



Budget Estimates 2020-21 – Friday 30 August 2021

Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW

Responses to Questions on Notice

Question 1 (Page 4)

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Have you received that advice that you commissioned?

Mr BARNES: Yes, I have received the advice, and that advice has come to me and the advice is clear with a number of recommendations. Firstly, I had to ask whether I had an obligation under section 11 as to report things forward to the ICAC as to whether there was any corrupt conduct, and the probity report ruled out the fact that there had been corrupt conduct and also ruled out that there had been a direction made by Minister Marshall for that to be funded. The Deputy Premier cannot provide that direction. He can lobby as a local member to the Minister, which I believe he did. And there were a number of things in the probity report when it finally came back, which was after the second call for papers, so it was not completed during the second call for papers. And I believe the third call for papers did not ask for a probity review to be furnished.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Yes, if you could table all probity advice as you have it, that you are able to provide.

Mr BARNES: I voluntarily will do that.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Thank you.

Mr BARNES: I am not required during these meetings, but I am more than happy to do that. So, I will come back to you with the dates around when I received that and I will look at that during the break today, if that is alright, Mr Searle.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Of course. But these emails suggest that the Deputy Premier did not just lobby but did purport to direct the allocation of a sizeable amount of public money. Did the probity adviser get into the details about that kind of conduct by your Minister?

Mr BARNES: My understanding is that it was a fulsome investigation.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Mr Barnes, "fulsome" actually has a very important meaning and it does not mean "full" or "complete". It actually means "dishonest" and "meretricious".

Mr BARNES: It was a thorough investigation, Mr Searle, and all of the relevant people were interviewed during the process of that. But, as I said, I am more than happy to voluntarily provide the Committee with a copy of that probity report on the basis that it is dealt with confidentially and I can arrange for that to occur.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Okay, thank you. So that is your probity advice. Your legal advice, was that separate advice that you sought and received?

ANSWER

The Probity Advice was provided to the Secretary on 25 May 2021. The advice has now been provided to the Committee on a voluntary and confidential basis.

Question 2 (Page 5)

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Okay. Are there any provisions for the Deputy Premier to be able to claim reimbursement from the department for any legal costs associated with that defamation action?

Mr BARNES: Mr Field, that is a question that is best directed to, potentially, general counsel from DPC and/or to the Deputy Premier. I am not aware of those matters, and certainly he has not asked me for advice in relation to those matters.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am sorry, I asked whether you have processes available within your department for reimbursement to be sought.

Mr BARNES: I am not aware that we have, but I am happy to take that on notice and see if I can get you an answer back at maybe the morning tea break.

ANSWER:

The Department complies with the Premier's Memorandum M2019-01-Guidelines for the Provision of Ex-Gratia Legal Assistance for Ministers, Public Officials and Crown Employees. This is a publicly available document that sets out how assistance may be sought.

Question 3 (Page 6)

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, I appreciate that. Moving to Forestry, and I think in the first instance, Mr Barnes, this is still for you. When will the Natural Resources Commission's [NRC] report—the advice that it was asked to provide with regard to the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approval and post-bushfire logging—be made public?

Mr BARNES: Again, I am not aware of a time frame. That might be something that Mr Hansen or Mr Chaudhary might have at their fingertips, but I certainly don't. Again, I can take that on notice. I know that it has been with the NRC for quite a bit of time now, and that we have been pressing them for updates around progress because it is an important piece of work that they are undertaking.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Can I stop you there, Mr Barnes? The media commentary from the Deputy Premier is that it was provided to the Government by the NRC in June and it is under consideration. So, I am asking you when it is going to be released. It seems that it is in the hands of the Ministers now.

Mr BARNES: I will take that on notice and get back to you on that.

ANSWER

Mr Hansen provides the answer to this on page 6 of the transcript from the Hearing.

Question 4 (Page 6)

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Mr Hansen or Mr Barnes, this one is for you. Moving on from the NRC report, is it the case that the [inaudible] Boral wood supply agreements for the North Coast forests have been extended from their 31 December 2023 expiry date to 2028?

Mr BARNES: I think that one might be best directed to Mr Chaudhary, Mr Field.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I believe the Minister would have to sign off on any extension. This would not be a matter for Forestry Corporation. I am happy for Mr Chaudhary to answer but the Minister has ultimate responsibility here.

Mr BARNES: Again, I am happy to take that on notice and get that information back to you.

ANSWER

The non-Boral wood supply agreements for the North Coast forests have not been extended from their 31 December 2023 expiry date to 2028.

Question 5 (Page 6)

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Okay, thank you for that. Recently Sweetman Renewables chairman John Halkett said in industry media: based on advice from the Forestry Corporation of New South Wales, Deputy Premier John Barilaro had formally approved the transfer of longer-term log supply agreements to the company. Is this the case, Mr Chaudhary?

Mr CHAUDHARY: Mr Field, just to clarify that, Sweetman is an existing customer of hardwood. We have a sawlog contract with that customer. That customer has changed ownership, so there is a new customer that has bought them and is using part of the same name, and the assignment is of the sawlog contract to the new customer.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Has that assignment been made now?

Mr CHAUDHARY: I believe it has.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It seems to me that there has been no finalisation of the purchase of the sawmill. Could you confirm on notice if that assignment has actually been made?

Mr CHAUDHARY: I can take that on notice and check that for you.

ANSWER

The Assignment for three existing Wood Supply Agreements (Type A (HQL), B(HQS) and C, (LQ) Sawlogs only) from RA Sweetman & Sons Pty Ltd to Sweetman Renewables Pty Ltd has been executed by the Minister but will not take effect until the contract between the parties has been completed.

Question 6 (Page 7)

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you very much. This is a question for Mr Barnes in the first instance and then I might ask Mr Hansen and Mr Chaudhary as well. Have you had any meetings with Richard Poole in the last 12 months?

Mr BARNES: Not that I can recall. Who is Richard Poole?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: He is the CEO of Verdant Earth Technologies.

Mr BARNES: Certainly it is not a name that rings a bell. Again, I am happy to take that on notice and I could quickly turn that around. But, as far as I understand, I have not.

ANSWER:

No. Mr Barnes and Mr Hansen have not met with Richard Poole in the last 12 months.

Question 7 (Page 7) (Barnes)

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Also if you could investigate whether you have had meetings with Mr Tim Sommers or Mr Sean Neylon from Liberty Energy Capital in the past 12 months. And Mr Chaudhary and Mr Hansen, if you would be prepared to take that on notice as well, I would appreciate that.

ANSWER:

Mr Barnes has not met with Mr Tim Sommers or Mr Sean Neylon from Liberty Energy Capital in the past 12 months.

Question 8 (Page 7) (Hansen)

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Also if you could investigate whether you have had meetings with Mr Tim Sommers or Mr Sean Neylon from Liberty Energy Capital in the past 12 months. And Mr Chaudhary and Mr Hansen, if you would be prepared to take that on notice as well, I would appreciate that.

Mr CHAUDHARY: I have not met with any of those people [inaudible].

Mr HANSEN: No, same here. I have not met with them but I can check that and confirm.

ANSWER

No. Mr Hansen has not met with Mr Tim Sommers or Mr Sean Neylon from Liberty Energy Capital in the past 12 months.

Question 9 (Page 7)

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: With regard to this assignment, Mr Chaudhary, of the Sweetman Renewables log supply contracts—or wood supply agreements—you are going to check on notice if the assignment has been made. Under the agreement, Forestry Corporation must make a recommendation to the Minister on the assignment of agreements. Will you provide some advice on notice as well?

Mr CHAUDHARY: Yes. So, just to be clear, you are looking for the advice?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Yes. Sorry, Mr Chaudhary. Did you hear that?

Mr CHAUDHARY: Yes, I did. Sorry. Yes, I have taken that on notice.

ANSWER

Yes, the assignment has been made.

The WSAs requires that Forestry Corporation considers any application for Assignment and makes recommendation to the Minister on the action the Minister should take on behalf of the State of NSW. The WSA states that the Minister will have regard to Forestry Corporation's recommendation but is not bound by the recommendation.

Forestry Corporation considers that there are no impediments to recommending an assignment associated with:

- a. Regulations under the Act,
- b. The need to promote a competitive timber industry,
- c. Government policy including the socio-economic impact on rural communities;
or
- d. The impact on Forestry Corporation 's capacity to meet its obligations under the WSA(s) or other written contracts for harvesting, haulage or supply of timber.

Forestry Corporation will require all outstanding monies owing to Forestry Corporation have been received.

Noting the above, Forestry Corporation recommends that the Minister approve the Assignment of the RA Sweetman & Sons Pty Ltd Type A, Type B and Type C WSAs to Sweetman Renewables Limited.

Question 10 (Page 8)

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Barnes, is there a priority process that is done at all for the SO 52s? How do you work out which ones to get through first?

Mr BARNES: Again, I would have to take that on notice. My understanding is that they work through them as they come in and try and meet the deadlines that have been determined. My understanding is that in preparation for budget estimates we went back and looked at all of the Standing Order 52s. And I think that Standing Order 52 is close now, but I am happy to take some advice from the governance area and get that time frame to you immediately after.

ANSWER

The team that administers these notices is also responsible for administering GIPA applications, the Department's risk management, privacy management and conflict of interest systems and advice. The team balances delivery of standing order 52 papers with its other responsibilities by:

- Processing SO52's in the order in which they are passed by the Legislative Council, where possible.
- Continue working simultaneously on 2nd tranches, where relevant
- Prioritising those notices that due to their scale and complexity can be delivered in the required timeframes.
- Seeking to clarify the scope of the notice to reduce unnecessary searches and document administration and improve timeliness.
- Reducing processing time on large returns by delivering the information without redactions (i.e. only providing a document in the privileged folder).
- Where possible delivering tranches of documents in accordance with the required timeframes, and continuing work on the 2nd tranche whilst other SO52's are coordinated to deliver all outstanding returns as soon as possible.

Question 11 (Page 10)

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: In July the Resources Regulator published an investigation into the death of an employee at the Snapper mine and found that there had been seven collisions and near misses at both Snapper and the nearby Ginkgo mines in the last five years. What sort of systemic and proactive enforcement measures have you taken in the wake of that report and what are you doing at a systemic level to make sure that mines really lift the standard when it comes to observing health and safety requirements in their mines?

Ms BEATTIE: The Resources Regulator—in terms of that particular incident I would have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

In the last 12 months, the Resources Regulator has initiated specific priority projects to address concerns over incidents involving heavy mining equipment. This includes:

1. A targeted awareness campaign completed in May 2021, which reached out directly to over 13,000 mineworkers at 37 large mines across the state. The campaign was focussed on highlighting to workers the criticality of the controls to prevent vehicle incidents and their role in ensuring these controls are maintained. This program included the publication of supplementary educational resources.
2. A priority project in the coal mining sector focussing on the implementation of collision avoidance and personnel detection technology on mining equipment and vehicles.
3. A priority project in the metalliferous and quarrying sectors focussing on the effective use of positive communication protocols between operators of vehicles and mobile equipment to prevent incidents.
4. Planned assessment programs in the coal and metalliferous sectors examining the effective implementation of controls identified in mines' Principal Hazard Management Plan for Roads or Other Vehicle Operating Areas.

Further to the above, the Regulator:

1. Investigates all serious or high-potential incidents reported by mine operators
2. Publishes a weekly incident summary to provide details of incidents and recommendations to prevent recurrence.
3. Has published 7 safety bulletins and alerts relating to incidents involving mobile plant and equipment since October 2020.
4. Has made presentations on incident statistics and case studies at Industry Engagement forums organised by the Regulator itself, and at the invitation of other stakeholder organisations.

Question 12 (Page 10)

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Just to be clear, in the wake of that report the regulator has not done anything specific to lift the standard of health and safety enforcement in the industry beyond what it was already doing?

Mr BARNES: I think, Mr Searle, Ms Beattie said she would take that on notice and get back to you.

ANSWER

See previous answer.

Question 13 (Page 11)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH:

Mr Barnes, is it possible for you to provide a full list of the projects that were funded under round seven? I think there are about 80-odd.

Mr BARNES: I am happy to provide that.

ANSWER

The 84 successful projects can be viewed at www.nsw.gov.au/regional-growth-fund

Question 14 (Page 11)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Barnes, there is an interactive map, so if people go to the interactive map they can see where the projects that have been funded under Resources for Regions are located, but unfortunately it does not say which round of the program they were funded under. Is it possible for that amendment to be made to that interactive map?

Mr BARNES: I am more than happy to take that on notice.

ANSWER

Yes, this amendment will be made to the map.

Question 15 (Page 11)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That would be good. I just think it would assist people in working out when these projects were funded and how. Mr Barnes, how many applications were received under round seven of Resources for Regions? Do you know?

Mr BARNES: My understanding in round seven was that 84 projects were announced. I am not sure how many projects were brought forward, but 84 projects under round seven totalling \$50 million, with all 24 eligible local government areas [LGAs] receiving their entire funding allocation. I would imagine there might have been a touch more than the 84 but, as you know, Resources for Regions has changed from being a statewide beauty contest to being an allocation of money per LGA based on the mining impactedness in those communities, which has been welcomed by those LGAs because it gives them certainty and then they can work on the projects that they really want. I am pretty sure that we also, following feedback from the community and councils, have been doing a different form of economic benefit in the assessment process because the BCR process made it quite difficult to get some of the community-initiated projects up. But I can get back to you. If there were more than 84 I can get back to you on that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And the list of who the recipients were, the projects.

ANSWER

A total of 91 applications were received under Round Seven. The successful Round Seven projects can be viewed at www.nsw.gov.au/regional-growth-fund

Question 16 (Page 12)

The CHAIR: Thank you. It is the Chair here. My questions are to Mr Barnes initially. When did your department begin work on the Future of Gas Statement?

Mr BARNES: I might just pass that one over to Ms Beattie, who heads up that and led that work. Thanks, Ms Beattie.

Ms BEATTIE: Thanks, Mr Barnes. The Future of Gas Statement, in October last year the Government released the opportunities for gas and as part of that we committed to a Future of Gas Statement which would be released in the middle of 2021. We pretty much started work on that soon after October last year.

ANSWER

Work on the Future of Gas Statement commenced after the Government released the Strategic Opportunities for Gas in Regional NSW Statement in November 2020.

Question 17 (Page 13)

The CHAIR: Picking up on that comment about the time frames, when did you finish the submission and when did you hand it up to DPC for their approval?

Mr BARNES: I will have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

The Department of Regional NSW completed and provided the proposed submission to DPC for review and clearance in accordance with Premier's Memorandum M2021-008 on 6 July 2021.

QUESTION 18 (Page 15)

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Chaudhary, the question is quite specific. If you do not know, because you are not asking, that is fine, but the question is quite specific: What is the net profit per hectare of native public forest destroyed on your watch by Forestry Corporation?

Mr CHAUDHARY: I can take the question on notice, Mr Shoebridge, but the insinuation that it is destroyed on my watch I think is what I [disorder].

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am happy to have it rephrased as [disorder].

Mr CHAUDHARY: As I said, we are operating within the legal framework and we are managing sustainable forest management. We have been doing so for the last hundred years, but I am happy to work out per hectare. That is not how we actually measure our organisation, but I am happy to take that away and see what we can do.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thank you, Mr Chaudhary, and feel free to treat the question as, instead of "destroyed", "logged",

ANSWER:

Forestry Corporation is the appointed land manager on behalf of the Crown, to manage two million hectares of state forests for a variety of values, including tourism and recreation, roads, pests and weeds, conservation, fire, access for primary production such as apiary and grazing, and renewable timber production.

Of the two million hectares, Forestry Corporation conducts harvesting operations in approximately 30,000 hectares. The entire forest estate incurs ongoing land management costs, many of which are not related to timber harvesting. Forestry Corporation does not analyse net profit per hectare, which would be a misleading metric, as it does not take into account the multiple non-timber values provided by active forest management, nor does it recognise that native forest harvesting is conducted on a selective tree harvesting basis and not through clear-felling.

Forestry Corporation's audited financial statements are published in its annual report.

QUESTION 19 (Page 16)

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How many current investigations are you aware of that the Environment Protection Authority [EPA] has in terms of forestry operations, ones that have not yet been completed? How many have you been alerted to?

Mr CHAUDHARY: Mr Shoebridge, there are a number of investigations at any time the EPA would have going on. It is part of our checks and balances process. I do not have the exact number on hand right now but I am happy to get that for you.

ANSWER:

The EPA is an independent regulator and routinely investigates the compliance of forestry operations. Questions about these investigations would be best addressed to the EPA.

QUESTION 20 (Page 16)

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you direct drilling blackbutt into those State forests following harvesting operations? I am asking you specifically about Wild Cattle Creek and Conglomerate State Forest. Are you direct drilling blackbutt into those forests following the most recent logging operations there?

Mr CHAUDHARY: You said "direct drilling". You might have to explain what you mean by that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you planting blackbutt following the harvesting operations?

Mr CHAUDHARY: In the Wild Cattle Creek Forest?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And Conglomerate.

Mr CHAUDHARY: I will have to take that away. There are different species that we plant in the hardwood plantations. That depends on a whole variety of reasons such as soil, weather et cetera. So whether we [disorder].

ANSWER

Wild Cattle Creek and Conglomerate State Forest contain both native forest and hardwood timber plantations. Timber plantations are authorised under the *Plantations and Reafforestation Act 1999* and *Plantations and Reafforestation (Code) Regulation 2001*. Native forests are regenerated naturally and timber plantations are replanted by hand. Existing hardwood plantations in Wild Cattle Creek and Conglomerate State Forests are being progressively harvested and replanted with a mix of native species, predominately blackbutt.

QUESTION 21 (Page 18)

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE:

It is very straightforward. Has the conservation assessment as required under the National Parks and Wildlife Act been completed?

Ms FOX: We will have to take that on notice and get the answer from the DPIE, who are responsible for those technical studies.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: But the special activation precinct sits under your department, does it not?

Mr BARNES: Ms Sharpe, we outsource all of the up-front planning work—and we pay for it—from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. As Ms Fox is saying, they would fully appreciate all of the requirements that they would need to go through before they can take something forward to Minister Stokes for his sign-off on the various component parts of the planning requirements. We can turn that around quickly and I can ask Secretary Betts to get an answer back on that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If you could also get information in relation to who has conducted that conservation assessment, I would welcome that. There are 23 items. To be honest, I am quite shocked that there is a plan out for public consultation that does not clearly and explicitly deal with this issue. The proposal is within a national park, which makes it unique. It is not just a box-ticking exercise; it is actually required under our laws. I am concerned that you cannot tell me whether that has been completed, but I am happy for you to take that on notice. If you could also tell me who did and who has done the conservation assessment and whether it is available, that would also be very useful. Thank you.

Mr BARNES: Yes. I will try and get that back to you before the Committee rises today.

ANSWER:

The National Parks and Wildlife Service complies with the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 when preparing plans of management.

QUESTION 22 (Page 18)

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Great. Thank you for staying with me. I have one question. I think maybe this is to you, Mr Hansen. There is considerable community concern in the Clarence Valley in relation to catchment management issues and mining exploration licences. That is not an issue that I want to go into today, but I am very concerned about the lack of community consultation. It is my understanding that the community group, which has got over 11,000 signatures for debate in the Parliament, which has of course been delayed, has written to many of your Ministers seeking meetings and discussions. All of those have been forwarded to the Deputy Premier. He has written back to that community and said he is too busy to meet with them. My question to you is what, if any, consultation and discussion are staff in your department having in relation to this with the local community? There are significant concerns from fishers and farmers, tourism operators and others.

Mr HANSEN: Thanks for the question. I will have to take that on notice. The conversations actually have been led by others, not by the Department of Primary Industries, and it will only be whether those conversations have come up in our regular forum of consultations and engagement with those industries and the industry groups up there that we would actually be hearing any of that. I will have to take on notice which of those groups we have been meeting with and get back to you with that one.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you. I am not sure whether Mr Barnes has any input to that question either?

Mr BARNES: Sorry, Ms Sharpe. I will do a follow-up on that one.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you. That is it from me.

ANSWER:

Mining Exploration and Geoscience in the Department of Regional NSW has supported the Deputy Premier and Parliamentary Secretary to respond to correspondence received from members of the community on exploration licences in the area.

Staff from Primary Industries have met with Clarence Valley Council and other local industry groups in relation to floodplain management projects under the Marine Estate Management Strategy.

QUESTION 23 (Page 18)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So it is my turn. Thank you for your patience. It is an interesting process, these virtual hearings. Mr Barnes, I just want to very quickly clarify something arising from my last round of questions. Round six of Resources for Regions was underspent. Is that correct?

Mr BARNES: I will confirm that but from the note that I have got in front of me from Mr Hanger, it would appear that it may have been underspent.

ANSWER:

A total of \$26 million was allocated under Resources for Regions Round Six. The remaining \$24 million was rolled into Round Seven.

QUESTION 24 (Page 19)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Three years? So they will then be readvertised, or will people just be automatically rolled over into the positions?

Ms BROWN: I will have to take that on notice, but I would expect that they would be readvertised or re-examined in terms of whether the representatives were still appropriate and delivering on our mandate.

ANSWER:

Contracts will be reviewed based on performance.

QUESTION 25 (Page 19)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: With regard to the KPIs, the key performance indicators, are you able to provide those to the Committee on notice, please? **Ms BROWN:** They are set by a performance agreement between me and the individual, who is a public servant subject to the control and direction of the CEO of Investment NSW. So it would not be appropriate for me to provide that on an individual level but we are determining KPIs for the agency as a whole, which includes things such as [disorder].

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Ms Brown, with all due respect, this is a parliamentary inquiry, a parliamentary committee. You can provide those in confidence to the Committee; there is a process for that. So I would ask that you table the KPIs to this Committee.

Ms BROWN: With the caveat that they have not been bedded down yet because we are examining the opportunities globally coming out of COVID and we wanted to be as accurate as possible, I will still take the question on notice to see what I can provide you.

ANSWER:

Investment NSW, as a still new organisation, is currently finalising its overarching business plan and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). For the international team, KPIs under development may include achieving results specifically related to investment attraction and export outcomes. These may include; investment or export leads identified that align with NSW's priorities, account management of, and service delivery to these investors, including client satisfaction with our services, or investment deals supported with foreign businesses.

QUESTION 26 (Page 19)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: How were the locations for these hubs, these offices, determined? What was the process for that?

Ms BROWN: The hubs—and indeed the spokes—are set out in government's policy, which is Global NSW, which was determined by the Government at the time and sets out precisely where we see the opportunities are globally for New South Wales, what the hub locations will be and what the spoke locations will be to make sure that we have adequate representation to drive investment into key industries.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The article in the Financial Review this morning mentions a number of the locations that are yet to have someone appointed. Is that all of the remaining locations or are there others?

Ms BROWN: That is correct. There are 55 positions across 21 cities in 15 countries. I believe most of the new locations were reflected in today's media. We have 10 new locations; I think eight of those might have been reflected because we are just examining, for example, whether or not a spoke office in Beijing, for example, is something that we want to press forward with at this time. Again, that depends on the economic climate coming out of COVID, amongst other things.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Are you able to provide to the Committee then, on notice, all of the locations, please, just so we have got an understanding of where all of these offices are actually going to be located?

Ms BROWN: Of course. Would you like me to do that now?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You can take it on notice and lodge it with the Committee secretariat when they get in touch.

Ms BROWN: Okay.

ANSWER:

Details are available in the Global NSW Strategy.

QUESTION 27 (Page 20)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can I ask that you table the Global NSW report for the Committee, please.

Ms BROWN: I will table it for the Committee, yes.

ANSWER:

The Global NSW Strategy is available at www.global.nsw.gov.au

QUESTION 28 - (Page 23)

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Could I perhaps ask the same question of Mr Barnes then. Given the recent debates over the territorial limits bill and the idea that we should be looking at climate change impacts when assessing the environmental impact of mining applications, does this recent judgement lead your department to think differently about its obligations and particularly those provisions of the Mining Act that refer to protecting the environment?

Mr BARNES: Sorry. I forgot to unmute myself. Look, as always, when we are developing policy options for government across all of our areas within our portfolio, climate change is an important consideration. We have worked hand in glove with DPIE around renewable energy zones. All of our business propositions—no matter whether it be mining, other parts of regional development, land use management et cetera—all need to take climate change into consideration and have it front of mind when we look at putting forward those policy options to government. You do have a government that is not scared to take on board new ideas and balance things up. So, yes, that ruling last week will cause us to sit down and factor that in as an additional piece of information around the advice that we bring forward to government around policy options going forward—including in the mining space.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you. Is there a current plan to review and modernise the Mining Act to take into account some of these things?

Mr BARNES: I probably would defer that to—we had Georgina Beattie, who is the head of Mining, Exploration and Geoscience, here for the morning session. She is undertaking a legislative reform agenda at the moment. I might, if you like, take that one on notice so that I can allow Ms Beattie the opportunity to respond to you.

ANSWER:

No amendments to the *Mining Act 1992* related to these matters are planned.

QUESTION 29 (Page 24)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, that is correct, Chair. Thank you very much. Just two very quick follow-up questions from my most recent round of questioning, which relates to the agent-generals. On notice, can you provide the total budget or the global budget for that program and how much has been spent year to date— so as at today's date—if that is possible, Ms Brown? Then the second thing, if you can take it on notice: This recruitment decision, is there a recruitment panel and, if so, who makes up the recruitment panel? Who are the members of that panel?

ANSWER:

The total four year budget for the international network program is \$128.9 million. As of 30 August 2021, \$2.6 million has been spent this financial year.

QUESTION 30 (Page 24)

Ms BROWN: Yes, I will start with the latter question if I may. There is a lengthy selection process, as I said, managed by external recruitment firm NGS Global. The most suitable short list of candidates are interviewed by a four-member panel, including senior public servants and independent specialists. I commenced in this role on 29 March and, for example, since that time we have had—I always sit on the panel, but we usually have secretary-level representation on that panel as well, and then, as I said, they are employed as public servants under the Government Sector Employment Act henceforth.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: On notice, can you provide to the Committee the make-up of members of those respective panels, please? That would be handy. Take that on notice.

ANSWER:

The panel composition for the competitive selection of the Agent General, and other Senior Trade and Investment Commissioners, complied with legislation outlined in the *Government Sector Employment (General) Rules 2014* for a comparative assessment merit-based recruitment process within the NSW Public Service. The rules can be found here: <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/sl-2014-0065#statusinformation>

As required, the panels consisted of a minimum of three senior NSW government representatives, at level or above that of the candidate being recruited. At least one female senior government representative sat on each panel, to ensure gender diversity.

QUESTION 31 (Page 25)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen, has the \$5 million for the supply chain been fully expended? Or maybe, can you take it on notice and provide us with how much has been expended as of this day?

Mr HANSEN: Happy to do that.

ANSWER:

As of 13 September 2021, five manufacturers have signed up to the Zinc Phosphide Import Incentive Scheme, however no claims have been lodged so no money has been expended yet.

QUESTION 32 (Page 25)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay, thank you. I would like to go on to our seasonal agricultural workforce issues. Last year, as you know, because of the international border closures we ran into a bit of an issue about being able to shear our sheep, harvest our crop and pick our fruit and veg. I see the Minister has been putting out releases just recently, patting himself on the back, around bringing in some foreign labour to assist. What has been done, Mr Hansen, within your department? What has the Minister asked you to do to ensure that we have sufficient agricultural domestic workforce to shear our sheep, harvest our grain and pick our fruit and vegetables?

Mr HANSEN: Thanks for that. As you note, the agricultural labour supply issue is not unique to COVID; it has just been exacerbated and brought forward by COVID. In fact, in the financial year before COVID struck—the 2018-19 year—New South Wales agriculture relied on just over 9,400 offshore casual and contract workers to carry out jobs that we could not fill with the domestic workforce across our primary industries sector. This has always been an issue that the sector has grappled with for a long time, as you know, in terms of building the domestic capability or the automation and robotics capacity to be able to reduce that reliance on those offshore workers or overseas workers coming in. To date we have been able to facilitate only 1,905 overseas workers, predominantly under the civic mobility schemes, which means that we are really conscious of concerns around blueberries in Coffs Harbour, oranges in the Riverina, table grapes in the Murray, tomatoes up in New England and cherries and pome fruit here in the Central West, as well as the meat processors that employ about 16,000 staff across the State. The majority of those are actually Pacific labourers who come in under the Pacific Labour Scheme. There have been a couple of things that we have been doing. The first one is that we participate in a Commonwealth-led, all-State and all-Territory working group around agricultural labour. As you would be aware, Minister Littleproud commissioned a report that was presented to him about two months ago, I think—I will have to take that on notice—about the medium- and long-term plan for agricultural labour within the country.

ANSWER:

The [Pacific Labour Mobility Consultation](#) closed on 18 July 2021. The Commonwealth is yet to release the consultation report.

QUESTION 33 (Page 28)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen, I have probably only got time for one more question—maybe for Mr Barnes as well. What are the Department of Regional NSW and the Department of Primary Industries roles in working on the COVID issue in regional New South Wales? How are you supporting people in their tasks? Clearly you have resources that you could deploy—whether it be staff on the ground at Local Land Services, laboratories, for instance, or possibly accommodation. What are you doing to assist Health with the COVID matters in regional New South Wales?

Mr BARNES: I might start, Mr Veitch, and then Mr Hansen can complement. Mr Hansen can talk further about it, but his staff have been made available to Health to assist with contract tracing. Also, staff in one of his laboratories have been diverted to help process COVID tests so that we can get quicker turnarounds. Staff in Public Works Advisory and Regional Development who are based in the regions are all sitting on local emergency management committees—LEOCONs if you want. In fact, the weekend before last when the issue emerged with the cook at Wilcannia, we had folk who were assisting Health with logistics to make arrangements to have that person relocated into a caravan park just over the river. We are obviously playing a fairly significant role in cross-border issues. Yesterday James McTavish and I were talking to the deputy commissioner in Queensland because the new rules in Queensland have very tight properties at the moment around what constitutes an essential worker, which makes it difficult for the flow of agricultural workers across those borders in both directions, which are incredibly important. Mr McTavish has been leading that work, but we were certainly engaged in meetings over the weekend and further meetings to come in that regard. Last week we worked with Mr Hansen and public health to make sure that agricultural_ _workers could carpool to get to their work. There will be some conditions that will be discussed about how we can make that a reality—I think an exemption for the next three weeks and then they will need to line up to get a single dose of vaccine. We will leave no stone unturned. Obviously we are providing regular advice through to Minister Marshall and the Deputy Premier about the intelligence that we have on the ground. We have got 4,500 staff. As I previously told the Committee, 76 per cent of them actually live in the bush and they understand what is happening on the ground. They are the ones who can give information back to police and to public health. Anything we can do to help, we will. In fact, the other day Mr Hansen talked to me about diverting his own staff to help when harvest came around, and I am sure that some of his colleagues in my department would fully support downing tools and helping, where possible, the effort to get crops off and fruit picked so that we can optimise things for the bush. Mr Hansen, did you want to add anything to that?

Mr HANSEN: Just a couple of quick things if I can. Firstly, [audio malfunction] the number I gave you about 1,905 workers who have entered. It is actually now 2,145 as of today. Secondly, further to what Mr Barnes was saying -

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen, my time has actually run out and it would be unfair to the crossbench if I chewed up their time. Thank you very much. I would like to hear what you had to say; maybe you can provide it to us on notice.

ANSWER:

NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has established several industry working groups in response to COVID-19. These working groups are constructive forums to discuss challenges and actions underway to address issues such as jurisdictional border closures and regional lockdowns.

DPI has activated several channels to manage and share information with other industries, stakeholders, primary producers and NSW Government agencies, and the DPI Call Centre and is available to take primary industries related COVID-19 inquiries from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or by email quarantine@dpi.nsw.gov.au.

NSW is also a member of the National Agriculture Labour Working Group, a subcommittee that sits under Agriculture Senior Officials Group (AgSoC). This group will facilitate implementation of the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy and Roadmap. The group also provides advice on matters such as the Agricultural Workers Code.

NSW is supporting the two Commonwealth Pacific Mobility programs to facilitate the arrival of pacific workers into NSW. Regular discussions are held with the Commonwealth and the Approved Employers to facilitate the smooth passage of applications. NSW is providing a 50% subsidy (\$1,500) for each person who will be working the majority of their time in NSW. Once operational, NSW will support implementation of the new Agricultural Visa having regard to the Public Health Orders.

In addition, the NSW Government has recently called to establish an East Coast Agricultural Labour Task Force with Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania that will include industry and identify priority actions that may be adopted.

DPI is drafting a Primary Industries Labour Strategy to complement and build on the national roadmap.

DPI's Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute continues to provide diagnostic services (COVID-19 testing) and DPI's biosecurity compliance teams are assisting NSW Health with tracing and workplace preparedness.

QUESTION 34: (Page 28)

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Hansen, I have got a couple more quick questions. Back in 2019 a cell-based protein producer in New South Wales received a grant of \$25,000 from the New South Wales Government—that was Vow Food. I know you mentioned in your previous answer that the CSIRO is doing a lot of work on cell-based meats, but I was wondering if any other producers are receiving government grants or support at the moment in that space of cell-based meat production.

Mr HANSEN: Not that I am aware of, Ms Hurst, but I am happy to take that on notice and see what we can find out. One of the key things that we do try to do is not duplicate where work is already being done. We are conscious of the fact that our critical mass across the agriculture and food landscape means that we quite often divvy up between States, Territories, CSIRO and universities to work out who will be the lead and who will be the lead investor in certain areas of research so that we can ensure that we are not wasting money by duplicating each other's work. I am not aware of any other grants, but I am happy to take that on notice and see if I can find out. There are not any through our DPI but there might well be somewhere else in the Government.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I would appreciate that.

ANSWER:

Neither the RAA or DPI have provided any grants to cell-based meat producers to date.

QUESTION 35 (Page 28)

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Okay, thanks for that. Mr Hansen, I have just got one more question. It might be something to take on notice, particularly if it is quite extensive. In your last answer in the last round, you mentioned that the dairy industry was also looking at alternative proteins to cow's milk. I was wondering if you could provide more details of that. Again, that might be something to take on notice to provide us some more details about what they are actually looking into in regards to alternative proteins in the dairy industry.

Mr HANSEN: Yes, I am very happy to do that

ANSWER:

Some examples of the dairy industry looking into alternative proteins include:

- Australia's largest dairy co-op, Norco, are partnering in Eden Brew, a start-up company developing animal-free dairy alternatives. The CSIRO are also partners.
- Bega Cheese's range now includes plant-based products under the Vitasoy brand, after its acquisition of Lion Dairy and Drinks.
- Dairy Australia also reports to industry on alternative protein products.

QUESTION 36 (Page 30)

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much money has Monaro Farming Systems been given by the New South Wales Government? If you can only provide advice through your department, Mr Barnes, how much have they been given since 2011?

Mr BARNES: Yes, I am happy to take that on notice.

ANSWER:

As at Monday 20 September 2021, the total money paid to Monaro Farming Systems by the agencies within the Department of Regional NSW since 2011 is \$585,697. This is made up of \$439,347 from Local Land Services since its inception in financial year 2013/14 and \$146,350 from the Department of Primary Industries since 2011.

QUESTION 37 (Page 31)

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is the number of active investigations for prosecution under section 55A of the Game and Feral Animal Control Act for alleged interference with hunting on public land?

Mr HANSEN: I would have to take that on notice, sorry.

ANSWER

As of 15 September 2021, there are no active investigations for prosecution under section 55A of the Game and Feral Animal Control Act for alleged interference with hunting on public land.

QUESTION 38 (Page 31)

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Hansen, when people are concerned about hunting occurring on neighbouring properties and make complaints to police, is there a practice in your department that when you become aware of that you then seek to investigate and prosecute those concerned landholders for an alleged offence under section 55A? Is that a practice in your department?

Mr HANSEN: Not that I am aware of, but I am happy to take that on notice

ANSWER:

DPI takes all complaints about alleged offences under the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 seriously and investigates them where possible.

QUESTION 39 (Page 31)

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Without disclosing the name of the person who has had this experience with your department, a neighbour of Forestry Corporation in Bago State Forest in the south of the State has had that exact circumstance where having gone to the police concerned about hunters being right on her boundary fence and made complaints about it, she has become the target of an investigation for an alleged breach under section 55A of the Game and Feral Animal Control Act. Is that usual?

Mr HANSEN: No, and I am not aware of that case. I am taking you at face value that that is what has happened, but that is not usual.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you see how deeply troubling that would be if somebody went to the police with concerns about people being right on their boundary fence, armed and in camouflage gear, and complains to the police about the conduct of somebody, that they then become targeted by your department for a prosecution under section 55A? Do you see how problematic that is, Mr Hansen?

Mr HANSEN: I would have to actually know the full details to know whether the synopsis you are painting is actually the accurate one. If it is accurate, then that obviously is problematic. If it is not accurate or if there are mitigating factors around that, then I would have to look at those as well.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Hansen, I invite you to respond on notice. If in doing that you require any additional information from me, I am very happy to provide it to you. Will you take that opportunity up?

Mr HANSEN: Yes, if you can provide me those further details, I am happy to come back to you on those.

ANSWER:

A complaint was made by the hunter to Primary Industries, which was subsequently investigated by Primary Industries. The Department will not commence legal proceedings following this complaint.