

Answers to Questions on Notice

Question 1

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, how much is the Local Land Services travel budget this year compared to last year? If you don't know, could you please take it on notice?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: The specific travel budget I will have to take on notice. I will come back to the Committee

ANSWER

I am advised that the LLS Budget for travel in 2022/23 was \$2.5m. The forecast and allocated LLS Travel Budget for 2023/2024 is \$2.5m.

Question 2

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We've got 18 seconds left. Are you going to be attending the LLS board meeting in Sydney tomorrow? Yes or no?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I believe I am, but I'd have to check my diary. I apologise. I don't have it memorised.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you take that on notice, just so we're clear? You're back to Sydney for that but not for today. Thanks for clarifying.

ANSWER

Yes, Minister Moriarty attended the LLS Board Meeting in Sydney on December 14.

Question 3

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you met with the Minister for Local Government in regard to the legislation?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I would have to check. We've certainly had conversations.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Could you take that on notice?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'm just going to finish the answer, if that's okay. Sorry, Ms Hurst.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I think you said you'd have to check, so my question was can you please take that on notice?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: We will have had conversations—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Can you take it on notice whether you've met with the Minister for Local Government in regard to puppy farm legislation?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: We will have had conversations, as I do with all of my colleagues. I've said to you already that I'll check, and I'm happy to come back. I don't know that there would be—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Can I confirm that you are taking that on notice?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: —a specific item in my diary in relation to discussing puppy farms. We will have had discussions with my colleague, and I will continue to do that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, can I confirm that you are taking that on notice?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Yes, I'm really trying to answer the question, Ms Hurst.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, you said that you needed to go and check, so my question then is will you confirm that the question has been taken on notice?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: What I have said is that, yes, I will check and I will come back.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Yes. It's taken on notice. Thank you.

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: But what I'm saying to you is that I would have had ongoing discussions with my colleague the Minister for Local Government because we cross over on a lot of these issues. So whether there is an entry in my diary that specifically is a meeting about this, I am not sure. I have said that I will check and come back, but I have regular discussions with colleagues [disorder]—

ANSWER

The Minister has had a number of discussions with her colleague, the Minister for Local Government.

Question 4

The CHAIR: Minister, I might start with the Kamay Ferry Wharves. Your department did not support the project initially because of various reasons that included threatened marine species as well as the fact it is going straight through a recreational fishing haven. At budget estimates last month, Minister Haylen agreed that it was a dog of a project, but she had made the final decision to proceed with it in May. Did she or any member of your ministerial or department staff consult with yourself or your ministerial or department staff when considering whether to proceed or not with this project?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'm not sure. I am happy to check, Mr Banasiak. There may well have been discussions at a departmental level in relation to that. I don't know, but I will check that, and I will come back.

ANSWER

The Kamay Ferry Project Proposal is deemed a State Significant Infrastructure (SSI) Project and the final determination for SSI is made by Department of Planning after the required public exhibition. DPI Fisheries provided comment to Department of Planning on Final Conditions of Approval in September 2022.

Question 5

The CHAIR: Thank you. It was also confirmed last month that there actually won't be a ferry service, but, in the words of Mr Collins, this will be an excellent resource for fishers. Given there is no fishing facility for disabled fishers in Botany Bay, and Maritime have confirmed with stakeholders that they have no money, what is the budget in Fisheries to provide disabled access for fishermen in Botany Bay, particularly on this wharf?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Sure. In relation to the specifics that you put to me about comments from Transport—I think—and Maritime, the truth is I'm not sure of the details from a transport or maritime perspective, because that's obviously not part of my remit. But I will get that for you, and I will come back, because I understand the nature of the question. In relation to access for making fishing more accessible and particularly in relation to disability access, that is something that we are certainly committed to. We actually have a round of—

ANSWER

Applications for the most recent round of Recreational Fishing Trust grants closed on 18 December 2023. These grants provide funding for projects to improve and promote recreational fishing, and the most recent round included a focus on encouraging projects to boost fishing opportunities for people with disabilities, such as fishing platforms in popular fishing spots. There is no funding set aside in the Recreational Fishing Trust for particular locations, such as Botany Bay, and projects are considered on their merits wherever they are across the State. The Recreational Fishing Trusts are accountable to the community on how funds are spent, and it is anticipated that a future round of grant applications will be opened later in 2024. A total of 11 applications to make fishing more welcoming for people with a disability were received in the recent round. The Government has also allocated \$4.9m to address the full suite of fishing election commitments which includes improving access for people with disability, among the other election commitments on fishing.

Question 6

The CHAIR: Can I just redirect back to the wharf. Given that this is a \$78 million wharf that won't have a ferry and based on the design has only a small section for maybe half a dozen fishermen to stand on and fish and has maybe space for three boats to tie up, do you agree with Mr Collins public statement that says this will be a great resource for fishermen? Do you think \$78 million for three boats and half a dozen fishermen is money well spent?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Mr Banasiak, I'm not familiar with the comments made by Mr Collins, who is, of course, in the department of transport—Transport for NSW, sorry.

The CHAIR: Prima facie, would you think that is a good use of resources?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: The work of Transport for NSW, in relation to whether there's a ferry or the wharf, that is in their responsibility. I don't have the details, but, as I have said to you, I will check, particularly if there have been any discussions between my department and Transport and/or Maritime. I have said to you, I'll check that and come back to you. What I would like to finish saying though—with respect—is in relation to disability access, that is a very key piece of work for us, and we are very keen to make sure that fishing is more accessible. There is a round of the fishing trust open for applications now, and we've encouraged people to apply for projects that fit within that remit, because it is important that we make fishing as accessible as possible. So that is something that is a priority for us, and I'm keen to see us develop better access in this space.

ANSWER

I am advised that the Department of Primary Industries – Fisheries has not been advised of any changes to the scope or delivery of the wharf or Ferry services. DPI has an ongoing role in providing advice to Transport for NSW and the Department of Planning with respect to the implementation of the Marine Biodiversity Offset strategy (MBOS), which is a condition of the approval for the project.

Question 7

The CHAIR: Are you also aware that part 5B of the Forestry Act requires both you, the Minister for forestry, and the Minister for the Environment to sign off on any changes to the CIFOA?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Yes, correct.

The CHAIR: Are you aware at all of a ministerial direction sent from your colleague Minister Sharpe to EPA advising or directing them to make, in her words, "necessary improvements to the CIFOA"?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: So the question is am I aware if Minister Sharpe has sent something to the EPA? I'll have to check and I'll come back to you.

ANSWER

I am advised that information relating to the CIFOAs are available on the [Coastal integrated forestry operations approvals \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/coastal-integrated-forestry-operations-approvals) website.

Question 8

The CHAIR: Can I just go back to the CIFOA and the issue around protocols. Is it not correct that EPA is actually seeking changes that go beyond protocols concerning hollow log provisions? Given that it's actually going beyond protocols, isn't it the fact that the ministerial direction to create a protection of environment policy is actually a try-on and an overstep? You can't make changes to the CIFOA that go beyond protocols, and here you have your colleague—and you say you don't work in silos—actually making a try-on and giving her department directions to, essentially, go beyond protocols?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Well, as you would be aware, the EPA can amend protocols in the—

The CHAIR: Yes, but they're going beyond protocols. Isn't that the truth? In what they're doing with hollow log provisions, they're going beyond protocols.

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I haven't seen the details of that, but I'm happy to have a look at the specific issues again. You have access to my office and have been in there many times over the past couple of weeks with questions. I'm very happy to continue that and I'll check for you.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Because that is not your job. Try and socialise it.

The CHAIR: Can you take it on notice as to whether the EPA is making changes beyond protocols and how does that actually sit with the co-responsibility of you as Minister for forestry and Ms Sharpe as Minister for the Environment, where she seems to be overruling your responsibility as Minister for forestry by giving a ministerial direction to her department to basically make wholesale changes to the CIFOA and you don't seem to know about it?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'll let you finish and then I'll answer the question.

The CHAIR: Will you take it on notice as to what the EPA is doing?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: [Disorder] I'll let you finish.

The CHAIR: That's it. Can you take it on notice about what EPA is doing with the CIFOA?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Yes. I've indicated that that's something that I will look at. Just as I work with my colleagues in relation to areas of interest, I expect my colleagues to do the same with me, but I'll check the details and I'll come back.

ANSWER

This question should be referred to the Minister for the Environment.

Question 9

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In those flights that you've taken, which you've now said you have over the course of your travel—which is fine; you're entitled to do that—were they commercial or were they charter flights?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: It's a mixture of both.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, thank you. Would you be able to provide on notice for the Committee when those charter flights and when those commercial flights were booked, please, through the booking agency? You can take it on notice, but we would like that information, please.

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'll take it on notice.

ANSWER

All Ministerial travel was taken in accordance with the relevant standards and guidelines set out in Part 5 of the Ministers Office Handbook (Handbook), available at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/premiers-department/ministers-office-handbook>.

Question 10

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. Minister, I noticed on 10 August you met with Woolworths. Your diary disclosures don't actually outline who attended the meeting or provide detail in terms of what you discussed. Given that we know there's a big discrepancy between the prices that farmers are getting at the market and what things are being sold for, and the cost-of-living crisis is hurting everyone across the State, did you raise these issues with the supermarket chain when you met with them on behalf of not just farmers but the people of New South Wales?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Yes, I did raise those issues, and it is an issue that I'm conscious of. I want farmers to get the best deal that they can, and I'm also, like the rest of the Government, conscious of cost-of-living impacts on consumers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So what was agreed to or discussed at that meeting? Who did you meet with? It didn't actually list who was present. Could you tell us who was there?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I just can't remember. I'll have to check.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you take that on notice, please, and respond to the Committee?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'm happy to do that. I don't remember the specific names, but I did raise those issues. I did.

ANSWER

The Minister was seated next to the CEO of Woolworths at the 2023 Bush Summit. As it was an unplanned meeting, a disclosure form was not submitted.

Minister Moriarty and an advisor had a further meeting with Woolworths Government Relations Manager on October 13.

Question 11

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, what work have you undertaken as the Minister to implement the recommendations of the Labor-chaired inquiry into the use of primates and other animals in medical research in New South Wales?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: As I've engaged with you on the previous answer, we are reviewing the commitments we made in relation to animal welfare at the moment. I'm looking at them as a whole and as I get advice—and that includes work in relation to medical research. So I'm getting—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, can I just confirm—you're saying that you're also reviewing the Animal Research Act?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: No, I'm looking at animal welfare issues and getting advice on those issues to be able to assist me to deliver on the election commitments that we made. In relation to your questions and the questions from earlier, I'm looking at a number of issues across this space at the moment as a whole so that I can work through the best way for the Government to be able to deliver the commitment that we made to the people of New South Wales.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's right; the election commitment was a review of POCTAA, which is a different Act. I just want to ask about the Animal Research Act. Do you have any plans to implement the recommendations from that report?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'll have to check the—I don't remember the recommendations off the top of my head but I'll have a look at them. I'm happy to take that on notice and check any of the specific details and come back to you. Again, you engage with me regularly on these issues outside of these sitting periods and you're welcome to continue to do that.

ANSWER

The NSW Government is committed to improving animal welfare outcomes in NSW and made several election commitments in relation to the animal welfare legislative framework.

A strong framework is in place to regulate the conduct of animal research in NSW, underpinned by the Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes. This includes comprehensive reporting on the use of animals research and teaching. Amendments to the *Animal Research Act 1985* were made in 2022 to strengthen requirements relating to the rehoming of dogs and cats used in research.

The NSW Government response to the inquiry into the use of primates in medical research in New South Wales was tabled on 23 January 2023 by the former Government. That response supported or supported in principle four recommendations and noted nine recommendations.

Progress has been made against the recommendations that were supported, or supported in principle. This has included holding three additional online animal research webinars in 2023 on the following topics, with approximately 400 attendees across the three sessions:

- 6 June - 3Rs ('Replacement', 'Reduction', 'Refinement')
- 22 August – Housing and enrichment for animals in research settings
- 14 November – Ethical decision making relating to teaching and wildlife

\$2.5 million in grants funding has been committed to assist research animals to be rehomed.

Question 12

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you received any correspondence from the Animal Research Review Panel requesting changes to the legislation in this space?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I don't know that I've received any correspondence. I would have to check.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Can you take that one on notice?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Sure.

ANSWER

The Minister has no record of any correspondence from the Animal Research Review Panel.

Question 13

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you met with the Animal Research Review Panel or representatives of the Animal Research Review Panel since being elected?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Yes, I believe so. Again, just to be 100 per cent certain, I will check that. But, yes, I believe so.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: In those meetings, did you speak about their position on the smoking tower models?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: There is work being done on that. As you are well aware, we've had a number of discussions about that issue. I know it's a keen interest of yours. I have said to you, and I will say now in the public domain, that I'm getting advice and listening to the experts on that. That's exactly what I'm doing.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you met with the Animal Research Review Panel about their position on the smoking tower models?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'll have to check the details of that and come back to you.

ANSWER

Minister Moriarty met with the Chair of the Animal Research Review Panel on November 8 2023.

Question 14

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Which experts are you seeking advice from?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: People across the department and there are committees, including the one that you've just referenced. I'm also happy to engage with stakeholders, including yourself, who are interested in this issue.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What about the NHMRC? Have you spoken to them about their position either on smoking tower models or the forced swim test?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'm not sure. I'd have to check the details of that. I have a lot of meetings—I apologise—but I'll check the details of that.

ANSWER

Minister Moriarty has engaged with a range of stakeholders in relation to animal welfare policy.

Question 15

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I might just go to my questions for the last seven minutes. Going to the questions from my colleagues about the Tallaganda State Forest, is it your understanding that these stop-work orders were relating to the discovery of a carcass of a southern greater glider?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I believe that's the case, yes. I'll check again if that's—I believe that to be the case.

The CHAIR: Can you confirm, perhaps on notice, whether that southern greater glider that was discovered was delivered to Taronga park zoo for an autopsy and what the cause of death was actually stated as.

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Sure, I'm happy to take that on notice. I know some work was done on trying to determine the cause. I'll find out where that got up to and how it was done, and I'll come back to you on notice.

The CHAIR: Are you aware that Forestry Corporation of NSW or its contractors weren't actually in that area where the greater glider was found, up to seven months before?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: The advice that I do have is that there was quite a lengthy period of time before this glider was discovered from when Forestry were conducting operations in that space. That is the advice that I have. I think you've just asked me if it was seven months. I don't know the specifics, so I'll check that. But I am advised that there was quite some time.

The CHAIR: If the cause of death can't be attributed to the activities of Forestry Corp or its contractors, can you take on notice why the stop-work orders are still in place?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'm happy to look into the details of that for you

ANSWER

I am advised that the cause of death of the deceased glider is a matter for the EPA. The EPA publishes relevant information relating to the Stop Work orders at [Stop Work Orders \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/stop-work-orders). Forestry Corporation continues to work with the EPA on the issues raised in the stop work order.

Question 16

The CHAIR: What about the contractors that are directly impacted by a potential Great Koala National Park? I'm specifically talking about the ones that I brought to your office a couple of months ago. Are they being included in those consultative panels?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'm not sure if they are specifically or not, but I will check the details for you on that. But I would expect wide consultation. That's the process that we have said that we will engage in. If there are groups such as the people that you brought to my office, who I was very pleased to engage with, who feel as though they've been excluded, please let me know and I'll make sure that that's not the case. It's really important that we engage with everybody who has an interest in this as we work through the process.

The CHAIR: As of about three weeks ago, the two main contractors that do the work in this area were excluded from those consultative panels. Who is representing the contractors on those consultative panels?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: It's representative bodies that would be representing them in general terms, but if people feel as though—and I accept the proposition that you're putting to me—they need to be heard, as I have listened to the people that you're referring to in my office, I'm happy to engage on that and make sure that we're not making people feel excluded. It's really important, in my view, that the Government engages with people who are impacted by this. We will be delivering the park, but we have said that we'll consult and talk to people about it, and that's exactly what we should be doing.

The CHAIR: What input has your department had in selecting an independent economic analyst for the Great Koala National Park assessment? Has your department had any input into that?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Sorry, I just missed the beginning of that because I think someone—

The CHAIR: What input has your department had in selecting an independent economic analyst to do the socio-economic study for the Great Koala National Park?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'll have to check the details of the specific discussions that will have taken place.

ANSWER

DRNSW is a key member of the WoG Steering Group that is overseeing this process.

Question 17

The CHAIR: What steps are you taking to make sure that the increase doesn't come from illicit timber from overseas countries, which then undermines our own market?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I'm supportive of a sustainable industry here in New South Wales to be able to meet our needs, and I'll continue to engage on that basis.

The CHAIR: I only have 10 seconds, so can you take on notice what work your department is doing around the issue of illicit timber and meeting that increase by 2030?

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: Um—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister. All I got was "Um".

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I thought someone took a point of order, sorry. I just paused.

The CHAIR: No, I think there was a comment by Mrs Taylor, but then there was a bell at the same time.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'll wait.

The Hon. TARA MORIARTY: I believe that DPI are involved in discussions of that nature through a national process. I'm happy to get the details of how that works, and I'm happy to come back to you with the details of that.

ANSWER

I am advised that the Commonwealth government administers legislation to combat illegal logging and promote the trade of legal timber products. These laws are set out in the [Illegal Logging Prohibition Act 2012](#) and the [Illegal Logging Prohibition Regulation 2012](#). This legislation ensures that imported products do not contain illegally logged timber.

Question 18

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have a number of questions for all of the officials, but I will start with you, Ms Fox. Because you're with the Minister, I'm assuming you're out in Broken Hill today?

REBECCA FOX: That's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you advise us when that trip was organised and booked?

REBECCA FOX: Yes. Before the start of November. This is part of a series of round tables, but I have James here doing various things today. I've had a team that I met with last night on cross-border issues. They were running a workforce project yesterday. I had a team, including Mr Wheaton, supporting the Premier on the trip north yesterday, including a round table. I've got a public works team supporting the Walgett pool, and I've got some regional development teams here, as well, doing some other work. Aboriginal Affairs are on a listening tour at the moment, so our Aboriginal partnerships team were in town last night as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Ms Fox. Sorry, I have a lot of questions that we unfortunately now need to put to you as officials without the Minister here. Just to be very clear, your particular travel to Broken Hill was booked and organised early in November. I just want to make sure that's correct.

REBECCA FOX: The arrangements for this round table were made before November, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm talking about your travel to be in Broken Hill today. Was that booked in early November as well?

REBECCA FOX: I'd have to look at the exact dates. I don't do my travel; I'd have to check.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you provide that on notice? Could you also advise whether the round table had always been communicated to stakeholders to be held today, on 13 December? Were any other dates canvassed or was it always today?

REBECCA FOX: I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I remind you that you are under oath. If you could provide that on notice, that would be great.

ANSWER

I am advised that travel to Broken Hill on 13 December 2023 was added to the Secretary's diary on 3 November 2023. The Secretary's flight to Broken Hill was booked on 4 December 2023.

The Broken Hill roundtable date communicated to stakeholders was 13 December 2023 and did not change.

Question 19

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for you to check with staff, but if you could let us know when those flights were booked or when travel was put in place, and also the second question of whether this 13 December date was always the date for the round table. That would be really great. Were you at any point given a direction by the Minister or her office not to appear here in Sydney in person?

REBECCA FOX: I wasn't given a direction. I had a discussion with the Minister's office last week about the difficulty of this time of year and for all of us to appear. We are all doing different things, based in different locations. I've got team members who have children at end-of-school events. We have difficulty—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So do we.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. As a mum, I hear you.

REBECCA FOX: Sorry?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I said that I understand that. I missed my kids' school presentation, so I get it. It's hard. Did you talk to the Minister's office about maybe then raising that with the Committee? We weren't given any indication that this was an issue until yesterday. I'm just curious as to what has happened.

REBECCA FOX: I'd like to be very clear about what we did in that process. We received a list of witnesses on Tuesday 28 November. There were 15 witnesses on that list, from memory. We went through and worked out where everyone's diaries were. We had a couple of people who were in Sydney. The DPI team was scheduled to be in Orange. We wrote a full list. We checked it early last week on, I think, Tuesday at our executive leadership team meeting or just after that meeting. My understanding is that my office sent it to the Committee secretariat on—I would have to check whether it was Tuesday or Wednesday last week. We were confirmed that Webex was fine for all of us to use, I understand, by Friday last week. If the secretariat of the Committee had suggested otherwise, we would have made different arrangements.

ANSWER

Question responded to during hearing, see also Question 21.

Question 20

The Hon. EMMA HURST: There was a lot of community concern when the lions retired from Stardust Circus ended up at the Central Coast Zoo in 2021. Are you able to advise if there have been any audits or reviews on how the lions have actually settled in and on their ongoing welfare at this facility?

SCOTT HANSEN: I don't have any up-to-date information on that. I don't know if Ms Filmer does.

KIM FILMER: I haven't got the recent audit information. I'm not sure if you've got any of that there, John, but they are being kept now and they would have to comply with the legislation of being in that facility.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Can you take on notice if there have been any audits or reviews and, if so, what was found in those audits and reviews?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes, we can do that.

KIM FILMER: Yes.

SCOTT HANSEN: Normally, if we haven't heard anything it's normally a positive sign, but we'll take that on notice

ANSWER

I am advised that on 8 September 2021, the lion enclosures were inspected with acceptable outcome. On 21 September 2021, the lions were approved to be acquired from Stardust Circus. An audit was undertaken on 15 October 2021 with an acceptable 'A' rating.

Another audit was undertaken on 27 May 2022, with no concerns identified regarding the keeping of lions. Other issues were identified and actioned through the audit. On this occasion, the audit delivered an unacceptable - 'E' rating. The audit noncompliance related to unapproved enclosures for three other species (alligators, marmoset and reptile). Corrective action was undertaken, and each enclosure was subsequently reviewed and approved. Two penalty notices were issued as a result of these breaches.

Question 21

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Ms Fox, I wanted to come back to you quickly. I had the opportunity to check in the break with the secretariat staff. The advice is that there was an email received from your office actually only on Friday at about midday to indicate that some people would be appearing online and the full list wasn't available to the Committee staff until late on Friday. I think you said earlier that you might have advised us midway through last week, but could you just reflect or check that for us?

REBECCA FOX: Yes. I saw a list on Tuesday that had the full list with where everyone was going to be. My understanding was that my office was providing that and working with the secretariat, which I thought would have happened by Wednesday. I was advised that we were confirmed on Friday that Webex would be available.

ANSWER

I am advised that the witness list was provided to the Budget Estimates Secretariat on 8 December 2023 after receiving confirmation from the Secretariat that witnesses could dial in remotely.

Question 22

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Mr Wheaton, just to redirect, could I ask you to provide the Committee with an organisational chart of Regional NSW at the end of June and also, then, at the end of December, please?

JONATHAN WHEATON: Yes, happy to do so.

ANSWER

Organisation charts provided for end June 2023 (Attachment A) and December 2023 (Attachment B).

Question 23

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have any corrective action reports or other issues been issued?

SCOTT HANSEN: I'm aware that there were two corrective actions required, I believe on 22 May 2020— unrelated to the lions, however. But if I get more information on that or if someone sends me a note saying I got that wrong, I'll come back to you on that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Could you get me some more information on what those corrective actions were?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

ANSWER

I am advised that the audit noncompliance found on 27 May 2022 related to unapproved enclosures for three species (alligators, marmoset and reptile). Each enclosure was subsequently reviewed and approved. Two penalty notices were issued as a result of these breaches.

Question 24

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you aware if there are any animal breeding programs ongoing at the Central Coast Zoo?

SCOTT HANSEN: Not that I'm aware of. No-one else here is aware of any, but if we, again, become aware of it over the course of the hearing we'll come back to you on that too.

ANSWER

I am advised that breeding at facilities is limited by the spatial requirements under the General Standards. There are special conditions relating to breeding at the Central Coast Zoo in relation to exotic reptiles. The new conditions that were applied to all authority holders on 1 July 2023, require any breeding plan to be documented – outlining species intending to be bred and the reason for breeding. Breeding Plans must be in place by 31 Dec 2023.

An audit, to be carried out in February 2024, will confirm compliance of breeding plans.

27 species have been reported to have given birth at Central Coast Zoo over the 22/23 reporting period. They include:

Species Name	Birth Numbers
Meerkat	13
Tammar Wallaby	8
Black Swan	6
Carpet Python	6
Single-backed Lizard	6
Masked Lapwing	5
Bush Stone-Curlew	4
Laughing Kookaburra	4
Princess Parrot	3
Tawny Frogmouth	3
Blackbuck	2
Australian Brush-turkey	2
Eclectus Parrot	2
Emu	2
Glossy ibis	2
Indian Peafowl	2
Northern Brown Bandicoot	2
Tasmanian Pademelon	2
Plumed Whistling-duck	2
Common Brush-tailed Possum	2
Eastern Grey Kangaroo	2
Banded Lapwing	1
Cape Barron Goose	1
Red Kangaroo	1

Rufous Bettong	1
Red-and-Green Macaw	1
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo	1

Breeding of the following species at Central Coast Zoo is prohibited, primarily due to biosecurity risk associated with these species.

- Leopard tortoises
- Star tortoises
- Hermann's tortoises
- Elongated tortoises
- Corn snakes
- Red-tail boa constrictors
- Burmese pythons
- Reticulated pythons
- Alligator Snapper Turtles
- Ball Python
- Dumeril's Boa
- Red-eared Slider Turtle
- Spur-Thighed Tortoise
- Double Crested Basilisk
- Taiwan Beauty Snake
- Russian Rat Snake

Question 25

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have there been any recent audits or inspections of the facility in Coffs Harbour since it changed hands?

SCOTT HANSEN: I assume that it will have, but I'll throw across to see whether Ms Filmer or Mr Tracey have any details on that.

KIM FILMER: Could you repeat the question, please, Ms Hurst?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have there been any audits or inspections of the facility in Coffs Harbour since it changed hands?

KIM FILMER: There's certainly been a lot of communication with them, but I haven't got the exact details of the audits. We can take that on notice and get those to you if required.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Yes, thank you. Also if there's been any inspections by the RSPCA or by any other authority, that would be fantastic if you could take that on notice as well.

ANSWER

I am advised that an audit was conducted by DPI as part of the transfer to the new authority holder. An acceptable licensing audit was conducted on 16 October 2023.

We have been advised that neither RSPCA NSW or AWL have had any complaints or undertaken any inspections of this facility recently.

Question 26

The Hon. EMMA HURST: In regards to the sea lions, I've seen some photos of the animals with quite red mouths and gums, and people have also raised concerns about the size of their night enclosure. Are you aware if there is a vet on site at the facility?

JOHN TRACEY: No, I'm not aware of that. I can take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I assume that's not a requirement for facilities like this to have a vet on site?

JOHN TRACEY: No, I don't believe it's a requirement. They need to have a nominated vet, but my understanding is that we don't have to have a vet on site at all times.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Do you know if there's been any assessment made on their teeth and gums, from those images, and whether they require any veterinary assistance?

JOHN TRACEY: No, I'd have to take that on notice, sorry.

ANSWER

I am advised that the establishment has four vets available. One is contracted by DMCP (dolphin marine conservation park) trading as Coffs Coast Wildlife Sanctuary, the other three are emergency vets. There are no onsite vets.

Currently no complaints have been received about the sea lions red gums and mouth.

Question 27

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The Hon. EMMA HURST: Do you know if there's been any assessment made on their teeth and gums, from those images, and whether they require any veterinary assistance?

JOHN TRACEY: No, I'd have to take that on notice, sorry.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's alright. Do you know if the facility is currently breeding any of their animals?

JOHN TRACEY: I'm not sure of that either. I'll take that one on notice as well.

SCOTT HANSEN: I think people are happy to come back to you if there's an alternative answer come up but, as far as I'm aware, the answer to that is no.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You don't believe that they're breeding any of the species there?

SCOTT HANSEN: That's correct. That's my understanding. But as I said, if over the course of this hearing something changes in terms of the advice on that, we'll come back to you on it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Thank you. In regards to any audits of the facility, which I know Dr Filmer took on notice, could she also take on notice what grade the audit came up with, and also if there were any corrective action notices issued with regards to that audit?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes, we can add that to that list.

ANSWER

I am advised that under the previous owner of Dolphin Marine Conservation Park, trading as Coffs Coast Wildlife Sanctuary, only three animal species had births. This included 22 Murray River Turtles, four Little Penguins and one Sea Lion. The number represents the number of animals birthed in the 22/23 reporting period.

During audit of the new entity on 16 October 2023 it was identified that the facility operates under the Australian Species Management Program (ASMP) regulated by the Zoo and Aquarium Association (ZAA). The facility has specific program for Australian Sea-lions and Little Blue Penguins only.

In February 2021, the Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Cetacea) Regulation 2017 (2.8A) was amended to define importing and causing or permitting breeding of Cetacea (which includes dolphins) to be prohibited under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016.

The audit carried out on 16 October 2023 resulted in an acceptable outcome and 'A' rating.

One minor corrective action request was issued for rust being present on a note board above a bench in the food preparation room.

Question 28

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I have some more questions about exhibited animals generally. How many full-time or full-time equivalent staff work specifically in the exhibited animals division of the DPI?

SCOTT HANSEN: I might put that across to Dr Filmer to answer.

KIM FILMER: Those staff are in the compliance area of the department. We'll have to take that on notice, sorry.

ANSWER

I am advised that there are 59 authorisations under the *Exhibited Animals Protection Act 1986*. DPI also has a total of 12.6 full time equivalent staff covering animal welfare, audit and compliance investigations in exhibited animals.

Question 29

The CHAIR: Mr McPherson, I wanted to pick up where we left off discussing the CIFOA and that ministerial direction. Can you confirm the date that you became aware of that ministerial direction from Minister Sharpe regarding the CIFOA?

DAVID McPHERSON: I'll have to take that on notice, but I can come back to you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. What was the process once you did become aware of that? Did you notify up the chain to the Minister that this had occurred and there may be some impacts on the CIFOA?

DAVID McPHERSON: I'd have to take it on notice, Mr Banasiak, mainly because I was on leave when this particularly happened. I'll have to consult with staff as to what actions were taken.

ANSWER

I am advised that DPI became aware of the Ministerial Direction on 5 September 2023 during the course of interagency discussions leading up to the Government decision and announcement to cease harvesting in the koala hubs on 12 September 2023. Minister Moriarty's office was notified.

Question 30

The CHAIR: Okay. Based on your understanding, Mr Hansen or Mr McPherson, a draft protection of environment policy—where would that sit in the legislative hierarchy in terms of the CIFOA? That wouldn't take precedence over a CIFOA, would it, in terms of the legislative hierarchy?

DAVID McPHERSON: Sorry, what? The CHAIR: Which has more legislative standing: a CIFOA or a draft protection of environment policy, as per the ministerial direction?

DAVID McPHERSON: We'd have to take that one on notice. That would be a complex legal matter. They're under two different pieces of legislation so the interrelationship of those two instruments would be something we'd have to—

The CHAIR: Yes, sure. I'm just trying to understand all the working pieces there. What has been your involvement, Mr McPherson—your department's involvement—in this consultative process on the Great Koala National Park? Are you a mere passenger in this or are you an equal partner in this consultation process?

ANSWER

I am advised that the question regarding legislative standing and the CIFOA and Ministerial directions should be referred to the Attorney General.

In relation to the consultative process on the Great Koala National Park, the Department of Regional NSW (Department of Primary Industries) has been consulted on the membership of the advisory panels and is included in cross-agency consultation forums.

Question 31

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to come back to the issues around redundancies or changing positions in the Department of Regional NSW. I'm happy to direct to you, Ms Fox, but if you'd like any of your other colleagues to answer, that's fine as well. This was canvassed in the previous estimates hearing, and I think there was a question on notice that pointed to the department's annual report, which at that time hadn't been tabled but now has. The figures in the annual report show that there appears to be 168 senior executive staff as at June. Is that number correct?

REBECCA FOX: I'd have to check. If the annual report says that's what it was at the end of June 2023, that would be correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you able to provide what the number is as of December? Obviously, from earlier evidence from yourself and Mr Wheaton, there's a process underway with some changing positions. I'm happy for you to take it on notice, but do you know how many senior executives there are as of today—if we want to pick a date—in that agency?

REBECCA FOX: Can I just clarify that annual report won't include, I don't think, the numbers for Local Land Services, which is a separate executive agency. I'm pretty sure the number across all of us is 208, from memory. But we can provide those numbers from July and currently on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great—specifically within the Department of Regional NSW. I understand that there are affiliated agencies that are separate, but it'd be good to know what they were for the Department of Regional NSW as of July, and then what they are as of December. That would be great.

REBECCA FOX: No problem. We can provide that.

ANSWER

I am advised that the number of senior executives reported in the DRNSW Annual Report 2022 – 2023 is 168. This number reflects June 2023 figures.

The number of senior executives as at 31 December 2023 is 158.

Question 32

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of some of those changes that yourself and Mr Wheaton referred to—and I respect that there are people at the end of this—is it anticipated that those whose positions will not be ongoing will be notified of that by the end of the year? Have they all been notified? I'm trying to understand where that redundancy process is up to.

REBECCA FOX: It will be up to different places for different people. We provide individual case management to any displaced executives, and that process is different for all of them. Some of them, for example, are undergoing interviews for a different role in a different part of government. We would case manage each individual person through that process. There's some rough time lines. The mobility process takes about four weeks—a little bit longer. I can't give you—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you expect, say, by February next year, that would've been resolved and finalised? I'm trying to work out the end date.

REBECCA FOX: By February next year, I would expect Mr Wheaton's change plan to be finalised, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What about across other parts of the department?

REBECCA FOX: It's an ongoing process at the moment. Mr Bolton's team has also undergone a formal plan of change process. I think that is almost complete. Again, we still haven't completely finished the process there, but the decisions have been made. Again, we're individually case managing those executives who have been displaced.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm not Nostradamus, but I'm assuming those numbers will go down, given that you've got a target to meet in terms of reduction of your senior staff. When you provide us with the numbers from July and December, is it possible to also get some figures around the redundancy packages and the cost of that to the department for those positions?

REBECCA FOX: No problem. We can provide that.

ANSWER

I am advised that redundancy cost to the Department between July 2023 and December 2023 amounted to \$153,956.

Question 33

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In a more specific area, with some of the special activation precincts—I'm particularly thinking of the Narrabri one, which is not going ahead at the moment—are there staff who were working on that project who have also been made redundant?

REBECCA FOX: I'll throw to Mr Bolton but, generally, the change of plans that we have run through Mr Bolton's team have taken into account the forward plan of work and what is required. I think most of the work that was being done in relation to Narrabri was probably being done by the planners who sit in the Department of Planning and Environment. We hadn't progressed very far in relation to that. But I'll ask Mr Bolton to comment further on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That'd be great.

JAMES BOLTON: That comment is correct. There have been no changes to staff numbers purely based on Narrabri and that precinct not progressing. How we deliver the precincts at that front end and the strategic planning work versus implementation has been where most of the changes to resourcing has occurred. We've had a reduction in senior executive staff with the program of three senior exec staff associated with the special activation precinct program, based on the realignments and priorities of the Government—so the four special activation precincts in delivery, as well as the budget that we have in place for those.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Those three positions, are they all regionally based? Are they regional staff or are they Sydney based?

JAMES BOLTON: I'll take that on notice. From memory, two were regional.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Mr Bolton, maybe you could provide to the Committee, out of those positions that have been cut, how many are regionally based and how many are metro based, please.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's probably more for Ms Fox with that number that we get back.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Ms Fox, are you happy to do that?

REBECCA FOX: Yes, we can do that.

ANSWER

I am advised that all positions in Regional NSW are advertised as 'regional locations' preferred.

The restructure of the Special Activation Precincts program team resulted in a reduction of three senior executive positions. Of the people in those positions, all three were based regionally. As at 31 December 2023, all three people were still employed by the Department of Regional NSW.

Question 34

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I've got some questions about Local Land Services, which will be directed to Mr Kelly. Mr Kelly, one thing that we heard in the last budget estimates was that there was a cut to the transport budget of Local Land Services. Is that correct?

ROB KELLY: There were reductions in budgets for travel. So not necessarily transport—travel.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Sorry, travel—my bad.

ROB KELLY: That covers things like overnight accommodation and airfares. It doesn't cover vehicle costs or anything like that; they're standard. Having said that, with additional projects we've had come on, like the pig project, we have now received our funding from the Federal Government for NHT. They come with additional travel budget.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: But just getting back to Local Land Services, and being a farmer myself—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you a ratepayer? Just to disclose a conflict.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Yes. I had better disclose that I am a ratepayer. That is why I am looking for rate cuts if the services are going to be cut. What I want to know is, how much the travel budget for Local Land Services has been cut? I am happy for you to take that on notice if you need to.

ROB KELLY: We will take that on notice, in terms of pure dollars. But what I would add to that is, particularly in relation to frontline services and delivering services to our farmers and our ratepayers, there's been no restriction or cutback in the way we deliver those services or reducing that service level.

ANSWER

I am advised that the LLS Travel Budget is \$2.5m for 2023/2024, no change from 2022/23.

Question 35

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: As much detail as you could provide as well. Who made the decision to cut the remuneration package of LLS directors?

ROB KELLY: I will refer that to Mr Orr.

STEVE ORR: Can you repeat the question, Mrs Taylor?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Who made the decision to cut the remuneration package of the LLS directors?

STEVE ORR: As the Minister was saying earlier today, there was a review which was done into LLS boards and committees. That review was done by Mrs Renata Brooks, and one of the observations Mrs Brooks made was that the remuneration which is paid to LLS board members, both local boards and the State board, needs to be reassessed as a consequence of changes to governance arrangements which had occurred over time, most noticeably the changes which came in as a consequence of the 2017 Act amendments. What those Act amendments did was to enhance the role of the State board and reduce the role of local boards. There wasn't a review of the remuneration at that particular time, so what the Minister did was write to the Public Service Commission and seek their advice on what the remuneration should be. The commission's come back with that advice, and that's what has led to the decisions which have been made.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Mr Orr, can you please provide that report and that advice to the Committee on notice?

STEVE ORR: On notice. Thanks, Mrs Taylor

ANSWER

I am advised that the report is Cabinet in Confidence and unable to be shared.

Question 36

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Can I go back to you, Ms Fox. In roles that people are leaving now for whatever reason, are they being backfilled?

REBECCA FOX: It depends on what the role is. Yes, we're doing still a lot of recruitment. We're filling, I think, on average 73 per cent of our vacant roles across the department internally, which means people are getting opportunities to do something different, but that is hard to answer without specifics. So generally if it's part of a change plan and a role has been delimited—and we can provide that information—that is mostly in those two areas we have discussed, Regional Development and Programs and the Regional Precincts Group. If they're not in those roles, generally they are being refilled at executive level.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Ms Fox, you just said that they were being filled internally, that people were being given the opportunity internally.

REBECCA FOX: Yes.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: My question to you then is, if people are leaving to go and do something, is there recruitment outside? Because I presume if it is internal, then it's less one somewhere else. Would you like to provide that on notice?

REBECCA FOX: We're certainly using external recruitment processes as well, yes.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Would you be able to provide on notice to the Committee how many positions are vacant and how many positions have been filled and to categorise that by internally and externally?

REBECCA FOX: Could we put a time period on that, Mrs Taylor? That might help us tailor—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: The last 12 months.

REBECCA FOX: Okay, no problem. We should be able to do that.

ANSWER

I am advised that in the period from 21 December 2022 to 21 December 2023, there have been a total of 2459 recruitment actions. Recruitment actions include casual, temporary and ongoing recruitment from the external market; as well as reassigning existing employees into new or existing ongoing or temporary roles, and seconding public servants from other agencies. Of these recruitment actions, 61% have been filled internally, 30% externally, and 9% represent casual positions.

Question 37

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: In terms of travel for LLS board directors, has that also been reduced?

ROB KELLY: The travel budget in general applies to all parts of LLS, so it will include board-related travel expenses.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Have any board members of LLS been asked to pay their own travel to events?

ROB KELLY: I am not aware of that.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Could you take that on notice?

ROB KELLY: I'll take that on notice

ANSWER

I am advised that board members are legally entitled to claim travel reimbursement, whether they wish to do that or not is at their discretion.

Question 38

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I might go back to Mr Hansen and Ms Filmer, and Dr John Tracey. We were talking about the exhibited animals. Can I just clarify, when you say that there are 59 staff that are involved in compliance but they also work on other things, that there are no full-time or full-time equivalent staff that specifically work in the exhibited animals division at the DPI?

JOHN TRACEY: I can get some more information on that, but the approach that we take is that we want a large number of people authorised so that we can successfully deliver the programs that we have in place. So the approach is that we do have a large number of people that can undertake that compliance work. I would have to check the numbers that are fully dedicated to that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: If you could take that on notice, that would be great.

SCOTT HANSEN: There are certainly dedicated roles in that space. I think we spoke at the last estimates—or it might have been the Office of Local Government one; no, I think it was the last one—on the fact that there is a team leader for exhibited animals, so that's a dedicated person leading, and then there are policy and project officers under that that work to that team leader in exhibited animals. So there is definitely a dedicated team. What Dr John Tracey was referring to is the fact that in the compliance space we tend to authorise our compliance officers to not only have compliance capacity under exhibited animals but also under other pieces of legislation, including, say, the Biosecurity Act.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Great. I appreciate that level of detail. If you could just take on notice the full-time time or full-time equivalent staff within the exhibited animals division, but if you wanted to add anything else in regard to the compliant staff, that is fantastic as well. Could I get a confirmation that that has been taken on notice?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes. Happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Unfortunately we can't do nods on Hansard. I think I asked the question and then we started talking about staff that work in compliance, but how many exhibited animal facilities are required to be audited each year?

JOHN TRACEY: We would have to take that one on notice, sorry. We will hopefully get back to you soon on that one.

ANSWER

I am advised that there are 59 authorisations under the *Exhibited Animals Protection Act 1986*. DPI also has a total of 12.6 full time equivalent staff covering animal welfare, audit and compliance investigations in exhibited animals.

The legislation does not require facilities to be inspected or audited at a set frequency. A risk-based compliance approach enables resources to be targeted to the areas where they are most needed and will prove most effective.

Question 39

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm not sure if this will need to be taken on notice as well, but to advise the total number of exhibited animal facilities that are licensed in New South Wales and whether they are fixed or mobile exhibits.

JOHN TRACEY: We can get back to you on that one as well.

ANSWER

I am advised that the total number of exhibited animal facilities that are licensed in New South Wales are detailed below:

Licensed Operators	NSW-based	Interstate-based	Total
Fixed	57	N/A	57
Mobile – not circus	32	7	39
Mobile – circus	2	3	5
Total	91	10	101

Question 40

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Dr Filmer, in regard to the staff that you mentioned within the animal welfare department, are there subject matter experts, particularly for different species, where there are unusual species at any of these facilities?

KIM FILMER: Yes, we've got expertise in a variety of animals, including exhibited, livestock and companion animals, in my team.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What species are there subject matter experts in?

SCOTT HANSEN: We might take that on notice and make sure we don't drop out or lose a species in that list, if that's okay.

KIM FILMER: I think that's a good idea. That's a pretty difficult question to answer off the top of my head.

SCOTT HANSEN: This is probably also worthwhile: Dr Filmer sits alongside Dr Jo Coombe, who is our Chief Veterinary Officer. Their two teams work incredibly closely together. So we also draw upon the deep veterinary expertise, and that veterinary expertise then also draws upon the expertise from our bryologists and pathologists, who are all based out at EMAI. They work collectively together on issues. For example, if we did have an exhibited animal that was unwell, sick or had some problem, we'd reach across the full width of the capacity we have in our chief veterinary unit and pathology and bryology units at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute to try to come up with solutions and equip Dr Filmer's team to be able to respond.

ANSWER

I am advised that DPI has a range of staff with expertise in a variety of animal species. The Animal Welfare Technical team mostly attends to Exhibited Animal matters. This team has experience in animal welfare across the range of exhibited animal species in NSW. The Animal Welfare team also seeks expert advice when needed, from other areas of DPI as well as agencies and organisations across Australia and around the world.

Question 41

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Could I also ask how many correction action requests there have been in respect to exhibited animals facilities issued in the last 12 months, overall?

JOHN TRACEY: We've got, in the last 12 months, four warning letters, seven directions orders issued, 12 penalty notices, one notice of intention to suspend an authority and one notice of intention to oppose or vary terms and conditions.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you able to provide the Committee details of each of those?

JOHN TRACEY: We can.

SCOTT HANSEN: We'll take that on notice and work out how much of the details we can provide on each of those.

JOHN TRACEY: There is some confidentiality around specific cases, but we'll provide what we can.

ANSWER

I am advised that in last 12 months, there have been 11 Exhibited Animal audits with a total of 19 corrective action requests. Audit rating breakdown: A = 8, B = 1, E = 2.

Question 42

The CHAIR: My main concern, and the concern of the recreational fishermen, is that those advisory committees get to see the rules as part of that process and get to comment on the rules before they go to a wider community consultation, given that they've had a significant input into the draft plan itself. Is it the case that a lot of those recreational fishing positions on those committees still remain unfilled? I know that was a problem—last Parliament we raised that. Is that still the case?

SEAN SLOAN: I don't think so, Chair. I do have some information on the current vacancies on our committees. If you give me a moment, I can respond to that.

SCOTT HANSEN: I think as of 3 October there's only four vacancies that we've got across the six different committees. I think we might be able to drag up what those four are. But since we last had a conversation that number has changed significantly.

SEAN SLOAN: For Cape Byron Marine Park Advisory Committee there's two vacancies: one for the Aboriginal culture and tourism positions. For Solitary Islands Marine Park there's three vacancies: marine conservation, maritime industry and aquaculture. For Jervis Bay there's two member vacancies: Aboriginal culture and recreational fishing, which was due to a recent resignation. I acknowledge those numbers don't add up to the four I mentioned earlier so I'll just need to double-check those figures, Chair.

The CHAIR: Sure. Just on notice, if you could just get some double-checking of that.

ANSWER

I am advised that there are eight member vacancies out of a total of 68 member positions across the six NSW Marine Park Advisory Committees. Alternate members may act in the place of the standing member with all the functions of the standing member, if the standing member is absent.

Cape Byron Marine Park Advisory Committee has two member vacancies (Aboriginal culture & tourism); Solitary Islands Marine Park Advisory Committee has three member vacancies (marine conservation, maritime industry and aquaculture); Port Stephens-Great Lakes Marine Park Advisory Committee has no member vacancies; Jervis Bay Marine Park Advisory Committee has two member vacancies (Aboriginal culture & recreational fishing due to a recent resignation); Batemans Marine Park Advisory Committee has one member vacancy (maritime industry) and Lord Howe Island Marine Park Advisory Committee has no member vacancies.

In relation to 'recreational fishing' member vacancies on committees, one member vacancy relates to this category on the Jervis Bay Marine Park Advisory Committee. There is currently no alternate member for this role. A member representing 'spear fishing' is on this committee. There is a process planned to fill all vacancies in 2024.

Question 43

SCOTT HANSEN: This year, 2023-24, funding under the Marine Estate Management Strategy, \$10.7 million—so about 35 per cent of the total program budget—is being spent on improving water quality and reducing litter. That's not delivered by us. That's funding that's provided to fellow agencies who predominantly take the lead in this place.

The CHAIR: Is that research or actually proactive action—or both?

SCOTT HANSEN: I believe it's a combination of both but we should be able to get you a breakdown of the difference between research and actual delivery on ground pieces.

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

ANSWER

I am advised that the breakdown of expenditure across MEMS Initiative 1 (improving water quality and reducing litter) is approximately:

- Operational including on ground works - 54%
- Policy aligned work - 12%
- Research and Monitoring - 34%

Question 44

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to ask some questions about the northern New South Wales drainage reset program. I will direct them to whoever is best placed to answer. Questions have been asked of the Minister about the report from Mr Culleton, and she didn't commit to the timing regarding its release. I want some clarity as to when the Government received that report from Mr Culleton.

SCOTT HANSEN: I can help.

REBECCA FOX: Mr Hansen can answer that, thank you.

SCOTT HANSEN: I'm just pulling that up. Sorry, I'm trying to look specifically for the date on which we received the report. Let me take that on notice until I can find it here. Sorry, I don't want to waste your time.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

ANSWER

I am advised that the report from Mr Culleton was received by the Department on 27 December 2022.

Question 45

SCOTT HANSEN: All have some form of action against them, from what I understand, including there was initial funding committed to on-ground action as part of the flood recovery piece. That was the \$5 million provided last year for immediate action. There's also continued action through the Marine Estate Management Authority's work, the marine estate management strategy work, up on the North Coast in delivering a piece around how we change the regulatory settings to fast-track and empower quicker decision-making around maintenance of drains. They're the two key priority ones I can readily think of.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is why it's sometimes challenging without the Minister here, but would you be able to take on notice when the Government intends to publicly release that report? I know you can't answer that, but if you could take that on notice. Do you know how much of the \$5 million that you just mentioned has been spent?

SCOTT HANSEN: I'll take both those things on notice. But unless someone is going to correct me here, I think all of the \$5 million was expended. But I'll take on notice that actual amount and make sure you've got it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And if that money has been spent, the time line of that would be great. On notice is fine; I understand the situation.

JONATHAN WHEATON: Mrs Mitchell, I can just confirm that that program—the \$5 million is actually managed by the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation.

ANSWER

To be referred to the Minister for Emergency Services.

I am advised that the report from Mr Culleton was published on the NSW Department of Primary Industries website on 20 December 2023.

The Northern Rivers Drainage Reset Program is being delivered by Reconstruction Authority. This question should be referred to the Minister for Emergency Services.

Question 46

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might deal with some Forestry matters now. I think that would probably be, just for the benefit of the Committee, the only questions that we would have, so we might be able to let you go a little bit earlier, if we can. I just wanted to come back to this issue—I know the Chair spoke about it, and I did ask the Minister as well—in relation to the stop-work orders on the South Coast. At the first estimates hearing that we had with the Minister, there were some questions asked in relation to data on the number of protests and the impact that that had in terms of output. The response back was that that data isn't collected. I'm just wondering whether anyone could tell us why that doesn't happen.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: The data on the what, sorry, Mrs Mitchell?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Into the number of protests that are held in State forests.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: We wouldn't understand the number of protests that are happening in our forests. There are several that have taken place, particularly up on the North Coast. So you're looking for the number of protest activities that have happened?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. My colleagues were on that hearing, not myself, but I think there were some supplementary questions in relation to the number of protests held in State forests. I don't think the answer that we got back indicated the impact that that has on output. Again, I'm happy for it to be taken on notice if that's easier, but we are just really trying to understand what is the impact, how often is it occurring and what data and costs there are that are associated with that.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Okay, I'm happy to take that away on notice.

ANSWER

I am advised that Forestry Corporation does not collate figures on the number of protests which take place in any given time period. There is no operational need to collate figures on the number of protests.

Question 47

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for this to be taken on notice, but is there any further information that could be provided to the Committee in terms of that impact over the most recent period?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Sure. In terms of volume of timber that we could have—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that would be great.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Yes, absolutely. I can take that away on notice.

ANSWER

I am advised that protests vary in size, duration, and location and so have varied impacts on Forestry Corporation activities. Where protests restrict safe operations, crews may be stood down for a period. If the stand down is not for an extensive period of time, the volume of timber to be harvested is generally caught up when work resumes.

Question 48

JONATHAN WHEATON: No, that's fine. The Cross-Border Commissioner role description has been reassessed to be a band 1 role, but there is still the senior executive band 2 that has and takes carriage of the executive decision-making at that level for the cross-border work and the broader coordination and delivery work of our regional development team.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So that's who the band 1, now, Cross-Border Commissioner—

JONATHAN WHEATON: Reports in to.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —reports in to. Okay, thank you.

JONATHAN WHEATON: That's right.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just wanted to clarify that. Is the updated role description of that position something that could be provided to the Committee on notice?

JONATHAN WHEATON: I think that's fine.

REBECCA FOX: We'll take advice on whether or not we can provide those time lines or whether we can't, but we are happy to provide whatever we can legally provide.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great, thank you.

REBECCA FOX: All of our role descriptions are public when the roles are advertised, so I imagine that we would be able to provide that. It would have been attached to an advertisement.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great, if you can.

ANSWER

See Attachment C.

Question 49

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that applications, I think, might have only opened earlier this month. I know it hasn't been there for long. But is there any data you could provide in terms of the number of applications that have been received under that Drought Ready and Resilient Fund? I appreciate it is in its early stages, but are there any numbers?

SCOTT HANSEN: What are we? Fourteen days in? Last night I had a look, and there are 19 applications that have been received.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What would be the average time frame for those applications to be assessed and processed?

SCOTT HANSEN: That's a good question. We haven't got to the first one going through to be able to give you what that time frame is. Obviously, again, with these being loans as opposed to grants, where we need to make sure and double-check all the pieces around the capacity to repay and the capacity to take on that lending, we are working through that with the first 19 applicants at the moment. The average amount of those loans that have been applied for so far is just under the \$250,000 limit. I think it's just over \$220,000, is sort of the average loan application amount at the moment. And there is a pretty even spread from across the State in terms of from geographical locations, but the predominant type of business has actually been beef cattle production—has been the predominant sort of applications so far.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for you to take it on notice. I know that there'll be a longer period of time for those answers with the shutdown, but if it's possible to come back to us with indicative time frames of application processing time—if you can.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I completely understand it's in its very early stages, but any information would be useful. Thank you for that.

ANSWER

Applications for the Drought Ready and Resilient Fund opened on 1 December 2023.

I am advised that as at the 10 January 2024 the NSW RAA has received 37 applications for the Drought Ready and Resilient Fund representing \$6.7 million in applications.

Of the 37 applications, of the approved loans the average approval time was 16 days.

Question 50

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Hansen, earlier today Daniel Brighton's court case concluded. He has been convicted of serious animal cruelty under the Crimes Act. He hasn't received any jail time. As the DPI is aware, Mr Brighton has continued to be heavily involved with several of his family's exhibited animal facilities. Given that Mr Brighton is now subject to a mandatory lifetime ban on owning or working with animals, will the DPI be taking steps to ensure that Mr Brighton is no longer involved with animals at those facilities?

SCOTT HANSEN: I might hand over to Dr Tracey and Dr Filmer on that one. That court case was today, wasn't it?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: It was, yes. It concluded this morning.

SCOTT HANSEN: Sorry, I wasn't aware of the outcome of that yet.

JOHN TRACEY: Thanks, Ms Hurst. Our teams have been watching that one very closely and we will be taking appropriate action in that case.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Can you let me know what that process will look like? How will you ensure compliance that he is no longer involved in the care of animals at those facilities?

JOHN TRACEY: Yes, happy to do that. That will be the action taken in terms of—we'll need to follow up on the details of the conviction. But if it is a recorded conviction then anyway with the conviction is unable to work with, care for, as you've stated—so we will be making sure that that's followed through and completed.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: How will you ensure compliance of that going forward?

JOHN TRACEY: Compliance will be followed up as we normally do—you know, in terms of follow-up audits or inspections or the typical sort of compliance actions that we take to ensure that people are following the rules that we set down.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: If he resides on one of the properties where the animals are being exhibited, do you see an issue there? Will he be allowed to remain on that property with the animals?

JOHN TRACEY: I'd have to check that, but I don't think that we would be able to exit him from that property. He wouldn't be allowed to care for the animals, but I can come back to you on that.

ANSWER

I am advised that Mr Brighton does not reside on the same property where animals are being exhibited and is not listed on any Authority to care for exhibited animals.

DPI will verify the authority holder's compliance with s 31A of the Exhibited Animal Protection Act 1986 and relevant conditions applicable to the authority. There is an obligation imposed on the authority holder to not knowingly cause or permit a prescribed person to work with, or care for, an exhibited animal under the authority holder's authority. Mr Brighton is not an authority holder.

DPI has not identified a breach of this requirement during officer attendance on site.

Question 51

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Will you still respond to any further emails or correspondence from Mr Brighton about the facilities in regards to animal care? Or will correspondence in the future need to come from somebody else at the facility?

JOHN TRACEY: Yes, I'd have to check that in terms of—if he's not directly taking care of those animals but he has an administrative role, we'd just have to look at what we can and can't do in that case.

ANSWER

I am advised that Mr Brighton is working in an administrative role for a company that holds an Authority, as such, correspondence may be exchanged on behalf of the company as required.

Question 52

The CHAIR: Can I just go to one of the other goals there? Under recreational fishing you have got a medium goal there of investigating the ramifications of hybridisation. With a lot of species that hybridise, there's normally a set of dominant traits from one species over another, or they're more like one species than the other. Are we seeing that with the trout cod and the Murray cod hybridisation? Are we seeing a more dominant species over the other?

SEAN SLOAN: No, I don't think it's a reference to Murray cod or trout cod. I think it's more the genetic diversity of the population, and obviously to have a healthy population you need a genetically diverse population. I can take a closer look at that, Chair, if you need me to and take that on notice and come back to you.

The CHAIR: Yes. I'm just interested in what the current school of thought will be in terms of compliance. When you might have a complete new species or variant of that species, will it be treated under the same category as the trout cod or something different?

SEAN SLOAN: They do look fairly similar so that compliance issue is already there to some extent. What I can say is the ambition is to get us back to a point where we can actually have a sustainable recreational fishery. We have already got that in the Talbingo dam, which is a catch-and-release fishery for trout cod, but we would like to obviously get back to that position in our waterways as well.

The CHAIR: You've touched on the river health and habitat, but in the plan you've got stage one, stage two and stage three, and there is very little detail as to what the difference is between those three stages. Perhaps on notice, are you able to provide the Committee some more detail as to what those three stages would look like?

SEAN SLOAN: Yes, happy to do that, Chair.

ANSWER**Hybridisation:**

Murray cod and Trout cod hybrids are rare in natural habitats, potentially due to differences in behaviour, including spawning patterns, or habitat preferences between the parent species. Previous research notes hybrid larvae accounting for about 2-6% in some areas. A focus of the NSW Trout cod Recovery Plan is to survey the genetics of all captured Trout cod in NSW as well as all of the brood stock utilised in stocking programs.

In terms of compliance, the Fisheries Management Act is silent on Trout Cod hybrids but the identification material for anglers is available in various formats. This will continue to be promoted and updated material will be developed to reflect any new findings.

River Health & Habitat:

The 3 stages referred to in the Draft Trout Cod Action Plan reflect the incremental nature of identifying candidate sites for conservation stocking of trout cod, increasing the number of locations for stocking over the life of the plan and the nature of on ground rehabilitation works required at the sites to make them suitable for sustaining Trout Cod populations. The Draft plan commits to establishing a minimum of three new viable populations of trout cod in 10 years – in order to achieve this, a strategic plan that identifies potential stocking sites and maps out the on ground works

required is scheduled to be undertaken in Years 1 & 2 (short term action). This plan will also outline the instream and riparian works required to be undertaken in Stages 1-3 (medium-long term actions) The works will be staged to allow for constraints on resources, obtain specialist advice and manage staff and contractor availability. Given that most riparian land is under private ownership, a staged approach is required undertake access negotiations with landholders and managers.

Question 53

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Hansen, just back to where I left off before in relation to the fire ants, my understanding is that there's been some genetic testing carried out or that it's underway in terms of trying to trace the fire ants found at Murwillumbah. Is that correct, and is there an update on that work?

SCOTT HANSEN: We have done the genetic testing, and the genetic testing is a link to the south-east Queensland genetics.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That you mentioned before, yes. How many staff are on the ground at the moment doing that surveillance and compliance work from DPI?

SCOTT HANSEN: That's a good question. I'll get the latest information, unless John has got it to hand.

JOHN TRACEY: While you're pulling that up, there's a core amount of activity that is happening with the dog teams and the surveillance teams from Queensland. We have about four surveillance teams there. In addition, DPI has contracted some additional surveillance teams—another two of those. That is the core in terms of—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When you say "team", how many people are in a team? Is it two? Is it 10?

JOHN TRACEY: We can pull up the numbers, but a surveillance team in terms of a foot on the ground walk-through can be anywhere from 10 upwards of staff moving across to systematically search those areas that have been identified as high priority. I think Scott previously mentioned the fact that we have now cleared that 500-metre zone, so the focus of the response now is to target those trace premises going forward.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And there was about 30 of those, is that right, those premises?

JOHN TRACEY: Yes, there's at least 30. I think overall we've got a larger number than that, that the team is working through. The majority of those have actually been cleared. I think they're expecting the final 10 of those to be cleared off at the end of this week. All the high-priority places have been done, and they're working their way through those lower priority traces. But it is an ongoing—it's a change all the time. The more information we get about links to properties that may have not been compliant or that we find and discover fire ants in Queensland—that's the target of the surveillance program not only in the Murwillumbah area, but across that whole North Coast region.

ANSWER

I am advised that as at 13 December 2023, 29 DPI and LLS staff were rostered on to the Fire Ant response in NSW. A total of 119 DPI and LLS staff had already participated up to that date.

With reference to dog teams, there have been four dog teams involved in the response, two from the National Program and two contractors from NSW. Each team is typically comprised of a handler and one or two dogs. Regarding non-dog teams this depends on the task. A large group of people might be involved in a line of visual surveillance while an individual property inspection might only require two people.

On the 13 December 2023 there were 30 Trace Properties that were being inspected. As of 10 January 2024, the following inspections/checks have been undertaken by NSW DPI:

Dangerous Contact Premises	Properties that may have shared contaminated equipment or vehicles.	24
At Risk Premises	Properties that are in close proximity to Infested Premises or deal with high-risk RIFA materials at Murwillumbah.	83
Trace Premises	Properties determined to have received materials from the suspected original source of the infestation.	80 (additional 11 have been found in Qld)
Total		187

Question 54

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Back to you, Mr Hansen, and back on to exhibited animals. I am wondering if you can give me a breakdown on how many A, B, C, D, E and F grades were issued during compliance audits of exhibited animal facilities in the past 12 months?

SCOTT HANSEN: I won't be able to do that here, but we can obviously take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I note that when we talked about the Central Coast Zoo you said that it was marked as having a satisfactory audit. I am wondering if, on notice, you can also provide me what specific grade it received out of that A, B, C, D, E or F?

SCOTT HANSEN: Sure. I'm happy to do that. While we are on the zoo, there have been breeding activities, breeding programs, at the zoo. There is a combination of both breeding programs that have been undertaken as well as a series of species for which breeding is prohibited. Those prohibited ones are largely the ones that are invasive species and pose biosecurity risks—things like corn snakes, for example. But we have got a long list here of a lot of animals, like princess parrots and tawny frogmouths, that have had two or three birth numbers that we can also put in a response to you on notice so you've got a list of all of that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Could you give me that list of animals, on notice, that are breeding? That would be great.

ANSWER

I am advised that in last 12 months, there have been 11 Exhibited Animal audits with a total of corrective action requests. Audit rating breakdown: A = 8, B = 1, E = 2.

Central Coast Zoo

An audit was undertaken on 15 October 2021 with an acceptable 'A' rating.

Another audit was undertaken on 27 May 2022, with no concerns identified regarding the keeping of lions. Other issues were identified and actioned through the audit. On this occasion, the audit delivered an unacceptable - 'E' rating. The audit noncompliance related to unapproved enclosures for three other species (alligators, marmoset and reptile). Corrective action was undertaken, and each enclosure was subsequently reviewed and approved. Two penalty notices were issued as a result of these breaches.

Breeding at facilities is limited by the spatial requirements under the General Standards. There are special conditions relating to breeding at the Central Coast Zoo in relation to exotic reptiles. The new conditions that were applied to all authority holders on 1 July 2023, require any breeding plan to be documented – outlining species intending to be bred and the reason for breeding. Breeding Plans must be in place by 31 Dec 2023.

An audit, to be carried out in February 2024, will confirm compliance of breeding plans.

27 species have been reported to have given birth at Central Coast Zoo over the 22/23 reporting period. They include:

Species Name	Birth Numbers
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Meerkat	13
Tammar Wallaby	8
Black Swan	6
Carpet Python	6
Single-backed Lizard	6
Masked Lapwing	5
Bush Stone-Curlew	4
Laughing Kookaburra	4
Princess Parrot	3
Tawny Frogmouth	3
Blackbuck	2
Australian Brush-turkey	2
Eclectus Parrot	2
Emu	2
Glossy ibis	2
Indian Peafowl	2
Northern Brown Bandicoot	2
Tasmanian Pademelon	2
Plumed Whistling-duck	2
Common Brush-tailed Possum	2
Eastern Grey Kangaroo	2
Banded Lapwing	1
Cape Barron Goose	1
Red Kangaroo	1
Rufous Bettong	1
Red-and-Green Macaw	1
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo	1

Breeding of the following species at Central Coast Zoo is prohibited, primarily due to biosecurity risk associated with these species.

- Leopard tortoises
- Star tortoises
- Hermann's tortoises
- Elongated tortoises
- Corn snakes
- Red-tail boa constrictors
- Burmese pythons
- Reticulated pythons
- Alligator Snapper Turtles
- Ball Python
- Dumeril's Boa
- Red-eared Slider Turtle
- Spur-Thighed Tortoise

- Double Crested Basilisk
- Taiwan Beauty Snake
- Russian Rat Snake

Question 55

The CHAIR: How is a farmer's or landholder's willingness to participate in that campaign then communicated to Firearms Registry, because one of the other concerns put to me is that farmers have contacted the local LLS office saying, " Hey, I am part of this authorised campaign or pest control program. Can I get a letter of confirmation to support my application for my category D?" And they have been told by the LLS, "No, we can't do that." Is there a formal policy where you will not write letters of acknowledgement stating that a farmer is part of the authorised campaign, if it is going to the registry?

ROB KELLY: There is a process that we go through to assess it. The landholder will apply to the registry first for the category D firearm. The registry then makes a number of checks, one of which is with LLS to determine whether they are participating in an authorised campaign. We have those details. We go through a checklist: Are they in the campaign? Do they have pests on the property? There is a whole process around that. Providing they get to the bottom and, yes, they meet the definition of an authorised campaign, then we write a letter back to the Firearms Registry confirming that they are participating in an authorised campaign. They use that then to determine whether or not the applicant is suitable. It's only one of them. We don't make the decision of whether they're eligible but it's part of the process.

STEVE ORR: Mr Banasiak, just to pick up on what Mr Kelly was saying there before, the process has changed. What used to happen was that the landholder would come straight to us and then go to the registry but, as Mr Kelly has said, they go to the registry first and then they come to us, and that makes the process a little clearer for everyone.

The CHAIR: I don't know whether you are able to pull this data out but on notice could you provide details as to how many times the registry has requested this information since the process has changed?

STEVE ORR: We'll take advice on whether we can provide you with that, Mr Banasiak.

The CHAIR: I don't need the specific details of applicants. I'm just looking at more of a number figure in terms of how many times the registry has contacted you seeking that confirmation.

ROB KELLY: We can take that on notice, and obviously with privacy-related concerns we'll give you what we're legally allowed to provide.

ANSWER

I am advised that since September 27, 2023, LLS has received ten requests from the NSW Firearms Registry to confirm whether Category D applicants are part of an authorised campaign.

Question 56

The CHAIR: Onto silver perch. The latest information you have on your website is a recovery plan from 2006. I'm just wondering whether there has been a subsequent plan that hasn't been uploaded or whether this is just an ongoing plan from 2006.

SEAN SLOAN: I'll take that on notice, Chair, and come back to you with some details. I think the response for all of these native fish will be similar because there is the same set of issues that they all face in terms of river connectivity and the habitat issues that they all face. All of those things are the same for these individual native freshwater species, but they obviously require a tailored approach. I will come back to you with the specifics on silver perch and Macquarie perch.

The CHAIR: The last one is the river blackfish, which is in that Snowy River catchment area. The same thing—the information on your website is a little bit dated, so I'm just wondering where we're at with that species as well.

SEAN SLOAN: It will be the same for that species, and species like eastern cod fall into that category as well as all the small bodied natives. If you like, we can put together some information that covers all of those native species and what we're doing on those if that's of interest.

The CHAIR: That would be fantastic.

ANSWER

I am advised that Silver Perch, Macquarie Perch, and River Blackfish have all suffered major, historical declines due to habitat modification of the Murray Darling system after European settlement. The NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has undertaken annual monitoring of native fish species across the State for the past 30 years. These surveys started when populations were probably at their lowest point and the results have shown that the populations are highly variable depending upon the environmental conditions but there is no clear increasing or decreasing trend in the population of these species over the past 30 years. As a result, NSW DPI has invested in developing hatchery reared fingerlings for Silver and Macquarie Perch and there have been releases of these species in specific locations. River Blackfish are a more challenging species to recover as they have specific, cold water habitat requirements that are shrinking with impacts of climate change. Consequently, this species will require more specific habitat maintenance/protection programs as compared to hatchery development to ensure they do not decline to very low levels.

This monitoring is facilitated through significant programs like the Basin Plan Environmental Outcomes Monitoring (BPEOM) and the Long-Term Intervention Monitoring (LTIM). These programs are integral to the continuous assessment of these native species in NSW.

Conservation stocking of Silver Perch:

2021 – Namoi river – total 62,000 SP fry stocked over three events.

2022 – Namoi River – total 46,000 SP fry stocked over four events.

2023 – Murrumbidgee River – 63,000 SP fingerlings stocked over two events.

Dam stocking:

2020 – total 40,000 SP fry stocked in Burrinjuck Dam, total 39,000 stocked into Blowering Dam, 20,000 stocked into Googong Dam.

2022 – total 10,000 SP fry stocked into Glenbawn Dam, 6000 stocked into Glennies Creek Dam.

2023 – total 24,000 SP fry stocked into Glenbawn Dam, 20,000 stocked into Glennies Creek Dam.

Silver Perch and other all species listed as threatened under state legislation is supported by the NSW DPI Priorities Action Statements (PAS) which are available on the DPI website. The PAS for each species is a statutory, non-regulatory document addressing each threatened species, population, ecological community and key threatening process (KTP) listed on the schedules of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*. The PAS provides an agreed list of strategies and actions that will assist to down-grade or de-list species, populations and ecological communities from the threatened species schedules of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*, as well as actions that will assist to abate or eliminate the impacts of KTPs. In addition to the PAS, Draft Action Plans are being developed by the Fisheries Threatened Species team for priority threatened species. The Fisheries Scientific Committee also compiles annual reports detailing the actions undertaken and the status of threatened species to the Minister – this report is scheduled to be submitted in February 2024.

Question 57

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Has the department been told that there will be no Regional Youth Taskforce?

JONATHAN WHEATON: No, we haven't.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Has the department asked the Minister's office what is going to be happening with the Regional Youth Taskforce?

JONATHAN WHEATON: We've provided advice to the Minister on options for how the Government could continue to engage with youth and youth-related matters across both metropolitan and regional areas, given on the basis that, as you know, formerly there was a Minister for Regional Youth. That is now the Minister for Youth. So the coverage of that portfolio is across the whole State.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Were you asked to provide advice to the Minister's office about ceasing the Regional Youth Taskforce?

JONATHAN WHEATON: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'm not trying to put you in a difficult position here, but what it would appear to be is that there isn't one. So my question to you is were you asked to provide a brief as to what other options there would be instead of having a Regional Youth Taskforce?

JONATHAN WHEATON: I'd have to take on notice specifically if we were asked for that.

ANSWER

To be referred to the Minister for Youth.

Question 58

JONATHAN WHEATON: I would say that there are two ways that we are engaged with police in our regional team. We have projects that have been funded and are to be delivered through various community organisations as well as direct partnerships with police and other State agencies. We hosted a summit in November that brought together police, other agencies and community organisations to discuss different approaches to disaffected youth in the Central West. We certainly worked across agencies, community organisations and councils in response to spikes in youth crime in Bourke and having a better, more coordinated and collaborative approach to addressing those issues when they have spiked in the past. In the Illawarra, our regional development team has worked with police, Youth Justice training services and Business Illawarra to help young offenders transition through to jobs. In Tamworth, in the Oxley Police Command, we've been working with their police officers and other government agencies to partner and design a program focused at young people aged 12 to 15 who are disengaged in school and who are involved in the criminal justice system. Those are a few projects that our local teams are involved in with police. We've also been involved in funding the Youth Action meetings that are coordinated. It is a police-led initiative where they bring together agencies to address, again, a whole-of-government, place-based approach to supporting young people who are at risk of being referred into the criminal justice system. I think that the police have received four years worth of funding to continue the Youth Action meetings. We have our youth community coordinators on the ground as well through our local teams. There is the Guumali Youth Project that is running events, diversionary measures to assist in the reduction of youth crime. We've got an initiative—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, Mr Wheaton, I don't mean to interrupt you but I've only got 30 seconds left. Thank you for those projects. The ones you talked about—Central West Tamworth, Illawarra et cetera—have any of those been funded from the most recent budget cycle or were they funded by decisions of the previous Government?

JONATHAN WHEATON: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could, that would be great—and any new projects in that space that were made available in this year's budget. If you can provide that on notice, that would be fantastic as well.

JONATHAN WHEATON: Sure.

ANSWER

To be referred to the Minister for Youth.

Question 59

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I believe there is something about a justifiable purpose for breeding an animal. What would be considered a "justifiable purpose" for breeding an animal under the new licence condition?

JOHN TRACEY: I might have to take that one on notice, sorry.

ANSWER

I am advised that the purpose for breeding is to be justified by the exhibitor consistent with the requirements of the legislation and standards. A justifiable purpose for breeding an animal under the licence condition may include the breeding of certain animal species for conservation purposes. A breeding plan ensures that the authority holder is breeding animals that are part of a Species Management Program administered by the Zoos and Aquariums Association (ZAA) or that there is a justified purpose and plan for breeding the animal. This helps to ensure that breeding efforts are targeted towards the conservation of endangered or threatened species, and that any breeding activities are carried out in a way that is consistent with legislative requirements.

Question 60

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I know that back in 2017 there were claims that when crocodiles went missing from Get Wild Animal Experiences, those crocodiles had been stolen. Are there any other notable case examples where animals have been claimed to be stolen?

JOHN TRACEY: Not to my knowledge, but I can take that on notice for you just to clarify that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Yes, please. If you could also take on notice what facilities and what animals have been potentially claimed, if you do find that there are further cases?

JOHN TRACEY: Yes, I'm happy to do that.

ANSWER

DPI has not received any reports of stolen animals in the last 12 months.

Question 61

The Hon. EMMA HURST: At previous estimates hearings I have raised concerns about exhibitors illegally removing animals from the wild to be exhibited and about how difficult this would be to detect, in practice. Is the DPI doing any work to investigate links between exhibited animal facilities and underground wildlife trafficking and trade?

JOHN TRACEY: We do use the information that we've got available. I am not aware of any detailed look at it, but we do take action on the information that is available to us. I can take that on notice as well, if you'd like.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Thank you. I might ask some further questions about that in February in regard to what would assist the department with investigations into that space as well.

ANSWER

I am advised that there are systems in place for exhibited animal Authority holders to report on animal holdings to the Department. Verification of reported data can be undertaken during the Department's routine inspection schedule.

DPI relies on reports from industry and the public to inform where unlawful animal acquisitions and displays have occurred. This forms the basis of investigations and where verified, action is taken to rectify non-compliance with enforcement action taken in accordance with the DPI Compliance and Enforcement Policy as required.

Question 62

The Hon EMMA HURST: Previously I asked the Minister a question that was on the New South Wales Government webpage about events in Armidale and Guyra in regard to what it says are captive reindeer exhibitions. This was quickly removed from the website after our question. Does that have anything to do with the DPI, or is it another department?

SCOTT HANSEN: No. We don't have anything to do with any funding or any arrangement for any exhibition of captive—and I assume that they are red deer—reindeers over the Christmas period. However, what we do have is, obviously—and there is one authority holder who does have approval to exhibit red deer as a mobile exhibitor in New South Wales and, obviously, we have a responsibility for ensuring that exhibitor complies with the standards for exhibiting animals at mobile establishments in New South Wales. And that includes them submitting an itinerary for the month for their forward plan about where they are exhibiting and where they will be having mobile displays.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What company is that?

SCOTT HANSEN: I don't have the actual name of the company in front of me.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you able to take it on notice?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And can you also find out for me if that is the company that is involved with the Government grants that were originally on the New South Wales Government website?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes. As I said, I am not aware of any—I can, but I am not sure, and I am not aware of any funding being provided for the exhibition of captive reindeers by the New South Wales Government.

ANSWER

I am advised that the company that exhibits red deer (reindeer) is Reimers Farmworld Pty Ltd which is based in Queensland. The Department received a mobile exhibition itinerary from this company on 30 October 2023 for multiple exhibitions within NSW including exhibition of red deer at Westfield Tuggerah on 12 December 2023.

RSPCA NSW reported receiving a complaint about two deer being exhibited at a shopping centre at Tuggerah around 6 December 2023. The deer were from Queensland. NSW DPI was advised that RSPCA NSW investigated the complaint and found no evidence of cruelty, and the case has been closed.

Question 63

The CHAIR: Mr Hanson, I might just go back to a question I asked around the Invasive Species Council funding. You took it on notice and got back to me with an answer. Your answer says that the funding is monitored by the monitoring and evaluation—or M and E—framework. Does your department have any input into that performance matrix or that monitoring framework at all, or is that a Federal thing?

SCOTT HANSEN: I might see if Dr Tracey wants to comment on that.

JOHN TRACEY: Yes. If that's in relation to the Invasive Species Council funding that DPI provided as a one-off—

SCOTT HANSEN: That was \$33,000.

JOHN TRACEY: Yes. That was part of a national initiative that was a cost-shared one. My understanding is that it wasn't about monitoring and evaluation but more looking at the biosecurity system and some initiatives around that.

SCOTT HANSEN: Your question was not about the actual program itself, but it was about how do we monitor that spend in our program.

The CHAIR: Yes, my question is about the monitoring and evaluation framework that is mentioned in the answer. A lot of the measuring of outcomes is quite subjective and vague, and a lot of the outcomes are vague too. I am just concerned whether your department had any involvement in developing that framework or that matrix in measuring this performance.

SCOTT HANSEN: That is something, that—if Dr Tracey doesn't know. I don't know whether we were involved in that or not, or whether we just signed on to the national program. We can take that on notice, and we can see if we can find out whether we had a hand on the pen at all on that stuff.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

ANSWER

I am advised that the funding provided to the Invasive Species Council was the NSW contribution to the Decade of Biosecurity Coordinator position.

NSW DPI, as a member of the National Biosecurity Committee, has input to the “Decade of Biosecurity” initiative, including the monitoring and evaluation framework, to ensure alignment between the respective implementation efforts and help to guide and shape efforts of the Steering Group to best support the objectives of the National Biosecurity Strategy.

The Decade of Biosecurity is a collaborative initiative that seeks to engage all Australians in a stronger biosecurity system. The initiative began as an outcome of the 2019 Australian Biosecurity Symposium to future-proof Australia’s biosecurity system and was officially launched in May 2023.

Question 64

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I think again it will be you, Ms Fox, but then you just flick me off to someone else. I understand the Regional NSW website now provides information about the Regional Development Trust Fund, and it's my understanding that the Regional Development Advisory Interim Council— it's quite a mouthful—will be appointed by the Minister. Is this correct?

REBECCA FOX: Yes, that's correct.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Do you think it's appropriate for that to happen?

REBECCA FOX: Chair, I'm not sure I need to comment on, or are required to comment on, Government policy in that regard.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Fair enough. I completely respect that, Ms Fox; that's fine. What selection process did the Minister go through to make these appointments?

REBECCA FOX: I'll take that on notice. I haven't been personally involved, so I'll take it on notice to make sure I have it accurately described.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Is there anyone online that is?

REBECCA FOX: No. Most of the administrative part of it has been run through either my office or Mr Wheaton's team, but I'm very happy to take it on notice.

ANSWER

I am advised that appointees to the Regional Development Advisory Council were identified through a process managed by the Department of Regional NSW working with an independent talent search agency, in consultation with the Premier's Department and NSW Treasury. The Minister for Regional NSW appointed members to the Council in accordance with the requirements of the *Regional Development Act 2004* and *Regional Development Regulation 2018*.

Question 65

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: But, Ms Fox, I understand that's an interim panel, and I thank you very much for telling the Committee that, but I'm really struggling to understand how you have an interim process that you said is going to last 12 months, you have an interim council that has been selected by the Minister that obviously is done and obviously you're about to announce but you can't tell me anything about the process. Surely some of this was run through the department.

REBECCA FOX: Yes, it's run by the department. The process, I understand, is set out in the legislation, but I don't have personal knowledge of that process other than what is set out in the legislation that the Minister can appoint under the legislation. But I'm very happy to take it on notice and provide that information to the Committee.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Was there advice sought by the department about the appointment of the interim council?

REBECCA FOX: I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So we have an interim council that's going to be in charge of distributing grant money and there's no-one that can tell me if the Minister's office consulted the department about that process.

REBECCA FOX: The department has been involved. I haven't personally been involved, so to make sure that I answer the question appropriately, I'm happy to take it on notice and come back as quickly as we can to advise—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Who has been involved? This is a really important question about funding allocation. Who has been involved?

REBECCA FOX: The department has been involved through the regional development team and through my office's team. We have a project team that has been working on updating the Regional Development Roadmap, and we're very happy to provide that information, but I will have to take it on notice.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Is there someone from the regional development team online?

REBECCA FOX: Mr Wheaton unfortunately has just left to get on a plane.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: May I request from you, Ms Fox: Are there any briefs that were sent up? What is the information the department provided on the appointment process? Who was consulted? Who was in charge?

REBECCA FOX: Yes, we're very happy to provide whatever we can on notice.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I don't mean to be difficult, but I just find that really hard to understand how on this major, only single grant allocation that the Minister has decided that they're running that no-one in a budget estimates forum can tell me how the selection process was made and the appointments. I find that really staggering, but anyway. Will there be equal representation across regional New South Wales on this council?

REBECCA FOX: I would expect so.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: But do you know?

REBECCA FOX: I think the regulations and the legislation set out the capabilities that are required. I know there's a designated Aboriginal position on the council and the skills required in regional development—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I redirect you back to my question, Ms Fox. Obviously you've chosen it. Not you, I beg your pardon—the Minister. But the process has taken place which no-one online can tell me or the Committee anything about. My question was very direct. It was will there be equal representation across regional New South Wales? Surely, someone knows that.

REBECCA FOX: I'll have to take that question on notice, and I understand I'm entitled to take questions on notice when I don't have personal information that enables me to answer your question. I'm trying to provide the information that I've got. I don't have personal knowledge of that process.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Right. Okay. Do you know—and I'm not asking you for personal knowledge; I'm just asking you for factual information—will there be equal funding allocated to each electorate and LGA?

REBECCA FOX: I don't think the investment strategy has been determined, and one of the purposes of the interim council is to advise the Minister on the investment strategy and particularly the initial investments to be made under that trust.

ANSWER

I am advised that appointees to the Regional Development Advisory Council were identified through a process managed by the Department of Regional NSW working with an independent talent search agency, in consultation with the Premier's Department and NSW Treasury. The process was overseen by an independent probity advisor.

The Department sought advice and consulted with the following agencies to inform the appointment of the Regional Development Advisory Council:

- NSW Public Service Commission
- The Cabinet Office
- NSW Treasury
- Australian Government

Members of the Regional Development Advisory Council were appointed in accordance with the criteria outlined in the Regional Development Regulation 2018.

Question 66

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is the round table that's in Broken Hill today to look at matters related to this fund? Is that correct?

REBECCA FOX: That's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Who was invited to attend?

REBECCA FOX: I wasn't there today. I'm sorry. I've been here. I can provide the attendees on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was it by invitation only to attend and who was invited? I'm happy for you to provide that on notice.

REBECCA FOX: No problem. We can provide that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many of those round tables have been held so far?

REBECCA FOX: I have a list here. We've done six to date and we've got another three or four to go into the new year.

ANSWER

Attendance at the Broken Hill roundtable was by invitation. A cross-section of stakeholders were invited to attend the event, including representatives from local government, business, industry groups, First Nations organisations, and community organisations.

Question 67

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the opportunities beyond the invited attendees, and any members of the public or community organisations who have a view in relation to this fund and how it will operate, what mechanisms are there for those people to provide input into what this process will look like?

REBECCA FOX: There's an issues paper which is out now and anybody can put a submission in in relation to that issues paper. The issues paper is quite detailed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know how many submissions you have received thus far?

REBECCA FOX: I'd have to take that on notice. I think the submissions period is still open. I don't believe it closes until February. I'm just waiting for my team to say—yes, February. I don't know how many we've received to date but I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. Will they be publicly available at any point?

REBECCA FOX: Yes, they will.

ANSWER

I am advised that the public submission process for the review of the *Regional Development Act 2004* closes on 31 January 2024.

As at 13 December 2023, 65 submissions had been received.

A Consultation Report outlining feedback received will be published following the closure of the submission period.

Question 68

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Ms Fox, the council is going to be announced by the end of the year and we're going to get more information on that. Therefore, it's not going to be administering any funds this year. May I ask, do we know about a time line for any future projects to be announced or administered by this council? Are we thinking midway through next year?

REBECCA FOX: I haven't got a time line. I'm happy to take that on notice, but I think the initial investments would be made this financial year. There is money in the budget this financial year. I would expect maybe March or April, and certainly in the last quarter of this financial year, for the first investments to be made.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I think you're going to tell me the same thing so just tell me that you're going to take it on notice, but in terms of the process to appoint the council, was it by application? I know it's appointed by the Minister and that's absolutely fair enough, but was that process then looked at from the department in terms of grading more specific applicants and things like that. Can all of that be included as well, please?

REBECCA FOX: Yes, no problem. It was a merit-based and skills-based council rather than a representative council. That's set out in the legislation, but I can provide that information—no problem.

ANSWER

I am advised that timelines relating to the delivery of the Regional Development Roadmap are available on the Department's website.

The Regional Development Advisory Council candidates were identified through a targeted recruitment process led by the Department in partnership with an independent talent agency. Candidates were assessed and recommended based on the appointment criteria in the Regional Development Regulation 2018.

Question 69

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Ms Fox, I think you said there have been six round tables held so far. I can't quite remember, sorry. Was it six?

REBECCA FOX: Yes, we've done Bega, Wagga, Orange, Bourke and Broken Hill. Sorry, that's five to date.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has the Minister attended all of those in person?

REBECCA FOX: I'll have to take that on notice. I haven't been to all of them, so I will take that on notice and confirm to make sure that I provide the correct information.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. Could you also—

REBECCA FOX: She was certainly at— **The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sorry, I'll let you finish.

REBECCA FOX: That's all right. I'll take it on notice to make sure I provide the correct information.

ANSWER

As of 9 January 2024, the Minister has attended Regional Development Roundtables in Bega, Orange, Casino, Bourke, Broken Hill and Maitland.

Question 70

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We assume she was at Broken Hill. We'll assume that, but if you take it on notice, that would be good. Again, could you take on notice if the Minister is slated to attend any of the forums or round tables in person in the new year as well? I appreciate that you wouldn't know that, so could you take that on notice as well?

REBECCA FOX: Sorry, I couldn't understand that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'd like to know, of the five that have been held, which ones the Minister has attended and which of the future forums to be held in the new year the Minister has confirmed her attendance for as well.

REBECCA FOX: No problem. I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But I know you won't know that and I don't expect you to.

ANSWER

As of 9 January 2024, the Minister has attended Development Roundtables in Bega, Orange, Casino, Bourke, Broken Hill and Maitland. The Minister has also confirmed attendance for the upcoming Regional Development Roundtable in Coffs Harbour, Narrabri and Moree.

Question 71

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Ms Fox, I'm sorry because I think you'll probably take this on notice too, but to gain further insight for the Committee, how exactly will the trust fund be run? And I know you said March but when are we likely to see projects actually in the pipeline and off the ground? You know how sometimes when we're applying for grants it has to be, say, shovel ready. When will we see that? Can you provide that to us on notice as well?

REBECCA FOX: I can do that, yes. I think some of that still needs to be determined and developed. We're in the early stages. The money was only confirmed in September, and we'll work through what that looks like through the trust fund and through the investment strategy, but I'm happy to provide whatever we can at this point in time.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Understood. Again, this might be to take on notice, but what input and oversight will the Minister have over the recommended projects?

REBECCA FOX: I'll have to take that on notice as well.

ANSWER

The Trust will be administered in accordance with the requirements of the *Regional Development Act 2004*. Initial investments through the Trust are expected to be considered by the Regional Development Advisory Council from March 2024.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is about a quite specific project so I don't expect you to have the details to hand. I wonder whether you could come back on notice with any information in relation to a grant that was approved, on my understanding, a few years ago for the Narrabri Industrial Network under one of the regional funds. I think they are under the impression that \$100,000 had been allocated, but I think only \$50,000 has been made available to them. That's the correspondence that I've received. I'm wondering whether, on notice, you could provide any information in relation to that particular grant for that organisation. It's the Narrabri Industrial Network.

REBECCA FOX: No problem. It's particularly in relation to the quantum?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. My understanding is that there was \$100,000 that they believe was allocated but \$50,000 has not been provided, and they just wanted me to find out where that was up to. If you could provide any information on notice, that would be very helpful.

REBECCA FOX: No problem. I can do that.

ANSWER

I am advised that in November 2020 the Narrabri Industrial Network Inc. (NIN) was offered a one-off grant of \$100,000 over two years to help the NIN to establish a shop front and employ a new local staff member to coordinate business development opportunities.

The letter of offer advised NIN that the payment would be split over two years (two \$50,000 payments), each requiring NIN to submit a separate acquittal for each annual tranche of works.

NIN lodged an acquittal for the first \$50,000 on 8 February 2021 that was paid to NIN on 31 March 2021. An acquittal for the second year was not received.

Question 72

The CHAIR: Can I go to the issue of water quality and oysters? Are you aware of the report that was just released by Southern Cross University around pesticides and water pollution in the Richmond River? Are you familiar with—

SEAN SLOAN: Chair, I'm not across that report. I'm certainly aware of the challenges that oyster farmers face with a whole range of water quality issues, particularly sewage outfalls, but I'm not familiar with that particular piece of work.

The CHAIR: It's just been released literally a couple of days ago and talks about them finding 21 different pesticides, some of which are actually banned in Australia—one particularly was benomyl, which has been banned since 2006. I guess this is probably an issue that is across a wide breadth of your portfolio area—not only farming but also fishing et cetera. I am just wondering what work is being done around the use of pesticides in and around these sensitive areas? In particular, what is being done to educate farmers and other users around some of these pesticides that may be lurking in sheds, that have been sitting there for a while, and that farmers don't realise are actually banned?

SEAN SLOAN: I think in terms of that report, I think I'll just take that on notice to have the opportunity to look at it and see what's in there.

The CHAIR: Sure.

SEAN SLOAN: We do have programs of work underway under the Marine Estate Management Strategy which are designed to improve water quality overall and that does include community education engagement activities with landholders, so I think there are works, or engagement pieces, underway on that front. But in terms of specifics, if it's of interest, I could come back with a more detailed answer on what some of that work looks like.

ANSWER

I am advised that the Marine Estate Management Strategy (MEMS) Initiative 1 (Improving water quality and reducing litter) has invested into addressing threats to the marine estate, specifically in the areas of marine debris, estuarine water quality, mapping estuarine outflows, land use pressures, oyster reef rehabilitation and clean coastal catchments research and monitoring. Responsibility for this work is primarily led by MEMS partner DPE-EHG. DPI (Fisheries and Agriculture) deliver oyster reef and clean coastal catchments work.

NSW DPI has shared the Southern Cross University research paper with relevant environmental agencies to develop a considered response.

Question 73

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Ms Fox, would you be able to provide, and I'm happy for you to do it on notice—in fact, I'm sure you will need to—just picking up on where we left off, a list of all of the funds that the Department of Regional NSW is now responsible for administering from, say, the start of December, if that's okay?

REBECCA FOX: Do you mean grants funds?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, and any funds that you've got responsibility for.

REBECCA FOX: Okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you also provide—I'll make that one grants funds as well— which were the funds you were responsible for as of, say, January this year? I'm just trying to understand grants funds specifically, but also more broadly, funds that Regional NSW was responsible for at the beginning of the year versus the end of the year. But I'm happy if it is on notice and for as much as you can provide.

REBECCA FOX: And do you want the funds from the primary industries team, for example? Across the whole department?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, please. That would be great.

ANSWER

I am advised that the full list of funds currently and previously available through the Department of Regional NSW is available on our website.

Question 74

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What work is being done by the department or what advice has been given to the Minister in relation to the impact that that decision will have on that particular precinct project?

REBECCA FOX: I'll hand over to Mr Bolton, who is responsible for that program, but we've been—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Great.

REBECCA FOX: Yes, I'll let him answer that.

JAMES BOLTON: We have been analysing the impact of that decision from the Federal Government on the delivery of the scope of works that we have in place. We have been engaging with the Federal Government around potential impacts for the operations of Inland Rail and the Newell Highway too. We are still reviewing the best alternative to how we get access into the special activation precinct and are providing advice to the Minister's office when that's completed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In your discussions with the Commonwealth, have you got any information in relation to the economic impact of cutting that intermodal overpass project? Has that been discussed? Is there anything you could provide on notice?

JAMES BOLTON: On notice, I could definitely provide a summary of the discussion we've had with the Federal Government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Thank you

ANSWER

I am advised that the Department is reviewing the impact of not constructing the Moree Intermodal Overpass (MIO) at this stage and while it is not the preferred scenario, we are progressing work to confirm that the precinct can be adequately serviced utilising the existing level crossing at Bulluss Drive in the short term while the precinct is growing.

We have discussed the project with the Commonwealth and expressed the need for the MIO to be funded to align with the precinct's growth and delivery of the Inland Rail project. No economic impact of cutting the MIO has been provided by the Federal Government.

Question 75

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, definitely. Is Transport for NSW engaged in those considerations? Particularly, I am thinking around the safety of heavy vehicles accessing the site. Do you speak with them as part of that work as well?

JAMES BOLTON: Absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What about the local council? Obviously, they have an interest in this. Are they involved in those discussions?

JAMES BOLTON: Absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, if you are happy to provide on notice an overview of that work that has happened and maybe time frames in terms of—I am assuming that you then have to present to the Minister what some of the options are, and I respect that there are budget processes if that all changes. But, for the people up there who are keen to know time lines of what may happen, any advice you can provide in relation to that would be also very useful.

JAMES BOLTON: Yes, we can do that.

ANSWER

I am advised that the Department is in regular contact with Transport for NSW and Moree Plains Shire Council on the design and delivery of the Moree Intermodal Overpass (MIO) and the need for the MIO to provide separation between trains and vehicles as the Inland Rail Project is delivered and the precinct grows. We will continue to engage with Council, the Federal Government and Transport for NSW on this important piece of infrastructure.

Question 76

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. How much funding had been allocated for both the Williamstown and the Narrabri special activation precincts?

JAMES BOLTON: There had been no formal funding allocation to either precinct—so Williamstown or Narrabri. Typically, the process for a funding decision—we take the precinct through a master planning process. We essentially present the final investment decision to government. Neither of those special activation precincts had progressed to that phase. So there was no—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But some money had obviously been spent on—sorry, I probably should have worded that differently. Some money had been spent on that planning work, yes, for both of those precincts?

JAMES BOLTON: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a funding allocation or a budget amount that you could provide on how much was spent to date on those projects? The bell has just gone, so I'm happy for it to be on notice, if you can provide any information on that.

JAMES BOLTON: We can provide that on notice.

ANSWER

I am advised that the spend to 30 November 2023 was \$10.3 million for the Williamstown project and \$4.2 million on the Narrabri project.