

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5

Friday 16 August 2013

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

RESOURCES AND ENERGY, SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE, THE CENTRAL COAST

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. R. L. Brown (Chair)

The Hon. J. Buckingham (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. R. H. Colless
The Hon. G. J. Donnelly
The Hon. A. R. Fazio
Dr J. Kaye

Mr S. MacDonald
The Hon. S. Moselmane
The Hon. Dr P. R. Phelps
The Hon. S. Whan

PRESENT

The Hon. Chris Hartcher, *Minister for Resources and Energy, Special Minister of State, and Minister for the Central Coast*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

CHAIR: I declare this hearing into the inquiry into the budget estimates 2013-2014 open to the public. Before I commence, I acknowledge the Gadigal clan of the Eora nation, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I also pay respect to the elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal persons present. I welcome Minister Hartcher and accompanying officials to this hearing. The Committee will examine the proposed expenditure of the portfolios of Resources and Energy, Special Minister of State, and the Central Coast.

In accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, you must take responsibility for what you publish or the interpretation you place on anything that is said before the Committee. The guidelines for broadcasting proceedings are available at the table by the door. I note that today's hearing is open to the public and is being webcast live via the Parliament's website.

Before we commence I will make some comments about procedural matters. Any messages from advisers or the members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber support staff or the Committee clerks. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. The transcript of this hearing will be available on the Parliament's website from tomorrow morning. The House has resolved that answers to questions on notice must be provided within 21 days of your formal receipt of the questions.

ANDREW LEWIS, Executive Director, Energy, Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services, and

BRAD MULLARD, Executive Director, Mineral Resources, Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services, affirmed and examined:

KYLIE HARGREAVES, Acting Deputy Director General, Resources and Energy, Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services,

BRUCE MORCOMBE, Director, Business Advisory Services, Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services, and

RACHEL CONNELL, Director, Office of Coal Seam Gas, Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure of the portfolios of Resources and Energy, Special Minister of State, and the Central Coast open for examination. Minister, the Government has elected not to ask questions and so the questions will be divided evenly between the Opposition and crossbench. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee, we will move immediately to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, no doubt you are well aware of Rio Tinto's current appeal against the Land and Environment Court's decision on the Mount Thorley Warkworth mine expansion. If that appeal is successful, what steps do you envisage the company will take to reinstate the planning approval for the expansion or to have a new approval granted?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The question is entirely hypothetical given that the matter is still before the courts and will not be decided for some time. Asking the Minister hypothetical questions is surely beyond the remit of this Committee.

CHAIR: I do not uphold the point of order. I do not believe that it is hypothetical, because there is a course of action already in place. Minister, you may answer the question any way you see fit.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The question related to the Mount Thorley Warkworth mine and what steps you expect will be taken if the appeal before the court is successful.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is an appeal by Rio Tinto. Joined into that appeal is the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. In that sense, the question really falls under the ambit of the planning Minister. The planning Minister's appeal is on a point of law; it is not on a point of fact. I think that you probably wish me to state the planning Minister's position in my answer, but I cannot guarantee what the planning Minister would say. However, if I understand the position correctly, the Court of Appeal does not have the right to set aside the Land and Environment Court judgement. The only right the Court of Appeal has is to send the matter back to the Land and Environment Court for further determination if the Court of Appeal finds that the Land and Environment Court has erred on a matter of law. It is not a general appeal as to the facts. If both or either Rio Tinto and the planning Minister are successful in the appeal the matter will then be remitted to the Land and Environment Court.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Did you at any stage propose or consider legislation to overturn the Land and Environment Court decision?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government has made it clear that it respects the independence of the court process. The Coalition Government is well aware that under the former Government, which was in office from 1995 until 2011, there were more than 20 cases where specific legislation was introduced into the Parliament by the then Government to overrule court decisions or prevent court decisions from proceeding on appeal. They related to matters such as the General Motors Holding site at Pagewood, to the British Tobacco site at Raleigh Park, to Parramatta stadium. There was a wide range, as I say. In more than 20 cases the New South Wales Parliament, under the former Government, interfered in the court process. This Government has made it clear as a matter of policy that it respects the integrity of the court process. Its position is that the present

appeal is related to the Warkworth matter and it will respect the court process in relation to the Warkworth matter.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So you rule that out?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I think my answer speaks for itself, Mr Whan.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The Wallarah 2 project is now at a fairly late stage in its planning and approvals process, with the company currently preparing responses to community comments. Once that is completed, the project will go to assessment and determination by the Public Accounts Committee [PAC]. If it is approved the Minister will presumably use his powers to reject the PAC's recommendation. Do you think the company is wasting its money when the Premier has said clearly that this will not be approved?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: With the greatest respect, Mr Whan, that is an extraordinary question. You said in part of it, "If it is approved by the PAC then the Minister will reject the PAC's finding." That is an extraordinary assertion that you have made in that question. I reject your assertion. I therefore reject your question. It is not worthy to even consider answering.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Is it your understanding that if the PAC approves this project it will proceed?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The questions should be directed towards this Minister in relation to his portfolio, not in relation to a hypothetical response from a planning Minister to a PAC report.

CHAIR: In this case I will uphold the point of order. Mr Whan, perhaps you might like to redirect your question so that it concerns the portfolio under examination.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You stood up before the election with the Premier and said about this resources project, "The next Liberal-Nationals Government will ensure that mining cannot occur here, will ensure that mining cannot occur in any water catchment area and will ensure that any mining leases and mining exploration permits reflect that common sense ... no ifs, no buts, a guarantee!" I have here a picture of you in your fetching red shirt that you have seen many times.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is a great picture.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You are looking a lot younger—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I thought, "Red T-shirt!" I looked very good.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: —and more relaxed, Minister.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And slimmer, I think, too.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: We have seen the number of Labor candidates that are wearing blue shirts this election. It is just a bit fairer, I would say—squaring the ledger.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: He has more hair there, though.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I do not know that he has. Minister, given the commitments made by the Premier, is it not reasonable for the community to expect that this project will be rejected. Therefore, as resources Minister, should you not be advising the company not to waste its money?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I notice Mr Buckingham was nodding enthusiastically as you put that question; you sort of forestalled one of his questions.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Stop taking his questions, Steve.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I can re-ask it.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: This very series of questions was put by Mr Foley at the estimates hearing last year. Every question that you have just asked was put on a number of occasions by Mr Foley.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, you have allowed it to proceed another 12 months in the planning process.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer you to the answers I gave to Mr Foley at the estimates hearing of this Committee last year.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: As Minister for Resources, what does it do for the confidence of investors in the mining industry if a company is allowed to proceed to the stage at which it has spent millions of dollars on an application when the Government has committed to rejecting that application?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government has made it clear that its position is to protect the water of the Central Coast, where I live. The water catchment of the Central Coast is the Government's primary responsibility. I stated last year—and I will answer your question to this extent other than referring to my answers previous—that the Government retains its commitment that it will fully protect the water catchment of the Central Coast. In all other respects, Mr Whan, please refer to the previous answers given to Mr Foley at the estimates hearing last year.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Can the water catchment of the Central Coast be protected and this mine approved?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer you to last year's answers.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: In other words, you are not willing to back up your pre-election promise that this no ifs, no buts project would not be going ahead.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am not willing to waste the Committee's time on revisiting issues that were exhaustively discussed last year. I would invite you to actually read the *Hansard* of this Committee. If you chose, Mr Whan, not to attend last year's Committee hearing and allowed Mr Foley to take your place—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: There was a clash of hearings.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —then you are responsible for what Mr Foley put.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Yes, your programming, your Government.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Yes, you are responsible for Luke.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And you are responsible for the answers that Mr Foley received.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I would be delighted to take responsibility for Mr Foley's questions in this place.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Please, Hansard, tell me you got that. Straight to the pool room for that one.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, could we go on to the Woodsreef asbestos mine. I note from ABC Radio reports of 26 July that rehabilitation work on the Woodsreef asbestos mine has been held up pending a plan for the relocation of two endangered bat colonies. What is the current status of the rehabilitation project? Has any work been undertaken to date from the project's announcement in 2010? What is the current time frame for rehabilitation to occur?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The bat population in question is in fact the large-eared pied bat population. There are a number of bat populations. It is this specific bat population that is involved. You have

asked for the information. I will give the Committee the full information. The Woodsreef mine is a derelict asbestos mine located in a rural area 15 kilometres east of the nearest town of Barraba in the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales. The former mine extends over an area of about 400 hectares and predominantly comprises Crown land. A total of 98 native fauna species and four feral animals were recorded present during the six site visits to the locality between August and December 2011.

Nine threatened species were recorded during the field work. Three of these species were recorded in the study area, those being the hooded robin, the large bentwing bat, the large-eared pied bat, and the little lorikeet, the speckled warbler, the turquoise parrot, the black-chinned honeyeater, the brown tree creeper, and the diamond firetail finch were recorded in the Crown land reserve. A flora and fauna impact assessment of the works has identified that the mill building to be demolished as part of the works actually does provide habitat for the largest maternity site in the locality of the threatened large-eared pied bat. In reference to the fact that you did not do Latin at school, Mr Whan, I will not give it its botanical Latin name.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I am not bad on plants' botanical names.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is presently occupied by more than 40 adult bats, which constitutes approximately one-third of the breeding population. A species impact statement has been prepared under division 2 part 6 of the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 for the impact of the rehabilitation works in relation to the large-eared pied bat. As I say, that population of 40 adults is approximately a third of the 112 large-eared pied bats known to occur in the locality's derelict mines, buildings and the concrete tunnel.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Thanks, Minister. Can you just come to the specific question?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, no. This is an important issue.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: That is why I asked the question, but I am specifically asking what the time frame is now and whether or not there has been any work undertaken on rehabilitation.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: If you allow me to finish, I will be able to address that very point. The doorway of the mill building recorded the highest number of large-eared pied bats on 30 September during the six nights of trapping. The 16 lactating females trapped on 29 November indicated that the mill building is used as a maternity site. This is the nub of your question. Provided that the demolition does not impact on the maternity period—and the maternity period is between October and January—it is unlikely that the works would directly disturb the breeding cycle. The worst-case scenario for the bats is that the site is no longer used by them following demolition works. This would result in the loss of 76 adult breeding bats from the Woodsreef mine site. However, the 35 breeding bats in the Barney Bernato and King Solomon goldmines are considered unlikely to be affected and would still be a resilient population. It should also be noted that all large-eared pied bats habitat within the mine site. The general locality is artificial and the species would not normally be present without the old mines and derelict buildings.

So where are we at as to the actual works program? The demolition works are subject to the environmental requirements being complied with, and the environmental requirements are not simply those of the New South Wales Government under the Threatened Species Conservation Act. Consent is also required from the Commonwealth Government under the Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Subject to those consents being obtained, the demolition works are intended to commence in 2014. I think everybody on the Committee knows a lot more than they did about large-eared pied bats.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: That is right. Minister, have your intentions been misunderstood when it comes to your amendments to the Petroleum (Onshore) Act?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I cannot imagine a more broad question than that: What are my intentions, and who misunderstood them?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: And he is continually misunderstood, Mr Whan.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, you would have seen a significant amount of community concern about that Act. Was it your intention that the amendments to the Act would have allowed companies

with exploration licenses access to the permits for environmental studies, or would they still have been governed by the provisions that related directly to exploration and prospecting?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I will have to ask you to rephrase that. You are asking me am I aware of widespread intentions. You are going to have to specify.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Of your intentions, Minister.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And widespread community concern.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: As you would be aware, I am sure, Minister, there has been widespread community concern and comment in the media about the amendments to the Act that you are proposing which suggest that you are going to allow companies with exploration licenses easier access for studies to people's properties.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You are referring to the Petroleum (Onshore) Act.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The onshore Act, yes.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And the amendment bill which is now in the Legislative Council?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Correct.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And that is what you want me to talk about?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, if you do not want to take the opportunity that I am offering you—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I am delighted, Mr Whan, to take every opportunity that you are prepared to extend to me.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You could always ask him to appear when the legislation comes forward.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I would love to appear before the Legislative Council.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You just want an easy life.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government's position in relation to the amendments is set out in the second reading speech, which was tabled in the Legislative Council. The Government's position is quite clear. If you are asking me in any way to add to that, then please specify in which way you wish me to add to it.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The simple additional question, Minister, is this: Are you considering making amendments to your current legislation that you have before the House?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government, through the Premier, has made it clear that the bill is being held, pending further consultation. The results of that consultation are not yet finalised.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Will the Government be implementing the recommendations of the Chief Scientist and Engineer's review of coal seam gas activities in New South Wales? If so, what is the time frame for responding?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Chief Scientist's report came down on 30 July. It is an interim report. It is not a finalised report. The Chief Scientist has made a number of recommendations. The Government's position is that it will consider the Chief Scientist's recommendations, but clearly the Chief Scientist's recommendations have to be seen in the light of her final report. The date of her final report has not yet been determined.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You are not proposing to respond to the interim report?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I did not say that.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Are you proposing to respond to the interim report?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please, Mr Whan, at least listen to the answers that you get.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, I asked you specifically what the time frame for the response is.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Whan, I said the Government is considering the report, which came down on 30 July.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: And what is the time frame for your consideration? When do you expect to have a response?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The time frame for consideration is determined by the release of the final report of the Chief Scientist.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Will you be funding recommendation 3 for the whole-of-State subsidence baseline mapping?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That will depend upon the Government's final response to the Chief Scientist's final report.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You would have noticed stories in the *Newcastle Herald* recently regarding Claris and Allen Watson's home in Bridge Street, Waratah, and the damage being caused to their home and their backyard allegedly by leaking water from an old mine works. Mr and Mrs Watson say that leaking water from the old Ellereay No. 2 mine has caused their backyard to be constantly wet. The *Newcastle Herald* has also shown pictures of sinking footings and a number of other problems. I am aware that this problem has existed for some decades. I would like you, if you could, to let us know what action you are taking to assist Mr and Mrs Watson and perhaps if Mr Mullard could tell us why no assistance has been able to be provided to this couple already?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I will take that question. I appreciate the Dorothy Dixier that you have just given me. On 7 August the *Newcastle Herald* published its final report on the Watsons. It begins with the words:

It was a seismic shift in attitude that Allen and Claris Watson have been fighting for more than 30 years. NSW Resources and Energy Minister Chris Hartcher ended decades of Government inaction yesterday by answering the elderly Waratah couple's call for help, which has been ignored since the 1970s.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Ignored.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The cheers echoed around Newcastle. Can I just make one point? In 2009 one of the members of this Committee was the Minister for Resources.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: No, really?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes and this issue was raging at that time.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Which one was it?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Actually, it was not raised with me.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: When you look at the file there was no action by that particular person when he was Minister for Resources.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: No action—over such a very important issue?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, does the file show that it was raised with him?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Whan, why do you set yourself up as a little Aunt Sally to have balls thrown at you? If ever in the history of estimates a question has backfired—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, I am very pleased. I was hoping that you would give us a positive response.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is a curve ball, that one.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: An own goal.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You did nothing—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: He is good at own goals.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —and when I got the file I did something.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, will you stop trying to be the questioner? You are on the wrong side now for that.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Whan, you are caught out.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, can you also address the issue of Andrew and Kylie Neale's property at Gillieston Heights?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, no, no, Mr Whan—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Have you also taken action to assist with that property?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —I am answering your first question and I will answer questions in seriatim.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, I have asked you another question now.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have not finished answering the first one.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Have some respect for the Committee, Minister—

CHAIR: Order!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I do, Mr Whan, and you will have some respect for me.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: —and answer the question.

CHAIR: Order! Do not make me stand up. The Minister can answer the question that has been put to him in any fashion he so deems. If you have another question, Mr Whan, there will be plenty of time for you to put that. Please proceed, Minister.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. The *Newcastle Herald* revealed last month the desperate fight of the Watsons and their neighbours to stop water from an abandoned underground coalmine inundating their properties and damaging their homes. It goes on; it is quite a long article. In fact, I might table it. But the Watsons' case has been handballed between at least eight government organisations, including the Derelict Mines Program, the Mine Subsidence Board, several Newcastle members of Parliament—and we know who they were before 2011—and the Minister's office under the previous Labor Government. Responses range from being not clear where the water was coming from to telling them that it was an underground spring to finally concluding in 2010—I wonder who was Minister in 2010—that it was their problem. The Minister in 2009-10 bounced it back to the Watsons and said, "Your problem".

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Disgraceful.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: A man, 92, and his wife suffering serious injuries, ignored by the Labor members of Parliament, ignored by the Labor State Minister. Thank you, Mr Whan, for that question.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, there is also a subsidence issue from Andrew and Kylie Neale's property at Gillieston Heights. Have you taken action on that issue to assist this couple with subsidence on their property?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Sorry, which ones are we talking about now?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Andrew and Kylie Neale at Gillieston Heights, where they have had subsidence occurring on their property.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Excellent. I met Andrew and Kylie.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Well done, Minister.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Excellent.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Unlike the previous Minister, who never met them.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Never met them?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: They never met the previous Minister.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Because we are a caring government, are we not, Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Do you want to move over to that side of the table, Mr Whan?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, I just want you to answer the question. What action has been taken?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Are we going to have more of these Dorothy Dixers? We did agree we would not have Dorothy Dixers, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Please proceed, Minister.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Let me answer this particular Dorothy Dixier. Following a meeting between the Minister and the Neales, it was agreed that an independent assessment would be undertaken on their property. It was referred to the Chief Scientist to determine who would be the independent assessor and the Chief Scientist recommended emeritus Professor John Carter to undertake the assessment and would contact the Neale's to arrange access. At the department's request the New South Wales Chief Scientist and Engineer, Professor Mary O'Kane, recommended Professor John Carter from the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment to complete this work. Professor Carter has been appointed and will report back to the Mines Subsidence Board, which will determine whether any further action is required under the Mine Subsidence Compensation Act. People in New South Wales—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you have a time frame for that, Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering the question, Mr Whan.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you have a time frame for that, Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Whan, I am answering the question.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, I am asking you a further question. Do you have a time frame?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have not yet completed my answer.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you have a time frame?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have not yet completed my answer.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Can you come to that point, please? We have limited time.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I will complete my answer and then you can ask a further question. The Neales, like other people who are aggrieved, have had right of access to the Minister, a right of access which has been denied to them in previous years by previous Ministers. Their matters have all been independently and fairly assessed. In this case, an academic from the University of Newcastle appointed by the Chief Scientist is assessing their situation and when the Professor's report is received it will be considered by the Mine Subsidence Board. The actual date of the Professor's report is not known. It will be given to me as soon as the professor completes it.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Good answer.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, how many meetings have you had with Jock Laurie in his role as Land and Water Commissioner?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have had a number of meetings with Jock Laurie.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you meet regularly on a particular time frame?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, we meet ad hoc from time to time as required. "Ad hoc" is Latin. That means, Mr Whan, "as required by circumstances".

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, do you mind? I know that you are still smarting from your first effort at estimates where you did not do anything. Can you answer me a question now on ethanol?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Were you there? Were you at the first one?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Did you or the Government receive—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: He had not been re-credited at that stage.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You just asked a question, did you not, about the first estimates?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: No.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Let us hear about the first estimates.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, did you or the Government receive any legal advice prior to your decision to amend the former Government's ethanol legislation which indicated that it was not legally possible to implement the legislation as it stood?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: To my understanding, under the standing orders legal advice is not a matter that can be asked, Mr Whan.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I do believe it can be. Did you receive legal advice—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have just raised that point.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: —about the legislation?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have just raised that point.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So you are refusing to answer the question?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am submitting to the Chair and to the Committee that legal advice is not a matter, under the standing orders—

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: Point of order: Can we get clarification on that?

CHAIR: Ask another question and we will come back to that one, if we may.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, would you say that the member for Kiama was correct when he told his local media that the reason the Government had ditched Labor's initiative to boost the ethanol industry, putting hundreds of jobs at Bomaderry in jeopardy, was that legal advice had been received by the Government saying it could not be done?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I do not comment on other people's statements, Mr Whan.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Would you say it was right or wrong? Are you willing to stand up for the member for Kiama's statement or not?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So you are not going to defend the member for Kiama.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is a comment made by you.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: It is true though, is it not?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am referring to my previous answer.

CHAIR: Order! I will rule on the previous point of order. I do not uphold the point of order. The question may be asked. Minister, answer as best you can.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, did you receive legal advice that suggested that the previous Government's legislation on ethanol was not possible to implement?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: It would be acceptable for the member to ask, Did the Minister receive legal advice on a matter? It is not acceptable to ask what the content of that advice is.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: To the point of order: You have ruled that the member could ask the question.

CHAIR: Yes, I did.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: He is asking the question.

CHAIR: And I also ruled that the Minister should answer to the best of his abilities.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government takes legal advice on a wide variety of matters.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Did you receive legal advice specifically on the ability of the Government to implement the legislation proposed by Labor, actually passed by Labor?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I cannot recall nor can I comment on the exact tenor of legal advice that is received on a whole range of matters.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So on one of the key policy decisions you have made while you have been the Minister you cannot recall whether you got legal advice on it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I said I cannot recall. Nor can I comment.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You cannot recall, being the key point, and you say nor can you comment. That is a bit different. In making that decision, did you get—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Whan, are we going to have constant comments from you or are we going to have questions?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: We seem to get plenty from you, Minister.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: We get enough from you too, Mr Whan.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, in making the recommendations to change the ethanol legislation, did you receive or have your department undertake any assessment of the costs to the industry and the potential losses of jobs by your change of the ethanol policy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Ask the question again please.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Did you receive any advice or did you undertake any research into the impacts of your decision to change the ethanol legislation, particularly on jobs in the Nowra region and the company investment?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: All matters relevant to government decision-making are taken into account, including potential economic and social impacts.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Did you receive an assessment of those potential social and economic impacts?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer you to my previous answer.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Will you be willing to table for this Committee the assessment you may have received on that?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer you to my previous answer.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So you are not willing to answer whether any assessment was done?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The previous answer, which you seem—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Was this not going to be open and accountable government?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The previous answer—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —which you seem to have misunderstood is that all government decisions take into account the economic and social impact.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What work was undertaken to determine the economic and social impact of this decision?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That would be a matter for the department.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You are here representing the department today, Minister. Are you or are you not able to tell us whether an impact statement was undertaken and are you able to table it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer you to my previous answer.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The people in Bomaderry probably will not find that very helpful.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The people of Deniliquin would not either after what you did to them.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Point of order.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Recently, you announced a new proposed State environmental planning policy. The discussion paper on the SEPP included raising the economic benefits of mining projects and put in an objective "to promote the development of significant mineral resources" elevating it above other objectives. Did you advocate that policy being put forward by the planning Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: These are matters for Cabinet. I am not prepared to comment on matters determined by the Cabinet.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You announced the policy. Does this announcement mean that you do not have confidence in the Planning Assessment Commission's capacity to deal in a balanced way with applications for new or expanded mines?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have full confidence in the Planning Assessment Commission.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Why did you feel it necessary to introduce another objective into the Act promoting the development of significant mineral resources above an existing objective that already included the economic benefit of mining?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I quote from 27 October 2010: "The cost of halting mining would cost the economy billions of dollars on top of tens of thousands of jobs." I will say it again: "The cost of halting mining would cost the economy billions of dollars on top of tens of thousands of jobs." Those words were said on 27 October 2010 by—?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Who, Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Hon. Steve Whan.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: And I absolutely—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Why do you keep doing it to yourself, Mr Whan?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You kick own goals all the time.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The question is why you felt it necessary to put in this new objective. I certainly value the role mining plays in the State economy—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: So you would support that amendment, would you?

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: —and I am asking you to comment on your motivation for putting it there.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is my comment. My comment is that I am adopting your remarks on 27 October 2010.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: That bloke was a very good Minister. Thank you for quoting him.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Pity your leader wants to shut down the entire coal industry in New South Wales.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: So for the reasons you enunciated on 27 October 2010, Mr Whan, I supported that policy.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: There are worse people from whom you take your lead.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Minister, in reference to your previous answers to the Hon. Steve Whan regarding the case of Andrew and Kylie Neal, the Mine Subsidence Board and the independent assessment being conducted by Professor John Carter, will you commit to making that report public?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I imagine it will be available under the Government Information (Public Access) Act [GIPA] anyway, will it not?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So you will not make it public, but people can GIPA it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is available. I certainly will be discussing it or have my department discuss it with the relevant people—with the Watsons.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: But will you make it public to the broader community?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Bear in mind, Mr Buckingham, one of the concerns that the Neals had, the Watsons had and other people had, is that these matters affect potential resale of their properties. If there is extensive publicity given to the fact that these properties may be affected by some matter, it makes it very hard for them, potentially, to resell. That has to be taken into account. The value of their properties and the value to them has to be taken into account. The Government is open and transparent. I personally have no problem in making such information available, but I would think as a responsible Minister, given that private property interests are involved, I would make sure I had the consent of the private property owners, any more than I would release information about your property without your consent. As far as the public is concerned, certainly it will be available under FOI. I am making it quite clear, as far as I am concerned, I have no problem with its release, but I certainly would want the support of the private landowners to do so.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: In New South Wales the coal sector has experienced a well-reported downturn. How many jobs have been lost from the coal sector in New South Wales in the past year?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I would have to take that on notice as to the exact number. Certainly a number have been lost.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Within a hundred, do you know?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I will take it on notice.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You do not know how many jobs have been lost?

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: Point of order.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: He is not the Minister for employment.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: He is the Minister for Resources.

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

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: The same question has been asked three times. It has been answered two or three times. Are we going to waste the Committee's time?

CHAIR: I will not uphold the point of order. The Minister is a Minister of the State. I am sure he can handle Mr Buckingham's question.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes. I have taken the question on notice.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Has your department initiated any modelling on future job losses in the coal sector in New South Wales?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It would be 100 per cent job losses if you and Labor ever get into power again.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: It is a serious question.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Yes, and you have a serious problem.

CHAIR: Order! Please. We want to get through this.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, and I accept it as a serious question because we are determined to maintain the mining industry in this State—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Hear, hear!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —along the lines set forth in October 2010 by Mr Whan. But the decisions of individual companies, of course, are made by them and the Government is only aware of them once they are announced. As far as I am aware, it is not easy for the Government to actually access future information because that depends very much on investment policies and depends very much on commodity prices. While I will certainly get and give to the Committee an up-to-date figure as to how many have been lost in the last 12 months—I would assume the Minerals Council and other bodies are looking at potential modelling—I have not instructed my department to undertake any modelling at this time. It may be necessary to undertake that modelling. I accept your point, Mr Buckingham, and I appreciate the interest you are showing in the mining industry.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: It has been more than two years since the Wilcox report was delivered in July 2011. When will the Government act to implement the report's recommendations? What time frames have been set to do this?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Have you joined the Dorothy Dixier brigade?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You do not even know how many people are employed in coal in New South Wales.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: We know how many would be employed if you ever got into power: something less than one.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: But I am not an industry shill.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Point of order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Wilcox report was commissioned in 2010 to address a range of issues facing the Lightning Ridge community in relation to opal mining, including compensation and access arrangements. The report was released in November 2011. The Government's final response is now available on the Division of Resources and Energy website. So I refer you to the website. The response is available. The final response has been informed by extensive consultation process. This includes broad public input on the New South Wales Government's draft response, which was released in late 2012, and subsequent consultation with targeted stakeholders. The Minister for Western New South Wales played a key role in this consultation process. The complex nature of the regulatory framework at Lightning Ridge required extensive stakeholder consultation. These processes also generated other issues in relation to Lightning Ridge that were not part of the draft Government response. As a result, preparation of the final response took some time. Some issues raised during consultation will require further investigation and the department has begun work on these issues.

The recommendations accepted from the Wilcox report are set out on the website. Compensation to Landholders: The Minister will be able to set a compensation rate for mineral claims and opal prospecting licences. The compensation rate for mineral claims is \$100 per annum. Although this rate is higher than the \$60 canvassed in the draft Government response, it is indicative of the required compensation to landholders who would otherwise withdraw from existing and informal access agreements. The rate for opal prospecting licences will remain at \$100 per annum, plus 10¢ per hectare. The compensation rates will increase in line with the consumer price index. Beyond this, the Minister will be empowered to initiate an independent review of the rate of compensation every five years. The final response set the review for a period of five years after consultation of the Lightning Ridge Miners Association. All stakeholders, including industry and landholders, were in agreement that the compensation rates need to be set and this will significantly reduce conflict between miners

and landholders. Justice Wilcox noted in his report that the level of compensation had not been adjusted since the early 1980s.

Collection of Compensation: A new process will be introduced to facilitate the payment of compensation by the miner directly to the landholder. Under this new process, miners will not be granted a small scale title unless they have paid the required compensation to the landholder. The process will apply for all small scale titles and renewals and will avoid administrative costs to Government associated with the collection and redistribution of moneys. Legislative amendments will be sought to implement this new process. The department will encourage miners to adopt the new process in the interim. In the draft response, the Government did not support the Wilcox report's recommendation that the department be responsible for the collection and distribution of compensation. The draft response flagged the possibility that this function could be handled by Walgett Shire Council, but agreement with the council on this could not be reached. The department has received correspondence about problems with administrative processes in its Lightning Ridge office, such as concerns about delay in processing paperwork and security deposits. It has also received correspondence from miners and landholders about onsite opal mining issues in Lightning Ridge. Administrative issues are being dealt with as part of the review of the Lightning Ridge office, which is currently underway. The onsite opal mining issues are being addressed as part of the New South Wales Government's final response to the Wilcox report.

Mr Chairman, with your leave, I will withdraw my undertaking to supply information on notice to the question by the Hon. Jeremy Buckingham and now give you the figures of the job losses in mining over the past 12 months. I am advised by the department that 1,476 jobs have been lost in New South Wales mining so far this year.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: The question was to do with coal. I did not ask you about mining generally.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is the coalmining that it is affected, the commodity price of gold such as Cadia and those matters, as far as I am aware. This includes approximately 709 suppliers and contractors.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Minister, with regard to the Office of Coal Seam Gas—this is a shambles, is it not—what is the total budget of this office and how many staff work in this office?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: They all work.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: We will see.

CHAIR: I remind members that interjections are disorderly at all times.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: And occasionally humorous.

CHAIR: Occasionally humorous, disorderly nonetheless.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I will go to Dr Phelps' comment. The department contains a lot of very good people who work very hard. The Office of Coal Seam Gas was established pursuant to announcement by the Premier on 19 February 2013. That was a joint press release by the Premier and Deputy Premier. The office itself was formally established within the New South Wales Department of Trade and Investment on 25 March 2013. The office currently has 14 staff. The final structure is still being finalised. However, it is expected that the full office will comprise approximately 27 staff, including seven strategic enforcement and compliance positions, which is shared with the Division of Resources and Energy. Recruitment is ongoing to fill these new positions. I congratulate Rachel Connell on her appointment as Director of the Office of Coal Seam Gas. The amount of finance allocated to the office for the 2013-14 year is approximately \$3 million.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Thank you, Minister. I have a follow-on question in relation to a previous question you answered. You said there would be legislative amendments coming forward in relation to the Wilcox report into opal mining.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Have those been drafted and when can we expect to see those?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, they have not been drafted yet, but I will be going to Parliamentary Counsel and, I would hope, subject to Parliamentary Counsel's time line they should be put to the Parliament this year.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: That is good news. My understanding in respect of the Office of Coal Seam Gas and the coal seam gas compliance positions is that there were 40 new compliance and community liaison personnel who were identified in the Strategic Regional Land Use Policy. Where are these personnel to be located, what have they been doing, and what are their achievements to date?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Many of them are communications people, of course, so their achievements to date are not measured in the terms of documents produced, they are measured in terms of working with local communities, talking to people, addressing issues, answering correspondence, and informing people as to concerns.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Debunking myths put forward by extremists.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Like the Minister.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: On 1 July 2012, the State Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment (Budget Measures) Bill came into force, and that introduced the administrative levy on the minerals and petroleum industry. The cost of these people is in fact paid by the industry; it is not paid by the taxpayer. Holders of all coal, mineral and petroleum titles are required to pay the levy, which is an annual charge equivalent to 1 per cent of the rehabilitation security deposit provided by titleholders. Approximately \$13 million was raised for the 2012-13 financial year, and it is estimated that the levy will raise between \$13 million and \$14 million for the 2013-14 financial year. The funds are used to expand Government enforcement functions as well as assessment, approvals and communication capabilities. The fund also provided for the creation of 40 new positions within NSW Trade and Investment, most of which are allocated or are to be located in regional areas. Forty new positions have been filled by a combination of recruitment, contractors and a reallocation of existing staff. The roles include compliance positions as well as social media, communications and community liaison positions.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: YouTube. That is very good. Minister, has the Government done any modelling or studies on the effect that coal seam gas has on the valuation of property?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You would need to make clear what you mean by that question. How does coal seam gas—on the valuation of property?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Does coal seam gas adjacent to a property make it more valuable or less valuable, and has the Government done any—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: Surely that is a matter that the honourable member should be raising with the Valuer General, who is the person responsible for land valuations in the State of New South Wales.

CHAIR: I will uphold the point of order. Perhaps the member might like to recast the question in a different light.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Oh, he does not know, that is okay. He has not done anything.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Why do you not ask him about health?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Minister, in light of the March approval for Santos to construct large plastic-lined dams to store coal seam gas-produced water in the Pilliga, how does this decision sit with the Government's July 2011 announcement to ban evaporation ponds?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is quite consistent. You need to have a transitional arrangement to store the water until you can treat it. You do not treat it all as it comes out in one go, do you?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: The water is sitting in the ponds until it can be treated?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is my understanding. Yes, they are holding ponds.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: For how long will that water be held there?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That will be subject to the licence arrangements. Mr Buckingham, you have to understand that there are very strict licensing arrangements in respect of water administered by the Office of Water and, clearly, when you are going to take the water out you then have to treat it, as is the requirement under the licence, but you cannot treat it all in one go. It needs to be held in a holding pond. The holding ponds are certainly not going to be allowed to be there on an indefinite basis but that will be a matter for determination by the Office of Water.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So where will that water be treated?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It will be treated on-site. Have you been to the Pilliga?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So that wastewater will be treated on-site?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is normally treated on-site, where else? It is not going to be brought down to Sydney and put through Kurnell.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: In light of the 30 per cent reduction—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Can I just say—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: —in this year's budget why is the Government's forward estimate still forecasting a growth in coal royalties and do you stand by that estimate?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The estimates are based upon the best information available at the time. It is quite clear that commodity prices all over the world have slumped severely and that will have an impact on the State's income from royalties. The estimates are prepared on what are the projected coal prices. If those coal prices fall then, of course, the forward estimates are affected. If the coal prices rise then the forward estimates are improved, as happened under the previous Government which had many estimates in relation to stamp duty revenue. In fact, I think they got something like \$9 billion more over the 16 years than they had actually budgeted for—not that we can see where that \$9 billion went—but they were modelled on future projections. Similarly with this Government, and with all budgetary proposals, you estimate upon what you know at the time but prices, especially commodity prices, rise and fall.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So you are confident that going forward we will see an increase in coal royalties delivered to the State through the new—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, what I am confident of is that—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You are not?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: But your budget estimates—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Let the Minister answer the question.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: He has just said that he is not confident we will see an increase in coal royalties yet the budget estimates, which have been produced recently, say the alternative. Minister, why are you not—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Point of order: It is only reasonable that once the Minister is asked a question he is given the opportunity to answer it.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: He did. He answered it.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The member is continually interrupting the Minister as he is attempting to answer the question. I ask that the member be called to order and that the Minister be allowed to answer the question.

CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. The Minister should be allowed to answer the question without interruption. The member will have an opportunity to ask another question.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The projected estimate for revenue from royalties is a matter that should be raised with the Treasurer considering that revenue expectations would fall under the Treasury portfolio.

CHAIR: I do not uphold the point of order. The Minister has commenced to answer the question so he may proceed.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: What I am confident of is this: the Government will use its best endeavours to get the best information possible in projecting its forward figures and as those forward figures change due to external factors such as commodity prices it will amend those figures. If the income levels were to actually rise and commodity prices were to rise, which would be wonderful, the Government will reflect that in its further budgets. If the income figures fall, and tragically at the moment the income figures are falling, the Government will have to reflect that too in its further budgets. Budgets are prepared on a 12-month basis; future estimates are prepared, of course, on a four-year basis and the future estimates need to be adjusted from time to time.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: What percentage of gas does Australia export?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: What do you mean? What percentage of gas produced does Australia export?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The Minister is the Minister for the State of New South Wales; he is not the Federal Minister for Resources and Energy. Expecting the Minister to answer a question in relation to a whole-of-Australia matter is completely unjustified.

CHAIR: I uphold the point of order.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Have you ever claimed that New South Wales was running out of gas?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Can you refer me to a statement, please?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I am asking you.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I am asking you to be somewhat more specific.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Do you want me to tell you what you have said?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, please tell me what I have said.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You do not remember what you said. In light of that, have you ever claimed that the lights will go out if we do not develop coal seam gas?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please refer me to the statement.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So you do not remember that either?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please refer me to it.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: What percentage of electricity generation in New South Wales is derived from gas-fired power generation?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: We know how much John Kaye wanted but then he changed his mind, didn't he?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Point of order: —

CHAIR: I remind members that interjections are disorderly at all times.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But hypocrisy should be disorderly.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Point of order: Government members are not asking any questions but are constantly interjecting. The Chair has ruled a number of times that interjections are disorderly yet those opposite continue to interject. I ask that the Chair reinforce his ruling.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: To the point of order: The honourable member asked a question knowing full well that his own party leader, Dr John Kaye, had been strongly advocating electricity through gas generation for some time prior to the 2011 election.

CHAIR: There is no point of order. I remind members that I give everyone a fair shake in these hearings. I would appreciate a little bit of respect when I make a ruling on a point of order. I would hate to think that any member was flouting my rulings.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Can I say by way of preamble to the Chair that I do appreciate these general knowledge sessions that Mr Buckingham and I have but it would be interesting to hear Mr Buckingham actually ask some questions in relation to estimates. Notwithstanding that, we will answer Mr Buckingham's latest question. The advice to me is that of the total electricity generated in New South Wales in 2012 of 70,000 TWh, 81 per cent was coal, 11 per cent was renewables, including the Snowy, and 8 per cent was gas.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Very good.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Does that get a nine out of 10 mark? He is going to hold up a scorecard.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: So if they close down coal—

CHAIR: Order! Interjections are disorderly at all times. Dr Phelps will cease interjecting.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you are aware of comments by AGL Chief Executive Michael Fraser who warned in April 2012 that the three Queensland LNG export plants would operate "like a giant vacuum cleaner for the east coast gas market"? Since that time the Federal and State governments have stood by and watched those developments occur. Will this Government consider advocating for a domestic gas reservation policy?

CHAIR: That is a very good question.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: A very good question.

CHAIR: One that I would seriously be interested in hearing the answer to.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Some 200,000 manufacturing jobs on the line.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And your support for the gas industry has been noted, Mr Buckingham.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I have no problem with conventional gas.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is absolutely passionate, as is your support for the mining industry, and the *Hansard* will record that. New South Wales produces right now 5 per cent of the gas it uses. It comes from Camden and has been operating for 10 years without a single incident or problem close by the Nepean River.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Never been fined by the Environment Protection Authority [EPA]?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You would never know that when you listen to Mr Buckingham's statements because he never talks about that.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: How many times have they been fined by the EPA?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Are we going to have a domestic gas reservation policy? Mr Buckingham, we have no gas to reserve.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: To be clear, the question was will you advocate for a domestic gas reservation policy to operate in Australia? Will the Government, for example, take to the Council of Australian Governments a proposal to consider a domestic gas reservation policy for the east coast of Australia?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The New South Wales Government's position is clear: It is committed to ensuring that New South Wales has an adequate supply of affordable gas.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Does that include consideration of a domestic gas reservation policy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering your question, Mr Buckingham. Given the New South Wales Government's position it therefore is strongly committed to the development of a natural gas industry in this State to supply the needs of New South Wales. Both the Federal Minister for Resources and Energy, Gary Gray, and his predecessor Martin Ferguson have made it clear that the Australian Government under the Australian Labor Party does not support a domestic gas reservation policy. Ian Macfarlane, the Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources and the previous Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources in the Liberal-National Government, has also made it clear that the Liberal and National parties do not support a gas reservation policy. Both major political parties, which will determine Australia's national policy—which is the policy you are referring to—have made it clear that the answer to Australia's gas supply needs lies in producing more gas not in imposing a gas reservation policy on existing gas.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I understand that that is the position of Gary Gray and Ian Macfarlane. It has been reported today in *Gas Today*, if you have been reading that.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have not read *Gas Today*, is it any good?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Yes, you should read it. It is very good in fact.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Does it have an article by you in it supporting the gas industry?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: No, it does not actually. So that has been well reported today in *Gas Today*. What is the position of the New South Wales Government?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As I just said, the New South Wales Government strongly supports the development of a gas industry in New South Wales to supply New South Wales needs.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Will the Government rule out advocating for a domestic gas reservation policy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The position of the Government is that it will look at all options necessary for the benefit of the people and the economic development of New South Wales.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: And does that include a gas reservation policy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have made that clear in many statements.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I do not think you have made that clear.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Is one of the options that you will consider a gas reservation policy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I just answered that.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: With all due respect, Minister, you did not. You said that you will consider all options. Is one of the options on the table in New South Wales a gas reservation policy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is up to you to interpret my answers as you please, Mr Buckingham. I have answered your question.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: No, it is up to you to answer them. This is an incredibly serious issue. There are hundreds of thousands of jobs on the line, and billions of dollars for the New South Wales economy. So the question is: Is one of the options on the table being considered by your Government a gas reservation policy in New South Wales?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I note you just said that hundreds of jobs are on the line—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I said hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, hundreds of thousands of jobs are on the line. And did you say we are talking about billions of dollars?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Yes, that is correct.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And yet for the last two years you have waged a single-handed campaign to close down every gas proposal in the State.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is a disgrace.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You are the ultimate hypocrite. You stand accused. What a disgrace you are.

CHAIR: Order! I want to make it clear to all participants that I will not tolerate aspersions being cast on any participants in this hearing, whether a Government Minister at the table or a member of the Committee. I ask you all just to exercise some restraint.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am determined to secure those hundreds of thousands of jobs. I am determined to secure those billions of dollars. I am determined to do what the Hon. Steve Whan in October 2010 said he would do but did not do—that is, protect the mining industry and the gas supply of this State.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Whose idea was the draft State Environmental Planning Policy (Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries) Amendment (Resource Significance) 2013?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Buckingham, I am going to put the statement you made earlier on the web. I am going to make sure that everybody sees that statement you made. It reveals you to be the hypocrite you are.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Point of order: the Minister is treating this Committee with a lack of respect. He was asked a very specific question. Instead of answering, he decided to insult one of the Committee members. Chair, I would ask you to point out to the Minister that he has an obligation to this Parliament to answer the questions of this Committee.

CHAIR: Order! This section of questions from the crossbench has come to a conclusion. I now pass over to the Opposition.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, has your department commissioned or conducted any modelling relating to the partial or complete privatisation or lease of the State's electricity transmission assets?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: None at all?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Not by my department.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Are you aware of any other modelling taking place in the Government on this?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I can only speak for my department.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, the 2013-14 budget reveals that only \$5 million of the \$12 million allocated to the Family Energy Rebate scheme has been distributed to assist families. Why is this scheme underperforming?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The scheme is not underperforming. It is an excellent scheme. It is a scheme that, of course, was introduced under this Government. It did not exist under the previous Government. The scheme has had an increasing amount of take-up. Like all new schemes—like, for example, the M4 and M5 Cashback schemes—it will take a while to penetrate the public consciousness. Over 80,000 applications were received by 14 June 2013. So it is going well and it will continue to grow.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, your Government has introduced a requirement for electricity bills to put in place a statement about the amount of the bill estimated to be the responsibility of the carbon tax. In the hypothetical situation that a Liberal Government is elected in the Federal election and abolishes the carbon tax, will you guarantee that each household in New South Wales will get a \$330 per year cut in their bill?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: the member himself that said that that question was hypothetical. The Minister should not be required to answer hypothetical questions.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I think the Minister wants to answer it. I can see him champing at the bit.

CHAIR: Order! I will not uphold the point of order. The Minister can answer the question if he sees fit.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: First of all, I do not agree with the use of the word "hypothetical" about the election of a coalition government. That is my first point.

CHAIR: Order! That is why I did not agree to the point of order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: My second point is that if you read—and I am sure the Hon. Steve Whan has read this—the red warning that appears on every electricity bill, which has appeared now for some two years, you will see that it says "the carbon tax and associated green schemes". It is very informative. It is transparent government.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So you cannot guarantee that household electricity bills in New South Wales will be \$330 per year cheaper if there is a change of Federal Government?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: If, as the warning says, the carbon tax goes and the associated green schemes go, then yes.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: If this occurs, how will you ensure that, over the next 12 to 18 months, households actually see a reduction in the amounts that you have told them they are paying in carbon tax?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As the warning on the bill also states, these matters are determined by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW [IPART]—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So you will not take any responsibility for that even though you legislated to put that on to the bill?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have not finished my answer. Therefore the abolition of the carbon tax under a new Coalition Government and, if the new Coalition Government also sees fit, the abolition of the associated green schemes—and I know the Hon. Jeremy Buckingham would welcome that too—would be fed into the IPART pricing determination.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, why do you not also have a notice on the front of the envelopes for electricity bills that says that the New South Wales Government is taking \$506 per year in dividend and tax income equivalents of each household payment?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I might well next year—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Are you giving a commitment to this Committee that you will do that?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I said that I might well next year—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: And will you adjust it every year for the amount it is going up?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I thank you for your suggestion. If there are any more suggestions then please send them to me.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What about giving us a commitment that you will do it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As I said, I might well.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, do you think that the \$506 per year in State Government dividends is meeting the commitment that the Liberal Party made in opposition that it would not be gouging from consumers?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Absolutely, because unlike the previous Government we do not believe in gouging consumers. Mr Whan, I know that you were not the Minister for energy, but you were a Minister in the Cabinet which ripped billions out of the system and transferred State debt onto the electricity system when it was not actually incurred by the electricity system. You were a party to all of those decisions. Unlike your Government, we are not interested in gouging customers.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Since you have mentioned it, will you update the Committee on the level of debt held by each of the State's energy transmission companies?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am happy to supply that information on notice.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: On 11 June you announced an accord on mineral development with South Australia, which a number of media outlets welcomed or mentioned as being a green light or an encouragement to uranium exploration in the border region. What are your comments on that?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is good to see New South Wales making sensible agreements with other States. In this case, it is a Labor State. The South Australian Labor Government is led by an excellent Labor Minister, Tom Koutsantonis. He is even in the same faction of the Labor Party as Mr Whan.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Is he a Terrigal?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: He is not a Terrigal. I do not like people talking about the Terrigals. It has cast aspersions on my electorate.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, can we come to the point, please?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering the question.

CHAIR: Order! Interjections will not be tolerated.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: We are keen to work with the South Australian Government on what the memorandum of understanding says, and that is to develop information. After all, all you are allowed to do in New South Wales under the existing legislation is explore for uranium. We will be working with the South

Australian Government, as we are working with the Federal Government through Geoscience Australia, on getting information about what minerals are in western New South Wales, including uranium.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Since the legislation allowing for exploration for uranium passed this Parliament, how much interest and activity has there been in uranium exploration in New South Wales?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Excellent. Are you sure you did not get my Dorothy Dixers? They may have fallen off the back of a truck.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I think we are playing to different audiences, Minister. Keep going.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Quite a number of expressions of interest have been received. Some 39 expressions of interest have been received from a wide range of companies, including a number from Aboriginal Land Councils. That shows an excellent level of interest. It also shows an excellent level of interest by the Aboriginal community in the development of the State's resources. Those expressions of interest have gone to an independent evaluation panel, which is being oversighted by a probity auditor.

A probity auditor is a new concept in mining resources in New South Wales. Probity auditors were somewhat lacking prior to 2011, as the Independent Commission Against Corruption has shown us. We have a probity auditor overseeing the evaluation of the expressions of interest from those 39 companies. The recommendations will be announced once that process has been completed.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What is your time frame for the assessment of the 39 expressions of interest?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is a matter for the probity auditor and the evaluation panel. Unlike the previous Minister for Resources and Energy, I do not sit in my office and draw little lines on maps as to how mining tenements should be constructed.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: One would think that you, as the Minister for Resources and Energy, would have some idea of the time frame of the process of assessment and the report from the probity auditor.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have a good understanding as to the process that I have set in operation and I will make sure that process is strictly followed.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What is the approximate time frame for that process?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The announcement will be made when the evaluation is completed.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Does Mr Mullard have more information on the time frame in this case?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Mullard answers questions when I refer them to him.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: One would have to think it is a bit odd that the Minister does not have any idea of the time frame. Is it a year? Two years? Ten years?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Whan, you were Minister in 2009 and 2010.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: No, I was only mineral resources Minister for a short time in 2010.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You never made any inquiry as to what was going on under your predecessor Mr Macdonald. Why was that?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, you are misleading the Committee. That is quite false.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, you made no inquiry. I have seen the files, Mr Whan. You made no inquiry about what Mr Macdonald, your predecessor, had been doing. No inquiry at all.

CHAIR: I call the Committee to order. The Committee is here to ask questions. The Minister is capable of answering those questions if given a chance. I ask the member to proceed with his question.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Mr Chair, I resent the implication the Minister made in his comment. I ask you to ask him to withdraw his implication about me.

CHAIR: What implication did he make?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The implication was that I took no action. In fact, I released the report into the Doyles Creek mine.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I note that you released the report into the Doyles Creek mine. I note that the Clayton Utz report on your release, which was tabled in your House of Parliament, strongly criticised that report.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Mr Chair, the Minister is seeking to impugn me by his comments.

CHAIR: I ask all participants to this inquiry to conduct themselves as though they were in the House. Mr Whan, did you take offence at the imputation?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I did take offence at the imputation.

CHAIR: Minister, could I ask you to withdraw the comment?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order—

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I just rely upon the facts. I do not make any comment about Mr Whan.

CHAIR: You have not intended to impugn Mr Whan's reputation?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have not intended to impugn his reputation.

CHAIR: Is that satisfactory, Mr Whan?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: It is. Thank you.

CHAIR: Let us proceed.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, recent press reports indicated that you had strongly suggested that you would deregulate all electricity prices in New South Wales. Is that your intention?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please refer me to the report.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Is it your intention to continue to have a regulated electricity price as a component of the pricing system in New South Wales?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government has not made any statement about that at this time. The Government has commissioned a report from the Australian Energy Market Commission.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: When will that report be handed to you?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have not yet completed the answer, Mr Whan. The Australian Energy Market Commission brought down an interim report and the Australian Energy Market Commission will bring down a final report in September. That report addresses issues such as regulation. When the final report has come down from the Australian Energy Market Commission the Government will provide a response.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: How much public contact will the Office of Coal Seam Gas have with members of the public in New South Wales? Given that one of its key roles is to provide information and communication, would it be useful for the office to have a phone number on its website?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The department has the phone number on the website.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Most of the other things have a number for the particular area as you click through. Would you please take that on board? It is really not that hard, Minister.

CHAIR: *Hansard* will note that the Minister has indicated that he will take that on board.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, let us return to the discussion paper on the State environmental planning requirements that you announced recently. How does that process fit with the process being undertaken by the planning Minister regarding the planning white paper and proposed new planning legislation—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Which State Environmental Planning Policy [SEPP] are you referring to?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The SEPP that you announced on 29 July regarding mining. How does that announced discussion paper fit with the process the planning Minister is undertaking with the planning white paper, and why was it not part of the same process?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: They are all part of the State Government's review of planning in New South Wales. Both of them are subject to public consultation. As I say, public consultation on the draft SEPP closed on 12 August. Public submissions are being evaluated on that. The Government's white paper on planning addresses the issue of future State-significant development, and public comment on that is also being considered. The Government's response to all of these matters will be expressed in legislation which will come before the Parliament.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Are you saying that the draft SEPP process will fit into that process and will be considered with the same legislation, or will that be done in a different time frame and be resolved separately?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As you know, Mr Whan, SEPPs are separate from Acts of Parliament in the planning Act. There are more than 100 SEPPs. Each of them has to be seen in the light of the State's planning legislation, and that will be the case with this.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What is the time frame for the Government to consider the draft State environment planning policy [SEPP] that you announced on 29 July?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The final decision on that will be made by Cabinet upon the recommendation of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: When do you expect that to occur?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: They are matters to be determined by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and by the Cabinet.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Let us start with the closing date for comment. What is the closing date for comment?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The closing date for comment on the State environmental planning policy was 12 August.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What is the time frame now for consideration of comments made by members of the public?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is up to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Yet, Minister, you announced and took responsibility for that State environmental planning policy, so one would think you are taking an active involvement in that process.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I certainly will make my submission to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, yes.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you think that, given the level of community interest in mining at the moment, it was the right time to come out with a State environmental planning policy that suggested a change to the objectives of the State environmental planning policy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am sorry; we were just trying to discuss the telephone number for the Office of Coal Seam Gas. Would you like to rephrase that?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you think that, given the level of community interest in mining at the moment, it was the right time to come out with a discussion paper on a State environmental planning policy that proposed elevating exploitation of the resource above some of those other considerations in the State environmental planning policy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Timing is a matter for the Government to determine. Governments are elected to announce what they are doing. The Government announced what it was doing. What sort of timing do you think would have been appropriate, Mr Whan?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I do not actually think the objectives needed to be changed, but anyway. Minister, do you believe that there is sufficient expertise in mining on the Planning Assessment Commission?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Planning Assessment Commission by its very title is a commission that assesses planning applications. It therefore is reliant upon the advice that it receives and the submissions it receives and the expert consultation that it may or may not engage in, in making its decisions. It is not of itself an expert body. The expert body in the department is the evaluation committee of departmental officers. The Planning Assessment Commission takes into account the expert advice from the Office of Water, from the Treasury, from the Department of Regional Development, on biodiversity from the Office of Environment and Heritage, and from the Aboriginal Affairs department in relationship to Aboriginal matters. It receives the expert advice and then it makes its assessment upon the basis of that advice. Just like a judge hearing court cases is not expected to be an expert in the court case, he is expected to hear and determine on the evidence presented to him.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you have confidence in the Planning Assessment Commission process when it comes to considering the expert advice that is given?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government certainly respects—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you have confidence?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: He is a member of the Government. Point of order—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am a member of the Government. I answer on behalf of the Government. The Government has confidence in the Planning Assessment Commission process.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: But you are not willing to say that you have confidence in that process?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The Minister has indicated that, being a member of the Executive, he is axiomatically part of the Government. He is part of the Executive. He has already made his point.

CHAIR: There is no point of order. The Minister is quite capable of answering the question.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have answered the question.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You are not willing to say that you personally have confidence in the Planning Assessment Commission and the way that it deals with mining applications?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The estimates process is to evaluate the Executive Government. It is not to evaluate the personal interests of individuals. The Minister speaks as a representative of the Executive on all matters here. You might as well ask him what his favourite shade of paint is if we are going to discuss personal views.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: To the point of order: Mr Whan is asking the questions. The Minister can answer them. He is the Minister responsible for these areas. I suggest that the interjections and the constant taking of points of order by Dr Phelps are a waste of the time of this Committee.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Further to the point of order: The member would be aware that the Executive is under examination through the estimates process. It is not an opportunity to ask any damned question you like; it is to ask the Minister and the officials in relation to their Executive positions.

CHAIR: There is no point of order. A Minister is a member of the Executive and therefore is quite capable of answering the question as he or she sees fit.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Thank you. I refer you to my previous answer, Mr Whan.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Thanks, Minister. Can we come back to the Wallarah 2 mine?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Yes.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: In relation to your comments before the election, which I reminded you of earlier, and the Premier's comments before the election, did you tell the community in letters that you signed that, if necessary, special legislation would be introduced to the Parliament to protect the Wyong water catchment?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Absolutely.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What do you envisage in terms of special legislation? Would you envisage that being able to take place, as well as a mine occurring?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That would be a matter to be determined once the planning process had been completed and the decision made, and it would be done in the light of that decision. I do not know what the decision will be. What I do know, Mr Whan, is that the Government is undertaking to protect the water catchment stance.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Could that legislation on the water catchment include preventing the mine from proceeding?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That will all depend upon the decision that is made by the Planning Assessment Commission.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, have the company or proponents of this mine indicated to you how much they have already spent on the process to date?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I think they did, actually. They did say—I do have it in my mind somewhere that they did give me some sort of figure that they had spent several millions of dollars. But that is a matter for them. It is not a matter for the department.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Does it not concern you, as resources Minister, that companies are investing this sort of money—I made this point earlier—and the Government has made a commitment that this mine will not go ahead and they have been misled by going through this process?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Companies invest money in all sorts of proposals. It is up to the Government to determine those proposals in the light of the law.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The pre-election commitment is not the law. The pre-election commitment is a promise that you made to the people of a region, which was that this project would not go ahead. Do you agree?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: My promise to the people of the region was that the water catchment, as you just quoted in the letter, would be protected.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: That is not the only quote that is there on that, is it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have just reaffirmed—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Mining cannot occur.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Are you asking the questions here, or Mr Buckingham?

CHAIR: Order! Interjections are disorderly at all times.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The Premier's quote on this was quite clearly to the people of that region—that "The next Liberal Nationals government will ensure that mining cannot occur here." I emphasise, "here". He then went on to talk about water catchments but he made it very clear that the next Liberal-Nationals Government would ensure that "mining cannot occur here". Is that not clear enough?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Well—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Were the people of the region misled into thinking that meant something else?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Have you finished asking your question?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I have finished now.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes. When we started this estimates hearing, you began with a series of questions about Wallarah No. 2. I referred you to the answers that were given at the estimates hearing last year.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: And it is a shame, is it not, that 12 months later the company is still spending money on this and the people of the region are still expecting that a commitment made by the Premier—that "mining cannot occur here"—will be met.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Would you like to ask that as a question, or is that just a statement?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You take it either way, Minister, because clearly you are not going to enlighten us any further. Minister, how much was spent on rebate schemes in the last financial year in the energy sector, including the Life Support Rebate, Low Income Household Rebate, Family Energy Rebate and Energy Accounts Payments Assistance?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Goodness.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You can take that on notice if you want.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I will decide what I take on notice.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I am just inviting you to.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Not you, Mr Whan.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: And we will determine which questions—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, who comes into this question and the circumstances under which they come. Under the Labor Party, they are all going to go to New Guinea now. On the Life Support Rebate, 25,000 households received the rebate, and \$4 million has been budgeted for it. On the Low Income Household Rebate, the budget was \$180 million. It has been extended, of course, in that period to retirement villages and some 700,000 households now receive the Low Income Household Rebate. That is pretty good. A round of applause, please!

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: As well as providing the amounts budgeted, can you also provide us with the actual amounts expended in each of those areas?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: In respect of the medical energy rebate, 5,000 households received the medical energy rebate. This year \$2 million is expected to be expended. The figures for last year can be found in the budget papers.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, you were talking earlier about government support for the gas industry in New South Wales and you were talking about the objectives of increasing the amount of gas that we supply locally. You mentioned 5 per cent. I have seen the figures of 6 to 7 per cent as well, but around the same. Do you have a Government plan for how much and how soon you would like to see our natural gas supplies supplied from local?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: With Mr Buckingham's newly expressed support, I am looking forward to further stimulation of the industry and what I envisage seeing is a successful gas supply occurring here in New South Wales.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you have any objectives or targets that you have actually set within Government that you want to meet in that respect?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have made it clear again and again that this Government is committed to the orderly, sensible economic development of the State.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Whose idea was the State Environmental Planning Policy (Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries) Amendment (Resource Significance) 2013? Who initiated that State environmental planning policy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Whose idea was it?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Yes.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Out of 300,000 public servants and 21 Cabinet ministers?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Was it your department or the planning department? Whose department initiated the State environmental planning policy, your department or the planning department?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The State environmental planning policy is a decision of the Government.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Who initiated it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is a decision of the Government and it is announced by the Government. It is government policy.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: That is a statement of fact but who initiated it?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: He is inviting you to take credit.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The New South Wales Government initiated it.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: But whose department? Was it your department?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Someone must have put a submission up.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: In response to what was the State environmental planning policy, who created it? Who drafted the draft?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: So that is what you are asking. The draft was drafted in the Department of Planning. It is a Planning Department document

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Did your department request the Department of Planning to draft it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I know that as a Green you can never expect to be in government but the Government is operating on a whole-of-government—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Except federally and in the Australian Capital Territory and in Tasmania.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Federally, with one seat?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That went well.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: And in France and Germany.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: In Germany?

CHAIR: I would stop there, Jeremy.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: What about North Korea, Jeremy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: In Zimbabwe as well?

CHAIR: I will call the hearing to order, Minister.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You are a joke.

CHAIR: I will remind all members to keep their invective to a minimum.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: Point of order.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Did your department request the Department of Planning—

CHAIR: A point of order has been raised.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: Mr Chair, this question has been asked I think six or seven times. It is getting to the point where everybody's time is being wasted.

CHAIR: The Minister is to be allowed to answer the question as he sees fit. I think perhaps the Hon. Jeremy Buckingham should move onto another question.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Minister, where is the State Environmental Planning Policy (Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries) (Coal Seam Gas. Exclusion Zones) 2013?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The State Environmental Planning Policy (Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries) (Coal Seam Gas. Exclusion Zones) 2013?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Yes. What is its status at the moment?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You are referring to the Premier and the Deputy Premier's announcement of 19 February 2013?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Yes, correct.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The two kilometres.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is being progressed by the Department of Planning.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: How is it being progressed?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: Once again, this is a matter that is clearly outside the specific purview of the Minister at the table. These questions should be directed to the Minister for Planning.

CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham might want to rephrase his question.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: If he does not know where it is up to, that is absolutely fine.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Strange, but fine.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Minister, were you or any of your staff responsible for leaking a letter dated 21 December 2012 from the Federal environment Minister, Tony Burke, to the New South Wales planning Minister, Brad Hazzard, which indicated the Federal Minister's intention to approve the Maules Creek coalmine with conditions?

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: Point of order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Before you raise a point of order, can we just get that clear? That is a letter that a Federal Minister sent to another New South Wales Minister, not to me and yet I am the person being asked about it.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: He is taking my point of order.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You did not have a copy of that letter at that time?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: On 21 December?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: No, you never saw a copy of that letter before it was leaked, before it became public?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, let us use the words "before it became public". Who made it public?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: That is the question I am asking. Are you saying that your office never had a copy of that letter?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have certainly seen a copy of it. But I certainly did not see it on the date it was sent. It was not sent to me. If I write to Hon. Robert Brown, how do you get a copy?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So you never had a copy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I saw a copy.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You did see a copy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I saw a copy. Of course, I saw a copy of that letter.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: How did you get a copy of that letter?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I imagine it was supplied to me by the Minister for Planning at some later date.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Before it was made public?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have no idea when it was made public and I do not know who made it public.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Will you ask the NSW Police Force to investigate?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I will not ask the NSW Police Force to investigate.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Because it served its purpose.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I have some questions on the Energy portfolio. Has the Minister undergone any further consultation with industry and affected stakeholders in the mining and fossil fuel energy sector since the consultation period for the Renewable Energy Action Plan closed?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: We talk to the industry all the time.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: If the answer is yes, what was the nature of that consultation?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: We talk to stakeholders, we talk to interested parties. That is the job of the energy Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary for renewable energy and for the department.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Can you explain why a solar rooftop feed-in tariff was not included in the draft Renewable Energy Action Plan?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: A solar rooftop feed-in tariff?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Can you explain why some form of solar rooftop feed-in tariff was not included in the draft Renewable Energy Action Plan?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Are we on the same planet?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: No, he is not.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: This is a scheme which Mr Whan's Government introduced in 2010, costed at \$450 million which blew out—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Is not there—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering the question—which blew out in nine months to a \$1.7 billion deficit, which has caused every electricity consumer in New South Wales to pay an additional \$12 per year on their bill, and you are asking us to reintroduce that scheme.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Is there a feed-in tariff that operates in New South Wales?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering your question, Mr Buckingham.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Is there any form of feed-in tariff that operates in New South Wales?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering your first question, Mr Buckingham. We are not going to be the economically irresponsible government that Mr Whan's Government was, supported with preferences at every election by your party.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I resent that statement; they did not give me preferences.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Well, they had some intelligence.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Not in 2011.

CHAIR: You did not ask the right Greens then. They preferenced us.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Minister, is there a feed-in tariff that operates in New South Wales for rooftop solar at the moment?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, of course, those who signed up before the various States.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Why is it that a solar rooftop feed-in tariff was not included in the draft Renewable Energy Action Plan?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: So we could throw another couple of billion dollars of taxpayers' money at the wall like the Labor Party does?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Minister, can you please provide a breakdown of the \$2.5 billion in projected savings from the restructuring of the electricity network as announced on 23 April 2013?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That has been provided on a number of occasions. I would refer you to previous documents on that.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: What are those documents, Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Why do you not do some research before you come to these estimates hearings rather than ask questions that are already on the public record?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Why do you not answer some questions?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Can you name the document that that is provided in?

CHAIR: Order! I remind members that interjections will not be tolerated.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I will send you the actual documents.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: It is very good that you have got them at hand.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And I will do your homework for you next year.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: What review process has the Minister undertaken on TransGrid's proposed construction of a 330 kilovolt transmission line from Bonshore to Lismore? What review process have you taken in relation to that transmission line?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Have I taken?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Yes.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Why should I take one?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So you have not taken one?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Why should I take one?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I am not here to answer questions; allegedly you are. Is the answer you have not taken one or you have taken one?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Does the Minister for Energy determine where every electricity line goes? Is that the job of the Minister for Energy?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you reviewing this massive piece of infrastructure?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: TransGrid, as Mr Whan would well know and you should know, is a separate statutory corporation incorporated under the State Owned Corporations Act. Through its board, one of whose members is a former Labor member of Parliament, the former Labor member for Maitland, it makes decisions that are relevant to future electricity distribution. When reviews come from me as Minister, where issues are raised for public concern, I then look at ensuring that the public interest has been fully protected in consultation with the responsible board. That is how electricity generation and distribution works.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Do you recognise that there is a community call for a review of that transmission line?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am being overwhelmed with documents.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So much information in, so little out.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Yes.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I learnt from you, Mr Whan.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Did you?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You were my role model.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You would do excellent then, but I do not think you do.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I can tell you, Mr Buckingham, the good news, which you obviously wish, is that TransGrid recently announced a review. TransGrid has announced a review of the Dumaresq to Lismore project and has invited interested stakeholders to participate in that review. We are a caring, concerned government.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: What have you done to ensure electricity companies are exploring less destructive tree clearing alternatives that have greater respect for the amenity of streetscapes?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Ausgrid, TransGrid, Endeavour Energy and Essential Energy all have tree clearance and tree lopping policies, which are designed usually in consultation with environmental groups and the appropriate offices, especially in respect of native Australian trees, to ensure as much as possible that trees are left in their natural state and are not sort of artificially distorted. I receive quite a lot of correspondence about tree lopping; it is an ongoing concern. The Government has responsibility to ensure that people get electricity. The Government has responsibility to ensure that electricity supplies are not interrupted by trees falling upon them. Landowners have a responsibility to ensure their trees do not obstruct electricity distribution. All of those responsibilities are reflected in the various protocols of Endeavour Energy, Essential Energy, Ausgrid and TransGrid. All of those protocols are publicly available to you, Mr Buckingham, if you wish to just turn on your computer.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: What were the results of the New South Wales Government's wind farm audit announced last year?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That would be a matter for the Minister for Planning and I refer you to him.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You had no role in that audit? You are not participating in that audit?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So you do not know when that audit will be available?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Can you outline the Government's plan for reducing carbon emissions in New South Wales?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government is working very hard to reduce carbon emissions in New South Wales. It has a 20 per cent renewable energy target by the year 2020. It has a Renewable Energy Action Plan, which it is already working to implement. It is working to develop gas supply because gas, of course, is less carbon-emitting than coal. I am absolutely delighted by your support this morning for the development of gas, Mr Buckingham. I know my parliamentary colleagues in the Legislative Council will remind you of it in many debates.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Absolutely; regularly.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, we are working very hard to reduce carbon emissions.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Can you please explain the impacts of keeping the total budget for the Energy Accounts Payment Assistance [EAPA] program at \$15 million while increasing the EAPA voucher from \$30 to \$50?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: We have increased the voucher from \$30 to \$50, as you said, and the \$15 million is the budgeted estimate figure. What I need to make clear, and which has been made clear on a number of occasions, is that in budgetary planning you budget an estimated amount for take-up. If that take-up figure is exceeded, then you allocate more money. Every person who is entitled to assistance under the various schemes will get that assistance. If more money is required than that which is estimated in the budget, then more money is made and will be made available.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So more money will be made available for—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: If necessary.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: What opportunities will be made for government schools to reduce their ever-increasing utility expenses? Are there grants, concessions or any such programs in the works?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer you to the Minister for Education.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Does the Government support goldmining and rare earth mining on the Dorrig Plateau?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government supports the responsible economic development of the State's resources.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Hear! Hear!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Subject to strict environmental, water protection, agricultural protection, biodiversity protection and Aboriginal heritage protection laws that we have in place.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Taking your answer into account, if a mining proposal can meet those requirements you have set out, the Government would support mining in those areas?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am not going to make hypothetical decisions on what the Planning Assessment Commission would determine because it would determine any such application in respect of those areas. But the Planning Assessment Commission would have to do so within the very strict environmental, water, agricultural, biodiversity protections we have in place, most of which were not in place under the previous Government.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you aware that antimony and gold mining is occurring at the Hillgrove mine?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: This is one you pretended to go to.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you aware that it is an operational mine? Do you support that mine continuing to operate?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Buckingham—

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: Point of order: I am not sure if this is a point of order.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You have never had one before.

CHAIR: If you are not sure it is a point of order, then do not take it. The Minister appears to be quite able—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I think he can handle it.

CHAIR: —and quite prepared to answer the question.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: The member is misleading the Committee, misleading this Parliament.

CHAIR: There is no point of order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Are you telling me that there is antimony and gold mining taking place? Is that your question?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I am asking you: Are you aware that there is an operational antimony and gold mine on the Dorrigo Plateau?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: On the Dorrigo Plateau?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you aware of that?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Are you asserting there is? Tell me Mr Buckingham?

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: You are misleading, Jeremy.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Do you support it? Are you suggesting there is not?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Buckingham, I am advised by my department in respect of the Dorrigo Plateau that Anchor Resources is the holder of an exploration licence, number 6388, in the Wild Cattle Creek area, 12 kilometres north of Dorrigo in the New England region. The Wild Cattle Creek area was previously mined and produced precious metals, including antimony. Currently, there are six exploration licences within a 30 kilometre radius of Dorrigo. However, Mr Buckingham, no mining leases or applications for mining leases exist. So Mr Buckingham, please check—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: What is the Hillgrove antimony mine?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please check your homework before you come to these estimates hearings.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Do you support—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I invite you to do it.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Do you support ongoing mining at the Hillgrove antimony mine?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government supports the orderly development of the State's economic resources in accordance with the Government's stated requirements to protect our environment, our water, our agricultural land, our biodiversity and our Aboriginal heritage.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Hear! Hear!

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: In May 2012 you stated that New South Wales could replicate the Western Australian Government's policy of reserving 15 per cent of gas output for local projects along with changes to royalties for suppliers into the local market in order, in your view, to ensure affordable local supplies. Do you stand by that?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I stand by what I said earlier in answer I think to Mr Whan. The New South Wales Government will take every reasonable, lawful measure to develop the State's gas resources to ensure sufficient gas supply for what you said are hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in investment.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Is the Government planning to cancel or annul or tear up the exploration licences that were the subject of the recent Independent Commission Against Corruption investigations?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Buckingham, this Government acts in accordance with the law. It is a democratic government that functions within the operations of the legal system. Any decision made in respect of any exploration licence or any lease will be taken by the Government in accordance with the law.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you considering that course of action?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Premier has made it clear that he has requested advice from the Independent Commission Against Corruption on those matters and that once that advice is received, it will be assessed by the Government and the Premier, as the head of the Government, will make the appropriate announcements.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Will you rule out tearing up those exploration licences?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer you to my two previous answers.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Thank you. Minister, in light of falling coal prices and excess supply, why is the Government proceeding with the Cobbora coalmine?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The what coalmine?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Cobbora coalmine.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government is not proceeding with the Cobbora coalmine.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: You were on your Contiki tour when all this happened.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Even I knew that.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please, Mr Buckingham—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you saying that the Cobbora coalmine is not being developed?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —do some research.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: The Government made a big announcement about that.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: I think you were in Indonesia at the time on your Contiki tour.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Or North Korea.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Which environmental group were you stirring up when this announcement was made?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: There was a big government announcement.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So there are no planning approvals currently before the Government for the Cobbora coal project?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please, Mr Buckingham, please do some research.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Can you answer the question?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have just answered it.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You had better get some advice.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, no, you had better get some advice.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: No, you had better get some advice. Are you saying that the Cobbora coal project will not proceed in any form whatsoever?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am saying that announcements in respect of the Cobbora coalmine have already been made.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: And what were those announcements?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You can look them up yourself.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: No, I am asking you a serious question. What was that announcement?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I am not doing your research.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You have just asserted—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am not doing your research, Mr Buckingham, on previous government announcements.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Mr Lewis is trying to give you a piece of paper. You should read it.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am not interested.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you suggesting that the Cobbora coal project will not go ahead in any form?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government has made its announcement in respect of the Cobbora coalmine.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Could you remind me of what that announcement—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It was made by the Treasurer.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: What was it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Refer it to the Treasurer if you are not prepared to look it up yourself.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: To clarify, you are saying that the Cobbora coal project will not be developed in any form?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am advising you of what the Government has announced.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: And you are refusing to answer my question—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am not refusing to answer your question.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: —in terms of what that announcement was.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, because it was made some time ago and you have not even researched it.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: My understanding is that the project is still going ahead. Is that your understanding?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, it is not. Please advise me as to how you understand it is still going ahead when the Treasurer of New South Wales has already announced—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So in no way, shape or form there will be a coalmine developed at the Cobbora—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please, Mr Buckingham, I refer you to my previous answers.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: This is embarrassing.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: It is not embarrassing. It is still going ahead, you turkeys.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: You were in a volcano when all this was announced.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Minister, what investigations are currently underway regarding alleged environmental breaches by Santos-Eastern Star Gas in the Pilliga Forest?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Buckingham, once again, if you did some research you will see that prosecutions have been announced by my department in respect of that matter. As to investigations, those investigations have been completed as far as my department is concerned and prosecutions have been announced by my department.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So there are no other investigations being conducted at all?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Other investigations would be by the Environment Protection Authority, and I refer you to the Environment Protection Authority in respect of them.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I did not ask you about your department. I said, What investigations were underway?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: And you are saying there are none underway at the moment?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I just answered that.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Yes, you just answered and said there were none underway, that they had been completed.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Did you listen to my answer?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I did listen. You just said they had been completed, there was none underway.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer you to my answer.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You maintain that there are no investigations being undertaken by the Government at the moment into environmental—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is your assertion.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I am asking you. Is that your position?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Will you please let me answer?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Yes, sure, you first.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I said investigations have been undertaken by my department and as a result of those investigations prosecutions have been instituted. If other investigations are to be undertaken, or are being undertaken, they are not in my department and I would refer you to those relevant bodies.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Thank you. Minister, why has your Government taken on the role of defending new coal by publicly stating that new coal investors are "innocent bystanders" in the corrupt awarding of the Doyles Creek exploration licence?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Did I make that statement?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I am not here to answer questions.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Did I make that statement?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Did you? Did a representative of the Government—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: A representative of the Government now, is it?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you saying no-one has said that, including the Premier?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Now it is the Premier.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You are fishing, mate. You have got no idea, have you, mate?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You are fishing.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You are flapping around. How long have you been in this place?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You are fishing, Mr Buckingham.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I have been here 10 minutes and I have got you rattled.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You want me to comment—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You have been in here for 40 years.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: Do not overestimate your abilities, Jeremy.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You want me to comment on a statement I did not make, and that is why you are not prepared to source the statement. You are caught out again.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you agree with it or not?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Do you agree with the statement of the Premier that new coal investors—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Oh, now it is revealed.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you suggesting it is not—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Now it is revealed it was a statement by the Premier. You were not prepared to say that initially, were you? Why was that?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Tricky dicky.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Point of order: The Minister seems to want to engage members of the Committee in banter instead of answering questions. Could you ask him to not ask questions in return?

CHAIR: There is no point of order. The Minister should not respond to interjections. He should answer the question as he sees fit. It is a two-way street. If members of the Committee are going to encourage the Minister to respond to interjections, then we are going to keep having these little circuses.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Are you aware of the comments of Andrew Stoner, the Deputy Premier, that he would not want a coal seam gas well on his property, and what is your view on that comment by the Deputy Premier?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Deputy Premier speaks for himself.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: You have no view on that? Would you want a coal seam gas well in your backyard?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Buckingham, like all people in New South Wales who live in a residential area—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: In your world.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —the State Government's 19 February announcement covers that situation.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: No, it does not. It is not an Act.

CHAIR: This session has concluded. Thank you, Minister, and your advisers. We will have a short adjournment and then deal with the remaining portfolios.

(Short adjournment)

ALAN ROY BLACKMAN, Senior Regional Coordinator, Central Coast, Department of Premier and Cabinet, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: We will now deal with the portfolio of the Central Coast. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questions we will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: How many staff report directly to you in your portfolio responsibilities as the Minister for the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Staff of the Department of Premier and Cabinet but they do not actually come under me; obviously they come under the Premier. The staff are at Gosford and consist of Mr Blackman and—

Mr BLACKMAN: Four staff.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: A total of four?

Mr BLACKMAN: Me plus four others, so five altogether.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: A total of five staff.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Are the five staff employed at the Gosford office full-time employees?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: They are all full-time employees, yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Do they all work out of that office?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: They all work out of that office.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: How regularly do you meet with them?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I try to meet with Mr Blackman every Friday afternoon or every second Friday afternoon, but he meets with me in my electoral office at Terrigal.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Mr Blackman, how regularly do you report back to the Department of Premier and Cabinet about meetings and matters raised with the Minister?

Mr BLACKMAN: We provide a regular weekly update to the Deputy Director General of the Regional Coordination Branch via video conference, so once a week, and we cover all of our activities in that discussion.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That is from the Gosford office?

Mr BLACKMAN: Yes, we do it via video conference.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: How is the work of the other four staff at the Gosford office divided?

Mr BLACKMAN: I have four staff who report to me. Our regional liaison officer, Tina Davies, has a particular responsibility in helping to support the administrative activities of the Minister for the Central Coast, as well as working on a range of other activities that we administer from our office. I have an assistant regional coordinator who has a particular responsibility in helping implement a range of activities under the Regional Action Plan. The assistant regional coordinator helps in particular with items of economic development and activities. Then I have a regional coordination officer who has a similar role. But neither the assistant regional

coordinator nor the regional coordinator have any real direct contact with Mr Hartcher. Then we have an administrative officer who looks after our office admin.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In the lead-up to the last election there was a declared promise about six more daily express trains to the Central Coast, and since then that undertaking has been given many times in public forums held on the Central Coast,

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: But nothing seems to be happening in that regard. Two and a half years later the people on the Central Coast are greatly frustrated. Can you explain why progress has not been made to deliver, as promised, the additional six daily express services to Sydney?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I appreciate the question.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: The people on the Central Coast are frustrated; they feel betrayed and are looking for answers.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: There have been some improvements—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am talking about the daily express trains.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: My understanding is that they are to be reflected in the new timetable that will be introduced by the Minister for Transport.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Has that been communicated to you by the Minister for Transport?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is my understanding from the Minister for Transport, yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Was that communicated to you by the Minister or by her office?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I sit next to her in question time and I think that was communicated during question time.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: So it is very clear that the new timetable will incorporate the six express trains as promised by you?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: My understanding is that the target date for that is October 2013. Can I read out my advice to the Committee?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Yes.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Transport for NSW is implementing a new timetable, which it is anticipated will be available in October 2013. The new timetable will focus on reducing timetable complexity with revised stopping patterns to better reflect customer demand, improved distribution of passenger loads and new services introduced, which I think is what you are specifically referring to.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am talking about the six daily services for the Central Coast.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Services for the Newcastle and Central Coast lines are being considered as part of the timetable rewrite. The new timetable will be released in full to customers once it is finalised. I do need to make the point that services to the Central Coast are interconnected with services to Newcastle because it is part of the Newcastle line.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I move now to the question of affordable housing on the Central Coast. As both a local member and the Minister for the Central Coast I am sure you were as horrified as the rest of us to read the recent article in the *Central Coast Express Advocate* about people living in shipping containers on the Central Coast.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: How many social housing units on the Central Coast have been funded in whole or in part by the State Government since coming to office? Do you have any idea about that?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Central Coast has developed, in line with what you say, a Regional Homeless Action Plan.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: My question was about the number of units/

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: What I would like to do is to take—can I just get an understanding of your question in specific terms? Are you asking about the number of public housing units or commercial—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Public housing units funded in whole or in part since March 2011.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Since 26 March 2011 to 30 June? What would your cut-off date be?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: The end of the last financial year?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am advised that the Land and Housing Corporation has developed 18 community housing dwellings for vulnerable clients—it is providing \$4 million in this budget year, and the Aboriginal Housing Office has paid \$400,000 for the delivery of dwellings for Aboriginal people. As far as the Gosford—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, my question was quite specific. I have nominated Terrigal, for example, an electorate with which you would be familiar.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I would hope so.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: There have been zero units built in Terrigal from March 2011 to January 2013. I would appreciate the extra bit of information you will give me through to the end of the last financial year. So there were no units built, funded either in whole or in part by the State Government, in the electorate of Terrigal. It seems to me that if there are no units built in one of the electorates on the Central Coast then the Government really does not have its eye on the ball with what is a very serious problem on the Central Coast.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I could not agree more that homelessness is a serious issue. In fact I have been taking an ongoing interest in the issue for many years. What you said about the Terrigal electorate is quite correct. Terrigal electorate does have a number of public housing units but they are historic; there are no new ones. Terrigal electorate is built out. There are no new land releases. It is only a small electorate now. It is fairly high density. There are high land prices, so it is simply unaffordable. It would be a misallocation of public housing money to be buying where there are very high land costs when there are other electorates on the Central Coast where land costs are a lot lower. So, for that reason, Terrigal electorate is not suitable for future public housing allocation—even though, as I say, it does contain a reasonable amount of public housing allocation. In respect of Wyong, The Entrance and Gosford, I will get you the up-to-date figures. I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I turn now to the issue of domestic violence, and there is a link between domestic violence and affordable housing. Minister, you would be aware that, sadly and tragically, domestic violence is quite high on parts of the Central Coast.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Tragically so, yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It is particularly high at the northern end. In the last 12 months, how many meetings have you had with peak organisations on the Central Coast who are dealing directly with domestic violence? This is a specific question about meetings.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, it is; and I will give you a specific answer, Mr Donnelly. But it is the custom that Ministers are entitled to answer questions in the way that they see fit rather than in the way that the questioner wants them answered. Out of respect, I am quite determined to give you an answer. In respect of the electorate of Terrigal I have had two meetings with people who have had issues with domestic violence, if that is what you are referring to.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: No, I was not referring to that, Minister. You were not listening to my question. I was talking about peak organisations.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Do you know which stakeholder groups you would be referring to?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: There are groups on the Central Coast dealing specifically with domestic violence. I am sure you are familiar with them. My question to you is: how many meetings have you had with them in your capacity as the Minister for the Central Coast—not in your capacity as the member for Terrigal—dealing with this very serious issue of domestic violence on the Central Coast? I am trying to get a sense of the meetings and the context.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The way these matters are arranged is that they are done through the appropriate portfolio Minister. The appropriate portfolio Minister has been on the Central Coast and has had appropriate meetings with interested groups on the Central Coast.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That was not my question, Minister, and you know that.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am a Minister in the Government—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: And the Minister for the Central Coast.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —yes, that is right. The issue of domestic violence falls under the appropriate Minister. The Government has ensured, through me as Minister for the Central Coast, that the appropriate Minister has been on the Central Coast to meet the appropriate stakeholder groups.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: So you are not prepared to say how many meetings you, as the Minister for the Central Coast, have had with domestic violence groups on the Central Coast over the last 12 months?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: My job is not the job of the Minister for—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: So it is not an area you have a particular interest in?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I certainly do.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: So why would you, Minister, not have made yourself available to meet with peak groups?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Because I make sure that the appropriate Minister meets the groups. That is my role—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: On how many occasions have you directed peak groups to meet with a Minister with respect to domestic violence issues on the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please let me answer. My job as the Minister for the Central Coast is to identify needs on the Central Coast and make sure they are addressed by the appropriate Minister. I do not do that myself. I make sure that transport issues are addressed by the Minister for Transport. I make sure that police issues are addressed by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I make sure that issues like domestic violence are addressed by the appropriate Minister. That has happened. I speak to my Cabinet colleagues, as all regional Ministers do, about issues in my area and they respond.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I move now to another area of questioning on the issue of board appointments. This is a very specific question. Minister, in your capacity as the Minister for the Central Coast do you have specific responsibility for nominating individuals to fill any board positions?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, but you do need to let me explain—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: And this is in your capacity as the Minister for the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, this is in my capacity as the Minister for the Central Coast. If a vacancy occurs on the Central Coast Local Area Health Board then that is the responsibility of the Minister for Health. The normal practice of the Minister for Health is to consult the local Minister, but the decision is hers. In respect of other portfolio matters—and I do not think I am speaking out of school here—the normal requirement is for the Minister to find the right people, put the people up and consult the appropriate Minister for that area before any decision is made.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: On the question of the development of a Chinese theme park on the Central Coast—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: This is in the northern area?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That is correct. Have you had any meetings with any individuals behind the proposed project to develop the theme park?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Mr Blackman, have you had any representations?

Mr BLACKMAN: No, I have had no representations. I do have regular meetings with the general manager and mayor of Wyong Shire Council and they have mentioned it in passing but there have been no discussions.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: What have they mentioned? What have they asked you, raised with you or proposed to you?

Mr BLACKMAN: It has been an issue which has been covered extensively in the local paper. Those have just been casual conversations that they are progressing with their discussions.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: So they have informed you that they are progressing with their discussions?

Mr BLACKMAN: That is correct.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: And that is all they have said to you?

Mr BLACKMAN: Yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, is the Government supportive in principle of the project? I am asking you in your capacity as Minister for the Central Coast.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As the Minister for the Central Coast I support orderly economic development for the coast. A theme park could well fall into that category. The Government has not received any proposal. The proposal has been received by Wyong Shire Council. The proposal has been assessed by Wyong Shire Council. It is up to Wyong Shire Council then to make a decision and to make any approach to the Government. If an approach is made to the Government, it will certainly be assessed in accordance with its merits—not through me but through the department and the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. What will be my role as the Minister for the Central Coast? If it is going to provide employment and if it is going to be an attraction for the coast, like the sinking of HMAS *Adelaide*, then I would certainly be supportive of it. That is just a statement of general principle. The actual details would be matters for the Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: On the issue of a regional airport for the Central Coast, what is your position on the proposed regional airport that has been outlined in the draft Wyong Shire Council Local Environmental Plan?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have only made one statement in respect of that—that is, I would not support it having any potential to become a second international airport. In my capacity, and it is obviously a matter for the whole of government, my view would be that I would be prepared to look at and examine a regional airport. But, once again, that is a matter that needs to be worked through. It is a proposal from the

Wyang Shire Council, once again. The Central Coast is an area of some 321,000 people. It is an important area. A regional airport, and I do not say where it should go, could well fit into the future economic growth of the Central Coast. So where I would stand is that once an application is made by Wyong Shire Council, and bear in mind that, as an airport, it also requires Federal Government approval—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I understand that.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I would be prepared to work with any program to see it fairly assessed, but I could not determine the outcome of such an assessment.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: But, as the Minister for the Central Coast, you support the proposition of it going forward as a regional airport?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As the Minister for the Central Coast I support it being fairly assessed in the light of the future economic development of the coast.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You are not prepared to be drawn any further on that; you will just leave it to the assessment process and you do not have a strong view either way?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The role of the Government especially as far as private enterprise matters are concerned is to ensure that they are assessed in accordance with the planning laws.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I will go back to the linkage between affordable housing and domestic violence. As the Minister for the Central Coast have you had any discussions with your Cabinet colleague Pru Goward about the provision of emergency housing for women and families who are exposed to domestic violence on the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Emergency housing is a big issue. I have had discussions with Coast Shelter, which, as you may know, is chaired by former Gosford mayor Laurie Maher. I have also had discussions with other responsible people. It is an ongoing issue and it is an issue that I will continue to pursue. There is no easy answer to it.

CHAIR: The time for Opposition questions has expired. Dr Kaye has not arrived, but I am advised that he is on his way. I will hand over a portion of my time to the Opposition if Mr Donnelly would like to continue with a couple of questions.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you. I am not asking you to breach any Cabinet-in-confidence discussions, but have you raised the issue of emergency housing on the Central Coast with the Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I think my discussions have largely been with the existing service providers. To carry it forward, I have indicated to them my support for future financial allocation to address the issue. I have written to either the Minister or the Treasurer to secure future financial assistance.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Will you provide us with a copy of that correspondence?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I think that is probably part of the Cabinet process.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You might like to check, because it may not be. I would be grateful for that because the stakeholder groups are very interested in this matter.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: They are, and rightly so. Homelessness is an issue everywhere, not just on the Central Coast. As you are aware, we have signed the Transitional National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and the State Government is keen. It should be put on the public record that the Government is committed to providing Coast Shelter with \$1.3 million to develop a Family Brokerage Project that will work to provide support to vulnerable families experiencing housing stress. We are well aware of it. There are the usual constraints of finance. We do need Federal assistance, and if you can assist in that respect it would be appreciated. It is an ongoing issue and it will never go unnoticed.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Mr Blackman, will you inform the Committee of specific projects or initiatives that have been spoken about in your office and in the community to tackle youth unemployment on the Central Coast?

Mr BLACKMAN: Within my office and within the government agencies that I talk to in both councils youth unemployment or unemployment generally—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am particularly discussing youth unemployment.

Mr BLACKMAN: The discussions we have had have been about unemployment in general, but a particular initiative that we have significant input into is the Regional Economic Development and Employment Strategy. That is a joint initiative on the Central Coast between Regional Development Australia, the two councils and the State Government to promote economic development on the coast.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: What about youth unemployment specifically?

Mr BLACKMAN: It is a wideranging strategy. We cannot just pick it out and say it is for youth unemployment. But that strategy looks at promoting economic development, which generates jobs.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: There are no programs targeted at the unemployment experienced by youth on the Central Coast?

Mr BLACKMAN: Youth unemployment has a particular focus on addressing educational shortcomings. If you provide appropriate education levels and skill levels for youth they have a much better chance of getting into employment. The Regional Action Plan is focused on improving educational attainment levels. There are programs rolled out through the Department of Education. There are also a range of non-government organisations—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Will you provide a list of those programs on notice?

Mr BLACKMAN: We can, yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I apologise for being late. I was in a budget estimates committee hearing with the Premier, so you can hold the media release this year.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Do you remember when they all walked out last year?

Dr JOHN KAYE: My first question is related to Mr Donnelly's line of questioning. As the Minister for the Central Coast—and we will get to Special Minister of State later on—are you entirely comfortable with the removal of second-chance learning from TAFE on the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You need to phrase these questions appropriately. What is the word "uncomfortable" supposed to mean?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Fair enough. Let me ask you another question. What have you done to protect TAFE on the Central Coast, in particular second-chance learning and second-chance access to the Higher School Certificate [HSC]?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: These are matters on a statewide basis; they are not regional specific. The Central Coast is part of the State of New South Wales. The policies enunciated by the Government in respect of TAFE and second-chance learning that you are referring to relate to the State Government's decisions in relation to future technical and further education. Naturally, I am concerned to see that the Central Coast gets the best educational opportunities available and I am satisfied the Minister for Education is making them available.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I draw your attention to the fact that the decision was made locally, not statewide. The decision was made by the Hunter Institute, which covers the Central Coast. Therefore, you might wish to rephrase your previous answer.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I will not rephrase it. The Hunter Institute operates in accordance with the State plans.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Can you direct me to that part of the State plan that says that second-chance learning will not be offered by TAFE on the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, the State plan says that the Department of Education will progress the programs which best advance the area as they are identified.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Do you think that mission is being fulfilled by the absence of second-chance access to the HSC?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is a matter for the Hunter Institute to determine. It looks at the needs in the Hunter and Central Coast. It looks at the best programs for the Hunter and Central Coast. It then develops those programs.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But I imagine you would have a view—and you might care to share it with the Committee—about the fact that one in eight people between the ages of 16 and 24 on the Central Coast are unemployed.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am quite concerned, as is everybody, with the level of unemployment on the coast. But the Central Coast is part of New South Wales. As was revealed yesterday by the Treasurer, New South Wales has the highest job rate growth in Australia. This Government is developing job opportunities right across the State and continuing to advance them. That is why unemployment is falling in New South Wales, or not rising at the same rate as other States. I do not particularly say that the Central Coast should somehow be quarantined. What I need to ensure, as part of the Government, is that we continue our employment growth opportunities, which will give excellent employment opportunities to the coast. We promised to do that. That is what we are achieving.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Are you arguing that a central plank of that is the reduction in spending in the public sector?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I am not arguing that. What I am arguing is that responsible financial management, which we have achieved—that we spend only the money that is within our means—is what we are going to do. We are not going to plunge the State into massive deficit, as our predecessors did.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Not that that is true.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: We are going to live within our means. We have not only retained our triple-A credit rating—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Three more deficits than we had.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: They are only retaining their triple-A because of Eric Roozendaal's hard work.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —but that is why we are leading Australia—not just the eastern coast, but we are leading Australia in job creation and economic development.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Hear, hear.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The figures were released yesterday by the Treasurer.

Dr JOHN KAYE: In effect, what you are saying, Minister—and you can correct me if I am wrong—that for the one in eight young people who do not have a job on the Central Coast, their chances of getting into further education and training is being sacrificed to prop up the triple-A rating.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No. What I am saying is that that one-in-eight figure we would hope to bring down, and progressively bring down, and that is what we have shown we have been able to do over the past two years.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But it is substantially higher. You would be aware—I am sure you would, as a long-term Central Coast resident and as somebody with a commitment to the Central Coast—that that figure of one in eight is substantially higher than the average for the State—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is; it is.

Dr JOHN KAYE: —where it is about one in six.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is. Oh, it is. The Central Coast, Dr Kaye, has always been. In the 25 years that I was the member for Gosford, youth employment figures have always been higher on the Central Coast than in other areas, or than in Sydney or Newcastle. It does not offer the same range of job opportunities because it is overwhelmingly a residential area. It has only a low level of small- to medium-enterprise businesses. But what we are trying to do and what we are successfully doing in New South Wales is to grow job opportunities right across the State so that people from the Central Coast benefit.

Dr JOHN KAYE: There is an element of trickle down in that, is there not? On your view of the world, if you solve the economic problems of New South Wales, as you put it, and boost economic growth and boost employment across New South Wales, somehow or other the Central Coast will be the recipient of that.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Not "somehow or other"; the Central Coast will be the recipient of that.

Dr JOHN KAYE: The Central Coast will be the recipient of that. Most of that jobs growth is in the high skill area, is it not?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, it is not.

Dr JOHN KAYE: It is not?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: There is a huge amount of job growth in the restaurant, cafe and hospitality industry, for example—massive amounts; massive amounts in that.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But the restaurant, cafe and hospitality industry is no longer a low-skilled area. Most people in that area—a lot of jobs but not all—would require some kind of qualification or are bettered by some kind of qualification.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: My three sons all got jobs in the hospitality area without any skills. When you are saying it is a high-skilled area—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: There are all sorts of things you could say about that.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Thanks, Dad.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Yes, exactly.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: You should have given them pocket money.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I do not regard most of the hospitality area as a high-skilled area, no.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That is why you would definitely not be concerned about hospitality being entirely removed from some TAFE colleges.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: What we are trying to achieve is the proper economic development of the coast based upon professional advice. That has to fit in with the Statewide scheme that we have for New South Wales. Yes, I am quite happy to say that the enormous improvements we have made in the State economy in the past two years are benefiting the coast and will benefit employment on the coast.

Dr JOHN KAYE: What has been the change in youth unemployment on the coast over the past three years?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As far as what?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Numbers.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: What, the actually percentage numbers?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Numerically, what has been the change?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Dr Kaye, first of all you would realise that the State only plays a part in the economic development of New South Wales.

Dr JOHN KAYE: No, no, I am sorry, Minister. My question of you was not: What have you done? My question of you is: What has been the change in youth unemployment on the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Those figures are available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Do you have those figures?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: You are the Minister. Surely you would have.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You can look them up as easily as I can.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Indeed, and I have looked them up. Have you looked them up? Have you?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You know, I have not looked them up lately.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You have not. Have you asked Mr Blackman to brief you on this matter at any stage?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I have not.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You are the Minister responsible and a local member and a man committed to this area. Where I think you and I would agree, most people in this room would agree or everybody in this room would agree, youth unemployment is a shocking outcome and should always be avoided, yet you have not bothered to apprise yourself of the figures.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I absolutely reject the use of the word "bothered".

Dr JOHN KAYE: Okay. Well, you have not. Let us just go to the facts.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, no. Let—

Dr JOHN KAYE: We will go the other way.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, no. Dr Kaye—

Dr JOHN KAYE: You have not got those figures.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Dr Kaye, stop. I am going to start answering your questions—

Dr JOHN KAYE: That would be good.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —and you are not going to keep interrupting me as I answer them.

Dr JOHN KAYE: It would be great if you answer the questions.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It would be very good if you would stop interrupting me. What I have done is what I have told you: That I have worked with my Cabinet colleagues to develop the State's economy to ensure that job creation takes place across this State and that job creation therefore flows through as a benefit to the people of the Central Coast. Not only have I worked to do that; that is what has actually happened. If you

want to play smart little games about Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] figures, I reject that because, as you well know—

Dr JOHN KAYE: Oh.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I am answering your question, Dr Kaye, and you will listen to the answer.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Well, no. Point of order: I do not have to listen to your answer.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As you well know—

Dr JOHN KAYE: I could easily wander off.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As you wandered off last year. You did not even ask a single question on the Central Coast last year because you could not be bothered.

Dr JOHN KAYE: No, Premier.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Premier? Please do not promote me.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: He has been promoted.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please do not promote me to Premier.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Because I was with the Premier. For some unknown reason, I thought the Premier was more interesting than you are.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please do not promote me to Premier.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering Dr Kaye's question.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Well, answer it. Stop with the preambles. Bloody answer it.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Well, stop interrupting, Dr Kaye.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Do not swear.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You might observe some standard of civility.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: He is from The Greens.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: He is your Coalition partner.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: You should talk.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Therefore the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which reflects the various movements of employment, while they are important are not the relevant consideration for me to look at from time to time. What is important for me to look at from time to time is the economic growth of New South Wales, the jobs this State Government is doing, the balanced budget this State Government is achieving, and we are exceeding every other State. The New South Wales Central Coast is benefiting from that growth.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Hear, hear.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Terrific. Thank you, Minister. Can I ask you will you undertake now to get a briefing on youth unemployment from Mr Blackman?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Dr Kaye, I will undertake—

Dr JOHN KAYE: I beg your pardon, on the Central Coast.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I will undertake now that I will continue my policy of ensuring job creation takes place in New South Wales and on the coast.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Hear, hear.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Thank you, Minister.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: How I do that—

Dr JOHN KAYE: Minister, can I—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No. I have not finished, Dr Kaye. How I do that is up to me.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Sure. Will you tell us how you are going to do that?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Dr Kaye, you can ask me next year, if you bother to turn up.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But you are not going to tell us now how you intend to do that.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No.

Dr JOHN KAYE: No. Okay. Fair enough.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Dr Kaye, you can ask me, if you actually come.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Okay.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It would be refreshing to see you for two years in a row.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: He is back to his normal self.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Were you thinking he was being a bit nice, were you?

Dr JOHN KAYE: As I said to you, Minister, I was in with the Premier last time. But anyway, Minister, you are also the Special Minister of State. Apart from a Saturday afternoon announcement on the coastal policy, what else have you done as the Special Minister of State in the past 12 months?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Special Minister of State is—

Dr JOHN KAYE: Special.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering your question, Dr Kaye.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Go. Go for it.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please do not interrupt. The Special Minister of State is a position created by the Premier for special projects from time to time, as assigned by the Premier. I think we had this question back in 2011 when you did turn up at an estimates hearing.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: And you could not tell us what you did then, either.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Minister, I have asked you a specific question. I have asked you in the past 12 months—this is budget estimates and we are asking what is happening.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: In the last 12 months I identified one project that you did, which was the Saturday afternoon announcement of a piece of legislation that you did as the Special Minister of State, and which is good because it got me the opportunity to comment on it.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And I am sure you did it very well.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I did. I did. Thank you for that. I am glad that is in *Hansard*. Minister, can I ask you what other special projects you have done as the Special Minister of State in this last special period that we have been in?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: They are matters to be determined by the Premier.

Dr JOHN KAYE: No, no, no. That is not possible.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Is it not? Why not?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Because I am asking you a historical question.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: We are interested in what you have done.

Dr JOHN KAYE: What have you done?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You have just been with the Premier.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: "Have done".

Dr JOHN KAYE: No, no, no. The Premier is a powerful man, but he cannot determine a historical outcome. I am asking you: What have you done, as the Special Minister of State? That cannot be to be determined in the future because it is past tense.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have made that announcement that you referred to.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That is all you have done as the Special Minister of State?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is right.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Why do we bother keeping the Special Minister of State?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Did you not listen to his answer?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Dr Kaye, does the Special Minister of State have extra staff?

Dr JOHN KAYE: No, I am just asking you why do we bother with it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have answered that. Do you listen to answers?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: He does not listen to anything.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Special Minister of State is there to handle special projects assigned by the Premier. That is why we have a—

Dr JOHN KAYE: Thank you for that.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am still answering the question Dr Kaye.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I thought you had finished.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is why we have a Special Minister of State.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The answer is longer than the job.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Have you finished Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have thank you, Dr Kaye.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Minister, can I ask you about the position of Mr Ray Carter who works as your electorate officer in Terrigal? Sometime around May of this year—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order—

Dr JOHN KAYE: You cannot take a point of order until I have finished the question.

CHAIR: I was about to say that I would prefer to hear the rest of the question before I allow a point of order to be taken. Please proceed with the question and then I will hear a point of order if necessary.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Thank you, Chair; I appreciate your ruling. As I understand it, Mr Carter is on leave; he is suspended from duties and he is fully paid. As the Minister responsible for the Central Coast, can you tell me whether your office has a replacement for Mr Carter?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: Estimates committees are specifically designed to ask Ministers about their responsibilities or their department's actions in relation to their executive positions, not in relation to their positions as members of Parliament. In this context—

CHAIR: There is no point of order because the question was asked in relation to the portfolio.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, I do.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That electorate officer is being funded out of the Parliament's vote, is that correct?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: So your electorate office is taking up two salaries at the moment?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: This point is quite clearly outside—

Dr JOHN KAYE: Two for the price of one, thanks.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: —the Executive responsibilities of this Minister. If this question is to be raised, it should be raised with the Hon. Don Harwin.

CHAIR: I have heard enough of the point of order. I uphold the point of order. The question is out of order.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You are the Minister responsible for the Central Coast. Do you think the suspension of Mr Carter, the resignation of Mr Koelma and the operation of the company Eightbyfive have damaged the reputation of the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: In what way is that relevant to me?

Dr JOHN KAYE: You are the Minister responsible for the Central Coast.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You are the Minister who within the Cabinet has responsibility for protecting the best interests of the Central Coast. I am asking you, as the Minister for the Central Coast with responsibility for the Central Coast, do you think the reputation of the Central Coast was damaged by revelations about Mr Carter, Mr Koelma and the company Eightbyfive regarding the donations issue?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I do not answer questions about the reputation of the Central Coast.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Do you think business opportunities have been undermined on the Central Coast by reports of the behaviour of particularly Mr Koelma, but also Mr Carter, around Eightbyfive and the way they were alleged to have been soliciting donations?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer to my previous answer.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I ask you then, Minister—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: Mr Chairman, this question is clearly outside the ambit of the Minister's responsibilities. I understand what the honourable member is trying to do, but he cannot go about it by pretending to fabricate some sort of link to the Executive responsibilities of the Minister.

CHAIR: Thank you. I understand the point of order but I do not uphold it. It is not clear what Dr Kaye is trying to do but, with respect, the Minister is quite capable of answering the question as he sees fit.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I refer to my previous answer.

Dr JOHN KAYE: As Minister for the Central Coast do you have any concerns about business development on the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, of course I do.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Do you have concerns about things that might threaten the development of business opportunities on the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Such as Labor policies?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Possibly—possibly Labor policies, Coalition policies or the actions of local members. Would any of those things fall within your concern?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And The Greens policies?

Dr JOHN KAYE: And possibly The Greens policies, sure.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Greens policies that degrade the entire future of the Central Coast—,yes Dr Kaye, I am very concerned about them.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Not to mention the planet, Mr Hartcher.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am very concerned about them.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You are focused specifically on the Central Coast.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am focused on the Central Coast and the devastating impact of the Greens on the Central Coast and their anti-employment policies.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Excellent; thank you, Minister.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, I am.

Dr JOHN KAYE: But you do not have concerns about the allegations around Eightbyfive?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have told you that I refer to my previous answer in respect of that.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Remind me—what was that again?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is in the *Hansard*; you can look it up.

Dr JOHN KAYE: On the one hand, you are concerned about Labor policies—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And Greens policies, Dr Kaye—I am probably far more concerned about them than I am about Labor.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Were you concerned about the behaviour of previous Labor members and their impact on business development on the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Is this an allegation against me?

Dr JOHN KAYE: No, I do not see how it could be. Are you concerned about the reputational damage that the behaviour of members of the Labor Party—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Which ones?

Dr JOHN KAYE: I am not naming any.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: If you are not prepared to name any then how can I answer? You are going to need to name someone.

Dr JOHN KAYE: So you have no concerns about any—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, you are going to need to be more specific in your question. I am not going to traduce the excellent reputation of some Labor members of Parliament. I cannot think of any.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It is a long list. It will take a long time.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Minister, I will ask you one last question, with respect to Empire Bay. You will recall that I wrote to you when you were in opposition with respect to the substation.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And you raised it in the Legislative Council, as I recall.

Dr JOHN KAYE: And I continued to raise it. You declined to be involved in that issue.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, that is not correct.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Can you tell us what you are now doing to address the problems that the substation at Empire Bay is causing?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The substation is completed, it is constructed. It has been there for over a year.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You have no concerns about the process?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: What are the problems?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Do you have any concerns about the process?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: What are the problems?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Do you have any concerns—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, no—

Dr JOHN KAYE: I ask you the questions Minister.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You asked me about the problems. What are the problems?

Dr JOHN KAYE: This is budget estimates; I ask you the questions.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, you rephrase the question. What are the problems?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Minister, do you have any concerns about the process that led to the planning approval for the substation at Empire Bay?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Are you withdrawing your earlier question? Your earlier question said that there were problems.

Dr JOHN KAYE: You are asking me questions. You are refusing to answer a question. Do you have any concerns about—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am seeking to clarify your question.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I will clarify my question for you, Minister. My question relates to the planning process that led to the approval of the substation at Empire Bay. Do you have any concerns about those—any concerns now that it is completed?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have asked those people who have concerns, which they have obviously expressed to you, to refer them to the Ombudsman as the responsible body. [*Time expired.*]

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Committee members. This session is now closed.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.

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