

Questions on Notice – Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Emergency Services and Resilience

QoN1 - Transcript Page 5

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Can we just go through the 11 o'clock meeting, which is detailed in the report. I quote again: On the day the Snowy Mountains region in NSW had a severe fire danger rating, due to high temperatures, strong winds and forecast thunderstorms. The region included the Adaminaby and Good Good fire-grounds — that was the first one, Adaminaby, and the second one was the Good Good fireground, which you referred to— which were both under the control of the RFS Cooma Fire Control Centre (FCC). At about 11:00 the Cooma FCC incident controller made a phone call to the RFS State Operations Centre. A number of senior personnel from the State Operations Centre were involved in the conference call. They discussed the escalating fire at the Adaminaby fire-ground, with rural properties under threat and concern the town would be impacted if containment lines did not hold. During the call, RFS personnel stated that there were strong winds, severe fire weather conditions, and that the smaller fire-control aircraft were not operating in the area due to the winds and poor visibility. There was also discussion as to whether a birddog aircraft had already departed to assess the conditions. However, a senior RFS officer stated that they should send the Boeing 737 LAT (large aircraft tanker) irrespective, 'as it can bomb by itself if need be' and 'not wait for the birddog assessment'. Someone in that room has said, "'Don't worry about it, they can bomb without the Bird Dog'", and sent them down there without the information. Can you tell me who was in that room at the time?

Answer: This matter is subject to a coronial inquiry, with the public hearing scheduled for March 2023. The coronial process will examine the lead up to the Bomber 134 crash, including the activities in the State Operations Centre. It would be inappropriate for this evidence to be ventilated during this process.

QoN2 - Transcript Page 8

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. We're almost three years on from the Mount Wilson back-burn fire that took place. The New South Wales coronial inquiry into the Black Summer fires—the cause and origin of the Grose Valley fire at Mount Wilson—was held on 15 to 17 June. The RFS fire investigators, accompanied by the New South Wales police fire investigators, told the Coroner they were given a brief of evidence at the Katoomba fire control by an RFS officer they could not name. The evidence was that the Grose Valley fire was a continuation of the Gospers Mountain fire. Can you, Minister, provide the name of the person who provided the brief of evidence to the Grose Valley fire fire control by an RFS officer they could not name. The evidence was that the Grose Valley fire was a continuation of the Gospers Mountain fire. Can you, Minister, provide the name of the person who provided the brief of evidence to the Grose Valley fire. Can you, Minister, provide the name of the person who provided the brief of evidence to the Grose Valley fire investigation team, Darin Howell and the New South Wales police forensic fire investigator, Neil Welschinger, at the Katoomba fire control centre on 21 January?

Answer: This incident is the subject of an ongoing coronial inquest and it would be inappropriate for this evidence to be ventilated during this process.

QoN3 - Transcript Page 9

Mr ROB ROGERS: One of those pilots is going to be in those areas that you're speaking about. We'll be putting those in place and just seeing if that's community acceptable. We're absolutely on it, but we haven't done the work yet.
Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have you got a timetable to do that? Is that indicated and available?
ROB ROGERS: I will get that for you. I don't have it on me. I can't tell you the time frame, I'm sorry, but I'm happy to get that for you.

Answer: The community hall in Mount Wilson is the designated Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSP). The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) is currently assessing several locations in Bilpin and surrounding areas for a potential NSP.

QoN4 - Transcript Page 9

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, in the 2009 Victorian Government royal commission into their Black Saturday bushfires, there was a recommendation for an inspector-general for emergency management. There's been a lot of feedback about that system, that it's a very effective system. Will you recommend or will you look into or commit to the creation of an inspector-general for New South Wales emergency management?

Ms STEPH COOKE: Thank you for the question, Ms Higginson. Tying it to your previous questions around the Bushfire Inquiry, the Government accepted all 76 recommendations coming out of that particular inquiry, all of which are either underway or complete. We've completed 50 per cent of those recommendations, sitting here today. With a lot of work still being done, we will absolutely close out the remaining 50 per cent. Commissioner Rogers has touched on the fact that we do have certain pieces of work very much underway at the moment. We've just also had the independent Flood Inquiry handed down. Through that process, a project management office has been established within DPC to consider the recommendations of that particular inquiry. There are 28 recommendations. Six recs have been supported in full, and the remaining 22 have been supported in principle, noting that there is a lot more work to be done.

In relation to your question, I will take it on notice.

Answer: The Independent NSW Bushfire Inquiry recommended the NSW Government establish a central accountability mechanism to track implementation of recommendations from bush fire-related reviews and inquiries, and consider expanding this to other policy areas. In response to this recommendation, the NSW Government passed legislation in November 2020 to establish an explicit statutory function for the State Emergency Management Committee to promote the continuous improvement in the NSW emergency management sector, including through consideration of reviews and inquiries, and their recommendations.

Emergency management in NSW has been considered by multiple inquiries and none have recommended the establishment of an Inspector General for Emergency Management in NSW.

QoN5 - Transcript Page 13

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Yes, but who are the legal owners—the beneficial owners of the company shares that will actually, in effect, have legal control of this body?

ROB ROGERS: Maybe it's better for us to provide it on—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: On notice.

Answer: The legal owner of the RFS Benevolent Fund is the NSW Rural Fire Service as a representative of the Crown. In that capacity, and in line with the Fund's Constitution, the RFS Commissioner is the Foundation Member. This approach is consistent with other charities, such as the NSW Rural Fire Service & Brigades Donations Fund. The RFS Benevolent Fund is a Company Limited by Guarantee, which is a common legal structure for charities. As a not-for-profit charity, the Fund cannot have shareholders and cannot make distributions to members. This is made clear in its Constitution.

QoN6 - Transcript Page 21

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Okay. Minister, did you give Commissioner Fitzsimmons the heads-up that the Government was going to announce acceptance, in principle at least, of the 28 recommendations before it was announced?

Ms STEPH COOKE: I had conversations with Commissioner Fitzsimmons. I would have to take on notice exactly when those conversations took place, but—

Answer: It is not appropriate for the Minister or her staff to divulge private conversations with the Commissioners. The Minister and her staff engage with Commissioner Fitzsimmons nearly every day.

QoN7 - Transcript Page 25

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there public transparency around the leases? Are the leases and the price that we're paying for those leasing arrangements publicly available?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I'll take it on notice. I think the expenditure would be certainly public, but the details of the leases and contents therein—I would need to take some advice on that. But obviously I have no problem sharing what is available to be shared.

Answer: In delivering temporary housing to the North Coast community, Resilience NSW has entered into leases and licences with a variety of landowners. Resilience NSW is currently considering a proactive release of these licenses and leases under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009, noting this will require the agreement of the relevant lessors and licensors.

QoN8 - Transcript Page 25

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. Minister, how many people in the Ballina and Lismore electorates have received Back Home grants? Do you have that?

Ms STEPH COOKE: In the interests of brevity, I might take that on notice.

Answer: This question was answered by Commissioner Fitzsimmons on the day of the hearing (page 46 of the uncorrected transcript).

QoN9 - Transcript Page 25

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you very much. Where have I put it? It was specific to the Aboriginal housing. There was \$70 million announced for Aboriginal housing solutions for communities such as Cabbage Tree Island. I understand that was announced in April. It was announced as further support for New South Wales flood zones. Is it the case that \$7 million of that money was taken out of the flood recovery and it was put into the more general administration of the Aboriginal housing organisation? Are you aware of that?

Ms STEPH COOKE: I'm not, Ms Higginson, but I'll ask Commissioner Fitzsimmons whether we either answer it or take it on notice, one way or another.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. Has any of that \$70 million actually been diverted away from the flood response housing?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I don't believe so. The distribution was done in accordance with local community groups. But we'll get the particular detail of that breakdown.

Answer: This question was answered by Commissioner Fitzsimmons on the day of the hearing (page 46 of the uncorrected transcript).

QoN10 - Transcript Page 27

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: None with the unions?

Ms STEPH COOKE: To the best of my knowledge, although I'm happy to take it on notice, the union hasn't reached out to me in relation to discussing specifically the future of Resilience NSW staff.

Answer: At the time of the hearing, the Minister had not received any correspondence from unions representing public sector employees within Resilience NSW. However, since Estimates, the Minister has received correspondence from and met with the Public Service Association (PSA).

QoN11 - Transcript Page 29

ROB ROGERS: Sure. Thanks, Minister. As Commissioner Fitzsimmons said, a number of community engagement events had happened post the incident. I will have to take on notice the sequence of events that led to what was done and what was committed to be done. To be honest, I'm a little confused as to how the reporting ended up the way it did as well.

Answer: As reported in the Q1 2022 Bushfire Inquiry report, the recommendation was closed once the Government's response to the recommendation had been addressed: "The RFS will develop operational doctrine to ensure strategic back burns are independently reviewed and affected communities are advised of back burns, this will include defining what is strategic and what is tactical. In addition the RFS operational system (ICON) will be upgraded to enable recording of back burn".

The RFS had addressed this by publishing the updated back burning protocol and the upgrades to ICON had/have taken place.

The RFS has been in contact with the various action groups since March 2022 in the Mount Wilson/Mount Tomah area. A formal meeting occurred on 15 September 2022.

QoN12 - Transcript Page 34

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: The question is how many people have asked you, or do you know of, that want to relocate?

Ms STEPH COOKE: I don't know the specifics of that, Ms Higginson, in terms of an overall number. You've got something? Thank you.

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: Just answering some of your questions there earlier, you can be assured that Resilience NSW, with the temporary housing and the reconstruction corporation, is working very closely together. We're co-located up in the Northern Rivers. We have appointed a dedicated director up there, from our perspective, to look at housing and work very closely with Mr Witherdin's team. Mr Witherdin is a member of our State recovery committee. We meet every week, and he provides regular updates. I have just pulled up this week's report concerning the— sorry, I looked at the Flood Property Assessment Program. I'll take on notice those that have signalled a desire to relocate.

Answer: This question should be referred to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Regional NSW.

QoN13 - Transcript Page 35

The CHAIR: You mentioned in the last 12 months that there were two or three were found to have been bullied or where there was bullying. How were they resolved? What is the status of those?

PAUL BAXTER: There's a number of them resulted in disciplinary actions. Some of them resulted in people being removed from the organisation, and others would undertake remedial action that was specific to the actual case, appropriate to the circumstances.

The CHAIR: Have you got those statistics in a table—

PAUL BAXTER: We have, yes.

The CHAIR: —that you could put on notice and supply to us please?

PAUL BAXTER: Yes. Be happy to do that.

Answer:

FRNSW	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Bullying investigations	9	15	9	13	3	9
Sustained	4	10	8	10	1	4
Not sustained	5	5	1	-	1	1

Direct remedial action - (A new category commenced 2019-20. The decision maker determined to take direct remedial action, no formal finding of misconduct)	1	1	4
Resignation (The person subject to the allegations resigned arising from the process)	2	-	-

RFS	2017-18	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Sustained	0	2	2	7	5
Partially sustained	1	2	2	6	0
Not Sustained	10	11	4	7	6
Not yet finalised	0	0	0	3	8
Did not proceed	10	5	1	5	3

SES: This was answered by Commissioner York on the day of the hearing. Please see page 36 of the uncorrected transcript.

QoN14 - Transcript Page 38

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Welcome back for the afternoon session. The first question is to Fire and Rescue NSW. Is there any contractual relationship between Dr Marc Stigter and Fire and Rescue NSW?

PAUL BAXTER: I would need to take that on notice to see whether there is any contractual relationship that still exists, but I think that is—

Answer: Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) advises that there is no current contractual relationship between Dr Marc Stigter and FRNSW. Dr Stigter was previously engaged from 25 May 2017 to 16 October 2021 and \$707,395.36 was paid for the services rendered.

QoN15 - Transcript Page 40

PAUL BAXTER: What I would undertake to give you is an extensive list of the activities and the work that has been completed as a result of the Plus Plan.

Answer: Plus Plan Activities

Safety and resilience

- World-first laundry service and app, improving cleaning processes for contaminated uniforms.
- Rollout of state-of-the-art structural protective clothing for all firefighters.
- Clear decontamination procedure for all incidents – including new Clean Firefighter Policy and Guideline Support Document (GSD) and carcinogen checklist.
- New fire station designs have three specific zones – living, transition and working.
- Continuing research into exposure for firefighters and improving education.
- >130 volunteer Peer Support Officers to provide one-to-one assistance, ongoing funding for five Occupational Psychologists, four Wellbeing Officers and a Wellbeing Coordinator.
- Psychological Triage Program, a national award-winning program, which ensures correct diagnosis, access to appropriate treatment supports, and return to work options, which is currently listed as an exemplar by Safe Work Australia.
- Embedded FIT MIND mental health awareness into recruit firefighter training, and Integrated mental health training into all promotional programs and stages of employee lifecycle.
- Successful development and rollout of Bystander Engagement and Firefighter Readiness to increase confidence in managing bystanders.
- Psychological First Aid training available to all FRNSW personnel through the learning station.
- Family assistance for injured firefighters and Mental Health First Aid training for leaders.

- Resilience at Work (RAW), a bespoke mental health training program for firefighters.
- Partnerships with Black Dog Institute, Phoenix Australia, Fortem Australia, Monash University.
- Encouraging better health outcomes through programs such as FIREFIT and better support for reporting injuries on the job.
- UNSW and South Sydney Football Club on physical training study that builds resilience by providing NRL strength and conditioning experts to improve firefighter recovery and resilience.
- Achieved 50% female representation within Executive Leadership Team and, 13.45% workforce representation - an increase of 3% in five years.
- Active member of the Champions of Change Program, implementing its priorities of inclusive leadership, talent development, removing systemic barriers to inclusion and reporting of diversity data.
- Respect, Reflect, Reset - Stop Bullying Action Plan asked employees to reflect on, and take ownership in, creating and sustaining a positive workplace.
- Coaching for individuals and teams on their unique strengths and development areas to enable better collaboration.
- Supporting high-potential employees with leadership programs such as Leading High-Performance Teams, Australian Institute of Police Management Executive Development Program and Diploma of Leadership and Management.
- Staff-led networks such as Women's Inclusive Network, and the FRINGE network (LGBTIQ+).
- IFARES program to increase the skills and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women interested in becoming FRNSW firefighters.
- Reset Professional Standards resourcing needs, operating style, and mandate.
- 2021 Public Sector Employee Survey (PMES) recorded highest ever number of responses, with a 71 per cent engagement score (PMES has showed real change since 2017 in areas, such as job satisfaction, wellbeing, confidence in senior managers and reduced rates of bullying and harassment).
- Learning and Development Plan 2022-25 clarifies training needs, capabilities, and structure with tangible projects such as enhanced skills maintenance (including 33 new drills) and open access to online learning.
- Creation of 'practical learning environment' at the Emergency Services Academy with a live fire facility, rail corridor and health care facility props, service station, tower, urban search and rescue environment, and fire safety systems training room.
- Regional on-call skills refresher weekends, Drill Night Live interactive education broadcasts.
- Established Operational Improvement and Assurance unit to provide assurance to the Commissioner on FRNSW's capability, foster a culture of continuous improvement and improve firefighter safety.

Innovation and research

- Increased safety and value to the community through updates to residential sprinklers, National Construction Code and associated regulatory change.
- Revisiting the effectiveness of residential smoke alarms to ensure safety technologies are in step with today's home environments.
- Investigating best practise response to lithium-ion battery fires, battery management and electric vehicle fires within buildings.
- Partner with Transport for NSW on optimal fire safety solutions for new infrastructure, such as road tunnels, interchanges, metro rail tunnels and stations.
- Partnered with the Office of the Building Commissioner to delivery regulatory pre-inspection online learning for certifiers and builders.
- Key member of Combustible Cladding Taskforce and Project Remediate to address risk of combustible cladding on high-rise buildings; reinforced training, pre-incident planning, response protocols for firefighters responding to these fires.

- \$28 million investment in the Connected Firefighter program including eight new or upgraded technologies (mobile command centre upgrade, new cell on wheels all-terrain vehicles, vehicle communications hub, vehicle radio replacement, portable radio replacement, two-way pagers, mobile data terminals (MDTs) and ADASHI laptop upgrades).
- Expanded Remote Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) capability with additional stations and personnel qualified and new fleet, including aerial incendiary device, light detection and ranging and rapid response mapping.
- New simulation training systems for initial skills training at the Emergency Services Academy and in regional areas.
- Managing water runoff and smoke at incidents, including the development of rapid, on-site identification of hazardous smoke and contaminated water.
- Ensuring firefighting foams are independently tested for safety.
- Collaboration with the Environment Protection Authority, NSW Rural Fire Service, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Indigenous communities to conduct hazard reduction activities, while ensuring the protection of key species and respect for traditional fire management practices.
- Use of 100 per cent biodegradable plastic in personal protective clothing (PPC) laundering process and for numbered security seals.

Community and partners

- Our two flagship events – the annual fire station Open Day and Sydney Royal Easter Show – showcase our services, diverse capabilities, and critical fire safety advice.
- Annual Winter Fire Safety Campaign aiming to address trends in house fire injuries and fatalities seen in the colder months.
- ‘FireEd’ school program, including tailored resources for children with diverse needs, and educating the youngest members of the community about smoke alarms and escape plans.
- State-wide Safety Visits by local crews to check and install home smoke alarms.
- Pre-incident planning to ensure crews are familiar with fire safety systems and potential risks in specific locations in their response area.
- Natural Disaster and Humanitarian Relief specialist capability helps mitigate loss to communities anywhere in the world within 48 hours. Formally certified by the United Nations International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG).
- Disaster assistance response teams (DART) support external agencies in disaster affected environments. This includes the assembly of field hospitals and self-sufficient accommodation as well as logistical support to AUSMAT medical support missions.
- Post-disaster, FRNSW strike teams assist with clean-up, through the wash out of mud, or the safe removal of contaminants and asbestos. Community Engagement officers check in with members of the community on their recovery (as seen during the 2022 Northern Rivers floods).
- FRNSW’s medical capability provides timely support to NSW Ambulance and medical assistance to people who are trapped, injured, or some other way affected by an incident or situation.
- Community First Responder program has saved countless lives in rural and regional areas. Crews receive training from NSW Ambulance Service and work alongside them when they arrive.
- New Fire Safety Operational Liaison Unit to tackle complexity in the built environment.

QoN16 - Transcript Page 41

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Can you confirm whether Fire and Rescue NSW executive officers have accepted any Frequent Flyer points during their business trips?

PAUL BAXTER: I wouldn't know the answer to that question.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Can you take that on notice and come back to us?

PAUL BAXTER: Sure.

Answer: The Fire and Rescue NSW Travel Policy and Procedures prohibits staff to seek or accept frequent flyer points in relation to official travel.

QoN17 - Transcript Page 41

PAUL BAXTER: I'm not 100 per cent sure. I think both parties are filing information in respect to that at the moment. That would be the most up-to-date information I would have on it.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: How much money has been allocated or spent so far in relation to those proceedings?

PAUL BAXTER: I imagine we wouldn't even have a bill in. It's a pretty fresh matter. So I wouldn't even imagine we have a bill in at this stage for that. But we have retained counsel in that respect. Yes.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: On notice, can you tell us how much has been expended, if any, and what your assessment is going forward?

Answer: \$11,000 has been spent on initial proceedings.

QoN18 - Transcript Page 42

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: When was the decision to have a prerecorded message answering SES calls, telling callers they could receive a call back, made? When was that implemented?

CARLENE YORK: I'd have to take that on notice.

Answer: On 2 April 2019, a Virtual 'On Hold' feature was activated on the phone call platform for flood/storm (132 500) queues. This provides the caller who is on hold, due to call volumes, the option of pressing # to keep their place in the queue and be phoned back.

QoN19 - Transcript Page 42

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: How many staff were rostered to respond to calls at any given time in that February onwards—

CARLENE YORK: I'd have to take that on notice, as it alters daily. We have a process where we have two contracted agencies. When I started, we had one to provide services. It does become difficult to get people to do that. So we expanded that to have two companies providing casual staff. Throughout COVID there were some difficulties. But we then switched over to being able to allow those staff to take calls remotely. It does depend on what's available and what we ask for each day. But I'll try and get as accurate figures on notice as possible for you.

Answer: 252 contingent labour staff were rostered across shifts in the NSW SES State Operations Centre between 28 February and 16 March 2022 to support the significant increase in call volumes in this period.

QoN20 - Transcript Page 42

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Is there a limit on the amount of calls that can come in before the system basically says "no more"?

CARLENE YORK: There is, yes.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: What's that?

CARLENE YORK: I'll have to take that on notice as well.

Answer: This was answered by Commissioner York in the Hearing - please see page 45 of the uncorrected transcript.

QoN21 - Transcript Page 44

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: So we don't have an idea, ballpark, of what that fire station would cover, notwithstanding the fact that you've said the flood planning might mitigate the further development?

PAUL BAXTER: No. We could probably provide that information on notice through the department of planning.

Answer: The Marsden Park business case for the Marsden Park Fire Station identified that a population of around 50,000 was expected within the service catchment of the new station.

QoN22 - Transcript Page 45

CARLENE YORK: It's a function of the system that we have internally with us. The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: When was that system implemented? CARLENE YORK: That was before I started, so I'll take that on notice.

Answer: The telephone system was implemented in 2017.

QoN23 - Transcript Page 46

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I meant like during February, during that heavy demand time when the call system was overloaded—my term. In that time, were you able to expand the directly employed workforce to deal with any increased demand?

CARLENE YORK: Through our two contracted agencies, we do do that. And then, in this circumstance, Service NSW and the bushfire line as well.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: On notice, can you tell us how much by? How many additional bodies were put on?

Answer: The NSW SES has a standing capability of 24/7 call takers, as well as surge capacity during major events. Between 28 February and 16 March 2022, NSW SES had a standing roster of 175 personnel (shifts) during the period. An additional 442 shifts (personnel) were rostered over this period to increase capacity to answer the increased call volume. Personnel included paid and volunteer. NSW SES has a scalable model to increase call taking capacity. This has been expanded by more than 300% over the last 12 months.

QoN24 - Transcript Page 49

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Do we have a figure for this year's budget.

PAUL BAXTER: I could come back to you on notice with that in terms of the allocation across the financial years.

Answer: \$1.5 million was allocated in 2015-16 for the purchase of land for the Oran Park fire station. In 2021-22, \$1.7 million was allocated with \$4.9 million allocated in 2022-23 for the construction of the station and designated fire appliances.

QoN25 - Transcript Page 51

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Can I ask how many staff does the RFS have back of house?

ROB ROGERS: I would have to take that on notice, I'm sorry Mr Buttigieg, I don't actually—to be honest, I probably want to understand exactly what we mean by "back of house". I think Commissioner York mentioned, if I am correct—

Answer: The Department of Premier and Cabinet PMO is leading the response to the Independent Flood Inquiry and, as part of this work, will scope out what functions are considered back office in the context of any merger between the RFS and SES.

QoN26 - Transcript Page 52

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Roughly 330. Do we have an idea of what the staffing levels were a decade ago, say?

CARLENE YORK: I could take that on notice for you.

Answer:

2021/22 - 376

2012/13 - 329

QoN27 - Transcript Page 54

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: How did it go from being not able to be funded in that round to being funded?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I'll take that, specifically, on notice.

Answer: This question was answered by Commissioner Fitzsimmons on the day of the hearing (page 58 of the uncorrected transcript).

QoN28 - Transcript Page 55

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I'm assuming we're talking about the same group, but my team did meet with lots of people. I also met with a group from up in that area as well about a project that was unsuccessful in BCRRF, which was about water and a car park and building or something like that. From memory, there was a mixed bag of stuff in that project and, as a matter of fact, I pointed them in the direction of an alternate grant funding mechanism, which I understood was successful.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: If you could just confirm that on notice, that would be very good.

Answer: This question was answered by Commissioner Fitzsimmons on the day of the hearing (page 58 of the uncorrected transcript).

QoN29 - Transcript Page 58

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I think the Acting Premier told question time at the end of March that the Government had announced over \$2½ billion to support communities impacted by floods. I don't expect you to have the number at your fingertips, but can you tell us how much of that \$2.5 billion has actually gone out the door?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: No. I can't off the top of my head.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: But you can on notice?

Answer: This question was answered by Commissioner Fitzsimmons on the day of the hearing (page 58 of the uncorrected transcript).

QoN30 - Transcript Page 59

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: In relation to the ones deemed ineligible, is there a particular theme of reasons for the ineligibility that has emerged?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I haven't got that detail with me.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Again, I wouldn't expect you to. But, if you could take on notice as to whether or not the unavailability of crucial documentation has essentially rendered those applications ineligible, that would be useful to understand.

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: That was pretty low doc and modified. I'll double-check what the reasons might be.

Answer: As at 20 September 2022, 13,854 applications have been received for the Flood Recovery Rental Support Payment in relation to the February-March 2022 floods.

Of these applications, 1,101 applications are currently under fraud review and 9,723 applications have been declined.

- 44% of declined applications were closed as evidence of damage to the applicant's principal place of residence was not provided or was suspicious.
- 11% of declined applications were closed due to evidence of fraud.
- 27% of declined applications were closed as Service NSW were unable to validate the applicant's principal place of residence.

Applicants are required to provide one document that shows the address of the impacted property, which can be any of the following:

- A council rates notice
- A copy of the current rental agreement
- A utility bill
- A current vehicle registration notice
- A letter from Centrelink, the Australian Tax Office, Service NSW or Transport for NSW.

Services Australia and local council representatives were included in the flood grant support sessions to assist with providing copies of documents held by their organisations if applicants were no longer able to access them.

QoN31 - Transcript Page 60

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: How much money has been spent on that project to date? Or has nothing been spent and now you've got the money?

CARLENE YORK: I'll have to get back to you on notice.

Answer: This was answered by Commissioner York later in the hearing - please see page 73 of the uncorrected transcript.

QoN32 - Transcript Page 60

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: That'd be very good. The Lismore Citizens Flood Review Group completed a review and issued its recommendations in, I think, August 2017. The SES responded to those recommendations. What is the status of that input from the citizens flood review group?

CARLENE YORK: I'll have to take on that notice. I know that some of my staff have met over the last 12, 18 months with that group in relation to their concerns. I'll get the information about the recommendations from their review.

Answer: NSW SES received correspondence from the Lismore Citizens Flood Group in October 2020. Senior representatives from NSW SES met with representatives of the Group following this correspondence. NSW SES provided the following information to address these concerns:

- NSW SES had reviewed and updated its Incident Management Framework;
- NSW SES had introduced an updated process for approving Evacuation Warnings and Evacuation Orders, which require approval from the State Duty Commander; and
- NSW SES was able to confirm and show how they use local knowledge when assessing intelligence related to potential flooding.

The recent funding announcement from the NSW Government and the NSW SES to split the existing SES Northern Zone into two separate zones will provide more local staffing resources to support volunteers and the community in this part of the State.

QoN33 - Transcript Page 60

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: In answers to supplementary questions in March, Commissioner, you distinguished between out-of-date flood management plans and flood management plans that had simply passed their review date. How many flood management plans have passed their review date?

CARLENE YORK: The whole State—those areas of risk of flooding—is relevant to that question. I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: When you answer, can you indicate which local government areas those plans cover?

CARLENE YORK: Yes.

Answer: There are 122 Local Flood Plans across NSW. 117 have recently been reviewed and are at varying stages of endorsement. 38 have been fully endorsed by LEMC, 2 have been tabled for endorsement, and 79 have been reviewed and are going through external consultation prior to endorsement. Lachlan, Oberon, Uralla, Walcha, and Orange City are still to be reviewed.

QoN34 - Transcript Page 61

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Is it correct that the Ballina plan was drafted in 2013 and had a review to be completed by 2018? Are you aware of that?

CARLENE YORK: I'd have to take that on notice as well.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: My question is: Was the review completed by 2018? Same question for the Byron plan—I think it was drafted in 2013 and had a review to be completed in 2018. Again, my question is: Is that information correct and did the review take place?

CARLENE YORK: I'll take that on notice. It has been an issue for us to update some of those plans. I don't know of those ones specifically, but I have redirected some additional resources for the northern zone to make that a priority to get those matters up to date.

Answer: Commissioner York answered this question later during the budget estimates hearing - please see page 61 of the uncorrected transcript.

QoN35 - Transcript Page 61

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: How many flood emergency sub-plans are out of date? Are there sub-plans?

CARLENE YORK: Yes. I'll have to take that on notice as well.

Answer: Commissioner York answered this question later during the budget estimates hearing - please see page 61 of the uncorrected transcript.

QoN36 - Transcript Page 61

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Recommendation 55 (b)—where's that up to? That's the one about the operational communications strategy and the interoperability with Victoria.

ROB ROGERS: Yes, there have been multiple cross-border committees with Victoria. There was, I think, one last year in the Snowy Mountains that was held. It brought together people from all different agencies, and there have been comms plans developed as a result of that cross-border work. The Cross-Border Commissioner has been involved in it as well. So they are there. I can get you details on notice if that's okay. I don't have the details exactly of what's been—

Answer: Commissioner York answered this question later during the budget estimates hearing - please see page 61 of the uncorrected transcript.

QoN37 - Transcript Page 62

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: What research and development has already been produced from that funding stream? How are you making sure that that is—I don't like the term—weaponised, actually properly deployed to assist?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I'll take that on notice and give you a response, but I think it's fair to say that what we've been able to do is consolidate our jurisdictional contributions to the national programs and then tailor a nuanced engagement with other entities domestically in New South Wales and build this centre of excellence process with the chief scientist. As I say, that's currently in the market at the moment and undergoing evaluation but I'll see what I can provide you.

Answer: The NSW Government has committed \$69.8 million over four years for the establishment of a Bushfire and Natural Hazards Research and Technology Program, and Bushfire Response R&D Mission. The NSW Bushfire Response R&D Mission, administered by the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer, includes the Bushfire Commercialisation Fund (an early-stage commercialisation program) and the Bushfire Technology Pilots Program (which enable NSW fire agencies to build expertise in the use of new bushfire technologies). The Bushfire Technology Pilots Program has closed the applications process for Round 1, and the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer is reviewing applications. There will be four rounds in total. The Bushfire Commercialisation Fund is currently open for applications. The preliminary applications round has closed, with shortlisted applicants to present to an expert panel in November prior to final applications being requested. Further questions about Bushfire Response R&D Mission, administered by the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer, should be directed to the Minister for Science, Innovation, and Technology. Though the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Research and Technology Program, the NSW Government has also provided \$4.4 million over four years (starting in 2021-22) to the Natural Hazards Research Centre to undertake research into natural hazard resilience and disaster risk reduction and investigate national research priorities. Under this program, the NSW Government is also currently considering applications received via tender for the establishment and delivery of the NSW Bushfire and Natural Hazards Research Centre.

QoN38 - Transcript Page 62

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Do you have a total or itemised cost for the suppression costs for the 2019-20 Black Summer fires? Do we know what it cost to battle?

ROB ROGERS: I think the problem is that there are so many different areas. I could provide on notice, for example, the direct firefighting costs—

Answer: NSW RFS recorded bush fire expenditure for the period 1/07/2019 - 31/08/2022 of \$451,569,499. This does not include expenditure by other agencies.

QoN39 - Transcript Page 63

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Regarding recommendation 1 in the Bushfire Inquiry progress report, what outcomes have been achieved in promoting the continuous improvement in the emergency management sector? Are you able to address that, or do you want to take that on notice?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I'm happy to take it on notice.

Answer: The NSW Government has invested \$830 million to implement the recommendations from the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and drive improvements across the emergency management sector. 50% of recommendations from the Inquiry are now complete. Progress achieved to implement recommendations is published quarterly and available at www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/projects-and-initiatives/nsw-bushfire-inquiry/nsw-bushfire-inquiry-progress-reports.

QoN40 - Transcript Page 64

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Regarding recommendation 48, the progress report for January to March 2021 said the final report by the University of Wollongong on back-burning was due in November 2021. Has that been completed?

ROB ROGERS: It's still—

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: It's still extant?

ROB ROGERS: Yes, it's still underway.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Do we have a time frame when it might be expected? ROB ROGERS: I will have to get that on notice for you. I'm sorry; I don't know. The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: That's okay.

ROB ROGERS: But it is a current body of work.

Answer: The University of Wollongong has provided a draft report to the NSW RFS following its evaluation of five back burns during the 2019-20 bush fire season. The RFS is currently evaluating the report.

QoN41 - Transcript Page 64

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: This is probably a question to all of you in the context of the various agencies that you head up. Any plans to sell any physical premises that you know of across any of the agencies?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I don't own any, so that's no for me.

CARLENE YORK: I don't own any either.

ROB ROGERS: Ours are vested in local government.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: We might touch on that later. Commissioner Baxter?

PAUL BAXTER: I'm not immediately aware, but I would check that on notice for you, Mr Buttigieg.

Answer: Fire and Rescue NSW has three surplus properties from two station relocations and a station merger. In accordance with the Premier's Memorandum 2012-20 Government Property NSW, these properties will be sold when decommissioning is complete.

QoN42 - Transcript Page 68

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: What's the percentage of the New South Wales population that Fire and Rescue NSW stations cover?

PAUL BAXTER: I will come back to you on notice with that, but I think percentage-wise it is around 90 per cent.

Answer: FRNSW directly protects just over 88% of the State's population (that is, within its Fire District). It also provides direct service for Rescue and Hazmat incidents, as well as mutual aid and support to the RFS and SES for a range of incidents outside of Fire Districts.

QoN43 - Transcript Page 69

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Could we get that on notice: the proportion of the budget spend outside Greater Sydney?

PAUL BAXTER: We will have a look at that.

Answer: In 2022-23, 36 per cent of FRNSW's recurrent budget is allocated to regional NSW.

QoN44 - Transcript Page 42

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: It was a national mental health and wellbeing study of police and emergency services. What percentage of your workers compensation injuries are post-traumatic stress disorder or mental health issues? Do we have an idea of that?

PAUL BAXTER: I am not sure in terms of percentage versus physical injury. We can simply provide that on notice for you as well. I can give you the data on the costs and the severity. I can't break it down by percentage but I can give you information on average costs of claims et cetera and total amount of claims. Happy to follow up on notice.

Answer: Due to the complex set of causes or factors that contribute to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and regulator endorsed coding, the workers compensation scheme does not separately record the rate of PTSD. Approximately 8 per cent of all workers compensation claims in the 2021-2022 FY were psychological claims.