

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 8 - CUSTOMER SERVICE

Monday 9 September 2024

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

EMERGENCY SERVICES, YOUTH JUSTICE, CUSTOMER SERVICE AND DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

UNCORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Emma Hurst (Chair)
Dr Amanda Cohn
Ms Abigail Boyd
Ms Sue Higginson
The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine
The Hon. Aileen MacDonald (Temporary Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Jacqui Munro
The Hon. Bob Nanva
The Hon. Peter Primrose

PRESENT

The Hon. Jihad Dib, *Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Youth Justice*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

The CHAIR: Welcome to the second hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 8 - Customer Service for the inquiry into budget estimates 2024-2025. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Emma Hurst. I am the Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Dib and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Emergency Services, Youth Justice, Customer Service and Digital Government.

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

Mr GRAEME HEAD, Secretary, NSW Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Ms LAURA CHRISTIE, Government Chief Information and Digital Officer and Deputy Secretary, Digital.NSW, NSW Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Ms SARAH CRUICKSHANK, Deputy Secretary, Customer Delivery and Transformation, NSW Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Mr GREG WELLS, Managing Director, Service NSW, NSW Department of Customer Service, sworn and examined

Ms JODY GRIMA, Acting Deputy Secretary, Policy, Strategy and Governance, NSW Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Ms MANDY YOUNG, Chief Executive Officer, State Insurance Regulatory Authority, NSW Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Ms KYLIE DE COURTENAY, Managing Director, NSW Telco Authority, NSW Department of Customer Service, sworn and examined

Ms DANUSIA CAMERON, Registrar General, NSW Department of Customer Service, sworn and examined

Mr MICHAEL TZIMOULAS, Chief Financial Officer, NSW Department of Customer Service, sworn and examined

Mr SAM TOOHEY, Executive Director, Emergency Management, NSW Premier's Department, affirmed and examined

Commissioner JEREMY FEWTRELL, Commissioner, Fire and Rescue NSW, sworn and examined

Acting Commissioner DEBBIE PLATZ, APM, Acting Commissioner, NSW State Emergency Service, sworn and examined

Commissioner ROB ROGERS, AFSM, Commissioner, NSW Rural Fire Service, sworn and examined

Ms JOANNA QUILTY, Acting Chief Executive Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority, affirmed and examined

Mr ANDREW GRAHAM, Chief Financial and Operating Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority, affirmed and examined

Ms AMANDA LECK, Head – Adaptation, Mitigation and Reconstruction, NSW Reconstruction Authority, affirmed and examined

Ms CANDICE NEILSON, Acting Executive Director, Youth Justice, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, affirmed and examined

Mr PAUL O'REILLY, Deputy Secretary, System Reform, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During those sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Good morning. Minister, when will you confirm that the staff of the Business Bureau are not under threat from the 31 per cent cut to your department?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, I can confirm to you that frontline staff from the NSW Business Bureau are not—there's not going to be a change this financial year to the staff at the Business Bureau in the frontline services. That's the concierge.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What about support services in the Business Bureau that aren't on the front line, as you call it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, you'd be aware that there's currently a process that we're undertaking through Service NSW in terms of being able to make sure that Service NSW fits within the allocated budget. That goes

back to an overspend of budget of about \$179 million over the past financial year. We're looking at all numbers. We're actually in the process of consultation. We've been through that for a while now.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is your budget. Are you saying that the Business Bureau will be subject to cuts—staff in the Business Bureau will be subject to cuts?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, what I've said is that the frontline Business Bureau services will not be. What I will also confirm is that the Business Bureau this year was funded with \$25 million in the budget, and there's a \$5 million budget as well. What it does is that we're looking at—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sorry, what's the difference between the \$5 million and the \$25 million?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The \$25 million is set up, and the \$5 million is the operational cost, of course.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: During estimates last week, you're obviously aware, I presume, that Minister Kamper said, "I've got the Business Bureau fully funded," and there would be no changes at all to the structure of the Business Bureau. Was he telling the truth? Who's in charge?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think what we've just seen then—what he said is the Business Bureau is funded. The Business Bureau, as I said, has \$25 million and \$5 million. There will be no changes to the frontline staff. That's the concierge staff, those who are working with people at that business frontline service. So there will not be a change.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: He said there would be no changes at all. So you're saying that he is wrong?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I haven't said that. I haven't said that at all.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Well, you are if you're saying that there will be changes to the structure of the Business Bureau behind the scenes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let's put this into perspective. The Business Bureau was part of an election commitment that we took. It has now been established. Within the Business Bureau, there are elements that were the old service to business in New South Wales. With that, there are no changes to frontline services. The reality of it is that we need these frontline services. There has been years of overspending, and we're trying to preserve these frontline services. The commitment that I'm giving—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How could there be years of overspending? The Business Bureau, you said, is apparently your idea. How could there be overspending?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Business Bureau was an election commitment, and that election commitment is being delivered.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But how can there be an overspend if it's your budget and your policy?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's very tricky, Ms Munro.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not trying to be tricky; I'm trying to understand.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Business Bureau is part of Service NSW. In Service NSW, there had been an overspend by \$179 million.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You're telling me that there's going to be changes to the Business Bureau. Is that what you're telling me? There will be staffing changes to the Business Bureau?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Business Bureau was set up as part of an election commitment. There was a service to business function. That has been changed into parts of the Business Bureau. The Business Bureau frontline services will not be affected.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My understanding of that, just to be clear, is that when Minister Kamper said, "I've got the Business Bureau fully funded," he was incorrect.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is funded.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So there'll be no staffing changes to the Business Bureau?

Mr JIHAD DIB: This year, there will be no changes at all to frontline services in the Business Bureau.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not asking about frontline services; I'm asking about the support services that are set up for the Business Bureau.

Mr JIHAD DIB: A lot of duplication happens around Service NSW. Part of the process that we're undertaking at the moment in that consultation to ensure that Service NSW can fit within its allocated budget actually means that we're looking at all of those at the moment. What I've said to you and to the Committee quite clearly is that there will not be any changes, any reduction, to the frontline services of the Business Bureau. I'm not going to make an apology if I'm looking to run my agency as efficiently as I possibly can.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'll move on. According to information that we have been provided, the previously proposed 31 per cent cut, which equates to \$11.7 million, will now need to be found elsewhere in Service NSW. Do you know which other part of Service NSW will be cut to make up for the fact that there are now apparently no changes to the Business Bureau, as you've just said?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I just want to go back to that point. I made it very clear about the Business Bureau, and I'll talk about the frontline services.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I don't know that you have made it very clear about the Business Bureau.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think we're maybe speaking in different lanes here. I have said that there is not going to be any change to the Business Bureau frontline services. Let me just give you a bit of context, Ms Munro.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But can I just ask about the \$11.7 million that will now need to be found elsewhere if the Business Bureau isn't changing?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Business Bureau received \$25 million in funding this year, and an additional \$5 million as well. That is the budget, and I will work within that budget. You asked the question a bit earlier about the budget.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It was about the 31 per cent cut, which is the information that we've been provided. There is obviously quite a lot in the public about the cuts to Service NSW, which we're trying to ascertain from you. This proposed 31 per cent cut, are you saying that's not happening or it is happening?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I have been very clear about the challenges that we face, particularly in Service NSW. That stems from the fact that, for a number of years, Service NSW has not been able to operate within its allocated budget. The previous Government had set up Service NSW and just kept giving it more and more tasks to do without some ongoing funding. That was then—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you're saying that you're reducing funding.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I just finish?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: This is going to be a very long day if questions are asked and the Minister isn't allowed to reasonably answer them.

The CHAIR: I think we're skating close to that. I don't think you've gone over the line just yet. I remind the member to be mindful of that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What's really clear and what's an undeniable fact is that Service NSW overspent the allocated budget by \$179 million. Service NSW does a lot of great work. The teams there are there to support New South Wales through a number of things. We'd had a series of compounding crises. Service NSW, from 2018 through to 2022 or 2023, literally grew double in terms of the staffing required.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This isn't really related to my question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It actually is, because it's related to the budget.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can I ask specifically then: There's lots of media reporting about cuts to New South Wales. Internal documents have been leaked and made public. You're obviously aware of that. Did anyone from your office discuss or exchange emails about the delay of the restructure announcement with Service NSW executives before it was leaked and made public?

Mr JIHAD DIB: How do you mean? Sorry, I don't really understand that question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: For example, the public service union was advised that you were only cutting 125 people—

Mr JIHAD DIB: By whom?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: —but, in fact, the first round of cuts was 225 people who ended up disappearing. Stewart Little from the PSA said that the cuts would disproportionately affect regional communities. This is in the public sphere. He has been fairly vocal about this, and journalists have picked up this information that has been leaked. Who advised the union that it was only 125 people when, in fact, 225 people have gone?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In fact, Ms Munro, we have been pretty clear and pretty up-front about this. We're undertaking, and we have been for a while now, a very good consultation process. That consultation process involves the Executive, the staff at Service NSW and the union. We know that we have to rein in a budget that was on target to go over \$1 billion to be able to work within its allocated budget. The point that you're making here is that somebody might've breached somebody else or that there was a leak. This is actually about consultation. We believe in consulting with our teams and looking at what are the best things.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is the public service union part of that consultation?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It may have been that there are things that, rather than duplicate, we bring them in.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was Stephen Kamper part of that consultation?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I just finish that? I'm happy to take that question if you let me finish this one off. It may be that there are elements in Service that are no longer required. As an example, think about the crises that we've been dealing with—bushfires across the State, floods and the pandemic. A lot of things were set up that are no longer required. We're looking at what duplication there is within services.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can I clarify that? You're telling me that staff are no longer required and resources are no longer required for flood recovery and bushfire preparation prevention. We're about to face an enormous summer of dry fuel and increasing fuel load. Is that what you just said?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think you're trying to put words in my mouth.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, I think you've just said that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: In 2022 we had massive floods. We enabled a whole series of supports that are still occurring at the moment. The intensity of what was required there has now tapered off. As a result of that, the same volume of staff is not required. The disaster teams still stand, but the volumes are not required at the same level. The COVID support that was there, the same numbers of staff are not required. You can see that. You can see that that's a very practical, commonsense approach. In terms of the upcoming fire season, we have just had the storm season launch on Saturday. We have got the upcoming bushfire season launch coming up, the Get Ready Weekend, later this month.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That wasn't my question, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You made the point about dry fuel loads.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, my question is pretty clear.

The CHAIR: There has been a point of order.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: You just made a ruling a few minutes ago suggesting that Ms Munro was skating close to the line. I fear that she may have traversed that now and that we should let the Minister finish his answers.

The CHAIR: I remind both the Minister and the member about Hansard and talking over the top of each other. If there is a redirection, make sure it is done in a respectful way.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I will endeavour always to be respectful, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Likewise.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My question was asking to clarify what you meant. What I understood was that we don't need as many staff because we're past some major disasters, like floods and bushfires. Is that correct?

Mr JIHAD DIB: When a natural disaster or a pandemic hits, we need to scale up. Service NSW was scaled up at that time. That scale is not required at that same level anymore. I think anybody would see that it is a very practical and commonsense approach. I want to make sure that Service NSW can operate within its allotted budget and that it focuses on the core functions of what Service NSW actually is. If you're saying that we should still have the same volume of people to deal with things—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You are the Minister. We don't need to traverse what I think. You're the Minister in charge.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm trying to tell you why I made that call.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I haven't asked a question about my opinions; I have asked questions about yours.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I am giving you that, but you're not letting me answer properly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, if I may continue, you've previously praised the disaster preparation and recovery team. Are you aware of what services they will no longer be able to provide as a result of your cuts?

Mr JIHAD DIB: They will still be able to provide all of the services. Indeed, they are doing that at the moment. There is still a team down in the Central West and they're still working on it. It has been right sized to fit what is required at the moment. The work that is required of the disaster team is not at the same magnitude or same scale that was required a year ago or two years ago. We're not in a pandemic, for example, and don't need to run those same programs.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, you expect them to operate at the same capacity, despite the fact that you've cut their budget by 64 per cent.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're coming back to the budget question here. I've said to you and I've said to the Committee that they've still got the same skills and the same ability. The fact of the matter is that they don't have the same level and volume of work. As a result of that, we have right sized it. I'm not sure where these figures are coming from. I don't know if I can clarify it any more than this. If I use the pandemic, because everyone is familiar with the pandemic—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, we're talking about emergency services that relate to bushfires and floods. I'm asking about the levels of service that you expect to provide with budget cuts. If we're talking about Service NSW more broadly, are you planning for in-person wait times for customers visiting Service NSW centres to blow out because of the cuts to the telecommunications-based service, in addition to on-the-ground cuts, I should say?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In the first instance, you're talking about budget cuts; I'm talking about making sure that Service NSW can actually meet the budget that is allocated to it. That hasn't happened for the last year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But your Government allocates the budget.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That tells me a few things. It tells me that either the budget was not the appropriate budget or, as we know, that at that particular time, when there was a crisis, there was an increase in the volume of work they were doing. We are in—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you advocating for the budget to be increased or are you comfortable with the cuts that you have apparently been allocated without any input from yourself? Have you felt like you've been listened to by the Treasurer in advocating for Service NSW and the staff around you?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I have. I've had a really good hearing, and I will say that I was able to secure \$83 million in transition funding and support funding for Service NSW. What we are looking at doing is making sure that we've got a Service NSW that is funded properly and is sustainable. We don't want to keep putting it in a position—as the previous Government did—where they are forced to overspend the budget because there isn't ongoing funding. That is what we're doing. This is the consultation process that we're going through. Service NSW runs—I will say this very, very clearly—a really important role in New South Wales. I want to make sure it goes back to focusing on the core business and fundamentally operates within its allocated budget. You can't keep overshooting the budget by well over \$100 million for consecutive years and say, "Yeah, this is fine." I'm looking for sustainability in my agency. I would think that the people of New South Wales would expect that from their Ministers.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You would remember that at the last budget estimates we spoke about AI. You said that you're allocating resources elsewhere so the person who was doing the data entry can now do something at a higher level. Now we have staff cuts and possible AI. We haven't got the benefit from introducing new technology, but we do have staff cuts. I'm wondering if you're improving the services that we deliver through AI.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I just go back a step? Sorry, when did I say that and what was the context? What did I say?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: At the budget estimates at the beginning of the year.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What did I say—if you don't mind—and what was the context in which I said it?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Let's not keep going over this. If you're going to ask me to read a quote—

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, you've quoted me as saying something. I'm asking what it was.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'll move on to the digital strategy refresh or update that you spoke about.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order. If the honourable member seeks to ask leading questions, I think it's quite reasonable that the Minister be able to answer them.

The CHAIR: The Minister was asking some clarifying questions and I think that maybe created a bit of confusion. I think Ms Munro has now gone down a different path of questioning.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I was, Madam Chair. Thank you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In February you said that following your stakeholder round table at budget estimates, the digital strategy refresh or update would be made public by the end of this year. Is that still the case?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The digital strategy is something that we've worked really, really hard on. We're really pleased to see the engagement and the refresh. I'm very confident that we'll meet our timelines. It's going to be well received.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: By the smirk on your face, it seems like it's going to imminently released.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on, the smirk on my face? Let's just stay civil here.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm just reflecting the context.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's a smile.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: By your enthusiastic response, it sounds like the refresh will be released very soon. Are you delaying the refresh until after budget estimates as a way to avoid scrutiny?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, you obviously don't know me very well. I do things in a proper process and a proper way.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm curious. Can you tell me when it will be released?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll let you know that one of the things that I did when we hosted the first round tables—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I didn't ask this question, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm giving you the answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I didn't ask the question. Could you please—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order.

The CHAIR: There has been another point of order.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You've made an imputation about why it hasn't been released yet. I'm releasing it when it's ready, but I want to talk about the round table because we made sure that we focused on two of my key areas, inclusion and accessibility. The engagement that we've done has been really good. I owe it to them—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can I ask Ms Christie, please? Ms Christie, do you know when this refresh or update will be released?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I refer to the Minister's answer per the time frames.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: He didn't give an answer per the time frames.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I said that we will meet that time frame.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Ms Christie, I am asking if you know the date of the release or at least the time frame?

LAURA CHRISTIE: We'll commit to the time frame that the Minister previously committed to. We'll meet that time frame.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you're not going to answer that question?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: She just did.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I just said to you that we will do it in that time frame. There's no conspiracy theory here.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good morning, Minister and officials. I will start with the eConveyancing reforms. I know there has been a bit of backwards and forwards between the Federal Minister and yourself. There has been quite a bit in the news about this. Where are we up to?

Mr JIHAD DIB: At the moment, Ms Boyd—and I appreciate your interest in this, and I know it's not a new thing and that you've been interested in it for a while. We had a national Ministers meeting about two months ago. We resolved, at that meeting, to request further assistance from the Commonwealth because this is an incredibly complex reform. It's a reform that I, as the Minister, had to pick up along the process. I am happy to discuss all the issues with it beforehand. We—myself and Queenslanders—have written to the Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer, seeking some involvement from the Commonwealth.

The recent NSW Productivity Commissioner's report also said that while the reform is ongoing and on the way there are some things that can't be done just from a State level. We're trying to work with the Feds a little bit more. That same feeling was then reflected in the meeting of all the Ministers and registrar generals, who said, "Okay, look, we need to just stop for a moment and have a pause and have a look at how we can address these other issues. How do we keep moving forward?" Rather than continuing on the same path where things had progressed to a point, we've kind of gone, "Have we hit the point where we can't go any further." As a result, ARNECC, which is all the registrar-generals across the nation—I think the view is very much shared that, whilst the reform is something that everybody wants to pursue, we need to make sure that we can actually deliver that reform as well.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: On 11 June we had the ARNECC meeting. When did you write to your Federal colleagues?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think it was in the past week or so.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So quite recently?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. We're working closely with Queensland at the moment, particularly through the pause, in terms of having a look at the things. Every State and Territory is at a different point in the continuum. One of our colleague States has just now gone into electronic conveyancing. New South Wales and Queensland are a long way ahead of that, so we're working with them. We did write to the Treasurer but we kind of made it clear that this is our intention, as was from that statement—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What were you requesting from your Federal colleagues? Was it to get involved to try to make people be a bit more competitive?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Pretty much that, pretty much saying that we're still committed, obviously, to this but we believe that there is a role that the Commonwealth can play a little bit more. I've also had discussions with Assistant Minister Leigh a while back where I made that point as well. I want to make it really clear that New South Wales is still interested in this reform, but we know that we might need a little bit of assistance along the way.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I agree with that. I think that there is some frustration about the delay and how long it's taking. As you know, yes, it's technical but it's completely solvable so long as we have the current monopoly player and the financial institutions being made to come to the table. I'm quite concerned that in the meantime the only currently viable competitor, who happens to be a New South Wales company, is going to be forced out of business. Have you taken any steps to try to ensure that that is not going to be the case?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm meeting with that particular company and the other company as well. I've met with them before. I think I'm meeting with them again. It could be later this—I know there is a meeting booked between both. I try to make sure that I meet with both. If I'm going to meet with one, I meet with the other. Some of the challenges are around the issue of financial settlement. Financial settlements are a place for—the Commonwealth has got more jurisdiction, which is why we want them to get involved. We've met certain targets and certain milestones, but there comes a point—this is why we've done the pause—where we say, "Okay, what are now the inhibitors, what are the barriers and how can we potentially move these barriers?" That's why we've been pretty up-front in saying that we want to work with the Commonwealth.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We need the Federal Government to tell the banks to do a thing, which is never easy but unfortunately has to happen in this case.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think it'll work. If I can just make a comment about this particular reform. It is a very complex reform and you've got to go back a little bit in history. This was sold off as part of the privatisation agenda.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I know.

Mr JIHAD DIB: After it was sold off, then the reform was to be put in place. I think, when you do something like that, you actually as government have taken away some of those levers that you could've managed. If you want to do reform, maybe don't sell stuff to begin with.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I 100 per cent agree and, personally, I'd just buy it back but we're a little—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll also let you know I have asked the Registrar General to look at some of the different options that we've got as well. We're not just sitting on this one.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: There's been an ongoing issue around trying to expand the presumptive cancer regulation—basically the list of cancers that would qualify under icare. I understand that icare has recently provided costings for expanding that list of cancers, particularly relevant to the fires. Is that something that you are aware of? How many RFS volunteers have been budgeted for under that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We made a commitment that we'll have a look at presumptive cancers. I know that it's a body of work that is being led by my colleague Sophie Cotsis, the Minister for Industrial Relations. We are working together on this. We have also been working with a range of stakeholders, including, of course, people who are affected by these cancers. There is some work that has been undertaken at the moment and it is probably about as much as I can tell you, Ms Boyd, in the sense that there was a commitment to explore it and it is a good body of work. It's being led by my colleague Minister Cotsis. I can advise the New South Wales Government is actively looking at some of these policy options.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: One of the issues is that, in costing this change, we're looking not just at the fire brigade but also at the RFS. My understanding is the RFS is not necessarily set up for accurate record keeping that would help it to accurately give data over to icare for that costing. Are you concerned about the lack of accurate record keeping at the RFS?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think part of that process and the body of work is letting us know where we're at, what our strengths are, what areas we need to improve, what's possible, what's not, what has been undertaken at the moment. I know Commissioner Fewtrell and Commissioner Rogers have carcinogenic management processes in place—things that we're working on. I'm sure they'd be happy to discuss that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: A recent GIPAA application that came back showed about 7 per cent of RFS volunteers didn't have any date of birth or anything in the RFS database, so that's an example. Obviously this is a primarily volunteer-led organisation. The question for you, Minister, is: Are you concerned about the levels of funding? Is there some funding you could give to the RFS to assist them to update their records so that they can more accurately provide data for this process?

Mr JIHAD DIB: About the date of birth, do you mean, or just in general?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just generally. If we're trying to work out an expansion of the presumptive cancer provisions, if we're trying to work out exactly how much that costs and we're trying to capture the RFS in that, there is real concern that we end up with a figure given to your Government that is far greater than it needs to be because of the inaccurate data keeping by the RFS.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think you said seven—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It's 7 per cent of 124,000.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Given that we've got about 70,000 members within the volunteers, obviously we'd like to get it as best as possible. If it's okay with you, I might just ask Commissioner Rogers to talk a little bit about that management of that system. He'd be much more across it than I would.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I will come back to the commissioner this afternoon. One of the other issues that has been identified is that a lot of these emergency services don't have ongoing Working with Children Checks. In particular, the RFS—again, I understand there is one at the time of employment but then you can be in the service for 20, 30 years and never have to do another Working with Children Check. Is that something that concerns you, Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Obviously my background is education. I have very much a strong interest in that sort of thing. I understand that there are people within the RFS with Working with Children Checks; it also depends on the role that they play. These are things that I'm happy to further explore. But people who supervise children, like when they go out to schools and do fetes and things like that, as we know volunteers do, they're expected to have Working with Children Checks, I'm advised.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But not the RFS?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, they're within the RFS.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I think you might need to check that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll check that.

The CHAIR: A report published by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research in August this year found that more than half of all 10- to 13-year-olds facing criminal penalties had been the victims of violence themselves and a third had accessed homelessness services. It seems that our criminal justice system is seeking to punish very young children for disadvantages outside of their own control. As the Minister for Youth Justice, could I get an understanding of what you're doing specifically to address this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's a really sad situation when you see young people living a life that is not the best life that they could have. I've often spoken about we need to change the circumstances; we need to change the conditions. There are elements that I do as youth justice Minister, because basically they come into contact with the youth justice system often at the end of that point—so after the courts have had interaction with them, after the police have had an interaction with them—but, notwithstanding, as youth justice Minister, what I do is work as closely as I can with all of my colleagues across the many different agencies dealing with young people and supporting young people. We've got to make sure that it's not seen as something that's just one agency's responsibility. This is a whole social problem. We've got issues when we're trying to bring together education, health, obviously DCJ, youth justice, the police.

I'm a big believer in diversion, big believer in making sure that there are different options there, big believer in working on place-based solutions, and I'm so pleased to see the work that Mr O'Reilly and the team in Youth Justice lead and Candice really pick up that point, that we've got to look at what the core issue was and how do we support young people. When I think about the budget that we've had—and one thing I'm really proud of is that my five predecessors weren't able to obtain ongoing recurrent funding for diversion programs that I was able to obtain in this budget. What that means is the diversion programs that we do with young people in the communities, to support them—now we can start employing people on an ongoing basis. They know where they're going.

We're working on programs that are place based. Often what might work in Bankstown won't necessarily work in a regional town. So we're looking at that place-based thing very clearly. Ultimately, what we're trying to do is say, "How can we support young people? What wraparound services do we need to provide?" When a young person comes to us, there's a lot of complexity there, and you can't just solve it with a simple blunt instrument, and we support them through—whether it's the education program, through some health programs, through some mentoring, through trying to get them to believe in themselves. I'm just incredibly proud of the work, or the mentality that Youth Justice teams have, in terms of "We don't give up on a kid."

The CHAIR: Have you been briefed specifically on this BOCSAR report? Are you familiar with the findings of it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I may have. To be completely frank with you, I don't know if it's that one specifically. I get briefed on BOCSAR statistics. I meet with Youth Justice. I think it's every four weeks. I have a designated meeting. That's in addition to just informal meetings or visiting Youth Justice centres or programs. A Place to Go, for example, is a program that we allocated money to—some of the bail accommodation—so kids can be safe.

The CHAIR: This one specifically? There's a lot of reports. I understand. It's okay.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't want to say yes or no, because I get briefed on BOCSAR often, but I don't know if it's that one specifically.

The CHAIR: I understand. I also wanted to get an update on your work in regard to raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14. I know you've previously mentioned that the Attorney General is taking the lead but that you also, as the Minister for Youth Justice, do play a role here. Have you met with the Attorney General in the last six months about this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I met with the Attorney General, but whether it was specifically about this, I can't recall specifically, but there are a number of discussions that happen. The Attorney General addressed this, I think, in his budget estimates last week. The Premier's made the position clear, as well. So, as far as I can see, this is a matter that's being led by the Attorney General. Raising the age of criminal responsibility, as the Premier said, is not one of the Government's priorities at the moment.

The CHAIR: Obviously, this is a very important human rights issue. Is it something that you as Minister for Youth Justice are advocating for, given that it does still fall somewhat into your portfolio as well?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We've canvassed this, I think, in previous budget estimates. Obviously, my responsibility is to make sure that the young people who come into our care and our attention—we give them the

best support that we possibly can. We try and help them build that best life. But, really, it is an area for the Attorney General.

The CHAIR: In regard to the statistics on the Youth Justice NSW website, I can see that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remanded in custody and sentenced to detention have gone up in 2023-24. I guess I want to understand, first of all, what's your plan, going forward, to address this. And then I'm concerned that these figures are going to continue to increase due to the Government's changes in bail laws and, again, the decision not to look at raising the age of criminal responsibility. What else are we going to do to make sure those numbers don't continue to increase?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Hurst, I want to say that there is over-representation of young Aboriginal people in Youth Justice. I think you can't get away from that fact. And I think it's a problem. It's a problem that successive governments have been dealing with for a long time. But we're looking at this problem in terms of how we look to address it. Some of the work, for example, that's happened in Moree is looking at how do we try and change this, how do we arrest this, how do we make sure that young people, particularly Aboriginal young people, if they do come into the Youth Justice system, don't come back into that system. So, as a result of that, some of the work that's taking place, particularly with—

The CHAIR: Isn't recidivism more likely once they're in the system—for anyone—already? Isn't that part of the problem? Aren't we doing something to actually stop them from entering the system in the first place?

Mr JIHAD DIB: They're some of those diversion programs that I was talking about a little bit earlier, and some of the work in Moree, in particular, in terms of place—

The CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt you. Obviously, I did hear what you were saying about the diversion programs. I'm assuming at this point in time, because it's such a new project, that there's no numbers to show that that has decreased the numbers. My concern is, obviously, that the numbers are going up. Have you been briefed on the reasons why the numbers are going up?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Pretty much once a month, we have those briefings. The numbers fluctuate a lot. They fit within, I suppose, a variable. I don't have the exact number for today. But I think—check with Mr O'Reilly—we had about 230 young people in youth detention.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's 236.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There's 236 young people in detention centres today.

The CHAIR: But you do realise that it has gone up?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think the proportion—as I said, there is an over-representation of Aboriginal young people. The data that you're asking—we don't have that clarity on that data just yet because we're looking at this again as a 12-month period.

The CHAIR: Just to clarify, you don't have the data on why the numbers are going up, rather than going down?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think there'd have to be a study on that when you've got enough data to be able to study the data properly. We haven't had a long-enough window of opportunity. But one of the things that we do work on, particularly—

The CHAIR: I'm a bit confused. There's been children in detention for a very long period of time. What do you mean, you haven't had a large-enough window?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've got that data. But I thought you meant the data referencing the bail things that you mentioned earlier.

The CHAIR: No. What I'm asking you is have you been briefed on why the numbers are going up instead of going down. Why are there more children ending up in detention?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We have lots of discussions about that, trying to find it with a solutions-based—there's a lot of work that's been happening, particularly with Aboriginal community controlled organisations, in terms of what we can do to do things better, in terms of how do we address the issues. There is a concern that these numbers are going up. That data has told us that these numbers are going up. What are some of those things, though, that we need to do to try and not only arrest this but reverse this? That's where—some of the diversion programs. But I think ultimately the big shift has been in making sure that we're working as much as we possibly can with community and also place-based solutions. Indeed, many of our frontline staff in Youth Justice and Youth Justice centres, Aboriginal as well, have then got a different connection and different understanding. Inside the centres,

the amount of cultural work that's taking place is absolutely phenomenal. We are looking at this with concern but with a view to finding and creating a solution.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, last year we had issues with multiple RFS volunteers having to refuel RFS trucks with their own money. How many times has this occurred since the last budget estimates?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Those fuel cards that we're talking about—and I remember that. I think Mr Fang gave me something. They're the responsibility of local government, and the commissioner could talk more to it. I don't have a specific number. But what I can say is that, if that does happen, then they're resolved usually within 24 hours. To give you one example—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I don't need an example. You've told me the fact, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You give me an example, then.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I know of an example where it took a few weeks for an MP to be repaid, let alone your average volunteer who's just volunteering their time. Minister, you got asked this at the last budget estimates. Did you not think to ask about this issue, on behalf of your volunteers, so that we could fix the problem?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, just on that point—and maybe we can get it clarified. You might want to check, with the MP, when they actually lodged the claim for reimbursement, because it may have been a couple of weeks, but I'm under the understanding that they may not have lodged that. I'm happy to stand corrected, but I'm reliably informed that normally, within a very short period of time—I'm talking about 24, 36 hours—there is reimbursement. Maybe you might want to check that with your MP. I'm happy to be corrected. I'm happy to find out the specifics. I'm happy, if that's the case and it has been a couple of weeks, to ask the commissioner to speak to them.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My question is, obviously, broader than one person.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But you raised the one person.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's right. You asked for an example, so I gave you one. I'm asking, more broadly, on a systemic level, are you tracking this kind of thing on behalf of your volunteers in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis so that people don't have to be out of pocket for volunteering their time?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, on the very rare occasions when it does happen—and I'm happy for the commissioner to answer if he has an update.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know that they're rare occasions?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Very rare occasions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Because you've been briefed on it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We have spoken about it, yes. Myself and the agency have spoken about it. But I'm informed that one—for example, I'm talking up to 24 hours or 36 hours. What I would like is a bit more specifics. If there is an MP who claims that they were not reimbursed for a few weeks, my question would be, firstly, when did they make the submission? If they made that submission and they claimed the receipt—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is that what you would ask an average volunteer when they made a submission?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I want to know that this is actually a situation where somebody has made the claim and then they weren't rectified within a few days. I said I am going to give you one example, Madam Chair, if I can, at this point. There was one that I'm aware of where, in a very small remote town, the actual fuel card wasn't accepted by that servo. As a result of that, the person then had to pay using their card. That was reimbursed, I think, within a day, Commissioner? There are a very small number of cases—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can I clarify, how much is that? How much does an RFS truck cost to refuel?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll have to take that on notice because, obviously, trucks are—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You would imagine it's fairly substantial.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It depends on the size of the truck and it depends on how much fuel was there.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It would be in the hundreds of dollars, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: As I said, it depends on—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: A normal tank of fuel is hundreds of dollars.

Mr JIHAD DIB: How big is your tank in your car that it's hundreds of dollars?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm lucky; I have a hybrid. But that's not the problem here.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It still takes fuel, though, doesn't it?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The problem is that volunteers are being placed out of pocket in a cost-of-living crisis when they're volunteering for the RFS. That's a serious problem. You seem to be making light of this because I've given you an example of an MP, but there are people out there who are facing this. That's why I'm asking this serious question. I hope you're not making light of it.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, I actually find it a little bit offensive that you think that I would be making light of this.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You have been trying to verbal an MP.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What I am hearing from you is that you've given me one example of an MP who actually didn't come to me. They didn't want the solution; they just wanted to be able to grandstand. I then challenged that MP, and you, to tell me if they made a submission and they put the claim in and the claim was going to come two weeks later or three weeks later, I think they have every right to be upset. I will commit that I will—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Excellent. The question is—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, I'm still going. On a very rare number of occasions when this happens—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But do you know what that number actually is?

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might ask the commissioner—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister, there has been a point of order.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: We seem to have veered again into that territory where Ms Munro keeps throwing sometimes questions and sometimes random comments at the Minister, which interrupts his capacity to answer. She has asked the question so I think we should dignify the Minister with an answer.

The CHAIR: I will allow the Minister to answer before we continue.

Mr JIHAD DIB: There are about 7,000 vehicles across the RFS and there are about 2,000 brigades. They've got established processes for fuelling vehicles that do not require volunteers to make payments. Has it ever happened before? Obviously it has. Has it been rectified? Obviously it has. You have asked me for a specific number. I don't know if the commissioner has a specific number in the last few months.

ROB ROGERS: I have records of five occasions, Minister, over the last 12 months.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Five from 7,000 vehicles for a number of refuelling from 2,000 brigades. You're talking about five incidents in a 12-month period and you're telling me that I'm making light of it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You were making light of it. I will move on. I appreciate the commissioner's response.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're talking about five instances, Ms Munro.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: At the previous budget estimates it has been clear that hazard reduction targets are falling behind. Out of a target of 313,000 hectares, 174,000 hectares were left untreated with hazard reductions last financial year. Given that the overall statewide targets have not been met, which areas of the State are most behind their targets?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm sure the Committee would be well aware of the amount of rain that we've been having in the past 12 months. Indeed, I think the last—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sorry, Minister, that's not my question. I'm just wondering which places are the most behind.

The CHAIR: Do you want to clarify your question, Ms Munro?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm clarifying that I'm asking which places are most behind.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm giving a bit of context with that, Ms Munro. Hazard reduction can only occur at certain times, in certain windows and when the conditions are right. If anyone was around Sydney yesterday, you

might have picked up a little bit of smoke in different parts of the State. There was also a bit of smoke because there was hazard reduction. What we've done is we've had a real focus on, whenever the opportunity arises, making sure that we get our RFS out there. We're also working with other agencies. There was a commitment of \$10 million to also employ hazard reduction crews so that we didn't also just rely on the volunteers, because there might be times when it comes up. Whilst we may have been less successful with those targets because we physically couldn't—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I appreciate the context. But I would really like an answer to the specific question that I asked.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: If these are any more than flippant attempts at pointscoring—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: They are not.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: —then the Minister should be allowed to answer a question, provided it's relevant, in any way he chooses. The Minister is being directly relevant to the question that was asked by the member.

The CHAIR: The Minister may answer the question the way he chooses.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm answering that way. I'm giving that context because it's easy to say the targets haven't been met without understanding why and what we are doing about it. Yesterday the RFS and Fire and Rescue were both out there because the conditions were right. There was a \$10 million investment by this Government to be able to employ mitigation crews. We have focused on—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Chair, my question was quite specific. Which areas of the State are most behind their targets?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can tell you that 78 per cent of targets, particularly around protecting homes, properties, businesses and communities, have been met. Indeed, there's a pilot, I believe—even with education at the moment—where we are using whatever opportunity we have to focus on the priority areas. We're looking at protecting people, property and infrastructure. I can come back to you with specific data.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That would be excellent. If only you had just said that at the beginning.

The CHAIR: Order! Let's move on.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think, Ms Munro, you will find that I'm actually being pretty fair. I'm answering the questions as best I can. I'm also not going to sit here and take an assertion without having the context around it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We're concerned about the volume of fuel load in the sections of critical softwood forest estate in the south-west slopes of New South Wales, particularly Bondo, Carabost and South Greenhills. Do you know how many tonnes per hectare of fuel load is regarded as being above an acceptable risk in this area?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might ask the commissioner to answer. He's the specific expert in this.

ROB ROGERS: I think it very much depends on where the fuel is as well. It's not just about the fuel load; it's about the history of that area, known fire paths and all of those things. It's very difficult to exactly say what that is.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My understanding is that it's 21 tonnes per hectare, which means that those areas I've just explained are over the acceptable risk. We've been informed that these areas have a current fuel load of 24 tonnes per hectare. This information has come via the RFS fire behaviour analyst division. Has the Government planned for this increased fire risk?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is this a question to me?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes, you're the Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The RFS is continuously assessing fire risk and also the situations at any given moment. I've talked about hazard reduction where we can. We've also made some big investments in terms of the technological advances that we can have that can predict where the fire would be. We, in an ideal situation, would be able to undertake all of the hazard reduction that we—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you're cutting your resources, from what I understand.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can you clarify that? Your understanding may be wrong.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We've been provided budget papers that talk about the cuts. We're talking about cuts to Service NSW and we're talking about cuts to disaster preparation.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on a second. We're talking about the RFS here. How did we get from the RFS to Service NSW?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is all interlinked.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, Ms Munro, the disaster preparation that you are talking about for Service NSW is completely different to this. That is about setting up and supporting people in terms of grants and so forth. That's completely different to what the work of the RFS is.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But we're talking about an interlinked system at a time where, in the words of the commissioner, "The lack of rainfall could make for a problematic summer," with hazard maps of the State already painting a worrying picture. I'm just understanding the full context of your department and the ways that you're making decisions about where resources are being missed.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Where operations come into place, we've got experts here on the right of me who have lived and breathed disaster management and emergency services their entire lives. I rely on the advice of the experts; I work with the experts. I trust their judgement on these sorts of things. I can't turn a tap on and make it rain, Ms Munro. The problem we've had—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But \$7.5 million has been cut from this region in the RFS.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What do you mean \$7.5 million has been cut from this region?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's what we've been told—from the operating budget.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know, but what you're wanting to do, instead of being told, is to actually find out what it is. You're posing a question to me without having an understanding.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you're saying that my understanding is wrong?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm not saying you're wrong; I'm asking you to explain.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You're the Minister; you should understand.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: You said \$7.5 million has been cut, but you can't tell me what it is.

The CHAIR: Order! There is a point of order.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: We seem to be getting into some unusual territory with Ms Munro, where she is asking the Minister to clarify the meaning of the question that she asked. I ask that Ms Munro keeps her questioning to areas that the Minister can answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How about I put it this way then, if I may, Chair. Minister, can I confirm that you have cut \$7.5 million from the operating budget of the RFS in New South Wales?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The RFS budget for this year is not the same as it was for last year, and there are a couple of reasons for that. One is that a lot of the implementation of the bushfire recommendations have now been completed. About three or four months ago I was out at Cudgong opening up the new command control centre there. As a result of that, that money is no longer in the budget and it's not required. The budget uplift, or the budget that was there last year, was to pay for specific things related to the bushfire recommendations. Of that, we've delivered over 100 new and refurbished fire trucks this past financial year, and there are another 100 on their way. In addition to that, there is the Aviation Centre of Excellence. What you might want to describe as a cut is actually because—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But what I said was the operating budget; I wasn't talking about capital expenditure.

Mr JIHAD DIB: These are budgets. I said to you that we've put in \$10 million for mitigation crews specifically to be able to support the RFS to deliver this.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But going back to my question, Minister, can you confirm that there is a \$7.5 million cut in the operating budget of the RFS?

Mr JIHAD DIB: What I can tell you is that the budget for the RFS is meeting the needs of what the RFS needs. There have also been less carry-forwards this particular year because the carry-forwards were to pay for things that we weren't able to get done on time due to constraints around supply lines. If you could point me to

the page in the budget book—I've got it here. If you point me to the page, I'll have a look at it and I'll go through it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you denying that there's a \$7.5 million cut in the operating budget?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can you point me to exactly where you're talking about?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: The Minister is asking for clarification and greater context in relation to the question. I suggest that it would be courteous to the Minister to be able to provide greater context and specificity so the Minister can actually answer the question directly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm very happy to. I'm really surprised that the Minister wouldn't know. I assume you know where your own statement is.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: We don't need the commentary; just the clarification.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Point it to me.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's at 4-20.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Which book are you talking about?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, this is wasting my time, to be honest, because it is in there. It's your budget.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I'm here trying to answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, I'm going to move on. This is a stunt to try to waste time. The budget papers are clear. We don't—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, it is not a stunt. You've asked me questions; I've asked where it is. You're not sure. You've just said, "We've been told; we've been informed."

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, it's in there. Let me move on.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, I have explained to you—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is a stunt. If you don't know your own budget, that's very concerning.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: Aside from Ms Munro continually speaking over the Minister, she's casting aspersions about the Minister's motivations, which clearly aren't correct. The Minister is making a genuine attempt, and continues to make a genuine attempt, to answer a legitimate question. If you could ask her to refrain.

The CHAIR: We can definitely cut the additional commentary, thank you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, how many aircraft have been procured for the upcoming fire season?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We have 11 aircraft as NSW RFS. What we should really be proud of as New South Wales people is that we own the only heavy helicopter, the Chinook helicopter. At this point that has also been converted to be able to be used for night-time flying. We also have the *Marie Bashir*. There are, I think, nine additional ones that have been procured or enabled for this upcoming season. Of course, recently we signed a five-year contract, with a potential five-year extension, when it comes particularly to aviation firefighting. But also, on top of that, the good part to that is that it will be stuff that will assist in terms of further training our own local pilots and our own local crews. I'd be happier to be the Minister here in terms of what we have in the air currently compared to some of my colleagues interstate. We also have another helicopter coming along the way. I don't know if I've let the secret out of the bag there.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, do you know how many are available this week, given the early start to the fire season?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know that we have got it in hand if required. We saw that with the fires, I think, last Monday or the Monday before. The RFS was quickly able to deploy aerial support. We have no issues there.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Perhaps I'll move to the bureaucrats in the afternoon for that. There were 50 or so fires apparently burning last week, so it's very important that we've got the aircraft ready.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, if the inference is that we don't—we've got the firepower and we've got the aerial fleet, but you don't fight every single fire using helicopters or the large air tanker. We have the volunteers. They're there to try to support. I saw that last year in the season. Their complementary work is brilliant.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I think you've answered my question, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, did you just say that I didn't answer your question?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are there any funding programs available to local communities—

The CHAIR: Sorry, I'll allow the Minister to answer the question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Did you just say that I didn't answer your question?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, I said I think you've answered my question, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, my mistake. I thought you said I didn't answer your question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are there any funding programs available to local communities in regard to fire preparedness?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There are some different grants that we've got going. There's the local brigades' work in terms of fire preparedness.

ROB ROGERS: Some of the DRA programs.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Disaster Ready programs. The landowners are supported in terms of if they want to do their own hazard reduction. We also want to get to a situation, though, where the experts are the ones who are doing the hazard reduction.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Perhaps I'll ask the experts this afternoon for a specific list of those programs.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm sure you'll get it. But the State Disaster Mitigation Plan, which is the first of its kind in Australia specific, looks at mitigation and preparation as well. It's the first time that has ever been anywhere in Australia. It's something that we're really proud of.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is your Government satisfied with the level of preparedness of the Blue Mountains and the broader State for the upcoming bushfire season?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We have been pretty clear that we'd like to be able to do more in terms of hazard reduction. We've had some limitations in terms of why we haven't been able to meet those targets, but we will continue to do that. What we've done is make sure that we try to look, where possible, to do the hazard reduction with the idea in mind that we will protect property and we will protect place. But we are being as vigilant as we can on all fronts. That's what we can do.

The CHAIR: Minister, I want to go back to talking about the statistics around Youth Justice. You mentioned before that you are focused on these diversion programs. What evidence did you use to suggest that diversion programs are the best way forward, given that you said you don't have any statistics or information about why the numbers are still going up?

Mr JIHAD DIB: To clarify that, Ms Hurst, when I said that about the statistics and information, I thought it was in reference to the bail laws. We do have statistics across a whole continuum. I think diversion programs aren't the panacea; there's a whole range of different things that we look at. I mentioned earlier the complexities around Youth Justice, particularly some of the young people who come into our contact. We can't just have a simple one-way answer. Diversion is one in a range of different things that we can do. To give you one example, I know of a town in let's call it the mid-west of New South Wales, where one of the programs that one of the local organisations is running is, effectively, going to pick up kids from home to then give them brekkie and to get them to school, because what they discovered is that these young people were not going to school and were getting themselves into some really difficult situations. They basically had nowhere to go. Idle hands are not a really good idea. That's why we're working also with Education and with Health in terms of a holistic approach.

The biggest player in this—and I think we need to always respect that—is also the local community input because local communities know their context better than anybody else. I think it's not a case of telling them what to do but actually saying, "How do we co-design something that's going to work? Is it diversion? Is it something else?" I would hope that in the next budget estimates there's something that I can refer to that we're in the process of trying to build at the moment with the local community that is absolutely brilliant, but I can't pre-empt that just yet. It takes that from a community perspective and says, "How do we address that? How do we work within the law, and how do we make sure that we can try to give this young person—maybe if we can tilt a little bit the way that their trajectory is going."

The CHAIR: What I'm trying to understand, though—and my background is in psychology. You're talking about these varied solutions, and certainly that makes a lot of sense. But if we don't know why the numbers

are going up, how do we then decide what those solutions are? It's almost like the first step needs to be to ask why the numbers are going up and what the specific factors are that are causing the numbers to go up. When you can understand that, then you can start working on those varied solutions. So my question to you is why are the numbers going up. Do we know why the numbers are going up or do we need to do research there before we start throwing solutions around to see what sticks?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I agree with you, in terms of we need to have a look at the why. Part of the elements of the why that we've already seen are things like is it education; is it broader social support; is it long-term, generational poverty, for example? Is it a lack of support in terms of places where kids can go in the evening? In one place, where it gets on average over the mid-30s in summer, the local pool closes at four o'clock. Where do the kids go after that? Is there a way that we could support that? I know that Mr O'Reilly looks at this with his team incredibly closely. I've said that there's a whole broader—I'm more than happy for him to talk about specifics that we might be aware of right now, some studies that we've got undertaken, if you're fine with that.

The CHAIR: I'm more than happy to speak to Mr O'Reilly in the afternoon. I know, from previous estimates, that he has got some useful information.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Pretty impressive.

The CHAIR: Yes. I previously asked questions about the long-overdue review of the New South Wales Young Offenders Act—an Act that you have joint responsibility for, I believe. At last estimates you said that you thought that there was a review underway. Are you able to give any updates on that review?

Mr JIHAD DIB: You're right, Ms Hurst, in that I jointly administer the Act. The lead of that, though, is the Attorney General. At the moment, it's a decision—well, it is a decision for the Attorney General. He leads on this.

The CHAIR: Is it something that you're pushing, though, within Government, given that you are jointly responsible for this Act?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We work closely, the Attorney General and myself, and so do a number of us. Basically, we've got a shared, I suppose, overlap in this area that includes myself and other Ministers in this same space. The young offenders review is being considered carefully. It's complex. I know the Attorney General is working on it, but it wouldn't be fair of me to say, "This is exactly where it's up to." It's something that he's leading. Obviously, it's something I've had some input in, and I will continue to, wherever I can. If anybody asked me for advice, I'm more than happy to provide it. If anybody asked for my views, I'm more than happy to provide it. I suppose that's life, where sometimes you give unsolicited advice, as my kids tell me all the time.

The CHAIR: Have you had any meetings with the Attorney General on this to talk about the timelines or to have any input into this space?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We've had many. There are a few things that the Attorney General and I share, so we meet and then we just have those discussions around the topic. There has been a contribution and input, but the timeline is with him.

The CHAIR: I also want to ask you some questions about segregations in youth justice centres. In the 2023-24 financial year, I'm wondering how many times were young people in youth justice centres subject to periods of segregation exceeding 24 hours?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Hurst, I think with that specific data I might either take that on notice or ask Paul—it looks like he has got some further information. We can come back to you this afternoon with the specifics.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I do have information.

The CHAIR: If it's just a simple statistic, that would be useful.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Mr O'Reilly, have you got a number?

PAUL O'REILLY: Segregation in 2023-24 over 24 hours is 143 incidents.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, do you seek that information? Do you get briefed on that information, given that it has already been reported by the NSW Ombudsman?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I get briefed. As I said, I have the meeting once a month. I get briefed on pretty much every element. I'm not going to remember every single bit of the data, but often what we will do is, when we have a discussion about that, we ask the whys. We try to explore why this was the case. Was it done in accordance with all of the things and in adherence with all the regulations and so forth? Obviously, segregation is like a bit of a last-ditch thing that you do; you don't just segregate someone in youth justice just because. Sometimes it could be

for their protection; sometimes it could be for the protection of the safety of others. They're the things that happen, and they're reviewed constantly. I think 143, did you say, over a 12-month period—

PAUL O'REILLY: That exceeded 24 hours.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We do have those discussions. One of the things is we meet regularly—I meet always with all of the agencies; plus I like to be as much as possible hands on. I will visit, and I will check out every part of those facilities, and I've done that. I know Ms MacDonald has joined me on a couple of occasions and also visited other things. We want to see it, basically, from end to end, the whole operation.

The CHAIR: At a previous estimates hearing, I was advised that Youth Justice NSW was implementing a new behaviour assistance pathway to replace detainee risk management plans and utilise a strength-based approach to manage high-risk behaviours. Are you across that work, Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm across some of that work, but I think Mr O'Reilly would be better placed to talk about the intricacies of that. Just with that thing is that we're always looking to continuously improve things where we can. That's the concept that we have. It's that continuous improvement in all of the areas, if there are things that we can do better, but Mr O'Reilly can speak to the specifics in much more—I suppose with much more authority than I would.

The CHAIR: I might come back to Mr O'Reilly in the afternoon. Minister, you and I have spoken several times, both in and out of budget estimates, about the need for better coordination between emergency services and animal rescue organisations, in respect of both wildlife and domestic animals. I appreciate you meeting with WIRES recently to discuss some of the concerns with the sector. Are you able to give me any updates on work in this space to improve that coordination?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I really appreciate those candid discussions that we've had and also that meeting that we had with WIRES, with RFS as well. Again, we look at it from a lens of learnings from previous experiences and go, "What could we do better?" We saw some of the impacts in terms of—we saw the disastrous impact of the Black Summer bushfires and how could we do it. I'm pleased to say that there's a wildlife element now that has been included in part of our emergency management planning. That is credit to yourself and the work that people who really say, "Hey, can we have a look at this and how we can do it?" That's the way that, I think, good governance works. It's now part of the plans, which is really terrific. When we look at an unfolding problem or a disaster, we go, "Okay, who's looking after this element?" It's really good and one of the things that I'm really pleased to see. I think there has also been some training for—I think some RFS volunteers have also learnt, I don't know if it's the correct word, the safe handling of wildlife. Is that right, Rob?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, that's correct. I think more than 2,000 now have undergone that training. Also, at the next Bush Fire Coordinating Committee, which is the peak bushfires group, we're having a presentation by WIRES. They're going to come in and talk about it. I've also undertaken that we're going to take measures to try to make sure that they're better informed, that our people understand when to call and what to do in the meantime that they're there and that they have contacts with our 24-hour centre. There is a lot of work being done to try to make sure that we address any gaps.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Just with that too, which I didn't add, there is also work that's being undertaken with the RFS and the department of energy and climate change in terms of wildlife first responders. We've also got our volunteers trained in their safety but also in the safety and welfare of the wildlife.

The CHAIR: There is obviously a big crossover with emergency response, the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Agriculture in regard to animals. Have you met with Minister Sharpe and Minister Moriarty in regard to this to work out how we best coordinate it so that it doesn't fall in the gap of the three portfolios?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Not as in personal meetings specifically with myself and those Ministers, but there have been meetings that have taken place. That's how we're able to get to these points with the training and with the Emergency Management Plan. Once there is an emergency, the Emergency Management Plan activates across all portfolios. That's sort of how we do it. As in me personally with the Minister, I haven't met specifically for that, but there have been meetings where people have represented both of us and that's how we got to this point.

The CHAIR: In respect to grants and funding currently made available by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, is any of that made available to animal rescue groups?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There are a number of different grants that groups can apply for. I dare say that if there was a particular group that applied for the grant, if they fit within those criteria—I don't know specifically if there's one off the top of my head.

JOANNA QUILTY: Certainly, under the Disaster Ready Fund, of which there were 19 projects worth \$68.9 million overall funded in the previous round, there would've been a number that were aimed at or there for animal rescue groups. I know that in round two there were a number of applications. We can certainly provide you with that information this afternoon.

The CHAIR: That would be really helpful.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's the point. It depends on the applications. People might do it with that focus. That'd be really great, if we had one specific.

The CHAIR: There's one as well that is \$5 million to help councils, NGOs and community groups to prepare for future natural disasters, called the Spontaneous Volunteers Support Program, where volunteer groups were focused on disaster preparedness. Were animal groups, such as WIRES, or wildlife charities eligible for that grant? Do we know?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think they would be eligible. They're eligible for the grant. Whether they've applied or not, I don't know. Are the applications still open?

JOANNA QUILTY: No, those applications have closed, Minister, but it was certainly open for councils, not-for-profit organisations and community groups. That application process has closed and assessments are underway.

Mr JIHAD DIB: They would be eligible. I think that's a way of making sure that we can try to have the spontaneous volunteers, so that if we need it, at any given time, a group of people can step up and be ready for it. We're happy to continue having these conversations outside of budget estimates, as I've done before with you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. I also wanted to ask you about the development of the guidelines for the disaster adaptation plans being led by the NSW Reconstruction Authority. Successive natural disasters are obviously impacting wildlife, farmed animals and companion animals. Will the need to protect animals from disasters be reflected in the guidelines around the DAPs? If not, who is going to be doing this work?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It should, because it looks at all of the disaster adaptation plans that are working within that location and that local community. They basically come together and say, "What are the things that we need to do in terms of protecting? What are the things that we need to protect straight away? If there is a habitat, make sure that is part of the plan." That stems from the State Disaster Mitigation Plan. Eventually, what we'd love to see, and will see, is every local area will have its own disaster adaptation plan. It's not only adapting to disaster, but what is our game plan when something happens? Certainly animal welfare should be a part of that.

The CHAIR: Minister, have you read the 2024 review of emergency volunteering reports?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. This was released about a month and a half or two months ago.

The CHAIR: Yes. It was fairly recently. I think I've got it here if you need it.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm trying to remember. It was quite thick.

The CHAIR: I have got it here in case you need to—

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's where we talked about some of that spontaneous volunteering and the challenges.

The CHAIR: The only reference to any animal group in the reports is an acknowledgement that these groups do not have a recognised role in emergency and disaster relief, which you can understand is going to be very frustrating, particularly given the conversations that we have had and after all the recommendations that have come out of the Black Summer bushfires. How can we stop animals and animal organisations from being left out of these conversations and make sure that we're improving this coordination before the next major disaster?

Mr JIHAD DIB: This is where having it included in the State Emergency Management Plan is really important, because that elevates it to the important status and it becomes part of the plan, which requires people to say, "Are we addressing this? Are we looking at it?" That's a really important, significant step. I think we're getting better at looking at volunteering, especially around natural disasters, in terms of a more holistic approach. That report also indicated some of the challenges that we have with volunteers. People have lots of different challenges going on in their lives. The ability to volunteer as often as they used to can't happen, so what are the levers that we could pull there to try to help? I would fall back to the position that the fact that it's included in the Emergency Management Plan elevates this as a level of importance as much as any other element of that Emergency Management Plan.

The CHAIR: I'm going to move on to RFS questions. I know that it was already raised with you this morning by Ms Abigail Boyd—the concerns that volunteers are not getting formal police checks or Working with

Children Checks. Now that this is something that has been brought to your attention, is that something that you'll commit to looking further into?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm not 100 per cent sure about the police checks. I thought there had to be police checks. Is that right, Commissioner? I stand to be corrected, but I thought there had to be police checks.

ROB ROGERS: Yes, everybody that joins the RFS is required to do a police check, whether they're staff or volunteers. There are some historical members that wouldn't have gone through that process because of when it came in, but that process has been in for—I'd have to get the exact date—probably 15 or 20 years.

The CHAIR: Is there any way of retrospectively going back? I'm assuming that's what the concern is that has been brought to our office—that there are some that may be there from 15 or 20 years ago that have skipped that process.

ROB ROGERS: It's true that there may well be. We haven't done that retrospectively. The only trigger is when someone moves brigades. If they change brigades, they're then required to go through that process. With Working with Children Checks, anybody who has a role, be it staff or volunteer—so if they have a cadet group in that brigade and they have someone who coordinates that activity, they're required to have a Working with Children Check. We have quite a number of people that—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Adult members of cadet brigades, if they're doing activities with young people—

ROB ROGERS: Correct. I'll stand corrected, but I'm pretty sure anyone who has the potential to be alone with junior people is required to have a Working with Children Check.

The CHAIR: Minister, my time is up, but it sounds like there are possibly some gaps in both of those spaces. Can I ask you if you're willing to commit to looking into those gaps and making sure that's as strong as it possibly can be?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We'll have a look at that. I'll go a step further and have a look around that emergency services area, notwithstanding the fact that there will be some challenges. Certainly, I need to look into it. I have just been advised that wildlife organisations are now recognised in the Wildlife in Emergencies sub plan. That is wildlife specifically in the EMPLAN. That was endorsed in December last year. We're getting there slowly, but we're getting there.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any questions from Government members?

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: No, thank you.

The CHAIR: We will now break for morning tea.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back from the break. We will go to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I understand that Youth Justice has a one person per room preference to enhance safety and privacy for children in detention. Do you have steps in place to ensure that with the sharp increase in the population of detained children, this policy will not be jeopardised?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Firstly, thanks, Ms MacDonald, for the way we work together in this portfolio and for the stuff around the parliamentary friends group. It's been really good to see that. There hasn't been, as far as I understand, a sharp increase in the number of detainees. But Youth Justice is continuously looking at them. We're pretty comfortable in that space. Obviously the preference will remain to try to keep one person, one room. That's for a number of reasons, especially for safety, but also privacy and things like that. That's still the preference when possible. But there hasn't been a sharp increase. There are numbers that fluctuate, but within a pretty acceptable area.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On that, under the new provision in the New South Wales Bail Act, a young person can only be released on bail if the bail decision-maker has a high degree of confidence that the young person will not commit a serious indictable offence whilst on bail. What are the forecasted additional costs that will be incurred as a result of the anticipated increase in the number of young people on remand and being held in detention as a result of this new requirement?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think it's hard to forecast something when you're not 100 per cent sure what it's going to be. That works on the proviso that there is going to be an increase. I will ask Mr O'Reilly if there is anything to add, but we're not predicating that there is going to be X number of people, which means we need this amount of dollars. Paul, is that about right?

PAUL O'REILLY: There's not enough evidence to enable us to accurately forecast an increase in costs, specifically. There is a fair bit of fluctuation in the numbers in detention normally. Today it's 236. In the last six months it's varied between 200 and 250. It's 236 now. That's a fairly normal variation.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I will turn to the disability royal commission. It made a recommendation on screening and assessment for children with cognitive disabilities involved in the criminal justice system that they receive appropriate responses, including therapeutic and other interventions. Do you know if that recommendation is being fully implemented in New South Wales youth detention centres for children on remand?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms MacDonald, we've got a disability action plan and it has delivered 38 projects over a number of years—from 2021 to 2024. That was in tandem with the work of the royal commission. When a young person does come in they do get assessed on any number of things—as I mentioned earlier in the hearing—for not only their health but also any cognitive and other physical disability they may have. We work with them. The support they receive there is the therapeutic support that we run in our Youth Justice centres. There is a whole range. All the kids—or young people, I should say—will participate also in school. Every centre has a school and within that centre they cater to individual needs. Youth Justice is working with the recommendations and the royal commission outcomes to do that. The short answer is yes, we're working on it. There are sensory devices and a whole heap of things that we're doing. I'm happy to provide you with a bit more of a list later on as well.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can I turn your attention now to the Tasmanian Liberal Government and its evolving policies as they relate to youth justice reform. Are you aware of the creation of a special taskforce by the Tasmanian Government?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Not the one that you're specifically referring to. Obviously we look at what's happening in terms of best practice, but I don't know specifically what's happening in Tassie. Is there something happening in Tasmania? Would it help us?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I think so. I think it would. They're providing national leadership in their work and, basically, a new approach to youth justice. They are working with the whole of government and the whole of community. It centres around an integrated and therapeutic approach focused on the rights of children, rehabilitation and breaking the cycle of offending.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That's good. I did have a conversation with one of my colleagues from another jurisdiction about constantly sharing some information about best practice. But some of those things fit very well within the principles that we have, which is that wraparound and whole of government. I mentioned a bit earlier, when it comes to an issue like youth justice, sometimes it's easier to say, "We'll it's the youth justice Minister." But we know that there is a whole lot—as you would be aware—in all the government agencies, what we've got to be really good at is trying to break down those silos at the end of the day to try to make sure that we work well together. If we can fix one issue here, we don't want it to appear somewhere else. It is all of government. We're always open to looking at best practice. If we can improve ours, we will do that. I think that's what people should do.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On that, would you be prepared to take a proposal to the national meeting of youth justice Ministers to develop a best practice national model of youth justice?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We don't have a national youth justice meeting because here we have a youth justice Minister but in some other places it's part of the responsibility in addition to what they have. I'm more than happy to have a look at that if it means we have some conversations. You and I can continue these conversations outside of budget estimates as well. I think in terms of how that works with what we are doing in New South Wales, we are doing that. But if we can do it better, then why not? If there are things they could learn from us, we're also really happy to share that. There are good people in this space who genuinely have that intention of trying to help young people. That is probably the good thing about this.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I totally agree with you. Minister, you said before that we've got the Parliamentary Friends of Youth Justice Reform group starting. Would you be prepared to work with me in a cross-party way to advance the idea of developing a best-practice model for youth justice, with a strong focus on, as the Hon. Emma Hurst said, diversion and breaking the cycle.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms MacDonald, I'm always happy to have conversations and work with you. Indeed, we've done some really good things together. I will try to pop up to the meeting of the parliamentary friends group. We do have a strong focus on breaking the cycle, which is really excellent. I think if you can be excellent, you should be even more excellent. You should continuously look to improve. At the end of the day, you and I are going to leave this place and somebody else is going to be in these positions. If we can leave it in a better position

for them, and we can actually have a multi-partisan approach to try to help young people, then I actually think we've done some really good work. Let's have that conversation soon.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I look forward to having those conversations. I again reference what the Hon. Emma Hurst—our Chair—has said. She mentioned reports and reviews. Would you consider a reference to a select committee of Parliament or even an established committee to facilitate an inquiry into best practice and what that would look like in New South Wales, focusing on reoffending? We asked why the numbers are increasing. Would you be prepared to do that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We're doing some work at the moment in youth justice around the issues of best practice. We're also working so closely with our stakeholders in looking at what we can do better. I think let's start with that point. I understand also that I think the last Parliament—is it the law and order committee? I think they actually did do some sort of a review or inquiry. I really want to focus on the things that we're working on at the moment so we can try to finish one of those off before we start moving on to other things.

Ms MacDonald, you know I'm genuine in this. I'm more than happy to have conversations with you and to have meetings with you about how together we can progress some really good stuff. I think the honourable Chair and I'm sure everyone on this Committee would have that similar view of that opportunity to create a redemption story for a young person who sometimes, because of the circumstances that they face, does actions that they otherwise wouldn't want to do. I think that's the starting point for youth justice—when we believe that every kid deserves the best, maybe let's see how we can make it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, you did mention before A Place To Go. It's an alternative for youth detention. Are there any other alternative places located in New South Wales besides A Place To Go?

Mr JIHAD DIB: A Place To Go had some funding of, I think, \$2.9 million in this budget. There's that. There's the bail and accommodation services also that can happen in different parts of New South Wales. The idea, especially with A Place To Go, is exactly in that name; it is a place to go. It's somewhere safe for kids to go—someone who cares about them, someone who makes sure that either they get home safely or they get to their accommodation. We've got the bail services. We've got that. We've got the rural residential alcohol support services and then, of course, just those other programs that I've mentioned during the course of this hearing.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In March this year you announced \$8.7 million for the bail accommodation and support service in Moree. Is that facility operational yet?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's not operational yet. My understanding is that there has been some very strong consultation with the local community, as we committed that we would. I understand that it's due to go to tender fairly soon. It's in the design process—locally led design. The work itself is being led by Premier's Department and supported by a number of Ministers or agencies as well and also primarily in terms of working with the local community.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So you don't have a date from when it will be operational though because it is still in consultation?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't have that. It is about to go to tender, but I don't have a date in terms of operational, sorry.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might come back to that later. I'm just wondering how the Government is balancing investment in community justice initiatives across, say, regional New South Wales against the increasing need for investment in inner and metro Sydney.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, the increasingly—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I know we've invested in regional New South Wales but there appears to be a need for investment also in inner and metro Sydney.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You are 100 per cent there. The need is across the State and at different points there might be more targeted need given some local circumstances or some contemporary circumstances that might be happening this year. When we look at the budget—and I said the one thing I'm really proud of is that I was the first Minister in six to be able to deliver or to secure ongoing funding for diversion programs. It is something that I'm really pleased with, because it means that then we can ensure those programs are being rolled out across the board.

We've also got that commitment where we're using some funding specifically to work more strongly, particularly with some ACCOs, Aboriginal community controlled organisations, where Aboriginal young people, who are disproportionately represented—as I said a bit earlier, we're trying to work in that area. Youth justice

looks at the programs not only in terms of where the funding is required but how we can also best fairly share that around and work with community and, in some places, other agencies depending on the location.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With regard to the \$66.9 million, what influenced the Government? In response to youth offending, including Youth On Track and all of those types of services, you invested in government agencies as the delivery arm rather than supporting smaller organisations who are already providing critical bridging place-based services in their local communities.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, was the question about—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It was about—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Investing in government and—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, it looks that you're using the government agency rather than supporting smaller organisations that are already doing place based.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm going to answer parts of that and I can see Mr O'Reilly is looking at me like he has got more to add. We're really about trying to work particularly with local community. I've made it very clear as Minister that I am very supportive of place-based, co-designed and locally led initiatives and what the government agencies do is support them. Indeed, Ms MacDonald, I have seen some of the best practice from community groups that literally just started up because of a local need. One of the directions that I've given to Youth Justice is to really focus on where we can with real, localised community decision-making but community solutions. I think, with Youth on Track, maybe six out of the nine are ACCOs. We're really focused on that.

What we can do and what we do well in Youth Justice is make sure that, if we can, we also bring people who are reflective of some of the communities that we engage with actually into our service. I know that on the front line, particularly for many of our youth justice centres, people with Aboriginal heritage as well and who are Aboriginal themselves who—it makes an enormous difference. If we can work with the community organisations, with the local organisations, but then let's take it another step further. Let's also make our organisation, the agency, also reflective of that, because we've got to make sure that we do it right. Paul, was there anything to add?

PAUL O'REILLY: If I could. The vast majority of that \$66 million is commissioned to the NGO sector, to ACCOs, wherever possible. There is a small amount set aside for some specialist government caseworkers because clients need access to government services urgently and that is the most efficient way to do it. That is a handful of people. The rest of that money is commissioned.

Mr JIHAD DIB: So the big focus is on the non-government sector. We're not going to help resolve this. Government can't do it alone. The community sector can't do it alone. We all actually have to play a part in this. We're continuously reassessing and looking at it with that principle of continuous improvement, continuous improvement, continuous improvement—with the one goal of trying to save every single kid that we can, trying to make their lives better.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With the Bail and Accommodation Support Service, extending the hours of operation, what are the barriers preventing that extension of hours? How do you plan to overcome that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That would be some of the operational issues that I can imagine. Mr O'Reilly, is there something specific? I can't point to one specific thing, but in terms of the operation hours, whether it is local circumstance, local arrangements—but is there anything else that is an inhibitor that I'm missing?

PAUL O'REILLY: We're just seeking to implement extended operating hours now.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Sorry, I couldn't hear you.

PAUL O'REILLY: We are looking to extend the operating hours now. That's what we're working on at the moment.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I might come back to that. I understand that sometimes police aren't always utilising the bail accommodation and support service adequately. I know it's not in your lane but is there anything that you can do or any directives that you can issue to ensure the proper use of this service?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can't, obviously, direct police what to do, but what I can do is direct my agency—which they already do and they do well—to make sure that we engage. We've got a strong relationship with the youth commander, Mr Pisanos, in terms of working. They are included when we bring people together to talk about how we can improve the situation, what are some of the challenges that we face. I think that's what they can do. What we can do is continue to promote one of the options and the availability of that. That's on us, and we'll continue to do that. We've started. We'll do it. But we actually also want just the whole breadth of everything. I'd

love people in the community to know that this thing exists and what it's about, and what the potential goodness is in it.

Dr AMANDA COHN: My apologies to yourself and to the rest of the Committee. I'm chairing the PC 2 hearing, in the other room, where we're examining Minister Jackson's portfolios, so I'm in and out of here today.

Mr JIHAD DIB: This one's heaps more fun. Welcome. Nice to see you, Dr Cohn.

Dr AMANDA COHN: You too. My first question is about the accessibility of 000. We had a discussion, at previous estimates particularly about the National Relay Service not operating out of hours and the Optus outage in November last year. You indicated that you'd already reached out to telecommunications carriers at that time. What's been the result of those conversations?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I did. I indicated that I reached out. The issue was raised also with Minister Rowland at a national level, and I know that she's been working on it. I then also wrote to Minister Rowland formally, to make sure that we do that. Minister Rowland, I understand, has also just done a detailed update on this. So it's been something that was not only about being on the radar but also identified as a potential problem. The telecommunications people are also in work with the Telco Authority—have been asked about this, but also the expectation of the Government has been really clear about "Let's make sure that no-one's going to fall through a gap here." The work on that has not stopped, but it's brought in the Telco Authority. So our people, Minister Rowland and the telecommunications all have been working together on this.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm glad to hear that that work's happening. For someone who's deaf or hard of hearing, can they access 000 outside of business hours yet?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might just take that one on notice so I don't give you the incorrect—I'm just conscious that, with something as important as that, I don't give you the wrong answer. I'll give you the detail on that one, if it's okay, Dr Cohn.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Absolutely. I look forward to that answer on notice. It is obviously extremely important for that group of the community.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, of course.

Dr AMANDA COHN: On a different topic, I'm hearing that the current infrastructure funding model for fire stations is serving to patch holes where there are upgrades or fixes that are urgently needed but that there's a wider issue of the quality of the stations being quite poor and deteriorating. Is that something that you're aware of?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Dr Cohn, we've got, I think, over 300 stations across the State. Some of those stations are only a few weeks old, like Busby, but others are over 100 years old. In something that large, there's going to be some maintenance questions there or some maintenance issues that we do have. But the capital budget that we've got is, I think, about \$96 million or so, just for this year alone. We've got a building program in line. I'm not sure if the commissioner wants to add anything specific about those, but we do also recognise there are 300 stations, variable. Some are well over 100 years of age. There will be some maintenance that we need to address. But the capital budget at \$96-odd million is what's in there for this year. I don't know, Commissioner, if there's anything you wanted to add.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: It is a big challenge for us, given the number of stations and, as the Minister's outlined, the age of some of those. We know that 77 per cent of our stations don't have adequate facilities as what we would set the benchmark on today. So that's an ongoing piece of work. Between the program around privacy upgrades and also just the renovations and the new builds, we're doing what we can to address it, but it's certainly an area we continue to focus on and work with the Government with.

Dr AMANDA COHN: For those 77 per cent, is there a program for proactive maintenance or upgrade? Or are you relying on individual stations to apply for funding to fix them?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: No. We've rated all the stations in terms of the ones most in need of renovations or work, and then there's also a separate program for the repairs and maintenance budget as well.

Dr AMANDA COHN: What's the plan, moving forward, for that 77 per cent?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Obviously we're prioritising those. We're also looking at prioritising the stations that have women working at them, to put appropriate facilities in there as quickly as possible.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Can you give me some examples of the stations where the work is being done to accommodate women?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes. We've got a fair few there.

Mr JIHAD DIB: While the commissioner is talking about that, I'll also talk about some of the design principles, for example, where we're really accommodating this, where stations now are being built with an adaptability in terms of change rooms for women and for men, effectively, like a sliding wall so that we don't have women firefighters in really cramped spaces because the place was too small. All our design principles now are taking into account how we can make our stations better, and the change rooms particularly are really important. What's clever about this is that a wall that effectively is like a concertina can move, depending on the configuration of that local group.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: In 2023 we had six stations that were upgraded under our clean area and gender separation program, and this year, through 2024, we've completed upgrades at Coledale, Uralla. Alstonville will be finishing shortly, as will Cooma, and we've also got works going on at Thredbo, Ulladulla and Cootamundra.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I went to the one at Uralla.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: It makes a difference.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Uralla was the one that's like an old station, and then they've added the new, modern bit, where they've actually been able to work. That was good. I got to see that one myself.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Those changes make a huge difference to the facilities. Obviously we want our firefighters, as New South Wales public servants, to have appropriate amenities at their stations.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I look forward to following up on that work. I'm just going to jump across to the RFS. I've got a lot to cover in 20 minutes. How much has the RFS spent on aerial fire retardant in the past financial year?

ROB ROGERS: I'll take that on notice, but I don't believe we have spent anything. We bought a huge amount in 2019-20, and we've had that stored around the State, and we've been depleting those stocks before we order more. I will confirm that with you, but I don't believe we would've spent—unless you mean how much have we used in a year versus how much we've spent on it.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's all right. What consultation have you had with the EPA or other relevant government departments about the safety of the chemicals that are used in the fire retardant?

ROB ROGERS: We've had the EPA test the retardant for us to make sure that it was okay. The EPA had no concerns about the retardant itself. We, as a matter of routine, try to avoid putting it into watercourses, because, it being fertiliser-based, it can obviously disrupt the ecosystem of that water and can lead to things like algal blooms and the like. We have specific requirements about our people to try and keep it away, as best we can, from water sources, sensitive—say, organic farms. We again would do our best to avoid those things. It's not always able to be achieved. But certainly we do our best to minimise impact on them.

Dr AMANDA COHN: You've identified the same concerns that have been raised with me. A Queensland Government website states that there's no life-threatening risks to humans of fire retardant but that they're not fully biodegradable and may result in fish kills. The NSW Health fact sheet says that drinking contaminated water should be avoided. Have you done any audits to ensure that the retardant is actually being used and stored and disposed of correctly?

ROB ROGERS: We have a program to dispose of it, but it has quite a long life span. It comes in a powder form, and that's how it's stored. Once it's mixed, it has a particular life span, but I've got to say it lasts for some time. It just needs to be kept agitated and the like. I haven't heard anything raised with me about concerns about the disposal. Certainly some aircraft, once they take off with it loaded, it can be unsafe for them to land again with that same load. So we've got some nominated areas around the State—there's about three or four areas around the State that are nominated—where we can dump retardant. They're actually on Forest Corp estates where they've got plantations, because it actually won't do any damage to the trees. In fact, it'll probably help them grow a bit quicker. We've got arrangements like that to make sure that we don't dump retardant in places where it could be sensitive.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's quite a comprehensive answer to the part about storage and disposal. In terms of the use, you mentioned the need to avoid sensitive waterways or organic farms et cetera. Have you done any audits to check that it actually is not being deployed on those areas?

ROB ROGERS: I will have to check. I know where there has been inadvertent, accidental discharge into watercourses there have been inquiries into what has happened from that. If it's okay with you, I'll take that on notice and get you a fulsome answer on it.

Dr AMANDA COHN: In taking it on notice, you mentioned those couple of inquiries about when it has been notified. I would be really interested to know what work has been done since then to make sure it doesn't happen again.

ROB ROGERS: Absolutely.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Last year at estimates we also spoke about the community concerns about escaped burn-offs. The answer to my question was about how significantly extending the fire danger periods would create a real resourcing burden on volunteers. I am interested if any further conversations have been had about that, particularly if there is a risk here that we're putting communities at risk because of resourcing issues.

ROB ROGERS: I don't believe so. I think I mentioned last year that the decision on the fire danger period is left to locals. That's not just RFS; that's other fire agencies as well to have a say in that. We don't just make those decisions. It's a collaborative approach. Where they see that there's more need for a longer fire season, then that's absolutely still permitted. Some of the things we're doing for things like permits is we've introduced, indeed, in the last 12 months, an online system where people can apply for permits online. Where people are deemed as trusted people, we're going to allow local managers to authorise those people to have instant approval. They don't even necessarily need something.

Some of the examples there are people like sugarcane people that burn regularly their sugarcane for the harvesting, but they do it in a very responsible way and fires don't get out. We're looking at things like that that will help address any concern about additional resourcing. I think technology will have the ability to help us there. But that is in its infancy. I have lot of confidence that that will make a huge difference in the time ahead and, again, allow local areas to get more areas covered by fire bans if they want.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's helpful. For a local area, if there was interest or local will to extend the fire season, particularly because of the changing weather patterns that we're seeing—you mentioned in your answer that that's permitted, but I suppose my question is is that supported? Is it resourced? If the concern of the locals is that they haven't got the resources to assess all the permits, what support is being offered at a State level?

ROB ROGERS: There is a bit of a bespoke approach locally right around the State. In some cases, it's more the staff that do that work in some places. Certainly, in more urban areas, it's mostly staff that go out and do those inspections. In the more rural areas and the more remote areas, where distance is a massive issue and local knowledge is very important, it does fall to local volunteers to do that work. They're pretty passionate about doing that work because they try and balance everything that's going on in their area. We will obviously stay attuned and, where we can, use technology, like I explained, to try and help ease the burden on people.

Part of the problem is obviously the workload of people doing that but it is also about making sure that the law is upheld and that, where people have escaped burns, we actually take action against them. That's something we are now very much moving forward on to try and make sure people are held to account. If we hold them to account, that's obviously a deterrent for future potential breaches of the law.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I've got some questions about the Aboriginal cultural landscapes project. Who is the right person to ask? Is that you, Commissioner?

ROB ROGERS: For cultural burning?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Yes, that's right. It was the \$4.5 million project that was announced for cultural burning to control roadside strips of native title-owned land.

ROB ROGERS: There is a cultural burn group which we're part of. I would have to check out the details. I can tell you what RFS is doing with regard to supporting cultural burning, but I would have to take on notice that specific group. I just don't know, I'm sorry.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's all right. I'm happy for that one to be taken on notice. I'm also interested that there was a particular pilot on the South Coast that has been reported in the media as quite successful. This may be part of your on-notice answer. I'm interested in if there is any work being done to look at extending that to other areas.

ROB ROGERS: Is that associated with Firesticks?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The burning circle or Firesticks? Is that the Firesticks group?

Dr AMANDA COHN: Yes.

ROB ROGERS: If it's the Firesticks group, and that is on the South Coast, then I met with them around six weeks ago about the work they're doing. Some of the work they're doing is to try and get employment for some disadvantaged youth in the area to try and give them some purpose but also getting cultural burning underway.

We have been providing them support for cultural burns, attending where they need to. I have given an undertaking that we're comfortable to try and support them with additional training. If we can help them, even with giving them some work that we see as important through our hazard reduction grants program to try and give them meaningful work, then we are also happy to do that as well. If it is the group that I did meet with, I think they're very good and it's a really good thing for the local area. I've certainly committed to doing what I can to support them.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If I can add to that, Dr Cohn, earlier in the hearing we were talking about hazard reduction and looking at all the different options. Obviously there are some inhibitors that we've had. But a commitment that I made—I think it might have been at the last estimates or the one before—was around cultural burning and around different practices of the way that we do it. The commissioner and RFS have been doing some excellent work in that regard. Not only does it serve the purpose of hazard reduction but it's also a great way of providing employment opportunities and also a connection to land for some of the local communities. With anything that's a success in one place, if we can replicate that and adapt it to another place, and the local community is willing, then we're very open to that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I was particularly interested to read about this particular project that has been taken on notice. It is proposing to control roadside strips of native title-owned land. Certainly under the previous Government huge amounts of roadside vegetation was cleared in the name of fire prevention and some of that vegetation was key habitat corridors. I'm particularly interested if this is an alternative way of managing risk around roadsides.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think it is certainly one of them. Correct me if I'm wrong, Commissioner—I do sometimes pay attention—but cultural burns also burn a little bit slower and lower and less hot, so it actually has a better and not as destructive impact, potentially, when it come to some of the wildlife. We'll look at all the different potential ways of conducting hazard reduction and use the one that is most appropriate. Certainly if this one is appropriate in particular parts, then that's what we'll do. We need to manage the risk of hazard reduction, but it shouldn't just be a complete slash and burn. Let's try and do it in a responsible way.

ROB ROGERS: Sorry, if I could, we might just check also with Transport. It might be a program with Transport as well, I think. We'll make sure we check that out as well and we'll include that in our response.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I have a few questions about the State Rescue Board. I understand that they didn't produce annual reports for 2020-21 and 2021-22. I appreciate it is before your time, Minister, but are those annual reports available?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is before my time. I'll be frank with you, I haven't really looked at that. The last report I looked at was 2022, I think.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: There has been work to finalise a report for that period.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Was that the COVID period?

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm asking about 2020-21 and 2021-22. Commissioner, you just indicated that work is underway?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes, there is work underway to produce those.

Dr AMANDA COHN: When can that data be expected to be publicly available?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'll take that one on notice.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't have a clear answer on that one but the Premier's Department is coordinating and putting it together and working on it, so there will be something. The Premier's Department is coordinating it all.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I understand that the State Rescue Board collects data on the number of rescues performed by various units, but I'm also interested to know if that includes road crash rescue performance and things like the actual outcomes or the response times.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm not sure. The collection of the data would be a whole range of data that's collected, not only in terms of the type of incident but also how that incident was resolved. I'd like to think that they would have a collection of all the available data. But it might be best with this one, Dr Cohn, that I confirm for you 100 per cent. I may even need to take it on notice, if it's okay with you. Sam, from the Premier's Department, do you have a clear answer on this one?

SAM TOOHEY: Yes, it collects incident data but not outcome data.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Incident data but not outcome data. What does that mean?

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's also my understanding. Do you not think outcome data would be useful in protecting human life?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Let me have a look at that one. Sam, if we put it on the agenda for a discussion in the Premier's Department, I'm happy to pursue that. That roadside program is with the transport department. My colleague Minister Aitchison is the lead on that one.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, during last week's budget estimates the planning Minister stated that the total budget for the Resilient Homes Program is \$790 million. Last year the Treasurer announced it would be \$800 million. Where's the extra \$10 million? What's the discrepancy about?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is \$800 million. I'm not sure of the exact name of that program, but there is a \$10 million community support program. Does it have a name? I can't tell you the exact name of it, but there is \$10 million in terms of the communities. I don't want to mention the name because it's commercial in confidence, but that place that we've helped, that community where they've had to remove their local store, is that that \$10 million?

AMANDA LECK: That is correct, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What is the name of that program?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I will clarify that later then, if you don't know, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It is \$800 million all up, but some of that is a \$10 million component which is about supporting community. I could speak to you about it later. Because there's a commercial-in-confidence element, I don't want putting that out there to effect the business.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: During the October 2023 budget estimates hearing it was confirmed that the New South Wales Government would be seeking additional funding from the Federal Government for flood recovery in the Northern Rivers. Can you confirm if the Federal Government has been approached to provide more funding, specifically for Resilient Homes?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, I can. It was \$10 million that was committed to the establishment of the Northern Rivers towns and villages—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So the \$10 million was from the Federal Government that you wrote to the Minister for?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is that the \$10 million? Sorry, the \$10 million there is separate to funding from the Federal Government. There have been some discussions, and these get discussed not only between the States but also with others.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did you advocate for that from the Federal Government, and has it been responded to?

Mr JIHAD DIB: In terms of the advocacy, we're always advocating. We always like to get more money from the Federal Government. Let's also keep in mind—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But my question was specifically for the Resilient Homes Program.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, but there is still some funding for the Resilient Homes Program. It hasn't all be expended.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: There was a confirmation from the Government last year that you would be seeking additional funding from the Federal Government for flood recovery in the Northern Rivers. Have you done that?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes, there has been that, and conversation is ongoing.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you have written to the Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Have I? I know there has been some communication. We've written to the Minister. The Premier has written—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So, you have written to the Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Premier has written—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The Premier has written to which Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Premier has written to the Commonwealth Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know which Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm assuming the Premier would write to the Prime Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: To get funding for this Northern Rivers project?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The question is probably better directed to the Premier. The conversations have happened. We've made representations. We continue to have those conversations. Notwithstanding all of that, there is still funding inside the Resilient Homes Program and Resilient Lands budget.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But I'm wondering why you haven't, in your capacity as the Minister for Emergency Services, advocated for that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think that's a pretty unfair characterisation to assume that I haven't.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You're the Minister. How is that unfair?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, it's not that it's unfair. I think the fact that you would assume that I haven't advocated. How do you think these things happen?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You just said that the Premier wrote to the Prime Minister about this program, not you.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It doesn't go any higher up the chain than the Premier writing to the Prime Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you don't seem to know what the answer is.

Mr JIHAD DIB: You would assume that the Premier would have been having conversations with his Minister. What we have done is we've committed \$90 million.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you're the Minister.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: We've descended again into Ms Munro speaking over the Minister and making it difficult for the Minister to finish the sentence—so we can hear what it is that he did do, rather than what it is or isn't that Ms Munro is asserting.

The CHAIR: We will give the Minister a moment to answer.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The inference that I haven't advocated—I have advocated constantly. You don't get higher up the chain than the Premier and the Prime Minister. I know the Premier was writing to the Prime Minister to ask the Commonwealth to match the \$90 million that we've put in. I don't know that we can get any more clear than that: \$90 million in New South Wales. What we are trying to do is to say, "Match our funding." New South Wales has put \$90 million in the budget. We're saying to the Commonwealth, "Put in \$90 million as well. Match it to us."

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you had any personal conversations with your Federal counterpart about this?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Of course I have. With the previous Minister, yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: As in, the Federal Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Yes. There have been changes with the recent reshuffle, but with the previous Minister, Minister Watt.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: On the Northern Rivers, are you aware that flood victims who have applied for inclusion in the Resilient Homes Program are still waiting for answers to their applications and that they're being told to submit an appeal in order to garner a response?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm not aware of any specific individual cases. What I do know is that the Reconstruction Authority is working with people in the Northern Rivers and with the community of the Northern Rivers. We do have the appeals processes. There's a lot of work going on. Ms Leck, do you have a specific?

AMANDA LECK: Yes, Minister. To date—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I might just take this in the afternoon, if that's okay, given we have limited time.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on a second.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Hang on a second, courtesy!

The CHAIR: I think it's fine for her to move those questions to the afternoon.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It's absolutely fine.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'll answer the questions that I can answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes, I'm aware. Unfortunately we're not getting many answers, which is part of the problem.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on a second. Chair, I've put up—

The CHAIR: Order! If the Minister has an answer, he can give that answer.

Mr JIHAD DIB: For the past couple of hours I've put up with the snide remarks and I've ignored them. Please don't make those sorts of comments. I'm answering the questions. If you've got a question to ask, make sure you know what the question is.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm asking the questions. That's what we're doing.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And I've been respectful all the way with you, Ms Munro.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I just want to put on the record, Minister, that the MP who had to submit a request to get reimbursed for fuel from the RFS, his application took 11 days to reimburse. I just wanted to make sure you understood that. It was not 24 hours; it was 11 days between his application. I presume you don't think that's acceptable.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, you are talking to me about something that I have no evidence of in front of me.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You tried to present evidence earlier, and I'm correcting the record to ensure that you understand.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How about you table it, if you have evidence?

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Yes, table it.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What I said was, "Could you find for me whether that was the case." The overwhelming majority are within 24 hours. The commissioner then said there were five instances over a 12-month period for 7,000 trucks and over 2,000 brigades.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand the commissioner gave that answer, which was very helpful. I'll move on to—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I want to go back to that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, sorry.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, I'm sorry, but if you ask me a question you need to give me the courtesy of allowing me to answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I asked you if you thought 11 days was appropriate and you haven't answered that.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm sorry. I'm going to let you talk over me.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr JIHAD DIB: Keep talking, please.

The CHAIR: Order! I think it's probably time. If Ms Munro wants to move to another area of questioning, I think that's probably for the best.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Chair, I'm happy to look into it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, you can't cavil with the Chair's ruling.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If Ms Munro would like to give me the evidence—

The CHAIR: Perhaps Ms Munro would like to put that last question on notice and then the Minister can provide information on notice.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But provide me with the evidence, please, Ms Munro.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, last financial year Fire and Rescue NSW spent over \$820 million dollars on employee-related expenses. This financial year you've only budgeted \$785 million, which is a 5.4 per cent cut. Given that wages increased 4.5 per cent, which positions and programs in Fire and Rescue have been cut to accommodate this cut?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, are you trying to link the largest pay that firefighters have received over a 10-year period to this? Is that what you're trying to do? Are you saying that that's the result?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I've asked you the question: Given that wages increased—

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, but I'm asking for a clarification on the question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Given that wages increased 4.5 per cent and the budget has been reduced, which programs have been cut to accommodate this cut?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Actually, I don't accept the premise of the question. What I will inform the Committee of is that one of the things that I was able to secure in this budget is permanent ongoing funding for 286 firefighters that the Government of which you were a part had left unfunded. That's one—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But, Minister, how can you explain the cut? The cuts are in the budget.

Mr JIHAD DIB: That is one in every 12 permanent firefighters—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, that's not my question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —were left unfunded by the previous Government. So I'm not going to take a lecture—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, it gets sad when you have to start referring to the Coalition.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: The House adopted something very precise, and that is witnesses will be treated with courtesy at all times. It's very appropriate if a member wants to ask a legitimate question, but it's not appropriate to keep talking over the Minister. That is just totally discourteous.

The CHAIR: Both the Minister and the member are speaking over the top of each other. Again, I remind both of you just to be mindful that we don't need any extra commentary because it obviously inflames the situation.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I can take you to the budget.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, Madam Chair. I was still giving my answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I can take you to the budget where the cut is.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But I was still giving my answer. I was still trying to complete my answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Well, the answer was interrupted by your own side. Can I please direct you to the budget?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: He has been interrupting by giving you an answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Now who's interrupting?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How is that interrupting?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could I please direct you to the budget, Minister?

The CHAIR: Order! Ms Munro, are you redirecting your line of questioning?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm asking the Minister to please refer to his budget, where the cut exists, and explain what is being cut under his budget. I can take you to page 4-8, line one. It's part of the Fire and Rescue NSW budget.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, what we've got is a situation—Fire and Rescue had been underfunded. We have got 286 firefighters that were unfunded. You can shake your head, Ms Munro, but that's the fact of the matter. We're dealing with a mess that was left to me by the previous Government where Fire and Rescue had a situation where their overtime has stretched exorbitantly, where they were not funded properly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I think we can move on because—

Mr JIHAD DIB: The first instance—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is not answering my question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: At the first instance, the securing of the 286 firefighters that had been sitting there, unfunded, is something that you need to accept was a problem that we've inherited. This is why the budget kept moving around. The recurrent budget has actually gone 3 per cent higher than it was the previous year. What you might be looking at, Ms Munro—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, could I please move on—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm sorry, but I'm still answering the question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: —because you're actually not answering my very specific question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Madam Chair, this is what happens.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We can't just have Ministers extend their question.

The CHAIR: I understand, Minister, but I will allow the member to redirect her questions.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: There is no provision in budget estimates to allow redirection to occur.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But the Chair can make a ruling.

The CHAIR: There is also nothing within the rules that will prevent it either.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm fine.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes, there is.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's okay.

The CHAIR: Where is the rule that says that that's prevented?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: We operate according to rules. We seek the advice of the Clerk. The Clerk has said that there is no provision to allow redirection to occur.

The CHAIR: No, my understanding—and I'm happy to seek further clarification around this—is that there is nothing in the rules that will stop someone from redirecting as well. There's nothing in the rules either way. If it's done in a respectful way, I believe that we are in a position to be able to redirect questions. We're under the clock. I know sometimes there are Ministers that will talk for a very long time. It makes it very difficult for anybody outside of government to get answers from Ministers—and this is not a reflection on this particular Minister; I'm talking more generally here, just to clarify.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Thank you, Ms Hurst.

The CHAIR: I will seek further advice on that, but my understanding was that we are able to direct. The issue is whether it's being done in a way that's not allowing the Minister any time to be able to answer those questions, and it's problematic, or if it's becoming argumentative and difficult. They are the two things that I'm keeping in mind around this, but my understanding is that it's still a possibility for us to be able to redirect.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you, Chair.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: To the point of order—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is just taking up time.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can we stop the clock?

The CHAIR: Sorry. To the point of order?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Chair, could we please stop the clock?

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: I appreciate your explanation. I would submit that two aspects of that advice have not been adhered to in this case. One is—and the main one—not being respectful to the Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is running cover, absolutely. Speak more slowly.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: The other is allowing the Minister enough time to answer the first question before you redirect, and neither of those are being adhered to. In fact, I can hear the continuing stream of commentary now, which continues that line of behaviour, which is completely inappropriate.

The CHAIR: It hasn't always been adhered to, and certainly I have pulled up the member at certain times. But in this particular instance that we're now looking at, I didn't feel that it wasn't being adhered to. That's why I allowed Ms Munro to redirect her questions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you, Chair. Minister, could I please clarify something that you said earlier? I just want to be really, really clear. Last week Minister Kamper, regarding the Business Bureau, said about staff in the Business Bureau—not just frontline staff but the Business Bureau—"They're not being retrenched. I've got the Business Bureau fully funded." Could you please confirm that that is accurate?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, I'll say it again: Frontline staff in the Business Bureau are funded for this year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So Minister Kamper is not correct when he says that he has—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I wasn't in Minister Kamper's hearing.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm telling you what he said. He said, "They're not being retrenched. I've got the Business Bureau fully funded." But that's not accurate, is it?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I have said again and again—and I wasn't here for that hearing, so I'll take your word for it. The frontline staff, I've said now—I think this is probably the fifth time I've said it today that there's not going to be a change to frontline staff. I've also said that there was—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand you're saying that there's no change to frontline staff. I understand that. I'm asking if there will be any changes to the bureau at all with staffing.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The consultation process across all of Service NSW, which Business Bureau is part of, is being undertaken at the moment. The commitment that I gave at the time, and I continue to give it, is that the frontline staff is what we want to make sure that we preserve, and I've said, Business Bureau, that will be it. These are the business concierges. I don't know if you're trying to pit one Minister against another.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, I'm actually trying to understand what the truth is because we're getting two different answers from different Ministers. That's what I'm trying to ascertain.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's obviously something that we share, in terms of the Business Bureau. The budget and the digital element is something that I have responsibility for, and the policy and engagement is something that he is responsible for. I've answered it the way that I can. I suggest you might want to ask him when you see him.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I did—we did. That was the whole point.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And I—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you don't agree with what he said?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: You're saying that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: He said that there would be no retrenchments.

Mr JIHAD DIB: And I've said to you—

The CHAIR: Sorry, the Hon. Bob Nanva has taken a point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: The member has now repeatedly asked the same question a number of times to the point where it's almost now badgering the Minister. I would suggest that's not in accordance with paragraph 19 of the procedural fairness resolution, concerning courtesy.

The CHAIR: I think there is a bit of a strong back and forth. I encourage the member to direct her question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I will move on then. Minister, why have you not directed the New South Wales registrar to use her powers to ensure that PEXA contributes, in good faith, to the reforms around eConveyancing, when you have those powers?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I spoke about eConveyancing a little bit earlier.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I heard.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I said that we are working across all of the different registrars-general across the country. We're also trying to work—well, we are working with the Commonwealth to try to help implement this.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you don't think it's time for the enforcement powers to be used?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The enforcement is one element of things that are available. We're constantly looking at reassessing where the situation may be. Ideally, I'd love to see a resolution to this, but I haven't given that direction at the moment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But will you act as the Minister to ensure a resolution to this? I mean, we've got a deadline of December 2025.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I am the Minister responsible, yes, and I've inherited something that, like many things from the previous Government, were left either half done or undone. I spoke earlier about this reform—the issue with this particular reform is the asset was sold by a former government that was obsessed with privatisation. Then they wanted the reform. Subsequent to that, the levers that we had as a government to be able to use were not available. I will continue working with my colleagues across all jurisdictions and encouraging the Commonwealth Government to get involved so that we can deliver this reform. I have made it clear from the first time that I did budget estimates and was asked this question that I am committed to this reform. But like lots of things, I'm cleaning up a mess that was left to me half baked that we weren't able to complete.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The problems are clear.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What are those problems that are so-called "clear"?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The Digital Restart Fund—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sorry, you said that the problems were clear. What problems?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In *Budget Paper No. 01*, at A5-15, it talks about funding being released. Could you please tell me how much money is being released under the Digital Restart Fund?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We've got some guidelines around that. Ms Christie, have we made that announcement specifically? We're going through it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you have the figures, Minister? If you don't have the figures, I'll ask the bureaucrats in the afternoon.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The public servants. They serve the public.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We're all public servants here.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Some of us behave like them and some don't.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, are you aware that the NSW Reconstruction Authority is employing staff in Queensland?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm aware that there could be some situations where, in cross-border towns, people could be employed in that area.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know how much money is being spent by the Government on flying people from Queensland to New South Wales to undertake those roles?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't have that figure off the top of my head. However, what I will say is that it wouldn't be unusual, particularly in cross-border areas, where people who might live in the northern part of New South Wales or the southern part of Queensland or other bordering States, that it could happen. As a result of that, if somebody is living, for example, in the most southern part of Queensland and they need to get to Sydney for a meeting—it's their place of residence. You could be living in the most northern part of New South Wales but work in Queensland simply by a five-kilometre trip. Most of us travel more than five kilometres a day for work.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It might not just be people in border towns.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Order!

Mr JIHAD DIB: I've given that as an example.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Good afternoon, Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Good afternoon. How are you?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Very well, thank you. I want to go back to the "young people in trouble" conversation, particularly First Nations children, and your Government's policies and bail laws. In particular, Minister Harris in estimates last week, when we were looking at the numbers and the fact that we're not closing

the gap—the gap has widened, is widening and looks like it will continue to widen in relation to that very important target that we have of outcome 11, which is to reduce the amount of young people arrested and increase the diversionary action—said to me that things get worse before they get better. Is that your view?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm really concerned about that particular element of the target. It's a target that has got to be more than an aspiration. I can only speak for the things that we do in Youth Justice. We look at that target, we look at the numbers and we see the increase in the number of Aboriginal people in youth detention. We're worried about that. We're concerned about that. As for his comment, that's his comment. I am concerned about not meeting that target at this point in time.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What are you doing particularly? I'm really concerned about it, and so is probably every other person in New South Wales. BOCSAR's preliminary analysis of your new laws has identified that there were 66 first bail appearances from April to June inclusive where the matter was listed within the scope of section 22C. Eighty-five per cent, or 56 individuals, involved defendants who were Aboriginal, and for 52 individuals—representing 79 per cent—it resulted in court bail refusal and the young person being remanded to custody. Of those 52 resulting in court bail refusal, 46 individuals—or 88 per cent—were First Nations people and young people. What do we do now, Minister? I realise that the Attorney General has set these laws. What are you doing specifically to get these young First Nations kids out of youth detention and remand?

Mr JIHAD DIB: You're right. It is the Attorney General, and they are matters for the court. We're not obfuscating from that and saying that there isn't a role that we can play. I said earlier—I'm not sure if you were here or not—that there's a whole-of-society approach that we need to look at here. I can control the things that I am responsible for, which is in that Youth Justice space and the work that we're doing, especially in terms of the targeted focus work with communities, local-led decision-making, co-designed programs and looking at every possible scenario so that we can get these young people out of the situation that they find themselves in. That's what I can control. I can't control court decisions. I can't control police action.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It's your Government that has made these laws. The court used to have more control. The court now doesn't have that control.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I know, but I am one part of the Government. I do my bit.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I know that you have done a lot of work in terms of the diversionary programs. I know that you engage with those particular providers. We've got the Youth Koori Court, youth conferencing, the Bail and Accommodation Support Service, A Place to Go and the Aboriginal youth program. Did any of those services and organisations come to you and say, "Minister Dib, we need stronger bail laws. You've got to urge your Government to introduce strong bail laws, with the court's discretion being removed from granting bail"?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Not in those words. With any of the groups I have discussions with, we talk about the fact that we've got an issue that young people are on the wrong path in life. All of those groups also would feel the same way. There are many different opinions out there.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Did any of them come asking for stronger penalties, stronger bail laws or to put more kids behind bars? No.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No. But many did come and say, "How can we work together to try to do things better for young people?"

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you know how well the NRL thing in Moree is going? It was touted as an incredible diversionary program of sorts.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's another element that will assist. It's not going to be the panacea.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you know how it's going though? How many children are signed up? Do you know?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Signed up to?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: To whatever this NRL thing is.

Mr JIHAD DIB: So it's a bit of a mentoring program?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I might get some further information later on, but we don't actually manage that program.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you interested in how well it's going and what it's doing?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Of course I'm interested. Whilst I might not be the Minister responsible for managing it, it doesn't mean that I don't have an interest in it or a desire to see it go well.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I sincerely ask because I consider that you probably are interested.

Mr JIHAD DIB: This is only one example, but I have come across some information that, for example, in a town, if there is somebody who is seen as a role model—someone who the kids really look up to—just them visiting the town makes a difference to that young person and the possibility that it could lift them. That's one of those elements that we're looking at. And, sorry, it's led by police. I said the Premier's Department. That particular program is led by police.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It was touted as "Chris Minns has launched the new initiative". It was about Project Pathfinder. Perhaps I'll come back to the department later and ask.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I will also confirm that I was there on the day up in Moree.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You were. That's right.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I remember it, because it was super hot and humid, and I was fasting at the time. There was beautiful cold water next to me and I couldn't have it. That's what I remember.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm just curious how many First Nations kids are not behind bars because of it. That's my question.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If we try to draw some linear outcomes, we're not going to get it. We want to try to attack this in every way possible. This might be the thing that could help one kid, or it might be something else.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: When do you think we might be back on target, recognising that the fact that the gap is widening is catastrophic? Getting it down was the issue. Decreasing the numbers was the goal. We're not just not on target, but we've gone in reverse. When do you think, and when have you been told, that we will be remotely in focus of being back on track to reduce the numbers of First Nations kids behind bars in New South Wales?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Every single day we try to do the best that we can in Youth Justice to reduce the number of kids. There are some things that are not in our control.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can you tell me then, what is the current dollar value? How much is it at the moment to keep one kid behind bars per annum?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Over a 12-month period, I think it's—

PAUL O'REILLY: It's \$2,700 per day.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Has that gone up from the last estimates?

PAUL O'REILLY: Not since the last hearing, no.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It's been sitting around there.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What's that per annum?

PAUL O'REILLY: It's a big number.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It's a very big number. Mr O'Reilly, do you know what that very big number is? It's over \$1 million a year. What's the dollar value of the new funding for diversionary services and wraparounds, compared to \$1 million a year per kid?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I haven't done that calculation per kid.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you think you should? Do you think it's an important one for New South Wales?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I think what I should do is continue to advocate as strongly as I do and set some direction with Youth Justice, as we do. Mr O'Reilly, do you have anything you want to add to that?

PAUL O'REILLY: Diversion programs are far cheaper than detention.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: They are.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you think by the time we come to the next budget estimates, Minister, you'll be able to tell us that there are less kids in remand than what there are now, as opposed to a lot more?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I would love to be able to say there are continuously less kids. What we have now is a number of young people in detention. It varies. I think it was about 236 today.

PAUL O'REILLY: There are 236 children in detention and 165 on remand.

Mr JIHAD DIB: But during the year it varies from 200 to about 250. These things move up and down. I would love to continue to see downward trajectories. That's what we're trying to do. To ask me if I would like to do that; I would love to. Wouldn't it be great if I could do that?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, did you go back and get your hair cut by that lovely young man at Cobham?

Mr JIHAD DIB: It doesn't look like it. I haven't been out to Wagga. I was actually planning to go out to Wagga. I'll let Mr Fang know when I'm in Wagga next time.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: No, don't tell Wes.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Just on that point, I reposted something recently on my social media for Skills Week to share that beautiful story. We talk about all this stuff—and I know that you know it, and everybody on this Committee would be the same—but we actually do believe in trying to change things for the better for kids. It's complex. It's difficult. It requires every part of society to do their bit.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I know. We need to try harder.

The CHAIR: Minister, before I was asking some questions about the RFS. Another concern that has been brought to my office is that RFS volunteers are only eligible for workers compensation if they are injured while fighting fires or at fundraising events, but not if they're injured while undertaking training. Is that correct, to your knowledge?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can I pass that to the Commissioner? I'm not sure about that. I know there is some other stuff around workers comp. Commissioner?

ROB ROGERS: No, that's not correct. They are covered. I presume what you're referring to is that there was, a few weeks ago, a suggestion that one member wasn't going to be covered because they were attending a meeting. That has been resolved. We worked through that with icare and the member is now fully covered for that incident. We're also working with icare to make sure we give examples of what's been previously approved, just to make sure we can give surety to our members. I've also put out communication to our members saying that as far as I'm concerned they are covered for anything that is deemed to be a bona fide activity for the RFS.

My problem is to make sure I work with the rest of government to make sure that happens. The Minister supports that position as well. I think part of this is that the legislation that covers the workers comp is quite old and it hasn't really kept up with the changing roles of emergency services. I think there probably is going to be some need for some legislative reform in the future to just close those gaps. But the good thing is that we can have those discussions with icare to make sure we resolve any of those sorts of issues. Certainly that one has been resolved.

The CHAIR: Minister, with that in mind, will you be advocating for a review of the workers comp legislation for workers in emergencies?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I mentioned a bit earlier that Minister Cotsis is leading some work. We've made some commitments, particularly around full-body impairment. That's a commitment, as well as—as I mentioned a bit earlier—the presumptive cancers.

The CHAIR: I'm talking specifically about what we were talking about. There was one case that has been fixed for a worker during a meeting or training. Will you also be looking at areas of that workers comp review that might affect gaps within that legislation because it is quite old and might affect workers working in that emergency section?

Mr JIHAD DIB: There are some things that I can do in terms of the regulation. But certainly we will have a look at it. I will ask SIRA if it sits within their purview. But I know that Minister Cotsis has a very strong track record and a very strong commitment to try to fix some of those things, particularly around workers compensation, and to have a better understanding and look at them.

The CHAIR: Do you know if the RFS has a public gift register?

Mr JIHAD DIB: They do have a public gift register, yes. They would declare their gifts in line and in accordance with the guidelines, as they are required to do.

The CHAIR: Is there any public register of consultants and/or contractors engaged by RFS?

Mr JIHAD DIB: We'd report on spends that we have. Do you mean a gift register?

The CHAIR: A public register.

ROB ROGERS: Do you mean of contractors?

The CHAIR: Yes, of consultants or contractors that are engaged. Is there any kind of public register where people can see what contractors—

ROB ROGERS: I'm not sure what you mean.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We do report, of course, in reports when there is a consultancy. One of the commitments of our Government was to reduce the amount of consultancies and bring them in house. But when there is a consultancy, the report is published. All of the information is published there, including the—

The CHAIR: But would that require people to go through each report to try to find that information, rather than there being an actual schedule of consultants in one place? Would it require somebody to go through each report to try to find that information?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Consultants would be reported in an annual report.

The CHAIR: So there's a whole schedule?

Mr JIHAD DIB: That would be the one place where it would go. Consultancies would be reported there. Is there a particular question or concern that you had?

The CHAIR: I haven't been able to find any sort of public register of consultants or contractors engaged specifically by the RFS in one notice of schedule. That's what I'm trying to understand. When you're saying it's in these reports, I'm wondering if it's in there somewhere, but you've got to go and find it in each report, or whether there is actually a schedule where you can go to one place and actually see.

ROB ROGERS: I know that we meet all the requirements that we are supposed to. I'm not sure whether other agencies have these reports that you're suggesting.

The CHAIR: Maybe a better way to put it is to ask whether it is possible to get on notice a schedule of the contractors and consultants engaged by the RFS over the past two financial years?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Sure. I'm advised that the RFS does not routinely engage with consultants. You want a schedule of the consultants that RFS has engaged—

The CHAIR: And contractors, in the last two financial years.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Contractors in terms of consultancies?

The CHAIR: Yes, not any kind of contractor.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Because we would have so many contractors for anything, from paperclips to whatever.

The CHAIR: Fair enough. Last estimates I also asked about the expenditure for section 44 during the 2019-20 bushfires. I was advised that several section 44 events occurred and cost over \$30 million, and one single event cost over \$50 million. I am just wondering what you are doing, Minister, to ensure best practice in terms of procurement during section 44 events?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Those events, if I remember, were during the height of the worst fires that we've had for a long period of time. The goal there is to try to protect property and protect life as much as possible. In terms of procurement, for example, you heard the Commissioner earlier talk about the retardant, that they were able to buy a lot of it and store it. That is, effectively, I would say, a more cost-effective way of doing that. In terms of some of the work we are doing with our aerial fleets, us training our own staff and having our own crews will make a difference. We all have fiscal responsibilities that we need to address. We're dealing with a pretty difficult financial situation, having inherited \$187 billion in debt. RFS, like all of my agencies, are being asked to make sure that they stick within their allocated budget. But I also know that Commissioner Rogers is pretty frugal when it comes to some things—in the nicest way possible, Rob.

The CHAIR: I understand you were talking about historical here when we're looking back at emergencies, but we know in the climate crisis that we're in we're going to have future emergencies, so I'm just trying to get a better understanding of what will now be put in place to make sure that best practice is put into place when those future emergencies occur.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Something that is really fantastic there is our State Disaster Mitigation Plan that I've spoken about. I say it a lot because Minister Scully and I—we're really proud of that. It's a first step in looking at

what we do in terms of having that plan. But the other things, too, that have happened that have been really good is the interoperability between our agencies. It's one of the things that I as Minister am incredibly keen on and have spoken about and have given direction to. I want agencies to operate together so that, whilst one is the lead, the others can support. That means that then we can make sure that we have the plan.

The work the Reconstruction Authority is doing in terms of how we quickly stand up a response, the State emergency controllers—certainly in the last year and a half that I've been the Minister, we've spent an incredible amount of time saying, "We want a really clear set of the way that we do things." There probably could be a better way to say it but I refer to it as "the game plan", knowing that the game is never going to be the same but we really do a plan—what happens when this occurs? How do we set it up? Even to the point of how do we get messages to communities? How do we make sure that we engage with people who could be at risk? When we discover there's a problem in our communications, how do we fix that straightaway?

All I can basically say to you again is that there's been a very strong focus on making sure that we are prepared and we respond in a way that's consistent, that's very clear. I just want to conclude with, where we saw this really well was when we had some floods in April. It was kind of like the first big incident we've had since we stood up a lot of these things. The seamlessness in the way that it operated was great. SES was doing that. RFS actually assisted with some of the rescues. The RA quickly got the funding arrangements organised with the Feds. People were quickly supported and that made me really happy because it was that dream that you have when you say, "We don't know when the disaster is going to be in. We don't know how it's going to be. But what we do know is the way that we're going to respond to it." Even after that event, we looked at it again to see if we could do it better.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I want to take you to some figures that we have been given from an internal document that basically raises a range of options for cuts to Service NSW. I'm hoping you can give some clarity as to whether they will be implemented or not. If I can just take you through the areas of Service NSW that they relate to, first of all, there is—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Is there a document?

The CHAIR: Can we stop the clock? I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Chair, if the member is questioning the Minister about matters that are contained within a document, it would assist, no doubt, the Committee if that document were tabled.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm very happy to table it. I just need to get it printed. Is that okay?

The CHAIR: If there's only one copy of the document, you can finish the question but, yes, if you could table it after that.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: It would assist, no doubt, the Minister as well to have that document in front of him.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm happy to provide it, but I'll have to get it brought down. The first one is for a \$33.8 million cut to service delivery in Service NSW, which is a reduction of 9 per cent. Are you able to rule that in or out?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm happy to wait and I'm happy if you want to stop the clock until I see this document that you're talking about.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can we swap the times?

The CHAIR: I will stop the clock and I'm going to go to 3½ minutes for Ms Sue Higginson, if she is right to do that and then we'll come back.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Sure.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I should be at least seeing the document that I'm being asked about.

The CHAIR: That's alright. We'll go to Ms Sue Higginson.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I think you may have answered earlier that any review that's happening of the Young Offenders Act is being managed by the Attorney General's department.

Mr JIHAD DIB: No, I said that the Attorney General is the lead on that review.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, what are the feed-ins that you're having in terms of the review to that Act? I note you said earlier you're doing work looking at best practice approaches to young offending. What is your view and what are you feeding into this very important piece of work?

Mr JIHAD DIB: My agency is working as part of it, of course. We have different conversations. They are contributors to the review. But my part is around youth conferencing as well. I've seen the value of youth conferencing and what we've been able to achieve. That's part of the element of the Act that technically I own—I've got responsibility for, I should say. If there are practices that are good, that we can see, then we keep it intact. It doesn't have to be just during the review of this Act. If there are things that I can do for the Act that I am responsible for, then we'll do that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: With that, what sort of things in terms of youth conferencing are you recommending at the moment for change?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I can tell you the successes in some of the youth conferences. If I can just read a little bit of information that I've got for you here—61 per cent who participated have had no further contact with the justice system within the past 12 months. That's something to really celebrate.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That is a good figure.

Mr JIHAD DIB: It shows how good that is. Of that too, 53.7 per cent are Aboriginal young people. What that shows us is that this is one thing that we could use within the justice system that could work. It may not be the only thing that could work.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is your focus on beating that recidivism element?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Absolutely. Even before that, I would love to not even see the young people involved in the youth justice system. But then, once they're there, what we really want to ensure is that we don't see them again. I've said to them—I think the first time I said it they thought I was a bit odd—"Look, I love you but I don't want to see you anymore." This is not how we want to see them. That's why we do those programs.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What about the fact that young people on remand—because obviously they're not proven or sentenced or guilty—are not able to generally access supports and programs? Has that changed? Is that changing now?

Mr JIHAD DIB: No. Young people who are on remand, it's the court's decision. But anyone who is with us in youth justice is able to access everything that we've offered. The programs—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there work that you can do as the young persons Minister and, therefore, advocate? I'm not saying you are the advocate.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The youth justice Minister, not the young persons Minister.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can you talk with your counterparts about how serious and significant it would be to assist young people that are on remand accessing programs to help them once they're not—

Mr JIHAD DIB: I am going to say something quickly. I know that Paul has got something to say.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Mr O'Reilly and I are going to have a good chat.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Anyone who knows me knows I always have conversations, but my advocacy for young people, particularly young people in these situations, is incredible. Paul, there was something just quick about programs. Could be an arvo situation.

PAUL O'REILLY: Young people on remand have access to all programs and supports except for criminogenic intervention for the index offence. They have access to everything else.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I talk to you a bit later about what that is? We'll come back after lunch.

PAUL O'REILLY: Absolutely. I'd be delighted.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I've provided the Minister with one of the documents. This is called "Overview of impact - Disaster Preparation & Recovery", "Indicative Savings Target". There is a reduction of \$9.2 million, which is a 62 per cent reduction. Could you please confirm if this is going to be the cut under your ministerial leadership?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I said at the very outset, Ms Munro, Service NSW had not operated within the allocated budget, to the tune of \$179 million, said—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Under your budget previously.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Actually, under the previous Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But it's your budget.

Mr JIHAD DIB: If we want to play that game, Ms Munro, under the previous Government, the budget expenditure far exceeded, for a number of years consecutively.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I'm talking about your expenditure because you're the Minister.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Ms Munro, that's why I have now—Service NSW will operate within the budget that is allocated to it. We will not be continuing—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you comfortable with a 62 per cent reduction in disaster preparation and recovery in the lead-up—

Mr JIHAD DIB: You know what I'm not comfortable with? I'm not comfortable—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: —to one of the most dangerous summers that we're going to experience?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Hang on a second.

The CHAIR: There is a point of order.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm happy to keep going with this one.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: He doesn't need to run cover. But, actually, the point of order has to be listened to by the Chair.

The CHAIR: It's up to the member, if he wishes to continue with it.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: It would assist with the fair and orderly conduct of these hearings and assist Hansard, no doubt, if we could operate this as a question-and-answer session rather than a—

The CHAIR: Yes. That is a reminder to both.

Mr JIHAD DIB: In relation to this, I'm happy to answer some questions, but I also want to make it clear: We inherited \$187 billion of debt. We inherited—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But, Minister, I'm asking about your cuts.

Mr JIHAD DIB: We've got to actually look at it in the historical sense. Service NSW—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Actually, we need to talk about it in terms of what you're doing as the Minister.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

Mr JIHAD DIB: Service NSW was unfunded—

The CHAIR: There is a point of order.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You are cutting the budget by 62 per cent. It's outrageous.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Madam Chair, this is the same thing happening over and over.

The CHAIR: Order! Everyone is talking over the top of each other, which is not useful.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's outrageous. You've got to take responsibility.

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm actually not, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR: Order! There is a point of order.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You've got to take responsibility.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can you not lecture me?

The CHAIR: Order! Both of you, please, stop.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Can you not lecture me, please?

The CHAIR: Order! Minister.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Chair, it's not courteous to the Minister, under the procedural fairness resolution—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Running cover.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Really? I'm trying to answer the question.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. BOB NANVA: —to not allow the Minister at least a reasonable amount of time—

Mr JIHAD DIB: If you try and get your little grab, maybe that's what you're going to get.

The CHAIR: Order! That is enough.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: —to answer a question, including providing some context to his answer.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. Did you want to finish answering that question?

Mr JIHAD DIB: I don't even know if there was a question. It just seemed like she wanted to make a point, Madam Chair, and the point was incorrect.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you're not cutting 62 per cent off the disaster—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You said it's incorrect.

The CHAIR: We now go to Government questions. Do the Government have any questions?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Are there any matters that you wish to raise, Minister?

Mr JIHAD DIB: Funny you should ask. There actually is.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You spent all night thinking about the question.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr JIHAD DIB: I'm sure you're asking me the question about some budgets and what this Government inherited. The previous Government decided to put everything they possibly could on the credit card, forgetting that, one day—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: He can't read his own budget let alone the previous budget.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —I'm sorry, I wasn't interrupting—that credit card needed to be paid back. This Government is being fiscally responsible with Service NSW, that had grown exponentially because of a series of disasters, one after the other. This is now right-sizing the department back to what it can do. All of these things—Ms Munro presented me with something about disaster preparation and recovery—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's right.

Mr JIHAD DIB: —but there was actually no question linked to it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes, there was. I said, "Can you please"—

Mr JIHAD DIB: So as a result of that, what we have—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I asked you if you would permit—

The CHAIR: It is now Government question time.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: Could you call her to order? It's enough.

Mr JIHAD DIB: What we have seen is an Opposition that's more interested in playing games, in making things up. If you want to read something, you read it in its context, in the same way that they will use some information to provide some questions that are unsure. Madam Chair, I just wanted to clarify that point. I'm more than happy to answer questions, as I have. What today's experience has also showed me, too, is that sometimes people who want to ask a question don't want an answer. Or they may be rude in the way that they conduct themselves. I have tried, myself, on the respect that I will display to others. I want to conclude, as I always do with these things, by thanking the enormous number of people who do the great work behind the scenes, the public servants who actually keep this State going. I want to say that for all the people in the department of—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: There's no doubt about that because the Ministers don't.

Mr JIHAD DIB: Are you really interrupting while I'm thanking people?

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr JIHAD DIB: Really? While I'm actually acknowledging people, public servants?

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr JIHAD DIB: I want to especially say thank you to them. I know they're tuning in today. They didn't go to their morning tea, so they can watch this. I hope it was worth it for them. I also want to thank the people in our emergency services. There was a reference to the upcoming fire season and, of course, the storm season. I was only with Acting Commissioner Platz the other day, launching the storm season. I know I'll be with Commissioner Rogers, launching the bushfire season. They say then they're always prepared as best as they can. We don't know what will come our way. We prepare for it. But what I've got every confidence in is the quality of our emergency services in New South Wales, not only the paid ones but also the volunteers. I know that, no matter what the disaster is, no matter what the incident is, they step it up.

I also want to acknowledge the work that the Reconstruction Authority is doing, particularly in looking at lessons that we have learned from the Northern Rivers experiences and making it better, the experiences around the Central West. The relationship building and the community work is just second to none. I think that's something that really is acknowledged there, and I want to thank them for that. As I said, all of the Department of Customer Service. You can see, just from the sheer volume of people that we have here as witnesses, the breadth of this portfolio, the incredible pride that I feel in being able to do this but the teams that I have.

I want to also then with that—I know Ms Higginson's not here, but this may be then for Ms MacDonald—the special passion that we both share for Youth Justice and my team in Youth Justice who go to work every single day with that one desire—to try and change a kid's life for the better. I think everybody that we work with, whether it's in Youth Justice, whether it's the Emergency Services, whether it's in Customer Service—we all do it to serve the public. I think that needs to be acknowledged. Maybe we don't thank them often enough. These are difficult things, preparing for budget estimates. There's been a lot of people who have prepared for this, a lot of work that's gone into it. I know my office up there, they're all viewing it, and in Punchbowl.

Just in conclusion, Madam Chair, can I thank you for chairing. I know it wasn't always the most pleasant but thank you. I do thank the Committee for the questions and for the mutual respect that we showed one another. Last but not least, because he'll be upset if I didn't say it, Mark, happy birthday for today. That's Mark from my office. I think his mum was watching. Thanks so much, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR: You'd hope so. Wonderful. Thank you so much. We will now break for lunch and return at 2.00 p.m.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We will now throw directly to the Opposition for further questions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My first questions are to Commissioner Rogers. Thank you for returning. I'm sure you have fought many fires that are hotter than the ones we dished out this morning. I wanted to start with the community of Bilpin, where 70 homes were lost and nearly 70,000 hectares were burnt out. I'm wondering if the RFS has been engaging with the Bells Line of Road Business Council following that.

ROB ROGERS: At my level, I'm not sure. I would have to find out if locally we have been talking to them. I honestly don't know the answer to that. I will have to take it on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That would be helpful. There have been proposals from the community for a number of large water tanks so that RFS trucks don't need to travel the long distances required to refill the trucks. Probably you will take this on notice as well, but are you aware of this proposal?

ROB ROGERS: I am.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How has that progressed?

ROB ROGERS: We referred that in the first instance to the local bushfire management committee, which is a collection of all the agencies who have a say in fire management in that local area, and it's local people. They have asked us for more information on that, which we're endeavouring to provide. As part of that, the council has

also installed a couple of water tanks in the general area as well, not to the level that the community plan had envisaged. I know I was just talking to one of the members of that group when we finished before and I gave an undertaking—because apparently there's some issue with the council there—that I'd send a senior officer up to see if we could broker some way forward to help provide some assurance to that community before we're dealing with bad fires in that area again.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Perhaps you will have to take this on notice. Do you know how far trucks are travelling to refill their water in that area or from that area?

ROB ROGERS: No, I couldn't tell you. The other thing I know that is part of the considerations is that the Federal member arranged some donation of money to individual brigades in the Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury area. I know some of the brigades are considering water tanks to be part of the things they want to do with that money because that's, again, money directed to what they see as important. Generally, I would have to find out and take on notice for you how far they have to go now. We do have some mobile tanks that we have gotten more of since those 2019-20 fires and we're looking at having the ability, not just in that area but across the State, to put water—so that trucks don't have to travel as far. After the fires have finished, we move those tanks out and take them somewhere else.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's helpful. This is a bit of a broader question now about hazard reduction with the RFS, Forestry and the National Parks and Wildlife Service around how much money was spent on hazard reduction. Obviously you have a specific responsibility for that, but is there an understanding—perhaps, from Mr Head—about hazard reduction spends over different agencies?

ROB ROGERS: I'm happy to answer that. That falls to the RFS to coordinate that because we're the lead agency. We collate statistics and we produce statistics in our annual report that's from national parks, State forests, Fire and Rescue NSW as well as RFS and also what council report. We're talking to Transport, trying to get them to also report on that. From a whole-of-government point of view, that's what we seek to do. Our Act actually provides that. We have a system that's a multi-agency system that everybody can input their data into, and that's very much what we go off. The figures we talk about—completion rates—are all agencies, not just RFS.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That data is specific to hazard reduction?

ROB ROGERS: Correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And that data includes the money spent as well as other data points?

ROB ROGERS: It will include any grant money spent, if we gave money to help an activity. But it won't cover, for example, the costs of an agency providing their own people and resources and fuel. It won't do that. That will come out of the respective budgets of those agencies.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: As the Commissioner, can you please confirm whether an RFS volunteer, if they're called to a meeting at their brigade or at the fire control centre, if they have a car accident on the way to or from that meeting, icare will cover them as they would in any other workplace?

ROB ROGERS: Yes. I spoke to the Chair about that, where there was an example where there was a bit of a dispute. But that was cleared up with icare and coverage has been given. There has also been an undertaking to make sure we examine the legislation, making sure it's fit for purpose and, if need be, date that, just to make sure there's actually currency in the legislation. I also sent out an email to all of our members saying that, from my point of view, they will be covered. That's my job to make sure that I get them covered. We can't have people, obviously, particularly volunteers, giving up their time to do things if they're not covered for workers compensation. Indeed, I know that is the attitude of the Minister as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I have some questions about the Fire and Rescue budget. Who is the best-placed person?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: The Commissioner of Fire and Rescue.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I asked the Minister earlier about the cuts to employee-related expenses and the wage increases. Are you aware of whether the wage increases that were promised by the Government—that 4.5 per cent—are included in this budget?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I will take that on notice. I think we're waiting to see what the outcome is, though, of the arbitration to know what the final figure will be.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was there any calculation in creating this budget that did account for some change in the wages?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: They're normally done in the background so that, if there was a change based on whatever the pay rise ends up being, that's factored in when it occurs.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When you say "factored in when it occurs", it will be included in the next budget or perhaps the half-yearly update and it will be reflected in the budgeted versus actual?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: It will be an update accordingly, yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'll go back to the RFS. How many RFS volunteers are currently signed up to the organisation?

ROB ROGERS: It's approximately 70,000. It is 70,948 as of June last year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you got a trend? Is there a trend up or down at the moment?

ROB ROGERS: It has dropped off. I think it was 76,000 at the 2019-20 bushfire period. There have been, certainly, a number of people who exited the organisation after that. They just didn't want to deal with the scale of those fires again. So we've been on a rebuilding mission. It has also been reflective of change in demographics across the State, with people moving out of smaller localities and moving into regional centres. That has been something that reflects in any emergency service or organisation in those smaller towns where that has been the case. I know that some towns, particularly when you start talking about places in the Far West, are really struggling for people. The peak was 76,319 in 2019-20. It was around 73,000, 71,000, 76,000, and it has slipped back to 70,000 now.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you worried about not having enough volunteers with a concerning fire season coming up?

ROB ROGERS: I think we have enough volunteers at the moment. We have enough numbers. Sometimes it's that they're not in the right places. That's probably something that concerns me. We're having some discussions with our local area commands and also looking at what does the future look for. Obviously I'm thinking about what will that look like in 10 years time. We're building, for example, trucks that don't need as many people to man. We're getting better communications on the trucks. We're looking at different ways of having people come in from different areas to support and not just relying on those same people.

It was a mistake of RFS—we disengaged a fair bit from farmers, but we're making a lot of efforts to reconnect with that. We'd like to think that farmers, with the pumps that they have on their own properties, can also be part of a first-strike thing to try to stop fires getting big. There's a lot of work to try to complement the way we deal with fires. One of the other things we're doing now on bad days in some areas is we're sending aircraft at the very first call to try to, again, stop those fires taking hold. If we can do that then obviously we can save a lot of damage to the community but also stop those really big fires occurring.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are there particular areas in New South Wales that you're looking at to implement these measures that will hopefully assist where there aren't as many people anymore?

ROB ROGERS: Yes. There have been a number of areas. Some of those trucks that those local areas are asking for—those types of trucks with lower numbers of people. You will have areas like the south-west of the State. They have been after that sort of vehicle and they have found them very useful. That's something that we're constantly evaluating. That's something we're looking at. We're just moving into a new generation of fire trucks. Part of that's going to be what does firefighting look like in another decade.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is there a specific part of your budget that you've allocated to recruiting more volunteers?

ROB ROGERS: There are budgets that we have where we assist to try to do local, targeted campaigns, but it's not an organised thing; we just do it from within. But I've certainly asked our public information people to start to think about developing campaigns that can be rolled out, particularly on social media, in the local areas to try to target as many people from the available pool that we have. I think those smaller areas are a challenge, and my colleagues here will also be facing exactly the same challenge in those smaller demographics. Those are things that people, in years to come, will have to have discussions on—what does emergency service protection look like in those areas.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are we going to see you on TikTok, Commissioner?

ROB ROGERS: No, definitely not.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's a shame. I think you would be a very good salesperson. This is probably for Commissioner Fewtrell. For the fleet maintenance, this year's budget is down over \$50 million on last year's spending. How is your department covering the fleet maintenance required, given that cut?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Some of the reduction in the fleet is only minor in terms of what our capital allocation is, so I'd question that amount. We've got \$18.6 million for new builds this year, and then one last tranche of the stage three bushfire funding for new tankers.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How much was that?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: That was \$449,000. Then we've also got additional funding for three new appliances for Badgerys Creek fire station, and we have our maintenance fix-and-repair-type budget in that as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How much is that for Badgerys Creek?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Badgerys Creek is \$2.4 million.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What's the target age of a firefighting appliance before it's replaced?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: It depends on the different types of vehicles. Our urban fire trucks that we have in Sydney have a target age of 15 years. Our fire engines that are typically based in regional locations are 20 years, and our specialist appliances are also around the 20-year mark.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What funding has been spent on fleet repair and maintenance in the past 12 months?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'll take that one on notice, if I could, please.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: At the last estimates there was a confirmation that over 3,000 appliances were over 20 years of age. How many have been replaced since then?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I think that might be an RFS figure, with that many trucks.

ROB ROGERS: I'm sorry, what was the question?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: At the last estimates there was a figure provided of 3,000 appliances that were over 20 years of age. How many have been replaced since then?

ROB ROGERS: We currently have 1,169 over 20 years of age. Our average fleet age is 15 years. Does that answer your question?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes. That answers the question, thank you. Now we have a question about the forestry package in the Murray region. Minister Moriarty announced a \$13 million forestry funding package which was designed to provide protection for the softwood industry in the Murray region. How much of that has been spent? Is that something for Commissioner Fewtrell as well?

ROB ROGERS: No. If that was expending on forestry assets, that would be a different portfolio.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So go straight to Moriarty on that?

ROB ROGERS: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I presume in that package there are things like fire trucks included. What kind of assets have been provided to the Minister or whoever is undertaking that plan?

ROB ROGERS: Forestry Corporation are a recognised fire authority in themselves; they're recognised under the Rural Fires Act. They have their own fire trucks, but they buy them through the RFS contracts. They get the same standard of trucks that the RFS have. They have a number of new vehicles that were purchased following that 2019-20 season that didn't have safety equipment. They have modernised their fleet. I don't know the exact numbers. I don't have that. I would have to refer that to Forestry Corp. One of the things I would say is that we work very closely with Forestry because the protection particularly of plantations is a critical asset for the State. You may be aware but obviously the sawmills rely on them. They're a massive employer in local areas. We work very hard with Forestry to assist to protect those assets, whether that's helicopters or large air tankers. We consider them a critical asset. We certainly put a lot of work into trying to protect those assets.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Commissioner Fewtrell, could you please provide us with a list of stations that have been taken offline in the last financial year?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: No, not in a practical sense. It's a dynamic operational network that we run. There have been stations taken offline temporarily under settings that we've had in place since 2008 at different times. Sometimes they might be offline for an hour or two; they might be offline for training or other reasons. I don't know that we would be able to give you a consolidated list of all that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I would have thought that you'd have a dashboard or something somewhere that says which offices have been taken offline.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: On any given day we will know which stations may be offline.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But there's not a record of all of them?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'll take it on notice, and we'll provide what we can.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: If you could also take on notice how many hours they were offline in the last 12 months.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: See how you go.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: We're happy to do what we can.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you. If you take it on notice, Commissioner Rogers, the number of members over 50, 60 and 70 years of age in the RFS and under 40, please.

ROB ROGERS: Yes, no problem.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And also in the SES, if that's—

DEBBIE PLATZ: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you, Acting Commissioner Platz.

The CHAIR: I might start with a conversation with Mr O'Reilly. Continuing on from the questions I was also asking the Minister this morning, do you know what the longest period of segregation of a young person that was subject to, in the last financial year?

PAUL O'REILLY: No, I don't have that figure.

The CHAIR: Is that ever recorded?

PAUL O'REILLY: It would be, yes.

The CHAIR: Is it something that you could take on notice for me, then?

PAUL O'REILLY: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I mentioned earlier that at the last estimates hearing I was advised that Youth Justice was implementing that new behaviour assistance pathway to replace detainee risk management plans. Can I get an update on where that's up to?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, absolutely. The behaviour assistance program was introduced following criticism of the DRMP, the risk management plans. The risk management plans were lawful, but they weren't the best that we could do. Just over probably a year and a half ago there was a leadership forum, and we took advice from our senior Aboriginal practitioners, who had, I think, a much better model in their mind. We started working on that, and it has been implemented now since last November. The focus shifts from managing risk to managing supports and services. The key features, I guess, include for Aboriginal young people, which is the majority of young people in our system—it's led with a cultural response, with guaranteed access to a cultural practice.

The voice of children is in the development of the plans and, where possible and where appropriate, the voice of the families is involved in the development of the plan as well. Then we have the features from the previous model that were supported—for example, the role of psychologists and caseworkers, the inclusion of school and teaching and vocational training, and any other health or psychological supports that were relevant.

The CHAIR: Great. Is there a timeline for a review of this program and its effectiveness?

PAUL O'REILLY: We will absolutely need to review it, yes. It has been running for almost one year. After one year, we'll probably start the process of reviewing, but nothing formal at this stage.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Thank you. I also want to ask some questions about the Young People in Custody Health Survey that was done in 2022. I'm wondering when we can expect to see the results of that survey published, if you're aware.

PAUL O'REILLY: Soon, I hope. It normally takes almost two years for that process to complete. The last one was done in 2015, and it wasn't until 2017 that the data was available. It will be the same process here.

It's a complex process of gathering information with our Health partners and synthesising all of that and validating it. We hope it will be a few weeks.

The CHAIR: I'm curious why in the 2022 survey Youth Justice made the decision to replace the physical and pathological testing components with a self-report physical health questionnaire. Do you know what was behind that decision?

PAUL O'REILLY: I probably should get advice before I answer that, because the senior psychologist leading that work would prefer that I take advice, I think, and they're probably right.

The CHAIR: Yes, if you could take that on notice, and maybe they can give me some information. That would be great.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

The CHAIR: The 2015 survey found that 83 per cent of young people in custody met the threshold for a psychological disorder. Do you anticipate that this number would have gone down for the 2022 survey?

PAUL O'REILLY: No.

The CHAIR: Or are you expecting it to go up or stay the same?

PAUL O'REILLY: I don't know, but I don't think it will go down.

The CHAIR: Can you tell me a little bit about any work that's being done to ensure young people with psychological or mental health challenges are not ending up in the Youth Justice system and particularly not ending up in custody, particularly in rural and remote areas where these health services are even more lacking?

PAUL O'REILLY: I can talk a bit about that, but it's probably important to note that this is a statutory service that we provide. We don't have a statutory or even any mandate outside of our statutory function. We work with other agencies who do have that mandate and who do have that reach in the community. But we know, from the people we work with and the clinicians that we work with, that most of the young people who come into our system have come in from the very well-documented determinants of offending for children. It's things like trauma, exposure to violence as children, family breakdown, poverty in the community, exclusion from school, high prominence of disability and, in lots of communities, racism in the community. They're the sort of determinants, I think.

That hasn't really changed and, I would say, in some communities it has intensified. I know that's a very grim picture, but I think that's the truth of what some of our young people are contending with when they end up in our system. It can be frustrating for our staff because they can see that and they're working very hard to try to respond to it, but it can only be a response inside a tertiary statutory system. It can't really be a prevention, from that standpoint. We work very hard to try to prevent re-entry, but there are probably a couple of reasons why that's particularly difficult. One is—and I think I've said this in previous budget estimates hearings—that the detention centre is probably the worst place to provide a clinical intervention.

The second one is I guess the transient nature of the group. So 57 per cent of kids in detention are in detention for less than 24 hours. That's a very short period of time to stabilise somebody and get any sense at all of what the best support or intervention is during that small window. I guess I'm setting out the complexities of preventing kids entering the system from where we sit.

The CHAIR: Definitely. Thank you. I might move to Commissioner Rogers. Going back to some of those questions about the section 44, have there been any formal concerns or complaints raised with the RFS about the spending of the section 44s in emergencies?

ROB ROGERS: There certainly was during 2019-20. There were concerns expressed by local government, because at that point local government were doing pretty well all the purchasing. Apart from things like aviation and things like that, they were doing the majority of the purchasing. Then, because they were doing that and then they were paying vendors, there was a massive time lag before people were paid. We had a dedicated multi-government agency team come in. People from right across the sector came in to help us try to clear that. Since that time, we've put in place an electronic logistics system and we've taken the bulk of those things now away from local government needing to do them. We do them directly. That's overseen by our procurement people. That looks to use people that are either already on contract or, if it's smaller amounts, they can be quickly bought and vendors can be quickly bought online. I guess it's fair to say that the whole system is being reviewed.

The CHAIR: Fair enough. I also understand that additional hazard reduction crews will be deployed in 2024-25 through a \$5 million allocation towards bushfire mitigation. Will burn-offs be part of that mitigation approach?

ROB ROGERS: Sorry, the last bit again? I missed that.

The CHAIR: There was the \$5 million allocated towards bushfire mitigation.

ROB ROGERS: That's the additional crew money, I think. It was \$5 million a year to have an additional 100 people of that mitigation crew. They're the paid people employed to carry out mid-week burn activity, help prepare burns for volunteers that they can do when they can. The idea is to maximise the time available for volunteers but also recognising that sometimes they're not available to do those things during the week, so we need to continue that work, and that has been very much about what they do. Part of the other work they do is 900 people per year—it's called our AIDER program, which is helping vulnerable people who don't have the financial or physical means to clear their own property, that we go in and do that for them. We get referrals from other agencies, just to try to make sure that our most vulnerable people get help preparing their property when they're in a bushfire-prone area. That's all part of that as well.

The CHAIR: When back-burning is done, are there guidelines that the RFS has in regards to measures to take around the consideration of wild animals and controlling those burns? I see that you're nodding, but I've only got 20 seconds left. Can you tell me a little bit about those guidelines?

ROB ROGERS: Sure. Each burn-off has a burn plan done for it. Really, it has a prescription that says, "To achieve what we want to achieve with this burn-off, these are the circumstances that need to occur." There's the weather, the humidity—all of these things give a general target to say that to achieve the outcome, this is what we need to do. Obviously, if there are endangered species and things like that, we get advice from people before we go ahead and do those things. I know that a lot of birds have been moved where, for example, it's in an area in spring where there's nesting or when it's mating time and we're trying to avoid those things. Where we're made aware of concerns, we absolutely do what we can to minimise the impact on local wildlife.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I would like to speak on some of the Youth Justice matters, if that's okay, Mr O'Reilly. I'm looking for some numbers, if you have them. If you don't, let me know. How many kids are currently in Acmena?

PAUL O'REILLY: I do have that. I have today's figures for Acmena. Today, we have 29 children in Acmena at Grafton.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And Frank Baxter?

PAUL O'REILLY: At Frank Baxter, we have 63.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: At Cobham?

PAUL O'REILLY: Sixty-five.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Orana?

PAUL O'REILLY: Seventeen.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Campbelltown?

PAUL O'REILLY: Seventeen. Sorry, I'm going to correct that. It's 18 at Orana and 37 at Reiby in Campbelltown.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I was going to say it sounded a bit low. It's 37 at Campbelltown?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And in the Riverina?

PAUL O'REILLY: Twenty-one.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do we have kids anywhere else?

PAUL O'REILLY: There are two children at the Austinmer forensic mental health ward.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Out of those numbers, are you able to tell me how many are First Nations?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. At Acmena, there are 26 Aboriginal children. That's 89 per cent. At Frank Baxter, there's 39 Aboriginal children. That's 62 per cent. At Cobham, there's 28 Aboriginal children. That's 43 per cent. At Orana, there's 17. That's 95 per cent. At Reiby, there's 17. That's 46 per cent. At Riverina, there are nine, which is 43 per cent.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And the two children who are in the forensic facility, do you know their—

PAUL O'REILLY: They're not Aboriginal children.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Earlier this morning, the Minister was talking about Youth Justice conferencing. He was telling some good anecdotes around that. Is there any involvement in those programs from so-called "non-official" oversight bodies? I think the Children's Guardian, the Ombudsman and the inspector have the official oversight role. Is there any input from the ALS, Legal Aid and others in the design of the programs?

PAUL O'REILLY: Of Youth Justice conferencing specifically?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: They're certainly aware of it. A Youth Justice Conference is restorative practice, as you know. It's really about moving away from a court-based process. Kids can absolutely have access to lawyers if they want to, but it doesn't depend on that. It's mainly a facilitative process with the victim of crime, the police, our staff coordinators and whoever else is relevant to the situation. It could be family, it could be friends or it could be other leaders in the community. The procedures are set out in regulation through the Young Offenders Act. We recruit convenors from across the community. We try to recruit as many Aboriginal convenors as we can because a lot of the children participating in those conferences are Aboriginal children. For example, in the last financial year, there were 1,043 conferences, and 472 of those were Aboriginal children.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there a place where that is happening more? Is there a region where we're doing the conferencing more than in other places?

PAUL O'REILLY: They're available everywhere. The trend of increases and reductions fluctuates everywhere. They're driven by police referrals or court referrals. It will depend on the flow of referrals from those two places.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That's what I was getting at. Is it very much personality driven? I'm not trying to be smart in saying that. Is there a propensity of some police and some magistrates to be more inclined to refer matters?

PAUL O'REILLY: It could be, but I think it's probably more accurate to say it's a complex process that not everybody is aware of. Our job, at Youth Justice, is to work with magistrates and particularly youth liaison officers, police command and crime managers to make sure that they are aware of the process and to encourage participation in the process. We find that police respond pretty well to that approach. But, as you would be aware, there is a lot of turnover of staff, so then we start the process again. That can often drive some of the fluctuations. There is no evidence of a tactical or deliberate resistance to the process; it just needs a lot of maintenance to keep referrals coming.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I have got a lot more on Youth Justice, but I'm going to ask some questions in relation to Service NSW. I don't know if anybody asked the Minister any of these questions earlier. I apologise if they have been asked; I missed some of this morning's session. My understanding is that \$170 million has been taken out of the budget and that there are three waves of restructuring. I'm wondering how many regional jobs are being cut in wave one and if you could tell me the location of those.

GREG WELLS: That's correct. It'd probably be more correct to say that we've been overspending our budget by \$170 million, not that \$170 million has been taken out of the budget. A lot of what's been confirmed in the budget is to sustain things that didn't have funding, just to clarify that. Specifically in terms of regional jobs, it's certainly not disproportionate in terms of the regional impact.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So how many jobs in round one?

GREG WELLS: I'll take that on notice specifically. We have just communicated the end of the consultation for wave one. We're in the process of assigning people to roles in those divisions. I can take on notice, as we get to the end of that phase, as to what that impact is. Specifically, though, about one-quarter of our team is based in regional New South Wales. I'll get the figures for you, but it's a lot less people that are going through restructure and management processes in general for regional jobs. The exception to that is in our contact centres, where we are doing some reorganisation. There are some contact centres in places like Lithgow, Maitland, Gosford et cetera where there might be a slightly higher impact in our leadership positions.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Would you be able to take it on notice? I'm specifically interested in if we can quantify the number of jobs in wave one and what locations they will come from.

GREG WELLS: Absolutely. The only caveat I'll put on that is that we've got a time frame and a process to work through, so we just need to make sure we assign those people to roles in that process. If that coincides with the question on notice, we can certainly provide that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm interested in how many staff in regional locations whose jobs may be in a metropolitan team will be cut.

GREG WELLS: If we can get that breakdown, we certainly will.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It has been put to me that staff have had their headquarters changed from regional locations, including working from home, to metropolitan offices. Can you confirm whether that's the case?

GREG WELLS: That's not the case. Through the process, we will need to assign people to locations. Service is fortunate that we have a statewide footprint, so there is a lot of opportunity for us to not only assign people to places like the McKell Building in the city, Gosford and Parramatta but also to a number of DCS offices across the State.

Then in addition we have some service centres that sometimes have capacity where we could also assist and allocate those as headquarters in exceptions as well. There are lots of options. We're not changing role locations through this process. To be really clear, the process is merit based. We make the assignment based on merit, then we sit down with an employee and look at a range of things—what's the business need, where are you located, do you have specific needs et cetera. We're going to be really careful about how that process works.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If I have any employees who are in regional locations such as Taree, Lismore or Tweed Heads, have any of them been told that they would need to travel to Sydney on a regular basis, even a weekly basis, so that they can maintain their position in the region where they are?

GREG WELLS: Not that I'm aware of, but let me take that on notice. Again, it really comes down to the sort of business we are doing. Some teams have to be on site, obviously, all the time. Other teams will have a flexible arrangement based on the sort of work they do. A lot of regional teams—whether they are doing driver testing compliance or support for front office—have regional locations. It really will depend on the sort of business and the team that it is. But I can take that on notice.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can you also take on notice whether any staff have been told that they do have to travel to Sydney from regional locations and with no extra money or compensation to do that? If that is the case, has there been any cost analysis of what this would mean and how it would impact?

GREG WELLS: Sure.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Mr O'Reilly, you may have to take this on notice, but what does the latest data from each New South Wales Youth Justice centre show as to the amount of time in each 24 hours that children spend locked in their rooms?

PAUL O'REILLY: For each centre?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes. You might take that on notice.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. I would also add that in some of the metro centres there are different programs with different routines because of risk. That would skew the average in those centres. But we can certainly provide a report on notice that deals with that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: As a follow up, probably again on notice, are you able to advise of the number and duration of lockdowns in each of the Youth Justice centres over the past 12 months?

PAUL O'REILLY: Do you mind explaining what you mean by lockdowns?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Security lockdowns.

PAUL O'REILLY: Where the whole centre is locked down, you mean, apart from when people are asleep?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we will take that notice. It's pretty rare that we would do that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That would be good.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Normally when we refer to lockdowns it's any non-scheduled—out-of-ordinary period.

PAUL O'REILLY: For the whole centre, you are talking about?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, for the whole State. This morning I asked the Minister a question with regard to the disability royal commission. Do you know what percentage of young people are currently screened in relation to cognitive disability?

PAUL O'REILLY: You mean in detention?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's low because, as I said earlier, 57 per cent of kids are in for less than 24 hours and around 68 or 69 per cent are in for less than 72 hours. There is not really the opportunity to do a proper screen during that period. But when they're there for longer, part of our job is to ensure that they are not only screened but also connected to NDIA.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So for the young people who are there for longer than the 24-hour period, can you provide that on notice?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, I'm just conscious of not misleading the Committee. It will be a longwinded answer on notice to explain some of that. There are very few kids who are there long enough for a proper process of testing, screening, assessment, referral and connection to the NDIA.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: One of the other recommendations from the commission was that Youth Justice agencies and Justice Health should engage First Nations organisations to provide culturally safe disability screening and assessment services. If children and young people are there for, say, more than 24 hours, have you been able to act on this recommendation?

PAUL O'REILLY: We try to. I support the recommendation. Clearly it's a very sensible recommendation. Wherever possible, because of who our clients are, we would like to have a culturally led response, whether it's for education, health, disability services or criminogenic interventions—whatever it is—we would want to see a culturally led response, including for this. But, again, it's rare that we get enough opportunity to do the full process with young people. But I do support the recommendation and we'll continue to work towards it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are staff satisfaction surveys regularly conducted in the Youth Justice system?

PAUL O'REILLY: There are probably three things that we do. We participate in the PMES—the same survey as the rest of government—every year. We also do targeted surveys in centres where we think there is a particular need or in response to a particular risk or concern. We've just started doing psychosocial safety wellbeing surveys in response to changes in legislation around positive duty for psychological safety. There is a number of ways we test that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are you able to provide the results of those?

PAUL O'REILLY: The PMES data should be available publicly, but if not we can give you the PMES data. We can find that for you, certainly. The other data is specific to particular issues. With the kinds of things that come out of those surveys, we're testing for quality of leadership and we're testing for the existence of sexual harassment, racist conduct, perceptions of fairness in decision-making and we're trying to assess staff perceptions of the way young people are treated.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That helps in recruitment?

PAUL O'REILLY: It kind of helps us to maintain the wellbeing of staff. That's the main purpose of it—to try to get evidence of what some of the challenges are. It helps us target our approach to leadership development and recruitment and direction to leadership. It helps us improve our response to misconduct. Finally, I would say it can shape our client service strategies as well. It's one of the many inputs into that. But we would talk to the young people directly for most of it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Would it also help you with regard to what training is needed?

PAUL O'REILLY: It certainly can help with training. That's true.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: We also mentioned what's happening in Moree. I know the bail support and accommodation service isn't built yet, but when it is, how many young offenders do you think will be serviced by that facility?

PAUL O'REILLY: They will be young people on bail. They won't be convicted offenders; they will be on bail. That is an important distinction to make.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Sorry, yes.

PAUL O'REILLY: We don't know exactly. One of the opportunities here is to do co-design properly with the community. You can do proper community co-design or you can get something up and running really fast, but you can't really do both. We know that Moree has had bail support accommodation services in the past that haven't been successful. My team spent a lot of time working with the community, particularly with ACCOs in the community, to work out what a consultation co-design model should look like. There is a two-step process.

The first step is to build a picture of what the community needs and some of the elements that the community needs. That would include that the service would need to be run by an ACCO and it would need to be staffed by Aboriginal people. The service would need to have access to all of the services that young people need.

The young people we spoke to were very keen on the service having employment pathways for them. That was one of the biggest ones. An open-door policy for family was probably the strongest thing. Those are some of the outputs from the first set of consultation. We will now be going to tender at the end of this month to see if there is interest in the market. If we are successful in the tender process the next stage of co-design will be led by the successful group in the tender. They will then work with the community on the next set of questions. That would include the location of the site and the make-up and number of bedrooms and so on.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When do you think this centre will be built then?

PAUL O'REILLY: It won't be built. There's no capital funding, so it would be a lease. It would be as soon as the proponent is found through a tender process and a location is found. We would have to then work on acceptance in the community at that location. That's quite a challenge sometimes in some places. Then there would be the process of getting set up. I do have an incredibly talented team working on this. One of the things they have done is built a partnership with TAFE so that we can start developing a workforce pipeline of local Aboriginal people who are interested to do this kind of work with young people and their families to give them the qualifications and confidence to do the work. All those things have to line up. Our plan, our intention, our desire is to have the service up and running in the first half of 2025.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It's my understanding then that this facility will be for young Aboriginal persons on remand.

PAUL O'REILLY: It's for young people—not on remand. For young people on bail.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Sorry—bail refused.

PAUL O'REILLY: The intention is to give police and courts confidence to grant bail. It's not that we want this to be for Aboriginal kids. What we know from our experience and data in that community is that almost all of the children before police and courts are Aboriginal children. That's why it's a culturally led design.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Are there any plans for other facilities or additional facilities in other regional areas to be—I won't say rolled out, because I know each area would have to have their own; it's bespoke. But are there plans for other additional facilities?

PAUL O'REILLY: That's really a decision for the Government, because that's all about funding and not a decision that I can make, unfortunately.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The Inspector of Custodial Services did an inspection—I know it happened in 2022.

PAUL O'REILLY: She did.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: There were 51 recommendations in that report. How many have been accepted and then acted upon?

PAUL O'REILLY: We've accepted all of them except for four. There are four that we couldn't accept for a few reasons. One of them was about the expansion of our Enhanced Support Unit. The Enhanced Support Unit is a unit at the Frank Baxter centre with a very carefully designed service model which deals with trauma and emotional regulation for young people with a particular set of characteristics. It has an extra dedicated psychologist and speech therapist and caseworker. That is really very specific. We didn't support the recommendation to do that in all the centres, because there is not the demand for that very specific—for young people.

However, that unit has developed a lot of expertise and they share that expertise with the other centres as required. I certainly accept the thinking behind the recommendation. But, practically, I don't—so we haven't been able to accept that. There are then some other recommendations that relate to decommissioning or closing down some units at Cobham because they are very old units. We would love to be in a position to close them but we can't because we need them. We really have to do what we can to stick to our intention to have one room per person. By closing units before there is funding to replace them, we really start to then get into the territory of overcrowding risk and we're not willing to do that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is that in relation to Cobham?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. The other recommendations we do support, some of them are very clear and clean—yes, we support the recommendation; yes, we will do this—and others are support in principle and we have ongoing conversations with the inspector to work through that. But it is a very helpful report. Some of the

findings are a little unclear to us; however, the intention is really clear. A lot of the improvements in the system that have been implemented over the last five years, I would say, are thanks to the work of the inspector and the rigorous approach she takes to compliance.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In the report it said there were gaps in staff training, particularly in regional areas. What specific training programs are being rolled out to address those gaps? How will you ensure that staff, knowing that they're in regional areas, receive the training?

PAUL O'REILLY: This is an example of a recommendation I support in principle because, of course, everyone should have great training, and people do. But I don't think it's accurate to imply that staff in regions are less trained than staff in Sydney because that's certainly untrue. What we are doing is making sure that we keep refreshing our training approach. The period of the pandemic made training difficult for some of our staff because of the challenges around travelling. We're now well out of that process and we're rebuilding our training system again. But it's important to note that for training for the two big metro centres—that's Cobham and Frank Baxter—there are some elements of the training that must be different because they are high-risk centres and they have different processes.

They have incident response teams, for example. It would be pointless to do incident response unit training exactly the same way in Cobham as it would be in Wagga, because it's a very different environment. However, we do take elements of incident response preparation and deploy that training in Wagga but it is rightsized for the environment. But it is not the same training. It is really about making sure that we are constantly reviewing the training, freshening it up, trying new things. For example, in the last two years we've done a lot more highly specialised hostage negotiation training in preparation for hostage situations in detention. Staff from every centre are a part of that process.

Every centre has a number of accredited hostage negotiators now. We don't pick and choose the centres. They all get access to that. But it is about recognising the local needs. Another variation would be the centre at Dubbo and the centre at Grafton have almost all Aboriginal children. The centre at Penrith at Cobham has usually between 30 and 50 per cent Aboriginal children but a lot more cultural diversity. The training needs to respond to that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In the report there was a recommendation—and you maybe said you did other surveys with regard to culture and behaviour. I don't know whether you did the survey based on the report or whether it was—it's one of the recommendations to address issues of racism, bullying and harassment. What steps are being taken to investigate and eliminate those behaviours? How will you hold employees accountable for perpetrating?

PAUL O'REILLY: We take an enormous amount of action in relation to those issues. It is a constant portfolio of work in our jobs. We roll out an enormous amount of training around the code of conduct and we invest in video messages, all sorts of communication around the impact of sexual harassment, bullying, intimidation and racism. I work with all sorts of people in the system to try to make sure that we fully understand what the issues are. In terms of holding people to account, we exercise our obligations under the GSE Act, particularly in relation to section 69, where there are sanctions for sustained allegations of misconduct. Then we will implement sanctions in accordance with that. We normally have a portfolio of around 30 or 40 matters that are being investigated at a time.

When an allegation is made, it goes to a committee of experts who assess the allegation and make recommendations to the head of the agency about whether to proceed under the legislation or to manage the issue locally. They usually proceed under the legislation. Then, at the end of that process of assessment, there will be allegations put to the person—under the legislation of course. They will respond to the allegations and then there will be a formal investigation. Findings are then put to the person and then the decision will be made about what to do. Sanctions will range from cautions to warnings to demotion to fines to termination. We have terminated quite a few people through that process.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you suspend employees as well?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, we frequently suspend people during the investigation process.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When you suspend, are they on full pay?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, people are paid on suspension for misconduct unless they—generally speaking, they're always paid on suspension for misconduct, unless they are criminally charged and on remand for a criminal offence.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You might have to take this on notice. Do you know how many staff are suspended at the moment?

PAUL O'REILLY: I might have that figure, actually, if you give me a moment for a bit of minor shuffling. I might have that figure or my colleague might have it. No. I'll take that on notice. It will take too long.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Just with the Reiby Youth Justice Centre, there was a complaint that young female detainees weren't being provided new—they actually had used underwear and weren't being provided enough hygiene products. So that's been addressed.

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, that has been alleged more than once. Our policy for all kids coming into detention—and I've reported this here previously—is and has always been new clothes for every young person coming into detention, and we fund every centre. We check to make sure the stocks are up and that there are new clothes for girls and boys of all sizes in every centre, and then occasionally we'll get a complaint that a young person has come into the centre and received second-hand, laundered, clean clothes. We investigate each of those. We have not been able to identify a case where that has actually occurred, but we step up our spot-checking to make sure that the supplies are up.

It's never been a policy to give people second-hand clothes. We absolutely recognise the trauma that come with kids when they come to detention, and we also recognise the trauma that the detention process can cause, even when it's done according to the regulations. It can still be traumatic. This is a very simple way to minimise the trauma—to make sure of fresh, clean clothes every time they come in. It has always been our policy. We have not yet worked out how those allegations came about, but we continue to investigate.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I go back to you, Mr Wells, for a couple of last questions on the budget issues with Service NSW and the \$170 million. Are you aware of any guarantee that the Government has given, or is there any discussion internally amongst the sector, around making sure that there will be no Service NSW centres closing as a result of the restructuring? Is that a guarantee that you're sure of?

GREG WELLS: Yes. That's a commitment. That's correct.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there anything on the horizon of any more office space being leased along the lines of—I think it might've been the Premier who made a commitment of sorts, with the changes he wants to see from the work-from-home practices. He said that if the Government needs to lease any more premises, then it will do so. Is that something within Service NSW that might be likely?

GREG WELLS: Just speaking for Service NSW, because we're going through this process that we've talked about, we have done a bottom-up analysis of where everyone is, of all the office locations that are available to us and any exceptional circumstances, and we think we can accommodate all of our teams, through this process, with the accommodation that exists within the Department of Customer Service and specifically in Service NSW. So, not for Service NSW.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I see. That might lean into why maybe some people might need to move around the State.

GREG WELLS: Again, we're not trying to make people move around the State. From the footprint of offices we have and locations that we work from, we try to accommodate, first of all, the way we work—and that we have the way teams work—but also then what's reasonable for our employees. Reasonable is a combination of distance and time and fatigue—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Cost.

GREG WELLS: —cost, personal circumstances. All of those sorts of things will come into consideration as we get through the process; that's right.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Just going back to where we started, when do you think that the first round will be completed? When are you expecting that?

GREG WELLS: We've finished the consultation on the first round, and what we're in the process of at the moment is assigning people to roles. We anticipate doing that in the coming weeks. The second wave has commenced consultation, and we finish that this week, and the third round of consultation commences shortly.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Mr O'Reilly, can we go back to more Youth Justice, if that's okay. I'm curious about whether you've actually heard—I've asked every Minister I possibly can about the NRL Moree, and I realise now that, apparently, it's in the ownership, as we refer to it, of the police, as a program. Have you heard anything, given where you're sitting, in terms of that as a program? I can't remember what it's called—the pathfinder program?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. We are involved in the pathfinder program, but it is a police-NRL-Youth Justice partnership—police are the lead government partner—with the NRL. The intention of the program is to connect

young people with NRL players to give them some exposure to the inner sanctum of the league, which many young people do find pretty exciting and inspiring. They truly do, and that's great. But it's also an opportunity for the young people to get access to some mentoring support as well. I will say that the target group for the program is not exactly the same target group as Youth Justice. It's a different target group, with some overlap. The role of Youth Justice is to work with the police to identify young people who may be suited to the program, and we've identified a small number who may be useful, and then they are assessed by a panel, and young people are then taken into the program.

But we're not the only referring group. Young people who are currently offending, for example, would not be eligible. Young people who are in the middle of a complex court process generally wouldn't be eligible or appropriate. But some of the risk factors I mentioned earlier, those determinants of offending—young people who are experiencing some of those risk factors may be eligible or suitable for the program. Then there's a very careful matching process that goes on. We were involved in the early conversations around the establishment of the program. We were part of the launch at Moree, and we are strong supporters of the program. But, like many programs, it has a target group, and it's important to get that right.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. That is so hopeful. This is the first I've actually been able to know anything in terms of the detail.

PAUL O'REILLY: You should've called.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I should've called. That's right. The Ministers just didn't seem to have the same brief, I might say. I think it's realistic to understand that it is a small group of people. Can you give an indication on, maybe, how many kids have already entered or been identified as potential—

PAUL O'REILLY: No. I'd have to check with police.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is that something you can take on notice for the purpose of this?

PAUL O'REILLY: Absolutely.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. That would be great to know. And I'm assuming that these are kids that have a sport aspiration. Is that part of it?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. We work closely with the police command. I can't speak for them, but we work closely with them on all sorts of diversion activity, and the police absolutely recognise that not everybody likes football. I personally don't understand why they don't, but not everybody likes football.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Depends who your team is.

PAUL O'REILLY: The police have invested in some fantastic music programs, gaming programs, education programs to try and develop a sense or an understanding of what are the kinds of diversion activities that will attract young people to more prosocial contacts. It's a pretty diverse range of things the police youth command invests in. This one is prominent for obvious reasons, but they do other things as well, and we support them in that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I think its main prominence is Minns flew into Moree the day he announced that he was going to crack down on bail and other things. That's how it was taken, I think.

PAUL O'REILLY: I can't comment on that, but I do know that the police and the NRL do a lot of work behind the scenes, as well, with young people.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes, and I think people would love to come along and believe in it, too, but it was seen as a very cynical exercise and really difficult to take at the time. That's incredibly helpful and gives us quite a bit of insight. Can I ask, as well, about something that I know you and I discussed at last estimates, in relation to access to the tablets and the devices in the detention centres. I think things were still being scoped in terms of what we were going to do. Have we made any progress?

PAUL O'REILLY: Scoping is done, but we now need funding. There's a process of searching for funding and prioritising that amongst the Government's funding decisions. That's the next stage.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there a dollar figure on that, through the scoping?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes. I'm just reluctant to declare it, for commercial reasons. But what I can tell you is that it is significantly more than the advocates suggested, and I have explained that to them.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But in the scoping, has there been an analysis or is there an existing analysis on the benefits?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What the advocates are suggesting with their work on the benefits, they are spot-on still?

PAUL O'REILLY: As I said in the last hearing, we support the case that is being made about the benefits. My sense is that there would be a positive return on the investment—absolutely, there would be a return. But we still need to find the capital. That still has to be found. That is challenging. Sometimes, no matter how good the return on investment estimate is, there still needs to be money found. That's the situation we are in with this program.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is that something that now is resting with the Minister?

PAUL O'REILLY: No, not just with the Minister. There are a number of funding sources. There is the annual budget cycle but there is also a centralised DCJ IT project budget that is distributed amongst DCJ depending on the many priorities across DCJ in IT investment. We participate in that process as well. We're hoping to find a funding source.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I just ask you, Commissioner Rogers, whether you are aware of the research that has been published quite consistently now for the last couple of years about the increased frequency and intensity of bushfires due to logging the public native forest estate?

ROB ROGERS: I have seen some research. I do believe that it is one of those things where there is also research suggesting otherwise. But I do know of the research around it. It is very similar to where you've got some people suggesting that hazard reduction burning is counterproductive for protecting people and then you've got a whole lot of other people saying it's the other way.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: No, I think it is quite specific. It is published research through a bunch of universities, particularly ANU, and Professor Phil Zylstra has put out some papers. It is comprehensive analysis over years now that the more intensive logging regimes lead to more frequent and intense bushfires. It doesn't go to hazard reduction, which is still encouraged—particularly the cultural cool burns—but it is actually the practice of continually opening up forests to make them drier and then they are more susceptible to burn.

ROB ROGERS: Is that plantation or is that native forests?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: No, quite the opposite.

ROB ROGERS: Just native?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is it research that, if I sent to you, as the Commissioner, you would be interested in looking at?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, I would. Absolutely.

The CHAIR: I might go back to the questions we were talking about in regards to back-burning. You said that you often get advice from experts prior to doing any back-burns around wild animals that might be in the area. Can I ask who those experts are? Is it a particular organisation that you go to for that advice?

ROB ROGERS: For example, there has to be an environmental approval that's done for a burn. At the simplest level, it is what they call a hazard reduction certificate. Part of that is looking at, for example, if there are endangered species—flora or fauna—in the area. If it's on a national park, then National Parks would obviously provide that information, or another landowner because it might be on council land. It is either captured by the landowner or by the environmental approval. If it can't be done, for example, we use the hazard reduction certificate as a streamlined approach. But, if there is, say, a native species in there that's endangered, then that has to go to a review of environmental factors. Obviously, part of that needs to consider the impact on them.

The CHAIR: And so it only gets flagged if it's an endangered species? If it was another native animal, what would happen there?

ROB ROGERS: Endangered species or if it's, say, for example, koalas and things like that or anything that's—

The CHAIR: But what if it's a native species that is not endangered? What would be the process?

ROB ROGERS: It would then rely on whether there is—and I think I gave this before—birds nesting in spring and things like that. Those sorts of things come to the fore in those environmental checks. I can't give you an absolute answer. I can take it on notice and give you a more fulsome response.

The CHAIR: That would be useful.

ROB ROGERS: It certainly is considered.

The CHAIR: I wanted to get an understanding of if there was, say, native lizards and other species in the area, what the process is, if anything. I know that small native animals that are usually on the ground are the ones most likely to be killed in any kind of fire because they have the most difficulty escaping. I wanted to have a better understanding of what is actually considered and what is potentially put into place. I know the RFS also has hired companies to use goats as well for certain spaces. Is that something that is used where there are threatened plants or threatened species? Is that a second option?

ROB ROGERS: The trigger more often for the goats has been where you can't get access to the area—it's on steep terrain and, if you tried to do that with machinery, you would cause massive erosion problems. They have been beneficial in those sorts of areas and also where there are, say, brambles and things like that. I don't profess to be an expert in goats, but I do understand that they are actually specifically trained to eat that sort of thing. But it takes some time.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: They eat anything, don't they?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, they do.

The CHAIR: Apparently not. Apparently there is lots that they leave behind. It just depends.

ROB ROGERS: They toughen up their tongue or something like that. It's quite an involved process. But we rely on the contractors because they understand. If you leave them too long, then it becomes quite a destructive thing. There is a set period of time that they put up an electric fence to make sure they stay there and then they move. I've got to say it has been well received because it hasn't been completely removing every bit of vegetation. They have just been left there to the point where they are reducing it. It's something that we think is still beneficial, and I think it will have its place. It's a pretty renewable-type industry as well.

The CHAIR: There were questions in another budget estimates hearing from Ms Abigail Boyd asking about a particular company that was using goats where she had heard that some of these goats were actually starved before they went out so that they would eat it. Do you have any welfare factors that you consider in regards to which companies you hire for these goats?

ROB ROGERS: No, I don't. But for any company the Government engages, we have expectations on the way they behave. Dealing with animals, we would expect them to be handled ethically. If there are actual allegations against companies, then I would be more than happy to have that looked at. We certainly wouldn't be interested in using companies where that sort of thing happens. The ones that I have come across are people that treat these animals almost like their pets. I've only ever seen things that have been done in a good way. Certainly, if there is anything specific, we would not tolerate that.

The CHAIR: I have one more question on the wildlife. Is there a guideline or a process, if an animal was injured during a back-burn, that takes place with somebody onsite that finds any of these animals?

ROB ROGERS: As you know, we started that training program for RFS members so that they become better informed. I think, from having the contact that we have had with WIRES, we are looking at now formalising how we cement communications with them so that, if we do get those things, we can contact them for either advice or maybe handing over the animal to their care, if appropriate. We had a really good meeting with WIRES and I think we will do some good things in the future to make sure that we consult them early on things and we give them access to firegrounds early, which is what we have agreed to do. But we also use them as a first port of call to give us advice on what we should be doing with some animals. Clearly, some of them are not ones that they would necessarily look after, but they would give us advice on that.

The CHAIR: I think these questions are best directed to Acting Commissioner Platz. At the last estimates Commissioner York referred to an upcoming meeting with the head of the RSPCA to discuss improving communication between the RSPCA and emergency services. Are you aware if that meeting went ahead?

DEBBIE PLATZ: Yes, Chair, I understand it did.

The CHAIR: Do you know what the outcome of that meeting was?

DEBBIE PLATZ: I would have to take the outcome on notice. Certainly, we are endeavouring to work with all agencies and all non-government organisations to ensure that we are doing our very best to protect animals and wildlife. In fact, our agency does have large animal rescue training. In the last two years we have managed to train 300 people from our organisation to be able to rescue both large animals and small animals, including domestic animals.

The CHAIR: Who was that done with?

DEBBIE PLATZ: We have that expertise within our agency.

The CHAIR: Do you know if there were any action items or current issues with communications with the RSPCA or any other organisations that came up as a pathway forward?

DEBBIE PLATZ: I would have to take that on notice, Chair.

The CHAIR: This one might also be taken on notice, but how can communication between the emergency services and the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League, for example, be improved?

DEBBIE PLATZ: There are always opportunities for improvement, absolutely. Particularly after any event, we would look at the lessons learnt and determine what actions we could do to improve any communication. If an event is occurring we do have liaison officers from many different organisations come into our ICCs, our incident control centres, so that we can get the best advice on how to look after, in this instance, animals during the course of an event.

The CHAIR: We have talked about a meeting with the RSPCA, but do you know if that meeting was also attended by the Animal Welfare League, or if there are going to be efforts to reach out to the Animal Welfare League, who is another enforcement agency? I understand they have emergency veterinary vehicles and things like that. Is that another group that you have been engaging with, or will you be, as part of this process?

DEBBIE PLATZ: Chair, I would have to take that on notice. However, I can inform the Committee that, at a local level, we have seven zones right throughout the State, and each of those zones has a headquarters in it. At those zones there are community engagement officers who would be reaching out and consulting with and working with various animal welfare groups.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is to Ms Quilty from the Reconstruction Authority. I asked the Minister earlier about the amount of people who are employed from Queensland. Do you have numbers that you could provide the Committee about that?

JOANNA QUILTY: We think it is about five staff, but we do need to crosscheck that with payroll information and also look into what the travel and accommodation arrangements might be. We will come back to you on that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That includes how much money is being spent on travel and accommodation to get these people into New South Wales for the work?

JOANNA QUILTY: If any, we need to check what those arrangements are.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You may have to take this on notice, but could you please tell the Committee the money that has been spent on bushfire recovery and preparedness by the Reconstruction Authority?

JOANNA QUILTY: I can certainly refer to what was allocated from the 2019-20 fires, where \$4.5 billion has been committed since then to support recovery, response and preparedness initiatives in local communities.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That was over the forward estimates?

JOANNA QUILTY: That was in response to the 2019-20 bushfires. Much of that would have already been expended. Obviously there have been other bushfires and other funding arrangements activated as a result of that, so that would not be the total picture.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It would be good to get the figure for this year's 2024-25 budget and also over the forward estimates, if possible, please.

JOANNA QUILTY: We will come back to you on that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I also wanted to ask Mr Head some questions about your involvement with PEXA. Obviously we've had questions about eConveyancing. I'm curious about your interaction with PEXA since you've become a government employee.

GRAEME HEAD: I have very little to do with eConveyancing; eConveyancing is a matter for the registrar, and the registrar is not subject to my direction in respect of eConveyancing matters, which you would be aware of from the legislation the former Government took through the Parliament. I've met with each of the ELNOs since I started—just an initial meet and greet—and I've had some correspondence with each of the ELNOs, which has generally been around advising them of the process that applies to the work the registrar leads. I have very little direct involvement with eConveyancing at all.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you disclosed your former relationship with PEXA as part of your employment?

GRAEME HEAD: I didn't have a former relationship with PEXA. I think you're referring to the fact that the firm I used to be a partner at had an engagement with PEXA, which I was not involved in. Yes, I have disclosed that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Mr O'Reilly, children have reported that it's hopeless to make complaints in Youth Justice facilities. I know that you and I spoke previously at an estimates, and you suggested that you were pursuing reforms to ensure that there was a complaints process for young people detained. Have we made progress? Have you looked into that? Where are we with that?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes, there has been a lot of work done. However, I accept that there are still going to be situations where children feel that way. I think that's realistic, unfortunately. We have a complaints process. We have anonymous locked complaint boxes that kids can privately put information into, but I totally understand why people might not trust that process. It's a detention centre with an enormous power imbalance, so obviously there are going to be faults and criticisms. I totally accept that. There are a number of very formal processes. For example, Official Visitors that are not under our control at all have whatever access to the centre they wish, and they can access young people and have private conversations. They do take complaints. Every quarter a report comes from the Official Visitors to the executive director of Youth Justice, which lists every single issue and complaint. It then identifies which ones were resolved locally on the day with the manager, which ones require escalation, and then the head of Youth Justice's job is to address those.

We also have the Ombudsman, of course, who is responsible for managing individual complaints. We work very hard to promote the services of the Ombudsman. We meet regularly with the Ombudsman's office. We actively provide data to the Ombudsman, and access to the IT system. We're very open with the Ombudsman about all of our functions. But not every young person is comfortable accessing those two options because they are funded by the Government. I think that's what young people tell me as to why they don't use those services. There is a trust issue. That's not me criticising those regulators; it's just what happens. There is the Inspector of Custodial Services, who visits regularly. Her team also take complaints. We have the Aboriginal Legal Service and Legal Aid, who access the centres to work with our clients. We work with those two legal organisations constantly on not just individual client matters but systemic issues as well.

The ALS is our Youth Justice partner from CAPO on reform, and is involved in the reforms we're leading through Youth Justice. We're about to embark on a process with the ALS to develop a shared decision-making framework for all aspects of Youth Justice business, in line with priority reform one from Closing the Gap. It is priority reform one and three, really, because it's about sharing decisions but it is about transforming the institution as well. That will hopefully open up more avenues for complaints. We also invite lots of non-government agencies into the centres and give them whatever access they wish so that young people have access to a diverse range of government and non-government—DCJ and independent, formal and informal, legal and non-legal—options for raising their voices and concerns. We make sure that we have a strong complement of staff that reflect the population as best as we can.

The CHAIR: We will now break for a short afternoon tea.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. I'll throw straight to the Opposition.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is to possibly Ms Christie or possibly Ms Cruickshank, if she's here still. I'll let you decide. The Digital NSW website states:

Every calendar quarter we do a minor release where we review new strategies, policies, frameworks, and programs to update the contents of this strategy where required.

But it appears that no new update has appeared on the site since the new Government came in. I'm just wondering if there's a reason behind that or if we can expect some updates.

LAURA CHRISTIE: I think that might be referring to the digital strategy. The previous digital strategy under the former Government was the Beyond Digital strategy. That was updated a couple of times, regularly. The Minister spoke about the upcoming New South Wales digital strategy that's currently under consideration by the Government at the moment. Once that's released, we expect that that will be updated on a regular basis on the Digital NSW website as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So that will also be every calendar quarter?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I won't commit to every calendar quarter, because I think we might want to refresh that approach but, yes, it will be updated regularly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: There was a survey that the New South Wales Government did of customers in Victoria and Queensland, as well as people from other countries, to compare and understand how satisfied New South Wales customers are with government services. These results also haven't been updated, it appears, since the Labor Government came in. I'm just wondering if there is any intention to update that.

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: Yes, I can take that question, Ms Munro. The short answer is yes, there is. That's called the Customer Experience Survey, and that is ongoing. That continues to monitor the service lines across New South Wales government and how customers are experiencing them, and then there is a subset connected to that, which is how does what New South Wales does compare with other jurisdictions. To be clear, it's not compared with every single Australian jurisdiction. It's a selection of Australian jurisdictions. I would have to check which ones they are. In the past, there has also been a comparison with international jurisdictions and, again, I would have to take on notice whether we are doing that again. As you would appreciate, that costs quite a considerable amount of money to do that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes. I understand the last results that were made public were in March 2022. Are you going to make anything public coming up that's more related to the next—

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: The intention is they would be public but, as I said, we are just in the process of finalising those now, and they will look back over the past 12 to 15 months.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is there a date on that?

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: No, there isn't, not at this stage.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Before the end of the year?

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: I would anticipate before the end of the year, but we are still collecting the data.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: On the Digital Restart Fund, I directed the Minister to *Budget Paper No. 01*, page A5-15, which referred to the allocation of money, or appropriation of money. I want to clarify. Do you know how much is being released this year?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes, I can confirm that \$240 million has been released from the Digital Restart Fund for use on ICT and digital priorities in the 2024-25 budget.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is there a budget allocation for the forward estimates?

LAURA CHRISTIE: That is for this financial year. I'd have to take the forward estimates number on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are there some specific examples of projects that will fall under that?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes, a number of projects. Approximately \$99 million was allocated as a contribution to a number of cybersecurity bids across agencies. One of the projects referred to in the budget papers was the Regstar Program, which is DRF funding for a transport project that's looking at delivering a new learners driver licence, with the DRIVES system that Transport currently administers. The Digital Restart Fund was used to co-fund the digital identity and verifiable credentials program, the Youth Justice CYMHS program, and the grants management program that we currently deliver. So it was used to co-fund a number of ICT and digital priorities.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you preparing for the audit from the Audit Office with the Digital Restart Fund?

LAURA CHRISTIE: The Digital Restart Fund is audited every year—the financials. The team is well prepared for any audit on the Digital Restart Fund.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I believe the Audit Office has specifically called out that they're going to do a project on that in the next—a project? I don't know, a report?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes, I think it's on their forward agenda—again, because it's audited relatively regularly, yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Onto workplace flexibility, which I think is a question for Mr Head—actually, it might be Mr Wells. Mr Wells, you mentioned earlier in response to Ms Higginson's questions that you were assigning people roles in the coming weeks and months. I'm just wondering whether that includes assigning people the role of being retrenched?

GREG WELLS: I might just begin—and I should have begun with this before—just to acknowledge that this is a very difficult process for our staff as we go through this process, and we're going to be doing everything we can to support them through that process. Ms Munro, we follow a very standard process through a restructure management plan process. As I said before, for the first wave of consultation, we've completed the consultation but are in the process of assigning people to a role. That takes probably up to four or five weeks. We're in the middle of that at the moment. Following that process, there's a mobility and a reassignment process that we also support impacted staff through, which we're not up to at this point. So not in the coming weeks, essentially.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do people find out in the next four to five weeks if they have a job or not? Is that what that means?

GREG WELLS: For the first wave, which we've completed formal consultation on, that's correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But then there are more waves to come after that?

GREG WELLS: There are three waves in total; that's correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What is the timeline on those three waves?

GREG WELLS: As I said, we've completed consultation on the first wave, and we're in the assignment-to-role process. The second wave commenced consultation about I think it was last week or the week before, and that finishes this week. The third wave commences shortly.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In the coming weeks?

GREG WELLS: Yes, in the coming weeks.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Accessibility NSW—who is the best? Thank you, Ms Christie. My understanding is that Accessibility NSW is not funded beyond 30 June this year. Is that correct?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes, that's correct. Accessibility NSW was funded by the Digital Restart Fund. It was funded for a time-limited two-year period. It has delivered a number of things during that time, including the accessibility and digital inclusion toolkit. Because accessibility remains a critical priority, we are continuing to deliver accessibility services within Digital NSW, but Accessibility NSW itself was subject to a time-limited funding by the Digital Restart Fund.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know how much Accessibility NSW had under the DRF?

LAURA CHRISTIE: It was approximately \$2.9 million.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How much are you putting aside within your budget for the continuation of—

LAURA CHRISTIE: I'd have to take the specifics on notice. It's less than that, though.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The digital identity program—what is the status of that?

LAURA CHRISTIE: The digital identity program is underway. It's being delivered by both Digital NSW and Service NSW. Digital NSW is administering the strategy and the policy components of the program, and Service NSW is delivering the digital products and services. The digital identity will be delivered through the Service NSW wallet. So, yes, we're working collaboratively together on that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When will that be available?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Great question. We're delivering a number of proofs of concept for digital identity and verifiable credentials. In June this year we delivered the first verifiable credential in the Service NSW wallet—a proof of concept of the first aid certificate. We're currently working on the photo ID card as the next proof of concept—the photo ID card in an international standard to enable it to be interoperable with other States and Territories and internationally. We're working with Transport on that as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are they designed to all be launched together or are you going to be launching those for public use on a rolling basis as the proofs of concept are explored?

LAURA CHRISTIE: We're learning from the proofs of concept. My colleague Greg Wells might wish to talk more about this as well. We're getting the learnings from the proofs of concept and the pilots that we're undertaking and using that to inform a broader approach—so the photo ID card, and we're also looking at the digital driver licence and enabling that into the international standard that would enable that to be interoperable with other States and Territories and internationally. That's part of the road map for this year. Again, we would use those learnings to expand the program in time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How are you looking at securing privacy data within this system?

LAURA CHRISTIE: The program is designed in a privacy-preserving way. Rather than having a central honey pot of information where all people's data and attributes go, we're effectively establishing a system that would enable a person to be able to only share the information they choose to share. The example that is often used is that in a night club the only thing that the bouncer needs to know is that a person is over 18. We'll put the power back in the citizen's hand to be able to say, "What I wish to share with you is just that green tick that says I'm over 18", rather than having one central repository of information that holds all of the attributes about Laura Christie: my identity attributes and the credentials I might hold.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How does that work functionally? You have, obviously, the Service NSW app on your phone. At the moment you show a licence, which is essentially a replica of the physical document, and you don't have much choice over that. Is the idea that I'm going into a club or an RSL and I just want to say that the Government has identified me as someone who is over 18, so I tick a box within the app that says, "Yes, I'm over 18", and show whatever establishment that I'm entering that information?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I might get my colleague to talk about the technology itself.

GREG WELLS: To pick up on a few of those points, your first question was will the credentials be rolled out progressively. That's essentially our approach. What we have established, though, are other platforms that will enable us to do that. As Ms Christie talked about, we have piloted the first credential in one of those platforms—the first aid certificate. We have also piloted the biometric matching to make sure it's a really strong proof of identity as you go through that process. We have got that working in production for Working with Children Checks at the moment.

To answer your first question, progressively we'll pick up, as Ms Christie said, credentials like first aid certificates and photo cards et cetera. That's the approach. In terms of sharing, that's a really great question. What we want to minimise is the storing of the identity documents that go with proving your identity. This process will do away with that. Exactly as you've talked about, the scenario would be that either online you could scan a QR code and choose what you'd like to share with that provider or, in a physical case, in a proximity case, you might do the same with something that you scan at a door and then, again, choose only to share the elements of your identity that you choose to share.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When you say that you want all of that data to not be stored in a central repository, where is it? How are you decentralising that? Where is that information held?

GREG WELLS: It's pretty much stored on your device.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Only?

GREG WELLS: Yes, that's pretty much it. We'll store the bare minimum of metadata we need to make sure we can manage the system, but we really want to decentralise that information and have customers take control of that information.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How will you be verifying, for example, that I am the person that I say I am when I download the app?

GREG WELLS: When you onboard, you'd go through a very strong proof-of-identity process that's very similar to what you would do now, but the additional step would be a biometric match back to source, which is the driver licence photo at the moment but could be others in time. That would verify your proof to a high level—something we call proof of identity level three. A lot of what we do at the moment is just level two, so it's a stronger proof. The difference is that, in this case, we don't store all of that information centrally, which is currently the case. So you go through a very strong proofing process to do that. We may also, for high-risk transactions, ask you to re-verify or re-prove through that process as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is the idea that you know that I have the data on my phone? Where do I get the data from? The data has to come from somewhere to get on my phone.

GREG WELLS: Exactly. Whoever is providing a credential—in this case, a driver licence, a photo card or, from a DSC perspective, a high-risk work licence, for example—would be the provider of that information. They're the ones that verify that they've—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So each department will have that responsibility?

GREG WELLS: That's right. There are three players. There's a provider, the customer and then the relying party that checks all of that. Those three things work together.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is there a concern that departments are set up in an appropriate way to store this data? Obviously, departments house a lot of data already, but if people are going to be using it and updating it more regularly, you would hope that there's going to be more security around that.

GREG WELLS: I think it's a big change to the whole ecosystem. That's probably the easiest way to put it. What we're trying to provide centrally are the platforms to do that and the standards through which you would comply to enable this. That's the way we'd see this progressing over time.

LAURA CHRISTIE: Just to add to that, there are standard data standards required of the international standards that we referred to that our States and Territories and the Commonwealth are working towards—so the W3C standards and the ISO standards. We are looking to introduce legislation to cover the digital identity and verifiable credentials system that will cover those standards and what the requirements are for those data holdings. It is an approach of making sure that all agencies are working to the highest standards that are required.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When are you expecting to have that bill ready?

LAURA CHRISTIE: It's currently in drafting and will obviously need to go through a relatively rigorous consultation process. We're working towards next year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know what quarter next year?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I think there's a bit of work on the consultation to do before we can commit to introduction.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Which half? The first half or second half of next year?

LAURA CHRISTIE: We'll say 2025.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Does that mean that you're not going to be rolling out any of the proofs of concept for public use until that bill is passed through Parliament?

LAURA CHRISTIE: The proofs of concept, we're using those to test the technology and approach.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When they become real, you're going to wait until the bill is passed?

LAURA CHRISTIE: The intention is that they would be covered by the legislation.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not sure who this will go to, but I'm curious about current statistics on the adoption rate of eConveyancing in New South Wales.

DANUSIA CAMERON: I can assist with that. We have mandated the use of eConveyancing in New South Wales. The rate is effectively at 100 per cent in this State.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you feel confident that people are using the technology successfully?

DANUSIA CAMERON: Yes, that's right. We worked closely with the peak bodies to set up the timetable for the mandates. Since then, we have also implemented an ongoing audit process to make sure that the subscribers—lawyers, conveyancers and banks—are using the technology appropriately, with the appropriate security, access and those metrics.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What have the results of that audit been?

DANUSIA CAMERON: It continues to go. It's an ongoing process. Part of my team does that as their basic work. We started it as an educative program because it was new to the practitioners, but over time we have continued to provide more information and reminded people who have made mistakes of their obligations. Over time, the rates have consistently improved.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In terms of the recent report that was published, you're obviously aware that there was some concern that there were discrepancies between the Federal commentary around the progress on eConveyancing and the State report. When are you expecting to provide an official explanation to Parliament about that?

DANUSIA CAMERON: Is that the Registrar General report to this Parliament? I'll just describe the sequencing of timing for that report. That report is required to be tabled on each anniversary of the passing of the emergency Electronic Conveyancing Enforcement Act 2022. It needed to be tabled in June. Obviously we were very aware that there was a ministerial forum coming up in June so we were trying to align it with the timing of the statement that would usually come out of that forum. Unfortunately, as June progressed, Ministers continued to discuss the statement coming out of the forum, which meant that we did have to go ahead and table the report before the statement was ready. But we made sure to alert Parliament to the fact that a statement would be forthcoming and where to find the statement.

As the Minister noted in his comments this morning, there was a strong feeling by the State and Territory Ministers who met that some of the matters relating to the interoperability reform could not most effectively be managed by States and Territories, particularly those relating to issues of financial certainty and the relationship between ELNOs and banks, and whether land title registrars are best placed to be involved in that. Obviously the interoperability reforms are competition reforms and the ACCC has a role to play in competition. Since we tabled the report, which was just a point-in-time report, we've continued to look at the aspects of the reform that need further attention and how we can work with the Commonwealth on those.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sorry, just to clarify, will you be making an official explanation to Parliament?

DANUSIA CAMERON: We did provide an updated addendum explaining the timing issues. My understanding is that it was provided to the Clerk of the Parliament on 27 August. I understand that will be tabled by a Minister on the next sitting day under order 56.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I have questions for all three of the emergency service commissioners this afternoon. I will start with Fire and Rescue. I am interested in a report, *FRNSW Adverse Structure Fire Outcomes 2016–2021*. I understand that that report analysed a significant number of fires, including 88 fatalities, 52 of which were deemed preventable. Can you inform us what work has been undertaken to implement the recommendations of that report?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: That report has given us a good detailed understanding of the nature of those sorts of events. We defined an adverse outcome as when there was either a fire fatality, an injury, the fire extended beyond the compartment of origin, or firefighters were needed to assist in an evacuation. That has also given us an understanding, aligned with some of the other risk profiling work that we have done, of who in the community is at greatest risk. We are targeting a number of our risk reduction and community engagement programs in those areas.

We also have tools available for the fire stations and crews at the fire station to use when they are looking at, "We're going to go do some fire safety prevention work; where are we going to put our efforts?" They can identify that down to an individual household level, where they want to work with those households and residents to reduce the level of risk in the community. We're also looking at other work that we do, particularly around other at-risk groups. We know that seniors are at greater risk. People with any complication related to substance addictions and people who are dealing with issues of hoarding are also at much greater risk. We are using the knowledge and the insights from that report to better target our efforts for the most at-risk groups.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's quite a comprehensive answer. Will there be any public reporting against those recommendations in the future?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: At this point we're undecided on that. There is just no position on it. I'm certainly open to that. I think our focus, particularly on reducing the number of fire fatalities each year, is something that we're obviously reporting quite openly. It's a key target for the organisation. Indirectly, that's achieved through that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm also interested in the use of standby firefighters at on-call stations. I understand that this practice is sending crews from permanent fire stations to on-call stations to cover understaffed smaller units. Do you have any figures on the cost of that service over the last financial year?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: I'll take that on notice just to give you the exact figure. At times we do have different stations in different locations that might not have a crew that is fully available. In those cases we will often send staff from other locations, whether it be permanent firefighters or other retained firefighters, to those locations to fill in on a temporary basis.

Dr AMANDA COHN: It's been reported to me that that's a very time- and resource-intensive process for the duty commanders to organise. What kind of support or additional resourcing is given to areas that are having to do this regularly?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: This reflects some of the comments Commissioner Rogers made before about the challenges in some regional communities. Communities have been impacted over several years with the effects of drought, bushfires, floods and general downturn in some rural businesses. What we are saying is that a number of communities have fewer people available in the pool of possible employees as retained firefighters. Also, there is a sort of consolidation into the larger regional centres, like Dubbo and Tamworth and those larger regional locations. We've put a lot of effort into trying to recruit more firefighters in those areas. We've put in dedicated command recruitment coordinators and recruitment officers to be working in the local communities with the local

stations, undertaking recruitment efforts to try to capture anyone that might be interested and get them in as quickly as possible

There is a range of systems that we are looking at to try to make the duty commander's job easier in the way they do that. Some different approaches have been developed or trialled. That is an ongoing piece of work. There is particular effort at the moment to work with the duty commanders to manage those workload issues. It can be quite time consuming, but we're also looking at ways that we can provide support from afar to enable them to achieve the outcome that we need in terms of maintaining operational staffing levels and reducing the time and impact on them.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I've heard that one of those proposals involves RFS members covering on-call stations. Is my understanding correct?

JEREMY FEWTRELL: No, that's incorrect.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'll go to the SES next. I'm interested in the work that is being done towards your reconciliation action plan. In particular, I note the real cultural sensitivity there is, for example, for volunteers who might not live in an area recommending to people that they evacuate country that they live on. I understand that you've started on this work. What is happening with the reconciliation plan and where is it up to?

DEBBIE PLATZ: You are correct. We have started on the reconciliation action plan. We proposed to do this over a period of time so that we can really, truly understand and collaborate with First Nations people. We had a number of meetings in the beginning where we actually sought to really dig deep and understand what impacts flooding and our services have for First Nations people. We estimate that the whole project will take about 18 months to complete. If I can add further to that, we're also doing a number of projects in First Nations communities, trying to get more volunteers to assist in those areas and also collaborate and liaise with the people on the ground in those First Nations communities. That is, firstly, to understand from them what might be impacting them from a cultural and historic perspective, because they do understand more about the landscape and rivers. Secondly, it is how we can help them to best manage their local areas as well.

Dr AMANDA COHN: In terms of the work of recruiting First Nations volunteers, is part of that work actually looking at the cultural safety of the SES and the model of volunteering and how that could be adapted for First Nations communities?

DEBBIE PLATZ: The model of volunteering is something that we continually work on as to how we can encourage people to be more involved in their community and more involved in volunteering. Moving towards a more flexible model, a model where people can choose how and when they might like to participate in volunteering, is really crucial. As we always say in the SES, there's a job for everybody. It's not necessary that you have to be in a boat in flooded waters or climbing a roof or attending a car crash. It might be working in administration or logistics. There are plenty of roles for everybody. We want to make the volunteering so flexible that anybody can do it at any time.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I might come to Commissioner Rogers just to follow up on the brief discussion we had this morning about escaped burn-offs. One of the things you said in your answer was about moving forward on accountability for people who've lit those fires at the wrong time or in the wrong way. Could you provide more detail on that answer?

ROB ROGERS: Certainly. You find—and, indeed, if you look at Hazards Near Me, you will see, as we get into the spring period, there are always dozens and dozens of fires. I think last week we had about 50 fires burning at any one time. Some of those fires are from escaped landowner burns. Some of them are permits. Some of them are not—prior to permits. One of the things we work at is working out the facts of the matter. We'll get a fire investigator to really track and make sure we know where that fire came from. Then, once we identify that, we try to understand, with the landowner, have they taken reasonable precautions and things just were—say, the winds were stronger than they had anticipated or what was forecast.

If we think it was a reasonable action—like they'd tried everything but it just got away from them—then we take that into account. But if it's neglect, then it's my expectation that we fine those people and, if they become consistently doing the same thing, then we need to take them to court because the State spends hundreds of thousands of dollars fighting those fires that, in some cases, are a result of neglect. I would say, though, that by far that's a minority of people. Most landowners are very, very responsible. They don't want fires to get off their land, so they do take appropriate precautions. But there is, like in any sort of cohort, a minority that just simply do the wrong thing. They're the ones that we need to target.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Is it your view that those deterrents that exist at the moment are sufficient if you've got people having to be investigated on multiple occasions?

ROB ROGERS: The fines are appropriate. I think it's more about the work involved and the time involved to actually really investigate them, tie them back. Because, obviously, before we can issue a fine to someone, we've got to be satisfied we can prove that in a court of law if someone chooses, as is their right, to take that to court. We need to make sure that we've got the right evidence to support that. That's where sometimes, once these things might have burnt for a week or two, then trying to go back to the beginning of that and track all that, who did what, what action was taken by brigade, did they burn, did they not—you know what I mean; it's a fairly laborious process to try and link that back.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I also wanted to ask about the review on bullying experienced by members of the RFS. Earlier this year you shared with the Committee that there was a new system for members to make complaints about inappropriate behaviours. If I recall correctly, it was due to launch in May. Can you update us on where that's up to?

ROB ROGERS: It actually didn't go live until July—15 July it went live. Since that went live, there have been some 51 complaints lodged, which, whilst some people may be concerned that that's a high number, I actually think that's a good sign, that people are having faith in a system and they're prepared to use a new system that has more support for people wanting to make complaints. I expect that there will be a peak while people ventilate things that may have been frustrating them for some time, because the previous system we had was just simply not fit for purpose. There was that level of frustration.

The system is in place. The training has been provided. We've got an external independent service that people can contact and make complaints directly to someone else to make sure the complaint is lodged. We've had these complaints—those 51 have come through in three different ways. That's okay because we want to make it flexible enough for people to make those complaints. The proof in the pudding is going to be, once it's been in place for, say, six months, it's going back to those same people that have lodged complaints to check their satisfaction, that they're happy with the process, the outcome and making sure that it has been fair and reasonable to both parties.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I understand an important part of that project was its ability to collect data.

ROB ROGERS: Sorry, I missed that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: The ability to collect data out of that system.

ROB ROGERS: Yes, absolutely.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I appreciate it may well be too early if it only launched in July. But have there been any meaningful trends in that data identified at this stage?

ROB ROGERS: I don't know. I'm not sure. I can take on notice to look at whether there is particularly—if it's bullying or what the nature of the complaints are. I could probably break it down by category if that's helpful. I don't have that on hand. But I'm happy to take that on notice.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'd be very interested in that answer on notice—and if we can compare that as well to the previous financial year or previous data that you've got.

ROB ROGERS: Yes. I think one of the problems with using the previous financial year data is that people just didn't have the confidence to use the system. It's interesting because I was asked, "Do we have a bullying problem in the RFS?" My answer was, "I don't believe we have a bullying problem. I think what we have is an accountability for action problem." People weren't being held accountable for their actions. I'm confident that, under this new system, people are going to be held accountable, but it is to be done in a fair way. So, absolutely, I'll get you a comparison and what the trends are showing us so far.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That's very helpful. I also have some questions about the contract that I understand has been signed with Coulson Aviation. My understanding is that that is a 10-year contract worth \$400 million. It's difficult to find any information about that tender. My understanding is that it doesn't appear on eTendering. What was the process for that tender and why is that information not public?

ROB ROGERS: It was a public tender. It went through the standard tender portal. It was on there. It's a five-year contract with a five-year option to extend, so it's a five plus five. It's not a straight 10-year contract. Government has the right after five years to opt out or continue on if it works for us. At the time the government of the day will make the call on that. But it went through standard protocols because of the value of the tender. It was looked at by the Justice cluster also, because of, as I say, that value. It has been through an absolute appropriate—it's met all government requirements, independence on the evaluation panel. Everything that is required to be done was done.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Given that I had some trouble finding it, would it be possible to provide the Committee with a copy of the tender?

ROB ROGERS: Absolutely.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Have you been made aware of any concerns about the tendering process?

ROB ROGERS: No, I haven't. I've been asked about what was the process, but I've not been made aware of—I think the only thing I heard was the Treasurer was asked in his estimates session. I was made aware of that, but that's the first that I've heard of any concerns about it. But I would say that it was a public tender available to any company that wished to put in for it.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Can you provide us with a breakdown of that \$400 million and what's been purchased with that?

ROB ROGERS: Sure, absolutely. No problem.

Dr AMANDA COHN: You're taking that on notice, I assume?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: I might go back to Acting Commissioner Platz. You mentioned earlier that you had people with expertise in large animals within the department. Do you also consult externally or do you rely just on the people within the department that have that expertise?

DEBBIE PLATZ: Chair, we always look to how we can improve things and that will include consulting with other agencies and non-government organisations. We are extremely lucky that we actually have a member within our organisation who is recognised pretty much around the world for his expertise in large animal rescue. He and others have developed the training package. It has been peer reviewed, as I understand it. We rely on that. But we're always looking for improvements and are happy to liaise with any organisation that can assist us in that regard.

The CHAIR: Thank you. So you're open to external. But, at the moment, you mostly rely on the expert that's within the team already?

DANUSIA CAMERON: He also conducts Train the Trainer programs. We have a number of trainers and assessors within the organisation, so we're not reliant on one person. But we do have an, as I said, almost world-renowned expert in our organisation, which we're very lucky to have.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask what their background and experience is? I don't want to identify them or put them on the spot, but I'm just curious genuinely.

DANUSIA CAMERON: I would have to take that on notice. I'm not exactly sure of his background.

The CHAIR: I guess, if we're talking about him being an expert, I'm just wondering what those qualifications are or what experience there is to make him an expert would be useful—and if possible, as well, just a bit of an understanding about that role, as well, that he takes on, whether he's involved in pre-emergency training or if he's involved during the actual provision of the emergency services themselves, just to get a bit of understanding of how he takes that role on and what's involved within it.

DANUSIA CAMERON: If I understand your question correctly, Chair, this member is actually a volunteer of our Hawkesbury unit, is very active in this role and does attend conferences as a speaker, has won awards internationally in relation to his work in large animal rescue.

The CHAIR: Is he involved in the provision of the emergency services themselves or is he more just involved in training and that aspect of it?

DANUSIA CAMERON: He can do both and does do both.

The CHAIR: Thank you. More generally, who's the first point of contact when emergency services become aware of an animal welfare issue at a particular site or call-out? What's the procedure that happens there?

DANUSIA CAMERON: That would depend on where the incident was actually occurring and as to who or what emergency organisation was able to conduct that particular rescue. It would be very much dependent on where it actually occurred.

The CHAIR: Do you mean that there's different people within the department that they would contact, depending on which region that it's occurred in? Is that what you mean?

DANUSIA CAMERON: If there was a rescue of a large animal, the location of that would depend on where or what unit they may call. But we have a call centre, obviously, for SES. All our calls would go in there, and we would then activate the relevant unit, if it was an SES unit, to respond. If there was no SES unit to respond, obviously we'd look to our other emergency service partners or NGOs or other wildlife organisations that could assist.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Mr O'Reilly, if I can go back to where we left off with regard to the report, how will you ensure that transparency and accountability in implementing—I know you said, of the 51, there were four that you put aside—the recommendations? Will you be providing regular updates to the public or will it be through a budget estimates process? How will we know where you're at with the—

PAUL O'REILLY: You'll definitely know. The inspector requires us to report on a regular basis, and she publishes those reports on her website.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you have a timeline or an action plan for actioning those?

PAUL O'REILLY: Yes—as soon as possible. They're generally about safety and service quality and rights. They're all urgent in that sense. They're part of a whole range of changes that we're making in the system. The reform process began in 2019 and just has been rolling consistently. It's important that it doesn't stop rolling, because of the vulnerability of those kids in the centre. So we will roll this into all of the other urgent actions. Most of our reform focus this year is focused on Closing the Gap reform priorities, and a lot of the recommendations in the report align with that reform neatly. So they're all as soon as possible.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: And, just on a question that Ms Higginson had with regard to iPads, do you know what percentage of young people in detention—their literacy levels?

PAUL O'REILLY: Literacy levels can vary a lot.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On average, or is that too—

PAUL O'REILLY: I'm probably not the right person to ask, and I'll explain why. Every centre has a school with a school principal, controlled by the Department of Education, and their role is to assess and support kids with their education, and each child has an individual teaching plan based on their level. We have children aged, today, from 12 up to 20. Certainly, up to the end of school age, they participate in the classroom teaching, and we have kids in that bracket doing very, very basic learning to read, to doing HSC, to doing university modules. It's very mixed, depending on their needs and their abilities, and then there are some other kids who don't do school but do vocational training and skills-based courses as well.

Teaching and learning is a critical part of the routine of a centre. The schools do a very good job at strength-based approach. A young person may be not particularly good at reading. But there's an intense focus on teaching them how to read. But there is also an intense focus on things where their strengths lie. That might be catering or cooking or horticulture or something like that to get a balance and really focus on the strengths of the young person.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I just have one more question. It's to do with mental health and to do with the report. I think that said it was essential that mental health nursing hours should be increased. What plans do you have in recruiting and allocating more mental health nurses to Youth Justice centres?

PAUL O'REILLY: This is recommendation 10. The recommendation is:

Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network review the level of mental health nursing hours at each centre to ensure there are sufficient hours funded to meet the needs of the population.

The Justice Health network runs all the health services in the centre. We have a team of psychologists that work alongside those nursing teams, and Health is responsible for implementing those programs. So this recommendation has been referred to Justice Health, and that's the response we've given the inspector.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is a question to Ms Cameron, please. This is in relation to the enforcement powers that you have under the Act. Do you anticipate utilising those enforcement powers or—I don't want to ask you for your opinion. What are the triggers that would cause you to use your enforcement powers?

DANUSIA CAMERON: We continually assess when we use our regulatory powers under the operating requirements and our licence conditions, and the use of those powers would then be backed by the enforcement regime that we have in New South Wales. We have and will continue to be assessing the appropriate steps to take at the present time, whatever the context is. For example, at the moment New South Wales is working closely with Queensland on a review of the interoperability reform with workshops, with ELNOs, with banks. As part of that, we look at how we could use particular regulatory powers to support that. It's just an ongoing process to look

at what regulatory powers we should be using at the moment, and then that would be backed by our enforcement powers.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is the December 2025 timeline looking like—are the milestones being hit on the way to that deadline?

DANUSIA CAMERON: Until the end of June, we had a program in place that would've enabled achievement of those milestones that were in the operating requirements. But the issues raised particularly by the financial institutions indicated that the reform wouldn't meet their objectives. Understandably, it's really important that we preserve the settlement times that we enjoy currently in electronic conveyancing. What we and colleagues in Queensland have indicated to the ELNOs is that we're doing this review to identify the issues and solutions and then we will review the milestones and the operating requirements as part of that program. That's currently underway.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When do you expect to have an announcement about whether that December 2025 deadline will be preserved or whether there will be a changed deadline?

DANUSIA CAMERON: Unfortunately, I can't indicate that at the moment. This work with Queensland continues. We have drawn very heavily on engagement with the ELNOs and other industry stakeholders. We need to assess that material and understand what the next steps of the program are, and then we will be able to be confident about the appropriate timetable.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you feel comfortable—sorry, I can't ask your opinion. Just to confirm my understanding of the situation, because the banks are essentially asking for extra time because they feel like they can't meet the deadlines, the ELNOs aren't required to meet those deadlines either, if that ends up being the result of the consultation? I'm trying to understand the responsibility of why the deadline might not be met.

DANUSIA CAMERON: The timelines that are in the operating requirements are linked to a particular scope. They were built around the design build and test work that was needed to deliver that scope by the ELNOs. The discussions with the financial sector have emphasised that they think the scope isn't sufficient. We need to do more work on understanding what that means. With the way the program was structured, we first need to clarify the scope. That will then help us understand what the appropriate timetable is. It needs to be something that is achievable for industry. As you've mentioned, there are the ELNOs, the banks and there are other industry members. These are all part of our considerations as we work through the timetable.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Will the updated scope be made public?

DANUSIA CAMERON: At the end of last year, ARNECC, which is the group of registrars, did publish a set of principles for the scope. Beyond that, the scope becomes a list of APIs that are delivered. It may be, to be honest, too specific for me in my situation. It's very specific deliverables that occur under an ELNO workspace. I'm not sure whether the scope, as we call it in the program, would be made public, but the principles are published on ARNECC's website at the moment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: If you could take on notice whether they will be made public or not, that would be helpful.

DANUSIA CAMERON: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Mr Wells, are there any budget constraints in Service NSW that have led to reduced services or longer processing times for services?

GREG WELLS: Not at this stage. As we have talked about, we're working through this consultation process with all points of Service NSW. So, not at this stage, no.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How much of the Service NSW budget is allocated to technology investments like upgrading digital infrastructure, improving cybersecurity and integrating AI?

GREG WELLS: I might need to take that on notice because that would be a number that would be across a number of divisions. Obviously there's a specific digital division that maintains all of our digital services but there's also, in front line, a lot of frontline technology we use. There's also a cybersecurity division. Fraud management is part of the risk and strategy division. Technology is a part of the fabric of all of New South Wales. I can try, on notice, to get a figure for you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not sure if this is still with you, Mr Wells, or with Ms Christie. How is AI currently being used within Service NSW? What specific functions or processes have been automated or enhanced by AI technologies?

GREG WELLS: I can start, potentially, with Service NSW, if that's helpful. There are a number of small components that we have started to use within Service NSW from an operational perspective. We have a chatbot on our website called Eva that helps customers navigate some of the questions they might have. We use some forms of machine learning to help our contact centre staff ask questions of our databases to surface answers for the 1,300 different transactions that they may get a call about. There are some elements of AI in the biometric matching process that we talked about from the digital identity and verifiable credentials program. There are specific use cases that are very carefully controlled in our environment where we understand the datasets and the controls around them. They are just some of the examples that we use operationally. Ms Christie might have some broader sense of that across Government too.

LAURA CHRISTIE: Would you like me to expand?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: If you would like to.

LAURA CHRISTIE: The AI assurance framework is administered by Digital NSW. That applies to use of AI in New South Wales agencies. That was recently updated for generative AI. It's the second iteration of the AI assurance framework. We expect that there will be more as the technology evolves. Agencies are required to make an assessment about the use of AI against that assurance framework. We have also integrated the AI assurance assessment framework into our overall digital assurance framework. Effectively, what that means is that all ICT projects over \$5 million are assured by Digital NSW. We have now integrated AI into that assessment to make sure that we're capturing and we have a good understanding of what's going on across government in the use of AI.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Mr Wells, has the use of AI resulted in any job reductions within Service NSW?

GREG WELLS: No, it hasn't.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You mentioned the chat function that your staff use. Are you familiar with QChat that the Queensland Government are starting to explore?

GREG WELLS: I'm personally not.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But Ms Christie is?

LAURA CHRISTIE: I am, yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is that something that the New South Wales Government is looking to explore, implement, fund?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Not at this stage, no.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Why not?

LAURA CHRISTIE: It hasn't been proposed by any particular agency. We work very closely with other States and Territories and share our learnings. The New South Wales AI assessment framework was just used as the basis of a national AI assurance framework that the Data and Digital Ministers Meeting recently agreed. We share different types of guidance that different States and Territories are preparing. As an example, Queensland have shared the work that they're doing on QChat. New South Wales has shared some of the work we're doing about procurement guidance and buying for AI and how we support agencies to do that work safely and ethically. We are watching carefully the Queensland experience.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is a question about the COVID-19 microbusiness grants, I think to Mr Wells. Is there a floor amount for recovery or attempted recovery of funds from microbusinesses? What is the lowest amount that is being sought in terms of repayments for possible fraudulent claims or if people just aren't responding with the documentation that Service NSW is requiring of them through compliance?

GREG WELLS: I don't think there's specifically a floor amount. I might take that on notice. As we talked about last week, again, the only reason we're getting in contact with customers is if we don't yet have proof of their eligibility for the programs. That's the reason we're getting in contact. I don't think there's specifically a floor amount. It's more about eligibility or potentially fraud.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: For everybody who received a grant, no matter how much they received, if Service NSW feels they haven't provided appropriate documentation, every person will be contacted?

GREG WELLS: That was part of the conditions of the grant that was kicked off in 2022, and compliance started in September or August, I think, in 2022. We had to check 100 per cent of the applications because businesses self-declared their eligibility. So, yes, we are checking all of those applications.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What happens with businesses that have claimed money but no longer exist?

GREG WELLS: That was part of the process of looking at the cohort that did receive money. We did look to and pause the process late last year and into early this year to remove a number of customers that were experiencing hardship. One of those is what you have just mentioned—the business no longer existed. There are a lot of other financial hardship mechanisms that we take into account via data matching with the Commonwealth. We removed all businesses that were in impacted flood LGAs as well. That was part of the process of trying to make sure we removed anyone that was experiencing hardship from that compliance program.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What about people who aren't necessarily experiencing hardship but don't want to repay—so they've found a loophole, essentially, to not repay the money? I'm trying to understand if there is a different process between business owners who are trying to do their best and possibly have to invest \$1,000 or more going to an accountant to try to prove, for a small amount of money, that they are eligible for it, as opposed to businesses who might be doing the wrong thing.

GREG WELLS: As we talked about, I think the first thing that I'd really stress is that if businesses can get in contact with us, we can really assist them with that process. First of all, we can offer more time. The second thing we can offer is free independent business advice to help get that documentation together and potentially provide alternative means of proof. If you haven't been putting in tax returns, there are other ways to prove your eligibility. We can really take into account personal circumstances or any hardship mechanisms that we haven't been able to ascertain by data matching. There are lots of mechanisms. If businesses get in contact with us, we can help them through that process. To your question, there's not a specific loophole through that process. Businesses went through a very rigorous self-assessment process to successfully obtain the grants. What we are doing is just checking that we have that necessary documentation.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: They went through that rigorous process initially. Is Service NSW now saying that it wasn't rigorous enough?

GREG WELLS: No, we're just doing the compliance checking that we need to do as part of all grants. Again, if we don't have documentation to prove eligibility, which customers were supposed to provide through that process, then we just need to check that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What I'm trying to clarify is: Were people given money even if they didn't meet the eligibility requirements initially?

GREG WELLS: No, they self-assessed. That was a really important part of this process. Businesses self-assess their eligibility through a process, on condition that they provide that documentation as evidence.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So they had to provide that documentation after receiving the money?

GREG WELLS: As part of or shortly after. That's correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Has there been a recent assessment or audit of security protocols at Service NSW centres? I've just been made aware that some Service NSW staff are feeling fearful of their safety in customer service centres.

GREG WELLS: That's a really, really important element of what we do. Trying to keep staff safe is our absolute top priority, essentially. We have a very rigorous and expanding program around all aspects of physical security—whether that's guards or barriers or other things—to try to do everything we can from a physical perspective. There's a very rigorous process around training and de-escalating; helping staff to de-escalate situations where there might be unreasonable customers. Unfortunately, as you indicated, that does seem to be escalating a little bit. There's a range of rigorous things we are trying to make sure are in place to make sure we can do everything possible to keep staff safe.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I have a couple of questions for Commissioner Rogers. I know there were already some questions asked today about volunteer numbers. I have a few more questions about that. In the Government review into emergency service volunteering that was released in May, the RFS was the only agency that wasn't able to identify the tenure of the volunteers. Why is that?

ROB ROGERS: What do you mean by that, sorry?

Dr AMANDA COHN: How long they've been in the service.

ROB ROGERS: I think that's where some of the historical data prior to the early 2000s were from legacy systems, and there were problems with that older data. We can provide data on people who have been in the

organisation since the early 2000s, and we've got that, but we just don't have the whole cohort so we can say, "This is how long each one has been involved."

Dr AMANDA COHN: So if someone has been there for fewer than 24 years, you've got that data, but not if they've been there for longer?

ROB ROGERS: Pretty much.

Dr AMANDA COHN: At the last estimates we spoke about the definition of an "active volunteer". I appreciate that there isn't a statewide definition of that, which makes it hard to aggregate that. I'm interested to know if the new ACTIV app can aggregate that data effectively so that that question can get answered at a State level in future?

ROB ROGERS: It can with regard to telling us who is turning out to fires in a given period of time, but I would also say that the ACTIV app is only useful when mobile phone coverage works. A lot of the areas we cover don't have mobile phone coverage, hence they're still on pagers—we still have pagers—or the ACTIV app. It's a mixture. Over time we will get a good historical record of who has attended what fire. Again, people might turn out to a fire when there's a really big fire every two or three years. The brigades still find those people very useful. They're good to come along at those times. They will go on a night shift. They're still worthwhile members of the RFS.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I appreciate the issues with mobile blackspots, even in my own region. In your annual report there was the figure provided that just over 28,000 members have logged into ACTIV and 15,000 have updated their availability. What proportion do you estimate of the available volunteers that is? I'm trying to work out what proportion are accurately reflected by putting their availability into ACTIV and what proportion are still manually registering availability with people using pagers?

ROB ROGERS: I will take that on notice because I think it depends on if we are talking about the percentage of people in the area covered by ACTIV or the percentage across the whole State, which is limited, as I mentioned before, by mobile phone coverage. I'm not quite sure, to be honest. I will take that on notice.

The CHAIR: I have a couple more for the acting commissioner as well. Just to clarify from where we left off, there's no central role where there's one central point of contact for people to contact if somebody in emergency services was to come across a situation where there was an animal welfare emergency at the same time. It would all be dependent on where they were regionally and who they contacted within emergency services.

DEBBIE PLATZ: Chair, if somebody requested SES assistance for any matter, they would ring 132 500, which is our State operations centre. From there, units and members are contacted to deploy to whatever the rescue situation is. If it was something that we weren't able to handle, obviously we would refer that on to the most appropriate organisation, be it our emergency services partner, the RSPCA or any other animal welfare organisation.

The CHAIR: What I mean is, say somebody was to go out to an emergency—so they're on the ground and they come across an animal emergency, for example, which does happen a lot, obviously—what's the protocol there? Is there a policy for those situations? Is there a protocol for SES to follow if they are on the ground and they come across an animal emergency within the work that they're doing?

DEBBIE PLATZ: That would then be relayed by the volunteer or unit that is attending that scene back to our operations centre, who do have protocols in place as to who to contact, depending on the situation.

The CHAIR: I have some final questions for Ms Neilsen in regard to the sheep shearing program at the Riverina Youth Justice Centre. I'm wondering why that particular program was selected specifically for the Riverina Youth Justice Centre.

CANDICE NEILSON: There are a range of programs that get selected for each of the six Youth Justice centres, largely based on the demographic of the young people in the centres, and particularly on what employment pathways are most likely to be viable for those young people in the communities that they return to. I don't have specific information in front of me about that sheep shearing program, but I can certainly get some more information on notice.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. I might put these questions to you, and they might end up going on notice, but please jump in if there's anything that you might be aware of. I was wanting to try to get some information about what evidence was used to consider this program. Did somebody specifically request it or was there something that was considered particularly therapeutic? I also want to get an understanding of who supplies the sheep for the program and what welfare oversights there are and—this one you may know—whether or not the sheep live full time on the site of the Riverina Youth Justice Centre or if they're just brought in and out as part of the program.

CANDICE NEILSON: I can take that on notice about how often they are there. I was out at Riverina a few weeks ago and did see sheep on the periphery of the centre. So perhaps they do stay there, but I will confirm definitely for you.

The CHAIR: Great. Thanks for that. I also want to know if the sheep that are part of the program are subject to live lamb cutting as well, which is also known as mulesing, and then also what happens to the wool shorn as part of the program—if it's sold or used in any specific way. What happens to the sheep after the program concludes? This one you may know: Do you know if the program itself is mandatory or is it voluntary for youth to participate in?

CANDICE NEILSON: Any programs would be voluntary for youth to participate in and also on the basis of what stage of their incarceration period that they're up to, any risk assessment factors that need to be considered—there are a whole range of factors that are considered. The other questions I will have to take on notice, please.

The CHAIR: When you say "risk factors are considered", does that also include a previous history of animal cruelty, things like that?

CANDICE NEILSON: There'd be a range of factors considered, and I can also find that out specifically in the context of that program.

The CHAIR: Thank you. This is probably one to take on notice, but how many young people have participated in the program so far and how much funding has gone into the program as well? That would be fantastic.

CANDICE NEILSON: I will take it all on notice, thank you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is back to Ms Quilty, I think. I'm curious about the licensing fee regarding pod villages and their occupation. I understand that the Government said that there would be no rent associated with them, but it was raised in budget estimates last week that there might be a fee that occupants have to pay. Are you able to give me some information about what that fee looks like and where it's up to in consideration?

JOANNA QUILTY: Certainly. The introduction of a licence fee was raised in an initial review that was undertaken by Mr Paul VEVERS into the pod villages and how to best transition residents out of those villages. It is also something that the Community Leaders Forum in the Northern Rivers are supportive of. It's a matter for Government. They are considering a range of measures when it comes to how best to manage the villages. Our focus at the RA remains very much on supporting residents to transition to more permanent accommodation outside the villages as part of the next phase of their recovery. We're very much working with the community housing providers who are managing the 11 villages in the Northern Rivers to ensure that that transition planning is happening and that, as part of the case management approach, residents are being connected to other supports such as financial planning, legal aid, mental health supports, whatever it is that is going to assist them in the next phase of their journey.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is the Reconstruction Authority playing any role in advising about the licensing fees, or potential licensing fees?

JOANNA QUILTY: The villages are managed through contracts with the community housing providers, but obviously we have overarching responsibility. It is a matter for Government. Meanwhile, we are very focused on how do we work with residents to ensure that they are supported in their recovery and able to move to that next phase, with the goal of stable, ongoing accommodation the priority.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I don't think this will be for you. It's about the flood rescue training academy. Maybe it will be. Does anyone know about that?

DEBBIE PLATZ: I can respond, Chair.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That would be fabulous. Thank you.

DEBBIE PLATZ: There was a recommendation out of previous inquiries in relation to developing a flood rescue academy. There is a joint project underway and a business case has been developed in relation to that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And that's being provided to Government?

DEBBIE PLATZ: At this stage, I understand that it's with the Premier's Department.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was there money put aside in the budget for not just the business case but actually the program itself?

DEBBIE PLATZ: I'd have to take that on notice. In relation to our budget, there was only funding for the business case.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I presume that was just for the last financial year?

DEBBIE PLATZ: Yes, that's correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So there wasn't any funding in this financial year's budget?

DEBBIE PLATZ: That's correct. There's no funding for this at this stage in the SES budget.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you. Sorry I'm jumping around so much, but I might go back to Ms Christie. The NSW Data Analytics Centre, is that being retained?

LAURA CHRISTIE: That's for my colleague Ms Cruickshank.

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: Sorry, I know it's confusing. The Data Analytics Centre sits with me. And, yes, the Data Analytics Centre is funded for this year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay. So the Data.NSW function, how does that work as, like, an office or an agency, just in terms of the structure? How does it sit within your purview?

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: Data.NSW, it's just a website—for want of a better word. We use it for a number of different things. It's the primary source for open datasets that are made available to government, public, community and universities et cetera to access. There are also news stories and updates that are put on it. It's really a website, if that makes sense. It's not a specific, standalone function.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How is it serviced by staff? Are there specific staff that are tasked with keeping that Data.NSW website active and pulling data from lots of different agencies? How does that process work?

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: There are no staff that are primarily dedicated to that. They just do that as part of their broader role within the Data and Insights team within my group.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are they proactively going out to departments to say, "Hey, what datasets have you got?" or are departments required to come to you with new datasets that they're creating?

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: It's really a combination of both, and it depends on what the priority projects are that my team and other parts of government are choosing to focus on. For example, we've been doing some work with the office of the 24-hour commissioner on Sydney's night-time economy. You maybe aware of it—you're nodding—and it's a combination of a dozen or so datasets from across New South Wales government but also gives local councils access to those datasets as well so they're able to work on what their vibrant, diverse economy work might be within their local areas. We've been doing some similar work with the Department of Education around school attendance and enrolments. Again, that's primarily my department—well, not my department, but our department and the Department of Education working together. So it really depends on what the projects are.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is part of that actually uncovering datasets that are available that the department might be collecting—or that any department might be collecting—but they're not necessarily making public or they haven't realised that people would like that information publicly?

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: That's probably quite complicated to answer because, as you would appreciate, depending on what the nature of the dataset is, there may well be privacy considerations that are attached to individual datasets. So it's not as simple as just going out to agencies and saying, "Give us all your datasets and we'll upload them." There will be considerations that have to be worked through, largely of a privacy nature. There is a huge amount of work that does happen, both within my team and across government, on that. There is also a lot of work that we do with the Commonwealth around linking datasets. As you'll appreciate, there are a lot of datasets that the Commonwealth holds that are useful for State and Territory governments to be able to access as well. That's the kind of work that my team does, but they can't do it on their own.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: With trade data—this is quite a specific example, and I'm not trying to catch you out at all—the trade department website is not particularly up to date in terms of information about exports and imports, for example. Is it their job or your department's role to coordinate that to get Federal data and appropriately publish it?

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: With that particular example, it's probably for the Commonwealth. That would be the Australian Bureau of Statistics, probably supplemented by Austrade. That's not an area that we've done particular work on. To your point and to my earlier comments about prioritisation, it would be fair to say that most of our work has been on the human services side of things, because our priorities have been those really complicated social issues that require looking at datasets across Education, Health and the Department of Communities and Justice. Most of our work to date has been in that space. The 24-hour economy is probably the first substantive piece of work that we've been doing on the economic side of things. No, we haven't collected and done significant work with the department of investment and trade.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm very excited to see this work on the 24-hour economy published. Do you have KPIs around increasing the depth of the data that is made publicly available?

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: That's a very good question. I would have to take that on notice. I don't think we have specific KPIs. It's more that my team sits down on a regular basis and works through where it's going to prioritise its efforts. We all know how important data is and there's so much you could do, but you've only got limited resources that you can do it in. I've got some figures here. We added some 2,500 datasets just in the last 12 months for the public to be able to access. We just keep trying to do as much as we can.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's pretty remarkable.

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: It is, actually. I've got a very good team.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is the New South Wales insights hub being retained?

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: That probably relates to the community sentiment insights hub.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Quite possibly. I'm not familiar with the insights hub, I'm sorry. This is something that our shadows asked.

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: I'm not quite sure what your question is asking, but maybe this will help. There's a series of different things that my team does, all of which have been in place for two or three years and have not changed. The first one, which we touched on earlier today, is the customer experience body of work relating to how the New South Wales community experiences multiple different service lines of government. The second one is the community insights work, which started during COVID. I think that might be what you're referring to.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Quite possibly. I'm not sure.

SARAH CRUICKSHANK: That's all right. I wasn't at DCS when it started. I think that's what you're referring to. The community insights work continues. There is also business insights work, which we obviously share with our colleagues at Service NSW as it relates to their business focus. There has also been some work we've been doing with Treasury around the performance and wellbeing framework.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: On AI—I think this is for Ms Christie; it could be Mr Wells as well—how is the Government, Service NSW perhaps, communicating to the public the benefits and potential drawbacks of AI integration?

LAURA CHRISTIE: The role of Digital NSW is to support the safe and ethical use of AI across the New South Wales public sector. There are a number of roles that government can play in supporting community confidence in AI. The approach that we're currently focusing on, as New South Wales government, is to make sure that the use cases within government are being rolled out in an ethical and responsible way because of that shadow that we have as government and the impact that we have with the use cases within government. I think that is our primary focus. Really embedding the ethical and responsible use of AI across the New South Wales public sector is the way that we are currently seeking to influence community confidence in AI.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Will you be responding to the upper House committee's AI inquiry recommendations?

LAURA CHRISTIE: Yes. The Department of Customer Service is coordinating the all-of-government response to those recommendations.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When will that be published?

LAURA CHRISTIE: The date escapes me, my apologies. We will be responding within the time frame that Parliament has asked of us.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What are the plans for further integration of AI into Service NSW?

GREG WELLS: At this stage, it's probably those use cases that I talked about previously. It's building on the digital identity and verifiable credentials program and seeing where those biometric proofs can be used in other transactions. We're looking at those with a number of agencies. We're looking at efficiencies internally to help our staff with searching knowledge bases. We will continue to develop those chatbots that are on our website as well. Over time, we'll further integrate those to be more of a logged-in experience so that's a better customer experience. They're probably the main three use cases currently.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: For workplace flexibility, there has obviously been some confusion around the mandatory circular. What is Service NSW doing to ensure that there is clarity amongst staff about their requirements regarding return to work?

GREG WELLS: As I talked about before, we are making sure that, as we go through our restructure of management process, we are really clear on the options and flexibility that we need to have in place for assignment to role. More broadly, we're working in with the Department of Customer Service on the consultation approach to that circular—how we might fit in with that et cetera.

GRAEME HEAD: If I can just add to that, Ms Munro, at DCS we have been doing quite a lot of proactive work with staff at a number of town halls—very detailed Q and As—about all of that. It was coincidental that I was having a town hall meeting the day after the circular was issued, but that was obviously a hot topic.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Lucky you.

GRAEME HEAD: DCS has a strong track record of consultation around workplace issues. We've received lots of questions. We're working through those with staff. DCS has, of course, a footprint across the State. Many of our staff are in customer-facing roles and a relatively large proportion of our staff do work from DCS locations. But we are paying close attention to the issues that people are raising with us through the consultation.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The requirements in the circular are pretty clear. Is there enough flexibility in the circular to accommodate the diversity of staff and their preferred arrangements?

GRAEME HEAD: I'm not trying to avoid the question, but in a workforce of over 12,000 people in multiple functions across the State, where many people's work would already comply with the intent of the circular, it's really a matter of working through with our people when there are issues and when they may wish for some special accommodation. We are trying to make sure we understand what people's individual needs are and also, importantly, how those needs correspond with the operational requirements of the organisation, which has always been a tenet of workforce flexibility in the New South Wales public sector. That's quite important. Well before this circular was issued, I had already been talking to staff across DCS about some of the challenges that I had observed in how people were able to develop in their careers when they were working a much higher proportion of their time from home. Certainly most of us, like me, in the sunset phase of their careers—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Don't be too pessimistic—or optimistic, depending on how you look at it.

GRAEME HEAD: No, I've had a long career and I think most people who have been in work for a long time would say that they learned a large part of what was valuable to them from being with colleagues, observing people with more experience and getting guidance. All of those things are relevant considerations to how we implement this.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Finally, there was some public commentary around there being enough capacity, particularly in the city offices. Mr Wells, you said earlier that you felt confident there was enough capacity in the office space that you have. Could you outline how you made that calculation?

GREG WELLS: We've looked at where everyone is. We've looked at where our locations are. We've thought about—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When you say you've had a look at where everyone is, do you mean where staff live?

GREG WELLS: To be really clear, this was about Service NSW. That was the question earlier. I've looked at the types of business across the organisation. I've looked at the locations that we could potentially use. That could include some city locations, lots of regional options and some service centres as exceptions. With some really clear oversight about what the work is, as the secretary has talked about, with reasonable travel arrangements around those things, and with flexibility, we think we can accommodate that. Obviously we still have to work very closely with the department in terms of how that fits in across customer service. That's what we're doing.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Very quickly, what is considered a "reasonable travel arrangement"?

GREG WELLS: We really aren't going to put up a hard-and-fast definition of that. We will really carefully consider time, distance and individual circumstances, and all of the things that would go into what would be considered reasonable. We'll assess that as a leadership team and make sure that it is reasonable for everyone as we go through the process.

The CHAIR: Are there any Government questions?

The Hon. Dr SARAH Kaine: No, thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you to all the government officers for your attendance today. We appreciate your time and all of your answers as well. The Committee secretariat will be touch in the near future about anything that was taken on notice. I thank you again.

JEREMY FEWTRELL: If I may, I took one question on notice about the fleet maintenance budget. I can confirm that's \$12 million for 2024-25.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Did anyone else have anything they wanted to add?

DEBBIE PLATZ: I took a question on notice from Ms Munro in relation to our volunteer numbers. As of today, there are 10,816 volunteers. You also requested a break down in relation to age. For under 40, there are 4,609. Between the ages of 40-49, there are 1,899. Between the ages of 50-59, there are 1,874. Between the ages of 60 and 69, there are 1,525. For those 70 years and over, there are 909.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

The CHAIR: Thank you again. That's the end of our session.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.