

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4 – CUSTOMER SERVICE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Tuesday, 15 March 2022

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

AGRICULTURE, WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES

UNCORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:30

MEMBERS

The Hon. Mark Banasiak (Chair)

The Hon. Scott Barrett

Ms Abigail Boyd

Mr Justin Field

The Hon. Emma Hurst (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Peter Poulos

The Hon. Peter Primrose

The Hon. Mick Veitch

PRESENT

The Hon. Dugald Saunders, Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales

* Please note:

[inaudible] is used when audio words cannot be deciphered.

[audio malfunction] is used when words are lost due to a technical malfunction.

[disorder] is used when members or witnesses speak over one another.

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 additional public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2021-2022. Before I commence, I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay respect to Elders, past, present and emerging, of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present. I welcome Minister Dugald Saunders and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Agriculture and Western New South Wales.

Before we commence, I would like to make some brief comments about the procedures for today's hearing. Today's proceedings are being broadcast live from Parliament's website. A transcript will be placed on the Committee's website once it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings.

All witnesses in budget estimates have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. There may be some questions a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances, witnesses are advised they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they should do so through the Committee's staff. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Finally, could everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing.

All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister Saunders, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn, as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. I would like to remind the following witnesses that you do not need to be sworn, as you have been sworn at an earlier budget estimates hearing before this Committee. Mr Gary Barnes, Mr Scott Hansen, Mr Anshul Chaudhary, Dr John Tracey, Mr Sean Sloan, Mr Daryl Quinlivan, Dr Kim Filmer and Ms Suzanne Robinson.

Mr GARY BARNES, Secretary, Department of Regional NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

Mr SCOTT HANSEN, Director General, Department of Primary Industries, on former oath

Mr ANSHUL CHAUDHARY, Chief Executive Officer, Forestry Corporation, on former affirmation

Mr STEVE ORR, Chief Executive Officer, Local Land Services, affirmed and examined

Mr ADAM TYNDALL, Acting Executive Director, Policy & Strategic Reform, Local Land Services, sworn and examined

Dr JOHN TRACEY, Deputy Director General, Biosecurity & Food Safety, Department of Primary Industries, on former affirmation

Mr SEAN SLOAN, Deputy Director General, Fisheries, Department of Primary Industries, on former oath

Mr DARYL QUINLIVAN, NSW Agriculture Commissioner, Department of Primary Industries, on former affirmation

Dr KIM FILMER, Chief Animal Welfare Officer, Department of Primary Industries, on former affirmation

Mr DAVID McPHERSON, Deputy Director General, Forestry & Land Reform, Department of Primary Industries, affirmed and examined

Mr ROB KELLY, Executive Director, Regional Operations, Local Land Services, affirmed and examined

Mr JONATHAN WHEATON, Executive Director, Regional Development, Department of Regional NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms SUZANNE ROBINSON, Acting Director, Animal Welfare, Department of Primary Industries, on former affirmation

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 12.45 p.m., with a 15- minute break at 11.00 a.m. We are joined by the Minister in the morning. In the afternoon, we will hear from the departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.15 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only. If required, an additional 15 minutes is allocated at the end of the morning and afternoon sessions for Government questions. We thank everyone for their attendance today. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you, Chair. I thank you all for being here today, mainly because I know there is a fair bit going on in other parts of the State that would have you all engaged. I appreciate you giving your time to come to this hearing. Minister, I just want to again publicly acknowledge you for taking me along last week up to the flood zone. It was good fun, loading trucks with hay—you and I. I think some people were a bit surprised that the Minister and shadow Minister actually knew how to throw a hay bale around. Thank you for that.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Thank you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, section 21AA of the Fisheries Management Act in November was the basis of a couple of resolutions put through the upper House. When will you be enacting 21AA of the Fisheries Management Act?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That, obviously, historically started before I came in. It is in the process of going through all of the stages it needs to go through. It will be as quickly as possible but within what needs to happen, which is—we have had consultation to a concern point. It now needs to go through the final approaches to come back to the Government for final adoption. But it is certainly in the pipeline, as it should be.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, there were two resolutions. One was to establish an upper House inquiry into 21AA and cultural fishing. The other one actually was quite specific: the House requested that the Minister, which is now you, would request that the Director General of the Department of Primary Industries [DPI] conduct a review of the previous breaches of the Fisheries Management Act to ascertain whether or not they were cultural fishing. Has that direction been provided to the Director General?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Again, that was before my time. I am not sure if Mr Hansen received that direction from the previous Minister.

SCOTT HANSEN: Thanks, Minister. Not as a direction but, obviously, we paid attention to the debate in the upper House. We did undertake a review of all prosecutions currently afoot and put them into different categories in terms of risk categorisation and have been working through those accordingly with Crown Prosecution.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is there a time frame on that, Mr Hansen?

SCOTT HANSEN: I can come back to you later today.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can you this afternoon? That would be good. Minister, has the department budgeted and spent any money on Aboriginal cultural fishing local management plans?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There are certainly two trials underway, at Hastings and Tweed. I am not sure what the costings are for them. But, as you are aware, the blanket approach for cultural fishing has been one that has not really worked very well. Since 2009 there has been various attempts to get cultural fishing right. I think the local management plan is a really good way of trying to actually do on the ground what people want. The north compared to the south compared to inland—they are different fisheries. They are different cultural practices. We now have two pilot trials that are actually getting underway. That will feed back into a final decision on how that should happen. But I think there is support from Aboriginal land council, the Aboriginal fishing groups. So I think we are heading in exactly the right direction. It has taken time, clearly. But, rather than a blanket approach, I think, the local management plan approach is a far better one.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The two trials you just raised—when do they start? When do we look at finishing those trials?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: They are a trial that is up to two years to gather the information on them. I am not sure exactly when they started. Sean might have some details on that.

SEAN SLOAN: Thanks. Those two trials are about to commence. They are expected to commence this year—the Hastings community and the Tweed. Obviously, they will be then used as the blueprint for additional communities that wish to engage in that process. So—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Sorry to interrupt, Mr Sloan. Essentially, you are going to finish the trial and then look at further plans? Or are you going to commence further plans before the trial ends?

SEAN SLOAN: The idea of the trials of the local management plans is to trial that concept of managing cultural fishing with an engaged community. If that trial proves to be successful, then the idea is to use that as a blueprint to manage cultural fishing across New South Wales, using that same approach.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. Like Mr Hansen, when we come back to this this afternoon, if you could let us know how many Indigenous, First Nations people have been prosecuted for offences under the Fisheries Management Act since 2009—is that data possible?

SEAN SLOAN: Let me see how quickly we can go back as far as 2009.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We will do that in the afternoon session. Thanks. Minister, Japanese, I say, "encephalitis" but I heard last night on the news it was "enkephalitis". Anyway, it reads the same when we read the transcript. Japanese encephalitis is actually a big issue right now. What interactions are you having with the Minister for Health on this mosquito-borne disease?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The Minister for Health and the Minister for Regional Health and I have spoken numerous times about this. It is a human issue, a mosquito-borne disease. Thankfully, we have amazing biosecurity, which has actually helped pick up the movement through things like piggeries. That is actually helping inform where the concern is and may be moving to. But we talk regularly. The Minister for Health and I spoke on the first day that it became aware through our checks. We have been in semi-regular contact ever since. But it is a health issue.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, last night, on Channel 7 news, the story ran about the Windridge piggery at Young, which is the most recent of the piggeries, apparently, to have Japanese encephalitis identified. It is a pretty big piggery—a lot of sows. In the Young area there are a lot of pigs. A number of questions arise from that. Have we assessed every piggery in New South Wales for Japanese encephalitis?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not sure that every piggery has been assessed. But certainly there has been a program. Where signs or symptoms have shown up, there has been absolutely widespread testing within that area, obviously, to alert humans as to the possibility of contracting it if they are working at certain piggeries where it shows up.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We know where each piggery is in New South Wales, don't we? Mr Hansen showed me a pretty snazzy thing the other day when we were up in the flood zone around mapping some of these things. Are we going to assess every piggery?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: As they become at risk, I think they become assessed. You could do testing on every pig, every single day, but if it is nowhere near that piggery—we have populations of wild animals that are tested as well. We have mosquitoes that are trapped to show where the virus might be spreading to. If there is a risk that is seen to be heading in a certain direction, then those piggeries would be tested. But just testing them for the sake of testing them is probably not something we are doing. But it is certainly to actually monitor where the spread of JE is heading.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That risk assessment, the risk profile—let's use Windridge piggery as an example. It is on the outskirts of Young. It is pretty close to the township of Young. When we look at the risk profile there, I gather we will look at vaccination for the workers in that piggery? There are about 40 employees. Is that correct?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Because of the proximity to the township, is there a campaign that is conducted, then, for the population of Young to give them the opportunity for vaccination?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That would be a Health question. But given the proximity to town, you would think that would be part of an overall health approach. The main messaging becomes around mosquitoes. That is for whether it is piggeries or just homes—to not have water lying around, if possible, and trying to remove any breeding ground for mosquitoes, because that is the main risk. It is not the pigs; it is the mosquitoes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Of course there is a rush now on—

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: DEET.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: —all sorts of protections, such as Bushman and the like. The floods in the Hawksbury, for instance—there is a lot of water lying around now on those river flats. It is a pretty good spot to breed mosquitoes, clearly. As I understand it, there is a piggery near Windsor. Has that piggery been assessed at all?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not sure. I will have to ask Scott that one.

SCOTT HANSEN: We can find out whether there has been deliberate testing for that one. What we have done is followed all trace forwards and movements to and from all known infected piggeries. So the priority has been doing all that movement tracing and all the testing, and we have completed all those. As the Minister highlighted, it has switched to broader surveillance not just across pigs but across mosquito populations and wildlife populations. That is rolling out across the State. I can come back to you later again with regards to whether that one specifically in Windsor—bearing in mind, there are a lot of backyard piggery operations across western New South Wales as well. I can find out what level of testing is going on there, but it will be a broader surveillance testing because the focus of our testing has been on piggeries that have shown symptoms and then all traces forward and out of those piggeries. That has been our key engagement. Now we are working with Health on that broader environmental surveillance of both mosquitoes and wildlife.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So just to clarify, it is probably a more reactive surveillance process than a proactive surveillance process at this point in time?

SCOTT HANSEN: Our tracing out of the infected piggeries has certainly been reactive. The surveillance we are doing with Health—and this is joined up across the whole Commonwealth, both for mosquitoes and wildlife—is actually proactive. That is trying to give us a handle on where else it might be. At the moment we are getting the dots on the map as a result of pigs being an easy way of detecting presence for the disease. But all animals can be infected. So this broader surveillance activity will actually proactively help us identify where there might be risks, as well as obviously if this arbovirus has been able to make its way down, what else might there be out there in the mosquito population. We are also joined up with Health in terms of helping to test for and look for that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am going to come back to that in a minute. On the issue about vaccination for the workers, clearly Health will organise the vaccines. As I understand it from media, we are sourcing these vaccines from South-East Asia because Japanese encephalitis does not usually come this far south. Do we know how it got into the piggeries on the southern borders of New South Wales, Victoria and into South Australia, Minister?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It is speculated to have come from a couple of sources, possibly water birds that have migrated down to follow the water, given there are larger areas of water now in our part of the world or possibly just with windborne mosquitoes actually making it this far down. And that is obviously a risk of other airborne mosquito-borne diseases as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: At the start I acknowledged that the department is working under a fair degree of strain at the moment because your forward works plan would not include massive floods along the eastern seaboard. This Japanese encephalitis, how are we resourcing that? Are the floods putting a degree of strain on your resources to encounter issues such as Japanese encephalitis.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Last week I was up in Orange where we have the State control centre, which is managing both the flood response and the Japanese encephalitis response. There is a team there led by the Chief Veterinary Officer, Sarah Britton. I am not sure if Sarah is here today but John Tracey is, who heads our biosecurity team. They are two very distinct teams running out of the same purpose-built facility to manage these responses separately, but resourcing them from right around the State. It is a very deliberate response and it is a very well-managed response.

SCOTT HANSEN: We have had over 300 staff involved across DPI, no less, on the flood response, and we have got over 70 staff involved in the Japanese encephalitis response at the moment. We will continue to draw staff from across our combined businesses to be able to resource them up as they need to and make sure we are rotating staff through. Obviously with something like JE there is a high degree of technical specialist skills needed in a lot of the areas, hence why we rely heavily on our vets. Those vets are also in high demand for animal health and animal welfare issues up on the North Coast. The one advantage we have had has been that the New South Wales pork industry is extremely well organised and coordinated, and has on hand a ready supply of technical veterinary expertise, which has been quickly deployed to assist us on that front as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen, you mentioned earlier other mosquito-borne airborne diseases. In the flood zones—I am not going to focus just on Lismore because there have been others as well—are we seeing things like equine encephalitis, any cases like that? What are the other mosquito-borne events we are seeing in our animals?

SCOTT HANSEN: I might in a moment throw across to Dr Tracey to just confirm. We have always had a proactive program of national arbovirus monitoring across the country. It has been one in which all the States have joined up and worked in partnership with the Commonwealth and with industry, and there are both sentinel herds and flocks across the country that are monitored and tested on a regular basis for early signs. That monitoring and surveillance is now being ramped up at the moment to make sure that we get on top of any of the other viruses that can be brought down via either water birds or mosquitoes. To my knowledge, we have not found anything else unusual at this point in time. But it is certainly a focus of the collective of the States, Territories and the Commonwealth in terms of ramping up that national arbovirus monitoring and making sure that we do stay ahead of whatever else might be out there. I might see if Dr Tracey has anything else to add.

JOHN TRACEY: That is true. We have not found anything unusual. We do find West Nile virus down in the south in Riverina, so we are monitoring that. That has been picked up in horses, and Murray Valley encephalitis also. As the DG mentioned, we are particularly concerned about what is coming next. Our focus is on preparation for diseases such as lumpy skin disease. That is another mosquito-borne virus which would have a significant impact on the cattle industry up north. That monitoring through the mosquitoes is a key part of what we have in place, working closely with Health. In addition to that, as was mentioned previously, the strong biosecurity in the piggeries has been a good example of a sentinel, basically, being able to detect a virus that is naturally circulating out there in the mosquito population.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Excellent. I think we are going to come back this afternoon with the staff to spend a bit more time talking about that. I want to move on to Monaro Farming Systems. Minister, have you had a chance yet to read the probity report that was prepared around the Monaro Farming Systems issue?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: As you would be aware, that predates me significantly. No, I have not involved myself in that at all.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The Hon. Keith Mason, AC, QC, judged a distributed claim of privilege on that document. I quote from Mr Mason's ruling. He said, "Documents numbered 102A are claimed by the office of Minister Marshall to attract legal privilege"—professional privilege—"on the basis that they were created for the dominant purpose of the provision of legal advice. That such an untenable claim should even be advanced is itself disturbing." Those are pretty scathing comments from Mr Mason in regard to claiming privilege on Standing Order 52 documents. Minister, can you give an undertaking that that will not be your approach in your tenure?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I expect the highest levels of probity in all members of my department—I have made that very clear to all of them—and that is what I expect for the future.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Will you avail yourself of information regarding the Monaro Farming Systems, particularly the probity report?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I understand a review is underway internally, which Gary Barnes can possibly talk about if you want to hear more information about that. I will then get a briefing from him.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I had the pleasure of discussing this with Mr Witherdin at previous budget estimates. I note that Mr Witherdin has gone and Mr Orr is now in his place. In my most recent look at the organisation chart I noted a new division within the department with Mr Witherdin at the top of that. Was that new division created as a part of some assessment of the needs of the department?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That was some movements by, again, the secretary, Mr Barnes, which sort of predated me moving into this role. But it combines public works and Soil Con under a new banner. But, again, that predates me moving into the role. It happened basically at the same time as I moved in.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: In your incoming briefs was this restructure of the organisation discussed with you—that there would be a need to rearrange the structure of the department?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It was not discussed as being a need, it was just discussed as being, "We are moving in a different direction to have Soil Con and Public Works under the one banner to work a bit more collaboratively."

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is Mr Witherdin on the same pay level?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have no idea.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Essentially is it a sideways movement?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Honestly, I do not know.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Organisational restructures like this in the public service are usually about creating the capacity of the public service to deliver upon the outcomes required by the Minister of the day or the Government of the day. Do you think that was the driving force for this restructure?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: As I say, I did not make the restructure. I am sure Mr Barnes can talk to it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We will talk this afternoon about that.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The collaboration of Soil Con and Public Works is a good collaboration. Public Works does a lot of projects right across regional New South Wales and, in collaboration with Soil Con, I can see that being a really good partnership. So I do not have any issue with it but it was certainly not something that I was involved with.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, do you think you will be restructuring the organisation to meet your imperatives, your deliverables?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Not that I can see any time soon.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You will be holding the ship as is until 23 March?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes. There is no reason that I would not be.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: With regard to Mr Witherdin's division of the department, will you be reviewing that at any stage to ensure it is actually meeting your deliverables, your requirements?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Sure. And again, it is something that the secretary is responsible for. I will be talking to him and the director general about how that is working, as is the case with every single department. It will be part of the department. I see that as being no different to anything else.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Good morning, Minister. I would like to ask you about your meeting with Greyhound Racing NSW on 3 February 2022 regarding frozen semen procedures. It was reported in the *Greyhound Recorder* that you "unequivocally confirmed the removal of the FSI element from the list of banned procedures under the new animal welfare bill". Is that a correct summary from that meeting?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, I would say that is.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You also sent a letter to Greyhound Racing confirming the removal of that part of the legislation?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you aware that the draft animal welfare bill has been years in the making with multiple rounds of public and stakeholder consultation?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you aware that the bill is currently before a parliamentary inquiry?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And yet you were still happy to agree to a unilateral change to the bill based on that one meeting with the greyhound industry?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Did you consult with the RSPCA, the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds or the Australian Veterinary Association before making this assurance with the greyhound industry?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Not that I recall.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you aware that the RSPCA describes this surgical procedure as "highly invasive", and says it causes significant pain to the female dog?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I would say that there are certain sections of the veterinary industry that would agree that it is a practice that has question marks, but then there is the majority of vets who disagree with that assertion. My decision was based on the fact that greyhounds, for one, are covered under the Greyhound Welfare Integrity Commission [GWIC] and any of the welfare issues are covered under GWIC as opposed to needing a separate scenario. All other dog breeders have the ability to make those decisions.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you aware that that procedure is banned in many other countries because it is considered ethically unacceptable?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am aware that it is banned in some countries.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And that does not change your position?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: No.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Some people would argue, Minister, that you have really fallen under the same conflict of interest trap as your predecessor. Why are you supporting industry without any regard to your other responsibility as overseeing animal welfare? How did you consider animal welfare in this decision?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I spoke to a number of vets. There are a number of veterinary practices across regional New South Wales that see this as, by far, the best way of ensuring the best response to animal welfare. That includes both for the mother and also the ongoing security to make sure we have good quality dogs being bred.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: When you say you consulted with vets, did you consult with vets within the industry or did you consult with vets who were independent of the industry?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Both.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You said that those vets, though, were somewhat divided on their views in this space?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The people I spoke to very clearly said that surgical insemination is a practice that is widespread and widely adopted. The reason I made the decision around this very quickly was to reassure an industry and also dog breeders that there is a clear pathway forward for them. The draft bill is exactly that. It is a draft bill which was put together with consultation from portions of the industry and literally put everything on the table. But very clearly I could see there was an issue with that—an unintended consequence, I would have thought—which, to give clarity around what that bill would look like, I said would be removed. There might be other sections of the bill that will come up and be not fit for purpose as well. Part of the committee's responsibility is to go through all of those. But this one was a stand-out one, that clearly was not fit for purpose. There is already the ability for GWIC to handle all of that under greyhound management.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, you just indicated in your answer that your primary purpose was to look after industry. You have also admitted that you did no consultation before that decision with welfare

groups. How can the people of New South Wales trust you to oversee animal protection in this State and, indeed, the largest reform of animal protection laws in four years when one of your first actions as Minister is to agree to what an industry wants with no consultation with animal welfare organisations in the same space?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That is your perception, Ms Hurst; it is not my perception. What I would say is that I very clearly took on board what was being put forward in a draft form and made a decision to clearly give, I suppose the broader scale of dog breeders, some comfort that parts of that bill that were seen to be unfit for purpose would not be part of the draft bill.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: This is not obviously the first time there has been a conflict of interest for an agriculture Minister. Your predecessor, Adam Marshall, was actually caught out in a freedom of information document. He said, "NSW awaits the proposed guidelines but indicates it will not support a phase-out of conventional cages." That is despite the fact that every animal protection organisation, and that there was a 10-year national standard process, recommended that he do so. So, again, it is a perfect example of an agriculture Minister listening to industry and ignoring the animal welfare side of that portfolio. Given what you have just revealed about agreeing to what the industry wants in the greyhound racing industry, can you not see how the public might see this as a major conflict of interest—that the agriculture Minister is protecting industry and not considering welfare.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Point of order: This is my first point of order, so I hope it is along the right lines. Surely we are here to interrogate this Minister, not the actions of the previous Minister.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: My question was directed to this Minister, asking him how he can ensure that himself, as agriculture Minister, will deal with this perceived conflict of interest.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: But surely the actions of the previous Minister are not relevant.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I was giving an example.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: About the previous Minister, not this Minister. I just think it is this Minister that we are speaking to.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am sorry, but I completely reject any suggestion there is a conflict of interest. I engage with all stakeholders that I am involved with, from sheep farmers to cattle farmers. The greyhound industry is an industry in New South Wales that has a part like every other industry does. They are managed and the welfare of their dogs is managed absolutely by the Greyhound Welfare Integrity Commission. So this line in the draft bill is already taken care of by GWIC. I removed it to create certainty for that industry but also for other dog breeders—as simple as that; no conflict, as far as I am concerned, at all.

The CHAIR: Just before I throw to Mr Field, I should rule on Mr Barrett's first point of order, to give him some feedback. I understand where you are coming from. I think the Minister was doing quite well to bring it back to his actions.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: He didn't need protection.

The CHAIR: And I was listening carefully to Ms Hurst to make sure she was not focusing solely on the previous Minister's actions. But thanks for the try.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You will only get better.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Get your hands on the ball early.

The CHAIR: That's it. Mr Field.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, Chair, and good morning, Minister. Congratulations on the new role.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Thank you.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It is an important time to be looking at the future of forestry in New South Wales. Minister, are you aware of the Natural Resources Commission report on post-fire logging, which concludes that there is a risk of serious and irreversible harm to New South Wales native forests as a result of the compounding effects of fires and harvesting?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am vaguely aware of it, but it is Cabinet in confidence. I have not actually seen that report.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: You are a member of Cabinet are you not, Minister?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I was not then though.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: No, but I assume as forestry Minister you have asked to see the report. You have not read the report?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: No, I have not.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Have you been briefed on the report?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Briefly briefed.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: You have been briefly briefed on the report. You would be interested to know that in the report, which is widely circulated publicly in part thanks to *The Guardian* and it is on my website, so it is not that secret, it does say that the assessment of the impact on high-quality wood supply over the last five years as a result of fires and other impacts on the forests is a reduction of 84 per cent on the South Coast and 19 per cent on the North Coast. Are you aware of that?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am aware there has been a reduction and severe impacts, obviously, from the fires.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, I have an answer from questions on notice from you in the last month that shows that Forestry Corporation has sent out letters to North Coast wood supply agreement holders—they sent them out in December—and I am quoting now from that, and the text was provided in the answer, so I know your office is aware of it, "I am now pleased to advise that with support from the Deputy Premier"—this would have been before you came in, but I think the current Deputy Premier—"Forestry Corporation NSW will progress discussions with holders of type A, B and C wood supply agreements on possible extensions until 31 December 2028 for existing annual quantities." It goes on to state that "the time line for finalising those extensions for type A and type B wood supply agreements is between January and March this year". Minister, how can Forestry Corporation be negotiating in good faith with wood supply agreement holders and be considering extensions to contracts at existing annual quantities when there has been a demonstrable collapse in wood supply?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The way that Forestry Corp manages wood supply is over a 100-year sustainable yield model; it is not a snapshot of one year or two years, and we are talking about a year or two after the worst possible bushfires.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: These are extensions for five years, Minister.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, but it takes into account a 100-year sustainable yield.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: The NRC report, which you have acknowledged you have only been moderately briefed on, points to a dramatic fall in wood supply, particularly in the short term. This is the period these contracts would be extended for. How does that gel with what you are saying about a 100-year time line? We are talking about the future of the forests now.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The actual harvestable forest is about 0.1 per cent of the overall State forest. You might be aware of that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: But you would agree that there has been a short-term wood supply impact from the fires?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There has been a short-term wood supply impact.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So how can Forestry Corporation be offering up contracts for the next five years at existing supply levels when you have just acknowledged there is a wood supply impact from the fires?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There has been a supply impact but it does not mean there is no wood. There is still wood available. Unfortunately we have now got flooding as well, so that has an impact.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: If you were sustainably logging before the fires—

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It is not logging; it is selective harvesting.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: If you were sustainably logging before the fires and there has been a hit to wood supply, how can you offer the same quantity in contracts for the next five years and do that sustainably?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That is exactly what forestry is about: sustainable timber harvesting, selective timber harvesting, to manage the wood supply into the future. That is exactly how it is managed.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, are you the person who signs off on a wood supply agreement and extension to the contract? Is that your job?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: In the final case, yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Have you signed off on any extensions of the North Coast wood supply agreements?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That is Cabinet in confidence.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Why would that be Cabinet in confidence? That is your power; it has got nothing to do with Cabinet.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It does.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Are you saying that any wood supply agreement extensions will go to Cabinet to sign off?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: No, they do not go to Cabinet to sign off, but some of them do go to Cabinet, yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am sorry, do they go to Cabinet for sign-off or is that your power? They are mutually exclusive, are they not?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Can I jump in there, Minister, just to explain the process there? The State is party to some of the contracts, not all of the contracts. Where the State is party to a contract the portfolio Minister would be signing off on those.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So, Minister, your responsibility. Have you signed off on the extension of any North Coast wood supply agreements that were due to end in 2023? Have you signed off to extending them to 2028?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: No, I have not actually signed them off, no. I know the letters have gone out, but I have not signed them off.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Given that there is an NRC report commissioned by agreement from your predecessor and the previous environment Minister to give advice to the Government on how to manage harvesting in the forests post fires, will you give an undertaking to not sign off on any extensions until the Government has actually responded formally to that report and has actually conducted the review into sustainable yield and done the field studies, which I understand are currently underway as well? Will you give that undertaking?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The field studies are currently happening and I think Anshul can probably talk a bit more about where they are up to. But you are splitting two different scenarios as well; you are talking about a South Coast report and the North Coast, are you not?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: No, not at all. I am talking about the North Coast, the possible extension, as per the letter that was sent out by Forestry Corporation—the extension of the North Coast wood supply agreements. The NRC report covers the entire forestry management estate in New South Wales and that identifies a fall in wood supply as well. I am asking you to give an undertaking that you will not sign off on any contract extensions until the Government has formally responded to that report.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: What I will do is I will be briefed on those contracts; that is certainly what I will be doing. I will discuss with industry where it is up to and then I will be making a decision in due course.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So you will not give that undertaking? You could do it irrespective of what your colleagues in Environment, in Regional NSW, say about the NRC report.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Your assertion that things have been done incorrectly I do not agree with. I actually think that forestry is a sustainable renewable regenerative resource.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I did not suggest they were being done incorrectly; I am just asking for that undertaking.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: My undertaking is that I will get a briefing on the contracts before I sign them. I will consult with industry and then we will make that—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Could I suggest you read the NRC report as well?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Sure, you can suggest that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Minister, I might just turn to the issue of category D firearms and their role in pest management. Have you been briefed on the current situation we have in this State with category D firearms?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: To a limited manner, to be honest. It is not in my portfolio.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that. I might, through you, ask Mr Orr just some basic details about LLS' use of category D firearms and then I will go to the heart of the matter. Mr Orr, perhaps on notice if you do not have it, how many semiautomatic centre-fire firearms does Local Land Services possess?

STEVE ORR: Thanks for the question. I will take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Can you also take on notice what the make and models and calibre of those firearms are?

STEVE ORR: Sure.

The CHAIR: Can you tell us in what LLS regions those firearms are located, on notice?

STEVE ORR: Yes.

The CHAIR: Obviously, without disclosing specific details, are these firearms stored in LLS employees' homes or are they in LLS offices?

STEVE ORR: My understanding is that they are stored in LLS offices, but I will confirm the range of questions which you have.

The CHAIR: When you are confirming that, if they are stored in LLS offices and not the principal place of residence in accordance with the firearms regulations, what additional safety measures are you putting in place to ensure safe storage? And, perhaps on notice, have all LLS firearms safes been inspected by NSW Police Force and when?

STEVE ORR: Yes, sure. Obviously the storage and management of firearms is critically important, so LLS takes that very, very seriously. But in terms of your specific questions and the details within those questions, I will take those on notice and come back to you.

The CHAIR: Are the permits that have been issued to LLS for 12 months like non-government licences?

STEVE ORR: Again, I will confirm that. I will take that on notice, Mr Banasiak.

The CHAIR: Can you perhaps confirm whether they were granted under section 28 (g) of the Firearms Act as a special commissioner's permit, I think they call it now a general permit? If you could that would be great.

STEVE ORR: Sure.

The CHAIR: Minister, to your knowledge—and perhaps Mr Orr might be able to assist—has LLS ever asked the New South Wales Firearms Registry to withhold issuing permits for non-government category D licence holders?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Not that I am aware. Mr Orr?

STEVE ORR: No, I am not aware of that.

The CHAIR: I pass up a series of emails between Mr Wayne Jackson from the New South Wales Firearms Registry. It went to a series of people, including a Mr Sears from LLS. While you are having a read of that, Mr Orr, is Mr Sears still working for LLS? Just so we get a baseline.

STEVE ORR: I would need to confirm whether or not Mr Sears is working for LLS. Mr Kelly, do you know?

ROB KELLY: We will take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Have you got the document there?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: We are sharing it.

The CHAIR: I will ask the secretariat to give you an extra copy. Just to help you, Minister, this is an email that was sent by Mr Wayne Jackson from the New South Wales Firearms Registry to a series of people, including LLS and National Parks, essentially soliciting support for a project which undermines any non-government category D licence holder in this State getting access to a category D firearm. I draw your attention to the bottom of page 3 where he has cleverly crafted a statement from whoever this was emailed to to basically fill in the blanks and sign it. If they sign it they are saying they do not support anyone who is not part of government having a category D firearm for pest control.

STEVE ORR: Yes. Again, Mr Banasiak, that is from 2014 or 2015.

The CHAIR: Yes, 2015.

STEVE ORR: I will take that on notice and respond to your questions, hopefully in the afternoon.

The CHAIR: Minister, can you see how that looks? Potentially this employee—I do not know whether he received authority to collude with Mr Jackson or not, but it looks like LLS has essentially conspired with the New South Wales Firearms Registry to disadvantage non-government pest controllers with their category D licence applications.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: You are talking about something that is eight years ago. That is a long time ago.

The CHAIR: Yes, but that has reverberated through the management of this problem—or mismanagement of this problem—that we now face.

STEVE ORR: Mr Banasiak, I guess the general comment would be it is up to the Firearms Registry to make those sorts of decisions. Obviously LLS plays a significant role in relation to pest animal control. We do use firearms, as you have alluded to. Those firearms from my perspective are managed to the highest standard in line with what we as an organisation need to do. But in relation to this specific matter and whether the staff members involved even continue to work with LLS, I will come back to you on that.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, I might switch to native title. I know it is not within your purview, but what is your understanding of native title's impact on rural land ownership? I have received a high number of constituent concerns that they have gone through the process of selling their agricultural land, they get to the point of cooling off and then they find out at the very end—oh no!—there is a native title claim. And they cannot sell their land and transfer it to someone else to be used for agricultural purposes. What is your understanding of the scope of that and has your department done any assessment on the impacts on agriculture?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not aware of any large-scale problems that that is causing, but the director general might have an indication of how many people have brought this forward.

SCOTT HANSEN: No. I would have to take it on notice. I have got to say I have not heard any concerns on that front recently, Chair. I do not know whether the agriculture commissioner in the discussion around land use, whether that came up at all in any of your conversations or consultations with industry?

DARYL QUINLIVAN: No. I cannot recall it being raised by anyone at all during my consultations.

SCOTT HANSEN: But if there are specific cases you would like to talk about after, I am happy to find out what we can on that.

The CHAIR: Yes, we might bring that up in the afternoon session. Did you have something to add, Mr Barnes?

GARY BARNES: I was going to say that native title is usually triggered when someone sells the land and the purpose for which the land is going to be used is different to what it currently is being used for. I think it would be unusual if it was agriculture for agriculture. But we can find out about that and get back to you. If you have got specific instances, we can do a follow-up for you on that.

The CHAIR: I might talk to you with those specific instances in the 11 o'clock break.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Speaking of specific instances, Minister, you might want to take this question on notice and at some stage maybe Mr Hansen could get back to us: In light of the Windridge piggery announcement last night on the news, can you produce us an update of piggeries that have been identified in New South Wales at this time, as of today? You can come back to us with that.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: We will probably take that on notice with the exact number. It may have changed again this morning.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And the locations?

SCOTT HANSEN: It is 15 piggeries. Rather than giving the individual ones here, we can tell you that they are spread from the very north of the State, as far north as Tenterfield, to as far south as the border.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: How far west?

SCOTT HANSEN: I would have to come back to you about the furthest west one. Further to your question previously, we have not done any targeted tracing or testing in the Windsor area. There are a number of

pigs in that area, if you want to speak to us offline. As I said, because there has not been a trace, it has not had any signs or symptoms, and our focus now is on that broader environmental monitoring component.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: In regards to the floods, Minister, obviously a large number of livestock and pets were lost. Do we have a handle at the moment on how many animals have been lost and then destroyed as well?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: You were up there and we saw some of the things together. But the numbers as of last night—we have had 1,215 requests for assistance, including 749 requests for emergency fodder. Of that there are now 60 per cent complete and 40 per cent in progress. Of the 749 requests for fodder there are 429 complete and 292 in progress. There have now been more than two million tonnes of emergency fodder supplied. Two helicopters are running, right through until they are needed really, but until at least the end of the week, although some of the aerial is dropping because roads are now opening. Aerial surveillance continues. There are basically 12 aerial drops planned for delivery today, again to get more stock taken care of. There are 41 animals in care. There have been 168 requests for livestock disposal, and of that around 1,370 animal carcasses have been disposed of. There are 306 staff now currently involved in the response there. We have engaged significant numbers of private vets as well to be part of the overall response, which is continuing.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do we have a handle on how many pets? That was the livestock numbers. Do we know the number of pets?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It is interesting. We visited the Animal Welfare League truck the other day and there are actually fewer numbers of pets than maybe was expected that have been impacted. Through the evacuation centres a lot of people had pets taken care of briefly. Those that are moving out are taking their pets with them as their companion animals. There has been a lot of provision made for pets to be stored safely at certain areas, but in fact the numbers are very low as people are taking them with them, not unexpectedly.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. Minister, I am not going to ask you the price of bread, but what I will do is let you know that I have printed up this morning the cost of cauliflower—which is about \$7.90 a kilo—and broccoli. The reason I am doing this is because farmers are complaining, I think quite validly, that the price at the farm gate is now not matching the price when you walk into a supermarket to pick up a head of cauliflower for your cauliflower rice or your cauliflower mash. Minister, what research is the department doing to assist farmers to better reflect the input costs in their organisation to achieve a fair and decent price for their produce?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Unfortunately, farmers—whether it is sheep, beef or horticulture—have for most of my life been price takers not price makers. That is a difficult part of what agriculture is. Now, there are different ways that business models and co-ops try to work together to try to change that, but I think everyone who is in agriculture wants to make a good living. Thankfully, at the moment there is a very good living to be made—the ag sector was worth nearly \$21 billion last year and is absolutely on an upward spiral, which is fantastic. But you are right; there are challenges all the way through the supply chain, from cost of fertiliser to cost of labour to cost of diesel, but that is something that farmers take on board. We have a significant program of research around helping farmers become technologically savvy to help with all of those challenges. Scott, you might like to provide a bit of an update on where we are at with some of our pretty amazing programs.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes. We can come to some of those details—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: This afternoon, Mr Hansen, I am going to spend a bit more time around the work the department is doing around input costs for farmers.

SCOTT HANSEN: What I would say is that we have a number of monitoring programs that assist us keeping track of those. Probably the best one, and one we have spoken about before here or in inquiries previously, is dairy monitoring. We have a number of dairy farms across the State in which we continue to collect detail—both physical and financial data—to reflect year-on-year changes on costs of inputs and also the prices received, to try to give us an indication as to farmers' terms of trade for that sector. The majority of the rest of the work that gets done in this "share of the consumer dollar" work is done nationally, and that is obviously because our supply chains operate on a national basis and a national approach.

Hence, you will find that the vast majority of this work is done at an ABARES level in terms of looking at the share of the consumer dollar or by the respective national RDCs—research and development corporations—as part of their economic analysis of their sectors and their industries. Something like dairy, which is a bit more limited in terms of its spread across the State because of the perishability of the product, we do have good monitoring on. We will be producing those reports soon. But for the majority of the rest—horticulture and particularly livestock—because of the national nature of the supply chains, that work is done nationally.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay. Minister, I have no doubt—and Mr Barrett is about to find this out. Most of the country MPs duck into the local Woolies when they come to Sydney to buy their fruit and veg for the week that we are here. You will have this type of price shock, really: \$8 for a head of cauliflower. The department's work on input costs—for instance, the Ukraine. Have we any assessment now on what impact that is going to have on the input costs for our farming sector that eventually lead into the final food price that everyone pays when they go to the supermarket?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: We know there are definitely impacts on fertiliser cost. There is impact on steel prices to put up fencing. There are impacts every step of the way. But a modern agricultural participant is always looking at ways of minimising those input costs—whether it is reducing nitrogen, utilising nitrogen in different ways or fixing nitrogen rather than spreading nitrogen. There are a whole range of ways that people adapt to that. At the end of the day, it is about trying to produce the best product you can and sell it for the most money you can, as the farmer, but trying to keep affordable costs for us as consumers. That is what everyone is trying to balance all the time.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: In the public domain today they are talking about—prices are going to continue to go up for fruit and veg. There are other contributing factors, though, Minister, that we can have some sort of an impact on. One of them is the agricultural workforce. I know you have only been in the gig for a short period of time. At previous estimates I have asked this question a lot around agricultural workforce requirements. COVID is now almost into its third year or is into its third year in Australia. We have known for quite some time that we have an issue around agricultural workforce issues. Minister, what are you doing to address it?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Look, I agree completely. There have been issues for a while now, including in your old shearing type of scenario. A lot of the workforce would traditionally come from overseas. In shearing, it is from New Zealand, who come over in teams. Fruit picking—coming from all over South-East Asia. Traditionally we had grey nomads doing a lot of picking as well, but they have been staying at home because of fears of COVID. The whole workforce scenario has changed. One thing we do know is that we need to encourage our young people to be part of that solution going forward. I recently announced the Agricultural Pathways program, which is providing scholarships for young people who are looking for a career in agriculture to spend some time at one of our actual research stations—so, a paid position while they are also doing further study.

They may have started a Certificate II in ag. They can do a Certificate III and IV or a diploma whilst being employed by DPI at one of the ag stations. That is a really good, clear pathway forward for people who want a career in agriculture. And then, there are people who just want part-time work doing whatever it might be. The drain has always been to larger centres, although at the moment people are not leaving our regional areas like they once did. So there is an opportunity to try to capture them within agriculture, whatever portion of agriculture it might be. Providing clear pathways, providing opportunities and scholarships, and signifying the great opportunity ag is as a career, I think, is a really good pathway forward.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, the former Minister announced the east coast task force—I think that is what it is called—to look at this issue. Have you met with the east coast task force at all?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I do not think I have met with the east coast task force, no.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you know how many times the east coast task force has met since its inception?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not sure. Scott, have you got any idea?

SCOTT HANSEN: It met once to establish the group of senior bureaucrats to work across the jurisdictions involved and to continue to share information about organisations and businesses that were looking to bring in Pacific island workers under the Pacific island workers scheme. That first meeting was basically the meeting that was required for all the Ministers to give imprimaturs to all their departments to work collaboratively and collectively together. We have been working seamlessly with Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT. The key thing we have been doing is—like, it was easy when it was the big operators who could fill a plane with the number of staff they needed to bring in.

But what we have been doing is making sure that someone who might need 20 from Mildura is linked up with someone who might need 50 from Gatton or someone who might need 30 in Shepparton and putting together plane loads that can be brought in and distributed across. Since the opening up and the freeing up of COVID pathways for those workers into the country, that has significantly reduced our need to be involved in coordinating that labour input because of no longer requiring quarantining upon arrival and no longer needing the mandatory quarantining arrangements and the limitations on incoming flights. And so, it has really switched back now to the businesses managing that themselves in terms of bringing in those workers.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: This afternoon I want to spend a bit more time talking about the Pacific islander program and just what the department's role is in making sure that people are not being ripped off in that program. I will flag that I am going to come back to that. Minister, one of the big announcements from your predecessor around this ag workforce issue and the shortfall was the harvest leave initiative. I know the department would be aware that I have been asking questions on a very regular basis about harvest leave. The most recent numbers no doubt you are aware of, based on my questions to the Chamber. Would you consider this program to have been a success, Minister?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Look, if you purely look at numbers probably you might not think it was a success, but there were a lot of things that changed the course of harvest in general terms. One was that rain caused havoc. As a DPI staff member, you might have wanted to be part of a harvest program and you had put in your two weeks of leave to go and do that, but then it rained for that two weeks. The amount of people who ended up actually being able to help was definitely impacted by weather and the fact that there was no certainty around when harvest started or finished.

In my part of the world, harvest was still going on up until February, which is extremely late. The certainty around that had changed. I think the idea of what harvest leave was about is a good idea. In regional areas we have amazing people that have had a career in ag and are quite capable and quite keen to actually contribute back in and help, whether it is driving a header or a chaser bin—whatever it might be—in wheat, but also picking berries, or whatever, on the coast. I think the idea is a good one. Unfortunately, impact-wise, it made it difficult.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, as of today, how many applications have been received for harvest leave?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I think it was thirty-something. Sorry, that was how many took part. I am not sure how many applications there were.

SCOTT HANSEN: Thirty-six staff providing 169 days of harvest support so far.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I do not want to—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thirty-six.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: One hundred and sixty-nine days though. That is not insignificant.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I do not want to single out which is the member of the Senior Executive Service, but there was, in my questions to the House, leadership being shown here—there was one member of the Senior Executive Service, in the most current data, that took it up. Is there any reason why the SES-level staff did not take up the option?

SCOTT HANSEN: I can tell you why I did not take up the option. That was because the two weeks I planned in West Wyalong ended up being delayed and delayed until it ended up being one day here, a day, three days later, a day, four days later—it ended up being unworkable with the floods and with the wet weather in terms of what it did on harvest.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, do you intend to carry this program going forward?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I think we would look at it as being an opportunity again, yes. People do want to try to provide that help. We were coming out of a known workforce shortage, which you have been highlighting. The idea that we can have staff help out is a great one. It was at no cost to the farmers, and it was all agreed to by the department. I think it was a really generous thing for the department to do, and 160 hours of harvest support is not a drop in the ocean.

SCOTT HANSEN: One hundred and sixty-nine days.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Sorry, 169 days.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: If you are looking at taking this forward, would you be having conversations with the PSA around how this fits into the enterprise agreements?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I guess I would, yes. First of all, I would be talking to the department about how best to structure things to maybe make it a bit more flexible but, yes, we would do negotiations as needed.

SCOTT HANSEN: Sorry, can I just come in here. Obviously, we are still running in the current environment through to the end of the financial year. To pre-empt the questions and the conversation that we will have at the next round of estimates, you would be aware that a lot of us were also lined up to assist in the

horticultural harvest that is shaping up across most of our horticultural districts at the moment. But you also are now aware that we have got 370 staff deployed at the moment on floods and JE. We are going to prioritise that over being able to do this. Does that mean that this is a bad idea? No. It just means that if we have got the flexibility here to do this, it is great. One hundred and sixty-nine days' worth of assistance is what it is. At the same time, finding that clean air for people to be able to do that when we have got these other priorities is always going to be tough.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen, can I just clarify? By my reading of the annual report and the budget papers, it says about 3,750 EFTs would be eligible for this program.

SCOTT HANSEN: I know in DPI it is 1,880. Then add on LLS and DRNSW.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The other agencies.

STEVE ORR: Just to add to that, you are looking at the DRNSW cluster generally. The numbers which you have in the annual report relate to—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The whole cluster.

STEVE ORR: —part of the cluster. You also need to include LLS there, which would be another 1,100 or so staff involved.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So 2,744 in DRNSW and almost 1,000 staff in LLS. Mr Orr, would that be right?

STEVE ORR: That is right.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Which comes pretty close to 3,700 or thereabouts. And how many? Thirty-six?

SCOTT HANSEN: Thirty-six.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, in the time I have left I am a bit concerned. There was an article in the paper today titled "Snowy 2.0 could catapult invasive fish species into new waterways". The article says—and this is the bit that concerns me:

Redfin perch is a declared notifiable pest under the Biosecurity Regulation 2017. It is illegal to possess, buy, sell or move this pest in NSW. To transfer water between Talbingo and Tantangara, Snowy 2.0 would have to obtain a special exemption to this rule.

Seriously, has there been an exemption granted for the Snowy 2.0 project to the Biosecurity Regulation 2017?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not aware. Sean, have you got any—

SCOTT HANSEN: The answer is no.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So this article is incorrect? They cannot transfer redfin perch from Talbingo and Tantangara or between the two?

SCOTT HANSEN: I will go to either John or Sean, but the bottom line is they have no exemption. What they need to do is produce a management plan to manage the risk of that from a threatened species perspective and from a biosecurity perspective. That is what they are currently working up at the moment—what those management plans are to reduce that risk in terms of the spread of that invasive pest.

JOHN TRACEY: The infrastructure approval, which was approved by the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, requires the minimisation of biosecurity risk. That is our focus—to ensure that happens to minimise the impact of the development on threatened species and to minimise the impact of the development on rec fish. The requirement there is for Snowy Hydro to be developing plans that we have to approve prior to commencing operation.

SCOTT HANSEN: The important thing here is that they do not have an exemption. They need to demonstrate how they comply.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Congratulations, Minister. It is nice to see you and all of the officials here today. Minister, are you comfortable with the fact that New South Wales taxpayers subsidised the destruction of 13,500 hectares of native forest last financial year at the cost of at least \$440 a hectare? Are you comfortable with that outcome?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I disagree with those figures. If we look at the Forestry estate, that is two million hectares.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You chopped down 13,500 hectares at a net loss of \$6 million. Do your numbers go in a different direction? Have you got a different form of maths?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: If you take a \$6 million loss and divide it by two million—six divided by two is three. There is three bucks a hectare.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You know that the only economic part of the native forestry division, under its current arrangements, is the economic returns it gets from logging. The economic returns they got from logging ended up costing taxpayers \$6 million more than it returned, and we end up costing \$440 a hectare to destroy the forest.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I disagree with that figure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much did it cost per hectare to destroy the forest?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have just told you. Six million divided by two is three. The \$6 million loss over a two million hectare managed estate is three. Sorry, that is my maths.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You know that, for 95 per cent of the forest estate, Forestry NSW does nothing—no weed management and no pest management. You just let it run rampant for 95 per cent of the estate.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I think they might disagree with that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much did Forestry NSW spend on controlling introduced animals last financial year? How much did it spend?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Anshul, have you got the figures on that?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I would like to actually explain that a bit, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, just tell me the dollar figure.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: If I can, please. I think it is an important point.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much did it spend on controlling—

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I can get you that information as well, but—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Good. That is what I am asking. This is not a free shot.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: It is of the order of millions of dollars. We have two million hectares of native forest and we harvest less than 2 per cent a year. This is an important point because I think we are often misrepresented here. We harvest 2 per cent.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much did you spend?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: We harvest—if I can just finish this—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much did you spend on controlling wild introduced animals in the two million hectares of State forest last year, Minister?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: We will provide that answer—

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I will provide that information—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much did you spend on pest and weed control over the two million hectares of State forest last year?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The two million hectares is actually managed by—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much did you spend?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: —Forestry Corp. I do not have that figure to hand, but we will get that for you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is it about 10 cents a hectare or five cents a hectare?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It is not 441, which you are alluding to is the loss.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is the loss you made from the primary financial activity of Forestry Corporation in the native forest division, which is chopping down and selling forest largely for export woodchip.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That is completely incorrect.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Of the native forest harvested last financial year, how much of it, by volume, went on woodchip?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: By volume, I do not know.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No idea?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I know, but the majority of the operations is for high-value sawlogs. That is what we extract. This information is published, Mr Shoebridge, on our website.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But you do not know?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: We harvest about one million tonnes in total of products from the native forests, and that is predominantly sawlogs. But there is a whole variety of products that come out of it: sawlogs, salvage logs and pulp as well.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There is a 55,000-tonne bulk carrier currently docked at Eden to take export woodchip from our native forests to a port in southern China, I think. What are New South Wales taxpayers getting in return for the 55,000 tonnes of our native forest that is being ground up and chipped, and that will be exported? How much do we get in return for that?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Your assertion that native forests are managed for woodchips is way off the mark.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking you about the ship.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am just telling you that I disagree with your assertion.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking you about the ship that is docked at Eden to take 55,000 tonnes of woodchipped native forests—from our public forests. How much are we getting in return for that amount of destruction of our forest for those woodchip exports, Minister?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I disagree with the assertion in the question, but we can find out what the value of that is.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You disagree that there is a ship docked at Eden to take 55,000 tonnes of woodchip export? You disagree with that?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I do not know.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are we in a post-fact world?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have not seen the ship, Mr Shoebridge, so I am not sure. But we will find out the value of that woodchip. But, as you have heard, native forests are not managed for woodchip. They are managed for high-value sawn timber.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So where are the 55,000 tonnes of export woodchip coming from that are about to be pumped into Eden?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That would be a by-product of the selective harvesting in our native forests.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That cannot seriously—

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Are you disagreeing with that fact?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am. By bulk, the primary outcome for many of the logging operations in New South Wales is export woodchip. You do not understand that, Minister?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I disagree.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alright. But you do not have any figures or any data to respond to it?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Mr Chaudhary, I am sure, can provide you detail, and he just has.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Give us the detail, Mr Chaudhary.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I will provide you the breakdown there, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: See, he did not provide the detail, Minister. It did not happen.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: The Minister is correct. I will get that for you, Mr Shoebridge. But can I just clarify—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is still not happening.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: —that the operation—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is still not happening.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: As the Minister said, we go into the forest to generate high-value sawlogs and the by-product is residue or pulpwood. That is what goes into woodchips.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But you do not have any data, you do not have figures—

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: But these figures are published on our website on an annual basis.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —and you do not know what the return will be to New South Wales taxpayers for the 55,000 tonnes of export woodchip that is about to be sent out of Eden. You do not know that, Mr Chaudhary?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Of what, sorry?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The 55,000 tonnes of our forest that has been ground up and woodchipped for export, and is about to be loaded on a ship in Eden—you do not know what the return is for that?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Again, the point is that when we go into the forest we are harvesting the trees for high-value—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is a bloody big by-product, is it not, Mr Chaudhary?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Point of order—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is a bloody big 55,000 tonnes of by-product.

The CHAIR: I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: My point of order is not against the line of questioning. Can we just give the respondents a chance to respond? It is consistently not happening.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. You probably need to give them a little bit more time to answer the question. I appreciate that he was not answering the question in the way that you probably would have liked.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Or at all.

The CHAIR: Or at all. Mr Hansen, were you looking at assisting in this?

SCOTT HANSEN: I would just hate Mr Shoebridge to go—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you going to tell us how much, Mr Hansen?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes, thank you. It did give me time to google it, because it is all publically available. The last figures, which were 2020, for hardwood native out of New South Wales: "saw and veneer logs" was 456,000 cubic metres, "pulp logs" was 149,000 cubic metres and "other" was 23.84 thousand cubic metres. I can go down—because we have hardwood plantation details out of that, which is another layer, and then down to the softwoods as well.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can tell us how much of the red gum went on firewood?

SCOTT HANSEN: If you give me another bit of time to google, I will probably be able to find that as well.

The CHAIR: Perhaps on notice you can come back in the afternoon and provide that, Ms Hurst?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, when we were in our last session you said that you had consulted with vets who were independent of the greyhound racing industry in regard to the FSI element of the bill. Did that consultation with independent vets happen before your meeting with Greyhound Racing NSW or after?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Both. I am not saying I have had sit-down meetings, but I have had phone conversations and incidental chats to other vets about it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Was that before or after your meeting with Greyhound Racing NSW?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I would say probably both—before and after.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Before and after in regard to this one element?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, as in it is a discussion point that people are talking about.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: In our last round you also said that you did not believe that there was a conflict of interest in the role in regard to protecting industry and animal welfare. With that in mind, Minister, and given that every independent welfare expert and welfare organisation, including the RSPCA, has called for an end to the use of battery cages in the egg industry because of cruelty concerns, will you be supporting a phase-out of battery cages if that is what is proposed in the final national standards and guidelines?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It is one of those things, again, that is going through a process. I will look at that report as it comes through and talk to the relevant people involved before making any decisions.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So, Minister, at this stage you are refusing to support the recommendations that come from that national process?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not refusing to support them. I just said I will take on board any recommendations and consult on it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You will not confirm your support for the national recommendations at this stage?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I will listen to those recommendations and consult.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you aware of how many RSPCA inspectors there are in rural and regional New South Wales?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Not off the top of my head, no.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You are also the member for Dubbo. Do you know how many RSPCA inspectors there are in the Dubbo region?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: No, not really. I think four, but that could be incorrect.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I think that might be the number of vets. I think you might only have one RSPCA inspector in Dubbo. Are you aware that historically the New South Wales Government funds only 6 per cent of the RSPCA's annual enforcement budget? I highlight that I am only talking about the enforcement budget, not about other random grants that the authorities may receive.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, I am aware that it is funded to a certain level and grants provide other funding.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you aware that 6 per cent is the lowest of any State and Territory in Australia?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That is an operational question. I really do not have anything to do with that. Scott might have some—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You do not have anything to do with the amount of money that is given to the RSPCA to uphold the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It is an operational question. It is really not one that the Minister is in charge of.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I will speak to Mr Hansen this afternoon further about this, but I would be interested to get your thoughts, Minister. The ACT covers about 79 per cent of the enforcement cost. Tasmania covers about 93 per cent. Here in New South Wales we are covering only 6 per cent. Does it concern you that the charity that is given those enforcement powers is funded in such a small amount to be able to uphold the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There is a range of other organisation that do contribute to that as well. But I am sure the director general might have some thoughts on that.

SCOTT HANSEN: If this is a line you want to progress this afternoon, you can. As you would also be aware, the amount that we make in recurrent funding year on year is dwarfed by the one-off funding announcements that are made by the Government to support—whether it is RSPCA or Animal Welfare League.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But, Mr Hansen, they are very, very rarely to do with the actual enforcement of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, correct?

SCOTT HANSEN: No. In 2020 there was a \$400,000 investment for additional compliance officers for investigation into puppy factories. That is directly a compliance activity. That was a significant increase in the year-on-year recurrent funding.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: It was double.

SCOTT HANSEN: I cannot work out quickly in my head what the \$10.5 million that was given to it last year—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I believe that had more to do with the establishment of its impounding facilities and very little to do with POCTAA.

SCOTT HANSEN: And in terms of its rapid-response facilities and a number of other infrastructure and staffing pieces. I agree with your sentiment that we get extremely good value, in terms of what our contribution is, to what is an overall operating expense for RSPCA NSW of about \$57 million per annum. That comes with expectations around what they are able to do with regards to compliance activities and, to date, our conversations with RSPCA and Animal Welfare League continue to be around how do we improve the linkages between government and enforcement agencies.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, looking at the budget estimate papers, in total the Government gave \$47.9 million to horse and greyhound racing, but for the enforcement of POCTAA it was just \$400,000 to the RSPCA and just \$75,000 to the Animal Welfare League to actually uphold legislation that we as a Parliament put together and asked them to uphold. I am not going to ask you for your opinion of those other industries, but obviously there is a major discrepancy when you are talking about certain industries getting nearly \$50 million and others less than \$500,000 for the upholding of criminal legislation that we ourselves have written. Do you not see that that discrepancy is problematic?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Both horse and dog racing industries are major industries that have major requirements around animal welfare specifically imposed on them. So it is understandable there is a high level of financial support needed and provided by industry but also supported by Government. In the other case, more around companion animals, as Mr Hansen said, it may not be in the initial figures but there is constant support and grants for the support of companion animals and prevention of cruelty to animals, and that is something that will continue to be looked at.

SCOTT HANSEN: I will just say, Chair, there is a third enforcement agency that we have not talked about here so far, which is the NSW Police Force, which we do provide considerable funding for.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, I am going to pass up a document to you. I appreciate it is not from your department. It goes to commodity forecasts for export up till 2056. To save you a bit of bedtime reading, I will ask you to turn to page 14, where we have a projection of commodities being exported. The far right column looks at the total increase. Can you see that total?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes.

The CHAIR: You can see with a large proportion of our commodities we are going to see an increase in export leading to 2056. I also ask you to turn to page 25, where it looks at the full export containers similarly of goods. Once again, the far right-hand corner looks at the total increase in those full export containers.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes.

The CHAIR: A lot of rural exporters have contacted me saying they are struggling to actually get containers up and back in time through Port Botany because Port Botany is running at 97 per cent. I appreciate that is not your portfolio, but has your department done any research as to how that Newcastle containerisation, essentially ban or embargo, has impacted those rural economies in terms of export? They are saying to me, "Tell the Minister to stop throwing money at intermodals", "Can you just fix Port Botany and open up Newcastle?" Has the department done any research, and if it has not, are you prepared to look at doing some research as to what the impact is?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There have clearly been impacts on all parts of the economy through Port Botany. Newcastle and also a southern port have been talked about as far as solutions. I am not sure if there is any specific research that has been done. Scott, are you happy to take that on board?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes. We have done no specific modelling or forecasting.

The CHAIR: Are you prepared to look at and try and get a scope of how this may be restraining our exporters?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes. I think we can take that on board and do some work around what that means and if there are opportunities for us to be involved in a pathway forward, absolutely.

The CHAIR: Awesome. Thank you, Minister. I turn to trout cod closures. You might be aware that there is an annual total closure on trout cod, and that is coming up. It is normally for about three months. Are you aware of that, Minister?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not a trout fisherman but, yes, continue.

The CHAIR: Are you aware that this is a total closure? I have received several representations from South West Anglers and also businesses in these areas where they are saying that for three months they estimate a 70 per cent downturn in their income because of that total closure. You are not only saying, "You cannot take trout cod", you are saying that kids cannot go in there and fish for yellow belly, kids cannot go in there and fish for carp. Minister, what is the status of the trout cod recovery plan, because the latest data is from 2017. I do not want to dwell on the former Minister, but he committed to an update being done in 2021?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I might have to throw to Mr Sloan on this to see what the update is. Our restocking program is incredibly good, but he might have some more detail.

SEAN SLOAN: Thanks for the question, Minister. There has been a review. The species is still conservation dependent. I think the best thing I can do is take that on notice and come back with some more information, with an update, if that is okay.

The CHAIR: While you are taking it on notice, can you take on notice whether you believe from that research that a total ban is required or can we go to a no take of trout cod but still allow people to go in and fish for other species? Can you come back with some comments on whether that is possible?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, I am sure we can do that.

The CHAIR: Thank you. In the two minutes I have got, I might turn to the Southern Fish Trawl. Minister, we were both on the telly a few weeks ago on that one. Where are we up to with that, Minister? Is it actually possible to turn this around and go back against an agreement that we may have signed with the Commonwealth well before your time?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I think the Commonwealth and State departments have been talking again recently about how that Southern Fish Trawl looks. The idea is actually to maintain a harbour strategy and look after fish stocks. That is the basis of the Southern Fish Trawl and the proposal around New South Wales licences transforming into Commonwealth licences. As I have said, I am more than happy to hear if people have specific issues with how that would happen, but it is actually about achieving the best result, which is maintaining the fish resource and giving people the opportunity to fish for it in those waters.

The CHAIR: Minister, have you heard the concerns that transferring to Commonwealth is not going to achieve the best result because you are then going to bring Commonwealth trawlers into what is a fish nursery for iconic species?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: But that is not what would happen. The Commonwealth waters start after three nautical miles. They are not allowed any further in, where the New South Wales fish fleet is. It does not provide that provision at all. That is a bit of a furphy.

The CHAIR: Are you aware that the Commonwealth fish trawl have lower standards in terms of net size and meshing size?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: This is about protecting fish, which this will do. It will not allow Commonwealth fisheries in any closer. It will allow New South Wales fisheries further out but not vice versa. It protects fish stocks and I think achieves everything it needs to achieve. No-one has reached out particularly saying they have any further concerns about where this is headed at the moment.

The CHAIR: On notice, can you provide the discard rates for all species for the past five years through the Southern Fish Trawl and also on notice can you provide any advice your department has received from the Commonwealth trawl about their sustainability for such species as dory, snapper, et cetera?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, we can do that through Mr Sloan this afternoon.

The CHAIR: Looking at the clock, we have about two minutes. Unless any of the departmental staff have some brief updates, we can go to a break.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Chair, can I just answer the questions that we took away?

The CHAIR: Yes.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: On pest and weed, the Forestry Corporation last year spent almost \$3 million looking after pest and weed control in the State forests and for hardwood forests. I think the question

was around how much pulpwood is generated in comparison to other products. Pulpwood last year as a percentage of the sawlogs and salvage logs was about 23 per cent. So by and large, as we say, we produce high value sawlogs from the forests.

SCOTT HANSEN: Chair, not one that we took on notice, but there was a question about companion animals recently from Mr Veitch with regards to the floods. One figure that we have just been able to generate is the average daily companion animals housed. So far, every day of the response it has been averaging at 191 companion animals housed. Interestingly, that compares to 113 in the 2021 North Coast flood response. So a significant increase in the number of companion animals on a daily basis, and we are not seeing the tail off that that you would normally see.

The CHAIR: That takes us to 11 o'clock. We will come back at 11.15 after morning tea.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back to budget estimates. I will now throw straight to the Opposition.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Sorry, Chair. Could I just make a brief comment before we start again, just to correct something. I think, under questioning from Mr Field earlier in regard to contracts for wood supply, I said agreements would go to Cabinet for a decision. That is incorrect. I just want to clarify that the Government is party to those final contracts. As Minister I will be the one who does sign them off. There is still industry consultation happening right now. When there is an appropriate time, I will be then briefed on where that is up to. I look forward to making decisions on those contracts. I can assure Mr Field, although he is not here at the moment, that those contracts will be set in line with long-term sustainable yield models, as they are required to be. I just wanted to clarify that. Thank you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, I am hearing some concerns—I hope probably, no doubt, you are as well in the regions—that DPI is looking to offload the Rural Women's Network. As you know, they run things like the Rural Women's Award and the Rural Women's Gathering and the Hidden Treasures Honour Roll. Can you rule out that that is going to occur?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have no awareness of that at all. Scott, have you got any comments on that?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes. "Unload" is a bit of a rough term for it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Offload.

SCOTT HANSEN: Offload. When the Rural Women's Network was set up, there was really no other activity that was systematically across government with regard to engaging women in rural and regional settings. However, obviously, now there is a whole portfolio and a dedicated Minister to this space. So our conversation has been how do we actually make sure it gets empowered by actually being part of that broader portfolio's suite of activities, as opposed to something that DPI does on the side. So we are actually actively working with the new portfolio, with the new agency, to work out how they bring it into their suite of activities for regional women, to actually make it a bigger and bolder activity, rather than something that we do in addition to because we were the only ones doing it at the time.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So, Minister, the program is going to continue, though.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Maybe in a different guise. I think the idea is that it becomes more about a women's program with the Minister for Women as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So things like the Hidden Treasures Honour Roll will not cease to occur.

SCOTT HANSEN: This is all just about who delivers it, as opposed to what gets delivered.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You can see that is why people are raising concerns. Clearly something is happening there. They just have not been, I guess, made aware that this is what you are going to do. People are concerned it is going to disappear altogether. That is just not the case.

SCOTT HANSEN: At the moment, our conversation is just about how it gets built into the broader suite of programs and delivered under a different portfolio, rather than being delivered by us.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But it is critical the program continues, though—all those programs?

SCOTT HANSEN: We certainly see it as a valuable program, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think that is a good starting point, that it is critical, and that it should continue. "But then let's have a conversation about what that looks like", I guess, is what you are saying.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes. That is it—and how they might take it out to a broader audience or to a broader reach as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. Minister, I want to talk about the farmland at Cudgen. As you are aware—2005, I think it was—there was a planning document that designated the land would be State-significant farmland. I am pretty certain that you are conversant with this patch of New South Wales. Have you spoken to the Minister for Planning to continue the protection of the Cudgen farmlands?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have not specifically spoken to him about that. I know it is in a bit of a holding pattern at the moment. But I have not specifically spoken to him about that parcel of land.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, can you give a guarantee, then, that this land will not be lost to non-agricultural development?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Until I have a proper briefing with the planning Minister—the one thing that we have seen, obviously, from current scenarios in the northern rivers region is that any land that is not flood prone is valuable land for everyone. So I think there needs to be a fairly detailed discussion I have with the planning Minister before I can make any assertions around any of that. But I take your point. It is valued as farmland, absolutely.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The preference would be tractors on that land, not bulldozers. I have stood there. It is sensational farming land. I think the member for Tweed has pretty much put his political career on this. If the Government allows it to be developed, he is out.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I will certainly work with the local member on that and continue to consult and definitely talk more to the planning Minister about what might be available there.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, this is a land use conflict issue. Has the ag commissioner been engaged at all in the processes occurring up at Cudgen right now?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I was going to say, actually, that is probably a good time to hear from Daryl around some of the land use conflict that he has seen in the report. Have you got some thoughts there?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Specifically about Cudgen thanks, Mr Quinlivan, because this afternoon I am going to explore a bit more, if I can, of your report.

DARYL QUINLIVAN: Sure. I cannot recall that specific case being raised with me recently. I am pretty sure it was not mentioned in any of the submissions or other material I received during the review process that we undertook last year. So that is a—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So the State-significant farmland at Cudgen was not raised with you.

DARYL QUINLIVAN: I am racking my memory for any references to it. I cannot find any as we speak.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, Transgrid's proposal for a 500-kVA HumeLink infrastructure corridor—down my part of the world, this is a very hot topic. In fact, they talk about it now more than they do the weather. I have just received more correspondence, I think, over the weekend from some farmers near Adelong that are going to be impacted upon. Have you had any discussions with the environment Minister and energy Minister around the impact on farmland of these proposed corridors?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Not that particular one. There has been a lot of work done around the Cassilis-Merriwa area and the lines there. In fact, there has been an agreement now to move where the original pathway of those was. Consultation is really key on these sorts of scenarios. EnergyCo is, in this particular case around Cassilis-Merriwa, the one that is renegotiating around where the new corridor will be. But anywhere where there is impact on community, farmland in any way, I think, there needs to be genuine consultation. We have been looking for pathways that might take the lines through Crown reserves or travelling stock reserves, anything like that, that takes it away from farmland. In some cases, that will not be possible. But I think it is imperative that we do everything we can to make sure that we explore all those avenues.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is causing a lot of angst, Minister, down my way. I think the most recent proposed corridor—there has been a number of iterations of this now. There is a lot of lines on maps. But it was going to go through Forestry land. Has Forest Corp been involved in discussions around this easement taking up some of its land?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I might throw to Anshul to see if he has got some thoughts there.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I think, Mr Veitch, yes, we have had some initial discussions. I do not believe any resolution has been reached as yet.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Chaudhary, are you aware of any maps of the new proposed corridor going through Forest Corp land?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I personally have not seen any maps. But I know that my office is working with the stakeholders there. They might have seen something.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can we take on notice whether or not that is the case?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Yes. Sure. I will get that for you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I want to explore this further this afternoon. Minister, again, have issues such as these powerline corridors—this is a 500-kVA. It is like 200 metres wide. It takes up a pretty fair swathe of land. Has this been an issue that has been referred off to the ag commissioner for consideration?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That absolutely forms part of what I have now tasked the ag commissioner to do, and that is around conflict between not just agricultural land but, let's say, ag land, community resource housing and the growth in renewables. Renewable energy and that sector is growing exponentially, as is agriculture. That is exactly why I have asked Daryl to take on board this new body of work, which will specifically look at renewables but incorporating things like the powerlines that are taking that renewable energy back to the east coast. So it absolutely will form part of that and the ag commissioner is in the process now of bringing together an expert panel to review what those policies and procedures are and how we can make sure there is a pathway for community as well as renewables and ag to work hand in hand into the future.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It appears from my conversations with the landholders down my way—in the Ellerslie Valley, through Adelong and the like, and past Killimicat—that Snowy 2.0 was given approvals and no-one thought about the transmission infrastructure that is going to be required once it is up and running. It just appears that that was an afterthought. You are talking about renewable projects. I think we had a bill go through the Parliament talking about hydrogen. Have you had any conversations with Minister Kean about the requirements, as a part of the consideration of these projects, that everyone gets all of the information on the table, including where the transmission corridors will go?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Absolutely. I have got Minister Kean as energy Minister and the planning Minister both as part of the process going forward around the work we are tasking the ag commissioner with now. It is in agreement that we need to find very clear opportunities but also very clear pathways to make sure that communities feel like they are part of the journey as opposed to being left behind. The reason I am doing it now is that it is at a critical time with the growth of renewables, the need to distribute power and the growth of housing. We need to do this now to make sure that we are not looking back in 20 years saying we should have thought of that. It is quite a big job that Mr Quinlivan will have, in quite a short period of time, to come up with some very clear recommendations around reviewing what is currently in place and what we can get to in the future.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, do you agree that the closure of Baiada processing plant in the Hunter is going to be an issue for the workforce up there?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There is no suggestion—sorry, there was a media suggestion that Baiada might close.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is not the case?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: We specifically reached out to the company, which confirmed that there are no plans for closure. If there had been any plans they would certainly have made contact with staff in a very clear manner and in a timely manner as well. But the suggestions that came up—it was probably a few weeks ago—are not founded on fact at all.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: My friends on the Central Coast have been into my office about this issue.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I spoke to one of the local members up there, who was quite concerned. From the company itself, there were no plans there at all.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, I want to talk now about the dairy advocate. Who is the dairy advocate today? Currently, who is our dairy advocate?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There is not one currently.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When did the former dairy advocate cease to be in the role?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The exact date?

SCOTT HANSEN: It was 22 September 2021.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Will there be a new dairy advocate appointed?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I do not think so at this point. The dairy advocate was brought in for a specific reason, to work on some pathways for the dairy industry. From the feedback I have had back from the department, that has been done in a meaningful way and it is not thought that there is a need for a dairy advocate anymore.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Has Mr Zandstra still been meeting with dairy farmers post the termination date, in any capacity, do we know?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not sure.

SCOTT HANSEN: I assume that he would be in whatever other additional capacity he has but certainly not as the dairy advocate.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is there going to be a review, or has there been a review, Minister, of that role and whether or not it value-added to the operations of agriculture, particularly dairy farming?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Has there been a review? I think there probably would be a discussion around what value that provided and whether it was needed again. But the advice I have been provided is that the purpose was served and actually done in a meaningful way, but it is not necessarily needed anymore. Scott, do you want to add to that?

SCOTT HANSEN: A key output has been the Dairy Industry Action Plan and the recommendations out of it, which have gone to the Government. That action plan recommended that, to actually have meaningful outcomes for the dairy industry, the majority of the actions needed to be led and coordinated by the industry, hence the creation of the panel and a chair now for that panel to drive the implementation plan and to make sure that both government and industry are meeting the aspirations that are captured within that plan. So we have gone from a single-focus advocate going around, coalescing the different groups and the different information and pulling them together through targeted consultation, to that Dairy Industry Action Plan to now a panel and a chair for that panel to be driving implementation and monitoring the rollout for that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister do you think the role actually added value?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I think it probably did at the time. But, as Scott has mentioned, the panel now has taken over that role. We have had, particularly in recent times, a lot of involvement and contact with the dairy industry, right up to northern New South Wales and into south-east Queensland and all the way down through the South Coast, around flooding. So there are committees that are in regular contact. We have got a very good, open relationship through the department as well. So I think the panel has taken over that role in a way that is sustainable and will achieve, long term, what dairy needs and wants.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, the floods have had an impact on agriculture in general. But often forgotten—a bit like the bushfires—are our oyster farmers. In all the packages of support that are being provided post the floods in New South Wales, is consideration being given to assistance for our oyster growers?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Absolutely. They are one of the groups that we have spoken to. Only last week I was on a hook-up with oyster growers, who are also prawn farmers.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You are having meetings with these people? You are a step ahead of your predecessor.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The oyster industry has been smashed up there. There is no other way of putting it. Without giving too much away, there is a series of proposals that we are putting forward around industry support, and that is across the board, to make sure that industry is viable into the future, but also mitigating some of the scenarios like flood that will, no doubt, occur again and making sure that we have some planning in place around maybe doing things slightly differently. Our whole fishery resource up on that part of northern New South Wales has been impacted, but noticeably oyster growers have lost entire stock. There is no spat available. It has been a massive impact.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Also the Hawkesbury.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: In the Hawkesbury-Nepean, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: As part of this suite of assistance, are you looking at maybe waiving any of the fees that are applicable from your department?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, we are. Again, without going into too much detail because it has not actually been passed yet, we are looking at rates being waived for various sectors, more grants being available and more meaningful, longer-term grants and loans into the future as well to support industry.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Low-interest loans and grants as well? Okay. Minister, I want to go on to the water sharing plans for the eastern flowing rivers. I know you will be getting lots of representations because I think just about every person at this table is getting representations from a range of people about concerns about the impact of the water sharing plans. Currently they are draft but they will be in place, I think, from 1 July. Have you had any discussions at all with your colleague Minister Anderson about these water sharing plans and their impact on agriculture?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Not specifically in this role. I have certainly had discussions with the former water Minister as the member for Dubbo around water sharing plans in the Macquarie Valley, but the water sharing plan really is an issue for the water Minister. Obviously water plays a fairly key role through the Macquarie Valley as far as irrigated agriculture, but we have not specifically spoken about those plans, no.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Has your department provided any data or research that would inform the development of these water sharing plans?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am sure they would have to the water Minister.

SCOTT HANSEN: I might ask Mr Sloan to comment on that.

SEAN SLOAN: In DPI Fisheries we do have a role to provide technical input into the water sharing plans. We do not have a decision-making role; we have got an advisory role. That is around the impact on native fish. So we are involved in that process and we will continue to be involved in the process.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is fisheries, but what about farmers? For instance, on the lower Hunter I think there are turf farmers, around Maitland there are market gardeners, and the Manning have some issues as well which they are approaching our offices about. Irrigated agriculture is quite a complex arrangement. Are you at all—

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I mean, they are all taken into account obviously through the water Minister, so they are not forgotten about. But if you are asking, "Have we specifically provided advice?" I am not sure that we have.

SCOTT HANSEN: I would have to come back to you with what formal or informal mechanisms for sourcing of information from us has been underway.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can we talk about this this afternoon in a bit more detail?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Because I am actually concerned. It is more about what will be the impact on their operations now and what assistance is being provided once the water sharing plan—once that instrument is put in place and gazetted, what assistance is being provided post that to irrigated agriculture? There are dairy farmers ringing my office. There is a range of other agricultural pursuits. It is not just fisheries. I accept that fisheries have an issue as well. These water sharing plans for the eastern flowing rivers, the coastal rivers, are causing some angst and I want to know what we are doing. So if you could this afternoon, Mr Hansen, that would be good.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, just very quickly in the brief moments I have got left, talking about fishing, is there any reason why you are not the Minister for Agriculture and fisheries? Commercial fishers and recreational fishers tell me they feel like they have been forgotten in the ministerial allocations.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Trust me, they have not been forgotten. I have been talking a lot about fish and sharks. I am not sure why the title does not include it, but it does not include forestry either.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Well, you are pretty close to the old Primary Industries portfolio, which I think is probably what everyone wants, actually. It is only a title, but it actually means a lot to a lot of people. The fisheries people in particular feel like they are being left out.

The CHAIR: To be fair they felt left out by the former Minister as well. Ms Boyd.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good morning, Minister, and congratulations. I want to talk to you a little bit about flooding and the impact on animals across those flooded areas. Among the Lismore community, for

example, are a number of volunteer animal rescue and rehoming groups and animal sanctuaries. Are you aware of those? What sort of support have you—or the Government—been giving to those organisations?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Sure. We were up there last week and met with one of them, which is the Animal Welfare League, which has its main truck based at our Wollongbar research station. So we visited there, which was really good to see that in operation. They also were doing a lot of outreach with vans and their staff. They had a few animals there in the truck on the day. Support-wise, I think the main role has been through LLS to help provide support for local private vets. LLS vets do not normally deal with smaller companion animals; they deal with large animals. I think the support through LLS has been quite significant. We have got more than 20—I think it is 22 vets on the ground now supporting those animals.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: In terms of, I guess, reconnecting animals with their humans or with their owners, depending what type of animal they are, what has the Government been doing to help with that in particular?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The feedback has been that we have had more animals than ever before that have been sort of dislocated but it has actually been managed in a really sensible and effective way, where people have been able to stay with or have their animal with them. I think, Scott, you might have some numbers on exactly how that has happened.

SCOTT HANSEN: Only a fraction of the numbers, unfortunately. Displaced stock is where we have significantly turned our attention to at the moment. That is everything from large stock all the way down to pet animals. Before you came in, I was just mentioning before the break that we have had 191 animals on an average daily rolling basis needing shelter or homing and that is the companion animals. But, for example, a number of our teams up there in the north have actually been rounding up and moving livestock. I think we have got at the moment over 1,200 head in the Casino saleyards that are unidentified and at the moment unable to be placed with owners. So that is going to be a long and tedious task, working our way through that, for those that have lost tags and do not have any formal identification on them, but as I said that is only a fraction of those numbers. Working with the local veterinary practices up there, and I think we have got all the veterinary practices now from Casino all the way up to the border captured in our networks, using them, their expertise and their knowledge alongside both LLS and DPI staff up there will give us the best bet to try to rehome as quickly as possible displaced animals.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just to clarify though, there has not been any additional funding given to the independent animal rescue and rehoming organisations in the area?

SCOTT HANSEN: Only if they have been part of the current recovery activity. If we have needed them, for example, to set up at evacuation centres to be able to provide equipment, people, then there has been additional funding provided. But at the moment there has been no systemic investment in either pounds or shelter as part of the response to date.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are New South Wales farm animal sanctuaries being given access to free fodder in the same way as New South Wales animal producers are?

SCOTT HANSEN: I understand yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: They are? That is good.

SCOTT HANSEN: Can I just add, if you are aware of anyone who did not think that they were eligible or have not put their hand up, feel free to either give them the 1800 number or tell us afterwards and we will make contact with them.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I should point out, Ms Boyd, there is quite a few—I have just got some details on some of the pounds across the region. There are many that have not actually been affected so they are able to maintain normal operations without needing any particular help, which has been in this case really, really helpful.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes. In terms of animal agriculture effluent flowing into pastures and waterways during the floods, is that something you have had oversight of? Did DPI NSW issue any advice to producers about that effluent overflow?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I do not know. Mr Hansen, do you want to handle it? The EPA is the authority that looks after any of that type of thing. But in a flood situation there is not really any control able to be provided anyway about effluent and/or animals being swept out to sea or down river. But I am not sure. We will, I guess, at some point get a report on what that looks like.

SCOTT HANSEN: In an emergency response, there are actually functional areas that are established to focus on different areas. One of those is in the environmental functional area. It takes responsibility for pollution

events, whether that is animal effluent or actually chemical drums and other residues out of streets and industrial sites and so forth. So that will be a major, swift change in the focus to doing everything from water monitoring through to soil monitoring and testing to be able to provide advice to the community about remediation and clean-up.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Perhaps you could provide on notice whether there have been any incidents reported in relation to animal agriculture effluent into our ponds and waterways and just any details you can provide.

SCOTT HANSEN: I am sure there are going to be masses. There are whole agricultural areas that are still underwater now and that underwater is water that is flowing into river ways, rivers, estuaries and streams.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Along with human waste—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Fair enough. Then can I rephrase that to if you could let me know on notice exactly how the oversight mechanism works with that to make sure that that is something that will be dealt with in the right way?

SCOTT HANSEN: Definitely.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you have any details on the numbers of animals who have died in the current New South Wales floods or those that have been euthanised because of injuries sustained?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, I mentioned that earlier, Ms Boyd. Around the 1,670 number is the number that have been disposed of. Do not quote me exactly on that. We do have the exact number but that is obviously changing on a daily basis as well. There are large numbers that have been found deceased and had to be disposed of and some that have had to be euthanised onsite and disposed of. LLS and DPI are working very collaboratively on and in fact have doubled the teams available to actually remove those animals as quickly as possible.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you.

SCOTT HANSEN: I just have one clarifying point there. We are actually working hand in hand with Public Works Advisory, Soil Conservation Service and the ADF in terms of that actual task of disposal. What we have been doing to speed it up is we have been deploying LLS and DPI teams on the ground to go identify locations, basically geotag that location, work out whether there is one animal or 10 animals and actually we are using that as a way of prioritising tasks at the moment. But although it is DPI and LLS staff on the ground up there, we would not be doing it at the moment if not for Public Works, Soil Con and ADF who are doing a lot of the heavy lifting.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: In our last session, Minister, you mentioned that there were extra grants given to the RSPCA in regards to their work on protecting companion animals. I was wondering if there were any extra grants that have been given to the RSPCA in the last year or two for their work on enforcement of industry, overseeing things like slaughterhouses and piggeries et cetera?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not sure that is operational. Scott, have you got any details?

SCOTT HANSEN: Not that I can think of. But I am happy to take it on notice. In fact, I will not take it on notice. I am pretty confident that there have been no additional grants made for that purpose.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, how is the funding to the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League, particularly their role in upholding the Protection of Cruelty to Animals Act, determined each year? Is there an official process, and are you involved in that process?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Having just moved into this role, I am not sure that there is a role for the Minister. It is probably recurrent funding. But, again, it is an operational matter. Scott, have you got oversight on that?

SCOTT HANSEN: I do, but are you okay if I throw to either Dr Filmer or to Suzanne to provide more details on it?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I might come back to them this afternoon, if that is alright.

SCOTT HANSEN: As you know, there is an agreement between both ourselves and RSPCA and ourselves and Animal Welfare League around the responsibilities and the activities. And you would also be aware that there are steps afoot to increase the transparency of those reports in terms of publicly reporting to Parliament.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Yes, of course. Minister, why does the New South Wales Government not fully fund the enforcement of criminal legislation to protect animals when every other piece of criminal legislation is properly funded by government?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That is not something I have been involved with previously. It is something I am happy to take on notice. I do not have an answer for that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: It is an odd situation though, is it not, that we have charities having to run fun runs and cupcake days to fundraise to actually uphold laws? You can see that perhaps this model might be outdated and in need of a review.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: We also do have police, obviously, and specific parts of police that are very much involved with the animal welfare side of things, so we don't not fund that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: One complaint I often get from my office is that people have come to a dead end or they have gone to the police with an animal cruelty complaint and the police have said that it is not in their portfolio—I understand it completely is. Are there any efforts to educate the NSW Police Force that they do have powers under POCTAA to actually uphold those laws?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I think that is something that I can definitely work with the police Minister on to find a bit of a clear guidance on that, yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you aware that there was a recommendation from the select committee into animal cruelty laws that the Government significantly increase funding to the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League and develop a quantitative funding model? Have any steps been taken to implement that recommendation or look into that funding model?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There are, and we met with the Animal Welfare League in Wollongbar last week. They are quite keen to see some ongoing funding and some more support for what they particularly do, and I am aware there are some thoughts around how that might happen through other departments, possibly not through DPI. But I cannot probably say too much more about that at the moment.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, I have talked about the fact that we have got the lowest amount of funding provided by government right across Australia. Only 6 per cent of the RSPCA's enforcement costs are covered. Can we get a commitment from you that you will at least review that and look into how much the Government will provide to these charities to uphold the law?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, I am more than happy to do that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Thank you. In addition to being the Minister for Agriculture you are also the member for Dubbo. I think we mentioned in my last session that there are only four vets in Dubbo. What happens in regards to vets in terms of the operation of Dubbo pound? Are you aware?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I will start off by saying that the number of vets in regional New South Wales is a large concern. When we talk about the ag workforce, we talk about teachers and nurses. Vets are a very high priority and there is a real effort at the moment to try to attract more vets to regional areas. The pound has sort of a revolving relationship, as far as I am aware, with local vets. The pound is run particularly well by Dubbo Regional Council and the vets have a revolving roster on who is responsible for assessing animals at any one time.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I have been given information that the four local vets will not actually work with the pound. So are you saying that that information that I have been given is incorrect?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: They certainly have; I am not sure if they are right now. There are more than four local vets. There might be four local vet practices, but I can think of probably five or six. Maybe there is more than one vet at the practice. But there is not a huge amount of vets, I certainly acknowledge that. But they certainly have worked with the pound previously, or some of them have. But at this point in time I am not 100 per cent sure who does.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You mentioned there is a significant vet shortage, and obviously that is hugely problematic in rural and regional areas. You said that you were doing some work to attract vets into the areas. Is there any other work that is being done by government to ensure that people in regional and rural New South Wales can have access to vets?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Through, obviously, what we have seen at the Northern Rivers, we absolutely activate when required to cover emergency situations. In general situations, it is a private practice; it is a decision. Vet is one of hardest courses to get into as far as an ATAR. It is very popular, but we do not necessarily always see vets coming out to do large animal work, which is what we actually need in regional areas. A lot of

vets like to specialise in dogs or cats or small animals and stay in the metro area. What we need is more large animal vets moving to regional areas. But it is like anything: If you do not have the attractant for that particular person, then they will not want to work in your area. Thankfully, we do have some amazing regional cities and towns that are working on ways to do that and I am confident that we can get there. But, as a government, I think we will look for opportunities to try to be on the front foot with attracting more vets to our regions, certainly.

The CHAIR: Minister, I note from the allocation of Acts that you are no longer jointly responsible for the Rock Fishing Safety Act of 2016.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I thought I still was.

The CHAIR: No. According to the allocation of Acts, you are not. What does that mean for DPI Fisheries enforcing the Act?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Sean?

SEAN SLOAN: For some time, actually, the Minister for Agriculture has not been responsible as the lead administrator of that legislation.

The CHAIR: He is no longer at all though. He has completely fallen off.

SEAN SLOAN: That is correct, and that was quite some time ago. Fisheries started out as the lead and then at a point in time that responsibility was passed over to local government and to police. DPI Fisheries officers have a role as cross-authorised officers to be able to enforce those rock fishing safety rules, but we are not the lead. The lead organisation is local government, so it is the Minister for Local Government.

The CHAIR: On notice, when did the Minister fall off in terms of total responsibility, or any responsibility at all? Because it seems like it only just happened in February when the new ministerial portfolios were set up.

SEAN SLOAN: I can clarify that—

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I think it might have been 2018.

The CHAIR: When you completely fell off as Minister for fisheries?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, I think in 2018 it was handed from the Minister for Primary Industries to the Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. But we can check.

The CHAIR: Just confirm that in 2018 you had no responsibility at all.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: But, as Sean has pointed out, we are still described as authorised officers under the Act in terms of our fisheries compliance officers. So the practicality of our involvement with regards to the Act remains as it was since 2016.

The CHAIR: Does this limit the involvement you get into in terms of education of rock fishers?

SCOTT HANSEN: Not that I see it.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I do not think so, no. It is recognised that rock fishing is a really dangerous activity, but also a really exciting one, and our compliance officers have a role to play to make sure that people are doing it safely. There have been some fairly high-profile, I think, education campaigns. I do not think we are impacted to not be able to do that anymore. Sean?

SEAN SLOAN: No, that is correct, Minister. Just to clarify, Fisheries has a role as cross-authorised officers to enforce the rules. Police, local government and National Parks also have a role, with local government being the lead. When DPI Fisheries issues a recreational fishing licence we provide information on safety, which includes rock fishing safety. We also have a contract with one of the recreational fishing bodies to enable them to engage with the rock fishing community on safety issues as well.

The CHAIR: Do you issue weather warnings or swell warnings as part of that role?

SEAN SLOAN: No.

The CHAIR: Take this as a comment, Minister, but I think you might have got the distribution of the responsibility for this Act wrong, given the lack of effort I see from local government in my own area, which has had significant rock fishing deaths. I turn to the Kamay ferry between La Perouse and Kurnell. On 9 August 2021 a senior fisheries manager, Scott Carter, sent a letter as part of your submission to the EIS, where you basically said "DPI Fisheries are currently unable to support this proposal" and listed several reasons why. Is that still the

position of your department and you, Minister—that the ferry is going through a recreational fishing haven and destroying critical habitat for fish?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I will have to pass to Sean on that one.

SEAN SLOAN: Thanks, Minister. That is correct. We were consulted on the proposal and under the Fisheries Management Act we have got responsibilities for key fish habitats like seagrass. There is important seagrass habitat in the area so we raised concerns about the impacts of the development on seagrass. It does not mean that we cannot support it in its entirety; it is a concern that was raised so that obviously that can be taken into account as part of the development application review. The other matter that we raised was access by recreational fishers to the area as well, given that it is in a recreational fishing haven and we have made the point that it is an area that can allow for both activities—the ferry activity and recreational fishing—to coexist.

The CHAIR: On notice can you perhaps come back and answer whether any of those specific concerns listed in this letter—I am assuming you know which letter I am referring to—have been resolved with your discussions with Transport for NSW?

SCOTT HANSEN: We are still currently in discussions on the three issues: there is the seagrass; there is the white seahorse; and the recreational fishing haven. All three are still—

The CHAIR: The ones I have: lack of information about the type of hull and shape of craft; the question about whether there will be recreational or commercial moorings; navigation channels, which I am assuming is taken into the recreational fishing haven; and—

SCOTT HANSEN: Can we get that tabled, Chair, so we can make sure we are working off the same list of concerns, because they would have evolved over time?

The CHAIR: Yes, sure. If you come back with where we are in resolving these issues. Minister, does it concern you that some of the key scientists who are involved in protecting and doing research on these grasses, particularly this protected grass known as *Posidonia australis*, have basically thrown their hands up and said this is going to destroy those seagrasses and there is not much we can really do about it and we are just going to have to wear it? Does that concern you?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It seems odd to take that approach. I will leave this with the department and we will find out a bit more detail.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, I have some forestry questions to run through. What was Forestry Corporation's total revenue in the financial year ended 2021?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Total revenue, Forestry Corporation—Anshul, do you have those details?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Yes, I do.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is okay, I will explore that this afternoon with Mr Chaudhary. We will come back to this, Mr Chaudhary. How much did Forestry Corporation pay out in dividends in the financial year ended 2021?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have not got that. That is all operational stuff. I do not have that in front of me at this stage.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I can answer those questions. So, we had—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Chaudhary, I have got you this afternoon. As you know, we will ask these questions this afternoon. So the dividend?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I do not know, but it is part of the annual report. I can look it up online if you like.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is in the annual report. How much debt was attached to Forestry Corporation?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Again, annual report.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: How many external contractors? What were the external contractor costs for the financial year ended 2021?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: These are probably questions for the shareholder Ministers as well, but they are all in the annual report I understand.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Does Forestry Corporation have any borrowings?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Again, operational. Anshul can go into that, but all in the annual report.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I can cover all of that this afternoon.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, one of your predecessors spent a fair bit of time on the commercial fishing industry. I am wondering if you might be able to tell us, or take on notice, how many commercial fishers are currently involved in commercial fishing in New South Wales?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have met with the Professional Fishers Association a couple of times now and regard that as a really vibrant industry, which has gone through some pretty tough times. I do not have the exact numbers of how many are involved but I can take that on notice. I think it has been through some tough times as well but looking to bounce back, albeit it will have been affected by flooding in the north as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You did say you have met with the PFA?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, I have.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Again, you are ahead of your predecessor. He did not do that. Recreational Fishing Trust Fund—have you met with the Recreational Fishing Alliance?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have met with the Recreational Fishing—what are they called?

SCOTT HANSEN: Recreational Fishing Association.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Recreational Fishing Association.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The RFA.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes. I met with them and the councillor reports to me.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You are a mile ahead of your predecessor now. I am looking forward to your ministerial diaries. No doubt the Recreational Fishing Alliance would have raised with you its concerns around the allocation of the Recreational Fishing Trust moneys?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I think there is probably a misnomer about the—recreational fishers love what they do but they also want to feel like everyone that is doing it with them is doing it in the right way. The discussions I have had is that they actually—the crux of what you are getting to is there is about \$16 million that is in the Recreational Fishing Trust and my discussions with the Recreational Fishing Advisory Council is that they want to see that money spent and they actually help advise me as the Minister on what that could, should be spent on, and in fact they approve any expenditure. But their thing has been around—if you are heading down the compliance route, which I suspect you might be—that they want to see more compliance. There are compliance officers that are funded anyway but some of that money from the Recreational Fishing Trust goes towards supporting more compliance officers based on the fact that the Recreational Fishing Advisory Council actually wants more and fishers want to feel like they are all doing the right thing. If I am doing something and you are not, I want to know why.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think we have all had conversations with the RFA over a number of years.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I should clarify; it is the Recreational Fishing Advisory Council, sorry.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You are talking about the council. I am talking about the RFA.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The alliance. I have not met with the alliance.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Regardless, there are a number of recreational fishing bodies that have concerns about the Recreational Fishing Trust.

The CHAIR: Regardless, you are still ahead of the former Minister.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I concur with the Chair's statement. Have you considered looking into a review of that program? As the new Minister you get a chance to have a look at these things and say, "Okay, let's recalibrate" or, "Is it actually working?" Have you looked at potentially having a review of the Recreational Fishing Trust?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have. What I have done is I have spoken to members of the advisory council individually about what they see and this is a council made up of people from different parts of the world, including in western New South Wales, north and South Coast and I think that is important. We have a good variety of input and most of the people I have spoken to think that things are working extremely well. It is quite a clear process, there is money that comes in through the licensing scheme, it is accounted for and then projects are brought forward through that Recreational Fishing Advisory Council to fund. Then they look at the best ways of

expending it and come back to me for that approval. I am happy to take that on board and have more discussions around that. But I think the process actually is working quite well. Interaction, engagement with the Minister, that is me, is important and I have committed to that group to meet with them every opportunity I can to make sure we have that open dialogue.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The council, as opposed to the RFA?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The council, which is my advisory body specifically.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can I suggest—

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, sure.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: —you take on board that I strongly urge you to meet the Recreational Fishing Alliance as well?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, sure.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: They have some very strong views about the Recreational Fishing Trust. If you can do that. Rice vesting is about to come up and I guess essentially are you going to roll over the existing vesting arrangements for rice in New South Wales?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It is due to expire in June. We have had quite a few discussions around progressing that and there is a lot being considered at this particular time. I cannot tell you exactly what the decision will be but it will be something that will be finalised in the short term.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I might leave that there. Minister, there is a level of compliance that is required at saleyards. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the RSPCA, for instance, are involved in those compliance checks. I have had raised with me concerns by people about bobby calves. People are getting a good dollar at the moment for their bobby calves, but can you tell me how many compliance checks—have you had any briefings at all around issues arising from bobby calf sales at saleyards?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: No, I have not specifically. I am aware that bobby calves have been raised as an issue in previous years, but I have not had any specific briefings or concerns that there is an issue at this particular point in time.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you know how often each saleyard in New South Wales is audited? When this occurs on the ground, is there a process that feeds up this information to you on a quarterly or annual basis?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have not even been there for a quarter yet. I have been here for 84 days.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think you have had more meetings than your predecessor in that time.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I might ask Scott if there a specific review timetable.

SCOTT HANSEN: I was just trying to find it because we will have some numbers, but I do not have them right here at the moment. One of the things we are very lucky about in New South Wales that other States do not have, whether it is our cattle tick team, our animal welfare compliance teams or the LLS teams on the ground, the DVs and veterinary officers on the ground, there are not too many sales that occur that do not have the presence of someone wearing a waratah badge. That is actually something that does not exist in many other jurisdictions. They are there looking at a broad range of things, everything from animal welfare all the way through to checking for cattle ticks or compliance. I remember numbers from two years ago. It was something like 340 inspections of saleyards over the course of the year. It was just over one a day, if you averaged it out. I do not know what that number is at the moment, and I do not know what that is because I do not know whether the trends around COVID's impact on sales has changed that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can we come back this afternoon, then?

SCOTT HANSEN: Sure.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am not sure if you will have enough time, but maybe we can come back and explore this silo.

SCOTT HANSEN: The comfort you should take is the fact that if there are sales occurring, there is a very good chance that there is a waratah badge there looking for everything from disease all the way through to animal welfare outcomes. As you rightly pointed out, with livestock being such a premium commodity at the moment, there is a whole lot of extra care being taken around the presentation of animals and how they are presented.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: And enforcement as well around stealing stock.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes. We will come back this afternoon, Mr Hansen. Minister, the chair of chairs for Local Land Services—as I understand it, we still have an acting chair, who has been in the role for about 12 months. Is the position to be made permanent? Are we actually going to go through a process to advertise and fill the chair of chairs for Local Land Services?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There will be a process to appoint a chair, yes. At this point in time, as you would understand, there have been quite a few other things that have been a bit more pressing and of an urgent nature. But, again, that will be happening in the near future.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When you say the near future, are you able to give us—

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I cannot give you a date.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: By the end of the financial year?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: At the appropriate juncture.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: At the appropriate juncture, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: He does not need assistance.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I was joking. That was a joke.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: No, I know. I have seen a briefing come through to me, but obviously we have been dealing with floods ever since then. It is something that is currently being looked at and a decision will be made as soon as possible.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. Minister, very early on in your tenure, not long after you got your feet under the desk, I am hoping you received my piece of correspondence regarding weeds and pests. None of these people needs to roll their eyes. Can I ask how many compliance actions Local Land Services has undertaken on public land managers since the Biosecurity Act was introduced back in 2017?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I will have to ask Mr Orr to take that one.

STEVE ORR: And I will have to take it on notice, Mr Veitch.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay. Can we get that this afternoon?

STEVE ORR: Yes, we will come back. Certainly when it comes to weeds and pests, that is a fundamental role of Local Land Services in terms of delivering actions on the ground. But I will come back to you this afternoon in terms of—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: We are going to talk a bit more this afternoon about the regional strategic weed plans and things like that.

STEVE ORR: I have no doubt, Mr Veitch.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I will make sure I tune in.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes. Minister, my issue is actually serious—public land managers, I think of the timber inquiry in Tumut. We heard, Mr Chaudhary, that the impact of blackberry growth on softwood plantations is about \$2,500 per hectare per year. That is the productivity loss because of weed growth. I know you said you spent \$3 million last year; that is way short of what is required. Minister, my correspondence to you was actually quite a serious issue regarding all of the agencies that fall within your remit. Have you acquainted yourself yet with the action that has been taken in regard to weeds and pests and their plans in place for the next few years around eradicating weeds and pests but also their management program, if they have it?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Thank you for the question. It is a very serious topic and one that the department as a whole and myself as the Minister take extremely seriously. The suite of arrangements that we have are increasing all the time around biosecurity, which includes weeds. There is a range of ways that the department—we have a biosecurity expert here, next to me. We have LLS, which has experts in the field. Recently I was at the ag institute in Orange looking at the brand-new biological research facility, which is looking at ways of decimating weed populations by use of biological means as opposed to spraying. We are already looking at better ways, and there have already been successful trials on Hudson pear in the west, where biological controls are really having a huge impact.

That research and testing at Orange is vital, so we are putting a lot of money into that type of thing. At the same time, apart from the regular weed programs and the weed action plans that LLS runs, through the Crown

Reserves Improvement Fund there have been hundreds of thousands of dollars. Recently I have been out to Nyngan, Gilgandra, around Dubbo itself and over at Mudgee, where all of those funding arrangements are in place with sometimes LLS or local councils or weed action groups that are doing spraying specifically targeting green cestrum or Hudson pear or whatever it might be. That continues, so there is a focus. Our biosecurity management is a key focus for the department because it forms—we have seen what COVID can do. We know biosecurity is important, and it is very much a part of what we are going to be delivering on.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: My issue, Minister, is whether it is sufficient?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Is it ever enough? Maybe it never is enough. But I can guarantee you that it is one of the things that we talk about regularly. I have regular updates. I am always asking questions around not just weeds but biosecurity at the next level up. It is something that we are looking at exponentially growing our commitment on. Obviously everything has a cost, but we are taking this very seriously.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: For our public servants this afternoon, I will spend a bit more time talking about this. Minister, can I go to travelling stock reserves? Are you able to provide any details of any work that is currently underway to recognise and provide for First Nations people's rights and interests in travelling stock reserves?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There certainly is some work that has been done, and there is some more work—we have Indigenous rangers that are part of some of those. Scott or Steve might have some more—

STEVE ORR: Yes, certainly. In terms of the travelling stock reserve network, Mr Veitch, you would be aware—550,000 hectares right across New South Wales, an important network not only for grazing but also for conservation purposes. LLS certainly puts a lot of emphasis on involvement of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal staff in terms of the management of those reserves. Our total in terms of Aboriginal staff—I think we are around 4 per cent. We are proud of that, but we certainly want to build that. In terms of travelling stock reserves we are doing a bit of work at the moment, which we will be briefing the Minister on, in terms of traineeships for Aboriginal staff to come in and play a critical role in terms of TSR management.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thanks, Mr Orr. Minister, how many TSRs have access agreements in place for Indigenous people?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That is an operational thing.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I do not think it is, Minister, with all due respect. This is a pretty serious issue for our First Nations communities. You are from Dubbo; you would know exactly how important the cultural significance of TSRs is. This is actually an issue that I think should be elevated to a ministerial level. It is quite serious.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, but I do not know the actual number. If you are asking what number, I do not know. Mr Kelly, have you got ideas of that?

STEVE ORR: Do you know, Mr Kelly?

ROB KELLY: No. We will take it on notice.

STEVE ORR: We will take it on notice and come back to you this afternoon, Mr Veitch.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can I get it this afternoon? I want to explore this a bit further this afternoon as well, if I can.

STEVE ORR: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Minister, there is currently a licensing arrangement in place, as I understand it, for access to TSRs. Can you just walk me through—it is relatively new—how that is going to work?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: My understanding is that we have got permits in place, if that is what you are referring to. There are permits for Central Tablelands, Central West, Murray, North Coast, Northern Tablelands, south-east and western. I think there is a current pilot around how that is going to work. That is going to inform how those permits will actually work. I think that will come back to me at some point for referral.

STEVE ORR: Yes, that is right.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When you say "some point", again, do we have an idea? Before the end of the financial year?

STEVE ORR: Yes, shortly. Certainly, one of the challenges with TSRs at the moment, Mr Veitch, is significant seasonal change and seasonal conditions and the management of TSRs, be it about weeds or be it about

fire risk and the like. We are certainly applying our mind to all of that. Rob, do you want to comment about the work which is going on in terms of the matters which Mr Veitch is talking about?

ROB KELLY: Thanks, Steve. We are referring here to the management agreement permit process, which is a longer-term permit allowing access for a tendered result for that TSR. The idea behind that is to give certainty of access. The ultimate outcome of that is an improved management of the TSR in terms of weed control, pest control and maintenance of infrastructure. It is really important to note in that process that it also does not exclude genuine destination travelling stock. If you are moving stock from point A to point B, you still have right of access to move through and access that TSR.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Currently, there is—like most of New South Wales—considerable growth on our TSRs, including weed growth. Mr Kelly, who is responsible for the weed management under this arrangement you are talking about?

ROB KELLY: Under the management agreement permit arrangement, it is the permit holder that is responsible for the weed management and pest management on the TSR.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is this a competitive process? People make a bid or an offer?

ROB KELLY: Competitive tender process, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So they competitively bid, but then they are responsible for paying for the maintenance of weeds on what they have just put a bid in for?

ROB KELLY: Yes. They competitively bid for it and, once they are issued the permit under that process, they then assume care, control and management of the parcel of land of that TSR.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: How long are these permits in place for?

ROB KELLY: They are in place for five years.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do they include things like access to firewood for firewood removal?

ROB KELLY: No, they do not include access of firewood or any destruction of habitat. They do not include cropping or the cutting down of timber.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So it is essentially grazing rights and weed and pest management?

ROB KELLY: Grazing rights and weed and pest management.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You pay for the privilege to remove the weeds from public land?

ROB KELLY: It is no different to leasing a private property in that respect. You pay for the lease of that, and then you have to pay for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of that parcel of land.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There is an issue about public land managers being good neighbours. It is raised with us a lot. I have no doubt the Minister, as the member for Dubbo, receives correspondence into his office about the fact that public land managers are not always seen to be good neighbours. If you have a permit and you are not conducting that weed or pest eradication or maintenance, will LLS then be the agency that will breach you for not doing that work?

ROB KELLY: Correct. Those who have got a management agreement permit are audited. If they are not maintaining or having the upkeep of that requirement, they have a number of options. It could be a rectification notice or it could be termination of the permit.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Mostly, those TSRs would attract—if I am backing onto a TSR, I would be the obvious one to take over control if I want a bit more land, as you do as a private landholder. You have got that responsibility to maintain that, as you do on your own private land under the Biosecurity Act. So, it is no different. You are applying to take over the land. In fact, near where I formerly lived, it was exactly the case. There was a public access way, and one of the neighbours actually ended up buying it. But you could also apply for a permit to manage it. It gives you a bit more land, and you, therefore, take on that role of weed maintenance, but you have got the grazing rights.

STEVE ORR: Mr Veitch, one of the other tensions which we try to deal with here is a reserve or TSR network that gets a lot of use in dry times but does not get as much use in the sort of times we have at the moment. That creates a range of pressures, particularly when it comes to some of our funding arrangements. These arrangements are designed to provide a degree of certainty for the lease owner or the person who has it but also to provide a bit more security of funding when it comes to LLS managing the reserve.

The CHAIR: I might just start off, picking up on Mr Veitch's comments about commercial fishing. Minister, I think BDO was contracted to complete a Fisheries economic social indicators survey and report. Have you seen that report yet?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have not, no.

The CHAIR: Do you have an estimated date as to when that report is due? Has anyone in the department seen that report in draft form?

SEAN SLOAN: I can respond to that. We have got a draft report from BDO, and that has been provided to our commercial fisheries advisory council. We are basically working through that report with them and, when that work has been completed, we will be briefing the Minister and then recommending that the report is made public. It is a contract that spans three years, and it is about 18 months into that process at the moment. They went through a process of consulting with commercial fishers on the design of the survey and then conducted the survey. We have got a full year of data that is now in a report that is being worked through. That will continue for another period before that contract is completed.

The CHAIR: Has that report been sent back to BDO for—I will choose my words—rewording or sanitation, like the Barclay report was under the former Minister? Has it been sent back to them for rewording or changes?

SEAN SLOAN: Any sort of consultant's or contractor's report is provided as a draft and then worked through. In this case, it is the commercial fisheries advisory council, which is made up of commercial fishers. They have had a look at the findings of the report, and they are essentially providing feedback direct to BDO. It is not a process where the department is in any way influencing the findings. It is commercial fishers themselves.

The CHAIR: I might just switch—

SCOTT HANSEN: Sorry, Chair. The only conversation we had with Professor Barclay was to ask her about the source of some of the figures she had in her report which, upon further investigation by her, she found had been incorrectly transcribed; therefore, she corrected them.

The CHAIR: There was a perception that the Barclay report was sanitised by the community.

SCOTT HANSEN: I would hate for that perception to be maintained.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that. I go to an issue that was further ventilated through an SO 52 on aerial shooting at Adaminaby. This was in June 2021. An LLS aerial shooter shot a sambar stag and then landed to remove the antlers and skin for his own personal use, which goes against procedures. To your knowledge, Minister—maybe with the help of Mr Orr—this is not an isolated incident, is it? This is something that happens quite regularly.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I might refer that to Mr Orr. I am not aware of the circumstance.

STEVE ORR: I am aware of that one particular issue. I am not aware of any other issues which are like that. If you have got any further information which is of that ilk, I am happy to consider that.

The CHAIR: With this particular incident, was any disciplinary action taken against that employee and when did that disciplinary action take place? Did it take being aired in Parliament for you to take action? That is what I am trying to get to.

STEVE ORR: Again, this is week five for me in this role. I will take that on notice and come back to you this afternoon.

The CHAIR: Just for some baseline questions, Minister, for this afternoon—have you read the draft NSW Mainland Marine Park Network Management Plan 2021-2031?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have not read the entire report. I think Mr Field wants to have a bit of a say in that as well.

The CHAIR: To be fair, it is about 160 pages.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am familiar with it, and I have had briefings on it.

The CHAIR: Do you support it in its entirety or, like the animal welfare draft legislation, are there things that you want to draw a line through or have concerns about?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I think with any scenario like this, it will be informed by consultation and discussions. I am not ruling anything in or out, but it is going through a process. The draft management plan has almost finished its first process, and then it will go through a second process. I think that is very worthwhile.

The CHAIR: But nothing has stuck out with you in terms of the briefing you received or the brief parts you have read? Nothing sticks out as a concern for you?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There are, obviously, things that are coming up around rec fishing. There are things around cruise liners that Mr Field might want to talk about. They are things that will be worked through. The overall network management plan is an important one and our marine parks are really important, and we do want to make sure we get things right.

The CHAIR: This will probably go to your department, because obviously a lot of this work was done before your time. What steps were taken to engage non-English speaking fishers in this marine park network plan? It is 160 pages long. For a normal English-speaking person, let me tell you it was a chore to get through. How have you engaged non-English-speaking fishermen, who might have trouble reading, writing and speaking English, in this process? They are a significant proportion of the recreational fishing sector?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Thanks, Chair. I might ask Sean to make a comment on that.

SEAN SLOAN: I will have to take that on notice and come back to you with a correct answer on that.

The CHAIR: I pass to Mr Shoebridge and then back to Ms Hurst.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, are you aware of a series of prosecutions and enforcement actions that the EPA has taken in relation to illegal logging by Forestry Corporation in Mogo State Forest, Boyne State Forest and Bodalla State Forest?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not aware of that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you get informed about the illegal logging by Forestry Corporation at any point?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: When did those alleged operations occur?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They occurred over a period of unlawful logging from 2017—in fact, all the way through to 2020—and a bunch of illegal logging happened just after the Black Summer fires. But the enforcement action has taken a lot longer than that.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have been the Minister for 84 days, so that certainly was not in my tenure. But I am happy to take that on board and investigate further.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: When Forestry Corporation undertakes illegal logging activities and has to pay fines to the EPA, is there an arrangement in place that you will always get notified of that?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I would assume there would be. Anshul?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Yes, that is right. When we have any regulatory action, such as a PIN notice or a prosecution, we brief the Minister's office.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will show you this document. Minister, that is the outcome of investigation, and enforcement and penalty notice to Forestry Corporation for \$16,500 in penalties for illegal logging that went on over two years in Boyne State Forest, Bodalla State Forest and Mogo State Forest. How is it that Forestry Corporation conducted illegal logging activities for more than two years? How does that happen?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: As I said, I have been in the role for 84 days, Mr Shoebridge. I think Anshul might be prepared to comment on that.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I am happy to comment on that. The incidents actually occurred in 2017 and 2018. They did not carry on, Mr Shoebridge, for over two years. They were isolated incidents.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And 2019.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: It was 2017 and 2018.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, sorry, Mr Chaudhary. The penalty notice states "conducting an investigation in relation to forestry operations". The commencement date is 20 September 2017 and the last date is 9 November 2019. It is over two years. It may be an uncomfortable truth for you, but that is the fact.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I am happy to look into the detail for you. But my understanding is that those incidents—the two you were referring to, the Bodalla and Boyne—were in 2017 and 2018. The Mogo one was immediately after the fires, and the PINs were provided recently. I think it was December last year.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This was failing to do the most basic work—failing to mark eucalyptus feed trees and failing to mark swift parrot records, one of the most endangered species in New South Wales. Are

you saying that that is just part of doing business, Mr Chaudhary? You just churn this through as part of doing business?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Not at all. We take compliance very seriously, Mr Shoebridge. We have hundreds of operations that are carried out in the forest. By and large, the majority of them, as you would expect, are fully compliant with the law.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have no such expectation, Mr Chaudhary, just to be clear.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: That is what the reality is. The EPA is our regulator. They regulate us. Where we have a breach or nonconformance, we take that quite seriously.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So what have you done?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I am happy to tell you that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Before we go there, I will hand you some other documents, Minister. There should be three. These are three separate penalty notices for removal of hollow-bearing trees that could be well over a century old: in Mogo State Forest compartment 174A, which happened immediately after the Black Summer fires in March of 2020; in Mogo State Forest compartment 173A, which happened at the end of 2020; and Mogo State Forest compartment 161A, which happened over about seven months over the course of 2020. Critical habitat was repeatedly destroyed—hollow-bearing trees in forests that have already been impacted by the Black Summer bushfires. Why does this environmental vandalism happen at the hands of Forestry Corporation?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Let me say very clearly and concisely, I expect Forestry Corp and all of its operations to be done in exactly the correct manner.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But it is not. It is repeatedly chopping down essential hollow-bearing trees that could be well over a century old, and they did it in the very aftermath of the Black Summer bushfires.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I do not think it was purposeful action, Mr Shoebridge. But, again, I was not the Minister at the time. I have had several conversations with Mr Chaudhary about my expectations about what Forestry Corp will do in the future, from now, and it is my expectation that they will continue to do the work that they do in the highest possible regard and the EPA should do what it does.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They cannot continue to do it because there is a pattern of repeated illegal logging. If this was a driver licence, Forestry Corporation would have been off the road five years ago, would it not? You would not let a driver breach licence condition after licence condition like this, but you are happy for Forestry Corporation to keep going.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am saying that I have made it very clear that I expect the highest level of compliance to be maintained by Forestry Corporation.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Chaudhary, Forestry Corporation was thumbing its nose at the EPA, was it not? The EPA was trying to restrict your logging operations after the fires, and you just thumbed your nose at the EPA, and went in and destroyed this habitat, destroyed hollow-bearing trees. Why did you thumb your nose at the EPA?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: On the contrary, Mr Shoebridge. The intent of the EPA and our intent was very much aligned. We wanted to protect the environment. We have a statutory obligation, as you know, to generate environmentally sustainable timber and to contribute to regional development and local employment. So we worked with the EPA immediately after the fires. Those fires were devastating for the environment—I understood that—and we worked on site-specific operating conditions with the EPA.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You worked with the EPA while it prosecuted you.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: But these rules were quite new.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They were prosecuting you for repeated illegal logging of trees that are over a century old.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: These rules were quite new as they came in, Mr Shoebridge. I agree with the Minister. My expectation of my organisation is the same—that we will comply with the law. We do comply with the law.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: These were not new rules, Mr Chaudhary. These are longstanding legal obligations. They were not new rules. You are making this up.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I am talking about the site-specific operating conditions.

The CHAIR: Order! Mr Shoebridge, that is time. I do not think you heard the bell over the excitement.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I misheard it.

The CHAIR: As a former teacher, that is one of the lamest excuses I have ever heard.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The truth is I heard it. I did not hear the answer, though. That was the problem.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, in our last session we were talking about the vet shortage in New South Wales, which we all agree is quite broad across New South Wales. Obviously during the floods the vet shortage became all the more visible. I heard horror stories, and I am sure you heard horror stories as well, from Lismore about animals that were affected in the floods. Vet practices had their clinics under water and they could not access their equipment. One of the biggest criticisms from people in Lismore and from the animal protection organisations in Lismore was about the speed of the reaction from the Government—that the initial response was too slow. What are some of the lessons that we have learnt from this? What will the Government put in place in regard to animal protection so that we are better prepared for future emergencies?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: We were up there last week specifically to look at how things were progressing around fodder, animal protection and what we can do better. Mr Veitch, the director general and Steve Orr came for that trip to make sure that we were all seeing and hearing the same story. I think out of any disaster there are learnings and there definitely have been this time round. The director general worked quite closely on that day with the private vets that have been doing some of their own work, some of it specifically contracted for the Government. I might pass to him just to clarify how some of those pathways have been rectified and heading into the future what we are doing together.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I might go to him in the afternoon because I am limited on time. I wanted to get your thoughts, Minister. I know that the department of primary industries in Western Australia, I think it was roughly about 18 months ago, developed a very specific State Government plan in regards to what different departments and agencies would do to protect animals in an emergency. I do not believe we have something the same in New South Wales. Is that something that you are looking to develop going forward to help us prepare?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That could be. All of those sorts of things come up as possibilities. As I say, when you are in an emergency, the first thing to do is to try and get the response correct on the ground. I think that is what we have now done. Everything has been ramped up—communications, financial support and departmental support. As we come out of this, there will be more opportunities to develop better ways into the future, there is no doubt.

SCOTT HANSEN: Just two things if I can. I am happy to go into detail this afternoon but two things. First of all, in terms of speed response, Sunday 27 February was when Lismore started to receive and in fact got 285 millimetres of rain that day. That was the day we started mobilising staff between DPI and LLS up in the northern rivers area. Monday 28 February was when the actual levee was topped. At that stage, on that day, we activated local command centres, State command centres and had liaison officers on the ground. I am happy to talk through it in detail after, but I just do not want to be sitting here, especially with a new Minister beside me, thinking that we were slow to act on that piece. We turned on quickly.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I should point out that we were utilising Fisheries vessels for rescues. Staff, whilst their houses were going under, were helping other people. The departments did mobilise extremely quickly and were under extreme duress at the time with their own situations.

SCOTT HANSEN: We do have a response plan around the animal response component; however, in this environment, because of the widespread nature of it in the geographical area, we could not rely on some of the things we would normally do in terms of dragging people from outside of the area in. It just became so big an area, dragging outside in became difficult. Secondly, there was such a humanitarian crisis in that first four or five days, we got given a lower priority in terms of access to aviation gas and to fuel, to airways, to choppers—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Hansen, I might come back to you on this sort of level of detail this afternoon. We have only got a couple more minutes with the Minister.

SCOTT HANSEN: Okay.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: We have spoken a little bit about the Animal Welfare League's truck. I believe they got called by the police to come up there because the local vets were saying that they could not do anything. They could not even reunite companion animals with lost families. My understanding is that the truck is privately funded, they have done it themselves, and yet it is one of very few trucks in New South Wales. It is obviously not enough in an emergency. Obviously with the vet shortage, particularly in regional and rural New

South Wales, do you think that more of these vet trucks would actually solve a lot of the issues that we are having both in emergencies but also for the rural and regional vet shortages?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes. It was great to be able to talk to Mark and his team up in Wollongbar and to hear about the work they were doing. I do think there is opportunity. I should point out that they do receive government funding.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: For the truck?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: For parts of the operation of the truck.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Is that just the memorandum of intent in regards to when they are dealing with emergencies?

SCOTT HANSEN: That is right. The costs associated with their activities up there—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: In an emergency. But the truck itself is—

SCOTT HANSEN: —both for staff and consumables. The truck was funded out of the disposal of other assets that they held.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: But to your point, and I think I mentioned earlier, there is some discussion within government at the moment about how to best look at opportunities for more of those type of vehicles into the future will be exactly the same, maybe not, maybe there are ways of changing it. But I think it has proven to be a valuable resource and people on the ground having a base to come back to, to work out of, is a really good idea.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Thank you. Can we get some level of confirmation from you today that this is something the Government will fund? It does not have to be with the Animal Welfare League, but that the Government will put funding into something like a mobile vet truck for future emergencies and to help with the vet shortages?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I do not have the purse strings. I cannot commit that there will be funding. I will commit to the fact that I have already started discussions and will continue discussions with other Ministers about the opportunity.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Thank you. We were talking about this major vet shortage. I know that Mr Veitch was asking some questions particularly around saleyards. I understand Dubbo has one of the largest saleyards in New South Wales. Do you know if there are vets regularly attending that saleyard?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There are. I think the LLS vets attend regularly. It is one of the largest and in fact the throughput is the largest in the State for all breeds. So, yes, there are regular vet checks there each time it is open. It has obviously been affected by COVID as far as numbers, but the vets are still there.

STEVE ORR: Ms Hurst, just to add to the question of saleyard inspections. There were 230 saleyard inspections conducted last year and 30 so far this year. On the issue of vets, LLS is one of the largest employers of large animal vets in Australia. We currently have around 55 vets in the field. To your point about shortages and issues in recruitment, that is a challenge, particularly in the more western parts of the State. That is why we partner with universities—Charles Sturt University and Sydney University—for placements of final year students with LLS to give them that sort of experience. But equally happy to look at other ways and means of attracting vets into the system.

The CHAIR: I will just pass to Mr Field to take us to 12.45.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, thank you for your clarification that you indeed do hold the power when it comes to those contracts and I urge you to read the National Resources Commission [NRC] report in full before you exercise that power. Another report—you have a busy month of reading in April I think—are you aware of the annual statewide land cover and tree study, the tree cover change reporting that happens annually?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Have you been briefed on the last report?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I have. We have had discussions around what that report shows.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Sure. The 2019 year was the last report—we get them a bit behind; it takes a while to go through them. It found of the 75,600 hectares of clearing on rural regulated land, 74 per cent of that was described as unexplained. Can you explain that?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It is something that I am seeking explanation on, Mr Field. In broad terms, unexplained clearing can include things like slashing along the fence line or clearing for a firebreak. So there is probably a fair bit of work that needs to be done to explain what clearing is and what regular maintenance of pasture might be. Bushy shrubs that might appear in a pasture that I might slashing, can actually show up as land clearing when it is literally a pasture maintenance. But the unexplained portion, I think it is 74 per cent.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: What per cent do you think is that sort of boundary clearing or allowable activities?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It is to be explained.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: In March 2020 the Government responded to another NRC report—handy organisation that NRC, we should keep that—into the Government's land management reforms. The Government's response to the recommendation to review the drivers of high rates of unexplained clearing was—and this is two years ago now—it was supported and it said "EES and LLS will work collaboratively to identify and review drivers of unexplained clearing and address identified issues." So after two years of looking at this, how much of that unexplained clearing do you think is illegal clearing or questionable clearing?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: There are obviously parts that are completely explainable and that is what I expect will be explained as quickly as possible. There are parts like invasive native species that are removed as part of it. But when you talk about the actual numbers of allowable clearing to what is actually done, the percentage in 2018-19—so again, a little bit behind—it was 3.34 per cent. There was a vast amount of clearing available legally, 3 per cent of it was actually done by landowners.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am sorry, I do not understand.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: The figures—and we have got the figures somewhere here—of allocated land for clearing legally to be cleared, that had been applied for and granted, the amount that was actually then done was only 3 per cent. So the expectation that people have a clearance and then go and wholesale—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I understand, nearly all of the clearing that can be done, even under the code, requires some form of notification or even a voluntary compliance certificate.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: But it is a tiny bit that is being done.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I agree, so why is there so much unexplained clearing? Because if you have all these notifications and all these co-compliance certificates, it is an overlay on a map and you go, "Look, over there, they have got approval. They have got approval. That clearing over there does not have an approval." How much is that?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: That is the point you have raised.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Two years after the NRC report—no idea. Will it be in the next reporting, in July? Will it actually break down the unexplained clearing and you will have a go at how much of that is illegal?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Can I pass to Adam just to maybe take that on, on how we are in the stage of that?

ADAM TYNDALL: Happy to—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: We might come back to that, if that is all right, this afternoon. I have a lot of questions on this. When will the native vegetation regulatory map be finalised? That is a big problem here, right?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Mapping is always a convoluted and quite—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So are ministerial answers on this question, Minister, to be honest.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: But you know how difficult maps are for people to actually agree with on the ground.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: In the army, you read them. There are boundary lines, there is re-entrance. There is north, south, east, west. It is not that hard.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: But did you always agree with them?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That is the problem. If you disagree with them, you get into big trouble. When is the map going to be finalised?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: What I am committing to is that the appropriate maps will be the ones that are considered. I am absolutely convinced there is a good way forward. But we have to ground-truth the maps—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: This year?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I am not aware of the time frames, to be completely honest.

STEVE ORR: Just to add in, obviously, it is a matter for EES in relation to the map, but I think the point the Minister is making is—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So they can publish it whenever they want?

STEVE ORR: That is, obviously, a matter for EES to do—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: They will let the Minister know. Good.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I just want to make sure. I will be working with the Minister for the environment. So I am looking forward to that.

The CHAIR: That concludes questioning from the Opposition and crossbench. I now look to Mr Barrett for his inaugural cross-examination. I encourage him to go his hardest.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Go hard, Scott. First question—"When can I be a Minister?"

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, is there anything you would like to add, that you might like to revisit?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I would like to take this opportunity, if I could, just to thank all of the DPI and the LLS staff. We have had a lot of discussion today about a lot of things, but the flood response that we have seen from—these are the head people that we have got here today, but the staff on the ground up there are doing an exemplary job under extremely difficult conditions. I just want to pay tribute to all of them that have done that, not just in the North Coast but also in western Sydney, the South Coast, the Hunter. It has been an extraordinary effort, which continues. We will be moving from emergency to recovery. Again, we will have people on the ground, looking at specifically biosecurity threats and disease control and disposal of, sadly, many more animal carcasses. But it has been one of those things that—until you are there, you do not quite understand the gravity of it, as Mr Veitch can concur. So I do want to pay tribute to all of those personnel from all of our departments that are involved and thank the Committee for its time this afternoon.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes your questioning. We will return at two o'clock with the public servants for further questioning.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back to this afternoon's questioning in budget estimates. I will go straight to the Opposition.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you, Chair. I have got a series of questions here for—no, I have not—Mr Barnes. I do not. I jest. There were a number of things I raised with the Minister this morning. If you can just bear with me, we are going to work our way through those. To assist I might actually start with some land use questions for the ag commissioner. Then, if no-one else has questions for the ag commissioner, we could probably allow him to depart as well.

The CHAIR: I can flag I do not have any questions.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: If that is the case, then, Mr Hansen, I might just direct my first series of questions through you to Mr Quinlivan. Mr Quinlivan, your report, *Improving the Prospects for Agriculture and Regional Australia in the NSW Planning System*—that report talks about statutory SSALUP policy. I will hand this up to Hansard so you can see that—should be supported by a map of State-significant agricultural land. It is one of the recommendations, recommendation 3. Are you aware if that has been progressed, that mapping exercise?

DARYL QUINLIVAN: Yes. The department has started that process, which is going to be quite a long one, I think. I think I recommended that the process start with the existing data sets, which are not fantastic, understandably, because it is a very complex thing to do and there is an enormous diversity of different types of land and land use around the State. But the department has made a start and released a version of the map, which—I think this is the first of what will be quite a number of iterations and improvement processes over the coming years.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: As soon as you talk about mapping, because of previous experience, most people in regional New South Wales become quite nervous. I have no doubt, as part of your exercise, you were appraised of some of those concerns. Your recommendation talks about the verification process, consultation, exhibition, alongside how the land is to be managed, for instance, and capacity for DPI to update these maps as better information becomes available. It is one thing to have it in a recommendation. But how do you see that being underpinned? If I was Mr Hansen, I would like to know what information you based that on. Where can you go to provide that veracity for the statement?

DARYL QUINLIVAN: It is a significant problem. But the two things that I relied on most were that the planning system in the end is based on maps—so, if you want to do things that are going to be influential within the planning system, you have to be able to map the land and the land use and the ambitions for the use of that land. That is an inescapable reality. The second thing was that the farming groups and local government, who are the regulators in most cases for agricultural land use—both of those groups were very keen on having better knowledge of agricultural land use, in the case of the farming groups, across the State and, for local government, in their individual areas. So I saw an inescapable thing for the Government and the department to do in the long run was to find a way to improve the knowledge base for land use by regulators and to begin to meet the demand from the farming groups now.

Everybody knew that the starting point would be far from perfect. In fact, the ending point will probably be far from perfect, partly because there are different views about these things. People view agricultural land in different ways. Secondly, it changes. The installation of new mobile phone towers and new roads and new water facilities and so on—all of those things change land use options for land users. It is not a static thing. But I am glad the department has made a start. They knew they were going to be criticised for it. But I thought it was important to start. I am glad they have.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: State-significant agricultural land—this morning I raised some issues with the Minister about Cudgen, which is pretty special land. We now have a hospital going on there, part of the public system. There is now a proposal for a further development on the land at Cudgen. It is so special that the member for Tweed has pretty much thrown his political career on the table to say, if it goes ahead, he is going to go. You talk about the far North Coast and mid North Coast in your report and your recommendations. Did you give consideration to the land at Cudgen as a part of this process?

DARYL QUINLIVAN: Not specifically. But I was broadly aware that that area had been mapped in a more intensive way. That was one of the areas where the knowledge base about the land and its qualities was better known than elsewhere in the State. I mentioned there is a variety of different ways of looking at these things. Some people—I think the farming groups can occasionally do this. They see the issue, being land use, through the single lens of agriculture and its needs. That is perhaps legitimate from their point of view. But governments cannot do that.

Governments have to take into account a whole range of competing uses. The planning system itself—we only have a planning system because we need to find some way of managing these conflicts, and governments always have to take into account the need to provide land for housing development because we have a growing population. There is also, as you know, a growing demand for housing in regional New South Wales. So governments have to have that in their frame of reference. They also need to have in mind land allocations for industrial development, both on the coastal zone and inland. So there are a whole range of things—public services, as you mentioned, the hospitals. Governments have got a whole lot of things they need to take into account.

There were lots of calls during the review for the identification of land and then effectively setting in stone that land use in perpetuity by preventing changes in land use. I just do not think that is realistic. We are not a society that is able to do that because we have got all these competing demands. So the task for the planning system and the long-term agricultural land use strategy is to find an orderly and logical way of dealing with those trade-offs and conflicts, not trying to pretend they are not there. They are not going to go away. They are the underlying realities that governments have to resolve all the time. So what I was trying to do in my report was to design a way of handling the interests of the agriculture sector and landowners in more orderly way in that system.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There are a couple of things. You talk about identified production areas in your report. Would Cudgen meet the—

DARYL QUINLIVAN: I would not have thought so. The idea there is really industry clusters, such as an area that has a lot of investment or a lot of capacity for investment, in winemaking and tourism, for instance, where it is sensible for perhaps governments—local government—and the industry to invest in facilities that they use collectively and provide planning approval for appropriate ancillary development like tourism facilities and accommodation and so on. That was the kind of thing we had in mind. The same would be true of some of the industry clusters around the poultry industry around Tamworth and the Riverina and so on.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Piggery clusters around Young, which we will come to a bit later on.

DARYL QUINLIVAN: That is the concept, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: These maps would be pretty crucial. An example would be the HumeLink transmission corridor, which has now suddenly come out of nowhere. The maps, as you say, are not static. They need to move. But if you are a farmer making business decisions around the operation of your farm, something like suddenly getting a 200-metre wide corridor sterilised in some cases right through the middle of your creek flats or lucerne flats—how does that fit with your maps?

DARYL QUINLIVAN: I am not going to comment on that individual case, although I have a feeling I am going to become quite an expert on that issue over the coming six months because of the amount of contact I have already had from people who have issues they want to raise with me and the task force on the planning for not just transmission capacity but also the facilities that they are serving in the renewable energy zones and outside them. So we will be looking at all that in detail over the next few months. I do not have any comments to make about that individual case at present but I will do in due course, I am sure.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Maybe next estimates I could talk to you a bit more about this. HumeLink has been around for a couple of years. After the Black Friday fires they got letters six weeks later saying this corridor is going to go down the middle of the property. It was not a very good time to send farmers letters about what is going to impact on their farms.

DARYL QUINLIVAN: That is quite a good example really of the trade-offs that governments have to take into account because I think the New South Wales power supply at present is roughly 20 per cent from renewables. That is probably going to be above 100 per cent when we have a more mature system. So the demand for extra distribution and transmission capacity around the State is going to rise by—I do not know whether those are the right proportions, but it is going to increase quite dramatically. So the kind of issues that people are concerned about and have been raised here today—it is a good time to be looking at those because it is only just a foretaste of what is coming.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is your role full-time?

DARYL QUINLIVAN: Some weeks I am. But, no, I am working as much as I need to to do the task that the Minister and the Director General have given me. It has worked out pretty well so far.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: On an as-needed basis you adjust your hours?

DARYL QUINLIVAN: That is right.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: If you were to average it, is it like three or four days a week?

DARYL QUINLIVAN: It is probably a bit less than that; some weeks it would be more.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think that is all I have for Mr Quinlivan.

SCOTT HANSEN: It is probably worthwhile pointing out that those maps, when we put them out for draft exhibition, were obviously keenly commented on. I think we had 108 written submissions, 584 comments on the interactive map and 228 participants in online webinars. So the maps have been keenly looked at. It is probably worthwhile flagging the fact that the key audience has been the councils, in terms of their desire to have some guide when they are approaching development decisions as to what is or is not important agricultural land, not to tie or bind but just to guide in the first instance some of the discussions and decisions. That was one of the things they really raised with you, wasn't it—that lack of knowledge in that space?

DARYL QUINLIVAN: It was. They want more knowledge, and I think by and large the councils are quite keen to have a slightly higher bar for development and land use change where the land is important to local agricultural production. It is not to be set in stone, but the questions are asked a bit harder and the approval process is more onerous. I think that is entirely appropriate.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But you would agree that there is a degree of hesitancy in the agricultural sector about maps. There have been some bad experiences. When you talk about mapping, they immediately draw on a more recent experience.

DARYL QUINLIVAN: Yes. And, in this case, on both sides of the ledger—there are some landowners who are very keen to have their land regarded as high-quality land and included in those maps, and there are some people who are quite concerned they might be included in that because they are worried about future restrictions on their own capacity for land use change and restricting their long-term commercial options. There is not a singular view of this issue amongst the farming community either.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That will be all, unless anyone else has got anything else for Mr Quinlivan.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Quinlivan. You can go.

(Daryl Quinlivan withdrew.)

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen, this morning I raised some questions around redfin perch and Snowy 2.0. You made it clear that there has been no exemption for that project because they need to have in place a biosecurity management plan. So they have prepared that plan—is that what you are saying?

SCOTT HANSEN: I might hand over to Dr Tracey and Mr Sloan who have been working on that.

JOHN TRACEY: That biosecurity plan is not due yet. They are on track with their biosecurity plan. They also have to complete two additional plans. One for rec fish and one for threatened species. Our teams have been working very closely with Snowy Hydro. In fact, myself and Sean are sitting on the steering committee to oversee that work as well. The key concerns from biosecurity perspective are redfin, as well as climbing galaxias and their threat to stocky galaxias, which are a threatened species, and Macquarie perch. So the focus is around the protection of them. There are commitments too in terms of funding both for a threatened species program as well as for the rec fish. So they are working really closely. They have put things in place. The key point there is that they have to receive DPI's approval as part of the process on those plans. We have got to be satisfied that the measures they have got in place there are going to address the biosecurity, threatened species and rec fish concerns, not only now but long term. So a lot of the focus for us has been how they are going to do that. That includes surveillance and monitoring in place for early detection, as well as response, as well as physical barriers and a range of other measures to both build resilience of those threatened species as well as prevent as best practical—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think you said red fish but you meant redfin, but it will be cleaned up by the wonderful people in Hansard.

JOHN TRACEY: Redfin, thank you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Sloan, my question is to do with fish at this point but I want to ask some questions about other potentialities up there. Biosecurity Regulation 2017 details what should be in the plan. Are we certain at this point that they are going to be able to prevent the transfer of the redfin perch from one waterway to the next, or are they going to try to manage it and, if it happens, they will manage what happens after? How detailed is this going to be?

SEAN SLOAN: Thanks for the question. I do not think it is as clear-cut as being categorically able to say that it will be the redfin, the incursion of redfin will be able to be prevented. But we are working with Snowy to make sure they do everything possible to reduce the risk that they will be transferred. The cost of the infrastructure build to take account of the issues that we are raising is quite significant. I am confident in the

discussions that we are having that they are taking the issues that we are raising seriously. There is a barrier, a screen and then a range of technical solutions that they are looking very closely at. As Dr Tracey said, we have both been up there for a field visit and been on site and had discussions with Snowy. We have also made it clear to Snowy that we are not looking at this issue as a short-term issue, just to make it clear that any incursions of redfin will be something that Snowy has to deal with in the long term just to make sure that they are thinking long term about how they find the solutions to that issue as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Who is responsible, Mr Hansen, for compliance of the plan? Who monitors compliance towards the biosecurity plan for Snowy?

SCOTT HANSEN: That would be something that we have responsibility for ensuring that they were sticking to and complying with the plan.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So it would be DPI? It will not be self-regulatory or self-monitoring?

SCOTT HANSEN: We would expect them to be self-monitoring and self-regulating and then we would be providing an oversight to that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Has there been a request or an approach for exclusions for any other potential biosecurity issues? Do they have an exclusion for any other purpose from the Biosecurity Act?

SCOTT HANSEN: No, that is only one. And, as I have said, they have no exemption from the Biosecurity Act.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you for that.

SCOTT HANSEN: We took on notice a question earlier about fisheries prosecutions back to about 2009. I think that was from you, Mr Veitch.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

SCOTT HANSEN: The total number of prosecutions—I am going to give you two lot of numbers. One is prosecution and the other is persons prosecuted, the difference being one person may have multiple prosecutions and alternatively prosecution may have multiple people involved, if that makes sense?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, it does.

SCOTT HANSEN: Total number of prosecutions since 1 January 2009 is 202 Aboriginal and 1,027 non-Aboriginal. The total number of persons prosecuted since that same period is 130 Aboriginal and 900 non-Aboriginal.

The CHAIR: Before going on to crossbench members, I want to talk about compliance in marine parks, Mr Hansen. In the past five years how many people have been caught fishing illegally in a marine park?

SCOTT HANSEN: I would have to see if Mr Sloan has that information in front of him. If not, we can come back to you later in the afternoon. I will have to take it on notice.

The CHAIR: While you are doing that can we get a breakdown of the marine parks in which those offences occurred and what those offences were?

SEAN SLOAN: Yes.

The CHAIR: How are these marine parks patrolled? Is it done randomly or is there a system to it? How do you decide when you are going out on a patrol?

SEAN SLOAN: I think in reality it is a bit of both. So there would be activities that would be responding to intelligence reports and, that is, I guess, about maximising the effectiveness of our use of resources. There would be planned activities as well that occur around long weekends and holiday periods. Then there would be more opportunistic patrolling where we have got resources in an area that we can deploy. So I think it is a combination of all of those things. But with limited resources we would tend to plan our activities.

The CHAIR: How do you use technology to obviously enhance the limited resources that you have?

SEAN SLOAN: There is a range of technologies that our officers use. Obviously there are additional things that we can look to in the future as well. But we are looking at use of drones which I think is one of the technologies that presents a lot of opportunity in the future. We have obviously got a fleet of vessels that I would categorise as technology, and those vessels are generally tailored to the specific needs that we have. So an offshore patrol vessel like the *Solitary Ranger* is used offshore. We have got vessels that go into rivers. We have got vessels in estuaries and then coastal vessels. We are looking to technologies in the future like vessel monitoring systems so that we can track vessels and that type of technology is used widely not just in other jurisdictions in Australia

but also around the world. Those sorts of technologies are there as well. Yes, just generally speaking, wherever technology solutions present themselves we are always looking at them to improve our effectiveness.

The CHAIR: How do compliance officers in marine parks record their interactions with people? Do they have notebooks or do they have body-worn cameras? Do they do instant reports or photos? How do they record their interactions?

SEAN SLOAN: Again, a combination of all of those things. Body-worn cameras are used, not in all circumstances but in certain applications. Obviously there is data collection that occurs constantly when fisheries officers are in the field and through our intelligence reporting system. We record all that information in a database.

The CHAIR: What would be the bare minimum you would expect, given that body cameras are not necessarily used all the time. What is the bare minimum you would expect from a compliance officer in recording their interactions? Is the note pad—jotting down their interactions—the bare minimum you would expect in recording any offences or any interactions with the public?

SEAN SLOAN: I would think so, but I am just not sure of the context of the question.

The CHAIR: I am just trying to clarify it because you said that sometimes body cameras would be used, but not always. I want to try to get a baseline of the bare minimum recording of interactions you would expect from them?

SEAN SLOAN: Specifically, the use of body-worn cameras, obviously we would not want to be collecting footage 100 per cent of the time because we have got to review that footage. It has got a purpose. So generally speaking the footage is collected when we are having more high-risk encounters. That is a generalisation but that is how that technology is used.

SCOTT HANSEN: The number of section 41s, which are harm or attempt to harm any animal in a sanctuary zone, in 2021 that was 174 penalty notices issued on that, and taking fish in declared waters there were 91 of those—that is, recreational fishing.

The CHAIR: That was in 2021?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The CHAIR: I asked you to go back further than five years. So could you provide that on notice?

SCOTT HANSEN: Okay, we will go back to before then.

The CHAIR: Perhaps also on notice, how many of those who have been caught fishing within a marine park sanctuary zone have been prosecuted? And of those that have been prosecuted, how many times has the maximum penalty been applied for that particular offence?

SCOTT HANSEN: I will have to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Sure. To your knowledge, Mr Hansen, in the last five years, if it has gone to prosecution or it has not, has the magistrate or DPI Fisheries shown leniency towards a perpetrator based on their defence, and what would be the guiding standards set of parameters that would allow them to do that, particularly the DPI Fisheries—not the magistrate, because you do not have control, or the magistrate does, but in terms of DPI Fisheries?

SCOTT HANSEN: I am actually struggling to think of any court prosecutions for recreational fishing in a marine park. The vast majority issued penalty infringement notices.

The CHAIR: In the Act it says that it can go before a Local Court or the Land and Environment Court.

SCOTT HANSEN: I would have to take that on notice because I cannot think of too many cases that have ended up there.

The CHAIR: Sure. Ms Hurst.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Ms Filmer, when we were in the earlier session I think the Minister, or perhaps it was Mr Hansen, threw one of the questions to you, and the question was: How is the amount of funding to the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League determined each year and is there an official process?

KIM FILMER: The process has been the same for 15 years. The amount of \$424,000 for the RSPCA and \$75,000 for the Animal Welfare League has been that for 15 years.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So there is no actual review process or anything else. It is just an automatic payment?

KIM FILMER: Yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: It is automatic. Thank you. Ms Filmer, are you the best person to talk to about animal research statistics?

KIM FILMER: Yes, probably.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The animal use statistics for 2020 still have not been published. It has now been a full year since they were submitted to the Department of Primary Industries. When can we expect those to be published?

KIM FILMER: The animal use statistics are due into the department at the end of March. So we have not had them for a full year. Once they come into the department they are then analysed and crosschecked to make sure that they are accurate. Then once they are statistically analysed they are sent to ARRPP for approval—the Animal Research Review Panel. Then they go up through the approval processes to the Minister to be published. They have been to ARRPP for the 2020 stats and they are going up through the approval process at the moment, so they should be out very shortly.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So the block is at the Minister's office, is that right? The 2020 statistics were approved at ARRPP on 2 December and it has been in the Minister's office since then?

KIM FILMER: Not at the Minister's office. They have to go up through the approval process to the Minister's office.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And what is that ARRPP approval process to the Minister's office?

KIM FILMER: Up through the department.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So who does it go through? Once ARRPP has approved it, who does it go to then?

KIM FILMER: It goes up through the approval chain.

SCOTT HANSEN: It goes through to John and then to myself and then through to the Minister.

KIM FILMER: That is it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Hansen and Dr Tracey, is that finalised from your department, from the DPI, or has that still not reached the Minister yet from the 2020 statistics?

SCOTT HANSEN: I cannot recall seeing them myself yet. So I would have to take that on notice as to where they are in our system.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Okay. Thank you. I was also advised in the last budget estimates, Ms Filmer, there would be a digital live system to gather the animal use statistics for 2021 onwards. Can you give us an update on this and whether the system has started to be implemented?

KIM FILMER: It has. You will be pleased to know—it takes many, many months to do that check process after we get the statistics in at the end of March—we have implemented the digitalised system. So when that formal notification comes in we can do that part of it a lot quicker than we have in the past, which should mean that we can move them through the system and get them up through ARRPP and up through approvals a lot quicker than we have in the past.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Do we have an anticipated release date for the 2021 statistics if we are going to be using the digital live system?

KIM FILMER: No is probably the simple answer to that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Not sure yet.

KIM FILMER: Not yet.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Okay. That is alright. Thank you. Mr Hansen, late last year the Department of Primary Industries—

SCOTT HANSEN: Sorry, we were just talking about the 2020-2021 ARRPP annual report and statistics, is that correct?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: We were originally just talking about the 2020.

KIM FILMER: The statistics, not the annual report.

SCOTT HANSEN: Oh, okay.

KIM FILMER: The annual report is up through, but the statistics are on their way.

SCOTT HANSEN: Thanks.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Hansen, late last year the Department of Primary Industries published a consultation paper on licensing and regulating cat and dog breeders. Can you tell me a bit about how and why this paper came about?

SCOTT HANSEN: Sure. I think you would be aware, and I am trying to remember the transcript from the last estimates hearing, the previous Minister indicated a desire to have a look at what further could be done in the area of regulating puppy factories, in particular looking at what feedback was required to help guide what kind of accreditation/licensing program might be of merit in this space. Out of that came a discussion paper to ask basically three or four targeted questions to help guide insights into a further step towards increased oversight and compliance checks for that sector of the industry.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The submissions closed on 31 September 2021. Can you tell me what the next steps of this process will be?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes, and I might get either Ms Robinson or Ms Filmer to talk to the next steps on those.

SUZANNE ROBINSON: Yes, we have been analysing the feedback from that for consideration. The intent is also looking at considering the consultation feedback and what the results are out of that. Some of the initial analysis has shown there is a broad range of views, so that will need to be considered then in future steps for how we move forward around breeder regulation. As you would be aware, we also have the inquiry pending, so we would be waiting to find out what the recommendations are out of that inquiry to the consideration in terms of further steps forward.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Okay, thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Field.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, Chair. Thank you all for being here this afternoon. I would not mind starting on marine, if I could, probably to you, Mr Sloan, in the first instance, or Mr Hansen. Have there been any changes made to the management rules around Fish Rock and Green Island in terms of the use of baited hooks around those sites?

SEAN SLOAN: Thanks for the question. There has been an amendment to a temporary order recently that related to—and I think I will need to take it on notice to give you the correct answer—but there was an administrative error in a notice that was corrected recently, related to leaded line, the technique of leaded-line fishing, and we corrected that recently. So it was largely an administrative error that was corrected.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: You mean weighted lines that can be used while underway, is that what you are talking about? You can use baited hooks on a leaded line, can you?

SEAN SLOAN: That is correct, and it is a specific method that is used. But there was an order that was put in place that had an inadvertent outcome that was corrected. So that was something that was recent. But I will need to take it on notice to give you the correct answer.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I would appreciate it if you could find out before the end of today, if at all possible, Mr Sloan. On the department's website the recreational and spearfishing management plan site for fishing and diving rules at grey nurse shark aggregation sites it says for both those sites that line fishing using bait is prohibited, full stop. But I have been told that pro fishers have been told by compliance officers that the use of baited lead lines, as long as they are underway at Fish Rock and Green Island, is now allowed. That does not seem to be how it is described on your website. If you could explain those changes, and if it is the case—I mean, this is new though, right? That has not been allowed there before.

SEAN SLOAN: To that gear method, I think it is not a new method. It has been around for a long time.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That has not been allowed at those sites before, has it? Certainly, it was not up until this change.

SEAN SLOAN: Let me look into it and get you the correct answer, just to make sure that I can give you—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That would be great, and if there was any form of risk assessment done before those changes were made and if it was subject to public consultation and the date of the change, if possible?

SEAN SLOAN: My understanding is that there was an administrative error in a recent rule, but that is something we will check and come back to you.

SCOTT HANSEN: We will come back to you with some of the details about when that happened and what the details around it were.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It seems substantial, though. It is hardly an administrative error if all of a sudden a new practice of fishing can occur that previously was not allowed.

SCOTT HANSEN: We will come back and check how substantive it is or whether this was just correcting an omission in something that was drafted three months ago. They are the either ends of the spectrum, I would say. We will come back and see what it looks like.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That would be great. Mr Sloan, what is the time frame for completion of the statewide network plan that has gone out for consultation? When do you expect to have that finalised?

SEAN SLOAN: The consultation started back in November and went through until the end of January. The Marine Estate Management Act requires a two-month consultation period but we put it out for three. The Marine Estate Management Authority is now considering the feedback that we received from that public consultation process and we will then provide advice up to Ministers for finalising the network plan. That is essentially the first step in that review process and the next step will then be to go to the rules and to review the rules. That process has a separate statutory two-month public consultation requirement on it, so there will be further consultation that happens on the rules part of the process.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I think this actually started with the independent assessment in 2011, if I recall. So it is almost a decade now and all we have done effectively is wind back sanctuary zones and have a bunch of amnesties in place. This has just dragged on and on and on. You must have a time line in your mind about when you will be putting forward to Ministers a final plan and when you would expect to go out for consultation on design.

SEAN SLOAN: That is correct. The public consultation on the plan has happened and the Marine Estate—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: When are you working to getting a brief for the final proposal to the Ministers?

SEAN SLOAN: That is what I was just coming to. The Marine Estate Management Authority is key to this. They consider all that feedback. Our plan with MEMA is to come to the Ministers by the middle of the year with a final management plan, and then the rules part of that follows.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So you are going to put maps out in the six months before a State election?

SEAN SLOAN: That is obviously a matter for the Government but the process we are involved in now is headed that way.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: But that is what you are working towards?

SEAN SLOAN: That is right.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: You are going to make that mistake again. It is up to them, I guess. Are the future of those sanctuaries that are currently subject to amnesties in Batemans Marine Park just wound up in this process now? Will that effectively be a question for that design phase?

SEAN SLOAN: That is correct. The review of the rules happens in that second stage and there is a two-month public consultation requirement in the Marine Estate Management Act. So that goes through that process.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Mr Hansen, are you comfortable with how long this is dragging on? You and I have talked about this in the past. There is a point at which you cannot just switch laws off without formal decisions being taken. How long can that reasonably drag on before there has to be a resolution? Because in all likelihood we are not going to resolve this before the next election.

SCOTT HANSEN: You heard the time frame that Mr Sloan has been talking to. In terms of dragging on, keep in mind that the changes down at Batemans I think changed the use from sanctuary to habitat protection zones for an area that represents 0.6 per cent of—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Sure, but Montague Island in particular—there are some high-priority sites, which I am sure you would agree.

SCOTT HANSEN: And you would agree that the modification as to the rules—the gears that are allowed and the rule that is allowed—has tried to mitigate the risks associated with that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Show me the risk assessment that was done before that announcement was made by Andrew Constance as part of his electioneering. I do not want to blame, but the point is that you are comfortable with that continuing as the status quo.

SCOTT HANSEN: The risk would appear to be manageable; the time frame would appear to be realistic. I am conscious of your comments around the time frame that we have running to the end of this year but, at the same time, the challenge for us has been that this has been a journey since the creation of the Marine Estate Management Act, the establishment of the authority and the work through the threatened risk assessment. We are now getting down to the pointy end about the management activities on water in each of these parks. We are conscious of what that means but we are hoping that the journey that has precluded it actually allows a better conversation amongst the community, not some of the scaremongering that we have seen in the past.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: We will see how we go with that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen, can I briefly talk about Scores on Doors, the system for restaurants? As I understand it, councils make the decision as to whether or not they come on board with the program. How many councils have come on board and of those that are resisting, what is their main reason for resisting?

SCOTT HANSEN: I can tell you that there are 61 local councils participating in the program. I do not have an insight as to why not for those who are not participating. The 61 councils cover over 25,000 eligible food businesses, which represents about 65 per cent of all food businesses in the State. I do not have any details as to the main pushback or the reason for non-participation, but I am sure someone who is listening might text me an answer to that before we finish up today.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The Food Authority is predominantly the entity that is working with the councils. Is that correct?

SCOTT HANSEN: That is correct.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: If the program is successful and we want to promote it, you would want to know why some councils are not opting into it. If I could I would like to get to the bottom of that. If you can take that on notice and see if that work has been done to determine why councils are not coming on board and get that information back to the Committee, not by the end of the day but as part of an on notice arrangement, that would be very good. As I understand it, the Food Authority also undertakes inspections—this could be wrong—of aged-care facilities. They do food safety audits.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Are they random audits, Mr Hansen, or do they give notice to the aged-care facilities before they turn up?

SCOTT HANSEN: I do not know whether Dr Tracey has an answer. As far as I am aware, the ones I have been aware of have been announced audits. But that could just be the difficulty of doing anything unannounced in aged care over the last two years and it might well be I just cannot think back before then. I know certainly in the last two years they have been announced. But, as I said, let me check as to whether that has been common practice before then or whether it is just a COVID-related rule adjustment.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: If they are announced, what is the period? Is that notice period seven days' notice, five days' notice? It might assist in one of the constituency representations I have to respond to in the next few days. Back in the February 2021 estimates hearings I explored what has become known as the \$107,000 grant to Monaro Farming Systems about the grassland pilot.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: With regard to that particular pilot, has that been finalised?

STEVE ORR: I might take that one. I think that is more an LLS matter, Mr Veitch. I came across this issue last Thursday. What I have managed to understand is that \$107,000 was provided to Monaro Farming Systems to develop guidelines with respect to the management. Money was provided for the preparation of guidelines for the management of grasslands in that area. I understand there was a contract for the provision of funding. The contract had some very clear milestones in terms of what was to be delivered. There is a final report and there was a signed off procurement strategy in relation to those funds.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Now that the works have been finalised, have there been any changes to the legal instruments around assessment of native grasslands, which will be the Monaro grasslands, arising from this work?

STEVE ORR: I am not familiar in terms of what happened next. In relation to the story, as I understand, there was a commitment to look at two pilot areas. One was the Monaro and the other was Walgett, and this was part of the Monaro piece. But in terms of where that work actually led, I do not have an answer. I could come back to you, Mr Veitch.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: There has been a body of work funded by the taxpayers of New South Wales.

STEVE ORR: Correct.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think it is important that the taxpayers of New South Wales know what that body of work has delivered. You said there was a final report?

STEVE ORR: Correct.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is that available?

STEVE ORR: I do not know where it is published. I came across it. Yes, there is a final report—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You might want to take it on notice.

STEVE ORR: In terms of whether it has been released publicly, I do not know.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes. I am happy for you to take it on notice and check.

STEVE ORR: Sure.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And then, if it is possible for that to be made available to the Committee, I would be very grateful.

STEVE ORR: Thanks.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I want to now go on to weeds, whilst I have Mr Orr. There are some lovely, glossy brochures around "no space for weeds" and the like. The Regional Strategic Weed Management Plans—I have one here. The rest are all quite sizeable, as well. It is 2022 for the Riverina Regional Strategic Weed Management Plan—that is the date. Is there any work being undertaken to review the outcomes of this with a view to putting a new plan in place?

STEVE ORR: Yes, and I will throw to Mr Kelly in a minute, Mr Veitch, in terms of some of the details. The weed management framework—there is a State weeds plan, which is the responsibility of DPI. Mr Hansen or Dr Tracey may want to comment on that in a minute. Then, at a regional level, there are regional plans. The regional plans are the responsibility of LLS. You are right; we are about to go through a review process of the regional plans, which have been in place for the past five years. That review process will be undertaken and the development of new plans will be undertaken with the local boards. Each one of those local boards has a weeds group or a weeds subcommittee which they work with, which involve all the local control authorities as well as public land managers. As I understand it, they will be putting together a new weeds plan ultimately for the consideration of the Minister over this year. Rob, you might want to comment on timing and the like for Mr Veitch.

ROB KELLY: At the moment we are developing the guidelines and the templates and the documents so that the regions can commence with the local community advisory groups, which, as Mr Orr said, comprise of the local control authorities and the other public land managers, to review their existing plans—the ones that are currently about to expire—and then, with the guidance of those advisory groups, develop the new regional strategic weed plans that will then work their way up through the local boards for approval and ultimately through to the Minister for approval. We would hope to have those completed within the next 12 months.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When you say that, are you saying a commencement date of 1 July 2023?

ROB KELLY: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is the date you are working to?

ROB KELLY: That is the date we are working to: 1 July 2023.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: When you talk about the advisory groups, the Riverina one has a range of public land managers. Forest Corp is on it, Mr Chaudhary. You also have NSW Farmers, Landcare, rural

landholders, Roads and Maritime Services and the like. Are there any First Nations representatives on that advisory committee?

ROB KELLY: I would have to take that on notice. I certainly know they have been invited where they have public land that is required to be managed.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am specifically thinking of the local Aboriginal land councils.

ROB KELLY: They have been invited. Whether they participate or not, I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can you take it on notice for each of them?

ROB KELLY: Sure.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Just to go back to when they are due for renewal, each of the regions will have their new plans in place by 1 July 2023. That is what you are saying?

ROB KELLY: Yes. We align them all for the same implementation time frame.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And, as part of the exercise, you look at the achievements to date against this voluminous effort here—the performance indicators, the reporting. You make sure that everything has been adhered to?

ROB KELLY: We review all of that to make sure that they have been adhered to. We also look at what has worked and what has not worked. We also identify areas where we may want to re-prioritise weed species and things like that to have a higher focus, tailored to that region.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: As part of this review exercise, are you going to look at the impact of fires and floods on the plan?

ROB KELLY: In terms of—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: These plans look at all the known weeds. But clearly, post the bushfires, for instance, down my way—there is an explosion of blackberries and the like. It was a perfect opportunity, in my view, for the public land managers to actually get in and do something about those weeds. We didn't, and now they are as high as the ceiling in this room and taking up hectares, not just a little bit. They are taking up hectares.

ROB KELLY: It is a prioritisation process and a risk prioritisation process. We do look at the factors that would contribute to new weed incursions and to whether, as I said before, we re-prioritise the priorities we had in the previous plans because of different factors on the incursion cycle. Each local community advisory group within each of the 11 regions will look at those things and, with guidance from the participants in development of those plans, will work through that and then list the species that need to be prioritised.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay. In this morning's session I posed to the Minister—I think someone took it on notice—had there been any prosecutions of public land managers against the Biosecurity Act. Have we been able to get that information before this afternoon's hearing?

ROB KELLY: From an LLS perspective, we have not. In terms of weed control, that is the local control authorities.

STEVE ORR: Which is local government.

ROB KELLY: It is local government's responsibility to do that.

JOHN TRACEY: I do not have information on the compliance. But in terms of the activities that local control authorities have done, we have a figure here of 228,039, so 56 per cent, in private lands and 170,336, so 44 per cent, in public lands.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And those numbers reflect—

JOHN TRACEY: They reflect weed control activities undertaken by local control authorities from 2018 to February 2022.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay, but that is weed control activities as opposed to—

SCOTT HANSEN: The answer for us on the prosecutions would be the same as that for LLS.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am just trying to get to the bottom of why some agencies seem to do this better than others. But any of us that live in the regions would know that the general consensus is that public land managers are bad neighbours. The funding streams that are mentioned in the New South Wales Weeds Action

Program Guidelines 2020-2025—there are a number of State sub-programs, regional sub-programs and innovative sub-programs mentioned. Where does the funding come from? How are we funding these funding streams?

JOHN TRACEY: Within the Weeds Action Program there is a State funding component, and then there are the regional grants that go out as Rob was describing in terms of what underpins that regional piece.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is it coming out of general revenue or DPI's budget? Does Mr Hansen have to kick the can, or LLS? Where is the funding that is mentioned in this document? Where does it actually come from?

JOHN TRACEY: That funding is part of the Weeds Action Program commitment that Treasury makes.

SCOTT HANSEN: Out of our budget.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is out of your budget? Okay. It is a line item in your budget, Mr Hansen?

SCOTT HANSEN: As a pass through. We get the revenue from Treasury and make it as grant out to regional councils or LLSs.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: And then it is acquitted in that accord, so it is an in-out arrangement, essentially, for financial accounting?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: How do we measure the outcome for that spend? We have all these plans. Money is coming into DPI and out to feed down. But as we were driving around the other day, Mr Orr, we were looking at weeds along the side of the road on the North Coast. We were down at Tumut with PC No. 4, driving around the forest and roadways there, and we were looking at those weeds. Can someone explain to me where we measure the outcome for the dollars that we spend on what is a serious issue? Because at this point in time, after years and years of asking—I am quite frustrated by this—no-one can actually show me in any of the public land managers' accounts that we get the outcomes that we say we are achieving. I have some nice documents, but are we maintaining our weeds? Are we preventing weeds?

JOHN TRACEY: In terms of the Weeds Action Program, the activity in there is overseen by the State Weed Committee. They have a role in looking at what is involved. The Weeds Action Program is a fantastic program. It leverages more than 1,000 partners across the State. It is about trying to look at priorities across the State. One of the real advantages of the program is that it is focused, often, on the front end of the invasion curve, so it is looking at those weeds that are not yet established. It has been able to do that in terms of driving outcomes right through regions. It is a good example of the State role, regional role, local role and the integration of that to achieve some really good outcomes for the State. In terms of some of the State programs, I am happy to talk through some of those because there is some really fantastic work in there.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It says in the New South Wales Weeds Action Program Guidelines 2020-2025 that the program is run in five-year rounds, the third round being July 2020-2025. Can someone provide me a list of recipients of the funding for weeds, how we have acquitted the dollars and that the original intent for those dollars has been achieved—that the reason we allocated the funds, if there is some sort of review that says we have met that?

JOHN TRACEY: I can point you to the Weeds Action Program report. We do report on this activity and, in that, it will have some really good stats in terms of the returns on investment. When you look at every dollar put into weed control, the focus for that program is exactly that—trying to get the best benefit out not only in terms of leverage for partners but also in terms of the maximum impact in the sort of work that is done there. Like I said, the focus is the front end of the invasion curve, which means you are getting 100-to-one returns in the sort of investments that we have got there. We are focusing on high-risk pathways. There are some really good programs in there also for weed biocontrol, which targets established weeds. The returns there are—some of the recent work there is more than a 60-to-one return on investment for some of the work that has been conducted. A lot of that is in those reports that we can provide you.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The NRC report from, I think, 2014 says that it is a \$2 billion hit to the State economy every year. We are spending this money, but does anyone know if we are making any impact at all on that or are we walking around blindly saying that we are doing a really good job and we are putting money out here? Does anyone know? It could be \$3 billion now. That is 2014. That is nearly 10 years ago.

JOHN TRACEY: I think what you are highlighting is—this is true for biosecurity. We have got increasing impact of existing threats, as well as trying to prevent those that are coming. I take your point. I think the focus for us is to get the best return on investment on the money that we do have allocated. That is our task. Through that program, there have been some fantastic outcomes. The advantage, too, is not only priority at State

level, but you have got local groups coming together to look at what that maximum priority is. You have got local government involved and you have got all agencies involved, not only at the regional level but at the State level and the local level, to get that outcome. That is the best way that you can maximise the returns on investment.

STEVE ORR: Mr Veitch, sorry, if I can just—in terms of outcomes, the report which Dr Tracey is referring to does have some pretty good numbers in terms of activity: 167,000 property inspections, 5,800 extension activities, 4,400 compliance activities and 62,000 targeted control activities. As he is saying, there are some pretty good numbers and information in terms of what was the impact of the program between 2015 and 2020.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yet people still tell us—I am going to move on. I will spend a lot of time talking about weeds and pests if you let me go. I want to move on to some biosecurity issues. Dr Tracey, you mentioned new incursions. Mr Hansen, is there a contingency fund held by DPI in the event that there are new incursions? Or do we wait for the new incursion, and then you have to go case in hand to the Minister saying, "We need some dollars for this pretty quickly," and the Minister then has to go to Treasury to get those dollars? How does this work?

SCOTT HANSEN: At the moment, an alert goes up. Typically, on a Friday afternoon, we get a phone call to say that there is a positive test out of something. We immediately start actioning against agreed action plans. These agreed action plans are usually part of a national response. We start spending, and we continue to spend in line with those action plans. Normally, within the first couple of days, we then have an agreement or discussion across jurisdictions about what it is we are going to try to do with the new incursion. We agree on a course of action, and then that triggers cost-sharing agreements between the Commonwealth, the States and industries, in some cases, to be able to agree to cost share. If that cost sharing is within a certain parameter, we absorb it and wear it ourselves, so there is no contingency fund.

We reprioritise other things that we would otherwise do, not just within biosecurity, but it could be something somewhere else that we were going to go. We prioritise to do that. If it starts to get to a quantum in which we cannot do that, we will look to put forward a bid to Treasury to be able to cover it. It is important to note that is after the event. We act and respond immediately in line with the agreed action plans. That is not only what we are expected to do, but it is what we expect every other jurisdiction will do when a new incursion comes into their State. The one thing that holds us all together in this biosecurity response nationally is that we all agree that we respond, and then we come together and talk about how we share the costs that otherwise would be borne by one jurisdiction.

The CHAIR: I might just pick up where I was regarding compliance in marine parks. Mr Hansen and Mr Sloan, would it be safe to assume that DPI Fisheries officers and DPI Fisheries managers are well versed in the rules and regulations surrounding the local marine parks? Would that be a safe assumption?

SCOTT HANSEN: That would be a safe assumption

The CHAIR: In the past five years, has any compliance officer or Fisheries manager or officer been found doing the wrong thing within a marine park by patrolling officers?

SCOTT HANSEN: I cannot think of any compliance officers.

The CHAIR: What about Fisheries managers?

SCOTT HANSEN: When you say "Fisheries managers", just people who work in Fisheries who are managers?

The CHAIR: Yes.

SCOTT HANSEN: I would say there probably has been. I am only aware of one that got high-profile media coverage on social media recently. Apart from that, I would not expect—the same way I do not know if they have got speeding fines on the weekend, I do not know.

The CHAIR: Can we go to the one that got a bit of social media attention recently? Can you provide any details as to where and when these offences occurred?

SCOTT HANSEN: I cannot. I do not know whether Sean can.

SEAN SLOAN: I am aware of one such incident of a Fisheries manager—a member of my staff—who was found to be in the Jarvis Bay Marine Park in a sanctuary zone and was issued with a penalty infringement notice and paid the infringement notice. That was the action taken. That is the one I am aware of. It did get some social media attention.

The CHAIR: That is why I am trying to clear all of this up. What was the infringement notice for? What specifically was he doing? There is nothing against the rules in being in a marine park. He could have been swimming or snorkelling. What specifically was he issued the PIN for?

SEAN SLOAN: It was fishing in a marine sanctuary zone. Keep in mind, infringement notices or penalty notices are not actually admissions of guilt. They are essentially on-the-spot fines, just like an on-the-spot fine is issued by police for various types of offences. This sort of information is not ordinarily out in the public domain. We are also very conscious of the confidentiality of these provisions when it pertains to—

The CHAIR: That is why I am not mentioning the person's name. You would admit that paying the PIN would be an admission of guilt, wouldn't it?

SEAN SLOAN: No, it is not.

The CHAIR: Has the person paid the PIN?

SEAN SLOAN: Yes.

The CHAIR: Has there been any other consequences issued to him outside of the PIN, given that he or she should be well versed in the rules and regulations around this? I hate to sound like a parent, but he or she should know better. From a departmental perspective, has any further action been taken against this person because they should know better?

SCOTT HANSEN: No. Yes, they should know better, but at the same time that is what penalty infringement notices are there for—as a penalty for those who should know better and who get caught. As you would be aware, there are a lot of notices or warnings issued for infringements, such as those for people who may not have known better or for not knowing where the lines are. This was a penalty infringement notice that was issued. It was paid. The person was off on their own time. They are not involved with Fisheries compliance. They do work in Fisheries. It has received a lot of coverage. I would not know of any other staff who have been caught for Fisheries breaches if not for the fact that this one has been particularly singled out in social media for reporting.

The CHAIR: Let me be clear. The reason I am asking is because it has achieved a bit of social media notoriety. That is why I want to try to get to the details as much as we can and put that to bed.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: How did we get to Fisheries compliance? I am liking this.

The CHAIR: Can we go to trust funds, Mr Hansen? Obviously over many years DPI has submitted applications to access trust fund money. In some of those applications it mentions the words "operational overheads". Can you explain what those overheads would comprise, generally speaking?

SCOTT HANSEN: I might ask Mr Sloan to talk to any details of that. But, giving him time to pull that information up, when we think about the majority of the projects that we have put our names forward for—things like the offshore reefs, the artificial reef program and so forth—the cost of building the reef is one thing but the costs of staff to manage the oversight of issuing the contracts, doing the expressions of interest, considering tenders and entering into contracts do not actually add to the structure of the reef. But if that is not done, you do not get a reef being built. They are the kinds of things that I assume are picked up in those descriptions of costs. But I will throw to Mr Sloan if there is anything in addition that he wants to add.

SEAN SLOAN: First of all, I just mention that we have recently published a Recreational Fishing Trusts annual report. It is the first report of its kind that we have published in New South Wales. It is available publicly on the website and provides all the detail of the expenditure of funds out of the Recreational Fishing Trusts. That is publicly available. It is the first time we have done that. Obviously that is in the interests of transparency and public accountability. In terms of the recent year 2020-21, there was \$17.7 million of revenue drawn in through recreational fishing licence fees. There were 474,517 fishers who paid those fees and \$16.8 million of new approved funds going out of the trust for projects. Of that, \$9.6 million worth of approved programs came into DPI Fisheries. They were for things like the fish aggregation devices, our fish stocking programs et cetera. In terms of the operational overhead component, coming to your question, I will have to take that on notice to give you the correct answer. But like any of the activities that we provide, there are overhead costs, so I will just have to give you the answer on that one, typically.

The CHAIR: While you are taking that on notice, can you provide an explanation as to how those operational overheads are accounted for? Is there a separate cost centre that you park those operational overheads in, or is it sitting with a project-based cost centre? Can you provide a bit finite detail on that?

SEAN SLOAN: Yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I go back to dog breeding. Mr Hansen, are you able to provide an update on how many breeders have been inspected, fined and/or prosecuted as part of the RSPCA puppy farm task force?

SCOTT HANSEN: I can. Just bear with me while I find it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And also, how many animals have been seized?

SCOTT HANSEN: The total number of new inspections—these are first-time inspections—is 448 and revisits are 199. Sixty-two PINs have been issued, three prosecutions initiated and 8,678 animals inspected.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Wow, thank you.

SCOTT HANSEN: Sorry, was there a second part to that that I missed while I was trying to find—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have any animals been seized?

SCOTT HANSEN: I am not sure on that. I do not know whether Kim can assist.

KIM FILMER: No, I do not have those numbers. They would be part of the prosecutions probably. But I do not have those stats.

SCOTT HANSEN: Actually, we know—individual cases—there was one in February 2021 in which they seized 79 dogs and puppies. So, yes, there have been animals seized but what that total number is, I could not tell you at this point in time.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That is okay. How often does the DPI or the Minister meet with the RSPCA in respect to the task force?

SCOTT HANSEN: For the Minister's part, it would be a question for the Minister, but from our perspective, and I might ask either Suzanne or Kim, but I know I have conversations probably monthly with Steve Coleman from RSPCA.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: On this specific task force or just generally?

SCOTT HANSEN: Conversations will include discussions on the task force—not specifically on, but it will be included in those conversations. But I do not know whether my colleagues have other answers.

JOHN TRACEY: I can add to that. I also meet with Mr Coleman around monthly. It is not a set time. But we are in discussions on a whole range of things, including that. Our compliance staff also meet with their compliance staff as well as Kim's.

KIM FILMER: I would speak with the chief inspector, Scott Meyers, probably at least weekly, including on topics related to this.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are the conversations more ad hoc rather than being part of any kind of prescribed meeting or process of oversight in regard to the task force?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Hansen, I ask you again about the New South Wales code of practice for animals used in rodeo events, which has not been updated since it was written in 1998. I assume there are still no updates on that code since we last spoke?

SCOTT HANSEN: No. That is right.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You will recall that the code says that "calf-roping in a form which permits the abrupt stopping of calves" should be phased out by 1989. Yet it still continues in New South Wales using the Ropersmate device. An answer to a question on notice at the last budget estimates states:

DPI is not aware of any studies into the Ropersmate device.

Is that still the case? Are you aware of any studies since the last budget estimates?

SCOTT HANSEN: No.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Does that mean that the DPI does not have any evidence that the Ropersmate device does prevent the abrupt stopping of calves?

SCOTT HANSEN: I might ask either Dr Filmer or Ms Robinson if they want to comment on this. But the short answer is I am not aware of any research that provides evidence. I am aware that the widespread belief is that it does provide a relief against the abrupt stopping of the calves and that the industry is self-regulating by requiring it to be used to actually prohibit that abrupt stopping of calves in roping, and disqualifying competitors

should that actually occur. So they are introducing their own form of self-regulation, but I am not aware of any research that is available that demonstrates or quantifies that benefit.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Hansen, when you say "the widespread belief", do you mean that that is simply what the industry says—that there is no actual evidence that the Ropersmate device is preventing these actions from breaching the code of practice?

SCOTT HANSEN: I might ask Ms Filmer if she wants to add something to that.

KIM FILMER: That is what the Ropersmate device is; it is called a shock absorber. It is like a pulley system that the rope goes through and so it stops the abrupt halt by acting like a shock absorber, because the rope goes through a pulley system. That is what it is designed to do.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But we do not have any evidence that that is what it is actually doing, do we?

SCOTT HANSEN: Well, we have evidence that it is acting as a shock absorber, because that is the way in which it is constructed. Visually you see a difference in terms of how abruptly the calf is. If you watch old footage from rodeos, that flinging action of the calf is not what you see now with the Ropersmate. But is that quantifiable? Not that we are aware of, nor has there been any research to do so.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Is it something that has been discussed or explored by the department at all to have a look at finding actual evidence that this device does what it is proposed to do and the problems obviously if the Ropersmate device is not preventing the abrupt stopping of calves as claimed?

SCOTT HANSEN: Not that I am aware of. I do not know whether there have been any discussions with any of the enforcement agencies, but not that I am aware of, no.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Ms Filmer, did you have anything to add to that?

KIM FILMER: No.

The CHAIR: Mr Field?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, Chair. I would not mind turning to some questions for LLS now. The NRC report into the land management changes highlighted the unexplained clearing, which I mentioned to the Minister this morning, is most likely related to allowable activities, land management under the LLS code and landholder self-assessment, particularly as it relates to disturbance of grasslands and groundcover. Do you agree with that, Mr Orr?

STEVE ORR: Thank you for the question, Mr Field. I will refer to Mr Tyndall. My understanding is there was a series of recommendations to come out of that NRC report, one of which was to form a joint committee between LLS and EES, which has been operating and has met, I think, on a dozen occasions. I have not attended one of those meetings. One of the things which they are looking at is this issue and I am not aware of exactly where it is but Mr Tyndall may have some comments for you.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Is there any sense within LLS, Mr Tyndall, of how much could be apportioned to those various elements, because it would really matter if you were trying to make sure that the code was applying appropriately and that the law was being enforced in New South Wales. You would want to have a bit of a handle on where those risk areas might be.

ADAM TYNDALL: Thanks, Mr Field. As I think EES indicated in their session earlier in this budget estimates, I do not think it serves either EES or LLS well to have such a high number in terms of unexplained clearing. As Mr Orr indicated, we have set up a working group to—pardon the pun—get some explanations on the level of unexplained clearing. Part of that will naturally be people working within the framework doing routine agricultural management, so clearing fence lines, those sorts of activities.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: The allowable activities.

ADAM TYNDALL: The allowable activities and a portion of that will be people not working within the framework. There is also a separate concern here that we are grouping those people who are acting lawfully into this unexplained category, so that is something that we are really interested in going forward, getting a better understanding.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: How would someone operate lawfully but get caught up in the unexplained clearing?

ADAM TYNDALL: Well, they will be doing a self-assessed allowable activity, so clearing a fence line or maintaining their infrastructure.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So we are back to the allowable activities.

ADAM TYNDALL: Yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It is a big chunk, possibly a big chunk.

ADAM TYNDALL: I am not sure whether we can say that with any accuracy.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: But that would be the only way that a landholder could be caught up, who is doing something that they were allowed under the law but ultimately it was still showing up in the unexplained clearing. It would only really be the allowable activities, right?

ADAM TYNDALL: Another portion of it would be the management of native grasslands under those transitional arrangements. My understanding is that the majority of the figures in that unexplained category are actually the management of non-woody vegetation rather than woody vegetation.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That could still involve the allowable activities and some of the pasture expansion stuff. It is not necessarily—

ADAM TYNDALL: To be accurate, not the pasture expansion, but some of those transitional arrangements under the regulation.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Let us just go with the allowable activities. Under the Act the rules for allowable activities for the clearing of native vegetation says:

The clearing of native vegetation that is authorised by this Schedule for any purpose only authorises clearing to the minimum extent necessary for that purpose.

How do you monitor and enforce that provision of the law?

ADAM TYNDALL: Well, we set up the framework or the biodiversity review panel report set up a framework that was a risk-based framework that placed trust in landholders. There are two countervailing parts of that. The first is that it costs the landholder to maintain their infrastructure and, secondly, we have a series of distances that are based on what could reasonably be done around a fence line in proportion to the property.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I understand that, but how do you monitor and enforce that? I appreciate the whole system is based on trust in a landholder, but when you have 74 per cent of clearing in the unexplained column, you sort of go, "Are you sure we can trust the landholders right now? It has taken three years to get a handle on it." I am just wondering how you actually go about enforcing that.

ADAM TYNDALL: So there would be two components. The first is, I suppose, to make it clear, LLS is not the compliance agency.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I understand.

ADAM TYNDALL: And the second is actually working with landholders in engagement and is it in their properties and giving them advice of how to use their allowable activities.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I might put some questions on notice then about how many of those visits have occurred and the activities on the ground to deal with that. Under the LLS code components, my reading of the code is that pretty much all of the code-based clearing can only occur based on notification to LLS or a voluntary or mandatory co-compliance certificate being issued. That is correct, is it not?

ADAM TYNDALL: Yes, from memory it is, yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So you would have some notification of any clearing under the code from a landholder, whether it was a notification or whether it was actually a voluntary or mandatory co-compliance certificate?

ADAM TYNDALL: Yes, we would and all of the certificates are on a public register on our website.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: You would have a map of that, right?

ADAM TYNDALL: I would have to take that on notice.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That 3 per cent that the Minister mentioned, 3 per cent of clearing versus what has been approved, that is sort of the difference between all of these notifications and all of these co-compliance certificates in the actual show up of clearings. That is that difference there, right?

ADAM TYNDALL: Yes. To be precise here, that was based on the SLATS data since the reforms were implemented in 2017. That is comparing what we authorised in terms of approvals compared to what is actually being cleared on the ground, which is less than 4 per cent.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Given you have got that, that is not a component of the unexplained clearing. So this has really pointed to the fact that it is the allowable activities that are a big chunk of code-based clearing.

ADAM TYNDALL: Again, this will be something that we will be working with EES. Again to reiterate, I think it is in both agencies' interests to seek an explanation for this unexplained clearing.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Set asides were also raised in the NRC report as a real concern. Set asides were well under what was estimated when the Act was created. The management code deals with the management of set asides and requires landholders, when requested, to provide records of management actions taken in those set aside areas. How many times since the code has LLS sought records of management actions undertaken in a set aside area?

ADAM TYNDALL: That is something I would have to take on notice, Mr Field.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: If you could, I would appreciate that. Thank you Chair.

The CHAIR: We will break now for afternoon tea break and return at 3.35 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. I will now throw back to the Opposition.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I want to ask a couple of questions around the Badgerys Creek airport relating to the establishment of an agricultural precinct. Essentially I am after a status report. Is that up to speed? Is it happening? Where is it at? What role does DPI have in establishing that agricultural precinct? Mr Hansen?

SCOTT HANSEN: There are probably two components to this. The first one was one that we were more directly involved with, which was actually discussions between ourselves and Sydney uni with regards to the potential for integration of some of our operations and some of our facilities between our Elizabeth Macarthur ag institute and Sydney uni with some of their veterinary and science-based courses. It is a subject which I believe has been on again and off again the agenda for the last 20 years. Some of the opportunities that we were being presented with—changes in key infrastructure out there—looked as though they might help facilitate that. It would be fair to say that COVID, and the impact of COVID on the university sector, put that discussion as a secondary issue for them, and we have not picked that up in the last two years as much as we should have or had originally planned.

The second part has been working to look at how we bring together an opportunity for the new airport to potentially integrate its biosecurity and incoming clearance and export clearance in with some of the facilities that we have out there, as well as some facilities that we could target build at the new airport, on a greenfield site, that would actually make the new airport an exit and entry point of choice for the agriculture sector because of streamlining of both pre-export protocols for market access and also arrival. Those discussions are still ongoing, about what we pull together where. We are in conversations also with the Commonwealth about how we work with them on that front, and also with the opportunity that some of that land out there under the flight path might present, in terms of protected cropping, to be able to move production processing and quarantining and post- or pre-quarantine treatment into a really small geographical area, to try to help with the rising costs of production.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But there is work going on there around ensuring that that agricultural precinct is not just a statement or an idea that disappears?

SCOTT HANSEN: It continues to move ahead.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Flood recovery and mitigation is very topical right now. I think there are 57 LGA natural declarations at the moment. For the flood event prior to that there were 59 declarations, I think. So they are getting pretty close to the previous flood event for the number of LGA declarations. What did we learn last time that we are going to implement this time? I fully appreciate every flood and every catchment is different each time. They have their own life and everything else. But can you update the Committee on what lessons we learnt last time that we are going to implement this time as a part of the flood recovery, from DPI's perspective?

SCOTT HANSEN: I was going to say I might just be selective because otherwise, as you know, you and I could be here all afternoon on this one. Firstly, it is 57 LGAs we are administering to at the moment. It might just be worthwhile—I have some stats from this morning with regard to applications to the RAA for the \$75,000 primary producer special disaster recovery funding, if that is the okay. So 587 applications have been received, about 53 a day. Now that is a lot higher than the floods in the 2021 flood event, because that averaged around 30 per day. So it is almost double, the application numbers coming in.

I guess one of the first things that we have learnt out of the last one was that speed in establishment and set-up. I think the fact that the RAA has already had \$32 million worth of claims submitted, the average claim

being worth about \$54,911, the fact that they have already processed and approved 132 of those cases—you think about the conversations we have had in previous years about the speed of approval, turn-on and distribution. The fact that we are sitting here so soon after that flood event occurred and already there is \$1.98 million—almost \$2 million out in bank accounts—that speed in terms of set-up for the RAA, its risk assessment and its processing has been fantastic.

Some of the Committee members here I know have asked this question in the past. The fact that at the set-up stage, which is quite often the longest delay stage, we are talking about a processing time of 2.5 days per application—the idea that someone applies on a Monday and by Thursday is getting the money in their bank account, that speed has been a key learning. That has been both our systems, our people and how we sort of deal with the evidence that is required from producers coming through. It has been captured in the data that we have got from people previously—there are almost 4,000 people that we were still dealing with floods from February-March last year that we basically said, "Confirm with us your details haven't changed. We know you meet the eligibility criteria. We keep rolling." That kind of systems approach to sort of fast-track the assistance out there has been one of the key pieces for us so far.

Secondly, for us, that establishment of the local command centres in areas in which we can continue to have access—some might question now "Why at Grafton?", for example, for the local command centre, which is a little bit removed from where we can now access. As I said, that was set up on day one of the floods. It was set up on the day, literally, that the levee was overtopped in Lismore, and putting it anywhere else would have put our own staff in harm's way. That early identification as to where the risk was, how we set up the local command centre and how we expand out that—in between events, at both LLS and DPI we have been doing a lot of work in training and getting staff ready to go on to rosters to be able to administer tasks. As I said earlier, we have had over 300 staff already involved. Those 300 staff will keep rotating through, and we will keep bringing additional staff in.

To a question and a point that Ms Hurst made earlier before about the single vehicle that Animal Welfare League has, I am not sure what other vehicles they need to look like but we were definitely faced with the real-life scenario last week of having it deployed in the north whilst western Sydney was looking like it was going to need mass evacuation and treatment facilities as well, including some of the Animal Welfare League facilities in that area. We keep gathering the insights about what worked well this time, which was that portable mobile vet facility. Again, the lesson for us out of that one was one at one end of the State would not have helped us with the widespread flooding we had—we needed to be dealing with more.

This one was quite unique in terms of that continued—the focus right up front was so much for so long about human life. As I know, we have spoken about previously the prioritisation of air equipment and boats, not for identifying stranded livestock nor doing fodder drops but actually picking up people off roofs and doing food drops. That changed our "What do we do? How do we do it?" routine from what we would normally have. So we have had to accommodate that and build that into our learnings for the next one.

I think the agreements we have in place between the organisations—the agreements we have in place between RSPCA and Animal Welfare League in terms of that activation—have been really useful and successful. But in this event, because of the size of it, we identified early that we needed to bring the engineering functional groups—so public works advisory and Soil Con services—to help us with the removal of carcasses. Only when we got really well behind in the fires did we reach out for assistance from the ADF and others to help us catch up. We reached out right at the start and set up the systems right at the start, which has meant that we are basically 24 hours away of being caught up in the disposal jobs we currently have logged. That is not to say that we do not find another heap somewhere, but we are not too far off what we currently have logged. These are all the lessons we have learned out of the last one that we are rolling forward.

What is critical after each of these is actually the post-action reviews that are undertaken. To be honest, we would love if someone could make it so that we had enough time to action everything out of this post-action review before we have the next natural disaster emergency. I think I saw a figure—it might have come from Mr Wheaton or Sam over the weekend—that this is the eighth natural disaster emergency declaration for Lismore since 2018. That leaves a very small gap of time in between to fast-track the learnings and the lessons before you roll into the next one. We are getting faster at doing that but we are going to have to keep getting faster, I think.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I raised this the other day after we had our visit up to Grafton, Casino, Lismore and Ballina, but for both Mr Hanson and Mr Orr, a number of your staff were impacted by the floods whilst they were still trying to do their job in assisting others. I came away from that (1) impressed by the fact that they were doing that and (2) a little bit worried about their own wellbeing. They were dealing with the fact that their houses and lives had been pretty much destroyed but they were still fronting up to work to help others.

STEVE ORR: Mr Veitch, just on that, we cannot underestimate that impact on those people. I know we have been thinking carefully and putting steps in place for staff to offer them the support they need. We have a whole range of people who have been impacted. Either they have been impacted personally themselves—we have a vet up north who is working out of an evacuation centre because the house he was living in is no longer there—all the way through to people whose family and friends have been impacted as well. You are dead right: All of that stuff is going on but people still turned up and did the job.

We really appreciated Minister Saunders' words about the effort of LLS and DPI staff in the efforts overall. We need to be mindful of those things, and that sometimes impacts on the ability to respond in as timely a way as we would like. The other issue is we have got close to 200 people who have been involved from LLS in terms of the response itself, but there is an impact on business-as-usual activities because many of those come from other regions over the hill. So we are starting to think about, well, given the frequency of some of these events, how do we set ourselves up in a different way to enable us to respond so that impact is somewhat lessened?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: What are the wellbeing measures you are putting in place for the staff in your respective agencies after this event?

STEVE ORR: In terms of our staff there is some quite specific support for those people. We are actually reaching out to those people who have been impacted. Certainly, when people come off a shift there is a check-in. Mr Kelly may want to comment on that further. Five days on, there is a check-in with that staff member. We have a five days on, two days off cycle, which we work through and that is quite deliberate. I think one of the lessons out of bushfires was that seven and two was a bit much and we are starting to notice some impacts on people, so it is five and two. Then there is a deliberate check-in with those people—again, Mr Kelly might want to comment a little bit more in terms of their wellbeing and how they are actually going—through to, "We have a group on the North Coast. How are we actually managing them as a collective of people to ensure they are getting the support?" Because, as I said, the impacts on those staff go all the way from "I've lost everything" through to "I know people." So we need to ensure that those checks are there. Mr Kelly, do you want to comment on anything else?

ROB KELLY: The other things that we are doing with the end of the roster shift—so the five-on, two-off—at the end of that there is a compulsory debrief for what has gone on. We are making sure that we are not continually using the same staff for each rotation so we are giving staff a break and we are bringing in staff from other regions, particularly given the fatigue that is caused with the North Coast staff having to not only work in it but live in it and deal with the issue with their friends. So we are making sure they get a decent break, go back to business as usual.

The Employee Assistance Program—we are accessing those. Benestar, who is our provider of that—they have specialist psychologists who are going up to the region to debrief with staff who want it. They have got staff based up there. There is a drop-in centre. The other things that we will do as it starts to ease down a little bit is we will get all of the teams together up there and we will probably have a barbecue or something—nothing formal—just to have a debrief and a chat and see how they are going and figure out what else we can offer them. But I think the primary thing that we are maintaining is to ensure that we are not continually having the staff that live in impacted regions being rotated through an incident response to give them a decent break.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen?

SCOTT HANSEN: The only thing to add—because, obviously, those systems and everything have been set up for all of the ag and animal functional support area for staff. So the only additional piece at the front end has been, to your point about staffing directly impacted, we have tried to make sure that where staff have been displaced from homes, we have been able to find accommodation within our sort of footprint of our research stations to be able to accommodate them, and to be able to give them places which they can use, where they can have lodgings in the short to medium term. Where we have needed to we have sort of made sure that, if they had a work vehicle and their home vehicle has been destroyed, they can use the work vehicle but just keep a log of it so that we know what is going on. It is those kind of things—just to make sure that they have their tools and basic facilities provided for them.

I would say one of the challenges for us in all this is that it is not just this incident or event. We are already getting reports of staff feeling that this triggers memories of the last—you know, whether it is the bushfires or the last floods. I mean, this is a cascade, a pickup of vicarious trauma, almost, of a series of natural disasters for which we have asked people to go over and above to respond to, and it is starting to wear across. It is not just in an office; our staff from the south, who are manning the phone lines and taking the calls from producers—they are back doing jobs that they did during the bushfires and during the floods of last year. They continue to appreciate the support and I know that both the Minister's comments before, his comments up there the other day and your comments up there to staff the other day are all most appreciated because it feels as though what they

are doing is being seen and being recognised. That is particularly important in an environment in which there is a lot of hostility around what is being done and what is not being done, so we appreciate that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay, thank you. Before my time runs out, you were talking about the RAA and rolling out or getting the dollars into people's bank accounts.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Did that require the RAA to staff up—to increase the staffing levels to meet demand?

SCOTT HANSEN: It will do. At the moment it has required them not to staff down—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes.

SCOTT HANSEN: —which is what we were doing from the previous flood event that actually was due to wrap up its processing on 1 June.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay.

SCOTT HANSEN: So the previous flood event still had an increase in staffing numbers there. However, as I said before, the volume of applications we are getting and the speed at which we are getting them mean that we will make sure that we continue to not only hold those staff on where we can, but continue to staff up to be able to handle it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you.

SCOTT HANSEN: Sorry, I might just say on that: One of the things with this one, we normally have a reciprocal arrangement with the RAA's equivalent in Queensland, QRIDA, where, if one of us is in need, we will send staff to assist. Obviously, they have their own applications and their own process underway, which means we cannot just readily turn on their support to assist us with this time.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. You may not have conducted this assessment yet, but the cost of damage to DPI assets or LLS assets through the floods, not just to the north but across the State—have you been able to conduct that? Do you have a bit of an idea about where that sits at the moment?

STEVE ORR: Certainly, the main issue for us, Mr Veitch, is that our office in Lismore was in the main street. Obviously, that has got some issues now and I think ultimately we will be looking for some alternative accommodation.

SCOTT HANSEN: And we are still compiling the list for us. We have everything from Fisheries offices along the coastline that are submerged, all the way through to Duck Creek—appropriately named at the moment because that is about the only thing that you can have on it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You may not be able to answer this—it is like, "How long is a piece of string?"—but what is the time frame that you expect to have a better handle on your own assets status?

STEVE ORR: I think in our case we are pretty clear and we will be talking to Scott about potentially moving in with him.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen, how is that arrangement going to go?

SCOTT HANSEN: We love it; it is great. It is always good having the teams together because they are on the ground and they feed off each other a lot anyway in terms of intel and what they are seeing and what they are doing.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is that at Wollongbar? Is that where you—

STEVE ORR: Yes.

SCOTT HANSEN: And, as you know, we have opened the doors up at our Wollongbar research facility. It is currently hosting everything from the New South Wales police forensic crime lab from Lismore, all the way through to the Resilience NSW recovery centre. We are hosting a lot of people up there at the moment—the more the merrier. The facility, we will probably have a finalised piece at the moment in the next week or two. We have a running tally; it is just under \$4 million in terms of damage and we are obviously feeding that into Treasury and the Treasury insurance process.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I think I have got a couple of seconds left.

The CHAIR: Twenty.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Very quickly, that laboratory that we looked at last week, you are doing some outstanding work there around soil contamination post-flood. Will that be used then for across the State? I was not quite clear the other day.

SCOTT HANSEN: That will be one of the labs that will be used. It will not be able to handle the volume of what is going to come forward. There will be other both private and government labs that will be used, but it will be one of the key ones and it will be one that focuses on a lot of the work up in that northern rivers region.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Okay, thanks.

The CHAIR: I might just do some mopping-up on some questions on notice from previous estimates. Going to the marine park advisory committee memberships, I think last estimates there were 44 alternate member vacancies and six vacancies in actual members and you did indicate that there was a bit of a recruitment process going on. Where are we up to with those vacancies?

SCOTT HANSEN: Good question, Chair. Let me just quickly—

The CHAIR: Do you want me to fire off some other questions that you might be able to answer and then we can maybe come back to that one?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes, that would be great.

The CHAIR: According to, I guess, the handbook and how these appointments are being made, there is a call for nominations, then there is an assessment of the nominations by the agency steering committee, and then there is a final recommendation being made by the DG. Who is on that steering committee and are those deliberations formally voted on, or is it just—

SCOTT HANSEN: I might ask Mr Sloan to talk about the committee, and I will buy him some time to pull that up to tell you that there are seven member vacancies across the six New South Wales marine park advisory committees at this point in time.

The CHAIR: Are they alternate members or just—

SCOTT HANSEN: No, they are members.

The CHAIR: So we have gone up one and we have lost another, because there were six last time.

SCOTT HANSEN: If it was six last time, then it is seven this time. And there are 45 alternate member vacancies across.

The CHAIR: So the recruitment process has not really worked?

SCOTT HANSEN: It has not been a great period to be recruiting people over the last 12 months to join community or advisory committees, but no. I think as a result, we are trying to think about how do you best use those alternate member roles and is there a more flexible way to be able to do this? Because, obviously, for a number of those communities, getting together face-to-face and having those conversations over the last two years has been really difficult, especially for some of the participants in the advisory committees. There has got to be a better way for us to be able to sort of make sure that there is a constant list of people who can participate when others have to drop out.

The CHAIR: I appreciate if people cannot get to these meetings and they are not well attended that the interest level naturally drops as well and it is a bit of a cascading effect.

SEAN SLOAN: I can just add to that one, Chair. Of the seven member vacancies, four of those are local government members, and that resulted because of recent council elections. So we were waiting for new members from local government to come forward. In terms of the committee, it is the Marine Estate steering committee and it is made up of all the government agencies that sit on the Marine Estate Management Authority.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Are the deliberations formally voted on? Is there a formal vote taken on "Yes, we are recommending that this person go forward," or is it just whoever puts their hand up gets the gig?

SEAN SLOAN: I do not think they would ever vote. To my knowledge, they have not voted. Generally those processes are run by consensus. So, to my knowledge, we have never had a situation where we have had differing views come forward on membership.

The CHAIR: Is there a different process for members who are moving from an alternate member and being promoted to the actual member, so someone who was originally an alternate member and they want to become the actual member? Is there a different process if there are no other nominations or are they just naturally elevated?

SEAN SLOAN: I do not believe so.

The CHAIR: There would still be a process?

SEAN SLOAN: Yes. The alternate members can continue to stand or act in the place of a standing member when that standing member is absent. But if that becomes ongoing then they do not just naturally fill that role; they actually go back out to appoint a standing member. The alternate member can nominate for that.

The CHAIR: But generally there would be no cause for someone to be appointed without an application.

SEAN SLOAN: That would be my understanding. That is correct.

The CHAIR: I will just go to the next question on notice. I asked about the Recreational Fishing NSW Advisory Council and conflicts of interest, particularly around the dusky flathead decision. The answer that you came back with was that all members of the advisory council declare their interests in the RFS NSW register of interests at each meeting, and then members are requested to declare any required updates. I have checked the meeting outcomes on the DPI website and there does not seem to be any update of interests along those lines about a recreational fisher who also has a charter business. Perhaps on notice, for people representing those eight regions who also have a charter business, did they make that declaration on their initial form?

SCOTT HANSEN: We will take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Sure. Mr Sloan, there was an answer that you gave regarding the \$148,000 for workshops to engage recreational fishermen. I appreciate you said that you had the workshops planned, but COVID got in the way. Have those workshops been rescheduled as of yet for this year?

SEAN SLOAN: That was the workshops related to fish screening?

The CHAIR: Yes.

SEAN SLOAN: They have. That occurred just recently this year. I think they were originally planned for last year but could not occur because of COVID.

The CHAIR: Yes. They were planned in August and September.

SEAN SLOAN: That is right. They have occurred. The good thing about that investment from the Recreational Fishing Trust Fund of \$148,000 is that it has actually resulted in a \$20 million Commonwealth investment in fish screens and a \$13.6 million State Government investment in fish screens. So that Recreational Fishing Trust Fund project has helped kick off this quite significant investment in fish screening, which is great news.

The CHAIR: On notice, are you able to provide how much we paid Charles Sturt University to facilitate those workshops? Or would that be some sort of—

SEAN SLOAN: I can take that on notice, but that project of \$148,000 did involve contracting Charles Sturt University to facilitate the workshops.

The CHAIR: Yes. Can you please provide, on notice, that component as to what they were paid out of the \$148,000.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I want to move on to the draft animal welfare Act that is currently before an inquiry. Mr Hansen, is there work going on in the background to draft the regulations to support the Act? Or is everything on hold while the inquiry is underway?

SCOTT HANSEN: No, we are continuing to do the work behind the scenes because, as you would be aware, there is quite a volume of work to be done on the regulatory front.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: It is enormous.

SCOTT HANSEN: That is continuing behind the scenes in anticipation or while we await the outcome from both the inquiry and then decisions from government about what they want to do with the Act.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Do you have a bit of a time frame? Are you working to a time frame that the draft regulations will be drafted at the end of the first part of the inquiry and then adjusted and then released? Do we have a rough time frame around that?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes, depending on what comes out of the first stages of the inquiry, because I think the inquiry's terms of reference actually require us, off the back of an interim report from the inquiry, to submit draft regulations for the committee to consider. We are working on the basis that we will need a quick turnaround on the back of the interim report from the committee and we would want to do that as quickly as possible but we

are balanced up with we do not know what changes to the framework of the Act that the committee might recommend. It is largely going to be we want to move as fast as we can. We know that there is a window of opportunity for us to make these significant reforms occur so it will be as quickly as we can to meet the time frames that are set out by the committee's terms of reference as well.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Have you been given a time frame to have everything completed before the end of this year?

SCOTT HANSEN: The time frame remains the one we have—I think we spoke about it last time—which is as soon as possible. We work to as soon as possible time frames in terms of trying to turn this stuff around quickly, and then it is really just a case of being prepared and ready to go should the environment be right for it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I would like to ask some questions about the exhibited animals regime and the relationship between the Department of Primary Industries and the licensees. When it comes to approving new facilities or new animals for an exhibited animal facility, is it standard practice for the Department of Primary Industries to deal with the licence holder directly?

SCOTT HANSEN: I might ask John, or Kim?

JOHN TRACEY: I think that does happen. Communication with the exhibitors is an essential part; it is not a required part of that but obviously they need to be in communication.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Would it be unusual for the Department of Primary Industries to deal primarily with someone who is not the licensee at that particular establishment, particularly for approvals for new constructions or new animals?

JOHN TRACEY: We would normally deal with the licensee.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: It would be quite uncommon to be dealing with somebody else within the facility?

JOHN TRACEY: Sometimes the licensee is a company and within those companies they might nominate persons to deal with.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: If someone was not the licensee and they were effectively in charge of the day-to-day operations of an exhibited animals facility would this be of concern to the DPI, or is that something that is allowable under the current regime?

JOHN TRACEY: It is allowable if they are nominated by that company as the key point of contact.

SCOTT HANSEN: I think it would largely come down to the context around the size and the scale of the exhibitor. I am just thinking through, in terms of dealing with some of the major zoos, for example, it would be common for us to deal with people other than the person whose name is on the top of the sheet in terms of who holds the exhibition licence. But when it comes to a petting zoo, it would be rare that they would have anyone other than the person who is on the licence to be dealing with. There will be a little bit of size and scale.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: We discussed previously, Mr Hansen, in estimates hearings that there is no scope for the DPI to remove an employee or a contractor of an exhibited animal facility, even if they have a history of animal cruelty? Is that right? It is really up to the licensee I think was the point that you made.

SCOTT HANSEN: No, we do have the opportunity and we do have the right to vary terms and conditions of an authority that is granted by removing a person who may be authorised to exhibit animals under the authority that is granted should they be found, for example, to be in breach of or be convicted of animal cruelty under either POCTAA or, say, the Crimes Act.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That would even be an employee, not the licensee?

SCOTT HANSEN: That is correct. Someone who would be authorised under that licence, that is correct.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Would a licensee potentially have their licence removed or be deemed not a fit and proper person under section 30 of the Act and disqualified from holding a licence if they were in fact to knowingly have somebody working on site that had been convicted of, say, serious animal cruelty?

SCOTT HANSEN: That would depend on the circumstances—at what point were they aware that the person was convicted of such offences, and what notice or direction were they given about that person and whether they fulfilled it or not. If they were not aware, or if the person in question was still subject to appeals and verification by the court of guilt, then they would not be held accountable for keeping that person on their books. However, if we had issued them with a direction that they must remove that person from the authorised list and they did not, and that person continued to be involved, then they do put their licence at risk.

JOHN TRACEY: We are taking actions in that particular case on this as well. Can I add to that? If anyone is convicted of the Crimes Act offences, they would be prohibited automatically under section 31AB of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of purchasing, owning or engaging in work, whether paid or unpaid, involving direct contact with, or care of, an animal. So there are some specific things that we can do.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So that does not count if that person is in that stage of being able to appeal, or if they do appeal, that falls away?

JOHN TRACEY: There has got to be a conviction.

SCOTT HANSEN: That is right. The person has to actually—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But if they have been found guilty but then they are appealing it, then it falls away?

SCOTT HANSEN: That is right. Until there is no question over their conviction then that is—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You are unable to act.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Mr Chaudhary, I would like to come to you. On the point that I raised with the Minister about the North Coast wood supply agreement contract renegotiations that are currently underway, are there any contracts sitting on the Minister's desk at the moment for his signature?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: No, there are not.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Is it still your intention to conclude contract negotiations for the type A and type B wood supply agreements by the end of March? Is that right?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Yes. The time line might slip a little bit. Again, because of the floods, we have had to work on the floods with our customers and contractors first up. But we are having discussions with our customers as we speak. I would not expect the time line to drag on for too long after that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Okay. Why does Forestry Corporation believe it can sustainably meet extended North Coast wood supply agreements at existing annual quantities, which is what you have proposed in your letter? Why do you think you can meet that under your sustainable forest management obligations under the Act?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Mr Field, after the fires we undertook a sustainable yield review, which basically takes into account the impact of the fires on long-term wood supply. The sustainable yield review looks at the 100-year time frame. On the North Coast, although the fires were widespread, the sustainable yield review informed us that we were able to continue at similar levels in terms of extending—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It suggested 4 per cent down, right?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: In terms of the impact on the long-term wood supply, yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: On that, you had that sustainable yield assessment reviewed independently by Dr Cris Brack. That is correct?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Correct.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: His report, which I have read, identifies that the post-fire sustainable yield review was not based on statistically valid models. In part—and it is pretty clear, he spells it out—because there was not sufficient time and there were issues with safe access to verify the assumptions against fieldwork—actual regrowth—to verify that. You would acknowledge that there is a great deal of uncertainty about your sustainable yield assessment, would you not?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Mr Field, my understanding is that the sustainable yield review goes through a fairly well-known and trusted modelling system, the FRAMES model. After the fires, when we undertook that model assessment, it was based largely on a desktop exercise. But we do have an inventory measurement that also occurs in the forest on the ground. The sustainable yield review is a periodic review, so it happens every five years. After the bushfires, though, the impact was such that we wanted to carry out a special review, and the inventory issues—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I get that, but you are basing these contract renegotiations on that review that occurred after the fires.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: And our understanding of the forest, as well.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Sure. Your independent reviewer, who is a person that you use pretty commonly, says:

I conclude the assumptions made ... appear reasonable for strategic planning needs. Sensitivity analysis of key assumptions would help to further build confidence while waiting for statistically valid models to be developed.

He has real concerns with the assumptions in your yield assessment. My point is that the NRC report, which we know was commissioned to deal with a dispute between your organisation and the EPA over what post-fire logging should look like, has not had a Government response yet. Why wouldn't you just wait either until there is a Government response to that or until you can actually verify your yield models before you sign New South Wales up to another five years of contract which you may not be able to deliver against?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: The contracts up in the North Coast are coming to an end date next year. You would expect those customers who have businesses to run—they have jobs that their mills support and they have to make decisions around investments—would want certainty around longevity of contracts, which is not unnatural.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: The South Coast ones have already ended, though, correct?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Correct. On the South Coast there was—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I agree they should have more certainty; that is a Government problem. You cannot fix that by signing the State up to undeliverable contracts.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: And we are not doing that, which is why I go back to the assessment that we have undertaken. A sustainable yield review is a 100-year wood supply model, and what we are looking at here is a five-year extension. Our assessment—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: In the event you cannot meet it—because the NRC report also acknowledges you have been down 18 per cent since 2015 on high-quality timber, right? Let us say you do not meet the timber supply expectations for those five years. At what point do the customers have a call for compensation on the Government?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: We have provisions in the contract that deal with when we are unable to meet contracted supply for reasons that are outside of our control.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Sure, but you are in force majeure now. If you sign new contracts knowing the fires have occurred, no-one is going to accept that you can then say, "Well, we didn't know there were fires." That is the point, right? You are giving away that legal protection against unseen or unexpected circumstances by signing new contracts. Why wouldn't you just wait?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Mr Field, we can only sign or enter into contracts based on the best information we have available at that point in time. The impact of the fires—we have taken assessments of that. That is the sustainable yield review that advises us that the volume is there for us to enter into this contract.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Well, that is contested, right?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: My understanding is that even with the review process that has gone through, our advice is that the wood is available.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: What if the Government, as a result of the NRC report, changes the policy, reviews the CIFOA, changes the prescription to protect hollow-bearing trees or stops harvesting in certain areas—all things that the NRC report recommends—but you have just signed contracts? The customers would have a call for compensation against the Government, then, if they have changed the policy, right?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: There is always the risk there may be change in government policy at any point in time.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: But is that what you are doing here? Are you giving them a get-out-of-jail-free card in case the Government changes the policy?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: No. We are entering into contracts under the current terms. The force majeure clauses always remain in the contracts. If there was a change in government policy down the track that prevented us from meeting supply, then the provisions of the contract would apply.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That was an interesting exchange. Mr Chaudhary, would you let the New South Wales Auditor-General have a look at the new contracts to see if they stand up?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: These are standard contracts, Mr Veitch. We are not changing fundamentally the terms of any contracts here. We simply are extending the volume out to five years. The contracts are all available on our website.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is not the question. The question is would you let the New South Wales Auditor-General have a look at the contract?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I will have to take that away and have a look at that myself. I am not sure what the outcome there would be.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: If these are standard contracts, what could possibly be the objection to having the Auditor-General have a look at them?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I am not saying I am objecting. I am not sure about the process of what that is, but that is something I can take away and take a look at.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Well, there is a New South Wales Auditor-General. A concern has been expressed in relation to the liability that may be imposed upon the State in future. It is not an unreasonable thing to say that the person responsible for giving that advice in an independent way should have a look at it. You would be disposed to providing the best possible outcome for the people of New South Wales by ensuring the contract was totally ridgy-didge—to use that legal term—wouldn't you?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I am happy to take that away and have a look at it, absolutely.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Okay. Well, have a look at it and take it on notice.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Yes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I would also be very interested in, if that is not going to be the case, your reasons for not doing that in detail.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Sure.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Whilst we have got Mr McPherson over there, who has had a day of listening, if I could, Mr Hansen, I am keen to understand a bit more about Mr McPherson's division, the Forestry and Land Reform Division. Can you explain a bit more about what that division actually does within the department?

SCOTT HANSEN: Sure. It does two key pieces. The first one is obviously forestry policy. On that front, it works alongside either Forestry Corporation or others with regard to forestry policy. It has a close working relationship with EES, for example. The second part for that is it is the key contact for us in discussions around private native forestry and the opportunities that sit between what is authorised at an LLS level versus obviously what happens at a State level via Forestry Corporation. No surprise, after the fires, there was a whole lot of conversation around the opportunity for private landowners to sort of become more engaged, and Mr McPherson's team are actively involved in those discussions around carbon sequestration and the opportunities that might be provided there but using forestry scientists that sit within our forestry policy group to help with that front. The term "land reform" is basically a reflection of the fact that we see the opportunity for mixed farms of the future to be a combination of cropping of livestock, forestry activity, carbon sequestration—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So carbon farming.

SCOTT HANSEN: —alternative energy generation and biodiversity generation. These are all new engines that will require us to bring some of the science that exists currently in isolated silos and try to bring them together. That is tapping into what both Forestry Corporation has available and our forestry science has available and making them available across LLS and our ag division.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You have been here all day, Mr McPherson, so I cannot have you sitting there and not get yourself into the transcript somehow. I would ask you to further elaborate on the carbon aspect of your area. What is the staffing profile for your division, like how many have you got FTEs? What is the mix so I have a bit more of an idea about what the division does?

DAVID McPHERSON: Thanks, Mr Veitch. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to get involved today. The bulk of our staff are involved in our forest science team. We have a number of key scientists, internationally recognised scientists, working in areas around carbon and working around areas of forest health and forest biosecurity, and also in assisting the NRC and others in the forest monitoring and improvement program and designing the systems as to how we monitor the health and management of forestry operations across the landscape. On the rest of the team we have a couple of staff involved in forest policy, and they get involved in, for example, the regional forest agreements and the renewal of those processes and the reviews and private native forestry, as Scott has mentioned. We also have some teams that regulate plantation forestry as well. They are involved in both the assessment of plantations and the regulation of compliance against those conditions.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is that private plantation forests?

DAVID McPHERSON: Public and private, so hardwood and softwood. To your point before, that also includes any plantations that might be used for environmental purposes and also for carbon as well. We have some

scientists working on carbon at the moment looking at biomass for bioenergy crops, looking at woody species and particular red gum and other species to look at them as not only carbon uptake but also as future feedstocks for biomass.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Does this work include looking at soil profiles to assist in determining—this is for a carbon future, essentially, where people will buy a farm. As a part of that sale process, they will want to know what the profile is like before they buy so that they can actually prove that they have increased the soil profiles, the carbon levels et cetera. Is this a part of that work?

DAVID McPHERSON: Some of our team—we are particularly working on the growing of the trees aspect of it, but we work closely with some of the other teams in DPI Ag that are involved in that soil carbon profiling aspect as well.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That helps me because there will be a few questions on notice and I know who to send them to. I want to ask a couple of questions—it is probably to Dr Tracey—to do with African swine flu, or African swine fever, as some people call it. Again, this is an issue around the globe. Have we done any work in New South Wales about what would happen if it arrived in New South Wales? I am specifically looking at things like carcass disposal and the methods of slaughter for infected pigs and the like. Have we done any work on that in preparation for—hopefully, an event does not occur.

JOHN TRACEY: Yes, we have. It is obviously one we are very conscious of. It is one of those top ones that we are in preparation for. We do a lot of work with the Commonwealth in terms of that preparation. We have also run some exercises on that in terms of what the response would look like. That involves stepping out all of the operational pieces as well—all of the gaps. We are working closely with industry. That helps decision-making. You need to move quickly in times like this. In the event we see African swine fever, we would want to move very quickly. In terms of disposal, there have been some projects looked at in terms of mass animal disposal. They are still underway in terms of the best way in which to undertake that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Dr Tracey, a locality like Young, where there is a large number of piggeries with a large number of pig populations—again, heaven forbid if this happens. I am hoping it does not. If it does occur, in a place like Young, you are going to need some large pits for carcass disposal.

JOHN TRACEY: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The last figure I saw was 100,000 sows or something in what was the old Young LGA. I am not sure about the Hilltops region. There are a lot of pigs there.

JOHN TRACEY: Yes. That is something that the teams are very focused on in terms of coming up with practical solutions there. We have looked nationally at appropriate equipment for disposal, as well as trialling some new technologies around that. I can get you some more details on that.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am happy for you to take it on notice and get back to me. That would be really good. The other part of this I am concerned about is the work that is being done to map the wild pig population because they would also clearly assist in the spread of African swine fever.

JOHN TRACEY: That is important not only for African swine fever but also other diseases as well—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Foot and mouth.

JOHN TRACEY: —in terms of understanding what that looks like. Our teams have been involved in large-scale mapping programs to get an idea of that. It is also critical, in any disease outbreak like that, to understand the epidemiology of the virus involved. The Japanese encephalitis is a classic example of that. Pigs are one host but, essentially, it is borne by mosquito populations. It is understanding how that looks and what that looks like in terms of the right species and what surveillance we have got in place for that. Feral pigs are part of that system, if you like, in terms of understanding what the epidemiology of the viruses are.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am happy for you to take that on notice and come back to me. That would be good.

SCOTT HANSEN: We have actually conducted four exercises since September 2020. Some of those have been Federal and some of those have been State. All of them have involved multiple agencies. Out of those have come the detail of both the trialling of new technologies, plus the development of plans—for example, on disposal, the development of sub plans with the EPA for immediate approval and sign-off with the EPA on things like disposal. There has been quite a bit of work that has gone on. A lot of those plans are equally as applicable for other outbreaks, should they occur. We have used that as the focus one because it does deliver such a high mortality rate in a large number of animals which does require the same kinds of responses in terms of disposal.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Speaking of large mortality rates, the proposal for the herpesvirus for European carp—where is that up to, Mr Hansen? Is that anywhere near being released yet or have you decided that it is just too risky and it is not to be released?

SCOTT HANSEN: Obviously that is with the Commonwealth in terms of rollout, but I might see if either of the two gentlemen to the left of me want to add more.

SEAN SLOAN: Yes. There was an additional piece of research that was commissioned at the Commonwealth level and that research has been completed, as I understand it. We are waiting for that information to be provided by the Commonwealth. It is a topic of regular interest from fisheries agencies and biosecurity agencies around the country. We are waiting on the research information being provided by the Commonwealth; that is where it currently sits.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen, there was harrowing evidence provided at the Senate Select Committee on Job Security earlier this year about a number of Samoan workers who provided testimony to that committee. Has the department been involved in investigating the complaints they raised? And have there been any in New South Wales of that nature? Essentially these are exploitation issues of the Pacific Islanders who have come to assist in our shortfall in the agricultural workforce.

SCOTT HANSEN: We have not had any of those formally raised with us, nor have we been requested or asked to look into any of those. There are other agencies that would be better placed to be able to do that than we are.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: If someone knew of issues and they raised them with DPI of essentially the abuse of these workers, would DPI act or would it be more of a triage arrangement to refer people on to the relevant authorities?

SCOTT HANSEN: We would be referring people on to authorities that have powers to be able to take action.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Of the Pacific Islanders, and I am not going to get into the numbers—I got the previous Minister into a bit of trouble, so I am not going to do that this time, Mr Hansen. Specifically in the Federal program, have we determined what our requirements currently are particularly for horticulture? There are melons being picked and apples in Batlow and the like. How are we sitting? Are we still short on what we require to pick our fruit and veg?

SCOTT HANSEN: That is a really good question because we have not had a chance yet to work out what the North Coast impact will be in terms of displacement of outworkers who can now be redeployed elsewhere, or who will need to be redeployed elsewhere. Until we get a good picture on that, or in the absence of that, I would be saying yes, we are still short. But now with those floods and in the absence of those northern crops, we are going to be seeing a redeployment of staff from up there to other areas, and I do not know what that looks like right at this moment.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: As you know, Mr Hansen, I am just a busted up old shearer, but I do the best I can. In December I had the opportunity to attend a shearing school at Muttama. I spoke to the instructors and some really keen and eager young people who are learning how to shear a sheep. It became quite evident that we are investing money in these shearing schools, but they are actually teaching people to shear a sheep. They are not teaching them to become shearers—that is, to earn a living from shearing sheep. There is a big difference. Shear a sheep—like, you learn how to shear a sheep in seven days—excellent. But that does not mean you pay your bills. What sort of work is DPI doing particularly with TAFE and the other RTOs in New South Wales around actually providing quality training and mentorship for young people who go through shearing schools to become a shearer? Not to shear a sheep but to become a shearer.

SCOTT HANSEN: That is an interesting insight about that difference between shearing schools versus—and I will have to look into the Smart and Skilled New South Wales TAFE programs in this space because I do believe that they do more than just "how to shear a sheep". They are trying to pick up—I think they have some AWI support on this front, for New South Wales TAFE to be rolling out programs to pick school leavers up and to actually attract gap year students and school leavers to a shearing career. But I am not aware of what the full components of that course look like, as to whether it ensures that it covers how to set yourself up for a business—the options of both, either mobile shearing versus fixed facilities. But I am happy to look into that and provide you with some more detail.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Thank you. Just so you know, I am not having a go at the school I went to. That was what they were paid for; they were paid to teach people how to shear one sheep—a sheep. That is what they were meant to do and that is what they were doing. But the issue is that does not fix the shortfall in shearers

in New South Wales and Australia because, of the 16 young people who were there, no-one is doing any follow-up to work out how many of that cohort in 12 months or two years' time are actually shearers. So we do not know what the value is of our spend—our return on investment. That is the first thing.

The second thing is the shearing schools that teach people to become shearers or assist in teaching people to become shearers are very different and they are a longer process. But I am told the thing that is missing is the mentoring that needs to happen post that. So you go through the school. Shearing sheds are often not a place for the faint hearted, as some of us would know. They can be pretty robust workplaces that are not for the faint hearted at all. Experienced former shearers or experienced shearers providing mentorship to young people who go into the industry is also required. I just do not know if that is happening. This is a problem because the average age of a shearer now is, what, 59 or 61? It is a real problem. We have to shear our national flock. We need skilled, professional shearers to do that.

SCOTT HANSEN: Further to your point, the predicted number of shearers in New South Wales at the end of last year was about 950, with an equal number of shed hands or shed staff. So 2015 was the last time a census was done on that, and we have had a 20 per cent drop to get down to that 950 number. I think we have been able to get by. I use that term loosely because we have, obviously, had the drought impact on sheep numbers. But as the sheep numbers are rebuilding post drought and, as livestock and wool prices continue to be strong and attractive, we are seeing the industry having to try to respond.

I guess the positive sign is that AWI—and I do not know how it has gone against this target—has set itself a target of 200 additional shearers trained in 2021. If you start adding those numbers back into the mix against the 950 that are there, provided those people are seeing both an opportunity going forward for them to have a worthwhile career and career progression, then I think that that focus that the industry is putting back into training is great. I think you and I have both talked about the comments and the discussions we have had with the chair of AWI with regard to his observations as to the new generation of shearers that is coming through the industry. I think this is going to be a really important two-year period to make sure that the industry does not lose people and, in fact, that we are making sure that we are setting them up for success.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But are you? Does DPI engage in any way with the RTOs or with TAFE around the mentoring part? This is the element that I think is missing in a lot of the training.

SCOTT HANSEN: I am going to say we have not been.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That is okay. You can take it on notice if you want, just to be certain.

SCOTT HANSEN: We are in a group that actually addresses attraction, training and retention. We are working with the NSW Wool Technical Advisory Group, as it is called. It has got AWI, Shearing Contractors Association of Australia, Australian Agricultural Training, National Council of Wool Selling Brokers of Australia, TAFE NSW and ourselves. We do sit on that group to try to address those issues. I do not know, outside of us participating in that, what other activities we have, so I could come back to you if there are more.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: That would be really good. I think the Hon. Scott Barrett is looking for a pen post 2023.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I thought you wanted to mentor John.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You can mentor. It is good to have a fellow—someone who has used a bogghi in the upper House again. It is a bit lonely.

SEAN SLOAN: Chair, when the opportunity arises I have got responses to a number of questions on notice that have come up during the course of the day.

The CHAIR: Yes, sure. We will try to clear the decks before we leave. Mr Sloan, during the last estimates I asked some questions on the utilisation of the eco huts. You provided some 2020 data. We would probably agree that 2020 was not a good year for people getting out and about and enjoying a trip away. On notice, are you able to provide some more longitudinal data. I think the program started in 2018, from memory.

SEAN SLOAN: That sounds about right.

The CHAIR: Can we get a bit more of a longitudinal view in terms of those occupancy rates, in fairness so the data does not look the way it does.

SCOTT HANSEN: It would be a bit like looking at the use of the Legislative Chamber in 2020 or 2021 in isolation, wouldn't it?

The CHAIR: That is a bit of a low blow, isn't it, but fair.

SCOTT HANSEN: We were all confined to barracks, right?

The CHAIR: That is right. Can I go back to another issue I raised in previous estimates and that was around the prawn draws in Myall Lakes. There were some concerns raised to me from constituents—and I know the Wild Caught Fishers Coalition has raised these with you, Mr Sloan—specifically, that fishers that are conducting the draw also have financial interests in the management of the co-op where the draw is held, and fishers conducting the draw also have access in the process of identifying other competing fishers' balls locations prior to finalising all positions. I also raised last time the issue of fishermen going into this draw, trading shares between themselves, or transferring shares to one person to then essentially give that one person more balls in the draw, and then as soon as that draw is over those shares disappear back to the original owners.

So my question to you is are you willing to review these concerns, because you would probably agree that it does not really go to the spirit of this draw if it is being manipulated in such a way? Are you prepared to look at reinstating the original conditions where it was an independent person doing the draw, whether that is a Fisheries person or someone outside the department, and are you willing to look at tightening that loophole that people are using or abusing to essentially stack the draw in terms of that transfer of shares?

SEAN SLOAN: Yes, it has been raised with me by the wild catch coalition. They have written to me. I have had it raised with me by a fisher in the fishery as well. I will look into it because the issues that have been raised with me warrant us having a look at it. I am not sure what can be done, but we will certainly have a look at it.

The CHAIR: I might turn to the stock assessment of mullocky. I note in the status summary of 2021 you say that commercial landings of mullocky in New South Wales have steadily declined from almost 400 tonne in the mid-1970s to a historic low of 37 tonne in 2008-09. They have gone back up to 110 tonne. That assessment seems like it did not include social influences over that time period, and that has been critiqued in some research through the University of Wollongong where the concerns were raised that in 1970 there were 5,000 commercial fishermen, when clearly now there are significantly less. So perhaps on notice you could respond to these concerns and tell us whether they have been considered as part of the assessment.

There is the decline in actual commercial fishermen from 5,000 in 1970 to under 1,000 now. There were obviously some changes in size limits that occurred in the eighties and also the nineties, where we originally had a 38 centimetre size limit and now we are up to a 45 to 70 size limit. Has that been factored in in terms of why we have seen a decline in commercial landings, because it seems like it possibly has not and that might help explain why there has been such a significant decline? It probably will not explain all of it, but it may explain some of it. So perhaps on notice you could respond to those concerns, unless you have got some answers for it now?

SEAN SLOAN: I am happy to take it on notice to give you a detailed response, because fish stock assessment, as you can appreciate, is a complicated exercise. If you go back to the 1970s, the fishing capacity of vessels of equipment of fishers with technology available to them is vastly different to the capacity of today, so there is that issue that needs to be taken into account.

What I will say is that fish stock assessments are done in various different ways with different methods, but quite often a technique called the "weight of evidence" method is used, which is where you pull a whole range of data sources and ways to assess a stock together and the weight of that evidence gives you a clearer picture of what the status of the stock is. With species like mullocky, there is a weight of evidence that is making it very clear that the stock is depleted and under pressure.

One of the measures that is very reliable to be able to assess the status of a stock is the size structure of the population. If you have got lots of big fish in a population, generally that is a reasonable sign that there is light exploitation occurring, but when you end up with lots of smaller fish you end up with the opposite of that. The size frequency information that we collect through the commercial fishery and the mullocky fishery shows what we call a truncated population—a stock that has lots of small fish. I will come back with a more detailed answer, but that is one of the explanations.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

SCOTT HANSEN: Chair, just before we go, CSU has been paid \$30,000 for the industry workshop to examine barriers to adoption for diversion screening.

The CHAIR: Yes.

SCOTT HANSEN: All three members of the recreational fisheries advisory committee who operate as licensed charter boat fishers have declared their interest.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I would like to ask some questions about SMART drumlines. If non-target animals are hooked by the SMART drumline, are they tagged or are they released without a tag?

SEAN SLOAN: The general practice is to tag and release the animals, and the reason for that is that it contributes to our knowledge of movement patterns and the overall biology. That is the practice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: With the non-target animals, because they are tagged, do you have an idea of their survival rate after the physical trauma of having a hook through their mouth?

SEAN SLOAN: Yes, we do. We use a number of different types of tags, but satellite tags allow us to track the movements over quite large distances of those animals. I do not have the exact figure available to me at this moment—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: If I could get it on notice, that would be really useful.

SEAN SLOAN: But what I can say, Ms Hurst, is that there is something of the order of a 99 per cent survival rate of the animals that we catch using SMART drumlines. That is obviously one of the reasons why that technology is favoured.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I understand that DPI representatives have told animal protection groups that work in this space that critically endangered grey nurse sharks cannot be tagged due to their sensitivity to the capture and handling. Is that correct?

SEAN SLOAN: I will have to take that on notice, Ms Hurst.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are any SMART drumlines installed in the vicinity of grey nurse critical habitat sites?

SEAN SLOAN: I do not believe so, but I would have to take that on notice to be sure.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: If you could. If you could also find out, if there are any, how close any of those SMART drumlines are to critical habitat sites for grey nurse sharks. Do we know how many critically endangered grey nurse sharks have been caught by SMART drumlines in each of the years that they have been in operation?

SCOTT HANSEN: Seven that I am aware of.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Seven across how many years, sorry?

SCOTT HANSEN: Across 30 years of operation.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: From those seven, do you know how many were found dead and how many were released alive?

SCOTT HANSEN: From what I can see, all were released alive.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Were they are tagged based on the data that you are looking at?

SCOTT HANSEN: I do not see whether they are tagged or not. Two were in the Ballina region, three in Evans Head, two at Coffs to make up the seven. However, I do not have data with regard to tagging.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Has there been any further research on the impacts of SMART drumlines on grey nurse sharks specifically regarding post-release survival or sub-lethal impacts?

SEAN SLOAN: Not to my knowledge.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Could you take it on notice to confirm if there was any research in that space? The SharkSmart website states that sharks caught in SMART drum lines are tagged and relocated approximately one kilometre offshore. Can you explain how the relocation works? Are sharks actually dragged out to sea with the hook still inside them? Is that the relocation process? I have seen a lot of images that show it in that way. I can table this, but I am sure you have seen some of these images yourself. Is that the relocation process?

SEAN SLOAN: No, the sharks are brought alongside the boat and they are handled, they are tagged and then they are relocated offshore. I can take it on notice and provide the specifics of the way that procedure operates, but it is all designed to look after the animal, and obviously when you are tagging an animal you actually want to maximise the survivability of the animal.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I might table this image to get your response to it. This is in Western Australia from a SMART drum line, and I have seen several in New South Wales as well. Is an image like this,

with the boat moving and the shark being dragged out, would that be going against the standard practice of how the animal would be relocated seeing that the hook is in that animal's mouth?

SEAN SLOAN: The image looks like it is from a media article. It is actually hard to know what that image is. It looks like they have caught a shark and they are bringing it alongside the boat. Obviously in the process of catching a shark on a hook you need to retrieve the shark and bring it alongside the boat—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Is part of the process that that hook is removed before that relocation where the boat would move one kilometre away?

SEAN SLOAN: That is my understanding. Let me take that on notice and give you a detailed response.

SCOTT HANSEN: That is certainly everything that we have seen. Again, the sharks are brought alongside. You would have seen the photos in New South Wales with the shark alongside being handled with regards to having the hook removed, having the tag—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: In the photos I have seen the hook was still in the face and that is why I was—

SCOTT HANSEN: In which case you are still seeing it being brought in alongside the vessel. Once it is alongside the vessel—because the hook in the mouth continues to provide a risk to our staff who are reaching over the side, the removal of the hook provides our staff with a safe operating environment as well. The sharks normally have a tag put in. They can also have a surgically implanted tag, a microchip, and are then taken out to sea and released—not dragged out with the hook in the mouth as you have got in that image there from Perth. I am happy to provide more detailed standard operating procedures.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What would happen if there was footage in New South Wales of a shark being dragged with the hook in the mouth? Would that be investigated because that would be going against the general procedure?

SCOTT HANSEN: It would and there would have to be a reason and rationale as to the why. Again, bringing it alongside the vessel requires dragging it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But the vessel would be still during that process?

SCOTT HANSEN: That would depend on the swell and what the sea conditions were like.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: There could be some instances where the boat would be moving with the shark attached for some time if there was a swell or if there were other conditions?

SCOTT HANSEN: I can imagine them. We are happy to go through the standard operating procedures and send them through for you to have a look at. Bear in mind that, unlike in other jurisdictions, we actually deploy drum lines, which send an immediate notification the moment something is caught, and we pay more to have contractors available to be able to respond immediately to an animal being hooked, as opposed to every 72 hours, because we are trying to maximise the survivability of those animals. It would appear that if anything else was being done that was to the detriment of the survival of those non-target species, it is sort of counterintuitive to everything else we are investing in to try to keep them alive.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: According to the SharkSmart website it says that it takes 30 minutes to respond. You are talking about that quick response. Is that 30 minutes from when the animal is hooked or is there a delay to when the DPI is alerted?

SCOTT HANSEN: No. The moment the animal is hooked it should trigger that alert for us. That should be real-time for us in terms of getting that notification. Basically, when the animal takes the bait and pulls on a hook it actually separately pulls on a wire, which breaks the connection, and that breaking of the connection is what triggers the alert to the SMS, which goes both to the contractor and to our Fisheries officers. The contractor has half an hour to respond.

SEAN SLOAN: That is the maximum time, as well, to respond.

SCOTT HANSEN: As you can see, we go to a great deal of length of effort to maximise the survivability for non-target species. The idea that we would be doing something counterintuitive to that just does not make sense.

The CHAIR: Mr Field?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, Chair. Mr Hansen, I just want to acknowledge the work that DPI has done over a number of years around moving to the smart drum lines. Certainly, the language and the most recent tragic death in Sydney is very different to what it was in 2016 when we had those bites up in Ballina. I note the

amount of work that the department has done. I think the real community attitude has changed substantially around that, which I recognise and welcome. Mr Chaudhary, I just want to finalise some questions around forestry. The last time we were here I asked you about the level of delivery against the contracts. Obviously, you are in force majeure—or you have been for a period of time. I think the South Coast was about 30 per cent. The North Coast was maybe 60 per cent or 70 per cent. Where are we currently at with delivery against those contractors?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Those figures were, Mr Field, last year. Currently we are, I would say, around 60 per cent in the South Coast.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Right.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: And, of course, North Coast has been severely impacted by bad weather so that would be well below.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Sure, right now; but before the weather, where was it up to?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I will probably have to take that away and take that on notice.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: But it was not back up at 100 per cent.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: No, definitely. I do not believe it was, no.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: And that is because of the additional controls that you had put in place there for those fires.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: So, yes. So we have put in additional environmental controls, not across all the forests, but we would have done risk assessments on where that should be. I cannot recall exactly when that started to come through in the financial years. That might have had an impact.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Sure. But, of course, if you are doing that, again it begs the question: How could you possibly sign woods programs at the previously contracted levels if even at your own sort of self-enforced rules that you are not at 100 per cent?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: I think, as I say, the additional conditions we put in to protect the environment—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I will say we are not going to protect the environment.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: No, sorry. That is over and above what is in the Coastal IFOAs.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Oh. I understand.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: And we have implemented—initially it was the South Coast; we moved into the North Coast. Immediately after the fires, our operations were mainly in the hardwood plantation so we have now transitioned into native forestry. I do not think there is any reason to believe that we are not able to meet that supply. It is really up to us getting into the forest and where there has been a real impact of that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Of course, the NRC report suggests that you should not return to those CIFOA provisions entirely on the North Coast. You would acknowledge that, right?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: The NRC report is Cabinet in confidence. I cannot comment on that, Mr Field.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Okay. Well, heaven forbid we would discuss science! I have been receiving several complaints about the state of roads, particularly in the south Brooman and Shallow Crossing. Forest logging has been happening out there since the fires. I know the weather has made this more difficult. I have heard of numerous accidents there—people run off roads and the potholes there causing people to be all over the roads. There are very narrow bends. I drive out there a lot. It is very bad. There is a lot of local tourism. There are some tourist ventures out there, including agriculture as well. Can you take on notice to provide details of the number of complaints that you have received about the state of roads and any roadworks that have been conducted by Forestry Corporation in the Brooman and Shallow Crossing forests since the fires?

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Sure. I can absolutely take that on notice and I will just add to that, Mr Field, that we have, after the fires, about 20,000 kilometres of roads that were damaged, and floods, both last year and this year—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: And they have been damaged three times since then, I know.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: So it is difficult and I totally understand. The forest roads are there for forestry purposes, plus having visitation, visitors in there.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: People do live out there as well.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Yes, but it is primarily for—you know, it is four-wheel-drive-type roads, as you would have experienced. But I am happy to take that away on notice and let you know.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you. I appreciate that. I want to get to cruise ships in Jervis Bay, if I could, while I have a couple of minutes left. The draft network management plan is clear. The proposal is to undertake a risk assessment to inform development of a policy on sustainable cruise ship visitation in New South Wales marine parks. Now I have raised this issue in the Parliament and in the media. The port authority recently came out and said quite plainly, "The plan was likely drafted at a time when the idea was initially canvassed and it has since been rejected." They have absolutely stated categorically publicly that there are no plans to allow cruise ships to visit marine parks in New South Wales and everyone who is still talking about it should stop talking about it, basically. Mr Hansen or Mr Sloan, what is the story here with the status of this proposal and the draft network management plan for visitation of cruise ships in marine parks?

SEAN SLOAN: Thanks. It is essentially a process where if there is a need for a cruise ship to come and have safe anchorage—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: This is not about safe anchorage in emergencies. The proposal in the draft network management plan talks about the economic value to regional economies of cruise ship visitation. That is not emergency stuff that we are talking here; this is under the tourism opportunity section. Developers plan for sustainable visitation. They are not sustainably visiting for an emergency. That is a different thing, right?

SEAN SLOAN: Yes, that is right, they are different things. I accept that. The process that is set up is that if a cruise ship wants to apply to be able to have that safe anchorage then there is a process that is already in existence at the moment to allow for that, and we would then assess that application on its merits. There is one such permit that is in place at the moment that allows for that type of safe anchorage and there have been permits like this in the past.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I get that. But when the Port Authority says the plan has been rejected, I assume the plan it is talking about is any idea about regular visits, cruise ship visitors actually coming ashore in various communities in marine parks. Has that been abandoned?

SEAN SLOAN: I do not believe there has ever been sort of push for that type of activity. But it is really just about—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: "The cruise ship industry has identified opportunities to expand in Jervis Bay and cruise ships occasionally visit the waters of Batemans Bay." That is the preamble of this entire proposal. So it does seem that someone has had a plan to push for cruise ship visitation in marine parks.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes, and that is probably a question for the Minister responsible for the Port Authority of NSW.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: This is your document, Mr Hansen. The DPI is the lead agency.

SCOTT HANSEN: And read the other partners to the—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Yeah, yeah, yeah, the Port Authority rejected that. It did not want to be involved. I got the document under GIPAA. It said no, right?

SCOTT HANSEN: If the Port Authority and Transport have no plans, we certainly have no plans. Currently, if they want to take a cruise ship in there, they need to get a permit to be able to do so. If no-one has plans for an ongoing port or terminal stop there then we certainly do not have any. We do not operate cruise ships, we do not operate ports.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So it will not be in the final plan then?

SCOTT HANSEN: We are not pushing for it to be in the final plan because we are not cruise ship nor port operators.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Alright. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: I will just throw to the Opposition for six minutes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Six minutes. Excellent! Mr Hansen, early this morning I asked the Minister a couple of questions around water sharing plans.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I believe Tocal will be impacted upon by the draft water sharing plan proposed for that waterway. Has the department raised any concerns on behalf of Tocal with WaterNSW or the agency responsible for developing the water sharing plan?

SCOTT HANSEN: No, the department has not. Tocal has a very strong alumni and stakeholder group that has been very vocal, as you would see, up there. It has certainly raised some issues with regard to the water sharing plans. We do participate in interagency working groups on the development of those water sharing plans, including the coastal water sharing plans. Not only Fisheries but also Ag has representatives on interagency working groups and they continue to raise issues and to seek more information with regard to a number of those plans but, obviously, within the confine of those interagency working groups.

Externally, the alumni and some of the foundation members of Tocal have been raising publicly implications on both the dairy and the operations of Tocal as a result of proposed changes to plans. There was one other component which we missed this morning also, which is not just Fisheries, but actually the marine estate. The consultation around the marine estate network management plan actually flags changes to inflows into a number of those marine parks being changed and varied as a result of changes to water sharing plans as being a risk as well that needs to be addressed. There are a number of touchpoints that we have with regards to the water sharing plans and our engagement in them, from an agriculture perspective, a fisheries perspective and also the marine estate perspective.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr Hansen, will the draft water sharing plan, if it is adopted, require Tocal to change their operations, which is what is being stated by the people ringing our offices?

SCOTT HANSEN: My understanding is we will need to change.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is there a transition framework being developed now for that?

SCOTT HANSEN: We are anticipating and planning for what it is we would need to do differently. The good thing is that there is no lost ground made if you focus at the moment on more water use efficiency and decrease reliance on irrigation. That is wins that we get regardless of what happens with the water sharing plans.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is a strange time to raise this question, but it is the best time. Mr Hansen, is your agency involved at all in discussions around drought preparation?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes, we are at the moment. It is multi-agency across government looking at the lessons out of the last drought package, because some of that only wrapped up in the last 12 months. What can we see that has worked? What did not work? What has been the benefit of some of those components? That evaluation analysis is also then leading directly into the compilation as to what does the next strategy look like, so that is an active piece of work at the moment. I agree with you. It is actually the best time to be having this conversation.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is the best time to have the conversation. That is right. As a part of the evaluation of the last drought and the rollout of programs and the like, does that include the dollars that were released via the Farm Innovation Fund in no-interest or low-interest loans and how they were distributed and the timeliness of those?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes, it will do. It will also look to what kind of activities and programs were the result of those investments. Most of those have actually translated into infrastructure, and so what has that infrastructure now done in terms of the individual resilience or preparedness pieces? All of that will be a feature of the evaluation and the review.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Has anyone mentioned multi-peril insurance?

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes. That is obviously something that we were keen to understand more about and to see where the opportunity would lie. We always knew that the opportunity would not lie within the State border. We have got too small a footprint of geographical risk, as the recent couple of weeks have shown. Multi-peril is only ever going to be able to done at a minimum at a national level, and most likely at an international level, for someone to be able to spread the risks associated with it. Obviously, we commissioned NFF to produce an investigation and a report into the opportunities that are presented. We have really been helping them lead both the national discussion with Federal Government and our counterparts across States and Territories and the national industry around: If not, what else is available in terms of mitigating risk using financial tools going forward?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You are doing this evaluation, Mr Hansen—

SCOTT HANSEN: Sorry, on that one, as you are aware, out of their report, a lot of things that are for State activity, like removal of stamp duty and so forth, New South Wales has already done.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The other issue then that arises about on-farm preparations, which is a criticism that I think a lot of us have heard in the past, is that a lot of the financial rollout goes to people who will need it at the earliest. But often—not always—they are the ones who have not actually conducted the preparation for a longer drought. So those who have actually done all the hard work and put the silage in and the stored fodder et cetera are the ones who do not put their hand up straight away because they do not need it. Are we going to look at a way of trying to ensure that everyone is on board with drought preparations?

SCOTT HANSEN: That is certainly one of the biggest challenges for us: How do you remove that moral risk of sort of incentivising no action because of a safety net provision that they believe will come along at some point in time?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: At some point in time, yes.

SCOTT HANSEN: Conversely, as we saw in this last drought and as we have seen in these recent floods, we know people who have absolutely done everything possible to build and prepare a response and a resilience to the worst previously seen either drought or flood and still experience hardships that require immediate assistance being provided to them. So it is always a tricky one for us: Who and how do you make sure the assistance gets to the right people quickly enough?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Did you say that there had been a report prepared?

SCOTT HANSEN: We are currently working our way through one, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is it publicly available?

SCOTT HANSEN: I am sure it will be at some stage, yes.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Is it possible to get that to the Committee members in confidence?

SCOTT HANSEN: This will be part of what goes up before Cabinet in terms of thinking about drought packages and drought response activities.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am happy to help Cabinet. Flick it my way and I will make some suggestions.

SCOTT HANSEN: I do not think it will go any further but I have already had one shot at an LSE.

The CHAIR: We will have a two-minute blitz round. In a question on notice I asked about fisher demographics you came back with some data but you noted that the data did not include disability of recreational fishermen. Do you acknowledge that that is probably a shortfall in terms of planning for recreational fishing facilities? Are you prepared to look at including that as part of your data gathering exercise so that when you do access money from the fishing trust fund for facilities there may be some slice of money for facilities that cater for disabled fishermen?

SEAN SLOAN: I am certainly happy to take that on board.

The CHAIR: Is there any work being done in the department about facilities for aging fishers, given that 20-odd per cent of fishers are 60 or above?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Post-politics career?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Are you talking about yourself?

The CHAIR: No, it has been raised by constituents. They went to the Minister for aging and he said, "Not my problem." They went to the Minister for Local Government and she said, "Not my problem." They are flicking it to you but it is an issue that sits across many portfolios in terms of provisions for aging and disabled people.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes, and certainly with any infrastructure we are building these days one of the first questions we ask ourselves is, "How does this work from an access perspective?" It is something that we are conscious of. As I said, when we are in the process of building access points or infrastructure, I am not sure if we have any specific targeted activities on this point, other than the fact that we make sure we build it in to all of our construction and infrastructure plans.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I have a question about the national standards and guidelines for poultry processing. Mr Hansen, I believe you are somewhat involved in that process. Can you give us an update on the timing and where that is up to?

SCOTT HANSEN: Unfortunately, I cannot give you much of an update on the timing. It is still with the Commonwealth at the moment. All States and Territories, I believe, have provided feedback on both the last

draft standards and guidelines as well as the regulatory impact statement and the assumptions made within that regulatory impact statement. It still sits in amongst that Commonwealth arena at the moment and has not re-emerged.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You have not heard anything about when it might come back to you?

SCOTT HANSEN: I have not. I am looking to see if anyone else has heard anything. No, sorry.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Mr Hansen, this question may be for you. Do you know where the financial assistance that workers at the Blue Ridge Hardwoods are receiving is coming from?

SCOTT HANSEN: That is actually not one for us. Sorry, I do not know.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It is \$150,000 per person and the payments are due to Blue Ridge Hardwoods not securing a future wood supply agreement and ceasing operations. You do not know which government agency is funding that money?

SCOTT HANSEN: I know it is not DPI and I assume it is not LLS.

STEVE ORR: Yes, it is not LLS. I think it came out of the broader DRNSW cluster, Mr Field. Perhaps we can take it on notice.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Regional New South Wales.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Sure. No worries, thank you.

SCOTT HANSEN: Mr Chair, a couple of clean-ups from me, if I can?

The CHAIR: Sure. Do you want to do the clean-ups before we go to the cross-examination?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That would be my question: Does he have any clean-ups?

The CHAIR: You can proceed.

SCOTT HANSEN: Do you want to ask your question?

The Hon. PETER POULOS: The Government rests.

The CHAIR: You have been resting all day, Mr Poulos. Clean-ups, let's go.

SCOTT HANSEN: In no particular order, 141 dogs have been seized by the RSPCA by that puppy task force since it started; the food safety for vulnerable persons, so the aged care, 1,374 audits and inspections in the 2020-21 financial year; and then a big drop-off, 604 in the 2021-22 financial year. The majority of those are announced. We used to do both announced and unannounced, but in this last period we have been having to do them announced so that arrangements can be made for COVID-safe entry and inspection. I think that is it.

The CHAIR: Does anyone else have any?

STEVE ORR: We had a number of questions. We will reply in writing to you, Mr Banasiak.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: Chair, can I clean something up as well?

The CHAIR: Sure.

ANSHUL CHAUDHARY: In relation to the wood supply for the North Coast for this year, I think I might not have been that clear before. The supply performance is not related to the additional environmental safeguards. It is really the weather, Mr Field, that is impacting supply this year.

SEAN SLOAN: We have commercial fishing licences, at current time, 1,039; commercial fishing businesses, 1,054; and 214 charter fishing licences. They are the current statistics. There was a question earlier around discard rates in the Southern Fish Trawl Fishery. We have had an observer program in that fishery, and the data has been collected and is being analysed. There is a report due out mid-year, and that report will be made public. There was a question around how we did the consultation on marine parks and was it available to people with a non-English-speaking background? The answer is yes, it was available through a translation service on the website. So when you went to the website, you could select between 100 different languages. Through the Have Your Say website, we also have an arrangement with the Department of Home Affairs where people can select to be put in touch with a translating service, where they can talk to somebody, ask questions and go through that process. We also ran a series of videos that were more visual to try to assist with that process as well. We had a couple of public webinars. They were in English, but we also have a question and answer that can be translated as well.

SCOTT HANSEN: There was a question about making sure that we remember the aquaculture industry in terms of recovery activities. We have had 26 applications for the \$75,000 primary producer grant from the agricultural sector. So they are well and truly participating.

The CHAIR: Excellent.

SEAN SLOAN: There was also a question from Mr Field around the weighted lines used. That fishery is the Ocean Trap and Line Fishery, and there has been a closure in place for that fishery that dates back to 2008. It applies north and south Solitary Islands at Fish Rock, Green Island and Magic Point, so it covers a range of areas where grey nurse habitats exist. There has been a method used which is called "weighted line". It is where a commercial fisher will be motoring and will use a baited lure that is trolled behind the boat. That method has been used there for all time. When the closure was first put in place, it was assessed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act sustainability guidelines. We renew that notice every five years; that is the standard practice. When it was renewed, there was an inadvertent amendment to the definition of "trolling", which meant that this method was not able to be used. We corrected it in 2021 because it was an administrative error, so that is the answer.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So it only relates to commercial fishing?

SEAN SLOAN: Correct.

The CHAIR: I think that has cleared the decks quite substantially. I thank all the witnesses for their time today. You have taken questions on notice—substantially less now—so the secretariat will be in touch about how you can get those back to us in the time frame.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.