

Question Taken on Notice

Response

<p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: —and you gave that particular date. In fact, on that date I was on leave and there was an acting Minister. The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: He had been chasing me for a couple of days. The Hon. DON HARWIN: I do not have a clear recollection of the events that you are talking about so I think the best thing to do in all the</p>	<p>A formal response has been provided to Mr Searle's correspondence.</p>
<p>The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: That appears to have been discovered and rectified. My question to anybody who is here present is: Who was responsible for that purported action?The purported reduction of the obligation on Ridgелands from \$5 million down to half a million dollars. The Hon. DON HARWIN: After consultation with the Secretary, and given that it was a decision of a staff member of the Division of Resources and Geoscience, I am going to ask the Acting Deputy Secretary, Division of Resources and Geoscience, to comment. Mr WRIGHT: In terms of that decision may I say that as Acting Deputy Secretary I was not part of the division at the time that action occurred. I suppose my preference is not to name the particular individual officer today. I can certainly provide information to you about that officer out of session, if that is okay? The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Sure. Mr WRIGHT: My understanding is that that officer may have inadvertently given Ridgелands the impression that they could reduce the payment into the community benefit fund. That was not his intention. His intention was to modify Ridgелands' work program, which is the program</p>	<p>The Department can provide no further information without breaching the privacy of the staff member involved. However, there was no variation to the condition. A subsequent investigation by the Resources Regulator has been conducted. The Division of Resources and Geoscience confirms between October 2017 and February 2018, and following the commencement of the Regulator's investigation, Ridgелands deposited five million dollars into the community fund over three payments comprising \$500,000 on 1 October 2017, \$500,000 on 25 January 2018, and \$4 million on 9 February 2018.</p>

<p>The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, let's cut to the chase. I have raised some very serious matters with what I thought was the relevant body. Months later all I have got is a phone call from an acting departmental head who said the Minister has said to contact me. The contact was very unsatisfactory—I am actually surprised Mr Ray is not here this afternoon, given that he was at the estimates hearing this morning. Can you explain to me: If it was not you, are you saying that it is Minister Roberts who gave the direction?</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: That is why earlier, Mr Searle, I said that I would take that aspect of your question on notice. I might be wrong, but I do</p>	<p>A formal response has been provided to Mr Searle's correspondence.</p>
<p>The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Can you explain why, months later, your administration is in such a shocking state that you cannot answer a letter by even giving an acknowledgement? Is that the state of the competence of your administration? If it is not a cover-up are you just not up to your job?</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: I have been outlining, as has the Acting Deputy Secretary, some of the changes that have been made. I made it quite clear that I was not happy with what has happened. I do not recall having seen this letter before, I do not recall having had the conversation with</p>	<p>A formal response has been provided to Mr Searle's correspondence.</p>
<p>The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I have written three times to what I thought was the relevant person in your agency. I do not want to hear about what you have done to improve it, I want to know how it came about that none of you can answer my question even today.</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: What I will undertake to do is not just to respond on notice but to reply to your letters within seven days. That is</p>	<p>A formal response has been provided to Mr Searle's correspondence.</p>

<p>The CHAIR: Do you have the statistics relating to how many businesses and households have been disconnected from electricity in the past financial year in New South Wales?</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: I will invite the Acting Deputy Secretary to respond.</p> <p>Ms HOLE: The disconnection numbers for the past financial year are still being sorted through by the Australian Energy Regulator.</p> <p>The CHAIR: Is it 10,000, 20,000, 100,000, 200,000 or a million? That is just residential. I would like the business numbers. We know that businesses are struggling immensely with the increased power bills and I thought that would be at the forefront of people's minds.</p> <p>Ms HOLE: Absolutely. Pleasingly, until 2016-17 disconnection numbers have been going down. Unfortunately, there have been data reporting issues for 2017-18 and we are waiting for the final numbers to come through.</p> <p>The CHAIR: What issues have popped up suddenly?</p> <p>Ms HOLE: Just the number of the retailers reporting through.</p> <p>The CHAIR: It is probably because they have not got enough electricity.</p> <p>The Hon. WALT SECORD: Let her take it on notice.</p> <p>The CHAIR: I still want the results, obviously.</p> <p>Ms HOLE: I understand.</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: We are happy to take that on notice and</p>	<p>The Department of Planning and Environment does not collect data on the number of disconnections from retailers. Instead, energy retailers are obliged under the National Energy Retail Law to provide accurate and timely data on their performance to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER). The AER publishes a retail market performance report which contains data collected from retailers each quarter on a range of indicators including disconnections.</p> <p>The AER has recently removed the data for the 2017/18 period due to errors in the data provided by AGL. The AER expects to release all quarterly reports for the 2017/18 financial year in December 2018.</p>
<p>The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: To draw a line under my previous line of questioning to the Resources Regulator, on receipt of my correspondence you fed it back into the departmental correspondence system. Is that what you are saying?</p> <p>Ms SHEARER: Yes.</p> <p>The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Dr Develin, is it your evidence that you have no idea what happened to my correspondence at that point? Dr</p> <p>DEVELIN: I have not seen that correspondence before today.</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: We have undertaken to give you a response</p>	<p>A formal response has been provided to Mr Searle's correspondence.</p>

Mr YOUNG: Sydney Water has been a strong supporter of Streamwatch, as has been noted, for a long time. It is true that we went into partnership with the Australian Museum and we have been strong sponsors of that program during that time. I am aware that in the past 12 months the Australian Museum came to us and said it was not looking to continue with Streamwatch. I said we could extend it for another 12 months and look at options in the future for the program. That seemed to me to be a reasonable approach, given the longevity of the program and the support it has received.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: When did this conversation occur about extending it?

Mr YOUNG: I have not got the details in front of me, but I am aware of this from about four or five months ago. It came forward as a discussion.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: A bit has happened since then. On 9 August the manager of Digital Collections and Citizen Science, Mr Flemons, wrote to all 50 groups and about 200 volunteers across the State to tell them that it will be axed next year and that the reason it has been axed is—let me quote it directly—"... because of significant improvement in waterway health over the past three decades." It has been scrapped because the Sydney water is so clean, according to him. Minister, do you support that statement that the program is no longer needed because Sydney water is so clean?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: It is a matter of record that a lot of our streams are getting cleaner, Mr Secord, but I would like to take the question on notice since there are no Australian Museum staff here for me to respond to you directly.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: What do you say to Wendy Oaks, who has been a long-term volunteer with Streamwatch, who said on 9 August that it was "galling" to see the Australian Museum given \$50 million to host the Tutankhamun exhibition

Since 2012, Streamwatch has been managed by the Australian Museum with funding from Sydney Water. This funding is committed through to 30 June 2019. Following a review of the Museum's Citizen Science programs in 2017, it determined that the Streamwatch program is not a strategic fit long-term given the Australian Museum is not involved in water quality issues.

To ensure an orderly transfer, the Australian Museum has held discussions with other not-for-profit scientific and environmental organisations about hosting Streamwatch to ensure the program continues to monitor the quality of Sydney's waterways. The Museum remains committed to identifying a new organisation to take over the management of the Streamwatch program in July 2019.

<p>The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Minister, in relation to the person in your department responsible for the Ridgелands incident—the reduction in the obligation—are you aware of whether that person has any close personal relationship to any present or former worker for Ridgелands or to Ridgелands itself? If you are not, and if no-one in the room is, can you address that?</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: I am certainly not aware of it myself.</p> <p>The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Can I ask that you to address that in the letter?</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: I am sorry?</p> <p>The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Can I ask that you address that in the letter that you are going to send me in seven days, or can you address it now?</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: I will just see if the Acting Deputy Secretary for Resources and Geosciences wants to deal with it, otherwise I will naturally deal with it in the correspondence.</p> <p>Mr WRIGHT: My information is that that particular officer has no</p>	<p>The officer referred to has no connection in any way, shape or form with Ridgелands.</p>
<p>Mr JUSTIN FIELD: In 2016-17 there was 114 megalitres per day leaking out of the Sydney Water system. Do you have a figure for 2017-18.</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: Could you repeat the question?</p> <p>Mr JUSTIN FIELD: In 2016-17, according to the Water Conservation Report, 114 megalitres was being lost in leakage from the system. Do you have an updated figure for 2017-18, the most recent annual figure?</p> <p>The CHAIR: I note the time is up and I have been generous with my time but after the Minister answers I will put a couple of quick questions on notice.</p> <p>The Hon. DON HARWIN: I think in all the circumstances, given the time has expired, the best thing is for us is to take that on notice.</p>	<p>The leakage for 2017-18 – 129.5 ML/day.</p> <p>The rise in leakage has been triggered by the prolonged period of hotter and drier weather over the last 18 months. This has resulted in soils shrinking and cracking, leading to an increased number of leaks in the network. This is a problem faced by water utilities around the world.</p> <p>Sydney Water has taken immediate action in response to the increase in water leaks by recruiting additional staff and supplementing internal teams with contract crews. Sydney Water is finalising a detailed review of its existing strategy to minimise leakage. This will result in a range of targeted, cost effective leakage reduction activities being progressively implemented over the coming months. Sydney Water remains one of the top performers in leakage management across the world.</p>

~~The CHAIR: Minister, can you take on notice. President of the Power House Museum board of trustees Professor Barney Glover said he believed the museum's collection could be spread across both sites, that is Parramatta and Ultimo. Professor Glover stated, "More than 90 per cent of the exhibits are not on display at the moment, we want to see more of that on display." I believe that this would provide an incredible opportunity for Sydney and Western Sydney based residents. Minister, will the Government consider utilising both sites for the museum?~~

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I will respond to that because 98½ per cent of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences collection is in storage. The MAAS already has three sites where you can see the collection: The Sydney Observatory, currently at Ultimo and as part of the Government's announced plans there will be a museum of design and fashion remaining at Ultimo where you will be able to see the collection, plus the new museum at Parramatta where you will also be able to see the collection and, finally, an expanded museum discovery centre at Castle Hill where you can currently see the collection in a different format as essentially a storage facility. What he is suggesting is exactly what we will be doing. Much more of the collection will be seen at four different sites.

The CHAIR: What percentage? Professor Glover is asking for 90 per cent. Take that on notice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Yes.

The Museum has advised that it has over 500,000 items in its collection. In 2017-18, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences had an average of 2.9 per cent of its collection on display across all venues (totalling 9,132 items); this is an increase from 2.3 per cent in 2016-17. The Museum advises that this is consistent with similar institutions across Australia and internationally. The flagship campus in Parramatta, along with the potential for a new fashion and design museum in Ultimo, provides the opportunity for the Museum to present more of its collection to the public. The Museum has advised that the exact percentage of items won't be known until the new museum in Parramatta opens. Also, the Museum Discovery Centre expansion aims to make more of those items in the collection not on display, more readily accessible to the public.

The CHAIR: I ask you take these questions on notice: Small businesses are still laying off workers because of electricity costs. Over the last 12 months what has the New South Wales Government done to reduce electricity costs for small businesses? How are you making energy affordable for small businesses? In the last 12 months what support has the New South Wales Government offered to small business to ensure costs do not continue to cripple resulting in laying off workers?

On 20 August 2018, the NSW Government announced it is investing a further \$72 million into energy efficiency programs. These measures will help to cut power bills for businesses across New South Wales, and will be funded by the Climate Change Fund.

Under this package, \$35 million will go to supporting manufacturing and energy intensive businesses with energy efficiency. The program will help businesses stay competitive by reducing their energy costs, including assistance for around 250 manufacturing businesses to install energy efficient equipment, such as upgraded boilers, refrigeration and metering technology to help track their energy use.

These equipment upgrades will help manufacturers save on average \$80,000 a year on their energy bills. In addition, around 1300 businesses will be provided with world-leading energy advice and training.

On 3 September 2017, the Government announced its Energy Affordability Package. This package provides small businesses with discounts to upgrade equipment, energy efficient lighting upgrades, and provide energy management training and follow up support so businesses know how they can save energy and money.

Businesses can register their interest by visiting the Power to Save website powertosave.nsw.gov.au.