

# **GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2**

**Tuesday 19 August 2014**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area**

## **AGEING, DISABILITY SERVICES, THE ILLAWARRA**

**The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.**

### **MEMBERS**

The Hon. M. J. Pavey (Chair)

Ms Jan Barham  
The Hon. D. Clarke  
The Hon. J. A. Gardiner

The Hon. E. K. C. Wong  
The Hon. H. Westwood  
Mr David Shoebridge

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### **PRESENT**

**The Hon. John Ajaka**, *Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for the Illawarra*

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## **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:** Welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2014-15. Before I commence, I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I pay respects to the elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present. We are conducting this hearing in the Government party room because the Jubilee Room is not available due to building work. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Government for making this room available for today's hearing. Welcome Minister Ajaka and accompanying officials to the hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure in the important portfolios of Ageing, Disability Services and the Illawarra.

In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I remind media representatives that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside of their evidence at the hearing, so I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after completing their evidence, as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take an action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that witnesses could answer only if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances witnesses are advised that they can take the question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or member's staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. I remind Minister Ajaka and the officers accompanying him that they are free to pass notes and refer directly to the advisers seated at the table behind them. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Finally, I ask everyone to turn off their phones for the duration of the hearing. All witnesses from the department, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn in prior to giving evidence. I remind the Minister that he does not need to be sworn in as he has sworn an oath to his office as a member of Parliament.

**MICHAEL COUTTS-TROTTER**, Secretary, Family and Community Services,

**JIM LONGLEY**, Chief Executive, Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Family and Community Services,

**STEPHEN MUDGE**, Chief Financial Officer, Family and Community Services, and

**PHILIP BERRY**, Coordinator, NDIS Cross-Agency, Family and Community Services, sworn and examined:

**SAMANTHA TAYLOR**, Deputy Chief Executive, Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (People and Choice), Family and Community Services, and

**ALASTAIR HUNTER**, Deputy Chief Executive, Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (Service Delivery), Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Ageing, Disability Services and the Illawarra open for examination. The Committee has resolved that questioning regarding the portfolio of Ageing and Disability Services will operate from 9.00 a.m. to about 10.20 a.m. The Government will not be asking questions at this time. Questioning regarding the portfolio of the Illawarra will run from 10.40 a.m. after morning tea, which should commence at 10.20 a.m., to about 11.20 a.m. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee commences asking questions, we will commence with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, we understand that you have managed to negotiate an extension to the Home Care Service of NSW contract with the Commonwealth until June 2016, is that correct?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Correct, thank you. Yes, the original contract in relation to Home Care Service was for the period ending 30 June 2015. After discussions between me and Senator Mitch Fifield we have confirmation that the contract will be extended to 30 June 2016.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Do you plan to sell off Home Care before this date?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** As you are aware, the enabling Act clearly sets out the provisions in relation to Home Care and other services. As a result of the heads of agreement entered into between the Federal Government and the State Government for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the State will be transitioning all of its disability services to either the non-government sector or to the Commonwealth.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Given your rhetoric on the importance of giving people with disabilities choice and control over service provision, what plans do you have to extend individualised funding for present clients of Home Care Service of NSW?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** As part of the transition of ADHC services to the NDIS, the New South Wales Government currently is considering a range of future options for Home Care, which, as you know, provides services to people aged over and under 65 years. There is no immediate change to Home Care services or the staff. The New South Wales Government will work to ensure any future service changes are managed smoothly and that there is no disruption for Home Care clients. In 2014-15 ADHC will continue to implement the Living Life My Way framework across New South Wales to better position the State for seamless transition to the NDIS by expanding the opportunities to individualised funding arrangements for people with disability. That will continue in relation to Home Care as well.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** The Legislative Assembly inquiry conducted by the community services committee into outsourcing community service delivery recommended that New South Wales should not proceed with outsourcing to for-profit organisations before more is understood about the impact upon service quality. Will you provide a guarantee that you will not sell Home Care Service of NSW to a large for-profit organisation, such as Serco, which, as you know, runs detention centres, or Bupa, which you would know recently attracted some controversy in the aged care sector?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** First, the Government did not accept that recommendation. Clearly, it is the Government's position that we will scope and examine all aspects relating to the transitioning and transferring of

all government services to the non-government sector. It is a matter we are examining carefully. My priority is to ensure that people with disability obtain not only the best possible services available but, more importantly, that they have the choice and control over being able to choose those services that are available. That is what we will continue to do.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** But will you guarantee that you will not sell Home Care Service of NSW to these large for-profit organisations?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** As I indicated, during the scoping studies being undertaken my responsibility as the Minister is to ensure that the best possible services are available and that the choices of all of the best possible services are available because, ultimately, it is for people with disability to be able to choose which services they want. They actually will have control and choice of the services that are available to them. Part of implementing the NDIS is to allow flexibility for those services to the non-government sector.

As I indicated, the Government currently is examining the issues associated with the transfers of those services. You will appreciate, Ms Westwood, that this is an extremely complicated and complex situation. We have a period of approximately four years to ensure that the transitioning is effected appropriately. It is not something I intend to rush. It is not something I intend to commit to one way or the other. I want all options available and open for us to examine to ensure again that the best options are available to people with disability to be able to choose the services they want and believe they need.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** I will take that as a no; there is no guarantee. In fact, it is likely we will see Home Care Service of NSW flogged off to one of these large for-profit organisations.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Please do not make assumptions or take certain words to mean what you believe is being said.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Give me a guarantee. Give the Committee a guarantee.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Ms Westwood my position is very clear. I have indicated to you all options are being examined, all options are available.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** It is not clear.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** As Minister for Disability Services, I will be putting to Cabinet in due course the best options that are available. I have not ruled anything in; I have not ruled anything out. It would be inappropriate for me to do that before all scoping studies have been undertaken. The only thing that I rule in 100 per cent is that the interests of the client are paramount. I will be looking at this from what is in the best interests of the client. I can rule that in 100 per cent.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, will the Home Care Service of NSW contract be put under a competitive tender in which not-for-profits will be able to tender for these services?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** What is being examined whilst we are also negotiating with the unions, whilst we are also discussing with staff and with clients, again, is the best options in relation to home care. One thing that is clear, Ms Westwood, is that after numerous discussions with clients, staff and other relevant parties within the home care sector a seamless transition of all of the home care services is paramount. A seamless transition to ensure that all of the home care services are not disrupted from a client's perspective is paramount. That is what I am looking at. That is what we are examining and that is what we as a Government are going to ensure occurs. We are putting the client first. We need the assistance and cooperation of the staff and the unions. I am pleased to report that we have had exceptional cooperation from the staff. We have had exceptional cooperation from the unions in respect to home care, and that will continue.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, I want to refer to a particular case of a man with disability living in regional New South Wales. It is a fairly big question, I apologise for that.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** That is okay.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** It needs to be asked. Josh Cowling is a 31-year-old who lives in Parkes. Josh requires 24/7 support in all aspects of his life and receives home care from two workers funded

from the High Needs Pool. Minister, I will quote from your answer to a question. You stated: "Individual participant funding levels are exactly the same on the Community Support Program. In fact, Josh's proposed Community Support Program [CSP] funding of \$71,576 will not cover the level of assistance he currently requires with services currently estimated at \$124,536." Those figures are per annum. The response from Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC] to the funding shortfall has been to suggest that his mother provide more informal support such as showering and toileting on the weekends.

Josh is quite a large man and at 31 years of age he is embarrassed and distressed at this suggestion. His condition has not changed and nor will it improve. How can the reality of Josh Cowling's situation, as is the case for many others, be reconciled with your response that I quoted earlier and also ADHC's letter of 7 August this year advising Josh of the change from the High Needs Pool to CSP: "The changes provide individualised funding and expand choice and flexibility in how individuals can use these funds to address their support needs in line with their goals, preferences and lifestyles."?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Thank you for that question, Ms Westwood. As that is an operational matter I will say a few things and then hand over to Mr Longley. In 2013-14, the Attendant Care Program and High Needs Pool were merged under a new Community Support Program for people with physical and neurological disabilities. These changes help to implement the Living Life My Way framework in Ready Together by providing greater choice and control for people with disability. In 2013-14, these programs were funded \$100.7 million to support 1,344 places. In 2014-15, this program will expand with an additional \$4.9 million through Ready Together for an additional 60 places. The Community Support Program includes the allocation of an individual budget and for existing participants the budget is the same as the funding allocated under the previous programs. Unlike the Attendant Care Program and the High Needs Pool, the Community Support Program does not dictate the type of support nor the cost per hour.

Nearly all Community Support Program service providers are providing the level of support for participants under the new program as they received in the Attendant Care Program. The Department of Family and Community Services is working with a small number of service providers that have increased their cost beyond the former attendant care benchmark to ensure there is no reduced service for participants. The few affected participants have access to a support plan to help them make informed choices. Disability support programs will continue to be streamlined and aligned with Living Life My Way as part of Ready Together to assist the smooth transition through the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]. The changes are in line with what people with disability told us they want through the Living Life My Way consultations and helps individuals prepare for the NDIS.

**Mr LONGLEY:** Thank you very much for that question. It is very important to recognise that the new CSP model is about individualisation. Indeed, you asked a question earlier about individualisation. It is a very important program and a very important understanding. As we move towards the NDIS, that is where we want to head, and under the original Stronger Together packages moving towards individualisation was key in terms of doing that. It is significant that under this process of moving people into individualisation, providers are now required to provide the full cost of providing that service, and so you do not have hidden costs, subsidisation and so on. Again, that is one of the advantages of moving to a NDIS.

In fact, it makes all of these things quite explicit and that is part of making sure that the system is fully funded, fully costed and fully provided to people with disability. What that can mean, of course, is that the full cost of providing that service is actually greater than the original allocation under the High Needs Pool and the Attendant Care Program. Again, as part of that added transparency that we want, it is a very significant element of that. However, and this is the critical point to the question you are asking, even though the full cost of that service, when you move to individualisation, might be greater than the allocation, where that does happen, the Home Care Service in fact has undertaken to continue to maintain existing High Needs Pool and Attendant Care Program clients at the current service levels, and that is really a very significant element there.

The guidelines for CSP mean that, as I said, sometimes those costs will include now the field cost and the administrative cost and sometimes that might yield a notional loss, but clients can choose to remain with the Home Care Service, and the Home Care Service will continue to provide and maintain people at the current service levels. You have raised an individual's name and I do not have the details of that on me. I am happy to make particular inquiries with regard to that person but it is important to know that transparency is significant as we move to the new NDIS in our own processes.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Mr Longley, I think that the problem with your answer is that in fact it is ADHC that suggested that his mother provide services, such as showering and toileting, on the weekend. ADHC recognises that there is a gap and it is saying that she should provide it. That does not reconcile with what you are saying, that people will not lose service. Clearly in this case they will.

**Mr LONGLEY:** You have raised a particular individual and made certain statements. I will need to verify whether they are accurate or not. I will take those elements of the question on notice. But I do want to reiterate that the homecare service does undertake to continue to maintain the actual existing service level for the High Needs Pool and Attendant Care Program, even though the costs of individualisation might notionally be higher than that. We have committed to the service level and that is the important thing. Obviously, when you have a range of highly individual services and so on there is a lot of discussion with families, carers and the person with disability.

You have raised certain issues there. I am certainly happy to have a look at those and refer further detail and take that as a question on notice. The general principle there is quite clear and strong, but it is all part of moving to the NDIS. It is very important to emphasise that the NDIS is a fully funded and fully costed system, and we are still operating under a State resource-constrained system. That is the value of moving to this new system and individualism is part of that. We need to be transparent as part of that process and we want to make sure that we do that properly. We do know that once we have moved to the full NDIS system we will have a system that is fully funded, fully costed and will ensure that the needs of those individuals are fully and properly met.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I understand that the community complaints policy, which was due to be finalised by the end of 2013, has been delayed because of the revised Family and Community Services organisational structure. Minister, can you advise when that document will be released?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC], as part of the Department of Family and Community Services, considers that it is vital to have a robust process to respond to, record and manage complaints. In responding to complaints the immediate concern of ADHC is to address immediate safety and support issues with clients. This is done at the local level by district staff. Additionally, complaints management takes advantage of information provided from community stakeholders to ensure that the quality of service is maintained and to provide the information base necessary to continually increase services. Our complaints handling system gives the department a means of maintaining client satisfaction service delivery. It is an important indicator of how well it is meeting its corporate objectives and an early indicator of emerging corporate risks. It is also a means of identifying good service delivery. I am just waiting on some information in relation to the specific issue raised by you.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Notice of this has been given because I have asked this question a number of times in House. Do you want to take the question on notice?

**Mr LONGLEY:** It is important to note, as Family and Community Services moves towards a whole integrated system, that ADHC is within that system. The first concern of ADHC is always to address safety and support issues, and that is done at a district level.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Do they operate within a complaints policy? All I am asking is whether or not that commitment has been realised and where it is up to in view of the organisational change.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that question on notice.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** In 2013-14 ADHC distributed \$8.8 million across 41 service providers for 67 advocacy and information services.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Yes.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** What is the funding allocation in the current year for advocacy and information services?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** As you are aware, the contracts in relation to advocacy are three-year contracts and the date to which those contracts are agreed is 30 June 2015. Advocacy contracts for the year to 30 June 2015 amount to approximately \$9.5 million in total. In the past few months I have met with various

organisations that provide advocacy and information services—I have also met with you on exactly the same issue on a number of occasions—including meetings with Family Advocacy and Leadership Development in April and Information on Disability, Education, Awareness Services [IDEAS] in May, in addition to the two stakeholders morning teas that I hosted at Parliament House in October last year and May this year for several organisations funded to deliver advocacy service information. From those meetings and morning teas I am well aware of the valuable work of advocacy information services. Indeed, I have indicated to them on many occasions that I am a great believer in advocacy services.

What I am looking at now—and I know this is very important to you—is what will occur between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2018. The NDIS will be fully implemented from July 2018 onwards. I have indicated to the advocacy groups on a number of occasions that I am having detailed discussions with the Commonwealth Government in relation to this. I need to come to an understanding with the Commonwealth Government on this matter and I anticipate reporting back shortly to the advocacy groups that raise it with me every time I meet with them. That is what I am proposing to continue. The actual figure is \$9.7 million distributed across the 44 service providers.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** My next question is about the Stockton Centre. Minister, can you explain about access to independent advocacy information and the options available to people who are currently living at that centre? How many of the residents have transitioned in this financial year?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Ms Barham, we have had many discussions in relation to the Stockton Centre. I thank you for your continued interest in the centre. For the record I will give a little bit of its history. The evolution of Stockton first commenced in 1998 and has continued from 1998 to date. I have met with the families and residents of the centre on two occasions. I have also met with the Public Service Association [PSA] and other relevant union bodies in relation to Stockton on three occasions. We are continuing to work with the Stockton Centre residents, their families and carers to ensure an absolute smooth transitioning and placement of the residents. What is clear, and I have indicated this on a number of occasions, is that the Stockton Centre must close down. Large residential centres contravene United Nations conventions. We have to ensure that the interests of the clients are absolutely paramount.

My job is to ensure that the clients obtain the smoothest transitioning into a new group home that they choose. They decide where they want to live; they decide which group home they want to go into. If I can take it to the nth degree, they decide what room in the group home they wish to live in and what colour it should be painted. We are ensuring that ADHC is meeting with clients and families to ensure that this transition occurs. We have had exceptional success in other large residential centres such as Rydalmere and Westmead in relation to the transitioning. I do not believe—and I am happy to be corrected—that we have actually had a client who has transferred from Stockton to a new group home. But I have attended a number of sites where sod turning has occurred, including one at Miranda and in other areas, and it is clear that one of the residents from Stockton has chosen to move to one of those places.

The main reason residents and families want to move is that, for the first time, residents are being given the opportunity to actually move closer to their families—to actually live within a community of their families, et cetera. This is not just about group homes; I used group homes as an example. Of course there are other models based on what the client wants, what the client chooses and what the families support. Again, it is a matter of what the client chooses and it is a matter of what the client needs. The Government is committed to the redevelopment of the Hunter residences. Members will note from the budget that \$30 million was allocated to immediately commence purchase of property for the commencement of the relocation—that is the purchase of land, of course; that is not the amount that will be ultimately provided to build and develop.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Are you able to provide the details for how much of that has already been allocated?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** The \$30 million was allocated in the budget that was just announced.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** So for 2013-14 there was no funding allocated? I thought you were purchasing properties last year.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No, funding was allocated in previous budgets for the other large residential centres, Rydalmere and Stockton. There was a \$17 million allocation in the previous budget in



relation to the studies, et cetera, in regard to Stockton. We have now had a \$30 million allocation in this year's budget to commence—

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Is that in addition?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Yes, it is an additional \$30 million in order to commence purchasing land. Clients and families will have a great say and will be involved in a big way in relation to that. In 2014-15 it is estimated that \$113 million will be spent on the redevelopment of all large residential centres. That compares to a figure in 2013-14 of \$39.84 million.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** In answer to my question, there has been no independent advocacy in relation to Stockton?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** My understanding is that the advocacy groups have been not only contacting Family and Community Services [FACS] and speaking to Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC] but also, as Ms Jan Barham would know, speaking to me in relation to Stockton. Any client at Stockton or their families and carers have the resources to not only obtain any advice they wish from FACS and ADHC but also, if they so wish—and this choice is open to them—to seek any advice they want from the advocates.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** And is it acceptable for any of those advocates to come onto the site?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I personally would not restrict advocates from coming onto the site, provided it is clear that it is at the request of a client and provided that it does not in any way cause any stress to a client or cause any concern for a client. At the end of the day, the consideration to be determined by ADHC is really that the client's best interests are acted upon. As I have said on a number of occasions, I have the utmost faith in and support for the advocacy groups.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I move now to the issue of young people in residential aged care. I would like an update. As of last year, there were 27 people in the process of transitioning out of residential aged care facilities under this program. Have they now all been moved out of those facilities and into the community or to some other alternative facility?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** The Younger People in Residential Aged Care initiative is a joint five-year program with the Commonwealth Government. It commenced in 2007 in response to concerns about younger people living in or at risk of entering residential aged care. While the agreement between the Commonwealth and New South Wales has now been completed, funding is committed and will continue to be used to support younger people with a disability in residential aged care. In the 2013-14 budget approximately \$26 million was expended on the program. This funding supported 287 people, with more than 1,500 services provided. In 2014-15, \$27 million is the forecast expenditure to support more than 200 people.

I recently visited Sylvanvale Disability Services in Caringbah to officially open a home in the community for younger people with disability. I strongly recommend that members go and have a look at this facility. It is the perfect example of how a home should look for younger people with disability. During the visit I met people whose lives have been changed since moving out of residential aged care and into their own homes. From my visit I know this move was significant. Providing this home is a great milestone. It means that young people with disability are accommodated with people their own age and within a community. There are 287 program participants receiving support, which includes supported accommodation, individual planned support packages, equipment, home modification and case management.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Do you have any details about whether those 27 people from last year were actually moved into homes?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice for you.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Thank you.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** In addition to the work being done by ADHC, some brilliant accommodation is being provided by the non-government sector. Youngcare is a perfect example of that. Again,

I have seen the work that it has undertaken during my visits to its properties, and I have met many people there. It is well on track, as are other non-government providers.

**CHAIR:** That is the end of your time, Ms Jan Barham. The Hon. Helen Westwood did go into your time a little. Ms Jan Barham, you will have another 15 to 20 minutes later.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** You get a second go.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** The Hon. Paul Green was unable to be here. He is in two committees at once, and he cannot be in three places at once. He is managing two, but not three.

**CHAIR:** We can come back for your second round.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I will ask one further quick question now. My question is about dementia patients and the impact of the Commonwealth Government's current reduction in funding for dementia programs. I am wondering if the Minister for Ageing, and Minister for Disability Services is able to indicate whether that is going to have any impact on the State budget and services provided to people with dementia?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Let me come back to you on that. I may have a note on that, and I know it is a Commonwealth matter. Let me come back to you on that. I know I have read something about it and I may have a note on it.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Thank you.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** In July 2014 the Parliament of Australia Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS] progress report on the implementation and administration of the NDIS said that it will be crucial that people do not fall between the cracks of the old and the new. ADHC is currently providing some services that do not come under the scope of the NDIS. The National Disability Insurance Agency [NDIA] is saying that in the trial site it will not cover what it calls Tier 2 participants between those three tiers. There would be a few examples, which I am not going to quote. I just want to know if the Minister will give an undertaking that the New South Wales Government will continue to fund and to take responsibility for these services?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** First, I do not accept the proposition that people will fall through the cracks. The starting point is that the current budget for disability services provided by New South Wales is \$2.7 billion, which in the last budget, including additional capital expenditure, has been increased to \$3 billion. By 2018, under the heads of agreement with the Commonwealth, the funding in relation to disability services in New South Wales will be a total of \$6.4 billion. If do you the mathematics very simply, we currently have a scheme for which the total funding is approximately \$3 billion. It will increase to \$6.4 billion. We also have a scheme in which funding is currently provided to approximately 93,000 clients.

By 2018 as a result of the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS] and increased funding a total of approximately 140,000 clients will be provided funding. That is an additional 50,000 clients who do not currently receive funding who will receive funding. When you put the assertion of falling through the cracks it almost implies that fewer people will be receiving funding than currently is the case. It is not the case. An additional 50,000 will receive funding. I will come to the Tier 2 in a moment but it is important to get on record that 50,000 additional people will be receiving funding. In relation to the Tier 2 supports, the development of a national framework for provision of Tier 2 supports in the NDIS is a key national design priority.

New South Wales is working closely with the Commonwealth and the other State jurisdictions to finalise an agreed approach by mid-2015. For example, as Ms Barham raised earlier, the role of advocacy needs to be considered in the context of the development of a national approach to quality and safeguards and Tier 2. Under the New South Wales heads of agreement with the Commonwealth, New South Wales will not be a residual provider of specialist disability or basic community care services under the NDIS, including Tier 2 services. New South Wales expects Tier 2 services to be delivered as part of the NDIS. As I indicated earlier, our \$3.1 billion contribution to the scheme with the Federal Government bringing \$3.3 billion to the scheme will include funding for Tier 2

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** Will your funding go to the mainstream State services or the National Disability Insurance Agency [NDIA] to provide those services, which you said will be covered for the Tier 2?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** The funding model is based on the State Government providing \$3.1 billion to the NDIA. The Commonwealth will provide \$3.3 billion. That will be a total of \$6.4 billion. That funding will be utilised in relation to the individualised funding packages and it will also be utilised as far as this Government is concerned in relation to the Tier 2 services that will be provided. If I can indicate again from personal experience, I was in the Hunter trial site to celebrate the one year anniversary. As you know, we have only now completed our first year in relation to the NDIS in the first trial site of Newcastle.

Ability Links forms part of the New South Wales contribution to the NDIS. People do not often realise that the NDIS is about more than just providing individual support packages to people. Ability Links NSW operates as a Tier 2 support in the NDIS trial site. It provides information and assists people to make links with mainstream supports and their local community. It is also about other ways to assist people with disability to play a role in society. That will continue.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** I am sure you are aware that some of those services that are supposed to be provided by Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC] are not covered in the NDIS as Tier 2. The KPMG interim report describes as critical the need for clarity on how Tier 2 will be designed, including how it will be linked to the broader human services sector in each jurisdiction. Recommendation 15 from the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme states:

The committee commends the attitude and direction that the South Australian Government is taking in its involvement with Tier 2 and the sector, and recommends that states and territories adopt this approach.

The committee understands that the South Australian Government will ensure that there will be funds to cover Tier 2 services. So we will be doing the same, particularly in the model that will be signed for Tier 2.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Before I ask Ms Taylor to comment in relation to the Tier 2 what has to be remembered is that each trial site in each State is different. It was clear that the Commonwealth wanted the various trial sites within Australia not to be identical trial sites. That was so that when one looks at the entire trial site information coming back over the next two to three years—not just the first six months or the first anniversary—we have the appropriate projections in relation to whether it is city, country, rural or regional. I will ask Ms Taylor to add some information in relation to the Tier 2.

**Ms TAYLOR:** I am not sure there is much I can add to what the Minister has said in response to your question. This is a national design matter where the way in which Tier 2 supports are provided needs to be consistently delivered across Australia. The New South Wales agreement very specifically states that our funding will apply not only to individualised supports but also to the ongoing provision of Tier 2 supports. The design of that is not necessarily the design that is in place within New South Wales. There may be the need for deeper supports in certain aspects of Tier 2 than there are in a range of jurisdictions. As the Minister says, a key contribution for us will be through the local area coordination model of Ability Links to deliver supports to people who may not be eligible for the scheme or who may benefit from a more intensive community-based inclusion strategy. We see this as a priority. Clearly you have done your homework so you may have heard our evidence on that to the standing committee.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** The Minister is saying that he will not do the same as South Australia for Tier 2 funding. Is that right?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Mr Wong, please do not put words in my mouth. What I made clear to you is this: The heads of agreement that New South Wales has with the Commonwealth clearly provides that we contribute the \$3.1 billion, which we will do. That \$3.1 billion includes all funding for Tier 2 supports and it will be administered through the NDIA. So we will be making our contribution. South Australia has a different set-up with the Commonwealth. You cannot compare South Australia. Their funding agreement is different to our funding agreement in some respects. I understand South Australia is considering some contingency plan to provide funding for Tier 2 supports in their State. We have already done it. We are, in fact, ahead of South Australia in that it is included in our funding agreement with the Commonwealth.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** You have paid \$550,000 to Ernst and Young as lead transaction adviser for the New South Wales disability transaction. Given your commitment to put people with disabilities at the heart of decision-making on disability policy, what advice have you received from people with disabilities about your NDIS Enabling Act and how services will be transferred from ADHC to non-government organisations?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** We well and truly discussed all aspects in relation to the enabling Act when it was debated in both Houses of Parliament. You are well aware of the provisions of the enabling Act and that the reasons for the enabling Act were due to the fact that clause 33 of the heads of agreement clearly requires our State to cease providing disability services by 2018. I will ask Mr Alastair Hunter to say a few words but I indicate initially that the Government has committed to a scoping and strategy study to investigate and determine the issues related to options for transition from service delivery.

To assist in the development and delivery of the scoping and strategy study a number of specialist advisers have been appointed. The joint transaction advisers are Ernst and Young and Ironstone Capital to provide commercial and advisory services. The legal adviser is Baker and McKenzie lawyers to provide the specialist legal advice. In line with government transactions, et cetera, we will await the reports from the advisers. We will then continue to meet with the sector and clients and, very importantly, we will continue to meet and discuss with the staff and their union representatives.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** That process has not been done yet.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will ask Mr Hunter to answer that question.

**Mr HUNTER:** Can you repeat that question?

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** Has the process of consulting with all the staff of the sector and people with disabilities been done?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am continuing everywhere I go, everyone I meet—whether it is clients with disabilities, their families, their carers, the non-government sector and staff in the various Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC] officers that I meet, the union representatives I meet—I am continually consulting with them. It is not a process that starts and stops. It is a continuing process that has well and truly started and will continue right through until the transitioning of all services in 2018.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** How much are you paying Newgate Communications for services around the transfer of ADHC services?

**Mr COUTTS-TROTTER:** We would have to take that on notice, but the transfer project is actually funded by the Treasury from the Crown. It is not funded from the agency's appropriation. It comes through the Treasury, but we would need to take that on notice.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** So you are not aware of that. Right?

**Mr COUTTS-TROTTER:** Yes.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** Okay. Do you plan to sell any assets as part of the transfer of ADHC services to the private sector? Assets—if you plan to transfer them. Yes?

**Mr COUTTS-TROTTER:** Mr Wong, I suppose the fundamental point to make about the transfer of disability services is that it is not like other transactions. Other transactions tend to be considerations for a financial return. That is not what this is about. This is about ensuring high-quality services, in particular continuity of service, for our clients. That is the objective that government agencies are working to. There are a set of public assets in New South Wales that support disability services—group homes and other physical properties. We will, through the scoping study and further work, need to look at how we effect in the future a transfer of those assets as part of the process of moving disability services to the non-government sector.

There is a range of policy issues that are yet to be concluded by the Commonwealth and by the National Disability Insurance Agency. The NDIA is just now beginning to have a discussion about the role of accommodation and supported accommodation in the provision of disability services. In other words, it is yet to work through policy on how the NDIS would price that aspect of service delivery. They have not yet settled the position on what price and non-government organisation would get for the cost of owning, maintaining and ultimately replacing physical assets.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** I have no doubt about the intention but I am pretty sure you will be selling some assets. How much money does Ernst and Young estimate will be raised from the leasing or transfer of New South Wales disability services?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Mr Wong, can I ask you not to make assumptions because, at the end of the day, as Minister my role is to absolutely ensure that clients with disabilities obtain the most seamless appropriate transitioning. I want to ensure that services are maintained; I want to ensure that quality is maintained. With all of that I want to ensure that the clients have the choice and control over what services they choose. To simply say that you are sure that I am going to sell the assets is, with all due respect, an assumption that you should not be making because the only thing that I can tell you with a 100 per cent guarantee is that any transfer of assets and any transfer of services will be in the best interests of clients. We will look at all available models and that is what we are currently doing.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** I am sorry, Minister, as we are representing the people of New South Wales, of course we need to know the process of it. I am not saying that you are selling for the sake of obtaining profits but we still need to be sure that the process is being transparent and that we know exactly what this money will be used for. I just want to ask the question: In the estimate of Ernst and Young, did they actually raise or did they have any kind of estimate in regards to how much money is going to be made?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Mr Wong, the process is transparent. The process will remain transparent. We will ensure that any aspects relating to the transfer of any real estate occurs in the best interests of clients. That is what I will do. I am still awaiting the advice. I am still awaiting the scoping study. As you know, the enabling bill requires not only that I as Minister consider this, but that I consider it jointly with the Treasurer. We also have Treasury playing a very active role in relation to this. Once those scoping studies are completed and once advice is obtained we will be in a position to determine what is also required. With all due respect, this is not a question about money. This is not a question about how does the Government obtain the best return in money. This is a question about how does the Government ensure that people with disability obtain the best seamless transition to the best services available.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, did Ernst and Young estimate how much money will be raised from the leasing or transfer? Did they estimate? That is what we are asking. If they did, how much was that estimate?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** What I can tell you very clearly is that I am still awaiting the scoping studies to come back from the experts in relation to all options available.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** So you do not have a report from them on it?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** That is not what I said, Ms Westwood. I am waiting for final details to come back from the experts to advise all of the options that are available. I am looking at each and every option to see what is the best way to transition services to the non-government sector that provides the best outcome for people with disabilities. I make it clear again: As far as I am concerned and as far as this Government is concerned, this is not a question of money. This is a question of what is the best for people with disabilities.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** But we are asking, though, what was the estimate that Ernst and Young provided to you? Did they not provide an estimate? If so, how much was it?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have already answered that question. The secretary made—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** So you do not know.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have already answered that question, Ms Westwood.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** There was no answer to that question.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have already answered that question.

**Mr COUTTS-TROTTER:** Sorry, until the Commonwealth decides how the NDIS prices services that involve bricks and mortar—physical assets—there is no way of putting a value on those assets.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** So you do not have an estimate?

**Mr COUTTS-TROTTER:** Yes.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Okay, thank you.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** Minister, thank you for mentioning transparency. Currently I find that there is no information on the tender website when you are paying Newgate Communications for services.

**Mr COUTTS-TROTTER:** Again, we would have to take that on notice and direct it to our colleagues in the Treasury.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** Minister, will any money raised from the sale or lease of government buildings or services be put back into Tier 2 or mainstream services for people with disabilities?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Mr Wong, the fact that you are asking me that question just demonstrates that you have no concept of how the National Disability Insurance Scheme will work.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** Sorry, Minister, if you do not know the figure—

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** You have no concept of how the funding arrangement is with the Commonwealth. I have made it very clear to you that the total budget of the State will be, under the National Disability Insurance Scheme, \$3.1 billion, which is an increase of \$400 million. We have to provide \$3.1 billion. The Commonwealth will provide \$3.3 billion. A total of \$6.4 billion will be made available to people with disabilities. The transitioning of our services will be in the best interests of people with disabilities, who will obtain this funding.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** I will repeat the question: Have you negotiated the sale, transfer or lease of any ADHC services or properties?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have already answered the question. Madam Chair, can I go back to Ms Barham's earlier question?

**CHAIR:** It is the crossbench time for questioning. Are you happy for the Minister to do that?

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Yes, thank you.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Thank you. I can indicate that New South Wales funds a number of dementia projects for younger people. My department works closely with the Commonwealth in relation to dementia. I am advised that the issue referred to relates to a decision by the Commonwealth to end the payments to eligible dementia payments in its residential aged care facilities. While this is a Commonwealth matter, I am happy to seek further information from the Commonwealth, take the question on notice and come back to you.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Thank you. I want to follow up on a matter that Mr Coutts-Trotter advised on last year about negotiations with the unions and workers in relation to the transfer from the non-government sector, their entitlements, continuation of service, superannuation and those things. Can I have an update on those things?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am happy to indicate a little on that and then to hand it over to the Secretary. A consultative forum has been established between the relevant unions, the Department of Family and Community Services and the New South Wales Office of Industrial Relations to discuss the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]. I can indicate that I have also met with the unions on three occasions, if I count the meeting at Stockton. Six consultative forum meetings were held between December 2013 and April 2014 involving representation from seven unions and Unions NSW.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NSW Enabling) Act protects key entitlements upon movement of staff from the Government to the non-government sector; however, the Act does not deal with all matters of detail related to employment entitlements. Further discussions through the peak consultative forum will be held with unions and staff, as detailed staff entitlements that will apply to staff movements, once we

have considered the various options. I know the Secretary has also undertaken extensive work in relation to this, so I will ask him to add to that.

**Mr COUTTS-TROTTER:** I am not sure what substance I can add, other than to this point: The discussions have been limited in their scope and that scope will only be broadened once the Government has had a chance to consider options for how we sequence and manage a transfer of disability services to the non-government sector over the coming few years. We have had productive discussions through Unions NSW and, through those discussions, the Government has a clear idea of the scope of the things that unions want to discuss or negotiate with government but until the Government has a chance to consider the results of the scoping study and related work, we are not able, through this consultative mechanism, to take discussions beyond a relatively limited set of issues. So we understand one another's position very well. The unions have communicated in some detail the issues that they would want to take into any negotiations the Government may agree to have and that is where it is up to.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** And are you aware that there are still concerns being raised in the community about service provision with a transfer and disadvantage to those people who have worked in that industry for a long time and who might be disadvantaged? What are you doing to get information out there or advice or an update on that issue?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Thank you for that question. As you know, Ms Barham, I have been meeting not only with the clients and their families but I have been meeting also with various staff in Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC]. I can say for the record that ADHC staff are absolutely brilliant and the clear evidence—not only from clients but from staff—is that there is an extraordinary relationship between the clients and the staff. Clients say to me that they do not want to lose the staff; staff say to me that they do not want to lose the clients. The reality is that they will not. And the reality for that is that, if I take every staff member that we have in the Government sector and every staff member that we have in the non-government sector, we are 25,000 employees short between now and 2018.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** That is my next question.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** So I am glad I mentioned that. I do not have concerns that staff and clients will be separated. I have made it clear to the staff that the sector needs them. They are in a terrific bargaining position because the sector cannot afford to lose them and the clients cannot afford to lose them. I also made it clear to the staff that they are the ones needed to find and train the 25,000 and considerable work is being done in relation to that. I can also indicate to you, before we get to the issue of the 25,000, that we have commenced a strategy with the staff called Working Together because that is exactly what is required. We are working together with staff through the various staff engagements. That was launched on 12 June by me as the Minister. Working Together is a commitment to provide staff with information and practical tools that will support them throughout the process. I have to say that since 12 June staff officers of ADHC that I visited have been far more comfortable since the launch of Working Together and have fewer concerns than they had previously.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Can you provide an update or clarification about workforce strategy planning, not only in disability services but also in relation to some work done by Charles Sturt University referring to aged care nursing? What incentives or strategies are being implemented to ensure disability services by 2018 and for the longer term with aged care—getting people into those jobs when we know that some of them have recently, by your Government, had increased costs imposed on them in relation to their training? Why are we not seeing some incentive being provided to get younger people into those much-needed sectors?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Thank you for the question. There are incentives and much work is being done in relation to that. I begin by indicating that under Stronger Together 2—and continued with Ready Together—\$25 million has been allocated over five years for non-Government organisation [NGO] workforce growth and development. That is funding from 2011-12 to 2015-16. This funding is being invested in a range of initiatives, including the workforce recruitment strategy. Key elements of the strategy include Carecareers' online recruitment service—an advertising campaign that has carried more than 25,000 job advertisements and has already attracted more than 50,000 applications. ProjectABLE information workshops have been held and work experience opportunities have been provided for high school and university students. More than 2,300 students have attended more than 200 workshops across New South Wales.

Additionally, the \$2.8 million Organisation Transition Fund is providing transition support grants for individual disability services in preparation for the NDIS. From memory there is also the Industry Development

Fund through the National Disability Services [NDS]—that is \$17 million. To date, \$10.6 million has been expended and the remainder is being committed to capacity building projects. So, Ms Barham, please be assured that it is a priority of not only me as Minister but also of the Government that we need to secure 25,000 additional employees by 2018. When I meet with young people, whether at schools, colleges or universities—in particular around the Illawarra and including my daughters—I tell them that if they want a really good career where they can be guaranteed a job, for many reasons the disability service sector can provide that rewarding career.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Do we have a guarantee that they will be better paid and that those jobs will receive increased payment? You can take that on notice. But last year I asked about the base unit price for self-care activities and the disparity between the ADHC price and the Commonwealth price. I understand there has been an increase, but there is still a shortfall of \$10 between the State and Commonwealth price. Where is that going to go and are we going to see parity by the time we get to 2018?

**Ms TAYLOR:** The base rate that you are referring to is a 9-to-5 weekday rate and not a composite price, which is a point of difference between the way in which we determine our hourly rate for service delivery and the way in which a number of non-government organisations do it. The way in which the NDIS calculates costs across an individual's plan is broken down to quite a level of detail, and prices match the different styles of support that the person needs, and the time and frequency of those supports. There has been an adjustment to that base rate to reflect a more efficient price for the non-government sector and for work done by the National Disability Insurance Agency [NDIA] and National Disability Services, and that price did increase.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Thirty-six?

**Ms TAYLOR:** Above 36—I think it is 38.5—but we might need to take that on notice to give you the exact number. So there are adjustments and we do not believe that there are any direct impacts on workforce attraction driven by prices. There are a number of national projects being driven around market development, and workforce development and attraction that we are also happy to provide you with details of, on notice. National Disability Services [NDS] has been commissioned by the Commonwealth. The Department of Social Services is leading the project on workforce development on behalf of all jurisdictions and NDS is giving some guidance about types of activities that governments might progress in order to grow the workforce to the extent that we need nationally.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** People with disabilities in rural areas sometimes require commuting a long distance to access basic services. What support is available or will support be increased over time?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Absolutely. One of the great advantages and pros of the NDIS for individualised funding is that, as you know Ms Barham, the current position of group funding is where an organisation has so many spaces, full stop. That is it. It is in a location. It is not moving. People have to come to it. Once people with disabilities have individualised funding they can choose the services they want and where they want. It will have a huge impact on services meeting that demand. Services will have to come to people with funding. No longer will it be the person with disability has no choice but to simply go to where the service provider is. I can give you a number of examples.

In Cowra in western New South Wales group home accommodation is also provided by a non-government provider. In this case, House with No Steps receives funding of \$1.3 million to provide accommodation for nine people with disability, including three young people who formerly lived in residential care. When those individuals obtain their individual funding they will determine whether they want to remain with the current service provider. Whether new service providers come within the regions, funding is available for them. I am very confident that as we transition to the individualised funding packages you will see a great difference. Also, in all the different country and regional areas I visit, local councils are looking at providing additional services because individualised funding will be available to be able to use those services.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** In the interim, what level of support is the State providing for those who have to travel? Concerns remain around the costing and pricing of services in respect of distance and allowable travel time to get to pathology or any other specialist services. I am happy for you to take that question on notice.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** If I can say this, between now and the full transitioning, ADHC and the non-government sector will continue to provide services for people with disabilities. The really good news in the last budget is that—



**Ms JAN BARHAM:** But is there any variation to the level of support provided, particularly for those in regions who have to travel?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Absolutely. The really good news is that we were able to obtain an increase in the budget of just over \$200 million for providing services as well as, I believe, more than \$100 million in new capital. So there is another increase of \$300 million to provide services additional to existing services being provided in the budget.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** I move on to the Elder Abuse Helpline.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Yes.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** It is promoted as having a resource centre attached to it. Can you advise on what resources are attached?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Certainly.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Are they publicly available? Will there be an evaluation? In light of recent shocking reports about financial elder abuse, are you doing anything specific on that matter?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Absolutely. I visited the Elder Abuse Helpline centre and, again, if you have not seen it I would be more than happy to arrange for you to see it. It is worth seeing and speaking to the staff. When I was there we celebrated—I always find it difficult using the words "we celebrated"—the 1000th caller. How does one celebrate a thousand cases of abuse? The short answer is that we celebrated the fact that 1,000 people who had been abused had somewhere to go for help. For that reason it was a good celebration. Today, we are at approximately 1,400 callers who have been able to seek assistance.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Is there an evaluation that identifies the types of issues?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Yes, that is what I was coming to. Sadly, the vast majority of the abuse is in relation to what I call economic financial abuse, as you have raised. Even sadder, the vast majority appear to come from a family member or a friend. The vast majority of calls that come in do not actually come from the person being abused; they actually come from a friend or a family member. We have created a resource where, for the first time, a family friend or family member who truly believes or even suspects that some form of abuse is taking place can make that phone call and then we will use all of the necessary resources. Whether those resources are the Guardian, Trustee, FACS or in some immediate situations the police, those resources are available for us to call upon immediately. To date that has been very successful. Again, I would be pleased if you would contact our office to make arrangements for you to visit. I will go with you because I need to visit a second time. It is well worth seeing.

**Ms JAN BARHAM:** Thank you. Can you advise about additional support for providing for Aboriginal people with disabilities and the numbers? Are they increasing? Are we seeing more Aboriginal people contacting for service requirements?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Yes. Thank you for that. That is a timely question. Only last week I again announced and launched further Aboriginal Linkers within country and regional New South Wales by appointing another 27 people to Aboriginal Ability Linker positions. The New South Wales Government has committed more than \$41 million to ensure older Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people with disability and their carers and families receive the supports and services they need, including the cultural provision of 27 Aboriginal Ability Linker positions throughout New South Wales; a range of innovative and flexible programs, such as the Aboriginal flexible respite program, Aboriginal intensive family support program and Aboriginal intensive support program, formerly known as Services Our Way, and Aboriginal Home Care, providing statewide coverage and delivering more than 340,000 hours of service to more than 3,400 Aboriginal clients et cetera.

We had 360 participants attend Yarn Ups, and many expressed a preference for Aboriginal Home Care workers and services to be more flexible and adaptable to changing needs. Aboriginal Home Care was seen as an integral part of their community. Much work is being done and will continue to be done. I am working also very closely with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Victor Dominello, who has provided some fabulous assistance in relation to some suggestions and work regarding assisting Aboriginal communities.

**CHAIR:** Time for questions on the Ageing and Disability portfolio has expired. We will take a break for morning tea.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Could I provide a supplementary answer to Mr Wong? My office has spoken with Treasury and has been advised that contracts are on the tender website, if he would like to look at that.

**(Short adjournment)**

**ANTHONY BODY**, Senior Regional Coordinator, Illawarra and South East, sworn and examined:

**CHAIR:** I now open up budget estimates on the portfolio area of the Illawarra. We have 40 minutes of questions from the crossbench and the Opposition. We will start with the Hon. Helen Westwood.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, my first question goes to the Illawarra Infrastructure Fund. Will you inform the Committee how much of the allocated \$20 million from last year's budget has been handed over to the organisations that were successful in applying for funding under this program?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Thank you for the question. As you are aware, Ms Westwood, following the Port Kembla transaction, the Government allocated \$100 million from Restart NSW for the Illawarra Infrastructure Fund. That was in addition to the \$170 million from the fund for the Princes Highway upgrades, which is a total of \$275 million. The \$100 million applies to the Illawarra Infrastructure Fund. The Illawarra Infrastructure Fund assessment process was overseen by Infrastructure NSW. Successful applicants were announced in December 2013. All projects are jointly funded by the Government and the successful proponents. By that, I mean, in total, in addition to the \$100 million Restart NSW investment from the Government for the 12 projects, the 12 projects will add another \$90 million, so it gives a total value to the Illawarra of \$190 million. The Illawarra has also benefited through Restart NSW funding under the \$130 million Resources for Regions program, which included the \$4.5 million allocation for the Cordeaux Road upgrade at Mt Kembla.

In relation to the disbursement of the funds to the successful applicants, obviously these are significant projects for the region and the Government has to ensure that they are undertaken with substantial due diligence in order to ensure that the projects are delivered on budget and as agreed. These are large-scale, high-worth projects that require a significant amount of planning to ensure that they are done correctly. That is why the New South Wales Government has done its due diligence to ensure that all projects have the necessary approval before they progress. We want to make sure that the projects funded through Restart deliver the best economic and social outcomes possible for the people of the Illawarra. The projects are progressing and Infrastructure NSW is responsible for administering the funding agreements. I understand that the terms of the funding agreements are commercial-in-confidence —

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** How much of the \$20 million from last year's budget has been allocated?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** My understanding is that four projects have now commenced and are shovel-ready. I have attended one of those projects for the sod turning. That was the University of New South Wales iAccelerate. I do not believe that any of the successful applicants has reached the necessary approval stages—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** So that is zero.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** To date, several organisations have claimed funding from the fund, and I understand that they are commercial-in-confidence, as I said earlier.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** How can the allocation of these grants be commercial in confidence? Surely you can tell me the amount. Is it 10 per cent, five, zero, 50? What are we talking about?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I can tell you the total amounts for each project because that is clearly on record. For Kiama Hospital's aged care centre, the total amount is \$8 million.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, I am asking how much of the allocated \$20 million. Can you not give me a percentage?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** As I indicated, several organisations have claimed funding from the fund and that is commercial-in-confidence.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** I think you should just say you do not know. That is clearly the answer. Minister, you said to the community that you were very keen to see this money flow to the successful projects. Are you not embarrassed that it has taken so long and even more embarrassed that you do not know how much of that \$20 million has been allocated?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** To the second part of your question—that I do not know—at no stage have I said that. I told you it is commercial-in-confidence. If you want to make that assumption, that is something for you.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** The percentage of the amount that is allocated could not possibly be commercial-in-confidence. By no stretch of that definition could that be accurate.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Funding for all projects will be made available as the projects meet their relevant milestones. As I have indicated to you, we have made it clear on the site as to the total amount that each project will receive. I have also made it clear in my answers when I have been asked the same questions on many occasions in the Chamber that the funding will flow as each and every successful applicant meets their milestones. That includes obtaining the necessary approvals. These are very large projects. The successful applicants were finalised only some seven months ago. As you are well aware, the Opposition did not even want this fund to exist. It did not want these moneys to go to the Illawarra. It opposed the leasing of Port Kembla from day one. I find it rather strange that now you are screaming—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** It is flogging off the State's assets.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** —about a project that is clearly going in accordance with its time lines, clearly going in accordance with its milestones—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, we are holding you to account, which is our role.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** —and clearly going in accordance with its projections.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** This is your—

**CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** That is what each and every successful applicant is going to do. This Government is not going to simply hand over money before any work commences. It is not going to hand over the money and simply wait. With all due respect, it will not find itself in the same position that your Government found itself with the Rozelle-to-nowhere metro. Your Government spent \$500 million and did absolutely no work.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** If you cannot tell me what proportion has been handed over—

**CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have answered the question.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** —could you then tell the Committee as of today how much of the \$100 million has been allocated?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have indicated to you that, to date, several organisations have claimed funding from the fund. That is commercial-in-confidence and all funding will be made available as the project meets the relevant milestones. The figures are clear. You are well aware there is \$100 million from the fund, and you are also well aware that the successful applicants also have to, in total, inject \$90 million in relation to their proportion. The way that they project their \$90 million is also part of the commercial-in-confidence. It is not just a matter of the funding coming from the \$100 million from Restart NSW. There is also an additional \$90 million funding coming into the Illawarra from those successful applicants.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, can you guarantee that all of the remaining funds will be allocated in this financial year?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I can guarantee you that all of the \$100 million will be paid to the successful applicants on top of the \$90 million that they are injecting into it as each and every milestone is achieved, as each and every necessary approval is obtained. What I can also guarantee you—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** That is a no.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I did not say that and you know that. Please do not put words in my mouth.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Can you guarantee that all of the remaining funds will be allocated in this financial year? It is a yes or no answer.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I can guarantee you that all moneys will be paid upon those projects reaching their milestones.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, given this fund is about supporting local jobs, what have you done as the Minister for the Illawarra to ensure local tradespeople and companies get a fair go when competing for this work?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Thank you for that question. The first thing this Government has been able to do is to ensure there is a Restart Illawarra fund of \$100 million. The first thing that it was able to do was ensure that the leasing of Port Kembla injected substantial moneys into the Illawarra. That is clearly occurring. The successful applicants, many of them local Illawarra corporations, including council, are also part of that area and are well aware of their responsibilities. That is why the community was actively involved in assisting in selecting the successful applicants. It was a community-based program. I am advised that, wherever possible, local suppliers are being sourced. However, the decision is made by the successful applicant. They determine the procurement processes for their respective projects. As you may be aware, Infrastructure NSW is also responsible for managing the fund, and utilising local suppliers was part of the original application process. Funding arrangements between the Treasurer of the New South Wales Government and the successful applicants are currently being finalised as well in relation to achieving their certain milestones.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, did the Government have a procurement policy as part of the funding agreement that required that local tradespeople and companies get preference?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No. You have to understand very clearly, Ms Westwood—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** That is all right. That answers it. Thanks, Minister.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No, I am answering the question. You have to understand the scenario. A successful applicant, in particular a local successful applicant, whether it is the local university or the local council, will do whatever is possible to utilise local services, they will utilise local employees. At the same time, they have to be able to deliver the project in the best possible efficient manner. It is not appropriate for the Government to be telling a successful applicant how they should undertake the delivery of the project. What is relevant is to ensure that the funding goes to them as and when they reach the milestones. You also have to accept the fact that any spending of close to \$200 million in the Illawarra, in addition to another \$170 million, has a major flow-on effect in relation to all other organisations within that area. Bringing an extra \$200 million to the Illawarra through Restart will help to create jobs and bring wealth to the area, increase infrastructure and provide further facilities. The ultimate winners from that will clearly be the people of the Illawarra.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, I am sure that the local businesses and companies, particularly the trade companies, would tell you that they are very competitive and provide good quality services. There is no reason why they could not have been given preference.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am well aware that those great providers in the local area have very strong connections with the successful applicants and they have strong connections with the university and council. It was imperative to ensure that the funding was available. It was imperative to ensure that there was a Restart Illawarra fund. The Opposition clearly opposed this fund; it did not want to see this fund created. I am sure that the local service providers are far happier that we succeeded in creating this fund and that we did not actually take the Opposition's view of not having a fund at all.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, given the evidence at the Independent Commission Against Corruption that Hunter Liberal members of Parliament have received cash from prohibited donors, can you guarantee that you did not receive an illegal donation at the last election?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am a member of the upper House. I do not receive funding for my election. I was not even part of the last election; I was part of the election in 2007. I do not quite understand why you are asking me that question.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** I think some of the evidence before the Independent Commission Against Corruption tells us that members of the upper House—

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** You asked me about the last election. I was not part of the last election.

**CHAIR:** Order! I remind the member that this is the budget estimates process dealing with the Minister's expenditure in his portfolio-related areas.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** I think it is reasonable to ask these questions. The people of New South Wales are really interested in donations and whether or not all members of Parliament, particularly Ministers, have complied with the laws.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I can assure Ms Westwood that I have never accepted an illegal donation and I have at all times complied with the relevant rules and laws both prior to being appointed a Minister some 12 months ago and since being appointed a Minister, if that is what the member is trying to seek from me. For the record, I was not a candidate in the 2011 election.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** You mentioned that you were not a candidate but were you aware in the lead-up to the last election the New South Wales Liberals promised 60 literacy and numeracy teachers for the Illawarra, as announced by Barry O'Farrell in March 2011? To date only a handful has been delivered for local schools. As the Minister for the Illawarra what do you know about your Government's significant election commitment for literacy and numeracy teachers for the region?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** The Learning Management and Business Reform [LMBR] Program will support educational reform in New South Wales, improve educational outcomes and deliver better services and value to staff, students, parents and the community. The 229 initial implementation schools for the LMBR received the first component of the new Student Administration and Learning Management [SLAM] and Student Wellbeing systems on 6 September 2013. In November 2013 public schools received the second component of the SLAM solution, student management and the new Schools Finance Solution [SAP]. To support the 229 initial implementation schools a range of actions, including additional funding for relief, additional training and more resources were implemented in consultation with the Primary Principals' Association and New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council to support them build their confidence and capability in using the new system.

Taking action and delivering critical support where it is most needed is at the heart of the Government's Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan, a commitment of \$261 million over five years. A plan of action based on the key recommendations of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Literacy and Numeracy, chaired by Dr Ken Boston, AO, is providing an evidence-based prescription for improvement. Four critical areas have been identified by the advisory group as requiring attention: a focus on quality instructional leadership; early identification of how children are progressing; tailoring a specific program of learning to each child's needs; and using tiered interventions where remediation in literacy and numeracy is needed. Improving and changing teaching practice to focus on the needs of the individual student is fundamental to the success of our plan.

In 2014 more than 300 government, Catholic and independent schools have been targeted to receive support under our action plan. These schools are facing complex challenges; the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] results of those schools indicate they are in the bottom quarter of performance in literacy and numeracy. With the appointment of 140 instructional leaders in public schools, the foundation stone of the action plan, these schools are being further supported in their efforts to improve the literacy and numeracy performance of students. An additional 107 public schools—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, the question was about the 60 teachers that were committed to the Illawarra.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** —in 2014 are to receive direct support from instructional leaders, bringing the total number of public schools to be supported through the action plan to 199.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** Minister—

**The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER:** Point of order: The time for those questions has expired.

**The Hon. ERNEST WONG:** But my question is about teachers. How many teachers?

**CHAIR:** Order! I uphold the point of order. The time for questions in the 17-minute allocation has now expired.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, in your role as Minister for the Illawarra I assume that close relations with the Wollongong City Council would be important?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Yes, not only with Wollongong City Council but also with the other councils in the four local government areas, educational institutions and businesses—basically everyone.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Talking with major councils in the Illawarra before major government decisions are made that might impact upon them would be a core part of your job as Minister, would it not?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Talking to the councils, receiving feedback from councils and the Illawarra Advisory Panel is part of what I consider to be my duty as Minister for the Illawarra. I agree that reporting those to Cabinet is also part of that.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** In doing that you would know that the Wollongong City Council is now lifting itself out of the stink of corruption which surrounded it under the previous Labor administration and the Table of Knowledge. It is finally pulling itself out of that stink of corruption, is it not?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I must say that has been brought to my attention by others on numerous occasions. I like to think that Wollongong City Council, under mayor Gordon Bradbery, is working towards what is best for Wollongong in the future. If I can put it simply: I try to take a very positive role in my relationship with Wollongong City Council and ask likewise of the council to try and move in a positive way.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** What really brought Wollongong City Council to its knees in 2008, 2009 and 2010 was that close relationship that developed between the developers in town and a number of the senior planning staff. The Table of Knowledge epitomised that, did it not?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I do not have personal knowledge of that. I am well aware of the reports that have come out in relation to this, as you are. Do I have personal knowledge of this? Did I have personal involvement at the time of this? Clearly not. Like you, I read much in the papers and, like you, I saw the information that came out about it.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** You would have travelled down there and spoken to residents and they would have expressed their mortification at what was happening.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Clearly there were some who spoke about it; clearly there are some who still speak about it. As a Minister of a regional portfolio I have no budget allocated but I do have a role to argue for what is best for the Illawarra.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, I do not mean to cut you off, but one of those key jobs you have is to look out for the long-term interests of the Illawarra, protect the reputation of the Illawarra, protect the reputation of Wollongong City Council and Shellharbour City Council, and be proactive in that regard, is it not?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I do not believe that my job is to protect the reputation of the Wollongong City Council. I really do not. I think that is asking too much of a Minister for any region. At the end of the day, it is the job of the Wollongong City Council to protect its reputation. It is the job of the Wollongong City Councillors to ensure that they comply with all relevant aspects of all of the various codes of conduct. It is for the Minister for Local Government to have the oversight responsibility in relation to not only the Wollongong City Council but also any other council. I do not have a day-to-day observation or control role over Wollongong City Council.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** But, Minister, when matters are being considered in Cabinet which would potentially have a very substantial reputational impact on the Wollongong City Council, given what a torrid time it has had over the last few years, it is your job as Minister for the Illawarra to stand up and say, "No, we cannot go down this path; we have to protect the institutions like Wollongong City Council"? That is your job, is it not? That is why you are a Minister.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Let me start with the first part of your question. Any discussions in Cabinet are obviously covered by Cabinet-in-confidence. I do not propose to go down that path. As I said to you before, my job as the Minister for the Illawarra is to advocate for the best interests of the region and to advocate for the best interests of the people within the region. That is my job. I am carefully considering what Mr Shoebridge is saying—please do not take it that I am not.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** No, I am not; I am listening to the Minister's answers.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I just cannot see how my role as a regional Minister is to have, in a sense, an oversight control or an oversight involvement with a specific council in relation to their reputation. To answer the second part of the question, if I ever became aware that there had been some corrupt conduct or some inappropriate conduct by any council then I would bring that immediately to the attention of the relevant authorities—and that may not be Cabinet; there may in fact be other relevant authorities to whose attention I should immediately bring it.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** And the Minister would want to ensure that Government decision-making did not create integrity risks for Wollongong City Council, would he not?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I would like to think that any decisions made by Government do not create any risks to local councils.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Did the Minister speak to anyone at Wollongong City Council before your Government decided to support the bill from the Shooters and Fishers Party to double corporate representation at local council level, given that sorry history of corporate developers corrupting the Wollongong City Council?

**The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER:** Point of order: Questions at budget estimates should be related to the Minister's responsibility as the Minister and not just general political discourse. I cannot see what relevance that last question has to the Minister's portfolio.

**CHAIR:** Order! The point of order raised by the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner is accurate in that this is about budget expenditure from the Illawarra portfolio and not some general political commentary on the responsibilities for overseeing that area. I ask Mr Shoebridge to broaden his questioning to other areas in relation to the Illawarra and areas the Minister has supervision of.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** The Minister says it is important that he consults with the council on important decision-making. I am asking if he consulted with the council on this important area of decision-making. He has no budget—if this budget estimates is only about the budget allocations then we may as well end it now because the Minister has not a dollar to spend in his budget.

**CHAIR:** Order! I have been listening to the Minister's answers. Just because Mr Shoebridge might not like the way the Minister is answering the question that does not mean the Minister has not answered the question or actually contributed significantly to the answer.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I have never taken an objection to the Minister's answers. I think he has been answering the questions in a forthright fashion, but I am now exploring where that takes us.

**CHAIR:** Order! I suggest that the member broaden some of his line of questioning to ensure that we cover the full range of the Illawarra region and not just a particular interest of the local government area.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Madam Chair, you cannot direct where I ask the questions. This is relevant to the Illawarra portfolio and I ask the Minister to answer my question on what consultations he has had with Wollongong City Council about this important reform that has such an impact on a key institution in the Illawarra.



**CHAIR:** Order! I propose that we continue with this budget estimates process in a way that brings good answers and dialogue to the discussion. I encourage the Committee to continue this process in a positive way.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I note your observations but my question is in order and I ask the Minister to answer it.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I do not mean to be rude but I ask Mr Shoebridge to repeat the question.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Given the past history of corruption of Wollongong City Council and the role of the corporate developers in corrupting the council, did the Minister talk to Wollongong City Council about the Government's support for the bill from the Shooters and Fishers Party, proposing to double the influence of corporate voting on local government, before the Government came on board with the bill from the Shooters and Fishers Party?

**The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER:** Point of order: I believe that is a question for the Local Government portfolio estimates hearing, if any hearing. I do not see what it has to do with this particular budget estimates hearing.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** We have already had this discussion: These objections are designed to eat up time and protect the Minister from having to answer the question. This is a simple question.

**The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER:** To the point of order: This is not about taking up time; it is about whether questions are relevant to this particular budget estimates hearing and this particular Minister.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** What could be more relevant to the Minister for the Illawarra's portfolio than proper communications with the largest council right in the middle of it?

**The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER:** It is a question about local government not the Illawarra portfolio.

**CHAIR:** Order! I accept the point of order taken by the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner that that question is relevant to the Minister for Local Government not the Minister for the Illawarra. But it is up to the Minister for the Illawarra to answer in the way that he sees fit.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Firstly, my understanding of the bill from the Shooters and Fishers Party which is now before the Legislative Council is that it relates to the City of Sydney. I do not believe the bill relates to the City of Wollongong.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** It has a regulation-making power to allow it to be applied across every local government area in New South Wales. Is the Minister not aware of that?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am aware of that, Mr Shoebridge, but you asked me about the bill and the bill relates to the City of Sydney.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Is the Minister aware that the Minister for Local Government has said that he would roll it out to Wollongong City Council? Is one part of government not talking to the other? Is that the problem here?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No, that is not the problem. Mr Shoebridge asked me about the bill. It relates to the City of Sydney—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** And the regulation-making power allows it to be expanded across the State. Your Minister has said he is considering using it for Wollongong.

**CHAIR:** Order! The Minister is answering question. Just because it may not be the answer that Mr Shoebridge wishes does not mean that Mr Shoebridge can continue to speak over the top of the Minister.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I respectfully submit, Mr Shoebridge, that the question you are raising should be put to the Minister for Local Government. Mr Shoebridge has asked me a question in relation to my understanding and my involvement. My understanding and my involvement is that the bill before the Legislative Council relates to the City of Sydney.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I take it from that that the Minister has had no conversations or discussions at all with Wollongong City Council about this proposal because the Minister does not think it is his job. Is that what I am to take from this?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No, I have made it clear that I have considered Mr Shoebridge's question carefully. I understand why he is asking the question—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** But the Minister has decided not to answer it.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** No, I am answering it. I am trying to be as forthright—to use the words of Mr Shoebridge—as possible. I appreciate the way that Mr Shoebridge has asked me these questions. I am saying that I see the bill before the Legislative Council as relating to the City of Sydney. I really do believe that Mr Shoebridge is drawing a very long bow in trying to now tie up issues of past dealings with Wollongong City Council that have come before the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the current council and the bill relating to the City of Sydney.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, last year you said in answer to questions that it would be ideal if a single coordinated cooperative deer control program was utilised in the Illawarra area with the primary objective of controlling these animals. Since then there has been no advance in that regard and feral deer continue to be a significant problem in the Illawarra. What is the Government doing about this?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I will take that on notice. I would say that really is a question for the relevant Minister but I am happy to take it on notice, refer it to the relevant Minister and come back to you.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** You are aware of the increasing size of the problem with feral deer in the Illawarra. You would see the signs every time you drive down there and probably confront feral deer when you are driving at night.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have seen signs, absolutely. I am also aware of the issues and I thank you for having raised them with me previously. I drive down to the Illawarra and back at least once if not twice a week. To this day I have not seen a single deer.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Perhaps you need to get off the main roads and visit the suburbs where you will see electric fences that people have put in their front yards to stop deer eating their gardens. Have you not seen that, Minister?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I have seen electric fences.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** You can just shine a torch across and see all the deer eyes.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Mr Shoebridge, you have asked me a question. I travel every aspect of the Illawarra. I can tell you the car has done more than 32,000 kilometres in just 10 months because of the amount we travel back and forth. But I am being honest with you. I have actually never seen a deer in the Illawarra. I would love to see one but I have not.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Have you spoken to anyone who has pointed out the substantial concern they have with feral deer in the Illawarra, or has it passed you by entirely?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Apart from you, no. The only person who has ever raised the issue of feral deer is you.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Perhaps you should get out more, Minister.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Mr Shoebridge, trust me, I get out a lot.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** When are you expecting the Restart Illawarra fund to next make an allocation?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** As indicated previously, and I know you were not here, we have answered that rather extensively—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** My question is really just when it will be.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** All of the \$100 million together with the \$90 million that the applicants themselves need to insert will be allocated once the appropriate milestones have been achieved in relation to each and every one of the projects. My responsibility is to have ensured that when the milestones are reached the funding as controlled by Infrastructure NSW, which will ensure that the funding is paid, will occur.

What is important is that the \$100 million Restart funding was secured. The process was appropriate, transparent and very community based. An additional \$90 million has been put in by the applicants. The funding is now there, it exists and it is a matter for each and every one of the applicants to achieve their milestones. These are huge projects. The applicants were only notified, I believe, in December last year that they were the successful applicants. It is not going to happen overnight but what is important to the Illawarra is that it will happen. It is happening and we are starting to achieve those initial sod turnings. I am happy to attend each and every one.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** What is the membership of the body that has been assigned the role of determining the successful applicants?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** The initial advisory panel in relation to how the Restart commenced and how the successful applicants were determined no longer has a role. The fund itself is administered by Infrastructure NSW, in my understanding.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** The advisory panel has now been disbanded and the further decisions are being made by Infrastructure NSW?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** Treasury, Department of Premier and Cabinet [DPC], Office of Finance and local representatives made up that original body. That body no longer has a role now in the actual administration of it after the successful applicants were determined through Treasury, DPC, Office of Finance and a number of local representatives. Their role was to work with the community to come down to the successful applicants which I as Minister then ticked off on.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, could you take it on notice to provide the detail of the membership of the advisory body and the decision-making process that will follow over the next few months?

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I am happy to do that, Mr Shoebridge.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister Ajaka and officers, for your attendance today. This concludes your budget estimates hearing.

**The Hon. JOHN AJAKA:** I thank you, Madam Chair, and all members for the courteous way in which questions were asked. I also thank Hansard and the Secretariat.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**