate. There are a number of those exemptions.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Were there any errors in Wollondilly?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There have been none identified in the paperwork that has come to me so, no, not that I'm aware of.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: None in Orange?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You've seen the paperwork that has come to me. It does not identify any errors other than the paperwork in relation to Sydney. As you're clear, that tranche 7 brief didn't make its way to me. The first time I was aware of the tranche 7 brief was when I was asked about it at this hearing.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Minister, what explanation do you have for the wild deviations between the 14 June original list in 2023 and the 28 July "source of truth" list?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: After the concerns were raised, as I've indicated to the House, I went to seek a verbal briefing. There has been a suggestion in the calls for papers now that there are multiple lists. I sought a briefing, as I indicated, from the program office in the Premier's Department. As I indicated, that was a verbal briefing, but I very much heard the story that you've heard just now from the program office. It was put to me that this was an iterative list and there were preliminary lists, but they were very clear that the list that was being used to operate the scheme was the 28 July 2023 list. I asked a number of questions about that in order to satisfy myself. I very much heard the same information that you've had put to you today about the way that process happened—that first batch and second batch process.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But, for Sydney, the 28 July list was in error. It was then corrected to be the 14 June list. The original 14 June list for Sydney was correct, but the 28 July list was in error. How many other errors are there on the "source of truth" list? And shouldn't we be referring to the original list, as opposed to the "source of truth" list, because it was correct for Sydney?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't know what the differences are between the lists.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There's quite a few.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You've asked for that information and that's understood, but I'm not aware of other errors in the list that have been put to me. They haven't been identified. There have been exemptions identified. There were errors in relation to the Sydney electorate, as I said, that I had asked about. There were not others identified.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: So it's just a coincidence that the original list for Sydney was correct, but the "source of truth" list was incorrect?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wouldn't use the word "coincidence", no.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Right. Minister, are you aware that the guidelines say:

All Projects must:

- Have been nominated as an election commitment prior to the March 2023 election

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: And what did you do to satisfy yourself of that in the guidelines?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I signed off the guidelines along those lines. It's not unusual for the Government to be dealing with election commitments. We make a whole lot of election commitments that are tracked through central government in the way I understood these were. That is a routine process, usually handled by the Cabinet Office or the Premier's Department, recalling they were the one thing when the Government was elected. These were dealt with in the same way. I did sign off those guidelines that were recommended to me by the agency. I thought they were comprehensive. In fact, I can guarantee you they were a lot more comprehensive than many of the grants guidelines that had come before.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You may not have heard, but Ms Morgan effectively said before that they trusted what the Premier's office told them about that being the source of truth, that 28 July document, but Ms Morgan now accepts that there was a 14 June version, which, as Chris has said, has the correct figures for Sydney that ended up being paid out. Now that you know that there was this original list and that there are differences, are you concerned that you may have inadvertently breached the guidelines because you've been given the wrong information about what was the true election commitment?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept your characterisation of the list, having it just been put to me this morning—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But it's here. It's black and white.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's just been handed up to me now. As I said, I sought a briefing from the program office along these lines. The position they put to me I found reasonably persuasive about the iterative nature of the list. I pressed a number of questions about it. The list on 14 June did not come up in that briefing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When you knew the Sydney electorate was wrong and there were errors—and you've just said now that's the only one outside some exemptions and minor things. When you had that briefing, did you ask whether there were any previous versions of this list or where did the correct Sydney advice come from? Did you seek to assure yourself that the list was correct?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Recall, on 21 August 2025, that was after a number of lists had been caught up in a call for papers. This had come to the House. There were potentially questions to me—I can't remember the way in which it was raised.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There were a lot, yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And I naturally sought a briefing from the program office at that time to say, "What are these multiple lists? How do they relate to the list on which week?"

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you ask for copies of the multiple lists?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I haven't asked for copies. I haven't done my own analysis.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Why not?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm relying on the very good public servants to do their job. I did want to assure myself by quizzing them directly—

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But, Minister, the issue is you're relying on the public servants, but the public servants are relying on the list that's given to them by the Premier's office, Cherie Burton and other Labor operatives. Did you ever pick up the phone to Ms Burton and the caucus liaison office and say, "Hey, is this the correct list that you've given to the department?" Because at the moment, you're just throwing the program office under the bus, rather than your own party.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept that, and I have found the program office and the Premier's Department to be doing some excellent work. The public servants there don't deserve to be dealt with in the way they have been. I think they've done excellent work to craft these guidelines and administer this program. I found the paperwork high quality and I'm extremely grateful to them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you're the Minister that signs off, and the guidelines clearly say they have to be pre-election commitments. You know that that has been formulated from your leader's office, the now Premier's office, so at no point have you spoken to anyone in the Premier's office and said, "Hey guys, I just want to check that this is 100 per cent right and that I'm not being stitched up here as a Minister, signing off on something that was wrong." You've never done that? You've never spoken to Cherie Burton about this at all?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not detailing all of the discussions with my colleagues, but I have been up-front with the House. If I've had concerns—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking you: Have you talked to Cherie Burton about these different iterations of these lists?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not going into all of the discussions I've had inside government. That's not unusual in these committees.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's not a hard thing to answer, to be transparent. Have you talked to her about it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If I've had any concerns, I've raised them. I did have concerns about the City of Sydney. I haven't had concerns other than that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In terms of being up-front, why did it take eight attempts to get from you the truth of how you found out about the Sydney errors, problems, alterations by talking to Jenny Leong? We asked you a whole series of times. What changed that allowed you to tell us it was through the conversation with Leong who'd spoken to Greenwich, who'd obviously said, "I've had some input here and I'm getting some results"?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think I was asked in the House on one occasion how did I know, and I couldn't at that moment, under serious questioning by the Opposition and the crossbench, recall what had sparked my concern first. But then on reflection when I was next asked about it, is my recollection, I was able to recall the dates of when I'd had that discussion with Jenny Leong. It was more about the timing, is the answer. One of the reasons why I was able to recall the date of that conversation is we're keeping a record of the interactions I have with MPs on these matters, and that has been produced in the call for papers.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And finding out about the member for Sydney and the opportunities he'd had to alter the grants according to his own priorities, did the penny drop for you that this is an important guy on the crossbench to keep the Labor Party in minority government in the LA and that perhaps some inquiries should be made about changes that other crossbenchers have made?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I don't accept this is all about the crossbench. I know that's how the Opposition is characterising that, but they've actually made a spray of allegations about a series of crossbench seats, about seats that are held now by the Opposition. While it has been characterised in that way, actually they're making suggestions about a whole range of seats.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You didn't make any broader checks than the electorate of Sydney?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have obviously made some checks, as I've indicated, that this process has been dealt with appropriately.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What are those checks?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As I've said, I've had this 21 August briefing. If I've had any concerns, I've asked for briefs to be checked, and I've relied extensively on the—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How many electorates have you done that in?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's really the Sydney electorate that I developed those concerns.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Only Sydney. In terms of what we're now calling the 14 June—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But, Mr Latham, I think this is important. After the concerns were raised more broadly about the other lists—this electorate, that electorate, by the way not all crossbench electorates—that's when I sought the briefing from the program office, and it was in terms similar to what you've just heard, and I found that persuasive.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: For how many electorates have alterations been made after 14 June?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't know the answer to that question.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In terms of what we're now calling the 14 June document, which is very comprehensive, for the 93 seats, there are only seven individuals listed as organisers, persons, notified of approval. They are Blake Mooney, Lucy Margeit, Liam Rankin, Oliver Plunkett, Alex Costello, James Callow and Rhys Patton. Would you understand those seven to be Labor Party field officers who worked in these electorates in the election campaign that ended in March?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wouldn't feel confident saying that, but I wouldn't be surprised if they were. A number of them are Labor Party members.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Wouldn't you expect that by the middle of June, three months after the election, the people who are the field officers in each of the 93 seats know, as of the election night, what were the LSCA commitments and, once set in stone, they couldn't possibly change? Isn't that how it was supposed to work?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When any party comes to government, there's a process of capturing all the election commitments centrally, transmitting them to the public service, and then those are then processed. That's the usual process, and I saw this as going through the usual process.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But wouldn't you expect these seven, three months after the election, given that these commitments can't change after election night, would have given, as they appear to have given here, very comprehensive listings of what the commitments were as of the middle of June?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can't comment, because I actually—I know this has been provided to me now, but I haven't—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's the first time as Minister you've seen this June document?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I wasn't aware it was in the call for papers. Just to be clear, I haven't sought to trawl through the—I've answered all the questions.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Will you undertake analysis of it now as to how much changed—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think you've asked that of the program office.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —the means by which it changed and what appears to be, realistically in politics, the role of Cherie Burton in changing these grants in consultation with crossbenchers for political reasons that just shouldn't have happened? Isn't that the inquiry we now need, seat by seat?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't think the evidence has been stacked up for that. But you've asked for some of that from the program office today, and they've said they'll complete that analysis.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But as the responsible Minister, shouldn't you be ordering that inquiry and investigation, because this looks terrible?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm certainly happy to examine any of the issues that arise out of today.

The CHAIR: Minister, you signed off on the program guidelines, correct?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct.

The CHAIR: Which were published on 31 July. I believe the first eligibility criterion was that these actually be pre-election commitments. We heard from Ms Morgan before that a decision was made to only satisfy that element by looking at what she's been referring to as the "source of truth" document. Did anyone ever discuss that decision with you?

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

The CHAIR: If we take a step back, there's lots of ways that you could satisfy a certain criterion. In this case, the criterion was that it had to have been a pre-election commitment. Ms Morgan says that she made the decision to satisfy that only by looking at this "source of truth" document that was given to her by the Premier's office, instead of, for example, going and requiring evidence of emails that were sent from candidates to groups or whatever.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Understood.

The CHAIR: There's lots of ways you could do it. The decision was made to only do it based on that "source of truth" document. Did anyone discuss that decision with you?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I was certainly aware, because I signed off the guidelines that these had to be election commitments and that would be dealt with in the usual way. That is, the Government would supply lists of election commitments. So it wasn't canvassed that there'd be an additional checking for these election commitments.

The CHAIR: Can I just pick you up there, because you talk about it being an election commitment? The program as a whole was an election commitment in the ordinary way, but these allocations made pre-election are slightly different, because we're talking about evidence that they were actually pre-election commitments. In terms of the evidence required to satisfy that requirement, did anybody discuss with you what evidence should be collected?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't really accept the distinction you're making. It's just not unusual after an election to have election commitments—big and small—to keep track of. It's a major job for the public service and for an incoming government to transmit those. Some of those are large; some of those are small. And tracking them all down, making sure they're all captured is—and this was dealt with in the usual way by—

The CHAIR: Perhaps I could just make it easier. If we look at, for example, pre-election commitments of that kind that are given to the PBO to cost, for this particular one, it was the total value of the program which was put forward.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I think that's been—

The CHAIR: I understand that the program then, once you won election, could be passed on to the public service, but then the guidelines were created which referred to one of the requirements for actually expending that money to be that it had to have been a commitment made in that particular seat by a candidate or by the party to particular people. There's different ways you could satisfy yourself that it was, in fact, a true pre-election commitment to that particular recipient. Did anyone discuss with you how they would satisfy themselves that a promise had been made to a particular recipient ahead of the election?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that was captured in the guidelines that the list would be—I was certainly aware that a list would be provided. I saw that as—

The CHAIR: That's not what the guidelines say, though.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, the guidelines indicated they'd be election commitments. I was certainly aware that a list of all the election commitments would be provided in relation to this process by central government.

The CHAIR: And you were happy that that was the process—that there shouldn't be any further interrogation of that list?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I see that as the usual process where central government provides—

The CHAIR: There is no usual process for this, though.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There actually is.

The CHAIR: We're not talking about election commitments as a whole—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's an unusual scheme.

The CHAIR: We're talking about individual promises as part of a program which was then to be implemented afterwards. That's not coming from government. That's actually needing everybody to have worked out who they promised a thing to in order to satisfy that criterion. Were you aware of the decision to just take on face value a list given by the Premier's office, instead of going and getting the evidence?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand the distinction you're making, but I don't accept it. In the transport world, for example, we might both have an election commitment about a broad set of commitments but

also a specific commitment in a specific electorate. It wouldn't be unusual for that to be the case. Both of those need to be transmitted.

The CHAIR: With the guidelines for that then saying that it had to have been—so that actually being a criterion of the relevant guidelines or criteria for expending that money—it's quite different, isn't it, to a transport project within an electorate?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I accept that that is less usual, but I don't think it explains why the public service would deal with it differently.

The CHAIR: We will come back to that.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Minister, are you aware of the Arrahman Benevolent Society receiving grants approved by the Premier under the previous Government?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have been asked a number of questions about this issue over the course of the last week. A number of them were wrong in fact. For example, it was asserted that this company was not eligible and should not have been given a grant. That was factually totally incorrect. It was eligible. That checking had occurred. In addition, the assertion was it was a company limited by shares. That was wrong. In fact, it is a company limited by guarantee. It is a society—that is probably the better way to put it—that has received grants from the former Government. They were signed off by the former Premier. I'd just make the point that these are not unusual for these grants. That was a grant for security for a place of worship. I would regard that as a good thing to be funding at the moment, given the tensions we are all aware of.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Yes. In fact, highly unremarkable given the tensions that have been happening. Minister, with regard to the line of questioning we had of Ms Morgan which suggested that, in her role, she should have questioned the various iterations of lists, it's a little bit unfair, isn't it, to expect a public servant to say to the Premier's office, "I don't think that list is right, because this original list says this"? The reality is that there is a multiplicity of sources coming in from 93 seats which are developing in various iterations because of the gathering of information, and the public servant's got to accept the Premier's office on face value as to the final list.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I almost don't quite agree with that. The public service have got to be satisfied that they are playing their role. If there are multiple lists, I would expect them to ask, "What are these multiple lists?"

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: "Which is the one?"

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand that did occur. In fact, that was put to me pretty persuasively by the program office, which is why I've accepted that. I think public servants have got a really important role to play. My perception is they have played that role faithfully and well in relation to this program. But governments are allowed to make election commitments. They need to catalogue those and pass them to central government. That's the usual process for any of these election commitments.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Ms Morgan's testimony about the previous Government's proposition of an almost \$300 million grants program, does that strike you as somewhat strange that she knew nothing of it, given they were in government?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No. I thought her explanation of that—that it may not have been with her area of government—made sense. I am concerned about that program, though. This is eight times as big. It contains a number of commitments that were made before the election and some that were to be made afterwards. It's very opaque; it's very large. Almost all of it ends up in Coalition seats, so I do think it's extraordinary. I don't mind answering questions about this program that gave \$400,000 to each electorate, regardless of who won the election. I think that's totally legitimate, and I strongly support the upper House asking whatever questions it does. I do think it's incredible that the Coalition were running a similar scheme at the same time, with no controls, that went entirely to their electorates. It was eight times as big, some committed beforehand—we know a little bit about what some of those projects were—but some of which are totally unclear. I would encourage the upper House to inquire further about the nature of that, possibly through a call for papers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a program that doesn't exist, John. Even you can't say that with a straight face.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: We lost the election.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is absolutely not true. These are—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What money has been paid out of that one?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: There's been interjections in the Minister's response.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can place on the record, if you'd like, some of what was—this is a range of pork-barrelling to the Wakefield Park raceway, to the Metro car park at Tallawong, the headliner act regional touring fund, which I recall well, the Young Police Station—a series of smaller grants. And it all went to Coalition electorates. I strongly encourage the upper House to play the same forensic role it's played on this program—and, in my view, appropriately. I would also extend a look at this program.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: How do you think the previous Government would have gone, had they been successful, standing up to the same level of scrutiny had that program been implemented?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Point of order: That's a hypothetical question and should be ruled out of order.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is getting pretty hypothetical, but I encourage your—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And asking for his opinion as well. That's a double whammy.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: That's one for the House.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd be happy to answer the rest of that in the House.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I think the interjections speak for themselves.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, I asked Ms Morgan the same question that I'm about to ask you. That is: As a result of the claims being made by the Opposition and members of the crossbench throughout this eternal inquiry, there is concern amongst some councils and community groups about the funding that they've actually received. The questions are being asked, "Will they have to pay the money back? Is it illegitimate? What's happening?" Have you heard any such scuttlebutt? I'm just wondering where you think that's up to, and if that's a concern.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would be unsurprised if some of the good community groups with almost no money, many of whom are making resources stretch a long way, were concerned that they might have to give this back. That would be terrible if that was the case. That's not the Government's intention, but I'm not clear on what we're being asked for here. This has been a campaign against men's sheds, parks, security for places of worship, homeless services. I think these public funds have gone in small amounts to really valuable uses. It has also gone in equal amounts to every part of the State. Anyone who is around this table who saw the grants previously knows how different that is to what was going on in the former Government and what the former Government intended to do if it was re-elected. That's also clear from the program that the Hon. Mark Buttigieg is indicating. I don't mind the questioning, but I can understand why community groups might be concerned if they think that the Opposition is campaigning for this money to be handed back in. It is—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I don't even know what this is. No-one's saying that.

The CHAIR: Name a person. Name one group. Sorry. I call myself to order.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm referring to Chris Rath's campaign against men's sheds, parks, and homeless services.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Oh, John, you're better than that.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: It's actually against your campaign—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: How about we let him answer the question?

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. You are correct. We will behave ourselves.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, can I ask you to please proceed in an orderly way?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think I'd largely concluded my answer.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you. I couldn't hear the last part but I appreciate it and I'll read it in *Hansard*.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Minister, can I ask you to clear something up that was raised by the Hon. Chris Rath in estimates with regards to this program? It was a social media post of a ribbon cutting for Ron Payne Park, North Epping, but I think the grant was actually for North Epping Oval. Is that correct?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, this is just one of the litany of errors as suggestions have been made about this project. The assertion was a Federal MP was there as one of these projects gets announced—that was categorically wrong. There was a photo waved around asserting that it was one park when it was a totally different

one. The two different parks, Ron Payne Park, North Epping and the other, North Epping Oval, are totally different places—just one more error of fact. There have been about 10 or 11 or 12 complete errors of fact asserted as being entirely correct. It's one of the frustrations. I don't mind being asked legitimate questions, but these assertions are not being made as "Is this true?" This is asserted as fact every time. It's just categorically wrong. This was another couple of examples of that being the case.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: In terms of the earlier question from Mr Latham, which was I think that all seats had no individual projects in the early list—this was this 14 June list I think—but then in the "source of truth" iteration the individual projects were allocated towards the crossbench, can you enlighten us on the veracity of that claim?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can't shed too much light because I have not been forensically examining these different lists. I have been briefed by the program office. I can confirm that despite the fact the Coalition has been asking about and presenting this as about Independent electorates, what they're doing is failing to mention the ones that are in Opposition electorates.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: In fact, I think Epping, Castle Hill, Kellyville.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Like what?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mark Buttigieg has just—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Epping, Castle Hill, Kellyville.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, but how do you know that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm just saying these are Opposition assertions. They're probably wrong. They could be wrong. I agree with that. But in fact while this is being presented as—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You said you only knew the changes in Sydney. How do you know these other ones?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm just saying the Opposition assertion, while they've raised concerns about—I have concerns about Sydney. Those errors have been fixed. The Opposition has concerns about a range of seats. Those include Opposition seats, something they have not been up-front about.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Minister, did you ever manage to figure out who Jerome from Epping was as the contact person on the Epping LSCA grants?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I stand by the evidence I gave last time, which is I understand why you're asking the question but I don't accept your assertion that these are the decision-makers for the program—something you've been repeatedly wrong about, by the way. The Premier's office and the program office have been clear. There were people going round collecting the contact details for these programs. There's no evidence that that wasn't the case here.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, just with the different variations of the list—and it's probably worth you and your office going to have a look at the difference between the June list and the July list—did you say before to a question from Mr Buttigieg that you did discuss with the program office the different versions of the list and you were assured that they had checked to make sure things were lining up? Is that what you said?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I'm referring to the 21 August briefing. After calls for papers, there was a briefing, and I've retold the story from that briefing. My question was, "There appear to be different lists. What's going on here? How have you administered this program? How are you confident of the list?" They've indicated that they are administering this list off the 28 July, and Ms Morgan has taken you through her rationale in far more detail.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But at that August briefing, did you check that they had looked at the differences between the list and made sure that everything was still consistent? Is that what they said to you in that briefing?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They said it was an iterative list, that they were given preliminary lists, that a final list was confirmed and it was the list of 28 July. That was what they were administering it off.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But did you ask them if they had, as we asked earlier, checked that it was all okay throughout that process?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I was keen to assure myself that they had a list that they were confidently working off. Having done that briefing, they made it clear that this was the list that they were operating off and they had, what was relatively persuasive at the time, a story about the iterative list.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just before, you said that some organisations had concerns that this was a war on men's sheds and we were doing all of that; I think it was in response to Mr Primrose. Which organisations have spoken to you about that, Minister? Can you name any?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I won't name them in order to protect their identities—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's convenient.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —but a number of your lower House colleagues have raised serious concerns about what you're up to and what it means for their local electorates. They're parading around celebrating these grants, often claiming credit, and they're not very impressed with some of what you're—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Name them.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I won't name them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So we take it at your word that there's all these people who are up in arms over it, but you can't tell us who they are?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: You've got to hang onto the furniture.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You're better than this, Sarah.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thanks, Peter.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Your lower House colleagues' names are safe with me.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Minister, just to be clear, you only checked whether errors were made for Sydney, not the other 92 electorates?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't think that's fair. As you know, the Opposition has raised concerns. And where the Opposition has raised concerns, I have tried to check those or tighten some of the processes. I'd characterise this in the same way. There were concerns raised about how do these lists relate. That was when I sought the briefing from the program office.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: What other seats did you check whether errors existed?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It was a very similar discussion to the one you've just had with the program office. Given the nature of their explanation, it ended up being much more about the process than individual seats.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: So you're 100 per cent confident that the "source of truth" document contains no errors, except for Sydney?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is the list that it's been administered off. Wherever I've had concerns, I've raised them. I did have concerns in relation to the electorate of Sydney. A member of Parliament said, "There's been some consultation. Can I change my list?" I said, "No, I don't believe you can." And I sought assurance that the list was correct for Sydney. They're the errors I had concerns about.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you ask for briefings on the list for seats of Orange or Wollondilly? Because we've raised those with you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: After you raised those—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What did you find out about those?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —I went back and talked to the program office. It was a verbal briefing, but you've had a very similar—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's convenient.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's actually not convenient. Any of the paperwork I've had, I've released. We're not shy about what the written briefings are, but I went and sought a briefing. You've asked me about it. I've encouraged you to ask.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But I'm asking you now. Let's take Wollondilly, for example. The June list, which you can go and have a look at tonight after you finish here, says all of that's going to parks and playgrounds. The July "source of truth" list suddenly has all these different community projects on it. Did you ask the program office to explain to you why there was that discrepancy?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've asked about the process and why there were discrepancies, as the Opposition were asserting—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What did they say for Wollondilly?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I haven't asked at specific levels because their explanation was quite persuasive. And part of the issue is your case has been hugely undermined by the multiple errors of fact that keep—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is not an error, Minister. One list says one thing and the other says other things. You sign off on it. This is on you. If it's wrong, it's your scalp, right? You might have to resign over this if it all falls apart, let's be honest. So a seat like Wollondilly, where there are big differences between the June list and the July list—your evidence to us today is "It was a verbal briefing and I just believed what I was told by the program office." Is that your evidence?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've taken you through the verbal briefing and I've been clear about what the content of that was.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What did they say about Wollondilly?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We discussed the process that was followed, not individual electorates at that level.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you didn't check that what you've signed off on in a seat like Wollondilly, where there are big differences—that you were correct in what you've done?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have gone back to check that the process is operating. I'm satisfied, after that briefing, that it was.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But, Minister, just to be clear, you've asked the program office about the list and whether there are any errors and what the process is. But just to be clear, they're relying on the list that is given to them by your own party and your own party's operatives, like Cherie Burton and Paul Mills.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The public service is often in the position where they're administering lists of election commitments handed over by the Government. The Premier's Department does this routinely after every election. After a change of government, there's obviously a bigger process, but that's routine.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: I think it's clear, Minister—and maybe you'd like to do this—that you should amend 3.2 of "eligible projects" on the grant guidelines from "have been nominated as an election commitment prior to the March 2023 election", and instead that point of the guidelines should be that you will fund all projects as per the "source of truth" document whether they're election commitments or not—because you're going off a document that's faulty.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If the public service had concerns about something not being right, they are always welcome to put it up, as they have in other instances, and say, "Here are the guidelines. This doesn't quite meet the guidelines"—for one reason or another, if it's a sensible thing to fund—and recommend an exemption. That hasn't happened in this instance.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Minister, the guidelines are good, but the public servants are relying on the information given to them by your political party and operatives in your party. That's the problem here, isn't it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No. There is a process with election commitments every election. I see this as consistent with that process.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, have you ever communicated with anyone about this particular program on Signal or other messaging apps?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would have to take that on notice. I think you've asked at estimates a range of questions about messaging apps.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you use Signal or WhatsApp? What do you use?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I do use messaging apps. I'd have to take on notice the precise messaging apps. I find the number of them slightly overwhelming.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you're not quite sure?

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: He's a Snapchat guy.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: A TikToker.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you message Ms Cherie Burton on Signal, WhatsApp or any of those other messaging apps? Could you let me know?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As is often the case, I'm not going to be detailing all the discussions I've had with my colleagues.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Minister, I think it's quite clear that if we're to find out what the election commitments are, we would need to painstakingly ask all 93 Labor candidates at the last election to appear before us and outline to us what projects they promised in the lead up to the March 2023 election. That would be a fair assessment, wouldn't it?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You just need the seven field officers. There are only seven.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Or the seven field officers, at the very least.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept where you're heading.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: You said that you will look into electorates or projects when they have been raised by the Opposition or crossbench in the Parliament. Will you commit to looking into the discrepancies between the "source of truth" list and the original list for Wollondilly, Orange, Charlestown, Canterbury and Heffron, and report back to us those discrepancies on notice?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As I have said, if I had concerns, I have sought briefings. I was satisfied with the explanations I got. Obviously, once again, you've raised a number of issues here. I'm happy to look at all of those. Once again, you've made quite a significant number of errors of fact, so I wouldn't be surprised if some of the things you put today are wrong. But I'm certainly happy to continue the approach that I've tried to take, which is to look at the issues you've raised in good faith.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, how can you explain that if you don't know and haven't seen the 14 June document that in the one seat where you corrected the so-called errors, the seat of Sydney, the allocations have gone back exactly to what the 14 June document said—the so-called original list that Alison Morgan had on that day?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Latham, I can understand why you're asking the question. I don't think it's reasonable for me to have an opinion without reviewing the document. I'm not going to do that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But can you explain how, in correcting the Sydney errors, it went back to the original list? What was the process by which you got it back to the original electorate commitments as certified by Lucy Margeit?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That's fair. I raised the concern. I didn't receive that tranche 7 brief. That came up with the errors in it. I said to my office, "Can we check that the Sydney electorates are correct?"

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You said to Damian O'Connor?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When I got the brief, I was comfortable that this was in line and, therefore, I was able to sign it off. But it was really that discussion—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did Damian O'Connor tell you how he reverted back to the original list? Where do those changed numbers come from?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No. I was really relying on the paperwork, but I'd asked for that to be checked. Once I was confident that we had checked this, then I was able to sign it off.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So it's your evidence that today is the first you've heard of this 14 June document—the original list?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I haven't had the benefit of reviewing it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When did you first find out about it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As it was raised in the hearing. I haven't looked through the document that you've handed up.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did you know Lucy Margeit was responsible for the original list, and what seemed to be the accurate bona fide Sydney allocations?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You never spoke to her? She works in Emily Suvaal's office.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, looking back on this very unusual scheme—no-one had ever heard of allocations equalled across every one of 93 electorates—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I can understand why you thought it was unusual, given the approach previously.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I don't want to be unkind. Some people have said it just looks like a straight bribe, and that's obviously one assessment of it. But looking back in the administration of it, what would you do differently now, given all the problems that have arisen? I would put to you, constructively, that perhaps one of the problems was that you had three centres of power: you had the program office in the Premier's Department, you had yourself as the so-called integrity Minister giving oversight to it, and you had Cherie Burton in the Premier's office, a political person obviously having a good time buttering up the crossbench with these changes. So, those three centres of power haven't worked, have they? You would have been better off with just one or two.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I take that suggestion in the spirit intended. We are open to good advice about how to structure any of these grants programs, and we've tried to take some of that on along the way with this one. In particular, the Audit Office has had a good look at the program. I accept the characterisation that Alison Morgan has just made about the Audit Office report. It really ran through and gave some good guidance. It made a couple of recommendations the Government accepts. We're always open to improving any program.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But in hindsight, what improvements would you make? Would you just bring it all under your direct administration as one centre of authority?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think we clearly accept the Auditor's recommendations. They will be adopted in relation to that suggestion. I take it as good advice. I would need to think about future program design some more before responding.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Before the next election?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Before the next election.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You said earlier on, on 21 August, the briefing you had from the program office was similar to what we heard earlier today from Ms Morgan.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I've got to say, if I'd heard that information and I'd been the responsible Minister, probably the first thing I would have done after the briefing is pick up the phone and ask Cherie Burton, "Why did these lists change so often? Why were there five different iterations of it? Can you explain that to me?" Did you do that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The way it was put to me was there was a first batch, there was a second batch, they were contacting the organisations to get the details and cataloguing the commitments, so there was not a discussion about a list on 14 June, but I asked a range of questions about it and found it reasonably persuasive as I was being briefed on it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But were you told what we heard today? That there are five different iterations?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There were a number of different iterations. There's the contact details being collected as people were—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did you check with Cherie why that happened? Wouldn't you check with her directly? How can you make five changes to election commitments that were solid in rock? Inscribed in rock on election night?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As I understood it, this was more about the contact details and the nature of the organisation and collecting those details.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How can that be true, say, in Wollondilly where Lucy Margeit testified and wrote down that there's just \$400,000 for playgrounds and parks? Three or four months later, how do you get a whole list of new organisations, unless you got it from Judy Hannan?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't know the details of that specific—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you check?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm happy to check.

The CHAIR: Minister, you said before—and you've said it a few times now—about "This is just the way we deal with election commitments. There's nothing unusual here". If it's so common and usual for election commitments to be dealt with like this, then why did you have to invent this entirely new process for this one? This was not a standard election commitment, was it, because we had to have an entire office set up to administer it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, an entire new office was not set up to administer it. There is a grants office that deals with a number of grants programs, and that's why they've got that—

The CHAIR: How many extra people did you have to hire to look into this program? How many hours of work went into producing new guidelines? My understanding is you're still working through these allocations. That work has not been done.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't know the answer to that. That's really a question for the public service in terms of extra people.

The CHAIR: Is it true that the Community Building Partnership program has been delayed because of the work that's been done on this particular program?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think in order to try to comply with the calls for papers for the House, that has certainly delayed some of these programs, absolutely, and that is true in this grants area as well.

The CHAIR: So it's the call for papers you think that is the cause?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's absolutely one of the factors here, and I've been clear in the House that I expect this material to be produced. I can understand why people want to ask questions about it, but of course that has an impact.

The CHAIR: How many tranches of this program are we up to now?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Of which program?

The CHAIR: Of this one. I keep calling it the pre-election Labor candidate slush fund. This one that we're talking about.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: The LSCA.

The CHAIR: Thank you, the LSCA. I understand there was a number of tranches. Sydney was in tranche 7 and there was a bunch of tranches.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There are more than 600 projects. The tranches more refer to the bundles of paperwork that come up altogether.

The CHAIR: What are we up to?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There are more than 640 projects I understand.

The CHAIR: How many tranches of documents have we—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I couldn't answer that. I can take that on notice for you. The tranches are more about the waves of paperwork.

The CHAIR: Right, so nothing to do with the SO 52 though?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No.

The CHAIR: That paperwork just exists.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, exactly.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: We've had several tranches of SO 52 papers as well.

The CHAIR: Yes, we have had several tranches. Sorry, I'm just trying to drill into this idea that somehow it's the SO 52 that's taking up all of this labour rather than the fact that, as we've seen, you've had to go out and find people's details. We've heard from lots of people saying that they didn't know they were getting money because they were never told before the election—all sorts of things. You're saying that it's the call for papers that this particular office is complying with that's delaying it and not the program itself?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sorry, that's delaying what?

The CHAIR: The doling out of the money, the actual giving of the money.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: For the Community Building Partnership program?

The CHAIR: For both programs. It's taking a very long time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm sure there is a range of factors. I would identify that is one of the factors.

The CHAIR: So bringing us back then, you've got an entire process, guidelines, people—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But I do want to stress, I think it's very important. I accept that the material should be provided, and we've asked for that to be prioritised.

The CHAIR: Sure, but the question that I have for you is basically trying to drill down into this very strange idea that somehow this is just like every other election commitment. As I said before, the program itself might be an election commitment, but this allocation of money to individuals who were promised something by a Labor candidate prior to the election is quite novel. If it's just so standard, why do we need to have all of these additional guidelines and programs around it? Do you accept that it's not standard?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I accept that it's not standard. This is not the same as every other commitment because the attempt here was to create a grants program that was equal in all aspects, which had taken out many of the flaws of previous Coalition programs.

The CHAIR: No, the unusual bit here is that it was promised prior to an election by candidates who were only Labor candidates.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't see making election commitments as an unusual part of the political process.

The CHAIR: I don't see the party making the election commitments as an unusual part of the process, but we're talking about a Labor election slush fund where candidates were able to run around as part of their campaign funding. They were going round having meetings where they were talking about how to best allocate this money in order to maximise their votes. That's quite an unusual program, isn't it, Minister?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I don't accept your characterisation of the program. The point I was trying to make though, which is relevant to where you're heading, was the process of transmitting election commitments is the bit that I see as the same. That's the distinction. Yes, I agree, a different program, but the process of collecting election commitments and transmitting them is routine but quite complicated in government.

The CHAIR: But not routine when you have to have an entire process, new guidelines, everything else set up. That's not routine. That's not just passing it onto the public sector, is it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That relates to the nature of the guidelines for the program to try and make it equal everywhere. It doesn't relate to the process of transmitting election commitments.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Minister, just following on from that previous characterisation about how this was a new program and things had to be set up, given everything that has been made of this program and the administration of it, I just want you to walk us through the lengths that were gone to to make sure that this program was a lot more equitable and had a lot more integrity vis-a-vis previous programs and how you think, as a Minister, that has been transmitted in practice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think we've canvassed a range of these, but it probably is worth just touching on them. Rather than allocate 96 per cent of any of these funds to just one political party, it's \$400,000 to each electorate. If there were residual funds, it's been allocated to quite a good public purpose: parks and playgrounds. That's been done in a strict per capita way. It didn't matter who won the seat, this was still delivered. We had seen examples of schemes before where candidates were going around saying, "If I'm not elected, don't think you're getting this project." This is the opposite of that.

The grants guidelines have been approved. A range of these election commitments that have been made, I've knocked them back because I wasn't satisfied that they did meet the guidelines. A range of others where it was sensible and a good use of public funds but didn't meet the guidelines, there's been exemptions where that's been recommended. So these are entitled to be dealt with under a range of ways. But, just to be clear, six projects have been refused. They were election commitments, but I couldn't satisfy myself and the program office couldn't satisfy itself that, for one reason or another, it was a good use of public funds. Those are all things that distinguish this program from some of the programs previously. That's not to say there couldn't be improvements, and there will be. Any of the suggestions that are made, we're happy to take seriously.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Minister, just on this piece about the local MPs, regardless of which political party they were from—be it Opposition or Government—being consulted on that residual amount that went to parks and playgrounds, can you remember that happening before?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I can't recall that. But that was one of the questions that was raised, "I've just been elected. How do I have some say?" I thought that was a good suggestion. And we made sure that, for that residual amount for parks and playgrounds, it didn't matter who had just been elected—they had a say in that.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I just want to walk you through this other little sort of microcosm example that gets raised fairly consistently in this hearing ad nauseam. This Sydney business, where they were meant to have got over \$400,000—the implication being that it was because it was Sydney, it was Greenwich, "Let's buy him off." That's the implication. In fact what happened was that the Premier's Discretionary Fund got used, which is a separate discretionary fund. There's nothing particularly novel about that. You've got the LSCA and then you've got the Premier's Discretionary Fund. And in fact the exact same thing happened in the Opposition leader's electorate of Cronulla, didn't it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I probably don't want to comment in great detail on it, but I do think it's very difficult to attack one MP for getting money from the Premier's Discretionary Fund and say, "That's over \$400,000," and then exempt the fact that another MP's done the same and that's not a problem.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Minister, why are you refusing to give any details of conversations you've had with Cherie Burton about the LSCA program?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I haven't had a great deal of discussions about this program in general, by the way. I've largely worked off the paperwork, and I've found the paperwork to be of very high standard. That's really been to avoid having my view influenced by others. So I've worked through diligently with that approach.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: How many conversations have you had with Ms Burton about—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not going to detail the discussions I've had with all my colleagues. That's not unusual for witnesses and Ministers at these hearings.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many programs do you administer as Special Minister of State? Is this the only grant one?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, it's certainly not the only grant program I administer. Although I wouldn't want to—often the decision-maker is not the Minister; on some occasions it is. I wouldn't want to mislead you about the number for which I'm the formal decision-maker.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Specifically as Special Minister of State. I know you've got Transport, Arts and others. This sits under you as Special Minister of State. Is this the only one that you do in that role?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I think that would be true, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You just said you haven't had a lot of conversations about it, even though it's the only one that you do in that ministerial capacity. I think we've asked about 50 questions on it in the House and there's an entire inquiry set up as we're here now to look into this program. Yet you haven't talked to many people about it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I've certainly spent time examining the claims of the Opposition and investigating them, if that's your concern.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Minister, essentially you're relying on the briefs and the advice that you receive from the program office. The program office is relying on the list of election commitments that they receive from Cherie Burton, Paul Mills and the Premier's office. So the buck really stops with the Premier and the Premier's office, doesn't it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I'm the decision-maker for the program. Everyone's played their own role here. The public service has got a different role to play to the Executive Government. Different Ministers or different offices have got a different role to play; that's not unusual. You have had access to all the paperwork to do with this program and all the communications about it. They have been happily released by the Government. I've encouraged that, on behalf of the public service. You've gone through that in great detail. You've made a range of assertions, which have often been in error, but have not really turned up anything compared to the incredible programs we saw under the Coalition Government. So I don't accept your characterisation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, why is this the only one you administer as Special Minister of State?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Special Minister of State role doesn't administer a lot of grants programs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But why have you been given this one, then? What was the rationale for that?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Those allocations are made by the incoming Government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So the Premier decided that it would fall with you? Who decided this one comes to John as Special Minister of State?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It's not my decision about precisely what responsibility—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I accept that, but whose decision was it?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Those are decisions normally made by the Premier.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And was it, in this case, a decision made by the Premier?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I'm not detailing discussions with—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just say yes, he's given it to you to do. That's pretty standard.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I'm administering this program for the team, yes.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: Minister why didn't we receive the 14 June list in the original call for papers? We could have had this list back in January. We only received it a month or two ago.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have asked the public service about that. I'd encourage you to pursue that with them.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: As the responsible Minister—we did call for all papers regarding the LSCA program. We gave a very generous, as the Chair would remember, time frame to provide those documents. I think it was something like a two-month time frame—maybe even longer—to provide all the LSCA documents. We then did a follow-up call for papers and then another one after that, and it's taken us some time. We get questions or criticism from the Government members: Why do we need to keep calling the same witnesses over and over again? Partly because we're not getting answers to our questions, but also partly because documents aren't being provided to the House when they're supposed to be. If we'd received all these documents in January, this inquiry probably could have been a lot shorter.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Rath, I don't accept you're not getting answers. I've answered questions.

The Hon. CHRIS RATH: But we weren't getting the documents when we were supposed to.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: On the question about the documents, I'm actually pretty sympathetic to where you're heading. It's one of the reasons why I've been clear in the House when I've been asked. I've been clear about my expectations to the public service up-front. It's also why I've been clear I want these documents released early and released publicly. You asked me about tranche 7 seven, for example. I hadn't received it, but it also hadn't been made public, and we made sure it was public as soon as it was brought to my attention. If you've got other concerns on that front, look, I think you're entitled to ask about it, and you can be assured the Government will act.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, on 20 October 2023 you directed the program office to conduct a conflict of interest review for 15 electorates because you'd been advised there may be a conflict of interest question. Most of those were councillors. Who advised you of the conflict of interest question or problem in the seat of Camden?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: My recollection is it was—I thought it was 17 electorates that ended up having that—recalling that the advice to me from the public service was, "The guidelines are quite strict. This isn't required." The Opposition had raised concerns, and I felt that this would add to the program. So I insisted that, wherever there had been issues raised, that this occur. One of those electorates was Camden. I can't recall the way in which that originally came up, but it would have been either a councillor or someone had identified this publicly.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you take that on notice as to who identified it? And was it because of material on the Labor Party website for the election campaign revealing that Mrs Quinnell ran a music business in Camden and was now allocating \$75,000 to the Camden Musical Society, which she'd helped establish?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Why don't I take that on notice? I'm happy to report back, but I couldn't tell you off the top of my head.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And who devised—

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Excuse me, Chair. I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr Latham and Minister. Just in terms of timing, I had thought we were at an hour for each witness—just in terms of planning.

The CHAIR: Have we got the timing wrong? Sorry. Apologies. Thank you, Dr Kaine, I didn't realise.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I thought I was due to leave at 5.15 p.m.

The CHAIR: Yes, apologies for keeping you. We were engrossed in your answers. Thank you very much. That does conclude our time with you. To the extent there were questions taken on notice or supplementary questions, the Committee secretariat will be in touch.

(The Minister withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 17:30.