

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 8 - CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wednesday 8 November 2023

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

BETTER REGULATION AND FAIR TRADING, INDUSTRY AND TRADE, INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, BUILDING, AND CORRECTIONS

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The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Emma Hurst (Chair)

Ms Abigail Boyd
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
Ms Cate Faehrmann
Ms Sue Higginson (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Aileen MacDonald
The Hon. Jacqui Munro
The Hon. Cameron Murphy
The Hon. Peter Primrose
The Hon. Bronnie Taylor

PRESENT

The Hon. Anoulack Chanthivong, *Minster for Better Regulation and Fair Trading, Minister for Industry and Trade, Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology, Minister for Building, and Minister for Corrections*

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**

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The CHAIR: Welcome to the second hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 8 - Customer Service inquiry into budget estimates 2023-24. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us here today. I welcome Minister Chanthivong and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios for Better Regulation and Fair Trading, Industry and Trade, Innovation, Science and Technology, Building, and Corrections. I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent.

Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I urge Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures. I welcome our witnesses and thank them for making the time to give evidence today. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister Chanthivong, 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 also remind Ms Hogan and Mr Tidball that they do not need to be sworn as they have been sworn at an earlier budget estimates hearing before this Committee.

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Ms EMMA HOGAN, Secretary, Department of Customer Service, on former affirmation

Ms NATASHA MANN, Deputy Secretary Better Regulation Division, Commissioner for Fair Trading, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Mr JOHN TANSEY, Executive Director Policy and Strategy, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Mr DAVID CHANDLER, NSW Building Commissioner, Department of Customer Service, sworn and examined

Mr ADAM DENT, Chief Executive, State Insurance Regulatory Authority, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

Mr KEVIN CORCORAN, PSM, Commissioner, Corrective Services, sworn and examined

Dr ANNE-MARIE MARTIN, Deputy Commissioner, Security and Custody, Corrective Services, sworn and examined

Mr LEON TAYLOR, Deputy Commissioner, Community, Industry and Capacity, Corrective Services, sworn and examined

Ms ELIZABETH MILDWATER, Secretary, Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade, affirmed and examined

Ms KATIE KNIGHT, CEO, Investment NSW, Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade, affirmed and examined

Professor HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE, Chief Scientist and Engineer, Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade, affirmed and examined

Ms TRINA JONES, Rental Commissioner, affirmed and examined

Mr JOHN MINNS, Strata and Property Services Commissioner, affirmed and examined

Mr MICHAEL TIDBALL, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, on former oath

Mr BRENDAN THOMAS, Deputy Secretary, Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes, Department of Communities and Justice, sworn and examined

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

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Welcome, Minister. It's great to see you here. A very big welcome to your department staff, and I thank them for everything that they're doing. Minister, you must be pretty pleased with the Prime Minister and his recent trade deals with China?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly any thought of that relationship—of course, there's been a great reset and I think there will be great opportunities for New South Wales businesses.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Great. Minister, in relation to DLO secondments in your office, have you or your office ever requested specific public servants to fill DLO positions in your office? It's a yes or no question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: All DLOs in my office are allocated by the secretary.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Can you confirm that DLOs, while seconded to your office, have not undertaken work that would contravene the Cabinet memorandum?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: My office adheres by the guidelines of the public service guidelines.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So that's a yes. Thank you very much, Minister. Have you ever visited the Junee Correctional Centre?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've visited a number of correctional centres already—

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The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: My question was very specific.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I said I will visit as many—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Have you visited the Junee—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I will be visiting those in due course.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, the question is really very straightforward. I think we should start off on a—I'll ask the questions and then you can answer them.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Okay, I'll answer your questions.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Have you visited the Junee Correctional Centre?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As you'll be aware, Ms Taylor, there are more than 30 correctional facilities across the State, and we are—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I am very aware, thank you, Minister. I will redirect you to the question, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Okay, well, if you let me finish—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: It's a simple yes or no.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: If you let me finish—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: My question is have you visited the Junee Correctional Centre?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: My answer is that there are more than 30 correctional facilities across the State and I will visit—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I will take that as a no.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —as many as I can during my term in government.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Thank you, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As you'll appreciate, we'll be in government for the next 10 terms so I'm sure I'll get to Junee in due course.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Wow. That's really a professional answer, Minister. I'd appreciate it if you'd show me a little bit of respect, Minister. My question was very—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think, in all fairness, if you'd let me finish I'm happy to do it—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: No, Minister, I'm the one asking the questions here.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order: Under the resolution of the House, witnesses need to be treated with courtesy and respect. That means allowing the witness—the Minister—to answer the question and not making statements and talking over the Minister while he's attempting to answer. I ask that you call the member to order.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: To the point of order: The Minister was directly condescending and rude to me just then when I was asking him a simple question. I would ask that he answers the question. It was a simple yes or no and he couldn't even answer that. But I'll continue with my line of questioning.

The CHAIR: Sorry, I will say something first. There was some rudeness from both sides, but the Minister does need to be directly relevant and direct with his answers.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to, Chair. Like I said, I've visited a number of facilities in my time already—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: But you haven't visited the Junee Correctional Centre?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —and I will visit Junee in due course.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: But you haven't visited the Junee—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, I will be visiting Junee in due course.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Gee whiz, you're giving me great footage in the first three minutes. Minister, since being appointed to your portfolio, how many times have you met with the Public Service Association of New South Wales?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: All my meetings with all stakeholders are disclosed in my diaries.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Do you know how many times you've met with them?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: My recollection is probably once or twice, I think.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Three times, actually, Minister, your disclosures show. Let's just remember we're all under oath here. According to your ministerial disclosures, you have met with the Public Service Association. Minister, have you discussed the Junee Correctional Centre with the Public Service Association of NSW?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Public Service Association covers not only my Corrections portfolio but all my other portfolios as well. Like all major stakeholders in all my portfolios, I meet with as many of them as I can. Just like I meet with the Community Justice Coalition, just as I met with SHINE for Kids and just as I met with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, I will meet with all stakeholders and discuss the issues that are important to them.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I will ask my question again. It's really helpful in this situation if you're able to answer it directly. Minister, have you ever discussed the Junee Correctional Centre with the Public Service Association? It's a yes or no. Have you got something to hide?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Naturally, the Public Service Association covers—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Have you discussed the Junee Correctional Centre—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —a lot of employees with all the other correctional centres.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: —with the Public Service Association?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, if you'd let me finish, I'm happy to answer that.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, can you not answer the question? Do you not know?

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You're asking the question. Do you want to answer it or do you want me to answer it?

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister. There's been a point of order.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Chair, I'm really reluctant to raise this as a point of order, but what is clear is that the question has been asked and the Minister is attempting to answer the question. Before the Minister can even get three or four words out, he's being interrupted with statements over the top of his answers. We ought to treat him with courtesy and respect, Chair.

The CHAIR: This is what I'll say: It does appear that the Minister is not directly answering the questions. I think that the questions are quite clear. I think the Opposition has the right to redirect the Minister in a polite way if they don't believe the question is being directly answered.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, I must ask this, then.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: What was the date you struck a deal with the union to take over control of the Junee Correctional Centre?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I reject the premise of that question.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Do you?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: There's no deal at all.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, was there a specific election commitment from the Government to reverse the privatisation of New South Wales jails?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It would be no surprise to anybody that the Labor Party, as a general principle, believes that public operation of a public service leads to a better outcome.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So that was an election commitment.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We went to the election with that general principle. It's no secret that the Labor Party believes this sort of thing.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: If I could divert you back to the question that you didn't answer before, have you ever discussed the Junee Correctional Centre with the Public Service Association of NSW?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I discuss with the Public Service Association any topics and any correction facilities, regardless—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So you have discussed?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Of course.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Great. Good. We've got an answer. That's great. Good. Well done. Okay. Fantastic.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Public Service Association—if I can finish, Madam Chair—cover up to 10,000 employees.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'm well aware of that.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's why we need to actually—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Because of the wide coverage, that's why I asked you the specific question, Minister. It's really helpful when you answer it.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: My simple point of order is that the question is asked, the Minister answers and then the honourable member talks over the Minister. I really do think it would be courteous to allow the Minister to finish answering the question and then the member can continue asking additional—

The CHAIR: I partially uphold that. I do think that there's a lot of talking over the top of each other. If the member does want to redirect the Minister, she can politely redirect him, but there shouldn't be talking over the top.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, how many people are currently employed at the GEO facility?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I recall it's just a bit over 300, but I might defer to the Commissioner of Corrections.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, respectfully, I've got a lot of time in the afternoon. I'm just asking you.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm trying to answer the question.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: That's fine. You can take it on notice if you don't know.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to take that on notice, but I also think it's about 240.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: That's great. Take that on notice. Do you know how many of those people will be retained in their current roles, Minister? You can take that on notice.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In the agreement, the current operations of Junee are not expected to change. We have a 17-month transition period. Of course, we'll continue to speak with all stakeholders at Junee and the local community down there.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So you're expecting all of those jobs to remain in Junee. Is that what you're saying to the Committee today?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The operations of Junee are not expected to change under the public operations of Junee.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, I understand you're saying operations. I'm asking you about jobs. Will those jobs stay in Junee?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's a transition. I don't expect anything to change in terms of the operations.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So you expect those jobs to stay in?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The operations of Junee are not expected to change, so therefore the operational requirements of the staff will—

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The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Of those proposed 340 jobs that you're saying will stay, because that's your expectation, how many new union members do you anticipate?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I understand it, there's a demarcation between the PSA and the United Workers Union. The current employees at Junee are covered by the United Workers Union.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: How much is the annual contract paid to the GEO Group for the management of the correctional centre?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: At the current operations, it's about \$60 million. Our advice in making the decision was that bringing it back to public ownership would actually not cost—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So \$60 million, you're saying, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Let me finish. On the current operations, GEO's contract is worth about \$60 million, and bringing it back to public operations, as I'm advised, would actually not cost the taxpayer any more than what we're currently paying for GEO.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: In *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 3 November this year it is quoted that the cost to taxpayers to fund this facility is \$75 million annually. How do you justify a decision that will cost New South Wales taxpayers additional money per annum in perpetuity?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That figure is actually based on a different capacity.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So that figure is wrong that was in *The Sydney Morning Herald*?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. What I'm saying—let me finish—is the current capacity of the operation of Junee costs about \$60 million. Of course, as you would appreciate, as inmate numbers—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So 60 or 50?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I haven't finished. As inmate numbers actually—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: It's just getting a bit confused.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, I don't think I ever said 50, for one. On the current operation of Junee, it costs about \$60 million. Of course, as inmate numbers increase, as you would appreciate, there would have to be more cost. That's where I probably believe the figure that is quoted in the Herald. But the advice that I've received in making this decision is that we believe it will deliver much a better outcome in general—broadly—in terms of rehabilitation, in terms of staffing and in terms of delivering a better outcome for the community.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, what we have here is you're saying you're not sure. You think it's around \$60 million.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. I'm not saying that at all. What I'm saying is that on the current operation, the cost—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So you don't know.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I do know.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You should know.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I do know, if you'll let me finish. In the current operations, the cost for Junee is about \$60 million. As I said, because our correction facilities have a demand-based model, as there are more inmates, the cost will naturally go up. But the important advice that I've got here, Chair, is that the decisions—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, you just said you wanted to get better outcomes before, right? The statement you issued on 3 November provides no reason for the termination of the GEO Group contract. Why have you made this decision?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Because we made this decision in the best interests of the local community and the best interests of New South Wales.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: "The best interests of the local community", did you say?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. The decision the Government has made is that this will deliver a much better outcome for the correction facility, bearing in mind that correction facilities are also about access to Justice Health. Justice Health will operate the medical facilities.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Thank you, Minister. I will move on from that. What advice—

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Let me finish, because I think it's important.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: No. I'm doing the questioning, and we're moving on.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, I'm doing the answering and I haven't finished my answer.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, what advice were you given by the Department of Communities and Justice prior to making this decision?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That advice is actually Cabinet-in-confidence and I'm not at liberty to disclose it.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Did they advise you to close the facility for better outcomes?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, because I believe that putting it back into the Corrective Services operations statewide will deliver a much better outcome.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, you just said yes. Do you have a brief—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: One, it will have access to Justice Health, giving them the expertise of Justice Health working across the whole network. Don't forget, Corrective Services operates a vast majority, if not all, of our facilities across New South Wales—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I have limited time, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —which, of course, means that we have—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: I don't wish to stymie the honourable members asking questions, but if the question is worth asking, presumably it's also worth allowing the Minister to answer the question before you commence another question.

The CHAIR: There is a fine line between allowing the Minister to finish and allowing the Minister to continue talking about a topic and wandering off topic without the member being able to redirect the question. I'm keeping an eye on it. Sometimes the Minister is rambling on, so I encourage him to refocus on some of the questions.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, Chair.

The CHAIR: But if there are ones that you want to make sure you're putting on the record—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, sure. I'm happy to do that.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Chair, I would like to rephrase the question. It's my right to do so. Minister, let's try this again. What advice were you given? Were you given a brief by the Department of Communities and Justice prior to making this decision? You've mentioned outcomes. You've said you want better outcomes; that's why you're doing it. We've seen nothing. Were you provided advice and a brief from your department that this was the right decision?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I was given advice that is Cabinet-in-confidence, which I'm not at liberty—as you would know, being a former Cabinet Minister yourself. What I would say in answering that question—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, this is a brief. This is not—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have advice with a Cabinet-in-confidence document, which I'm not at liberty to disclose.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So, no, you didn't receive the advice and you've done a deal for your union mates?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I would say to you is, in making the decision, the Government believes that public operations of Junee will deliver a much better outcome, given the economies of scale that Corrective Services has across the whole network and the opportunity for staff to move in and around the network—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: In the interests of time, Minister, I would like to redirect the question to you.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I haven't finished my answer.

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The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I am redirecting the question, Minister. Did you meet with Commissioner Kevin Corcoran regarding this matter? If so, when did this meeting occur and what advice was provided to the commissioner? If you're not sure, you can take it on notice.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I meet with the commissioner regularly to discuss—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I would expect that, but my question was very specific, Minister, and I can rephrase it for you: Did you meet with the commissioner regarding this matter? If so, when did the meeting occur—I am happy for you to take that on notice—and what advice was provided by the commissioner?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I meet with the commissioner regularly to talk about anything that concerns his operation.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I know that, Minister, but did you meet with him particularly when you decided to shut this jail with no reason?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, we made a decision, which we believed for Junee will be in the best interests for the people of New South Wales.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, take the question on notice. Have you discussed the closure with the community in Junee? I suppose it's hard when you haven't been there.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: There is a 17-month transition period, and we'll continue to consult with the local community to respond.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So that's a no. Minister, we will move on now. You received an email from the member for Cootamundra—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: —asking you to provide a briefing on the fact that you were changing, which is a really significant employer for this community town and does significant things. You still haven't responded to that email. Why is that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll correct you there—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Is she not worth it? Is she not worthy to be replied to by a Minister when you are shutting a major industry in her community?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I reject that. We are not shutting an industry in her electorate, for one. That's the first point I would make. The second point I would make is that I contacted the member for Cootamundra by a phone call, and I left a message. I then—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: But you haven't responded to her email. Why won't you put anything in writing, Minister? What are you hiding?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Then I sent her a text—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: What are you hiding, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Then I sent her a text, to which she is yet to respond. What I say to the member for Cootamundra is that my door is always open. If she wants to come and have a chat, that's okay. I've made two attempts to contact her.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister!

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: She hasn't actually responded.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: She doesn't return calls. She can't return a phone call.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I say to her, my door is always open. She's always—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, the appropriate course of action when you're sent an email by a member when there's something significant happening in their community is that you respond to that email. You haven't yet responded, and you haven't given a brief.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I responded by phone call and by text message to the member for Cootamundra, and she is yet to respond to me.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: Again, the honourable member can ask relevant questions, but she then can't also seek to answer them.

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The CHAIR: I do think that the Minister's answer was very relevant this time. I don't think he had strayed away from the question, so I uphold that point of order.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, are you aware of the social investment that the GEO Group does in Junee?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Tell me what some of those things might be.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I understand it, they obviously support the local community. But I've instructed the department—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So would you say that they are good corporate citizens?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's an assessment anyone is willing to make. What I am saying is that I have instructed—I am aware of these issues. I have instructed the department to, obviously, be a part of, as the transition process—the process to continue.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, will you match this level of investment that GEO has done in this community?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We will be continuing to—as I said, there is a 17-month transition period. It's not happening next week. What we want to do is continue to talk with the local community and talk with the major stakeholders down there. I have instructed the department, knowing some of the issues, and we will work through them in due course.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, you are saying a 17-month transition. You're saying you want to talk to people. You're saying you want to do the right thing, but you've never even been to Junee. You haven't met with any of the relevant mayors or stakeholders. You're saying that you think they're good global citizens, but you have cancelled their contract and you can't give this Committee a reason why. This looks very murky, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I reject that assessment. What the Government has done—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Well, what were your reasons for cancelling the contract?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What we have done is made the best decision which we believe will deliver a much better outcome.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: And what was that decision based on?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That decision was based—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Usually when you cancel a contract, you have a reason.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am happy to answer it, but if you want to answer your own questions, you're welcome to.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: All the cover you want to run isn't going to work here.

The CHAIR: Order! There has been a point of order.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: The Minister is diligently trying to answer the question to the best of his ability, and the member incessantly interjects to try to get a headline. I ask that you call her to order and let the Minister answer the question.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. I think that the Minister, as long as he is answering the question, should be given the space to actually answer it. I also reiterate that the member can also redirect the question if that answer does start to stray away from the actual question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure. I'm happy to.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, let's try again. Will you match this level of investment in local community once the GEO contract expires? Yes or no?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We will be having these conversations

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Yes or no?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —over the next 17 months.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: But you haven't even been there. How can you have conversations?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We will be having these conversations for the next 17 months.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You announced it outside 52 Martin Place.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have instructed the department—

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm aware of these issues, and we will continue to—

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

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Chair, you just made a ruling about exactly this point and the incessant interjections.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: All the cover is not going to save this Minister.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Even while I'm trying to make this point of order, there are incessant interjections, Chair.

The CHAIR: Yes, I call the member to order. I ask her to listen to my previous ruling and just be mindful of that while she questions the Minister.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, what assurance can you provide to the community that there will be no job losses associated with this change, both within the jail and in the broader community?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the operations of Junee are not expected to change and, therefore, the operational requirements of Junee shouldn't change either. I very much value the skills and the ability of the employees at Junee.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Will you go down to Junee and have a community meeting and tell the community members this, Minister? Will you front up?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Over the next 17 months, I will certainly be going down to Junee to have a conversation with all the stakeholders down there. That's not an issue.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: When do you expect that will be, Minister, seeing you announced it outside 52 Martin Place because you didn't want to go down and face the community?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We will always speak to the community.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: When are you going, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I will be going in due course.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: In three months? In six months? In 12 months? In 17 months?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We've got 17 months, and the department and I will continue—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So you won't even say when you're going to go?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I said I've got a number of visits that are already locked in to other facilities, but I will go down to Junee. I think it's important, and I am looking forward to it.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: It often is important, Minister, when you are making such a big change. But what you do is you front up and you talk to people, and you have the courage and the conviction to do that.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'm done. Time.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: This is not a forum for Opposition members to make political pronouncements and lecture the Minister. It's a forum for questions and answers. If we're going to have the Opposition constantly badgering and disrespecting the Minister, this will not work.

The CHAIR: I uphold that point of order.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Time's up. Thank you.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Good morning, Minister.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Good morning, Ms Higginson.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Could you tell the Committee which correction facilities you have visited so far?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've visited Parklea, and I've visited the Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre, and I'm due to be visiting Goulburn shortly.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If I could ask—and if you could be pretty brief—is that the first time you've ever visited a correctional facility in New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And what was your view?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Our correctional facilities—it's part making sure they have the level of care and the needs of not only the staff but also the inmates as well.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Were you pretty shocked?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think our correctional facilities have a range of functions. As I said, I thought the work of Justice Health was actually very impressive. I was really grateful for the staff and their—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Were you pretty shocked, in terms of walking in for the first time?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, I've never been to a correctional facility before my visit in my ministerial capacity. Certainly, in terms of a new environment, it is something I haven't seen before. In one sense, I was expecting nothing new—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you think, Minister, from your initial views—and I think it's really important to never lose sight of your initial views of walking into a facility.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, of course.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Let's use Parklea, for example. Do you think Parklea is a place where somebody can come out a better person than when they went in?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Part of the primary point of our justice system is about rehabilitation to reduce recidivism as people come out of the jail cell. Certainly, Corrections will continue to invest in our facilities, bearing in mind, of course, Ms Higginson, some of these facilities go back to the Victorian age. But we make investment—or the department makes investment in the facilities to make sure they provide the level of standard of care.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you now strongly advocating to your Cabinet colleagues that we've got a system, based on what you've seen—I have to say, two correctional facilities in nine months is not what I thought I was going to hear. I thought that you would have visited many more by now. Are you advocating with your Cabinet colleagues that we've got a system that needs serious investment and serious help?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, our whole justice system and Corrective Services is part the justice serving but also actually making sure that there are rehabilitation programs and also healthcare needs of our inmates and also making sure our staff out there are actually properly cared for and their wellbeing as well. Certainly, the department continues to invest in our facilities to ensure that they're up to the standard we have.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You're aware that my office receives an enormous amount of documentation from inmates in correctional facilities all across the State and that we have received many claims that inmates are routinely locked in their cells for 24 hours or more, usually once a week, for things like staff training and, at some centres, for 41 hours at a time. This has been, as you're aware, corroborated by current and former Corrections employees. Can you confirm that these lock-ins are occurring?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's quite a technical question. I know, Ms Higginson, you and I have spoken about this.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you concerned that inmates are being locked in their cells for hours and hours?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it also, I have to say, depends on the circumstances and the situation. There might be some serious operational reasons as to why this is happening.

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, are you doing anything to change any lock-in system that takes place? Are you doing anything? Is that a priority of yours, to make sure that inmates aren't being locked in?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I know we have spoken about this as well, Ms Higginson, and certainly there are sometimes very critical operational reasons why certain lockdowns happen. But would you like me to ask the commissioner?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I will follow up later. Long Bay Correctional Complex is made up of four jails, which I understand are metro special programs, Long Bay Hospital, forensic hospital and special programs centre. What is the special programs centre and why is there no information on that part of the facility? Do you know what happens in there?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Can I take that one on notice? Or I am happy to ask the commissioner, if you would like.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You can take it on notice. We don't know what happens at the special programs centre. If you could take that on notice. How many First Nations deaths in custody were there in 2022-23?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think any deaths in custody is a very sad situation and our hearts and our thoughts are always with the families and the friends involved. Corrections has a target of zero deaths in custody but, unfortunately, these things do arise.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: How many?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I understand it, if I'm not mistaken, the latest figures that I've got is four. Is that correct, Commissioner?

KEVIN CORCORAN: That's correct.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So this is a priority?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly. As I said, any deaths in custody is a very sad situation, and they're properly investigated. You will be mindful that also some of those deaths are natural and what we call unnatural as well.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But you see that Aboriginal deaths in custody is something that we know has been a blight on this State for so long that the aim is that we do not see one Aboriginal death in custody?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think we want to see no deaths in custody for any inmate. As I said, it's a very sad situation when these things occur. Corrections takes seriously its role to ensure the welfare and the wellbeing of everybody in our facilities. We do have a target of zero, of trying to almost eliminate deaths in custody.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I receive frequent and alarming reports of the denial of access to medical treatment, in particular psychological appointments being denied while in custody. Families have told me about inmates with diagnosed mental health disorders actually being denied psychologist appointments for months and months at a time. How many people are there in New South Wales correctional centres with mental health disorders, or what proportion?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That is quite a technical, specific question, Ms Higginson. I am happy to take that one on notice.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have you got any idea, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I would—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I remind you, before you do, that when we incarcerate somebody, we have taken their liberty and, as a State, we owe that individual a duty of care. Have you got any idea, out of all the people that you're responsible for, in terms of the custodial population, what proportion of them may be experiencing a mental health disorder of some sort?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, Corrections is very aware of the need to support our inmates during their health care.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you reckon it's half, do you reckon it's three-quarters or do you reckon it's not many?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The work of Justice Health is so important, given their experience and their clinical ability and access to NSW Health to ensure that inmates—

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What are you actually doing? I know these are genuine claims. I test the veracity of these claims. What are you doing to improve access for somebody who is requiring psychological assistance?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: If there are specific claims, I am happy to receive that correspondence, Ms Higginson. I can't talk about any specific claim but, in general, what I would say is that the health and wellbeing of everybody in our correctional facilities, whether it be the staff or the inmates and making sure they have access to a level of care and safety, is important to Corrections. That's why the work of Justice Health is so integral to the part of our correctional facilities.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: The specific claims are around denial of access to adequate care—or access at all—in the thousands. What is your approach? Do you understand that there are systemic problems? The staff are aware of this. You're the Minister now. What are you going to do in terms of actually improving? Are you arguing for more money or are you arguing for more people? What is your plan to improve access to basic essential health professionals?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Any organisation will always look for ways to improve. I have said that the health and the welfare and wellbeing of everybody in our correctional facilities is important to the department. We will continue to examine different programs and we will examine different ways. I am happy to ask the secretary on specific programs that the department is actually running in Corrections.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I can follow up on those.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's important.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What's your view on having online counselling? Is that something that is happening—access to tablets and online counselling appointments and psychological appointments? Are you aware of what's happening in the system?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We do have those activities and those support services available for our inmates in terms of their communication needs. I understand, for example, we have access to controlled iPads and controlled communications equipment to ensure that inmates, during serving their time, are able to. I was pleased—you will be pleased to know, Ms Higginson—that during my visit to the Silverwater women's correction, the inmates there had access to controlled iPads to ensure they were able to use it.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I just ask you one final question? How many Corrective Services employees are currently off on sick leave or on some kind of workers compensation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I will have to take that one on notice, given the very specific technical nature of that.

The CHAIR: Minister, I want to ask you about animals in rental properties. There was an election commitment by your Government to introduce new laws to make rental properties easier to rent for people with animals, but no legislation has been tabled yet. Can I ask why this election promise hasn't been acted on yet?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As you know, the Government has an election commitment regarding rental policy. When one in three people rent in New South Wales—

The CHAIR: I just want to know why it hasn't been acted on yet.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In terms of pets, if you are talking about pets, we are currently working through the responses that we've had from our survey. You may be aware there were 16,000 responses to our survey and also 400 written responses. It goes to show the level of interest in this particular policy area. I will continue to work with all our stakeholders to bring a final package.

The CHAIR: When can we expect to see legislation tabled in Parliament?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We are working towards this at the moment. The Rental Commissioner has asked me for a little bit more time to work through the significant number of responses.

The CHAIR: How much time has he asked for? What's our time line on it, then?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We have to bring the bill to the Parliament as soon as we can, being mindful that what we want to do is get the balance right. Anybody in this room and across Sydney would know, when we are talking about property, it certainly can be somewhat of a polarising debate. What we don't want to do is create a situation where we're pitting property owners versus tenants. What we want to do is get a good balance and bring a proper reform package that is balanced, that is fair and that is actually workable.

The CHAIR: It's interesting that you say that you don't want to pit property owners against renters. The former Liberal-Nationals Government did a large consultation in late 2022 that showed that 82 per cent of people

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in New South Wales supported the same model that's already in Victoria, and that was also the majority of landlords that supported that model. We know it's working. Why wouldn't we just use the model that we know is working and that we know from the previous consultation is supported by both landlords and renters?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm aware of that survey that was done. As I understand it, the question that was asked, whether laws should be changed—that was the question that was asked. What we are going to do—

The CHAIR: Sorry, what do you mean that was the question? Obviously, this was an entire consultation paper and it looked at different models and asked people which model they would support, whether or not that legislation—it goes well beyond just a question of whether—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, the Government has a commitment to make it easier for people to have pets in their rentals. Our recent consultation went to a lot more detail about what the actual laws would look like. We are also consulting with the RSPCA to ensure that whatever framework we have actually contains the animal welfare aspects to it as well.

The CHAIR: I am just wondering why we need to do this extra consultation when there is already a consultation within New South Wales as to what model people would like to see done in New South Wales.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, we had 16,000 responses to the survey and 400 written submissions—

The CHAIR: I think that was roughly similar—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I don't want to ignore that because I don't think that would be right. What we need to do is look carefully at those responses, work with the relevant stakeholders and bring a package that is going to be workable.

The CHAIR: Obviously this is a major issue. It's not just about people having animals. We are seeing people at risk of houselessness in New South Wales. This is a huge problem within the domestic violence space of people being able to find suitable accommodation; pounds and shelters are overrun with surrenders due to the fact that people can't get rental properties. I am just wondering why this hasn't been made a priority and moved quickly on.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: This is a priority for the Government. As we know, so many people in our community are renting now. It's one in three. In certain metro areas it's more like one in two. What we want to do, given the significance of the policy reform that's been required—and I think, in all fairness too, this particular area of reforming rental price has been pretty silent for the last 12 years, but we are going to give it the level of urgency and attention it requires. And having that really good survey—

The CHAIR: Do we have a time line, then, if we're going to give it the urgency it needs?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Our intention is to bring this as soon as we can, but hopefully maybe by early next year we are looking forward to tabling a reform package. Given the divergent views, given the significant number of interested parties that are contributing to the paper, the technical roundtables that we've actually done, and also the responses—we can't ignore the voices, varied voices—

The CHAIR: I am not suggesting you ignore it.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —of all the stakeholders involved.

The CHAIR: I am not quite sure why we've done it twice. In your consultation paper you had a list of prescribed reasons that a landlord is allowed to refuse an animal. Have you had any sort of determination, or are we going to look at what Queensland does, in regards to modelling the prescribed reasons that an animal can be refused?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly. We will be looking at all the models that are available. I know the work of the Rental Commissioner; she is doing a great job in this space since her appointment by the secretary. We can look at any model that we think will work in New South Wales.

The CHAIR: I know that a lot of the consultation paper and the election promise that was put forward by Labor looked very similar to the Queensland model. In the consultation that took place, only 6 per cent of people in New South Wales—and that is both landlords and renters—actually supported that model. Why would we be looking at the Queensland model that is not supported, instead of the Victorian model, which had 82 per cent support?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, New South Wales will do its own model. We will certainly examine where other jurisdictions have done their policies and whether it's worked or what hasn't. We will go through the process, look at the response that we've got from the survey and we'll deliver a model that's going to be workable for New South Wales. Yes, will we look at other jurisdictions? I think it's natural to have learnings from other jurisdictions, in any policy area. It doesn't have to be this one.

The CHAIR: As part of your consultation paper you also suggest that landlords should be allowed to impose conditions on renters having animals, including that certain animals must be kept outside. Have you spoken to the Minister for Local Government about that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I said we are going through our process at the moment into finer detail.

The CHAIR: Have you met with the Minister for Local Government about that condition?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I haven't discussed this with the Minister for Local Government, because we haven't finalised the package. Once those things are finalised, I will continue to have discussions with my colleagues.

The CHAIR: I note that some councils are calling for containment laws for animals. You said that you met with the RSPCA.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I say I haven't met with the RSPCA. I just want to correct that.

The CHAIR: I thought you said you had met with them.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, no. I said we are consulting with the RSPCA. First of all, we are consulting with the RSPCA to ensure that in the guidelines we are working towards, pets in rentals are actually going to be workable.

The CHAIR: The RSPCA are running educational programs at the moment to encourage people to keep cats indoors. Obviously, this condition that you are proposing, that landlords can insist that animals are kept outside, would conflict with the efforts of the RSPCA to encourage people to keep their cats indoors. I am just wondering how you think that's going to work.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, we are going through the process of actually working through our final package in terms of having pets in rentals. The Rental Commissioner is working extremely hard and will be consulting with the RSPCA to ensure that animal welfare is one of the guiding principles when we are looking at rental reform for pets.

The CHAIR: Have you met with DVNSW or Lucy's Project? I know that 70 per cent of people delay leaving violent situations because they can't find an appropriate property where they can take their animals, and that is one of the reasons why this is such urgent legislation. Are you including those organisations in the consultation process, or have you met with them?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly. I don't know every community group that the Rental Commissioner has met with, but I do know that we spread the net as wide as we can, and any interested stakeholders are welcome to always contact us with their views.

The CHAIR: Are you willing to meet with those organisations in regards to the legislation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am always happy and willing to meet with any stakeholders that are willing to make a contribution to the public policy space.

The CHAIR: Have you met with the Tenants' Union about the legislation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have.

The CHAIR: My understanding is the Tenants' Union supports the Victorian model. What feedback have you received from them?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Tenants' Union, it would not surprise anybody, is a strong advocate and good advocate for those tenants. They put forward a range of views, and of course I will speak to all stakeholders across the spectrum when it comes to property rental reform.

The CHAIR: Can you confirm whether the legislation that Labor will introduce will require the landlord to apply to the tribunal to refuse an animal, rather than the other way around? I think that is the key element of

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the reform that most people are concerned about, because there is that power problem. Can you confirm today whether the legislation will look at either the landlord or the tenant actually applying to the tribunal?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, we are going through to finalise the legislation, and once that's finalised we will table it for the Parliament.

The CHAIR: You're unable to confirm at this stage which way it will go?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, we're going through the whole consultation process. This is a significant area of policy reform, which the Government understands is important for the people of New South Wales, given how many people are actually renting now, given the housing affordability. Certainly, we will continue to investigate any issues that will make our policy reform applicable.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I just wanted to take you back to an answer you gave earlier to Mrs Taylor. You said that DLO allocation was a matter for the secretary. I just wanted to confirm—it's a yes or no question—did you or your office request any specific individual to be a DLO?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you very much. Minister, I was quite alarmed to see that you didn't meet with the Tech Council of Australia until August, which is almost six months after you were appointed as Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology. Did you initiate that meeting or did they?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We met with them, and I have met with the Tech Council, I think—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But did you initiate that meeting, or did they request a meeting? Because I am just curious about your forward engagement.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. Certainly, I meet with a lot of stakeholders, given the various portfolios—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Given you're not sure, I am going to take that as a no, you did not initiate the meeting.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, no. I don't think you can take that as a no. I'm happy to take that on notice. But I know I've met with the Tech Council—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You know if you asked an organisation to meet with you or not, I presume.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, I meet with a range of stakeholders, and I think certainly these.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I think it's very clear that you are not sure, and that indicates that you didn't. Can I confirm that your ministerial diary disclosures are accurate, that you met with a polling agency before anyone in the innovation sector?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Which one are you referring to?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You can look in your own diary disclosures.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: My diary disclosures have been disclosed as per—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: RedBridge polling. You met with RedBridge polling before anybody in the innovation sector, and you've already said that your diary disclosures are up to date.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: My diary disclosures are public posts.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you confirm that you met with a polling agency before anyone in the innovation sector?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I met with—I gather you're referring to RedBridge. Is that right?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's right. That's what I said.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We met actually to discuss about rental reform.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay, but that's a polling agency. That's not a—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: And that's a policy area that's important to Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes, but that's a polling agency.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, no, they do research also into the rental reforms, and it's important.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's a polling agency.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think in making good policy reform, we are certainly going to make sure we get the information that we've got. That's what I'll do.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We're driven by the polls in this Government, evidently, not actual engagement with the industry. Can I just confirm, have you visited the Central Coast Innovation District?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Not at the moment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What about the Westmead innovation district?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've been to the Westmead innovation district hub—at Westmead innovation district.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When was that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'd have to take that one on notice, but it's certainly in my diary, I suspect.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many meetings with tech startups, entrepreneurs and innovators have you personally requested?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's all disclosed in my diary.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, I am asking how many—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've met with a number of them.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, it's not about the meeting, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I don't know the exact number. I'm happy to take that on notice in terms of the exact number.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That you initiated.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: But I have proactively initiated a number of discussions

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just take it on notice.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —with all the different stakeholders within the innovation space.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It seems there is a theme emerging about stakeholder engagement, so I look forward to hearing how many meetings you actually personally requested. You obviously think it's acceptable that you didn't meet with Fishburners, which is Australia's most used co-working space and most recommended co-working space, in over six months since you became the innovation Minister. Have you visited Fishburners yet? It's literally just down the road from your ministerial office.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've spoken to all stakeholders here and a number of stakeholders in the innovation space, and I'll continue to meet with them.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But have you met with Fishburners? They're literally just a 10-minute walk down the road, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have not met with them, and I don't recall getting a request from them either.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That is just so remarkable to hear. Minister, I was disappointed not to see you at the launch of the 2023 Spark Festival, which was just last week. It attracted over 12,000 attendees in 2021. Could you please explain to the Committee why you didn't attend that launch?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, I've got a number of commitments in my diary, so I think the Spark Festival—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you had something else? Something else that was more important?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Spark Festival, certainly I'm aware of. I think it's a great initiative.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm glad to hear you're aware of it, Minister.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: But don't forget, we only had South by Southwest here a few weeks going, and what a great thing that was.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I am curious about this. I'm wondering if you didn't attend because you cut funding to the 2023 Spark Festival after it had been promised by the previous Government. Is that correct? Is that why you didn't attend?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I reject that assertion.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You reject that you cut funding to the Spark Festival?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I reject the assertion that you're making a link between my attendance and the decisions I've made.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did you speak to your Federal counterpart Minister Ed Husic about cutting funding to the Spark Festival?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I speak to my colleague Minister Husic—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, my question was quite specific, Minister. Did you ask the Federal Minister about his capacity, for example, to step in and fund the festival after you decided to cut funding?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Let's also take this into perspective, Chair. The New South Wales Government was actually left with—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, it's a very specific question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll get to that. The New South Wales Government was left with a difficult fiscal situation—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, I don't have much time here, and there's a lot to cover given your multitude of portfolios. I will just move on. Did you attend any of the Spark Festival events, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: They were, again, literally within walking distance. No, okay. I saw that you met with South by Southwest Sydney. I was wondering if you know how many tickets or badges, as they were called, were bought to that festival.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: A public—how many were sold to the festival?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes, how many people bought badges to the festival.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You met with South by Southwest. What kind of information did you ask for?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It was really an introduction to—obviously South by Southwest is one of the great tech events in the world. It's the first time it's come out from Austin. The fact that I think they've chosen Sydney says a great reputation—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Well, they didn't just choose Sydney, actually. It was the former Government that encouraged them to come.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The fact that Sydney was chosen is a great reflection of the reputation that we have here.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, we can all agree on the value of South by Southwest.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, I think discussing the program with South by Southwest was an exciting time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did you buy a badge to attend the South by Southwest Sydney festival?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll have to take that one on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did you attend any of the events? I didn't see you, for example, at the First Innovators and Indigenous Startups Breakfast that was held at Tech Central.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I did. I attended a number of events by South by Southwest—bearing in mind that Parliament was sitting that week as well.

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes, I'm aware. I went to events and Parliament was sitting—but, nevertheless, I'm just wondering, will you fund Spark Festival next year, given you're aware of it and you obviously, I presume, value its contribution?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, we'll go through the normal process of budget allocations over the next year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Why didn't it get funded this year? What will change?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Look, what I would say in the greater context is this: When we were elected to government—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Here we go! This old chestnut?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is about your decision-making as a Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —we inherited \$188 billion worth of debt—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You're in the chair!

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, we had funded Spark Festival into the forward estimates.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We had \$188 billion of debt. It is a significant fiscal situation.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Quickly, run cover. Let's go.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I know—unbelievable.

The CHAIR: Order! There's been a point of order.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: I've listened intently and there have been some very interesting questions, but the Minister ought to be afforded the courtesy and respect of being allowed to answer them. I have let it go for a number of them, but what's happening is a question is being asked, the Minister starts an answer and then he is being talked over in his answer with a statement.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm happy to move on.

The CHAIR: What I will say quickly is just that when there are two people speaking, obviously that creates a lot of problems for Hansard. Minister, if you do hear somebody respectfully cutting you off and asking to redirect, I ask that you stop. I also ask the Opposition to allow the Minister some time to begin an answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'll move on. Minister, your single legislative oversight responsibility as Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology is for the Innovation and Productively Council Act. Have you met personally with the council since becoming Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I have.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's not in your diary disclosures. Could you tell me when that was?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Right at the start, not long after I was sworn in as Minister. I can't give you the exact date, but it was in the early times when I met the chair and the council.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you directed the council to provide you with any advice?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I always take advice from all my government officials.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, the question was have you directed the council to provide you with advice, because that's a part of their responsibility.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, I'm always open to getting advice from all my departments in all my portfolios.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, it's not about getting advice from the council. It's about requesting information and directing the council to provide you with information about particular policy areas.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We've gone through a reworking of our innovation policy at the moment, and certainly the contributions of the departments and all the stakeholders will be very much welcome.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I will take that as a no because you didn't say yes. It was a very open question that you could have said yes so I presume that, no, you have not directed the council to provide information.

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The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order: The process here is one where a question is asked and then the Minister is given the opportunity to answer. It shouldn't be a process where honourable members take it upon themselves to make statements about what they think the answer should be.

The CHAIR: I do have sympathy for the Opposition member, who was making a clear question and didn't feel that there was a clear answer in that situation.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Then another question should be asked, not a statement, Chair.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sorry. This is just wasting time.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Stop wasting time to cover for your Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I presume you're aware of the council's joint report with Investment NSW, *Accelerating NSW: the impact of coworking spaces, accelerators, incubators, and startup hubs*. Have you read the report?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You're referring to the CAISH report?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, it has come across my desk. That's correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But have you read the report, though?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In parts of it, yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Which parts?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: With this report I understand one of the aspects, one of the recommendations that was made, was actually a better way to provide greater measurement accountability on what's effective in an investment in the innovation space. That part.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did you request that the council undertake that work, or did they do it off their own initiative?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I understand they probably—that came across my table, so it wasn't one initiated by me.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you intend to respond to the report's recommendations?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, we will continue to consider all reports and all—I said I'd put it to the Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How much money is budgeted for the operation of the Innovation and Productivity Council in 2023-24 and in the forward estimates, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I will have to take that one on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can you confirm that there is budgeted money into the forward estimates for the council?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I said that it's in the budget papers, but I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You don't know.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, you've previously declined to answer pretty reasonable questions about the budget, grants and staff that I and my colleagues have asked since you became the Minister. So I am hoping that you've had a change of heart today. How much less money has been budgeted for the office of the chief scientist in 2023-24 compared to the previous year?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to ask the secretary to answer that question, or Ms Katie Knight will take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Obviously, you don't know the expenditure in your own portfolio here, in your own department, so I'm happy to ask the staff later. I presume, then, the same answer is true regarding how much less money has been budgeted for the Sydney Startup Hub in 2023-24 compared to the previous year?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: With the Sydney Startup Hub, it's still going—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You don't know. You honestly don't know.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Sydney Startup Hub is an valuable resource for the innovation space, and we are continuing—it's still operating.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand that. That's why I'm asking about the funding.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's right. It's still operating, and there are still resources allocated to it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What are the resources? How much less money—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: But I'm actually happy to ask Ms Katie Knight to provide a specific—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, if you don't know, that's fine. I'll take that on notice from you, or I can ask staff later in the afternoon. The reality is, of course, that there is less money for the Sydney Startup Hub, and the fact that you have come to budget estimates without answers about the budget in your department is pretty concerning. Were you aware that the amount spent on grants and subsidies through the Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade in the last financial year is now equivalent to the total departmental budget? Are you aware that that's how large the cuts in your department were?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As you would appreciate, we inherited a significant fiscal situation that is actually very difficult at the moment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, this is about your decisions as the Minister. We had a surplus going into the forward estimates. Minister, can I redirect you?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to answer the question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The question is which programs will be cut because of the funding shortfall in your department?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to speak about that if you'll let me finish. As you know, before the pre-election budget update, the former Government cut \$263.1 million in phase one.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I've asked a very specific question about which programs will be cut under the funding shortfall.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm going there. They cut the budget in phase one, \$263.1 million—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, this is about your decisions. This is unbelievable. You're in government.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: This is a train wreck.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: A specific question has been asked and the Minister is attempting to answer by way of providing background context, which he's entitled to do. The Minister is entitled to answer the question in any way he sees fit, and I ask you to ask the Opposition to be respectful, stop incessant interjections and let the Minister answer the question.

The CHAIR: We do need to stop the number of interjections, especially from members of the Opposition who aren't actually doing the questioning. But I also understand that the member wants to ask the question again.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We have very limited time here, which is why I have been quite specific in my questions.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Let him answer the questions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, the questions are not being answered, so I'll just move on. Did you meet with the Treasurer before the pause to grants was announced earlier in the year in May/June?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I meet with the Treasurer on a regular basis. He's one of my senior colleagues.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did you speak with him about the grants?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I speak with the Treasurer on a range of factors. It wouldn't surprise you—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did you speak to him about the grants like the MVP grant and the Tech Central accommodation rebate?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We speak about these. It's part of the normal budget process. Of course I spoke to him about it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you spoke to him when those grants were paused in May and June?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I spoke to him about the difficult situation that we've inherited. I was also aware that prior to the election even being finalised, the former Government had already cut, in phase one, \$263.1 million—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, we actually have limited—if only you knew your own budget as well as you apparently know ours.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —and then came back for another bite and cut another \$153.8 million.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The beauty of being in government is that you get to make decisions and you get to be responsible, and that's why I'm asking you questions about decisions—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: But obviously you don't get the chance to answer a question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is why I'm asking the Minister about decisions that he made. Minister, did you direct the department staff not to spend the full allocation of grants and subsidies when you became the Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've said what we inherited—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Yes or no?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —was a situation where, as we went through the budget process, the funding in parts of Innovation was cut.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, it's a very specific question about whether you spoke to your departmental staff about whether you can spend the full allocation of grants and subsidies of the previous financial year, which were entirely budgeted for. Did you direct your staff to stop spending those grants and subsidies?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We were going through a budget process, given the significant fiscal difficulties we inherited, and, as part of that, of course we want to make decisions that are methodical and careful. The difficult situation meant that upon entering government, I do know that the former Government cut, in the first phase, \$263.1 million out of the FEF, and then came back for another bite of \$153.8 million.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is so irrelevant to the question I'm asking.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It is very relevant—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I am asking what you did as Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —because we're talking about a funding grant program.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You're the Minister now—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We're talking about a funding program, Chair.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: It is impossible, Chair, for Hansard. I can barely follow given people talking over each other. For the sake of Hansard, can you please direct members of the Opposition not to continually talk over the Minister?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: To the point of order: I understand what the honourable member is saying about Hansard, but it actually goes both ways. The Minister cannot continue to waste time, and you cannot continue to waste our time. The Minister needs to answer the question. If he doesn't know it, he can take it on notice and we move on. He is the one instigating this. He doesn't know.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The Minister is entitled to answer a question as he wants.

The CHAIR: I don't need to hear any more. I agree with the Hon. Bronnie Taylor that the Minister has to allow members to redirect him back to the question. If a member is talking, please think of Hansard as well. But it does go both ways. It goes both ways for the members and also for the Minister to be mindful of that, please.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Were you aware of the success of the MVP Ventures grant before the 2023-24 budget cuts were announced?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The MVP grant is still ongoing.

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, I'm asking if you were aware of the success before the cuts were announced at the budget.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The MVP grant is still ongoing, so—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's not my question, Minister. My question is were you aware of the success of the MVP Ventures grant before it was cut in your budget when you were Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The budget, as I said—and when we're talking about budgets, we're talking about grants. Let's also make the point that the former Government cut the budgets of this whole program, on all of this—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You're the Government!

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, there are people watching today who are very interested in the process of how this department and how your ministerial responsibilities are run. There are people out there who are suffering because of the decisions that your Government, and that you, as Minister, have made. These are entirely reasonable process questions so that we can get to the bottom of who is responsible and why you are making the decisions that you're making. Were you aware of the success of the MVP Ventures grant before the 2023-24 budget cuts?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's why the MVP grant is still ongoing. Let's not also forget, we're talking about grants here and we're talking about budget cuts. I can say to the Committee that the former Government cut the coal grant—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can I please move on, Minister? You're obviously not answering the question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Some 60 per cent of the funding was actually cut before I even—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, we have limited time here so please may I redirect you? We have seen the reinstatement of a stripped-back version of the MVP grant. It's significantly less money—we're talking \$10 million down to \$3 million. There was no official media release. Could you please explain why your office didn't prepare a ministerial media release with relevant details of the MVP Ventures grant program?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The MVP grant is still ongoing, and I think that it is comparable—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you ever look at the department's website?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm sorry, I don't operate my whole ministry—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you understand the confusion in the industry around this grant? You couldn't even put out a ministerial media release. Can you explain to me why the reinstatement of the grant was picked up through sector leaders' LinkedIn posts instead of an official piece of communication by you?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm sorry, maybe unlike the former Government, I don't operate the ministry just by pure media releases.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You don't seem to do anything.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We work through the policy process—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You don't seem to meet with your stakeholders. You haven't met with Fishburners; you haven't met with Junee prison. You're actually not meeting with the RSPCA—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: My diary with stakeholders is there for all to see.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Who are you meeting with? It's just unbelievable.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You're welcome to look at my diary disclosures. I have met with a number of stakeholders across the whole policy platform.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I've looked closely at your diary disclosures and they're very disappointing. Why didn't your office prepare a ministerial media release with relevant details of the significantly stripped-back MVP Ventures program?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: With regards to MVP, I said it's still ongoing. It's still working.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But it was cut. Did you ever look at—there was incredible confusion in the industry.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What we want to do—can I just say, the whole innovation space, we need to think much broader than just a financial transaction. It's about growing the ecosystem, more than just actually grants.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is an unbelievable abdication of your responsibilities.

The CHAIR: I want to go back quickly to animals in rentals. In respect of the second consultation that's now being conducted by the Labor Government, when can we expect the results of that consultation to be published? Will it be public?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We are working through all the responses from that consultation, as I mentioned before. There were 16,000 people who responded—

The CHAIR: I don't need the numbers again. I am just wanting to know if it will be public, or the results generally will be public.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We will use that to inform our policy reforms on that, but I'm happy to share that with you if—is that of interest to you?

The CHAIR: I suppose I just wanted to know if it was going to be published or public in regards to a report or something from that consultation process.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I might ask the deputy secretary to make that in terms of the actual mechanics of the survey.

The CHAIR: I don't need to know about the mechanics, I'm just wanting to know, Minister, whether the results of it generally will be made public.

NATASHA MANN: Thank you, Minister. Ms Hurst, I might answer that. Yes, they will.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. Minister, you have mentioned that this is an urgent piece of legislation, and obviously we've talked about the fact that this affects people who are trying to leave violent situations. We have talked about the fact that it's causing houselessness as well in New South Wales. Can I ask why then we saw the paintball legislation prioritised over this legislation in regards to the time line?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: But also the paintball legislation was based on a statutory review which was not actioned by the former Government so a lot of the recommendations were already there so we wanted to patch that through quickly. With the rental reforms, we were going through a process of consultation with a range of stakeholders.

The CHAIR: As you said, the recommendations were already there in regards to the paintball amendment but the recommendations were already there as part of the results of the first consultation.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

The CHAIR: Why did we go to a second consultation and therefore delay the legislation on rental law reforms when we already had results of a consultation? And will the first consultation be considered in the legislation as well?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You're welcome, Chair, to ask the Rental Commissioner who has led the consultations in regard to rental reform. We want to make sure that we get the broadest views from as many stakeholders as we can. As I said, it's not surprising to anybody that when talking about property, it certainly raises polarised views.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister, are you saying that the New South Wales Rental Commissioner wanted the second consultation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The consultation happened prior to the Rental Commissioner being appointed.

The CHAIR: That's correct.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: And she's working through the results, given the vast number of views that were provided.

The CHAIR: Who requested the second consultation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The consultation was the initiative of the Government. I assume you're talking about the August survey that we did.

The CHAIR: The Labor consultation.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct.

The CHAIR: What about no-grounds evictions? That is another election promise from the New South Wales Labor Government which again is incredibly important especially during the rental crisis? When can we expect to see legislation tabled in New South Wales Parliament and why has there been a delay on that as well?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, we are going through a significant consultation process. It wouldn't surprise you, given the differing views of the different stakeholders. As I said, we want to get the balance right on this issue. It is quite a complex issue, given diverging views of tenants and tenants' advocates, and property owners and property advocates. As I said, we don't want to get to a situation where I bring something forward that is tenants versus owners and we actually get a stalemate. I want to bring a package that's balanced, that's fair and that's actually workable.

The CHAIR: On 3 March 2023 the Minister for Science, Innovation and Technology announced two grant programs. This is the former Minister. One was \$4.5 million for medical experimentation and research that replaces or reduces the use of animals in experimentation and another was \$2.5 million for rehoming animals that had been used in research. I understand that the money has already been allocated in the budget, but it's unclear who is actually delivering on the funding. I believe it was transferred away from your department.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

The CHAIR: But it's very unclear as to where it has gone. I'm just wondering if you could assist me to explain what is happening with that funding and where it has been moved to.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That funding still exists, Chair, and I understand it's now with NSW Health and Regional NSW.

The CHAIR: Can you provide any explanation as to why nothing has happened with the announced funding to date and why it was actually transferred to another department?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The transfer is more of an administrative allocation but the important thing here is that the grant money is still available for what I know is an important area for you.

The CHAIR: I understand that the previous Government had a target of reducing adult re-offending following release from prison by 5 per cent by 2023. It seems that on the website this hasn't actually been updated since Labor was elected in March 2023. Can I ask what your targets or goals as the Minister for Corrections are over the next four years or if it's the same as the previous Government?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Can I just say in general, recidivism and reducing recidivism is so important and that's why having programs within our correctional facilities, the work of trying to upskill or provide skills and basic skills for inmates as they transition out—

The CHAIR: I just want to know what your target was, given the website still had the previous target on it.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure. I'm happy to take that one on notice, but I might just say, if I recall, we're trying to reduce it by about 8 per cent. Is that correct, Commissioner?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, we are still tracking the previous Government or previous Premier's Priorities, but we're also looking at some other priorities with a new strategic plan where we're looking at reducing those numbers even further.

The CHAIR: Minister, as mentioned, recidivism and reducing recidivism was a goal of the previous Premier, and I know that there was a project done by the nudge unit on this in the last Parliament. Have you been briefed by the nudge unit on the results of that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, not that I'm aware of.

The CHAIR: Is that something that you're looking to be briefed on to understand what is happening in that space?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Reducing recidivism is so important as part of our justice system. It produces better social outcomes and better economic outcomes for the people of New South Wales, so any ideas that can reduce recidivism would be very much welcomed.

The CHAIR: Have you reached out to that unit?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The nudge unit?

The CHAIR: Yes.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The CHAIR: Were you aware when you became Minister that they were doing work on that space?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, not that I'm aware of.

The CHAIR: Have any investments been made in programs to reduce re-offending and recidivism since you became the Minister? Are there new programs or initiatives that you're investing in?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, as I said, in general, reducing recidivism is so important to all governments and all political parties. We want to see as fewer inmates as we can, and of course for those who are in there we want to make sure that as they transition out—

The CHAIR: I'm just wondering if you have invested in that.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure. In terms of specific programs, I am happy to ask the secretary or the commissioner to provide that answer.

The CHAIR: I might go and speak to you this afternoon, if that's okay. I'm just wondering, Minister, if you have advocated within Government for investment specifically in programs in that space?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly I think as a general principle, reducing recidivism is actually good for the State, economically and socially, and any programs that are found to be workable and applicable will certainly be considered.

The CHAIR: Minister, we know that there is an ongoing problem of over-representation of Aboriginal people in the New South Wales criminal justice system. What steps are you taking as the Minister for Corrections to address this and do your part in terms of Closing the Gap?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think all of us would agree that we are committed to Closing the Gap. I think, sadly, there is a disproportionate number of Indigenous inmates, both male and female.

The CHAIR: Is there any work that you're doing specifically in that space?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: There are a number of specific programs that we are implementing to close the gap for our Indigenous Australians. Forty per cent of female inmates are Indigenous and about 30 per cent of male inmates are Indigenous; that's certainly too high. I think everybody in the Parliament will always work towards introducing—

The CHAIR: Have you met with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs or Minister for Police and Counter-terrorism to work in this space?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I meet with my colleagues all the time, Chair, to discuss a range of issues.

The CHAIR: But have you met with them specifically to talk about this issue?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: On this particular case? We discuss these issues in general, but certainly specific programs, we're always open to them.

The CHAIR: But you haven't sat down and had a specific meeting about Closing the Gap?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It would be part of a broader conversation that I've had with my colleagues in the different portfolios.

The CHAIR: Have you met with Just Reinvest NSW, who do a lot of work in terms of diversionary programs and keeping Aboriginal people out of the justice system?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I know I've met with a number of social community groups about reducing inmates and recidivism, and also with our Indigenous as well. But I'm always happy to meet with any community group that actually has ideas to reduce recidivism in our community.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Unlike my colleagues here, I was quite pleased to hear the announcement around Juneec changing hands and coming into the system.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You don't know why yet.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Were the holders of the contract likely to not want to extend the contract?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government made the decision, Ms Higginson, based on what we believe will deliver a much better outcome for the—

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have you received any indication that the contractor didn't want to renew the contract with the Government?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, the Government just made its decision given the contract was up for renewal. We looked at it from a much broader perspective. I think access to Justice Health—

The CHAIR: Is that a no? You absolutely categorically had no information whatsoever about the possibility of not extending the contract from the other party?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think the Government made a decision, Ms Higginson, to bring this back into Corrective Services ownership, and I think it's important—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Absolutely it did, and I commend that decision. I think it's a fabulous decision. I genuinely think it is in the public interest. Did you have any indication from the contract party that they weren't happy to extend the contract with the Government?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to take that one on notice, Ms Higginson. But I do know that the decision the Government's made in this space is a move in the right direction in terms of—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I agree. I'm with you.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —access into education and to health to deliver a better outcome on a much broader perspective.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, is it your intention to also change the arrangements with Parklea and bring that back into the public system of management?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Parklea contract is not up for renewal for a few more years.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: No, I realise that.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government will consider these things on a case-by-case basis and we'll make those decisions closer to the time.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If you have a program of de-privatisation and you've already made this decision for some strategic reason, or some reason you think best, would you not be sensibly planning for that change now if that is part of your strategic focus?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, like I said, the contract for Parklea is not up for a few more years and the Government will make its assessment—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What about the Clarence? It's not up until 2040.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Until 2040. That's a long way away. But in terms of Parklea, as the contract year is up for consideration, the Government will make its decision at the appropriate time.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you in discussions with the contract party for Parklea and Clarence about their expectations, or are we just going to keep running the way we are with this kind of cloud of mystery around the operating arrangements, given how fundamental it is to the culture of those institutions to understand what their future is and what their reform program is? Are you in discussions with Parklea and Clarence about their—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Clarence, as I said, is not up until 2040. But in terms of Parklea, when that contract is up for renewal we'll make those decisions closer to the time. It's no secret that the Labor Party has a general principle that public ownership and public operations of the public service will deliver better outcomes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, do you think it's strategically sound to take this approach rather than being in very active, engaged, positive, proactive discussions with the contract partners who are managing the State's correctional facilities now that you've put their future in serious doubt, in terms of their profit agenda of running those facilities?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, as a general principle the Labor Party does believe in public ownership of public assets and public services. But we made the decision of June given its contract was up for renewal. The decision on Parklea will inevitably involve a number of discussions and we'll make that decision when it falls due. We'll do things on a case-by-case basis to make sure that with the fundamental underlying factor that we will—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But do you think it's your role as the Minister for Corrections to have a vision and a kind of strategic view about where we're going to be in two, five, 10, 20, 30 years' time?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: For the corrective services system, Ms Higginson, what I really want to achieve is to reduce the level of incarceration within our facilities—having fewer inmates I think is better for the whole society—and that reducing recidivism is a goal of all governments of all persuasions. We want to make sure that those who are within our system, both the inmates and the staff, get the level of care, welfare and wellbeing that delivers a positive outcome. Our vision for Corrective Services is to ensure that we have as few inmates as we can and actually the level of care for those inside the facilities—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, I appreciate that. But your actual job is, once they're in that facility, for you to take care of them and to assist them to rehabilitate so that, when they leave the facility, they're actually in a better position than when they came in. Right now I would put it to you—but you've only been to two of those correction facilities—that the State is actually not best placed or even capable of being able to do that. Really the question is: What is your plan, genuinely, as the Minister to improve the health, the wellbeing and the outcomes? Going to the Chair's comment, this is about recidivism.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think the first one, that's why we made the decision about Juneec to ensure that it has access to the global network of New South Wales government services—those with Justice Health, those with our department of Aboriginal Affairs and those also with our Education and Training. Certainly I think—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Just on that point, I think it is about 32 per cent of women in prison who are First Nations despite being 2 per cent of the population. Do you have specific programs or are you looking at introducing specific programs for those women?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Our justice system is very complex because it's not just a one-factor issue. We try to look at prevention, of course. We try to look at a number of social programs that I suppose stop people coming to the justice system in the first place. That's the preventative. But once they are in our facilities, we want to make sure that there are programs in place—as part of rehabilitation, as part of reskilling—to ensure that once their time in the service has been finalised they can go out to the community and actually not recommit and come back to our facilities. But in terms of a specific program, I'm happy to—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you recognise that perhaps there is a problem within the system of women accessing programs? Have you been made aware of that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, those specific programs, I'm happy to take them on notice, or you're welcome to ask the commissioner.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I will.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: But certainly as a general principle, Ms Higginson, nobody would disagree that we need to do as much as we can to ensure that those within our facilities get the level of support and care so that when they are out, they are not recommitting to come back in. Reducing recidivism is important.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What do you say to the fact that there has been a culture of bullying amongst Corrective Services staff? In particular, I have had concerns around what happens at Shortland and Goulburn, and I know that you're probably aware of those. Are you aware of those two facilities and the issues that may be happening there?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly workplace welfare and workplace safety are important to Corrections. I think it's important across all of government. We should always find new ways and new policies to improve. Whether it's Shortland or in the other facility, if there are complaints about workplace issues, there are processes in place to allow the department to investigate and take the appropriate action.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you confident in your workplace systems?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, every workplace should and could always find ways to improve its processes to ensure that the welfare and the wellbeing of all its staff and those in facilities continue to improve.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It sounds like a good intention, but what sort of things are you aware of, Minister, that are in place for that workplace culture? It's a really difficult workplace and everybody knows that.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I have had people explain to me that they work there because they love to. They want to be a part of something that contributes and that they can thrive in the workplace. Do we have programs to support those people?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I can't talk to the specific programs. But certainly, Ms Higginson, any ideas and new processes to improve that would be something Corrections would always consider.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: We've got two more minutes. I will pass over to the Opposition before we break.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Minister, just following on from Ms Higginson's question then, can you please advise the Committee if you were told that GEO were not interested in extending the contract at Junee? It's a yes or no question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government made a decision based on advice about which we believe will deliver a better outcome for New South Wales—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You didn't have advice they were interested in extending that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. The Government makes its own decisions on a range of factors.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, can you tell me who was the Minister for Corrective Services in 2009? I can tell you it was John Robertson.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That was when Parklea prison was privatised. Do you know who his chief of staff was at the time?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I gather you'll tell me.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The one and only Chris Minns. Is this not the same Chris Minns who now, as Premier, has backflipped on his views on privatisation?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, it's no secret that the Labor Party has a general principle that, in public services and public assets, we believe that public ownership will deliver a better outcome. I don't think this is a backflip at all.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Thank you, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: This is a general principle, which is almost central to the Labor Party's identity.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Minister, let me redirect you. What union pressure has Mr Minns been under in that time to cause him to change his mind?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's a question you should put to the Premier.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Who made the decision, Minister? Did you make the decision or did the Premier make the decision?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The decision was made by Cabinet.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What advice have you actually received to cause the Cabinet to make that decision? Prior to going to Cabinet, surely you took a proposal to that Cabinet table. So what advice did you receive to take the Cabinet position?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The decision by myself and the Cabinet on Junee—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So now you made it.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The decision made on Junee was fundamentally always about delivering a broader and better outcome for the whole Corrective Services industry.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: On what grounds, Minister?

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order: The member is now asking about a Cabinet process and it's Cabinet-in-confidence.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Not at all. I'm asking about the advice that was given prior to Cabinet.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I think the question is in order still.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You're just wasting time. Minister, what advice did you receive to take a position to Cabinet?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, as I've said, I'm not going to discuss anything that was discussed that is Cabinet-in-confidence.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not asking you that.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: But what I would say is that the decision the Government made on Juneec was about delivering a broader and better outcome, having access—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So this is an entirely a political decision.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: It's entirely a political decision.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: What a sham.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Minister, the Opposition attempted to portray in their line of questioning a number of circumstances regarding so-called budget cuts. We all know that budgets don't fall from the sky. They're a continuum from one budget period to the other.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: They do this when they know their Minister is in so much trouble. They do questions. I've never seen it happen. Nine years I've been here and I've never seen it.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Could you outline for us the context of those questions in terms of the \$7 billion in unfunded programs and the \$180 billion in net debt that those opposite left us?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: This is not going to save you, Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Bring out the talking points.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Thank you very much, Mr Buttigieg.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: He's in so much trouble. This has been a train wreck.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As we all know, the New South Wales Government inherited the biggest transfer of debt in history—\$188 billion worth of debt left by the former Government. In addition, within that, of course, there was \$7 billion worth of unfunded programs.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You are under oath.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Your stakeholders are smarter than this.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Given that interest rates were moving, we are paying about \$7 billion worth of interest, which is more than what we do to fund the police and TAFE.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: This is pathetic.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: So this is a very difficult fiscal situation. It equates to about \$22,000 per person in New South Wales. This is the difficult fiscal environment that we've been left with, but we have an agenda to reduce the debt and to reduce spending, and also to reduce inflation within the economy as well. This is a very difficult fiscal situation—the largest debt that New South Wales has ever inherited from the former Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You agreed to the pandemic payments just as much as the Coalition.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We will work through those things methodically and carefully to make sure that we deliver sound fiscal management and not add to the debt that we were left with by the former Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You don't even know your own budget.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: This ain't going to save you.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: When the Opposition attempts to portray this as budget cuts, the truth is that, in fact, they budgeted for those forward estimates to cut those programs in any case.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's fake news!

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You should be the Minister, Butters. You'd do a better job.

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: He would.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: So it's a bit misleading, isn't it, to try and portray this as a cut when the forward budgeting from the previous Government was actually program cuts? Is that right?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct, Mr Buttigieg. As I said before, prior to even the election being finalised—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This makes a mockery of this process.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —I find out after being appointed that the former Government had cut \$263 million—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: In nine years I've never seen it.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —in phase one of the broader innovations grant, and then they went back for another bite of another \$153 million to cut it before the election was finalised.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Check your notes. You've got to check your notes.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: This makes you look more ridiculous.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Without informing us, they make these significant cuts and then they don't want to own up to them. This is a very difficult fiscal situation—the significant debt, the billions of dollars worth of unfunded programs and the debt per capita. This is a very tight environment and we'll work through the budget to ensure that it delivers good, sound fiscal management and good outcomes for the people of New South Wales.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's not delivering good outcomes, that's the problem.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: They make the cuts before the election was called, don't tell anybody about it and make it sound as though it's somebody else's.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is unbelievable.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I have one more point of clarification with respect to Juneec. The Opposition is clearly doubling down on their previous policy of privatising everything in sight. Obviously, the Labor Government was elected on a program of public ownership and the decision on Juneec feeds directly into that election promise.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Could you outline the degree of reasoning that went into that decision, based on that election program?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: He doesn't know.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I hope you get a better answer than we did.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Also, I would like you to address the stakeholder engagement. Given that the public sector association is a major stakeholder in that sector, it would be wholly unremarkable, wouldn't it, that they would have input into those discussions?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Then deal with them.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly. The decision on Juneec was made fundamentally about delivering a better and a broader outcome across the Corrective Services system.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You know that's blatantly untrue. You are under oath. It's a disgrace.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Inmates having Justice Health, with their expertise, and the resources of NSW Health to provide the medical, clinical and psychological care, is so important.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Because they do such a good job.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We've got the resources of government to do this.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You can't even get them into a psychologist at—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Rehabilitation—the skills bit—through our Department of Education and the broader education and skills training network will ensure that inmates, as they're serving their time, have the required skills so that when they have finished their sentence, they can contribute to the society and change their lives—which, of course, is aimed at reducing recidivism.

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The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: If you don't tell the truth, you get found out.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: For employees, Chair, it's also about being part of the broader Corrective Services family.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: This is shocking. Good SO 52s.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: I have put up with this for probably five straight minutes now. I've asked a question. They had, I don't know, two blocks of 45 minutes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Forty minutes.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Now they're interjecting in the 15 minutes that we've got. I ask you to call them to order.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We had two blocks of 20 minutes.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. The Minister will be heard in silence.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: In nine years I've never seen this done.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: She just cavilled with your order a split second after you made it, Madam Chair.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I beg your pardon, Chair. That's fair enough. The honourable member is right; I did cavil. But I have never seen this in nine years.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: And again.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You're trying to save your Minister. He can't be saved.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Part of it, of course, being part of the broader Corrective Services network, is we have significant economies of scale in Corrective Services and for employees. It gives them the opportunity to move in and around the State, should their personal circumstances change.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Lucky, because you don't go anywhere.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Having access to a broader, more integrated network will deliver much better outcomes for the Corrective Services portfolio. I think it is a great decision. It's a decision which is fundamentally based on delivering a better outcome for the people of New South Wales.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: It's a deal with your union mates.

The CHAIR: We will break for morning tea and be back at 11.15 a.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Thank you, everyone. I will go back to the Opposition for questioning.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I presume you're aware of the serious concerns raised by founders after they were told by the department in June that the department was unable to progress their tech central scale-up accommodation rebate application due to reasons relating to the comprehensive expenditure review. Were you aware of that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The budget process that we did certainly meant that there was a pause in and of the process—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand that. But did you understand that the founders raised serious concerns when they received that correspondence?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, as we go through our budget process, not everybody is going to be happy, and that's okay. But in terms of context and when—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Were you aware of it or have you seen any correspondence from founders about that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I said is that when we go through a comprehensive expenditure review, given the fact that we were left with such a fiscal mess, these things were—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I really don't need to hear the talking points of your Government—

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I think it's important—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: —trying to abdicate responsibility.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, let me finish—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I will move on.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure, I will let you finish, and then I'll answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When were you told about the comprehensive expenditure review?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: When was I?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I mean, I'm part of government. We discuss it all the time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand that, but when were you told that the comprehensive expenditure review was taking place?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As soon as we formed government, we discussed it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Were you told that already budgeted-for grant and rebate programs in your portfolio would be halted? Did the Treasurer tell you that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I did know, once we started the comprehensive expenditure review, was that the former Government had already cut first phase, \$263 million.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sorry, Minister, that's actually not true. There was already budgeted-for—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: And then they came back for another bite, another \$153.8 million of cuts. I mean, we're talking—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, as I've said, I really have limited time here, and I don't need to hear talking points over and over again.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I will let you finish, and then I will finish.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm asking, please, Minister: Were you told that the grant and rebate programs that were already budgeted for in the 2022-23 budget in your portfolio would be halted? Did you know that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I was informed, upon going through the comprehensive expenditure review, that the former Government had cut significantly from the innovations programs grant. This is important. You are asking me about budget cuts and particular programs. I am happy to advise the Committee that the former Government—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When you look at the portfolio papers, Minister, the budget papers—I've got them here, if you need to reference them.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I've got them.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: There was over \$700 million that wasn't spent in grants and subsidies. It was a line item in the budget—very clear.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I'm aware of it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you please explain why that money wasn't spent? Were you the decision-maker that asked the department not to spend this money that had already been budgeted for?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure, I'm happy to talk about the grants. As you well know, the former Government cut the grant before the election was—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, this is very tiresome.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You are talking about a grant, a program—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm actually trying to find out about process.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —and I'm trying to answer, but I will let you finish.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, you're not trying to answer it in an intellectually honest way, and it's really disappointing.

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The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: The Minister is actually trying to answer it in an intellectually honest way. Budgets do not drop out of the sky on day one of a new Labor Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We don't need points of argument during points of order.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I ask that you call the member to order and ask the Minister to articulate the context and answer the question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The question was very simple, Chair. It was about the program, it was about the budget cuts, and I'm actually answering it as well.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Sorry, you can't do that. You need to let the Chair speak.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I have listened to the point of order. I encourage you to keep the comments to a minimum, but I understand you're trying to redirect the question to get a direct answer from the Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, are you aware of the contention that the decision not to progress a number of the rebate applications, including the tech central scale-up accommodation rebate, was in contravention of the rebate program rules?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I know is that all this innovation work, whether it's a startup or the MVP or the other programs, these programs were significantly cut before the election, before we even started the comprehensive expenditure review.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, that's simply not true.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It is true, Ms Munro.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I've asked a very specific question. Could I please redirect you to the question?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it's very important for the Committee to be aware that before we even started a comprehensive expenditure review, the former Government had cut—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, this is not about the spending. This is actually about the process—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, it's about the program, which is part of the cuts that were actually made.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: No, no, this is about the process of the rebate. Are you aware of the contention that the decision not to progress a number of the rebate applications was in contravention of the rebate program rules?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm certainly aware—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's about the program rules.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure. I'm certainly aware, Chair, that the former Government made significant financial cuts to the program.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, this is very difficult. We're here to ask questions to understand the process.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The former Government cut \$416 million. That's almost half a billion dollars, Chair.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: If you're not going to answer questions, you can take them on notice. You obviously weren't aware.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: They've cut almost half a billion dollars into the program—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could I please move on, Minister, because you're not answering my very simple questions.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —and now they want to come here and say that they are the defenders—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, could you please explain—

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, please.

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you please explain why the department chose to progress some tech central accommodation rebate applications and not others after the announcement of a comprehensive expenditure review?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What we want to do, unlike the former Government which spent willy-nilly, we want to take a sound, fiscal approach to ensure that every dollar that's invested in this or other programs delivers for the people of New South Wales. What I would also say, in a much broader perspective, is that we have a strategy—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I think we don't need the broader perspective. I'm asking specific questions. Could I please ask another question, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —we have a program, and we want to make sure that it's much broader—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are you aware that the unfair and opaque process of halting the tech central accommodation rebate, which occurred due to the comprehensive expenditure review, has cost at least one startup in the order of \$1 million in potentially unnecessary relocation fees and to pay for costs they had expected to cover through the rebate?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Chair, the only opaque, the only unfair decision was made by the former Government in cutting the innovation funding grant—\$416 million were cut—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I'm asking are you aware—I don't need to hear talking points over and over again that are inaccurate.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, it's not a talking point. This is the fact. If you want to talk about cuts, you want to talk about grants—you're talking about innovation grants, and what you can—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, you're in government now, so you have to take responsibility.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You'll get called back for a supplementary at this rate.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is unbelievable.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: So what it says—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I am going to take it that you are not aware of the cost of halting this program, which was fully budgeted for, as you can read in the budget papers. I can pull out the budget papers. It's very clear that over \$700 million wasn't spent in grants and subsidies since you came into government. The reality is that, as Minister, you have responsibility for the spending of moneys in your department. If you want to have a look through the budget papers, I can direct you to the point. But the reality is that grants and subsidies were stopped, that this program was halted and that at least one business had to front up \$1 million because of the decision of this Government to halt an already budgeted-for program, and you obviously were not aware of that. Minister, are you aware of any legal proceedings that have been enacted against the department relating to the administration of grants and subsidies?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to take that one on notice.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You don't know?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's obviously not something—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, I'm happy to take that on notice; I've just told you.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So you don't know. Move on.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We are talking about, Chair, the broader scheme here about cuts, about programs, about impact on business stakeholders. I mean—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, will you take responsibility for this incredibly costly error in judgement in halting programs like this, possibly in contravention of the program rules?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I reject that assertion that Ms Munro has made.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you know that it wasn't in contravention of the rules?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I reject the assertion and the linking you're making. What I also say is this: We're talking about, in particular, grants and the impact of those for startups, for business, for people in the ecosystem. If we're going to talk about that, we also have to talk about the \$416 million cuts that you made. We are talking about fiscal management—

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can I direct you to a budget paper, please. This is just unbelievable.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, I think it's very believable.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you read *Budget Paper No. 02*? It's the financial agency statements. You can keep talking about talking points that you have, but the budget papers are very clear. It's 8-4, if you want to refer to it. Would you like to open it so you can see the black-and-white numbers here? There was \$700 million more than that that wasn't spent, and you have since cut \$1.4 billion—that's over 56 per cent—from what we budgeted in Coalition to the grants and subsidies line item in your department. For you to sit here and suggest to the Committee that you don't want to take responsibility for these cuts is honestly quite shocking and very disappointing for the sector. I will move on because obviously I'm not going to get any information about the process or what you did or did not understand or what you were or were not aware of when it comes to these grant programs. Now, I've asked you already if you were aware of the popularity and success of the MVP Ventures grant program when it was placed on hold. Have you read the *Startup Muster 2023 Report*?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What we're doing in the ecosystem spaces here—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, it's a very simple yes or no question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I get lots of reports that come across my way, but, certainly, I will be seeking—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But have you read this one? This is a very—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: This specific one, no, I haven't. But certainly—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You haven't read this? Are you aware of the Startup Muster report? This is a report that is able to get the opinions and views of thousands of people in our Australian ecosystem, and you're telling me that you haven't read it. What it did say was that the MVP Ventures grant was the most applied for, the most popular, the most planned-for State-based grant across Australia. I'm wondering if you were aware of that before the significant cuts that you've made to that program.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The biggest significant cut was made by the former Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, this is just unbelievable.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's fact. I think it's important. You're asking questions about—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I've just read out the budget papers.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —programs and you're asking questions about impact.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you dispute the budget papers, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: They are right here. What's important here—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, could I please ask you to answer the question? Do you dispute the budget papers?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Do you want to answer it? You're welcome to answer it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you dispute the budget papers that I have just read from?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I dispute the fact that the biggest cuts that were made in this whole program were made by the former Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's simply not true.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It is true. It is factual. This is important.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, this is not answering any of my questions.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am—\$472 million was cut.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could I please ask you another question, since you're not answering these ones?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This is unbelievable.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Chair, a question has been asked. The Opposition is entitled to disagree with the Minister on the interpretation of the budget, but the Minister is entitled to put forward his views, too,

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which is exactly what he is doing in the context of answering a question about cuts. I ask that you allow him to iterate his answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I will move on.

The CHAIR: I think he has provided an answer. I move to the member to redirect the questions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, are you aware of the Ignite Spark Program, which is available to founders in Queensland to progress the development of an innovative product or service close to the market?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That program is in Queensland. I'm not aware of it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you are not aware of interstate programs that are essentially competitors to the programs in New South Wales? You obviously don't know how much funding is available. It's essentially a replica of the MVP Ventures program. It was replicated because of the success of the MVP Ventures program. It is giving founders \$50,000 to \$75,000 in its grant program. Are you aware of how much the new MVP Ventures grant program is, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am, if you just let me find it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you need to refer to your notes for that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Let me find it. We do have an MVP program—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The announcement was literally made on Monday.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's still continuing, bearing in mind that the decisions that we have made are based on the—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How are you making decisions about these programs without even knowing the details of them, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am just about to tell you, if you let me finish.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I can also read—unfortunately, not a media release.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The MVP program is still in place. It's \$12 million over four years. We will continue that program.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How much is it, Minister, sorry?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's \$12 million over four years. What it is, Chair, is that, given the significant cuts that were made by the former Government and given the impact it's had on the innovation sector—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, it's \$3 million in a year. We were at \$10 million per year. You're actually cutting the MVP Ventures program—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The biggest cuts that were made to the whole program, which is part of the whole FEF, were made by the former Government.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: —and you didn't know without having to look at your notes about an announcement that was made on Monday.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You've got to take this into context here.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, do you know how much the MVP grant was—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Not only did you cut it—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, do you know how much the MVP grant was worth under the previous Government and how much a business could apply for?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I know is that the former Government made significant cuts to this and other programs.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The answer is no. You don't know that number.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I reject that assertion.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you please tell me the number?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What we've got—

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you please tell me the number of what the MVP Ventures grant program was worth to a business under the Coalition Government?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Take it on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You can take it on notice, if you don't know.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to answer it. If you want to answer it for me, that's okay.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Please do.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am. The programs—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, there are people who are watching this today who are absolutely distraught about the level of engagement in their sector and you're telling me that you can't answer how much the MVP grant program was under the Coalition.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The MVP grant is still continuing.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How much was it worth under the Coalition?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I would say to those sectors who are watching this that cuts made by the former Government have greatly impacted on the sector.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, this sector is well beyond listening to talking points. They live this every single day.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Given the difficult fiscal situation we inherited and the fact that—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I will tell you. It's \$200,000 per grant. That was the value.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order: Chair, I'm trying to listen to the Minister's answer. As soon as the Minister is asked a question, there is a constant stream of consciousness talking over the Minister's answer. There is not even a question yet; it's statements.

The CHAIR: I have already ruled on this. I reiterate again—and it's on both parties—that it's also up to the Minister as well to be mindful of Hansard and to not speak over the top of each other.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm happy to move on. Given that the new MVP Ventures program could be worth almost one-tenth of the Coalition grant to founders, Minister, will the application process also be an order of magnitude easier to complete?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As for the administrative process, I am happy to ask the secretary to provide the answer to that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I can ask them later in the afternoon.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I would say is that, with all of these programs, we are going to apply sound, fiscal management. I also say this: The broader aspect of this—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, could I please ask another question? You obviously don't know the answer. Do you understand how long it takes to apply for a grant like this for a business and for a startup?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Each application is a competitive process for each company and startup.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Actually, this is not a competitive process, just so you know.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm just talking in general.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The grant program rules are not competitive.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Government money needs to be spent and invested properly. We want to go through a careful consideration and analysis of all applications.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I asked a very specific question about the way businesses apply for these grants and your understanding of the process and how they have to deal with this process. You're not aware of how long it might take for a business to apply for this grant?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I would say to those businesses and those grant applicants is that the former Government cut this program so significantly—

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, this is unbelievable.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —which has actually reduced the availability of funds. We have to apply sound fiscal management.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, could you please answer this question: Given it is a non-competitive grant, which you didn't know, with significantly less funding, will you be informing founders—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I reject that, Chair. What I said was a general statement in that, when dealing with Government money, we want to make sure it's competitive and—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, this is a non-competitive grant.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am talking in general.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, could you please listen to my question so that I can use the time that I have?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure. Keep on going.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Given that it's a non-competitive grant with significantly less funding, will you be informing founders of the number of grants that have already been awarded and how much of the funding pool is still available?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, we will make those communications in due course.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So you don't know.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Will you make those communications via the website?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The administrative process of the grants system will be undertaken by the department and the secretary. What I would also say to those applicants is that the former Government made such significant cuts and had such significant opaque process—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, can I please move on? If you want to support under-represented founders, why aren't any of these groups—like women or First Nations founders—mentioned in the application guide for the MVP grants as people who would be prioritised?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, I'm happy to take that question, Ms Munro. In terms of the female grants, we've got the social impact accelerator—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand that. That's not what I asked for.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —the Female Founders Program, the female council pilot and we've got the—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, they are all being cut, in terms of their funding amount. I would like to move on.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I haven't finished yet, Chair. She has asked a question and I haven't finished my answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I asked a very specific question about a specific grant and you have now moved on.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You can't answer it.

The CHAIR: Minister, they want to redirect. I think you did answer the question. I know you wanted to provide more information, but there might be time later to be able to do that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, is the Government again reviewing the MVP grant for the second time?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government's got a program for the MVP for \$12 million over the next four years.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But we've heard reports in the media that will it be reviewed again and it's currently under review. Are you aware of that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, we are not going to review it, as I am advised.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So your department is not reviewing it at the moment?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am advised that's correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I don't have much time left in this session but I was listening intently to your speech at the InnovationAus Awards, particularly regarding the Innovation Blueprint. People have said that it's not what New South Wales needs and the Tech Council of Australia said that speed is of the essence. Why is it taking almost a year before you are holding a so-called ideas summit to inform an Innovation Blueprint?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Because, when we think about the innovation and the tech sector, it's more than just a financial transaction. It's not just handing out money to everyone who applies. It's actually creating a much broader and a more effective ecosystem. We have to think about the human capital. We need to think about—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Why does that take 11 months, though?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's taken this long because the former Government had no strategy and no idea. What we wanted to do is be methodical and be careful.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, could I please ask a question? Have you read the following documents: *Bringing Big Ideas to Life: NSW Innovation Strategy*; *NSW Innovation Precincts: Lessons from International Experience*; *Global Talent Wars: Learning from Locations That Attract the Best*; and the Innovation and Productivity Council scorecards from 2018 to 2022? I could go on.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Please, go on.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: There are many reports. Have you read any of those?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's why our Innovation Blueprint will take every idea into account to deliver a long-term strategy—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, why is it taking 11 months, when so much of this work has already been done?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —to ensure that we build a strong innovation ecosystem because it's more than just a financial transaction, Chair.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, could you please explain why it takes 11 months to organise an event with people who understand deeply the need for speed in their interactions?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's why our Innovation Blueprint is so important, taking into account carefully the stakeholders views.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm asking about why it takes 11 months to pull together.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: When you don't have a strategy for the last 12 years in this space, we just want to make sure that we do it right.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You are under oath. Don't lie.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I have just outlined a number of strategies that you probably haven't read.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What we've got is an Innovation Blueprint, which I have announced—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We haven't got a blueprint yet.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —which I think is a really good, solid direction to ensure that we actually grow the ecosystem.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, could I please ask about the specifics of that Innovation Blueprint? I think it was in August you said that it would be delivered in about nine months to a year. Could you please confirm that that Innovation Blueprint will be delivered before the next Labor budget?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We are going through our consultation process at the moment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you can't?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have stated, my intention is always to bring this as quickly as I can.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So we have to wait for another budget cycle before we might be able to see investment?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to answer that.

The CHAIR: You can answer the question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Innovation Blueprint is a redirection of strategy that's been missing for the last 12 years.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's actually not true.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's important for us to continue to build the broader ecosystem here, rather than a straight financial—that's actually not building a long-term vision for the sector. It's actually not in the interests of the industry. It's actually in the interests of the human intellectual capital—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So we have to wait until after the budget?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —that we actually need to build the whole process.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The question was specific to whether the Innovation Blueprint—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it's actually very important—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: —would be delivered after the budget?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We will deliver this as soon as we can.

The CHAIR: Order! We will get back to that in a moment, but we are now moving to the crossbench.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, are you confident that your transitional arrangements with Junee will provide the safety and security that inmates require while we are experiencing a transition?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Thank you, Ms Higginson. We are just at the beginning of the transition process. We have got 17 months to actually consult and carefully consider the ideas of how we actually do transition; so it is the start, not the end. Certainly any aspects of the transition that provide a better outcome will certainly be considered by the Government.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What I'm trying to say is, do you think that the people who are in control of the management of Junee right now are going to be able to continue to provide the right level of management and inmate support during this transition period? I think the key really is, do those people have the job security that they need and is that instilled?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct, Ms Higginson. The operations of Junee are not expected to change. I very much value the skills and the efforts of the work of the employees down at Junee and the efforts they've done since, undergone by GEO. There is no intention of reducing the number of employees, because the operations of Junee are expected to remain as they are now.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you aware of a recent spate of violence at Junee that has resulted in several inmates being in fear of their lives, they've requested that they voluntarily be locked in their cells and that they've been in there for the last 18 days?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. As I said, the welfare and the wellbeing of everybody in the correctional facility is important. On this specific issue I am happy to ask the commissioner to provide further details.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I will follow up with him.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We would all agree that workplace safety for everybody involved in what is a very complex environment—we are talking about our incarceration; our correctional facilities. These are very complex and volatile environments. We've got to make sure that we maintain the level of safety for everybody involved.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Absolutely.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Those specific ones, I welcome the commissioner to elaborate on them.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I received a letter literally as I went upstairs, suggesting that there are real problems in Junee—over the last couple of weeks. Somebody is suggesting they're really concerned that there will be imminent deaths at Junee. I don't know whether any of that comes from the recent decision or what's happening there, but there's real concern. Naturally I will write a letter to you about it now I have received this correspondence.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I look forward to receiving it.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, with the inquiry that's going on into Dillwynia, are you looking at expanding that into looking into other correctional facilities or has that already happened?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Upon being informed of the issues around Dillwynia and the conviction of Mr Astill I was really disturbed. This is not a situation that any one of us would actually feel comfortable with. That's why we moved urgently to have Mr Peter McClellan—one of the most eminent jurists in the country—conduct this special commission of inquiry, giving him all the powers that he has to go through his evidence, his hearing and his deliberation.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Based on the hearings that have happened so far, and some of the evidence that has been presented, are you looking at already the need to perhaps expand the inquiry's terms of reference, which I think it was suggested from the outset?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Under the terms of reference, Mr McClellan has the ability to make those recommendations.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do we need to wait for him? I am sure you've been seeing some of the evidence and you're getting briefed on that.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have been briefed on some of the evidence and I said it is quite concerning, quite disturbing. But what I would say is that I think we need to let Mr McClellan do his investigation without ongoing interference. Once his report and his recommendations are put forward to the Government, we will carefully consider it. If it suggests, or that that there might be one, then that is something the Government will consider.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: In relation to the evidence about the video cameras and that this view—I think *The Guardian* reported on it, that video cameras are a genuine safety measure. Are you taking action about that? Have you done an audit? Are all of our facilities in good shape? Have we got this kind of protection for employees and inmates?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I said, the welfare and the wellbeing of everybody in the correctional facilities is important to the Government.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Just on the cameras, Minister, if you could.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Any measures that we improve the safety of anybody involved will certainly be considered by the Government.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have you done the audit of how a camera system is throughout the entire correction system?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am happy to defer that to the commissioner in terms of his technical—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I will speak to the commissioner later, but I take it you haven't? You haven't requested that, you haven't acted upon that very good work that has already come out of the inquiry?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Of the Astill inquiry you mean, Ms Higginson?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, I want to wait for the recommendations of Mr McClellan when he delivers the report to the Government.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you, I do understand that.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it's really important. You have got to let him do his work.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I suggest, if it's okay, that as Corrections Minister there is so much good work that could be done and could have already been done in terms of helping the good people running the system and trying to make it better. But right now they need a Minister who is paying attention, who will respond to the things that are happening on public view right now. They need that kind of leadership, they need that kind of support and I'm not convinced that's happening. In relation to the video cameras alone, it's a really important feature. We know it works in police stations. We know this is a real, genuine mechanism and measure for safety and security of some of the most vulnerable people in the State to whom you owe a duty of care. Can I ask you to have a good look at the video camera system and do the audit, help your people and make sure that our system is the best it can be?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Ms Higginson, Corrections is a very complex portfolio, as you would appreciate.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It is.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly I would say the leadership that the Government has shown in instituting the inquiry is an important step of actually thinking where changes need to be made.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I think it was freefall. I think it was catastrophe. It was one of the most heinous revelations we've seen in the corrections system.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: This one individual was supported by an entire culture and system to enable some of the most harmful behaviour imaginable in our corrections system. I don't think this was an amazing step forward. I don't think that was great leadership. I think that was the very least that could have happened. In fact, what should have happened is there should have been a much broader inquiry that was much more inclusive of other corrections facilities to try to prevent this from happening.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Ms Higginson, in all fairness, upon hearing what happened at Dillwynia I was shocked and I was disturbed. Moving towards this inquiry with one of the most eminent jurists in the country is an important step of the Government's actions to address some of the issues. Mind you, these issues happened well before we were in government and we, I think, are showing good, strong leadership to undertake this inquiry and wait for Mr McClellan's report to come back.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you certain that these things aren't happening in other institutions now?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I want to do is wait for Mr McClellan to report back to the Government and whether we need to consider any other actions.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there a process, Minister, of actually consulting with prisoners as stakeholders to establish what they think they need? Is that something that is happening?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In terms of the inquiry, or just in general?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: No, no, in terms of prisons in New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I understand through the process they do have the Official Visitors program. If inmates have a complaint, there is a complaint process that they can choose, which can be handled through the department. Any ideas or any programs that improve what is a very complex environment for the staff will always be considered by the Government.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What do you say to the fact that inmates in remand have access to absolutely nothing—no education, no programs, no rehabilitation? They have access to nothing. Is that something you're looking at working out how to change?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's a very technical aspect of it. As I said, I'm open to any improvements in our Corrective Services system which deliver a better outcome for the broader community, for the staff and for the inmates. I'm happy to take that on notice, or you're welcome to ask the commissioner in the afternoon session.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you think that if inmates have a desire to gain an education whilst they're in a correctional facility, that should be facilitated?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: On that, when I visited Parklea, I was pleased to see that some of these programs were already in place. I think it's important as part of our justice system to ensure that we provide the programs and the opportunity for those to rehabilitate, to change their lives whilst they're serving their time so that they can come out and not recommit offences and come back to our system. This is a broader picture of how our Corrections facilities actually operate.

The CHAIR: Minister, I'm just going to quickly jump back to animals and rentals. I've one follow-up question, and it might be something you need to take on notice. I wonder how much it has cost the Labor Government to run the further consultation so far on this.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Can I take that one on notice?

The CHAIR: Yes, you can, absolutely. Just going back to Corrections and we were talking about Just Reinvest, I think you said you hadn't met with them. Are you willing to meet with them if they reach out to your office?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sorry, was that Just Reinvest. Is that right?

The CHAIR: Correct.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I understand, from the advice that I received from my staff, that we were going to meet and the organisation then was unable to meet with me. That hasn't been—

The CHAIR: Rescheduled?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, I'm happy to meet with organisations that can have an idea, or who want to make great input. In all my portfolios, I think it's so important to meet with them—

The CHAIR: I'll leave that with you, to reach out to them and reschedule that—hopefully?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We had a meeting scheduled but they cancelled, as I understand it.

The CHAIR: Obviously there is a serious problem associated with Aboriginal deaths in custody. Looking at the statistics on the Corrective Services NSW website, you can see the number of Aboriginal deaths in custody per 100 inmates has consistently gone up since 2012. What action are you taking to reduce Aboriginal deaths in custody?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly our Indigenous incarceration rate is a real concern for all of us. It has not gone down as fast as we all would like. In terms of any deaths in custody—Indigenous or non-Indigenous—it's a very sad situation, and you can only feel for the family—

The CHAIR: Minister, do you have any plans or initiatives over the next four years to drive that number down?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly Closing the Gap is a part of it, and we are working towards my other ministerial colleagues, other departments, to develop any suite of programs that actually reduce deaths in custody and reduce Indigenous incarceration.

The CHAIR: As part of that, Minister, have you considered introducing greater oversight and accountability over Corrections in New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In terms of the broader Corrective Services, I'm really looking forward to Mr McClellan's report and the recommendations—

The CHAIR: Have you been briefed at all around the claims of misconduct within the prison system and how they can be properly investigated and prosecuted?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, certainly. I often get advice on instances of misbehaviour, and those things we take very seriously because the welfare and the wellbeing of staff—to work in what is already a complex and volatile work environment—needs to be safe for them and for everybody involved. Any instances of workplace issues are properly investigated by the department and the appropriate actions taken—

The CHAIR: Sorry, my question—going back to the beginning part of the question—was about whether or not you've got specific plans or initiatives that you're working on in this space.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it's total quality management improvement. Any organisation should always be looking and going ways to improve their workplace and their workplace culture. In terms of specific programs, I'm happy to defer that to the secretary or the commissioner. As I said, it is a complex work environment, but we are always finding ways to ensure that it is a safe work environment.

The CHAIR: Since becoming the Minister for Corrections have you had any briefings on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Commissioner?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes.

The CHAIR: I'm sorry, Minister. I'm asking you if you've had any briefings on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Have you been briefed?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll take that one on notice, but I will say that I'm not aware—it's certainly not in my mind, but I'll have to take that one on notice.

The CHAIR: Are you aware of the report?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The report into Aboriginal deaths in custody—I think generally, yes.

The CHAIR: Have you read any of the recommendations?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I haven't read the recommendations, but I'm certainly looking forward to any advice that the department may provide to me on how we can reduce deaths in custody and Indigenous deaths in custody.

The CHAIR: I note that New South Wales has still not implemented all of the recommendations. This is a report that was done in 2018, and New South Wales is well behind in getting all of those recommendations done. Do you have a time line on when you will get those recommendations through in New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I suppose you could almost ask the question why the former Government didn't act on any of this report—any of the recommendations.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister, I'm asking you now, as the Minister that's currently in the role. You're not aware of the report or the recommendations—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly I will be discussing and liaising with the secretary and the commissioner as to find—in general, any initiative, any program that improves the Corrective Services we will consider. You have to ask yourself, 2018 was when the report was delivered and five years—nothing was done before we arrived.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm sorry. Actually 1991 was the first time—

The CHAIR: Oh, was the first one.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It was in 1991.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I'm aware of that.

The CHAIR: A certain percentage of the recommendations have been put into place, but now that you're the Minister responsible, I want to get your confirmation that any other resolutions that haven't been put into place will be put through in your term.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, of course the Government will always consider the recommendations and go through—

The CHAIR: Consider or that you will implement them?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have to consider the recommendations first and obviously conduct a thorough analysis of how it's going to be implemented. No organisation stands still. We can't be static in it. We need to make sure we find any avenues to improve the way organisations operate and, in this case, in what is a very complex and volatile work environment.

The CHAIR: As the Minister for Corrections, are you part of discussions around raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That is a matter for the Attorney General, who I understand is here on Friday.

The CHAIR: I did speak to the Minister for Youth Justice, who told us that a variety of Ministers would be involved in this and discussions around it. Are you saying that you won't be part of that with the Attorney General and the Minister for Youth Justice?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, what I'm saying is that those specific questions around raising the age are a matter for the Attorney General. Of course where it impacts—

The CHAIR: My question was are you part of the discussions around it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: If it impacts my portfolio—

The CHAIR: I understand the Minister for Youth Justice is part of the discussions—the police Minister and the Attorney General. So my question to you, as the Minister for Corrections, is will you also be included in the discussions?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: If I can play a role in this policy discussion, I'm always happy to contribute.

The CHAIR: Have you met with any of the organisations behind the Raise the Age campaign?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll take that on notice but not to my knowledge.

The CHAIR: Also, could you take this on notice if you've met with any of the legal, social, medical or community organisations that have signed on to the Raise the Age campaign?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I met a number of social and community groups regarding the Correction facility, as I mentioned before. PIAC—

The CHAIR: Have you met with them in regards to the Raise the Age campaign?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I met with these community groups. Given our discussion, I have to take on notice whether this was discussed or not. But I have met with a number of social and community groups in terms of ways to—

The CHAIR: That's all right. I just wanted to know in regards to the Raise the Age campaign. Just going back to some of the questions asked by Ms Sue Higginson around security cameras, have you been briefed on the issue around security cameras, particularly in women's correctional facilities and their concerns there?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Commissioner?

The CHAIR: No, sorry. Minister, my question was have you been briefed?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll take that one on notice. There's a lot of briefs that come across my table, but certainly any ways that we can improve the correctional facility is something that the Government will always consider.

The CHAIR: Given the questions that Ms Sue Higginson asked and some of the context around that, as the Minister, do you feel comfortable with the level of security cameras that are currently in correctional centres throughout New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Whether it's security, whether it's programs, we're always looking at ways to improve how Corrections operate.

The CHAIR: Do you feel comfortable with the number of security cameras and the level of security cameras currently in the centres?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think certainly I am open to ideas and suggestions which can improve our correctional facilities. This is a complex and volatile work environment.

The CHAIR: Do you feel comfortable with the number that are currently in place, or do you have concerns?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Can you repeat that question, Chair?

The CHAIR: Do you feel comfortable with the number of security cameras, or do you have concerns?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I would be concerned in any situation where the correctional facilities, and the safety and wellbeing of inmates and staff, are actually at risk. I mean, whether it's cameras, whether it's processes—

The CHAIR: So you are concerned with the concerns that have come forward.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm concerned about any situation that would jeopardise, or put at risk and cause harm to, everybody involved in our Corrections facilities.

The CHAIR: An evaluation of the New South Wales Domestic Violence Electronic Monitoring program published by BOCSAR in May 2023 found that it is associated with significant reductions in the probability that an offender re-offends or is imprisoned within a year of release. Given the success of this program, are there any plans to expand the program further or to make this option available in more cases?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to take that on notice, but I think any programs or any ideas that improve our Corrections, we are always open to.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, just two quick questions. Given you've spoken about connecting founders across New South Wales in virtual place-based ways, have you advocated for internet connectivity to form part of requirements for new builds and precincts with the planning Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I discuss a range of issues with my ministerial colleague the planning Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you done any advocacy work on that issue?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: On the advocacy—the Minister and I will always advocate for things that improve New South Wales.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have you advocated for internet connectivity to form part of requirements for new builds and precincts?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Just let me clarify that question. Are you talking about new builds as in buildings?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes, absolutely, new builds. As I'm sure you know, lots of founders are working from home, not just in co-working spaces and startup hubs. I'm asking if you have advocated for better technology to form part of a planning strategy, given the people you're representing as part of your ministry?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I always advocate for things that improve the whole ecosystem.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Will you take that to the planning Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I will take any idea to any of my ministerial colleagues that improves things.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'd love you to take that idea to the planning Minister, please.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am happy to do that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you. What happened to the Modern Manufacturing Commissioner?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Given the fiscal difficulties that we inherited—don't forget, as I understand it, the position was only funded for a year by the former Government. But what we've done in this manufacturing space—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you're in government, so you get to decide what the budget is.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What we have done is even reinforce how important manufacturing is here in New South Wales—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: By cutting the Modern Manufacturing Commissioner.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —by elevating this position to Cabinet. My colleague, Minister Houssos, is the Minister for procurement—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: She says you're in charge.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —and the Minister for manufacturing. I reject that question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Well, she has.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We have elevated this to Cabinet to ensure that manufacturing has a place at the Cabinet table to ensure that industry—don't forget, we have a suite of policies that reinforce—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay, Minister. We don't know what happened to the Modern Manufacturing Commissioner.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —how important manufacturing is to New South Wales—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just not when it comes to a modern manufacturing commissioner.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —our local contents, our tender weightings, our value for money framework. I know my colleague, Ms Houssos, is actually currently doing an inquiry into how procurement—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you, Minister. I think that covers off my questions.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —can actually stimulate the manufacturing industry, grow jobs and ensure that we skill up our workforce for the future. I am proud of our manufacturing space.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If I could turn your attention to the Rental Commissioner, how was the Rental Commissioner recruited? By that I mean was the role openly advertised and available to anyone to make an application?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, the appointment of the Rental Commissioner was a decision of the secretary.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Of the secretary?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That is correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Sorry, but what was the process?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I recall there was an advertisement that was actually put out by the secretary.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So it was a public advertisement.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That is correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did you recommend anybody for that position?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know if any of your colleagues recommended a specific person for that position?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You will have to ask those questions to them. I can only answer from my perspective, and the answer is no.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Are you going to throw them under the bus now?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. Like I said, you'd have to ask them.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The current commissioner was a CEO of Homelessness NSW. Does she have any connection with the Tenants' Union of NSW?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That is a question you should put to her when you see her this afternoon. But can I just say on that, I am delighted that the secretary has appointed Ms Trina Jones, a voice for renters that's been missing for 12 years. Given the size of the population that is actually renting—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, we are just talking about the process at the moment.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I'm happy to get to that, but I think it's important—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could I please ask a question about the process? Were you aware of the background and qualifications of all the applicants before making a decision?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The decision was made by the secretary.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you weren't involved in any way?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's a public service appointment that's made by the secretary.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: And you said the appointment was signed off by the Cabinet?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, the appointment was made by the secretary. It's not a Cabinet appointment.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Right, sorry. Can you tell me what is the remuneration of the Rental Commissioner?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I will have to take that one on notice, but you are welcome to ask her. The appointment of Ms Trina Jones as the Rental Commissioner has been a really positive step to address some of the policy and difficult policy reforms we want to do. More and more people who are renting—given the housing affordability challenges, given the lack of supply that's been built up for the last 12 years, putting significant pressure on rental prices, we really want to get forward with this policy agenda. I have to say, the feedback I have had—Ms Trina Jones has done an excellent job in this space.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I understand that, Minister. You've answered my question, so if I could just move on. You kind of outlined a little bit, but I wanted to know, with regard to the role, what are the specific responsibilities and powers of the commissioner?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The powers of the Rental Commissioner are all the powers under Fair Trading. She has the resources of Fair Trading and all the powers under Fair Trading. She will work across the whole network. In terms of her role, it's one of community engagement with her own stakeholders, policy reform and policy advice. It's important, given the fact that this space—given its importance—has been missing for 12 years. We wanted to ensure that we continually engage with stakeholders, given the polarising nature of property, as we all know. Nothing stimulates discussions in Sydney more than—

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I understand, Minister, thank you. Why wasn't the role description gazetted?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's a public service appointment by the secretary.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Who does the commissioner report to?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: She reports to the deputy secretary, and also the secretary.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How will the commissioner's success be measured?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think we've had great success—the fact that we have already appointed a rental commissioner, which has been missing for 12 years, I think this is a really positive move. In terms of her performance, that will be a discussion between her and her superiors in the department.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It sounds like an impressive title. How about we move to rental reform, because that seemed to be another topic that you were talking about just then. In relation to the recent rental law consultation paper, what are the outcomes?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The outcomes of that are that, first of all, we want to make sure we engage with industry and with a variety of stakeholders, given some of the contentious discussions that naturally happen when you try to do significant reform. I mean, in all fairness, I wish this had been done in the last 12 years, but it hasn't. We're going to move forward and give it the level of urgency that it requires, given the impact that it has on so many people here in New South Wales across the age groups and across the income bands. We want to make sure that we do a thorough consultation process and not get to the situation which reduces supply to the market, which would only ever increase rental pressure for tenants, and, more importantly, we want to make sure we get a balance right that doesn't pit tenants versus property owners. There is a balance I believe we can get here, and the work of the Rental Commissioner—her technical roundtables, her consultation, trying to bring people on the journey—is an important part of doing reform that is actually going to make such a significant difference to the people of New South Wales.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is there a time frame for results here?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think that was asked earlier. We are going through the consultation process. This is a very contentious area of policy reform, which we wish had been given a level of urgency and importance in the last Government, but it wasn't. What we are going to do is develop a package of reform. We have a suite of election promises, as I said, around many no-grounds evictions. Earlier this year we moved the portable bonds scheme, which is an important part of reducing pressure for renters. We stopped solicited rent bidding to close that gap in the legislation to ensure it applies to tech platforms, and also to actually direct property owners. These are things that we've moved forward, which are so important for renting and the renting industry—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I think you've answered that part of the question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —which we know has really impacted on so many people in New South Wales.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You say there is a need for rental reform and you've said it has taken a long time. I don't understand. Nothing has happened so far. Why is it taking so long now?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's not going to take 12 years, if I say so myself. What we're going to do is move as quickly as we can but in a careful and methodical way, given the contentious nature of this particular topic.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Any deadlines?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I mean, 12 years of silence—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We've had silence from you so far.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —but we're going to give it the level of urgency and importance and attention this particular area of policy deserves. I said one-third in New South Wales are renting. In some metro areas, it's closer to one in two, across—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Sorry, Minister. You said you've moved on portable bonds, but has anyone—what have you done?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As you would appreciate, the portable bonds scheme is actually quite a complex system in terms of determining what the rules are and also creating the IT system.

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The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Oh, it's complex; so you haven't done anything?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You know what? I've done more in the last nine months—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So you said you've done something but you haven't done anything.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —than was done in the last 12 years in this particular space.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But what have you done, Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We are developing a range of rules around the portable bond scheme, investigating the—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Where are they? Why hasn't anyone heard about them? Are you consulting?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We did a media release about it and I did a number of media events on the portable bond scheme, so I don't know what the issue is.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Media isn't policymaking, Minister.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So you do media releases when it suits you.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: But what it is, given the different aspects or categories within the rental reform space, we will move on them and not be idle and not be indifferent to the so many people who are renting in New South Wales.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Thank you, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Twelve years of silence—there is not going to be a fix within a few months.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Now you have your chance, so what is the time line for delivery to this community?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Are you talking about the rental community?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Absolutely. These are a third of people in New South Wales.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The portable bond scheme. You've said you want to get on with moving on it. I want to know what the time line for delivery is.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's correct, so that's why we are moving and working with industry as quickly as we can, given the contentious nature—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You don't have a time line!

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What I know is this, Chair, 12 years of indifference has meant so many people in our—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We've got nine months of inaction from this Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Indifference and insensitive to the needs of one-third, in some places one in two people, who rent. This is a contentious policy space and we'll continue to work with stakeholders to move forward on this policy.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I get it: You don't actually have a time line.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. I said, we'll move things as quickly as we can given the consultation we've proposed.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: That's not a time line. Let the member ask her next question. Stop talking over her.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I think it's important. I'll tell you what the time line is. It's going to be shorter than 12 years.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: That was a real clanger! Dear, oh dear.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is the Government looking to bring in longer term standard lease agreements?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government will consider all the policy options that are available—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Are you going to consider that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We will consider all that is available—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What's the point of being a Minister?

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —to ensure giving certainty to renters.

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

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Run that cover.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: The Minister was asked a very sensible question by the Hon. Aileen MacDonald but then that was immediately followed up by a different question from the Hon. Bronnie Taylor and then the Hon. Jacqui Munro asked a third question—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You can't keep up with us, can you?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: They're an amazing team.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: —over the top of those first two questions.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You can't pronounce the name right, you can't keep up with us.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: There should be one person asking the questions and then the Minister answering. I'd ask that you call the Opposition to order.

The CHAIR: It is the Opposition's time and they can spread amongst themselves where those questions sit.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Keep up. We should be barristers, all three of us.

The CHAIR: The Hon. Aileen MacDonald has the call.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I think I'll move on to the strata portal. Do you know how many strata schemes are on it?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I recall it's probably about 85,000.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So what percentage of strata schemes in New South Wales would that be?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's actually 85,000 in New South Wales, if I'm not mistaken.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: And are there plans to strengthen or improve the portal?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What portal are you referring to?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: To strengthen it—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Are you talking about reforms in general in strata?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No, the portal itself.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The strata portals.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Firstly, as we all know, many of our people in our community will be living in strata. Strata reform is important. What I would also say is that the former Government didn't move on the statutory review of strata reform, but we actually have. There is a current bill which has passed the upper House, so I thank my colleagues in the upper House for passing that, and that will come down to the Government in the lower House in the next sittings of Parliament. We've moved on those statutory reviews by implementing 30 out of the 139 recommendations on that review. That will be phase one of the legislative reform, but phase two, which contains a number of more contentious issues—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You're going to strengthen it then?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: What we're going to do is move urgently on the statutory review, which I think should have been done in the last former Government. But nevertheless the situation that we have here is that we've moved the first tranche, and of course phase two is something we'll be doing more consultation with industry and with stakeholders to ensure that we get a package of the reform actually correct.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I was just wondering, with the cost-of-living crisis, we've got media reports of owners' corporations bankrupting owners who are in financial distress. What steps are being taken to assist these people, particularly as we are going through this cost-of-living crisis?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That is correct. I think certainly strata reform will look at these issues, given the significant number of people who will be living in strata. By 2040, Ms MacDonald, one in two in Sydney will be living in strata. That is a significant number of people in these living/housing arrangements. The Government has a housing agenda determining about density in and around metro areas, in particular around public infrastructure which means—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That's great. Thank you.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —that as there are more moving into them, what we want to do is to have reform that is fit for purpose, that is contemporary—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Thank you, Minister. Can I draw your attention to—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —working on the statutory review—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'd just like to pivot and draw your attention back to Junee. I'm told that Junee has one contracted psychiatry service, two mental health nurses, two Aboriginal health workers, two Aboriginal liaison officers and three psychologists. Can the Minister guarantee that when it's taken over by Corrective Services NSW that inmates will receive better treatment?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think they will receive much better treatment under Justice Health. I honestly believe that.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: When you talk about that, currently new reception inmates at Junee are seen within 24 hours by their doctor. In contrast, in the public system they are seen within 14 days. Minister, how is that a better outcome?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: It's a better outcome because changing the—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: How?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —operations of Junee will deliver a much broader outcome. The access to the clinical expertise of Justice Health, working with our Indigenous affairs department and also working with the wider Corrective Services—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So now it takes 14 days as opposed to one and you think that's a better outcome? That is unbelievable. Thank you, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The work of Justice Health is important as part of our very complex Corrections system.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Outrageous.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Your colleague Minister Houssos has said that you're largely responsible for domestic manufacturing. I'm just wondering, which department supports you on domestic manufacturing work?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade reports to me. I will be working closely with my colleague Minister Houssos with her new portfolio responsibilities and also with industry on policy. We have a suite—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many staff are looking at that from the departmental view?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to take that on notice. It is a very specific question.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many staff are working on domestic manufacturing in your office?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have my office. We all work across the different portfolios. We all work together well. I'm delighted to have the staff that I have.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you don't have any policy experts on that specific topic area?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I have the resources of the department to provide me with that advice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you have four full-time staff in your office at the moment? Is that accurate?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Let me—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Because at 30 June, your office had four full-time staff.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Just let me do a quick calculation. I think I've got five—four full-time and one part-time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Has been there any turnover in your staff since you became Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Given your office has a number of significant portfolios—we obviously haven't really been able to get to all of them today because there has been a lack of detail in the responses—do you believe that you have an adequate number of staff to respond to the issues and work with stakeholders in a timely way?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm really excited with the suite of portfolios that I've got. There is significant reform that we want to do both in the building space, in rent—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'll get to that. I think it's going to be—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But it's a very specific question, Minister. Do you feel like you've got—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've got the resources of my office and I've got the resources of the department.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And you think that is adequate?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've got the resources for engaging with community stakeholders.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You're comfortable with that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm just excited with the work that I have. I'm comfortable with it, that's right.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: We've seen media reports of buyers' experiences at auctions where properties sell for well over their advertised price guides. How much of this is genuine competitive bidding or merely underquoting?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I assume you want to focus on underquoting. Is that right? Underquoting is an offence—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Just answer the question, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —under the current laws. We do have very strong laws around this to ensure that where instances are made around underquoting, Fair Trading will investigate and take the appropriate action. For those who are caught underquoting, you can receive a \$2,200 on-the-spot fine, and if you're further prosecuted it's a fine up to \$22,000. I'm happy to ask the deputy secretary to provide more technical details, but if you have instances or you're aware of instances, please let us know. I'm happy to investigate.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It looks like you haven't really done anything. You've had media releases on it but haven't really gone after anyone.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, we have. We conduct investigations on—if there are instances that you're aware of, please let me know. I'm happy to follow up and investigate that for you. We have current, existing laws around underquoting. If that needs to change, we'll always consider ensuring that our regulatory framework is fit for purpose and is contemporaneous. But if you want to know the specific details about that, I'm happy to ask the Deputy Secretary of Fair Trading to answer those questions.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: We'll be doing that this afternoon.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I just have one final question, Minister. In relation to the definition of "local content", what do you understand that to mean? Is that New South Wales, Australia, New Zealand? What does that include?

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Local content depends on a—the local content under global use is Australia and New Zealand as the broader definition.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Not just New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think we would always preference New South Wales business where that's possible, and that's where we've gone.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you've acknowledged that local content is Australia and New Zealand?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's the general definition that is used in the industry.

The CHAIR: We now move onto crossbench time. Minister, what role do you see the New South Wales Rental Commissioner playing in regards to animals in rentals?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: A very important role, Chair, because as part of her consultation process and as part of her advising the Government on the reform that's required in renting—which covers, as I said, the things around no-grounds, about the portable bond scheme, about privacy and data, which was part of the Government's election suite, and also about having pets in rentals as well—she will play an integral role.

The CHAIR: Sorry, my question was just about the animals in rentals and what you envisioned her role will be in that space.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, sure. It'll be part of her role to ensure that any aspects of the policy space to do with rentals is actually included. She's working very closely with the relevant industry stakeholders and the RSPCA to ensure that the policy reforms and the legislative arrangements that we arrive to take all those things into account.

The CHAIR: You've said a few times that this is a contentious area and that's why it's taking so long to develop the legislation. I want to understand a bit more. We've got 82 per cent agreement, including the majority of landlords, that want to copy over the Victorian legislation. I'm just wondering what groups are lobbying you that are heavily against these laws?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Nobody has personally lobbied me against these laws, but we are going through a proper consultation process to ensure that we arrive at a package that is going to be workable in New South Wales. Do we look at what's happening in other jurisdictions? Of course we would. It's part of the institutional learning—

The CHAIR: Minister, if you don't have anyone lobbying against the laws, I'm wondering why you're saying that it's contentious when we've got an 82 per cent agreement in the population?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I say that it's contentious in the whole property space. Certainly rent, and what we've seen in the feedback that we've had, whether it's—

The CHAIR: What feedback have you had specifically with animals in rentals?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As part of the survey response that we've had, certainly we've had a divergent set of views about policy implementation or policy ideas. That's why I say it is—

The CHAIR: In regards to animals in rentals?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Animals in rentals, but also in the general rental reform space.

The CHAIR: I just want to ask about animals in rentals because that's where, obviously, that statistic of 82 per cent agreement comes from. That word "contentious"—has something come up in your consultation to lead you specifically to believe it is contentious when there is such strong agreement?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think the Rental Commissioner is best to answer those questions, Chair, given the number of conversations she's had with all the stakeholders in this space. This is an important area of reform that the Government is committed to delivering and we want to make sure we deliver—

The CHAIR: So you as Minister haven't seen any evidence to suggest that it is contentious?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I said my word "contentious" was used in much broader terms of property and renting, of course—

The CHAIR: But not so much in regards to the animals in rentals?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, that would be a fair assessment. Certainly what I'm saying is when it comes to property reform, I think it always delivers a rather divergent set of views. We just want to make

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sure that we bring a package that is balanced, that is fair and that actually improves certainty for everybody involved.

The CHAIR: New South Wales has a great opportunity to be a leader when it comes to the production of cell-based meats. Cell-based startups have actually told me, though, that they're feeling forced to leave New South Wales due to the lack of regulatory and financial support available to them. The previous Government gave a \$25,000 grant to New South Wales cell-based company Vow in 2019, but I understand that there hasn't been any funding made available from your Government. Is there any funding currently available to support cell-based meat startups in New South Wales, or is that something you are willing to explore?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: There are a couple of components to that question, Chair. In terms of the cell-based production, I suspect that would mainly deal with the Minister for Health. I encourage you to ask—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister, the previous grant was given for Innovation, Science and Technology.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I was getting to that, too. I said in terms of the regulatory framework, certainly the Minister has a role here. But in terms of the grant itself, obviously we will have a competitive and open process for any applicant in any industry where they've got an idea which they believe will deliver great outcomes to make those submissions.

The CHAIR: Why do you feel that it would go to the Minister for Health instead of the Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology when we're talking about—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, what I'm saying is that in terms of the startup and that process, certainly that would come to me. But if we're talking about health-based issues in the regulation of producing food in this nature, it may well fall under the Ministry of Health—

The CHAIR: My question is more about the funding—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, that's fine.

The CHAIR: —and the fact that there was \$25,000 given by the previous Government. Are you advocating for any further funding within New South Wales in that space?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: We've got a program of the innovation grants that we've put forward given the very difficult fiscal situation that we've got. I encourage any startup, any idea, who wishes to make an application to do so.

The CHAIR: Are you willing to meet with any of the cell-based meat startup companies in New South Wales who are looking for grants to discuss those opportunities?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly anyone is welcome to contact me if they've got an idea.

The CHAIR: Would you meet with them?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to consider any request for a meeting.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Are you across or have you had any briefings around the animal programs that are often used for inmates in New South Wales Corrections centres?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I haven't at this stage.

The CHAIR: Have you met with or have you spoken to the Greyhounds As Pets program, or are you aware of the Greyhounds As Pets program in the jail system?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm not aware that the association has actually contacted my office.

The CHAIR: But are you aware of the program itself that is running through the system?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The technical aspects? No, I'm not. But certainly I'm happy to defer to the commissioner if he's aware of these programs happening in our facilities.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, we do have these programs operating, Minister. One is in Dillwynia and the last one I saw was also in Hunter, but I'm not sure if that one's still going.

The CHAIR: What about the Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Program run with Corrective Services NSW? Are you familiar with that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I'm not familiar with that specific program, but the commissioner might wish to add to that.

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KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, that's operating in St Heliers. At last count we had about 80 horses involved in that.

The CHAIR: Minister, given there's quite a few different programs with animals that are running through the jail system, I'm just wondering if anyone that is actually convicted of animal cruelty offences—obviously it's incredibly rare that somebody who's convicted of an animal cruelty offence is actually in a corrections centre, but I want to know if these programs are open to anyone that has been convicted of animal cruelty, or would those individuals be excluded?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to take that on notice, if that's okay.

The CHAIR: This might be another one for on notice, but I know that inmates are often part of a day work release program. A lot of those day work release programs include work inside slaughterhouses. Again, are there exclusions to ensure anyone convicted of animal cruelty offences is not involved in day work releases to slaughterhouses?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to just take that on notice, thank you.

The CHAIR: Something that's been raised with my office quite a bit over the years is that there's no specific rehabilitation for animal cruelty offenders. Is this something you're interested or open to looking into?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As a general principle, Chair, I'm always open to ideas that improve the whole corrections network. There is certainly an area of reform that the Government will always—any ideas that improve the whole network, I think, is something we should always be open to. We can't be static about these things. We've got to make sure that our policies—our framework—is contemporary and fit for purpose.

The CHAIR: You also have a program called the benchmark animal cruelty rehabilitative curriculum. It's an online course that cruelty offenders are often sentenced to which teaches the offender about respect and care for animals. Have you heard anything about those sorts of programs in the US?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I'm not aware of those specific programs in the US.

The CHAIR: Are you willing to meet with the organisations that run those programs to see if that's something that would be suitable here in New South Wales?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, in general, I'm always open to any ideas that make an improvement for the people of New South Wales. As we all agree, the Corrections portfolio—and, indeed, work environment—is extremely complex. Yes, certainly.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I want to turn to the new position of Strata and Property Services Commissioner.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'm interested in the position more broadly in terms of whether there is terms of reference and a budget and powers. If you could elaborate on that firstly.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure. The secretary appointed Mr John Minns to be our property and strata services commissioner. I think it's a great appointment. He comes with great credibility, great experience and great knowledge of the industry and the reforms that we need in strata. He would have access to all the resources of Fair Trading and also work closely with the Building Commissioner and also across the Better Regulation division. His role is one of policy development, policy advocacy and engagement with the various stakeholders within the strata space. So I'm looking forward to continuing to work with Mr Minns on this important area of policy reform.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That seems to indicate then that it's existing resources to deal with all of the issues in relation to strata and all of the incredible difficulties that people have who have already tried every day dealing with Fair Trading. Are there going to be any additional resources or any specific strengthening of strata skills, experience or numbers within Fair Trading if that's who the strata commissioner is working with?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, in terms of the access to resources, the strata commissioner has access to all of them—so Fair Trading—and also the Building Commissioner as well. But, in terms of future resources, of course the Government will consider that as part of the budget process.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: When you're saying that the strata commissioner will have access to the resources that the Building Commissioner has—

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No. He will have access to the resources of Fair Trading and the powers of Fair Trading as well—of the whole department. But he will work with the Building Commissioner and all of the other units of the department.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: We're aware that there's the bill before the Parliament now. We've been promised that much of the bigger—and, possibly, you could argue, more important—reform is still coming.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is it your expectation that there will be additional resources? I'm specifically referring to the fact that there aren't enough resources now within Fair Trading to deal with the extraordinary number of strata complaints and issues in relation to strata. Simply appointing a strata commissioner without additional resources isn't going to fix that problem, so when will more resources come?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government will consider its resources as part of the normal budget process.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So no more resources?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Government will consider, in its next year budget, resources across the whole of government to ensure that we have the resources that we require.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So Mr Minns has just been appointed the Strata and Property Services Commissioner.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is that right? The property services commissioner? Is that correct? That's the change?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The property and strata services commissioner, yes, appointed by the secretary.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Strata is in there.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So Mr Minns goes to Fair Trading and says, "Okay, where are my team and my resources? Who am I able to direct? How many staff do I have? How many staff are all mine?" What does that look like?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, they have access to the whole of the Fair Trading network, with expertise—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So he can just walk in there on Monday—whenever he's been appointed—ask for a whole floor and ask for 50 staff to sit down and do basically everything that he requires and says needs to be done in strata. Is that what you're talking about?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Essentially, the property services commissioner will report to the deputy secretary of the Fair Trading commissioner. I'm happy to ask her to elaborate further, but certainly he has access to the resources of the department to undertake the important policy reform in this space. Any resource requirements will be, naturally, delivered as part of the budget process.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: We can come to that maybe later in the day as well. I appreciate that.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But in terms of the terms of reference and powers—for example, in regard to dispute resolution by Fair Trading and mediation—what are the powers of the commissioner? Are they outlined anywhere?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The role of the strata commissioner, as I said, will have all the resources and all the powers that are currently within Fair Trading. In terms of the technical, legal powers, I'm happy to ask the deputy secretary and Fair Trading Commissioner to answer those questions for you, Ms Faehrmann.

NATASHA MANN: Thank you for the question. There are two questions that you have raised. Maybe I'll take them in turn. The first question was around how will Mr Minns work with the resources of Fair Trading in doing his job. The answer to that—I can give you a practical example—is we have a policy team in Fair Trading that is currently supporting Mr Minns to work through some of the strata reforms. So he would draw on the Fair

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Trading policy people to assist him with that. If there is an issue in the sector—for example, underquoting—Mr Minns would draw down on our inspectorate in Fair Trading to help him with that issue. So that's the answer to your first question.

In relation to your second one around powers, there's a raft of legislation that sits within Fair Trading, as you know. If you look at the Act, all the powers are vested in the secretary of the department, so the powers sit with her. Then what will happen is she will then delegate those powers as is appropriate. At the moment those powers are delegated to me as Fair Trading Commissioner, in the most part. John does have some powers that have been delegated to him under the Property and Stock Agents Act. He is able, under that legislation, to set professional development requirements for agents and also to set the supervision rules for agency businesses. Down the track we will look at do other roles and responsibilities under that legislation need to be delegated from the secretary to Mr Minns.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So that's not in the current legislation, or regulation supporting that legislation, in terms of ensuring that that new position has those parameters now, Minister? I've got key stakeholders asking what are the terms of reference, what are the powers and what's the budget. It's potentially a communications issue, that people who are dealing with strata issues need to know this.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, working with the different industries will be an important part of the strata reforms we want to do.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So there are no additional terms of reference? Is that what you're saying?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The role of the strata commissioner will have, as I said, all the powers and resources of Fair Trading.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is that outlined somewhere for people to see?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy to take that one on notice. But I gather that, because it's a public service appointment, it will report to the Fair Trading Commissioner.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Maybe some advice. It would be worth doing if it's not already outlined.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In the time I have remaining, I have a couple more issues. This is a broader issue around building defects in high-rise apartments and the role that you, as Minister, and the Building Commissioner play. I note that the Government is very intent on building high-rises around train stations and what have you, yet we have seen the extraordinary statistic around building defects in those high-rises. Four out of 10 buildings, I think, is one stat. What is happening to ensure that this—it's kind of the worst possible thing to do, in some ways, if you look at the evidence of those high-rise buildings in New South Wales, yet government policy is pursuing high-rise buildings right now. What are you saying to the Premier and the planning Minister about the risks in relation to putting all of our eggs in the high-rise basket?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, bringing back trust and confidence in class 2, or high-rise, buildings—or density buildings—is an important part of the Government's housing agenda. Now, there are a number of reforms that the Government will be embarking on. Firstly, I want to acknowledge the work of the Building Commissioner in trying to really accelerate the work that he has been doing, working with industry, to change the culture and to change the standards. Some of the reforms we're looking at are including decennial liability insurance. For committee members, you may be aware that decennial liability insurance is a 10-year warranty on the building. So that will give—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, Minister, but do you have concerns—let's just go down to the crux of it. If, for example, we see around all of these high-rise buildings being built, if that is the policy of the Government, are you concerned that in fact we don't have the level of skills and experience needed in this State to build those high-rise buildings without defects? You should be talking to the Premier and the planning Minister about the risks involved in so much high-rise.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, Ms Faehrmann. I am continually speaking with the Premier and the planners on this issue because of the risks in particular. The greatest risk we see in the house space, as people move from class 1 and go into class 2—that is those who are building up to three storeys—that's where the greatest skills gap is. That's why the legislation before the Parliament, which the upper House has passed, which is greatly received, will actually allow the Building Commissioner to take proactive and preventive inspections, in particular those class 1 builders, to ensure they upskill—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You've got a big job ahead of you, Mr Chandler.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: So they get upskilled and, as they move into class 2, they have the necessary not only the technical skills but also the corporate skills as well. Some of the reforms that we're moving in are around iCIRT ratings, which is also very important, working with market to ensure that we assess and also the DLI and other building reforms that we are doing next year with the building Act. There's a lot of reform in this space.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'll come back and maybe ask some questions of Mr Chandler in the afternoon.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Sure. There's a lot of reform in this building space. We know how important class 2 buildings will be in terms of the Government's housing agenda to ensure that we build not only the number of houses but the quality of those dwellings in the locations that are actually going to benefit the significant public investment that has been made in infrastructure.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, how many potential breaches of ticket scalping laws have been investigated by Fair Trading since you became Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Ticket scalping is just an awful way to fleece, and particularly young people or others who are actually going to a concert or an event.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I am aware of what ticket scalping is and why it's bad.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, so in terms of the specific—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's why I'm asking how many have been investigated.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Okay, well, Fair Trading will always investigate any instances of ticket scalping—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But do you know how many—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —or any contravention of consumer laws.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: My question is—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I am happy to take that on notice in terms of the specific number.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you very much, Minister. Could I please also ask that you take on notice—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: The Fair Trading Commissioner will always answer that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, could I please ask the next question, since you've said you'll take this on notice?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's fine.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, of these investigations, how many have resulted in compliance action and what actions were taken?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Fair Trading will always take the appropriate action for those who have—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But will you take that on notice? It's a very specific question.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think what I'm saying is that—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many have resulted in compliance action?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think any instance of where people have broken consumer law will be properly investigated by Fair Trading.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, I'm aware of that. That's why I'm asking the question about how many have actually occurred.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Of course. As I said, in terms of the specific numbers—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you please take that on notice if you don't have the number?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —the Fair Trading Commissioner is happy to answer that. I'm happy to pass over to the Fair Trading Commissioner.

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'll ask in the afternoon. Thank you, Ms Mann. Minister, are you aware of proactive enforcement operations that Fair Trading take?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Of course. Fair Trading will always take action, proactive or reactive, to ensure that consumer laws are done.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What operations? Are there any planned?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In terms of operations, I am happy to ask the Fair Trading Commissioner to answer those questions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Again, I have asked you, Minister, and I am happy to ask Ms Mann in the afternoon. Thank you. Do you think that Fair Trading has sufficient resources to stamp out ticket scalping? Because the Premier has spoken at length about this issue. You're obviously responsible, so do you take the view that Fair Trading have sufficient resources to conduct these investigations?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Fair Trading in this budget allocation I think works on a budget of about \$525 million. That's obviously not net costs of its revenue. Certainly, in terms of the operations of what Fair Trading conducts and what it does, I am happy to defer to the Fair Trading Commissioner.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you don't have a view of whether Fair Trading has sufficient resources or not?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think Fair Trading do great work to ensure that—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But do you think they have sufficient resources to do that work?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Back in your decisions.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Resources and budget allocations are matters of deliberation, which the Government will always continue to consider.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you're not going to take responsibility for the budget of Fair Trading?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well, I have. I am taking responsibility for the budget of Fair Trading.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So you do think they have sufficient resources?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I don't think you should put words into my mouth, and that's not true.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's why I'm asking you questions.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: That's what I'm telling you, if you maybe let me finish. Like I said, all budget allocations will go through the normal budgeting process. Fair Trading do great work trying to protect consumers on a range of issues.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's not an answer to my question, but thank you for providing some further information about your lack of view on that question. The current prohibitions only apply when the ticket terms prohibit resale or restrict resale. Do you think this needs to be extended?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, the Government will also consider any proposals that improve consumer law.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, are you aware of this issue? Do you think it needs to be extended? When you've been given briefings, do you think—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Are you talking about ticket scalping in general? Is that what— are you talking about ticket scalping?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That's right. Surely you've got information about this matter and you have a view of whether it needs to be extended, in terms of—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Extended specifically in what?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The current prohibitions that apply when ticket terms prohibit resale or restrict resale.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, there are laws in place to prevent ticket scalping. As I said, in any regulatory environment you can't be static. So if there are ideas or proposals with which we can

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improve the work of Fair Trading, as I said, of course the Government will consider all of them. But I'm happy to ask the Fair Trading Commissioner.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It must be difficult to make decisions and form views as the Minister and also to take a view to Cabinet and the Premier when you're not actually sure of when these breaches are occurring or how many are being followed up.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, we are provided advice and briefed all the time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I can understand why you don't have a view if you don't have that information.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I do have a view. My view is that we should ensure that our regulatory framework continues to evolve to ensure that our consumer laws are up to date and protect consumers from being ripped off. Whether it's been scalping, underquoting or misinformation—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you, Minister.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —we're onto this.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could I please move to a question just to follow on from Ms Hurst's question. Are you aware that companies are moving to Victoria because of more generous schemes that are being provided by LaunchVic, the \$2 billion investment arm? Businesses are literally moving their operations interstate because they are worried that the New South Wales Government is no longer a stable and secure and reliable partner. Are you aware of that?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, when the former Government cut significant budgets from the innovations program, it makes it very difficult. So what we will do—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, these are decisions that businesses are making under the watch of your Government. You are in government now. Will you take responsibility for businesses who are moving interstate? It's a yes or no answer.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Or are you going to let it evolve?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I won't take responsibility for the cuts that were made by the former Government in the innovation and the budget grants, causing significant pain for industry, for businesses. It's really difficult.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Minister, nobody buys these talking points. I have already read out the budget papers. It's just unbelievable.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Your poor department.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, will you please make the commitment here and now that you will receive a brief on the report into Aboriginal deaths in custody that was first tabled in 1991 and there are still outstanding recommendations?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Well—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: No, Minister. Will you commit here and now?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Like I said, I am happy to receive any advice from the department on a range of issues, which affect—yes, sure.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So that's a yes, you will commit—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes. I commit to it in terms of getting advice.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I bet he has. He just doesn't remember.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm going to get advice. That's fine.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Just check your diary.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, even just google—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm sorry?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Just google the report and have a look at the hundreds—

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, Ms Higginson, I'm aware, as I said, of the report.

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, does Corrective Services right now have a statewide alcohol and drug strategy in line with other jurisdictions that you're aware of?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Strategy for inmates or for what—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes, like a drug and alcohol strategy that is a corrective services one, so inmates, everyone.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I am aware of that because when I visited Parklea I also visited some of the health centres around this and even in parts of Silverwater I visited there also the work of Justice Health. There are certainly issues around substance, and alcohol is part of the rehabilitation program that Corrections actually delivers.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So there is a strategy in place now?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I'm happy for the commissioner to answer—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You're not sure?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: As I said, I know we have a range of programs about rehabilitation—it's in behaviour and to any substance issues—to ensure that those inmates, while they're serving time, are rehabilitated so that we can actually reduce recidivism when they finish their sentence.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you aware that inmates that leave Corrective Services are suffering a high rate of homelessness? Is that something that you're aware of?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly as inmates leave our facilities there are a number of challenges they will face, and we want to make sure that as many programs as we have to support them as they transition into the community.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you have an exit scheme for making sure that people, when they leave a corrective institution, have somewhere to go?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In terms of specific programs, I'm happy to take that on notice. But it's a multi-portfolio, multifaceted area of social policy and we want to make sure that we support—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But remember, Minister, you have a duty of care from the minute somebody enters your facility to the minute they leave. Do you accept that an inmate leaving a correctional facility—that it is part of the standard within the duty of care that you owe that you are assured that they have somewhere safe to go and sleep the night that they've left? Do you think that's part of your duty?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it's all part of our duty to make sure that inmates, when they come out, get the level of appropriate support to transition into the community. The whole aim is to reduce recidivism out in the community. Whatever programs we have, post and pre, will always be considered by the Government.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, are you enjoying being Minister for Corrections?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it's great. It's an area, I think, that is undoubtedly complex. There are so many aspects of the social policy space. We have to try to get a better understanding of preventative measures we can do to reduce inmates in the first place, so there's a whole suite of policy areas which need to work together to make improvements. I think it's a great portfolio.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm not asking you to disclose anything that you can't, and I know you wouldn't, but can I ask—and I think it's okay and it's within the parameters—are you an advocate within Cabinet to reform and invest more in our corrections system at the moment?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: In general, I am an advocate, of course, for making any positive reforms that make a difference to all my portfolios. I really think the report of Mr McClellan will be instrumental to determine the next actions that the Government will take.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, just on that point, the terms of reference for Justice McClellan are not to look at the entire prison system and how we reform them. He's got terms of reference and, yes, there's one that can be broadened, should he see fit, but that's not what he's looking at. You're telling me that that's what you're relying on, are you?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: No, I'm not only relying on that but I think certainly the work of Justice McClellan will be so important in terms of what recommendation he might want to make, and that's a

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decision for him. In terms of advocating for any reforms in our corrections system, of course, I'd advocate because I know the social benefit and economic benefit that can deliver.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, are you cognisant of the international jurisdictions and other models of corrective services, like the Nordic models and all of those? Are you aware of those?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, I am aware of those different systems that are in place.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Minister, could you remind us when you were sworn in?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: He can't remember.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Just in April.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Can I ask you, how many meetings did you engage in or have between July and September 2023?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I did 69 meetings with our stakeholders.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: He knew that one.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Minister, can you tell me, in the same period for the previous year—that is, 2022—how many meetings would the former Minister, Bronwyn Taylor, have engaged in?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You must be so terrified of me. What a joke!

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think it's actually 22—only a fraction of the engagement that I have conducted.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm not sure how this is related to budget estimates.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: So it's 22.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Yes, she did 22.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You guys. When you fail, you get personal.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: So the previous line of questioning—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Point of order—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I'm asking valid questions.

The CHAIR: I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'm very happy for this to get ventilated, Chair, but the entire time when the Labor Party is under pressure they like to get personal against me.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Is this a statement or a point of order?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Excuse me. It is a point of order until the Chair decides that it's not. Now you are going against something and you're making it very personal, and that is outrageous and that is—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: To the point of order—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Excuse me. That is unparliamentary.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: There was a clear implication that the Minister was abrogating his responsibility for stakeholder engagement.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So cheap. You are so cheap. You are better than this, Mark.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I am asking the Minister a direct question about the proportion of meetings that he's engaged in compared to the previous Minister.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Point of order—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I don't see how that's irrelevant at all.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I wouldn't be going here with what a member of your party has been doing to me.

The CHAIR: Order!

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Chair, this line of questioning is completely irrelevant to the actual actions that—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Really? It was relevant enough for you to imply that the Minister wasn't engaging with his stakeholders, but you don't like it when we do the same thing. Glass jaw.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Careful. Be very careful.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The reality is, Chair, that this Minister's job is the subject of budget estimates, not anybody else's job. I ask the honourable member to desist in that line of questioning.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: To the point of order: May I simply say that one of the ways of assessing if someone is doing their job is by comparison. I think this is a valid comparison.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You're in government now. This is pathetic.

The CHAIR: The Government has their chance to ask questions; however, I encourage the Government not to take shots at the Opposition just to try to fire things up. If they have questions to clarify some of the answers, then they have the floor to do so.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Minister, given that the proportion of meetings which you engaged in in that same quartile as the previous Minister is a ratio of over three to one—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I must be so good at my job.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: —do you think you've had sufficient stakeholder engagement, relative to the previous Minister?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Certainly, all morning I have been—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I have never performed so atrociously in budget estimates as you.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —peppered with who I've met and who I haven't met. I have met 69 stakeholders in three months, which is more than three times the former Minister. If you want to talk about stakeholder engagement, I'm always willing to meet.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Pity you can't remember any of them.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I never held your portfolios.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think is so important—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You guys are pathetic.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That is pathetic.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —that we hear from stakeholders.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many ministries do you have?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: They are such bullies.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Pot calling the kettle black here. You make questions of me engaging with stakeholders when the facts are actually put before the Committee that I have engaged with three times the number of stakeholders than you, Ms Taylor, engaged with.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Let's compare what my stakeholders thought of me compared to what yours think of you.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Point of order—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Glass jaw.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: And now you're sensitive to what are factual—

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, sorry, there's been a point of order taken.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: This Committee has to engage in reasonable conduct that is fair and respectful. I put that, unfortunately, the Minister has strayed from that ruling.

The CHAIR: Minister, I encourage you in your answer to talk about who you have met with—your stakeholders—rather than comparisons with other members of the Committee.

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Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think that's right. I reject the assertion that Ms Munro said I have been disrespectful; that's not true. What I'm clearly articulating is that—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The Chair ruled on it.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —in the three months from July to September I have met with 69 stakeholders across all my portfolios to ensure I hear firsthand about the issues that are important to them—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just not with Fishburners and not with innovators.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: —and the policy reforms that they would like to see and engaging in this space to ensure I get a broad perspective on all my portfolios.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It hasn't helped you in any of your portfolio areas, evidently.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I think this is such an important part of doing good policy work and good legislative reform, when you meet with stakeholders and you hear what their thoughts are.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You haven't done anything.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It would be horrible if this is what the Cabinet table is like.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: This is why they send people to bully me. You won't intimidate me.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: You can't engage with industry and you can't hear their views if you actually haven't met with them. I think it's really important for me, in some of the policy reforms, that we're looking to embark and that we actually continue to do it, and I'll continue to do it.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Minister, can I ask a follow-up on that? For the benefit of the Committee, can you remind us how many portfolios you've got?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Too many.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: I've got five portfolios and SIRA.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And only 4½ staff.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: And I have to say what an exciting time it is to manage these portfolios.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You won't be there long, after your performance today.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Five and SIRA—by my count, that's six. I understand that the previous Minister had three portfolios and yet you attended three times the meetings.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Are you trying to say the portfolio of women is insignificant, Mark? Is that what you are saying?

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: My portfolios are varied. I think it's such an exciting time for me to be in this portfolio to understand the different policy areas that are appointed to each portfolio, the complexities that are involved, and meeting with a range of stakeholders and their views. I think it's just a great opportunity for me, and I'm delighted to have these portfolios.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Just focus on them, Minister, and answer your questions.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Thank you, Minister, for all your hard work. The figures speak for themselves. We really appreciate the answer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The answers speak for themselves.

The CHAIR: That concludes our time with the Minister. Thank you for your time this morning.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG: Thank you, Chair and committee members.

The CHAIR: We will now be breaking for lunch. We will be back at 2.00 p.m.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the afternoon session. I will throw straight away to the Opposition for questions.

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The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to having a really nice afternoon. Can I just direct my question to the secretaries, because there are multiple secretaries at the table, right?

EMMA HOGAN: Yes, three.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Three secretaries, yes. Has a Minister or ministerial office to whom you report ever requested specific public servants to fill DLO positions in their office? To be clear, I'm asking about any Minister the secretary is responsible for, not just the Minister relevant for this budget estimates session. Do we want to start with you, Secretary?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: No, not to my knowledge.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Same, no.

EMMA HOGAN: Not to my knowledge.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Not to your knowledge. Would you like to take it on notice, or are you 100 per cent sure?

EMMA HOGAN: I will double-check, but not to my knowledge.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I have asked—no.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I would be most surprised if—I, as a matter of course, would not have been advised, but should my negative response be subject to any reason to change it I'll advise the Committee.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Thank you. I really appreciate that. I want to go straight on to Corrections. Please can I ask, Secretary, was there a brief provided to the Minister's office on GEO, on de-privatisation? I am not sure what the correct word is, but was there a brief provided?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: There was—as there would always be—a series of incoming government briefs, and in that context there's a total profile on each prison and each facility, including the three private prisons.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I understand. My question to you was very specific: Was a brief requested and sent—so requested by the MO, requested by the Minister's office—on Junee and the de-privatisation of that?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Not to my knowledge, but I'm happy to confirm that.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So, you'll take that on notice?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: But, can I just supplement? So no, not to my knowledge but happy to take it on notice. Certainly, the rest of the process, there, of course, was a decision by Cabinet.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Secretary, did you provide any information—was any information requested of you as to the performance of the Junee prison?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Not that I recall.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Secretary, were you or the department aware of the intention to—I'm sorry, I don't know if de-privatise is the right word. Does anyone—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Nationalise?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Nationalise the prison? Thank you, Abigail—nationalise the prison before the announcement?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: If I may seek the commissioner's confirmation of our knowledge of this?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Yes.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Clearly, there was knowledge of the contractual arrangements and the fact that it was coming to the end, and that a decision would need to be made.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Commissioner, did you have anything to add?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes. This particular facility was up for market test and a decision had to be made by Cabinet as to how that would progress. All options were put forward in the paper to the Minister to take to Cabinet.

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The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Commissioner, those options then, I presume would have been about perhaps having a competitive tender process?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Correct.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: How many options were put forward?

KEVIN CORCORAN: There were two options.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Two options.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Go out to market or return to the public sector—or not "return" to the public sector, because it's never been in the public sector.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Did GEO ever request to not be considered to further operate this prison?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I never knew about that. If they did, they certainly didn't do it to me, and I meet with them very regularly.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Secretary?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: No, not to my knowledge.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'm not sure if this is for the secretary or the commissioner, but what is the operating budget of the Junee prison?

KEVIN CORCORAN: That figure for Junee is commercial-in-confidence.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: It has been mentioned in the media.

KEVIN CORCORAN: A figure was mentioned in the media and it's not the correct figure.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Can you take that on notice? I mean, the Government said it's going to cost \$75 million to nationalise the Junee prison, and the situation is that—what's been said is that actually that current operating budget is much less than that.

KEVIN CORCORAN: The current operating budget is based on 910, as opposed to the full capacity of Junee. So that larger—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Can you tell me what the current operating budget of Junee is?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Well, that's commercial-in-confidence.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Do you understand that—and commissioner, I am just asking the questions. If you don't want—like, please. I really respect what you do and I will behave very differently, so don't you worry about a thing. Commissioner, I understand that it's commercial-in-confidence, so I suppose what I'm trying to ask you then is, is there a difference between the cost of running the Junee facility in its current form compared to what it will be when it is nationalised.

KEVIN CORCORAN: We anticipate that it will be less under the public sector operation.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Right, to operate it. And is that because you will be having more people?

KEVIN CORCORAN: No. Operation will be the same; cost will be less.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: And you will be having less services?

KEVIN CORCORAN: No, no. We will be having the same services we have in every other public sector facility.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So, Commissioner, if you say that—now I'm going to have to say this to you. At the moment, as I said to the Minister, currently new reception inmates at Junee are seen within 24 hours by their doctor. In contrast, in the public system they're seen within 14 days.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Well, that's the maximum period that they can be seen. Most would be seen by Justice Health on the same day as they are received, as part of the process. But, there is a period that we've got that they have to be seen by. But that is really a question for Justice Health.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: That's a pretty poor outcome, I'd imagine, Commissioner. I also actually know what that contract is worth for GEO, and that contract is worth \$50 million. Yet the Government is saying

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it's going to cost \$75 million, which was mentioned in that article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. I don't understand—I'm not very good at maths—but I don't understand how that then makes sense.

KEVIN CORCORAN: I think that figure was for the operation of the facility if it was fully occupied. At the moment, there's only 910, and I haven't got the figure in front of me of what the full capacity is, but I think it's around about 1,400.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Because what really concerns me, Commissioner—and you would understand this, and I'm a regional person—is the cost and the fact that we are hearing one thing and yet it's another. I appreciate that you can't tell me any more, but I am aware of that figure and I will be continuing to prosecute this going forward.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Well, we will see. When we take over we will be able to make sure that figure is public, as opposed to commercial-in-confidence.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Do you feel confident that you have the amount of staff to be able to take over that centre?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: How many of those jobs will be staying locally?

KEVIN CORCORAN: The jobs in?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: In Junee.

KEVIN CORCORAN: We'll be going through a process over the next 17 months where we engage with staff. We're still to work out how we can transfer those staff into the public sector. But we plan to go down there as soon as possible, once we get that information, and have staff meetings with all the staff.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Is it your intention to keep all of those staff members living locally?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I can't say that. We still haven't identified the mechanism for transfer over to the public sector.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: This is really the wrong way about it, isn't it, when you're talking about people's jobs? You're talking about the really difficult jobs that they perform under very difficult circumstances. I take my hat off to anyone in correctional services. I really do, but I don't understand how you can say—this is a really serious issue for this community.

KEVIN CORCORAN: It certainly is. Obviously it couldn't be announced prior to the Cabinet decision being made. Once the Cabinet decision is made then we have to—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: When did you find out that this was happening?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Shortly after the Cabinet decision was made.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Shortly after. Can you give us an idea—was it a phone call? Is there a brief or did you wait for the Cabinet papers to come out?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I think I was told by Deputy Commissioner Taylor.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'm advised that the Public Service Association were advised of the Government decision before Corrections New South Wales. Would that be correct?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I'm not aware of that. The Public Service Association.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: The Public Service Association. They knew more than what you did.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: With all due respect, the Opposition is now making inferences to try and verbal the witness. The witness clearly stated that they weren't aware of the time lines of the various communications, so I ask that—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'm happy to move on. I accept. Commissioner, I want to ask you, and Secretary as well—I'm sorry to do it to both because I'm not sure who is the appropriate one—was GEO not meeting its KPIs?

KEVIN CORCORAN: No, GEO is doing a good job down at Junee.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: That's honestly what I've heard, and I've spoken to an ex-inmate who has rehabilitated amazingly well. So they were meeting their KPIs; they're doing a good job. They're good, social corporate citizens of the community, pouring millions of dollars into it.

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KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Why are we getting rid of them?

KEVIN CORCORAN: It's probably not a question for me.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Secretary? Have you seen this before? I understand if people aren't performing and KPIs are not being met, and if there are serious issues somewhere, then you would look at things and you would interrogate it and you'd wonder, but if you're doing a good job, you're having good outcomes—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: I think we're skating very close to asking the public officials their opinions on matters of policy.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: To the point of order: The Minister made it clear that this was a make-good-on-an-election promise and part of the Government's philosophy of public ownership over privatisation. I think it's unfair for the bureaucrats to try and make informed commentary on Government policy.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: To the point of order: I understand what the Government is doing, but I have a job to do in Opposition and that is to ask questions. These are very experienced public servants. If they choose not to answer that, that's really up to them.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Further to the point of order: In terms of procedural fairness resolution number 10, public officials will not be asked to give opinions on matters of policy.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I haven't asked an opinion.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: The point of order is validly made. We're getting close. The honourable member is going to just stay shy of asking for that opinion. I also think the witness is incredibly competent. So how about we carry on? Are you satisfied with that?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I will take another point of order if I'm not.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Please stay on the right side of the rules.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I try very hard to stay on the right side at all times. I'm sorry if I've strayed.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Particularly in the afternoon session.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'm so progressive, as you know, Abigail. I can hear you smirking there. Secretary, maybe I shall rephrase the question. I'm sure Mr Primrose will tell me if I'm not right—and he does know more about the rules than me, I hate to admit. Secretary, have you seen before in your experience a service provider performing a good job, meeting KPIs—doing all of those things—to not have their contract renewed?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: DCJ is a large department and there are movements with contractors over time. I think the most helpful thing I can reinforce to the Committee is that within the bounds of integrity and the law what we are charged with doing is administering the system within the policy positions determined by the Government and the decisions made by the Government. It's what we do, whether it's GEO or whether it's public sector.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Basically it's not based on—it's a political decision and then your job is to do what the politicians tell you to do. You guys should think about running some time, I think. That's me, on June. Thank you very much. Sorry if I placed you in a difficult position, but that's my job.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you, everybody, for being here. I think this goes to Professor Durrant-Whyte about how much money has been budgeted for the office of the chief scientist in 2022-23 and also 2023-24?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: In 2022-23, \$47 million; in 2023-24, \$55 million.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In Investment NSW—perhaps, Ms Knight—the same question.

KATIE KNIGHT: Investment NSW for 2023-24 has a budget of \$355 million in recurrent expenditure and \$24.9 in capex.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That was for 2023-24. And the figure for 2022-23?

KATIE KNIGHT: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just to clarify, Professor, the first number was for 2023-24 and the second number was for 2022-23?

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HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: No, the other way around.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Got it.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: Perhaps a little surprisingly, the budget has gone up.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Again for Ms Knight, on the Sydney Startup Hub, are you aware of the funding for this year and last year?

KATIE KNIGHT: Yes, I am.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you please—

KATIE KNIGHT: For 2022-23 the funding available was \$17.4 million, which included rental expenses. For 2023-24 the budget is \$11.8 million, which includes rental expenses.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Could you let the Committee know how many staff have been let go since the announcement of the 2023-24 budget in Investment NSW, and how many you're planning to let go?

KATIE KNIGHT: Sure. I will speak to that one. We are in the middle of a restructure. At this stage we are still in a process of reviewing applications and there will be no changes to staff until December this year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is that for Investment NSW and also for the department?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Maybe I can speak to that. There's two separate processes. Investment NSW has, as Katie said, been going through a process of consultation with staff on a new structure and placement into that structure. The broader department is not going through that same sort of review at the moment. We are, in other parts of the portfolio, looking at policy first and then over the course of next year we'll see how we resource that. But Investment NSW is in quite a separate process at the moment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Back to Investment NSW, what is the nature of the restructure? In terms of, say, looking at middle management positions. How is that restructure occurring?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I might start on that one, just because it does cut across the department as well. As a consequence of a few things—some of it was outcomes of the budget, but also the commitments to public sector senior service reductions—we have implemented a review of Investment NSW to make sure we've got the right structure to deliver on the Government's priorities as they now are. It wasn't with any sort of particular piece in mind. We looked completely at the whole structure and what our priorities now were to redesign it. We also made some other changes in that process. For example, the office of the chief scientist came out of Investment NSW and now reports directly to me, and there are other parts that we have also taken out of Investment NSW to make them central resources for the whole department. So some of it is about reducing resources, but others are actually about moving them around the department to set us up for the forward.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you think this will impact on the department's ability to deliver programs with the expertise that has been built up through the department and Investment NSW?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It shouldn't, because we have designed around the programs and the priorities we now have. Some of it, I hope, will actually better position us—as I said, pulling resources out that are of value to the whole department and putting them in a central position, and making sure the teams we have in Investment NSW are focused on the priorities we now have.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Which policy programs are you letting go since the budget?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Which policy programs? It's more that there are new policies being developed in the investment space. Next year there will be work done on an industry policy and the Innovation Blueprint, as I think the Minister talked about this morning. There's also a bit of a review of a trade strategy going on. In the meantime we are confident we've got the resources to deliver on the priorities we have and to do that policy work together with Cabinet colleagues, and then next year we will have another look to see if we're set up to deliver on those new policies.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good afternoon to all of you. I wanted to direct my questions to Mr Adam Dent. There's a particular case with a Ms Melocco—I understand there were two women involved in this, but a particular employee of SIRA, Mr Darren Parker, was alleged to have acted inappropriately in relation to sharing information to people he shouldn't have in relation to those two people. This is a long-running saga, of which I know you are aware. I understand the matter was referred for investigation to PwC?

ADAM DENT: Not quite. The matter was referred by me to the secretary as it involved a public service senior executive. The secretary has the employer role. The Department of Customer Service then led that process, and, in so doing, requested PwC to undertake part of that work.

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Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'll come to the more substantial bit, but I am interested—does PwC get appointed to do a lot of those investigations? Is that normal?

ADAM DENT: I don't know. I don't appoint those investigators on behalf of the department. I would suggest they would have a number of providers they might use.

EMMA HOGAN: On occasion we will appoint an external, independent investigator to matters. I don't have my notes on this specific case with me, but I wouldn't say that we appoint PwC regularly. They might have been appointed in this instance for a level of independence. That would have been in a line with a panel that we would have pre-organised of people that we can call upon to perform that kind of work, and it would have likely been done through our HR team.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: The findings of the investigation and the report have never been made public, and they haven't been provided to the two women who made the complaint. Will that be provided to them at some point?

ADAM DENT: It would be, I imagine, highly unusual that an HR complaint handled by the department would be made public. I certainly wouldn't think that was appropriate in any way, shape or form, particularly given the amount of personal information that would have been in that report.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes. It's not good when your personal information is shared without your consent, is it, Mr Dent?

ADAM DENT: Correct.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: In connection with this particular issue, has any action been taken against Mr Parker and his inappropriate disclosure of information?

ADAM DENT: The outcome of the investigation was a number of administrative actions within the department, some of which included improving some of our own policies around how we deal with people who make complaints to the organisation, and how we manage that through social media. So SIRA found opportunities to improve in that way. We now have new policies in place, and the appropriate administrative actions were taken in discussing the matter with Mr Parker.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: The issue and the actions taken by Mr Parker in this case led to significant re-traumatisation of these women. Has any action been taken against him?

ADAM DENT: I think it's fair to say not all that was alleged was fully substantiated in the investigation. I think that is the first thing I need to say. The administrative actions internally have been of a performance nature and, yes, they have been taken.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you regret any of the communications that you sent personally to these women?

ADAM DENT: I had a very small number of communications that I sent. The two people you're referring to were informants into the DCS investigation. I received a large volume of correspondence from them. I probably provided two or three responses throughout the course of that investigation.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: On 28 March you sent an email to both of these women saying that SIRA does not intend to respond to any further correspondence, and you would like to reiterate what was said in your previous email, "SIRA will no longer respond to future contacts"—so basically saying, "That's it. This is the end of your matter. We will not be responding any further." Why was that action taken?

ADAM DENT: Those individuals had continued to correspond with SIRA around a range of issues that had been finalised. Over the course of a number of years, SIRA, including my predecessor, had provided final correspondence and said those matters would not be further corresponded with unless there was new information. At that point in time, the correspondence I was receiving involved previously closed matters as well. The role that was being played at that point in time was to provide advice into an investigation as witnesses who provided a point of view. The outcome of that—as would be with, I imagine, almost any investigation into a personnel matter within an organisation—isn't necessarily going to be further disclosed. I was making sure it was quite clear that we would not be providing any further advice on the outcomes, and that we had received their information and it was now part of the investigation.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Did you dismiss these women as being known icare detractors and just basically problem people?

ADAM DENT: No, not at all. I have never used that language.

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Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Was it thought within your organisation that they were contacting you more than was warranted for their complaints?

ADAM DENT: Yes. Given that we had on a number of occasions advised them that the matters that they had raised historically had been closed from SIRA's point of view, and that there was nothing further that we could do for them, we had said that there was no capacity for us to continue corresponding. Those individuals did continue to correspond with us, so to that end we had, in our minds, completed the matters, and there was nothing of further value in relation to those historic issues we were able to provide them that would have satisfied them.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You don't think that they might have wanted to know why they weren't being told what had happened? If you had gone through what they've gone through—you've had your information disclosed without your consent and you've made complaints to an organisation, and then that organisation just says, "That's the end of it, thanks. We're not corresponding with you anymore"—can you understand why they might have wanted to continue to get updates from you?

ADAM DENT: Absolutely. What I would respectfully say, Ms Boyd, is that that was not necessarily the question I was continually receiving either. The decision we made to discontinue correspondence was around the fact that a number of historical issues continued to be raised that had been closed from SIRA's point of view. In relation to the outcome of the investigation, I can appreciate that they certainly would have liked to know what might have happened as a result of that, but I don't think it's appropriate that some of that information was shared. The allegations made were not all substantiated to the extent that they were first made. There were matters that were raised that were of value and that were investigated.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are you aware of a letter that was sent from Mr Richard Harding of icare to Ms Melocco on 8 September 2023?

ADAM DENT: I couldn't say for sure. I have in the process of this seen—because it was provided to me I believe at some point by one of the individuals we are discussing, it probably wasn't appropriate necessarily that that was shared with me, but I do remember seeing a letter but I couldn't tell you it was 8 September or be sure of its content.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It's an extraordinarily apologetic letter; it's probably the most apologetic letter I've ever seen from a government department to somebody who has been raising complaints. In this case, she's been raising complaints for over three years at this point. This letter says, "You were subject to poor decision-making, inappropriate conduct". Another quote: "I acknowledge the poor case management and complaint handling practices had a negative impact on your experience." It goes on: "These impacts may have affected your treatment, health outcomes and ability to return to work. For this I am truly sorry." And another paragraph: "I apologise that in our internal communications you've been referred to as a known icare detractor. This reference is deeply regrettable." This letter indicates that these women had had an absolutely bruising experience within icare and then subsequently with SIRA.

ADAM DENT: Ms Boyd, let there be no doubt—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you believe that the way that you handled their matter was appropriate?

ADAM DENT: First, may I go back. Let me say there is no doubt in my mind that the experience of the claim and the case was a very difficult and horrendous one at various points in time. Some of those matters raised that Mr Harding apologised for did mean that those two individuals had a horrible experience with the workers compensation scheme. There is no doubt about that. The claims handling was problematic at times. The manner in which—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It was exacerbated, though, by SIRA.

ADAM DENT: That is the allegation, absolutely.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes.

ADAM DENT: As a regulator it wasn't our role to necessarily deal with some of those individual matters and that's why I think—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But the matter involved a SIRA employee.

ADAM DENT: Again, this is where the historic matters and that particular individual issue conflated. I certainly agree that as the regulator we were not able to assist with a number of the issues that were being raised. It wasn't our role. In relation to the allegation made about the SIRA employee, that particular approach was unfortunate, absolutely, and we have dealt with that quite separately.

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Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Did you refer to your appearance at the Public Accountability and Works Committee hearing as—let me find the quote—"scuttlebutt"? It says "questioning directed to you at the PAWC hearing as scuttlebutt". Did you refer to it as "scuttlebutt" in a staff meeting?

ADAM DENT: I'm afraid that is not a word I would have used, no

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We'll come back to that, thank you.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: This may be a question for you, Commissioner Corcoran. Are you aware that in August this year inmates at Junee were enabled access to content from *The Daily Telegraph* on their tablets?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And is that the case for other correctional facilities?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, that was the case.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And is it your understanding that, as a result of that, there may have been an ability for inmates to look at other inmates' offences and now there has been a spate of violence and retribution?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, I am aware of that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And is that just isolated to Junee or is the case more spread?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I think it might have happened elsewhere. We took action to suspend a number of news websites until we can upgrade the security on those websites.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Which other correctional facilities are in your mind's eye?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I'd have to take that on notice, sorry.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you think it's all of them? More than half of them?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Everybody would have had access to that website. There are about 11,000 tablets, so information does get around about how to, I guess, come up with a mechanism to access the search function, which we weren't aware of when those websites went live.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What are we looking at? I've been informed that the violent attacks have included bashings and stabbings. Would that be accurate?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I'm not sure about the stabbings but certainly there has been violence perpetrated as a result of that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is it your understanding that there are a number of inmates across the State that are requesting that they be locked in their cells for their safety?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I would say they requested protection.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And what happens when somebody requests protection?

KEVIN CORCORAN: We would generally assess that request and place them in an area where other protection prisoners are placed. So they wouldn't be necessarily locked in their cells but it may be that they were locked in their cells for a period of time until we could transfer them to a facility that could accommodate them.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you think it's possible that some inmates may have been locked in their cells for 18 days?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I would find that difficult to understand why that would happen.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But it's possible?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Well, it could be possible, yeah.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If somebody is locked in their cell and they don't want to come out because they're frightened to come out, do they still get access to have clean clothes or wash their clothes, that sort of access?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Generally that would be the case. They would get food, medication, access to the clinic, change of clothes, change of bedding.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What are we doing? How are we managing this going forward given that there's clearly a very volatile situation that we've caused and that people are in serious fear and obviously high risk?

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KEVIN CORCORAN: We have a classification system, a case management system and an intelligence system. All of that information feeds into these systems so we can manage people at the appropriate locations with the appropriate classifications, and if they are protection inmates we would place them in areas where they would be safe.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What is your confidence at this point? Is it still an active situation that you are managing?

KEVIN CORCORAN: At this point in time, inmates don't have access to those websites so they can't do those searches that were occurring before. We will not activate those websites until we are 100 per cent certain that that sort of search function can't be activated in the future. There are three websites that we have had to turn off.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What are they?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I only know two offhand. One is BBC and one is *The Daily Telegraph*. Hold on, and the other one is the Australian Electoral Commission.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Perhaps that relates to the denial of being able to vote if you've got—

KEVIN CORCORAN: I imagine the Australian Electoral Commission would have been there so that they could register to vote, but if they can activate certain other parts of the website then they might be able to search for people or something of that nature.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That is one part of the redress, but what about the harm that has now been done? There are clearly people now with knowledge about other people that they wouldn't have had before that is now placing those people in serious risk of harm, and harm has already occurred.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes. It's really unfortunate that harm has occurred, but, as I said, we have very robust systems in place to look after people who are at risk.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I am being told that people are very frightened. They're frightened that somebody is going to end up dead as a result of this. What are your extra systems in place that would deal with this?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I guess the most critical one is the fact that we can place people who require protective custody into particular areas.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But what if somebody doesn't know that they're the target? How do we do this? Is something happening within the prison where people are talking about what has happened and—

KEVIN CORCORAN: As I said, we've got a whole range of mechanisms inside the prison, including our intelligence system, so if we find out about things we are able to action those things very quickly. If people are at risk and we can identify it, we will move very quickly to ensure their safety.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If somebody feels that they are unsafe or at high risk then they report to—

KEVIN CORCORAN: To our staff. There are multiple means of reporting to the staff: through welfare officers, SAPOs, custodial staff and psychologists.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you have any fear, particularly in relation to Junee—it may be further afield. Do you have any concerns that there may be a vigilante or thug mentality that's now grown and there's a degree of confidence in that, and that that's not currently under control by the current managers within Junee?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I've only recently been briefed on this so I haven't spoken to the general manager down there. But from my perspective, I am very confident—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: You should talk to the PSA.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Sorry?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Sorry.

KEVIN CORCORAN: I'm very confident that that is a person of great experience and knowledge in the correctional system and I'm very confident in his abilities.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Even though that person knows—are you confident that the transitional arrangements in the future management wouldn't be impacting on how any response is happening now? You've got systems to make sure that's the case?

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KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, we do have systems to make sure that's the case. We've got very experienced people who monitor these centres. As I said, I am very confident in the management of that centre and that the transition that will occur over the next 17 months will be managed really professionally and very effectively.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You're looking at ways of allowing inmates to have access to newsworthy information—

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: —but doing it through a safer way. Where did the error happen? Was it just something we didn't think of? I don't know, I certainly probably wouldn't think about it.

KEVIN CORCORAN: We have got the ABC News still there, so they can't do the same thing that they did with these other websites with the ABC. There is some sort of mechanism—it hasn't been fully explained to me—that they were able to utilise to get a keyboard up, which enabled them to do the searches.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Quickly going back to the staffing levels in the department, you said that none had been let go, but have any left since the budget?

KATIE KNIGHT: Yes, we've had some natural attrition.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have they been replaced?

KATIE KNIGHT: No. It depends on the role.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: If I could just maybe correct you, I don't think we said no-one had been let go. But we have started reducing staff a little bit, and in Ms Knight's patch we are still in the process of consulting and filling the structure.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many people have been left go?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: In terms of how many people have left the department since—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In Investment NSW, how many people have actually been let go and how many people have left with no intention of replacement?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: We might need to take that on notice because we are midway through a process that hasn't—it's changing.

KATIE KNIGHT: And from what date in particular?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: From the budget.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes, we can take that on notice.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That would be helpful. Also, could you perhaps take on notice how many you intend to essentially cut by December, please?

KATIE KNIGHT: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I wanted to ask about the Tech Central accommodation rebate. I was wondering why the department chose to progress some of the applications and not others after the announcement of the comprehensive expenditure review?

KATIE KNIGHT: At the date of the comprehensive expenditure review—at the date of the pause—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What was that date?

KATIE KNIGHT: We notified applicants in programs that were funded from the Future Economy Fund on 22 May—towards the end of May—that those programs were on pause. In relation to the Tech Central accommodation rebate, that was not a program that was funded from the Future Economy Fund, and that program closed on 16 June.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But there was some concern held by some of the applicants that there was essentially an unfairness in the process, that some people progressed through the application process when others didn't, even though both parties had abided by the rules. Are you aware of those concerns?

KATIE KNIGHT: I have been made aware of concerns from a couple of applicants, but I can confirm that we did not continue to assess applications after 22 May.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: At what date were you informed of the comprehensive expenditure review cuts, essentially, or pauses?

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ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I can probably answer that because it was communications via the secretary. Soon after the election, during probably April, secretaries were verbally informed that there would be a process of a comprehensive expenditure review. I certainly received written notification in early May or mid-May. In relation to our programs, as Ms Knight referred, in relation to the FEF it was clear that we were to pause applications. It didn't say the programs had been stopped; it just asked us to pause. In relation to other programs such as the one you've just been discussing, we had to consider it on a case-by-case basis. We then did the work over the next couple of weeks to work out how to proceed.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The case-by-case basis—how was that process determined?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: We were asked to consider each program and to look at where it was up to, in terms of application processes and funding available, and then make recommendations, discuss them with the Minister, settle it with the Treasury secretary and then proceed. We did go as fast as we could to get clarity on each program.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Right. So the Minister was the one who made the decisions about which programs to pause?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: We consulted with the Minister but, in the end, I think the approval process to go ahead was via the Treasurer.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: All these programs that were paused—could you please confirm that they were actually budgeted for in the 2022-23 budget?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: In the budget last year, yes, they were all included, but over the course of 2022 some of that funding had been reduced. There was a difference between what we had available as funding and what was in the budget papers last year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was it a \$700 million difference?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: If you give me one second, the original—the figure of \$700 million that you're referring to is—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It's a bit above \$700 million.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes, it was the original FEF figure. We received a couple of reductions to that during the course of 2022. I think the total reductions to FEF were—let me just see. To FEF we had received—it was originally announced at \$703.4 million. During 2022 it was reduced by \$263.1 million, and then in the pre-election budget commitment \$158.3 million was reduced and another \$15.1 million. Then, in non-FEF funding, there were other savings applied during 2022—in November, \$52.8 million, and in the pre-election budget commitment another \$127.3 million. I think all of those figures total up to somewhere near 650.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Those figures from the Future Economy Fund and then the figures that you just read out—they're all a part of the grants and subsidies line in the budget of the Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade. Is that right?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: That's correct.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: There's a significant jump in the investment revenue between 2022-23 and 2023-24. This is page 8-2 of *Budget Paper No. 02 – Agency Financial Statements*.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Sorry, page 82, was it?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Page 8-2. If you look at the revenue half—the bottom half—and then to investment revenue, the investment revenue between 2022-23 and 2023-24 is fairly significantly different. I'm wondering what accounts for that difference?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I'll take that on notice. If I can get you an answer this afternoon, I will.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you so much. That's very helpful. Ms Knight, you've said that the New South Wales Government's "support for the sector needs to be grounded in a strong evidence base" and that you look forward to working with the innovation sector, including our universities and industry, to deliver the Government's Innovation Blueprint. The Committee earlier already heard about numerous detailed reports that your staff have conducted, which are of excellent quality. They're really detailed and extremely helpful in understanding the landscape and the strategy and what needs to be done. I'm wondering, from your quote it sounds like the Government hadn't been working with the innovation sector or universities and industries prior to this new Government coming in. I wanted to clarify that you were, in fact, working with universities and industry under the former Government.

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KATIE KNIGHT: Yes, we work with the sector and with universities all the time in the innovation space, including those Innovation and Productivity Council reports that you mentioned.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In terms of the direction of those Innovation and Productivity Council reports, obviously they were done in conjunction with Investment NSW. Who determines the focus and priority areas for those reports?

KATIE KNIGHT: That's the council members. We meet quarterly. I'm the only government member of that council. The committee together determines the work plan for future reports.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Fabulous. Thank you. When will the Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade's annual report be published for this year, Ms Mildwater?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Very soon, I would expect. I have signed off on it.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Fabulous. Will there be a separate Investment NSW annual report this year?

KATIE KNIGHT: No. It's now part of the department.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I did want to ask about an update on the Carla Zampatti fund. It was obviously a big announcement last year, but I understand there hasn't really been much action on that. I wanted to understand how that was progressing.

KATIE KNIGHT: That program will not be proceeding. It was one of the programs that was not yet open and was in the planning stages. But we do provide a number of other programs for female founders in the sector. We provide the Female Founders Program and we provide the social impact accelerator, and we provide a number of other programs for women at the startup hub.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have any of those other programs been given more funding than under the last Government or are they receiving less funding now?

KATIE KNIGHT: The Female Founders Program will now provide access for 300 women instead of 150 women, as with the last cohort.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Will it be of the same value, though? In terms of the value that the 150 women were getting, will the 300 women be receiving exactly the same program?

KATIE KNIGHT: That's right, they will be. It's being run by Tech Ready Women, so it's the same program now rolled out for 300 instead of 150 women.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understood the \$10 million for the Carla Zampatti fund was actually offered by Carla Zampatti as an organisation, so it wasn't really costing the Government that \$10 million in terms of a fund. So why is that not proceeding?

KATIE KNIGHT: That's not my understanding. It was a government-sourced program.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay. So there was no financial investment from Carla Zampatti?

KATIE KNIGHT: Not so far as I'm aware.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay, that's interesting. That's not my understanding.

KATIE KNIGHT: We can confirm that, but my understanding is that—

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: That's not my understanding.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I referenced earlier that the amount spent on grants and subsidies alone last financial year is now the entire budget for the department. I want to understand what is being cut to accommodate that.

KATIE KNIGHT: There are a number of programs ongoing. They include MVP Ventures, which we've talked about today—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: At a significantly lower investment from the Government, though.

KATIE KNIGHT: —and the Boosting Business Innovation Program. There are some programs run by the office of the chief scientist—the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy and the Biosciences Fund. Of course, we continue to provide other programs at our hubs, including the HealthTech Hub, run by Cicada at Westmead, and a number of other programs at our various hubs.

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Are any of the grants—I think what I'll do is put a list of grants in supplementary questions to ask more specific details, if that's okay, given that there are quite a lot.

KATIE KNIGHT: Sure.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: My questions are to the Building Commissioner. With consultation on the housing targets, did the Premier consult you or seek your advice about whether you think the new housing target of 377,000 homes per year is achievable before the New South Wales Government agreed to this target at National Cabinet on 16 August?

DAVID CHANDLER: I was consulted on the industry's capacity and capability to deliver on that target, not necessarily the planning department side of could they get that many apartments through their system. So my consultations have really been around does the industry have the capacity and capability to deliver? My response to that is that I think we'll need to build capacity over the next five years, particularly at the entry level of multi-unit apartment buildings, because when you upscale and you bring more people in, we need to look at where they're likely to come from. As the Minister mentioned earlier today, they are likely to come from the class 1 detached housing sector, and what we've seen is that there's quite a significant capability in people coming from class 1 into class 2.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Can I clarify on that, Mr Chandler, that your advice was sought by the Premier?

DAVID CHANDLER: I've been in a number of conversations with our Minister where the Premier's office has sat in. I have had one or two brief conversations with Premier where he outlined the targets that he had in mind, and the advice that he was seeking from me was around the capability and capacity of the industry to deliver on those targets. I'm not really going to comment on the role that Planning can make in delivering the pipeline of consents that are needed. My focus, as the regulator, is to say can we see where industry's capability and capacity is coming from?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: To confirm, that was prior to the announcement of the targets from National Cabinet or was that subsequent?

DAVID CHANDLER: It wasn't really around that conversation. It was really just talking about what the role of the Building Commission might be in the budget process. Really my conversations have been more in the budget process rather than dealing with the conversations with the national targets.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Following on with that question, what do you see as being the capability gap?

DAVID CHANDLER: It's hard to say, but looking at the number of the smaller-scale development applications, I'm estimating that we probably need somewhere between 50 and 100 new enterprises each year to come in. Now, they're not big enterprises; they're small- to medium-sized enterprises. Again, that's a really positive news story because if we actually start to bring the next generation of constructors in, they're going to largely come out of the class 1 sector.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You must have been concerned then about the ASIC reports, that construction and building companies are collapsing in record numbers since 2015?

DAVID CHANDLER: I wonder at times whether ASIC go to work at all, because they don't do much about it. There are a number of serious insolvencies that, really, I haven't heard ASIC do anything about. I don't really want to get into that conversation, if we could. But let me stay with the fact that we have an emerging strategy now to build that capability, and it will be available for public view probably in the next few months.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Before the end of the year?

DAVID CHANDLER: It will probably be available in the first quarter of next year, because the most demanding task at the moment is getting set to stand up a Building Commission on 1 December. So we're pretty occupied on that at the moment, but I would say in the first quarter of next year. I can tell you that it's really going to revolve around how do we do things to enable people to come into the industry and how can we provide the skilling capabilities for them. Bear in mind that most of the people who are going to come from class 1 into class 2 have been in the industry for up to 20 years, so it's not a case of putting them back through TAFE, or any other form of education, because most of these people haven't done any progressive career education.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So do you think—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you think it's realistic, that 50 to 100 number?

DAVID CHANDLER: Which question would you like me to answer?

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: That one.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: That one.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: We all picked up on the same question. It sounds like a very large number, and, as I said, ASIC has reported these collapses. So is it a realistic goal?

DAVID CHANDLER: If I may just split your question into two parts. First of all, I do believe it's realistic. We are working with the industry associations to actually identify the numbers of potential what I would call migrants into class 2 and how we can actually upskill them. So we have a strategy, which I'm happy to talk about next year. In terms of understanding what we would call "create resilient construction enterprises", we did some research back in 2021 to actually understand the nature of all of the people that are in the pyramid of the industry—so from the apex players all the way down to the bottom. So we've got a pretty good line of sight to what those things are.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Is that public?

DAVID CHANDLER: Yes, it has been on our website for nearly two years.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Very good.

DAVID CHANDLER: If you have a look at the digital survey, we did a survey to look at the digital maturity of the designers and building practitioners, so I would point you to that. But in the early part of that, if you look at it, there's a table there that shows you the curve that many startup companies don't get through the first five to seven years of their journey. So we're actually having a look at what we can do to help them better prepare for that journey. But, most importantly, we have a view that we need about 100,000 new constructors to come into the industry by 2030, and attracting them is important. Now we think that we can do that as well, but the most important element of that is that we create a work space and a work journey for them that gets them both to come into the industry and stay in the industry. So we are doing some work on that as well.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I will just follow on that question, with regard to building the capacity over the five years. I hope I'm not straying onto opinion.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I'm sure he'll tell us.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With that target, do you think that you will be able to reach that within the five years?

DAVID CHANDLER: I can't really comment on whether we're going to see the pipeline of development consents coming through—that's a matter for Planning—but I feel pretty confident that the Building Commission can work with the industry to actually build that capability. I feel very confident that we can do that.

The CHAIR: I just wanted to start with some questions to Ms Trina Jones, the Rental Commissioner. I just wanted to know or get a bit more of an idea about your role, particularly in regard to the animals within rentals regime.

TRINA JONES: Thanks very much for your question. I was delighted to commence in the role as Rental Commissioner on 7 August. I work within Fair Trading to advise government on risks and opportunities to improve the quality and supply of rental homes, but I will also be involved in providing oversight of tenancy information and support, the portable bond scheme, bond management education services, dispute resolutions, investigations, prosecutions and compliance—basically the rental regulation within Fair Trading. I'm very focused on reducing harms and identifying opportunities for improvement relating to residential renting in New South Wales, and that includes making it easier for renters to have pets. Yes, so I'm very much focused on that reform right now.

The CHAIR: The Minister said that you had asked for an extension of the time around those reforms. What do you envisage the time line to be now?

TRINA JONES: Right now, I've been consulting after the forum and "Have your say" consultation, where we had 16,000 surveys and 400 long-form submissions. I took it upon myself to then dig deeper into those findings. As the Committee could appreciate, we got such a diverse range of feedback, we really had, on so many of the issues one view on one side of the room and the other view on the other. What I set about to do was to engage with technical experts; with renters; with landlords; with people like the RSPCA; specialist organisations like the Women's Housing Company, Homelessness NSW, the Tenants' Union, the Real Institute of New South Wales; people like the larger real estate and property managers and industry experts, as well as academics, thought leaders; and even institutional investors. My goal was to say, "Who's working in this industry? What do they think about these issues, and how will it impact their lives and their livelihoods?"

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What surprised me was what I thought would be the difficult one to really get across the line around no-grounds eviction and what that would look like, we actually are making really good progress there, but pets brought so much passion and interest of diverse views from people. What they were bringing was, really, their own cultural experiences, their personal experiences, and not necessarily looking at it from the perspective of the renter or the landlord. So much of it is actually about individuals' experiences, whether they like cats or dogs or what they think is suitable. That's why it's very important to me that we speak to the experts.

When we think about suitability of pets in rentals, it's not for an individual person to decide whether that breed of animal is suitable or not. We need to make sure that we have experts at the table. I am very encouraged by the RSPCA's willingness to work together in partnership. We want to promote rights and responsibilities for the welfare of animals and their humans, but also make it easier for people to have pets in their home. So I recommended that we take the time to get it right because I don't want to end up with a list of changes that could have loopholes that would prevent the intention.

The CHAIR: I had heard legislation was going to come this year. I assume with the extension—the Minister sort of said early next year. Do you think that early next year in that first quarter is possible, with the amount of consultation you are doing?

TRINA JONES: This is absolutely the number one priority: ending no-grounds eviction and making it easier for renters to have pets. What I am very focused on is putting together a package of reforms that can really make a stride in improving renting in New South Wales, and, as I've said, pets is at the top of the list. The meetings are ongoing, but I am confident that we're getting closer to a better outcome.

The CHAIR: You mentioned quite a few different organisations that you are including as part of that consultation. In regard to the animals in rental accommodation, are you also talking with Lucy's Project and Domestic Violence NSW, given there's that real link between domestic violence and animal abuse?

TRINA JONES: Absolutely. There is an enormous link between people who are at risk of experiencing domestic violence and also those who are experiencing domestic violence, and also people who are at risk and experiencing homelessness. I haven't met directly with DV NSW yet, but they are certainly on my long list of people to consult with. Now that Lucy's Place is on my radar, I will make sure to touch base with them.

The CHAIR: Wonderful—Lucy's Project.

TRINA JONES: Lucy's Project, yes.

The CHAIR: They work specifically in the space of animals and domestic violence, so they will be good to talk to as well. In regard to the consultation that Labor originally put out, there had been some suggestions around imposing conditions on renters. Have there been any decisions made around this or do you have any understanding of how the model is forming? I know there has been a lot of concern that New South Wales will lean quite similar to the Queensland model. Are we at too-early stages for that or do you have an idea around some of those conditions?

TRINA JONES: We're very interested in what's happening in other jurisdictions, and I've certainly been talking to my counterparts in Queensland and Victoria to see what are the pros and cons of their models. I think we need to get a version of our own model in New South Wales. Our settings are different. We do have very different processes for fair trading and the way that we regulate the rental market. I don't think either of those is going to be the right fit directly for New South Wales, so we are trying to learn from their experiences and, I guess, take a hybrid model for what will work here. But that shouldn't slow the process down. We've done that analysis, and we're progressing with the work further.

The CHAIR: With the no-grounds evictions, how far along are we with that? Are we going to see all the reforms at once in one piece of legislation? Where are we up to there?

TRINA JONES: No-grounds eviction is absolutely the heavyweight change that needs to happen right now to improve renting in New South Wales. We know that so many renters are living in anxiety because of this. For that reason, I am recommending that it goes together as a package, and that reform package would include ending no-grounds as well as making it easier for renters to have pets.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. I will move on now to animals in Corrections. I was speaking earlier today with the Minister about the animal programs that are currently in Corrective Services in New South Wales. I know that the Minister took on notice about whether people who have been convicted of animal cruelty would be involved, so I was wondering if you had any further information on that.

KEVIN CORCORAN: No further information, sorry.

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The CHAIR: That's all right. I was just wondering, in regards to some of the rehabilitation-style programs, what safeguards are actually put in place to ensure that the animals are kept safe as part of these programs?

KEVIN CORCORAN: We engage in these programs with external bodies. We have the program at St Heliers, where Racing NSW is involved and does quality assurance on the program. The same applies to the greyhounds that we rehabilitate in a number of centres. We also do work with the RSPCA out at Windsor and get dogs ready for rehoming. We are looking at expanding that program down to the South Coast as well. We are having discussions with RSPCA about that. We also have a program up in Bathurst, which is a defence dogs program where we train up dogs for veterans. Inmates train the dogs and we have people from the Defence Bank who assist us with it. They're the people who do a lot of the training and quality assurance there.

The CHAIR: In regards to the thoroughbred program and the greyhound program, the safety of the animals is left to Racing NSW. Is that correct?

KEVIN CORCORAN: That's my understanding, yes.

The CHAIR: In regards to the Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Program, the website states:

... the program will decrease the number of unwanted thoroughbreds disposed of in ways unacceptable to animal welfare groups.

Can you explain what's meant by that?

KEVIN CORCORAN: What we do with these horses is train them up for use as pets for people or sometimes they go to being police greys or something of that nature. Rather than being disposed of, as you say, they are trained up and rehomed. My understanding is that, when they arrive at the facility, they are pretty skittish. They are not used to being involved with people in a way that a normal horse as a pet would be.

The CHAIR: You might need to take this one on notice, but I was wondering if you had any statistics around the number of horses that have actually come through that program and also how many have been successfully rehomed through the program.

KEVIN CORCORAN: I'd have to take that one on notice.

The CHAIR: Ms Abigail Boyd?

EMMA HOGAN: Sorry, Ms Boyd, I'm not sure if you're about to call Mr Dent but he has asked if he could have a moment to correct the record on something that was said earlier. It's directly related to the line of questioning you had.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I was going to ask a different question and then go back to Mr Dent. Is that all right?

EMMA HOGAN: Yes, of course.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I think, Ms Hogan, I will direct this at you. I'm not sure who is the best person, so redirect if necessary. There's been a longstanding issue where New South Wales has refused to sign on to the minimum accessibility standards under the National Construction Code. I understand that the Government's position has not necessarily changed, but has there, from a department perspective, been any work done on ways to implement some sort of mandatory accessibility standards in line with the NCC?

EMMA HOGAN: I will throw to my colleagues. Whilst I don't want to speak for the Minister, I do believe this issue has been raised within and he's taking a look at it. But I'm not sure how far he's gotten into it.

DAVID CHANDLER: John Tansey is probably best to provide that.

EMMA HOGAN: JT, is that correct?

JOHN TANSEY: We have been doing some further work. At the Minister's request, we held a forum with various stakeholders in the middle of October. That was really directed at getting an updated view and perspectives from both those advocating for those changes and those raising some reservations about it. Part of the reason for that was conscious that the original decisions around including those standards in the code were made by Ministers in 2021, and a fair bit of water under the bridge since then. So that was an act of attempt to update our perspective so that, if Government wants to consider its view on this time, we've got more current intel to share with them.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I know the disability royal commission—I think it's recommendation 7.35—recommends that the minimum accessibility standards be adopted in every State and Territory. Is that something that has gone into the considerations so far or is that too recent?

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JOHN TANSEY: No, we were aware of the progress of the royal commission and aware that that recommendation has been made.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That's really useful. I will now go back to Mr Dent, please. You had a correction?

ADAM DENT: Yes, thank you, Ms Boyd. First of all, we checked the transcript in the gap there and, while I didn't use the word "scuttlebutt" to describe my appearance, it was used in the context of saying that once we got past the scuttlebutt of the session I was able to convey a range of important matters. It's an unusual word for me to use and regrettable in the circumstances. I certainly took that inquiry very seriously, as I hope you noted on the day, and I agree—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It doesn't sound like it, Mr Dent.

ADAM DENT: Ms Boyd, I really regret that because we have worked very hard to reduce our use of consultants as an organisation. The references to my previous employment were difficult conversations. In my attempt to convey the good work my staff were doing, I attempted to minimise the focus that was on me throughout the course of that hearing and focus on the good work that my organisation had done to reduce our spend on consulting.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Unfortunately, as a senior official, Mr Dent, you are subject to higher levels of scrutiny when it comes to accountability.

ADAM DENT: I accept that, and your questions were very relevant and appropriate, but that didn't make them, necessarily, not difficult.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I can appreciate that. But I understand that you made those comments to an all-office—

ADAM DENT: It was in our town hall, yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, so there's about 400 staff.

ADAM DENT: The focus was to update—I went on to talk about the work we had done to insource a range of our capability.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you accept, though, that you had conveyed a form of disrespect to the parliamentary processes in front of 400 staff by referring to the proceedings as "scuttlebutt"?

ADAM DENT: I didn't refer to—it was absolutely not my intention, Ms Boyd. To that end, I deeply regret that that occurred. It was not my intention.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand and I know that we asked some questions in the context of the consulting inquiry on this but they weren't really directly relevant—at least they didn't turn out to be directly relevant—to the consulting inquiry in relation to the amount of venue, hospitality and ICT costs for SIRA events. There's been a lot of talk about different events being held by SIRA. We talked about the higher innovation forum in the questions and answers for the consulting inquiry. There were also, I understand, two functions—one at Doltone House in Hyde Park and another one in at Doltone House in Darling Island—the innovation forum, which we have talked about, and then there was another function for around 250 members of Parliament House. There have been concerns that this is quite a lot of expenditure by SIRA on events. What has been the total spend on those venue, hospitality and ICT costs for SIRA events over the last two financial years?

ADAM DENT: I would need to take that question on notice, Ms Boyd. The events you refer to were all-staff meetings. We were able to, for the first time since COVID, get our staff together. The two Doltone House events were all-staff meetings, where we used them as a combination of a communication event and an education forum, if you will, for all of our people. We don't have access to spaces within government buildings big enough to do that, so those venues were chosen through a process of trying to work out which was big enough and which was affordable, relative to each other. But I will take the question on notice around the exact expenditure related to those events.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That would be really useful. Are you still holding monthly meetings with SIRA staff in Sydney and Gosford offices?

ADAM DENT: Those meetings are broadcast as live stream-type meetings. They can last for about an hour, and we tend to use them as a monthly update communication forum.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I asked you during the consulting inquiry about a number of errors in SIRA's annual reports. At the time this was news to you, and we also talked about the EY contract being understated by—I can't remember what the exact—

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ADAM DENT: I think you said 9,200 per cent.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, 9,200 per cent understatement of the contract value, which was I think a record nationwide. What have you done since then to ensure that those sorts of errors don't occur again?

ADAM DENT: We have worked with DCS procurement, who manage the contract register. So if I can take that, there are probably a couple of component parts, the first being about the declarations. We did go back and check that it was in fact a human error. It should never have been declared as 132,000—I think was the number that was used. We've worked with DCS now to ensure that that team also has uplifted their understanding of how to deal with the standing order arrangements, as opposed to individual contracts. I've had an assurance from the chief procurement officer that the team have looked into that and now understand that. First and foremost, I think those types of errors, in terms of our tender publishing, should be addressed.

Given the inquiry put a very sharp focus on some of the accounting issues that might have existed, we discovered and published—our annual report that will be tabled includes a statement whereby there was one number, I think it referred to \$180,000 or \$185,000, that was awarded to Ernst & Young. That was actually awarded to Taylor Fry under that contract, not Ernst & Young, so we've published a correction in the annual report. It's in the addendum, not the audited financial statements. I think that's really important to separate that from the Audit Office point of view those audited financial statements were accurate. The disclosure of which of the organisations had done that contracting work was an error, and that will be corrected in this year's annual report.

Internally, and I mentioned briefly in the Public Accountability and Works Committee hearing, but internally over the last year and a half we have actually implemented a far more detailed process of checking whenever any actuarial orders—again, given that's the bulk of our consulting spend, when those actuarial orders are made we have a catalogue from which they must be chosen so it's really clear that they're actuarial or not, and if that work is not in the catalogue it cannot be procured using our actuarial arrangement and would go through a normal procurement arrangement for a consulting or professional services agreement under the scheme. So that tightening up and checking of those orders has been in place, and as a consequence that also means we're checking how they're recorded in the finance system to make sure they're accurate so that we can, at the end of the year, report appropriately on what's consulting actuarial, what might be consulting otherwise and what's professional services. A good amount of focus has gone into making sure those procedures are in place, many of which were in place at the point we had the conversation but weren't in place perhaps at the point in time that annual report had been written.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: During the errors, yes. In the answers to questions on notice, I also asked you about the negotiations around that Taylor Fry and Ernst & Young contract. I know that you said because of your previous employment with EY that you had put yourself out of that process when deciding between those two organisations. One of the questions I asked you in the supplementary questions, though, was whether you had any direct instruction or any influence over the CFO's decision to exclude Taylor Fry from the negotiations when they came in at too high a price. You said no, but I just wanted to ask that question again to make sure that we are talking about having no influence at all over that decision.

ADAM DENT: I obviously went back to that matter and found there was an email from the CFO to me that had indicated that the contract negotiations had not been going well and requested my permission to terminate the negotiations. I authorised her decision to terminate; I didn't ask her to terminate. I maintain that I hadn't made a decision or had directed the CFO to do that or tried to influence her decision.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You understand, though, that the—sorry, apologies, just with this last one?

The CHAIR: Sorry, we've only got five minutes for the Opposition. We can come back to the crossbench for another five minutes, but I will go to the Opposition now.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: The Building Commissioner again, just on building capacity and capability—if we can go back to that. How many electricians will we need in New South Wales to meet the housing target that has been set by the Government, of 377,000?

DAVID CHANDLER: We will break that down when we come up with a plan in the new year. So I will take that on notice and make sure that I can specify a number. But we are certainly going to need many skills across a range of sectors, including management. Management's going to be a big piece of that. I just reference the fact that we have just finished probably one of the largest women in construction surveys, and we will be publishing that in December. But it does really create a very clear message to employers that if you want to attract women into this industry we are going to have to really lift our game and create a much better workplace. You will find that report of great interest. We had 1,800 women respond to that.

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The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: With the plan that you are putting forward, when did you say that was—

DAVID CHANDLER: In the first quarter of next year

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I had some other questions but I might wait until—

DAVID CHANDLER: Sure. But in the interim, please feel free to send me any questions, because it would be useful for me to be conscious of the sorts of questions that you might like answered. So please in the interim feel free to share those thoughts.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I have a question for Corrections. Corrections isn't just about the custodial setting; it's also about in the community. So I wondered how many—the number of offenders that are being supervised in the community?

KEVIN CORCORAN: It's around 35,000 at the moment.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It's about, I think, behaviour change and diversionary programs. Are you able to tell me how many are being supervised as a result of domestic and family violence offences?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I think we will have to take that one on notice, sorry.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: And one of the measures that we have for managing offenders in the community that have domestic and family violence offences is domestic violence electronic monitoring.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I know that there are assessments, so not everyone is eligible to be fitted with the anklet. So how many are there being supervised with DVEM?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Apologies, I will see if I've got—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Can I ask something while you're getting that information, because I know that DVEM is only one part of the solution. That's like the compliance side of things—are you complying with the conditions of your order. There should also be programs and intervention. So what kinds of programs are you doing to assist with behaviour change and what are the consequences if they don't participate or complete the program?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I might have to defer to Deputy Commissioner Taylor for the answer to that first question.

LEON TAYLOR: DVEM has been around since 2016, so we have a little bit of history with this program, and success, notwithstanding COVID in the middle. We have 226 DVEM participants at the moment. And BOCSAR recently evaluated that program and had some really good results out of that program. I am not sure if you saw their evaluation. But, over the 12 months, the people that were on domestic violence EM were more than 10 per cent less likely to commit a new offence, being participants in the program. Significantly for victims, they were more than 30 per cent less likely to commit a new DV offence because of the participation in that program.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Is that within 12 months of being fitted and then after they've—

LEON TAYLOR: Yes, it's depending on their order. Many of those people are on intensive corrections orders and they have different periods that they're subject to those orders. They are all offenders that are assessed at a medium-to-high risk of reoffending and they have a ADVO with a no contact restriction on it.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Mr Dent, you were saying in relation to the chief financial officer that she asked you for permission to terminate negotiations with Taylor Fry.

ADAM DENT: That's right.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And you gave your permission?

ADAM DENT: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You understand that then led to the only other party involved in those negotiations—being your former employer EY—getting a \$12 million contract.

ADAM DENT: Yes. As I possibly indicated to you, I was no more pleased about that than anybody. The intention was to try and have three actuaries on our panel and use them as a combination of peer review actuaries and primary actuaries across our three schemes. That was how I had hoped things would play out. But in the contract negotiation, it did result in EY being the only organisation appointed under that contract.

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Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So the questions that you were asked from the Public Accountability and Works Committee that you answered—your answer, when you said you didn't instruct the chief financial officer to cease further negotiations with Taylor Fry, and you've said no.

ADAM DENT: That's correct. I didn't instruct the—she thought—the CFO had made that conclusion, in conjunction with the DCS chief procurement officer, that the—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So you were waiting for me to come and ask you, "Okay, you didn't instruct, but did she ask you for permission and you've said yes"—this is not really a fulsome answer, is it, Mr Dent?

ADAM DENT: Well, the question was "Did I instruct her?" and the answer is no.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: No, but you knew what was being asked.

ADAM DENT: That we can cease contract negotiations?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So did you instruct her to cease further negotiations—"No, but she did ask me for permission and I gave it."

ADAM DENT: Yes. That's right.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Right, but you didn't say that last bit.

ADAM DENT: That wasn't the question—I'm sorry. You're asking the question now, so let me be clear. I did not instruct the CFO. The CFO was working with the chief procurement officer of DCS on that contract negotiation. They formed the view that they could no longer continue the negotiation with Taylor Fry. And then, as the delegation holder, I was asked is it okay if we cease negotiations? The outcome of that, of course, was that there was now—and I think my email in return said something to the effect of it was a disappointing or regrettable outcome.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Was there a management process for your conflict of interest? Was there some sort of document drawn up?

ADAM DENT: No, there wasn't a formal document. Quite honestly, at the time it hadn't been considered a conflict of interest. I worked for EY for one year in 2016.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But when the decision was made for you not to lead those negotiations, you were at pains to point out that you had not been involved in those negotiations.

ADAM DENT: Correct, and—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Was that for conflict-of-interest purposes?

ADAM DENT: I'm not involved in any of our procurement negotiations generally. As the delegation holder, I authorise procurement to be undertaken and provide the budget authorisation to the relevant officer. I particularly wouldn't have wanted to be involved in that one, but I'm not involved in any of our procurement contracting processes, outside of being the authorised delegate that signs off on the financial expenditure.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Ms Hogan, was that you leading those negotiations?

EMMA HOGAN: No. It would have been—what I was going to say is that we have a chief procurement officer who would have provided support and independent advice as to that particular process. So it's not—it is part of our processes, whenever we are doing procurement of that nature, to have procurement involved to ensure that independent policy advice is provided, or that independent assessment is undertaken.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Would it have been usual for that person to have been consulted, and were they consulted in relation to ceasing negotiations with Taylor Fry?

ADAM DENT: My understanding is it was through the CFO working with the chief procurement officer that they reached that conclusion. The procurement was over \$1 million so concurrence had to be achieved through the department. SIRA is only able to procure up to—I think it's \$680,000 on our own. So, yes, they would have been involved.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So from an outsider's perspective, if you were looking in, you've got somebody who—I know you're at pains to say that you only worked there for a year. But it was as a, basically, government lobbyist within EY.

ADAM DENT: No, I totally reject that characterisation, Ms Boyd.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What was your position?

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ADAM DENT: I was a director of people advisory services, and the title we used was "government and public sector advisory". I was a consultant not a—I cannot allow that—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sure, okay. But in the government sector. That's fine—consultant in the government sector. You are in a position as the chief executive officer at SIRA. A \$12 million contract is signed as a result of a permission that you gave to stop negotiations with another entity.

ADAM DENT: Again—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just let me finish. Let's build the picture. We then have the amount of that contract disclosed on eTender at 9,200 per cent under what it should be. It comes up as a couple of hundred thousand as opposed to the \$12 million. What does it that look like to the average person on the street, do you think?

ADAM DENT: I think I said to you on the day, Ms Boyd, I completely understand why you would have raised that concern and were right to. On that particular day, I learned that it had been inappropriately disclosed at \$132,000, and I said I had questions about that too. I can see the picture you're trying to paint, and I don't disagree it's a picture that could be painted. What I'm trying to say to you is it's just not what actually occurred, and that is the fact. The fact is it was disclosed by human error by our department—not SIRA, by the department. That's now been corrected. The point I wanted to make is it's not a \$12 million contract per se. There is a \$12 million committed spend. It's a standing offer whereby we can offer any or no work as a result of that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You've got no-one else to offer it to.

ADAM DENT: We can go to market to use other actuaries if we choose to and—for example, Taylor Fry have conducted work for us, Deloitte is conducting work for us and we're about to go to market for a peer review actuary as well that is not EY. So we can use other actuaries, in fact—and do. The primary contract was only able to be awarded to EY.

The CHAIR: We will now have a short break.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. I will throw straight to the Opposition for further questioning.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: My questions will be again for the secretary and possibly the commissioner. I am just interested in, say—I'm going to talk about Junee again, sorry, just to be consistent—the quality support services that might go with the nationalisation. I take, for example, food services. Those will, I imagine, all go from the local community because you'll centralise that?

KEVIN CORCORAN: It's interesting you ask, because that's exactly the sort of thing that we need to speak to the Minister about during this period of 17 months because, as you say, it is a substantial proportion of money that is going to the community there.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Yes. I suppose that is what I'm finding really hard to get my head around, because we're saying that we are going to keep the jobs and the intent is there. I 100 per cent believe your intent; I don't necessarily believe the Minister's. We look at support services like HR, compliance, vocational services, food services—and that is not only the people providing the food, that's the shopping at the local supermarket. I don't know a lot about corrections, but I know within Health, when we centralised all the food, that meant those local jobs and local services—

MICHAEL TIDBALL: If I can just—then I will defer to Commissioner Corcoran. In terms of broad principle, I think it is the case that—so there are 36 prisons distributed across the State. It would be the case that there are some services that are centrally provided by the department effectively from the city, but it is also the case that a number of those regionally based facilities would procure locally and contribute to the local economy. I think it goes to the question of—

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So it hasn't been decided yet is what we're saying?

KEVIN CORCORAN: What actually happens is all those services, buy-ups and food, are centrally provided to all facilities apart from the private sector facilities. They may wish to engage us in buy-ups and things of that nature. But this is something I think over the next 17 months we are going to have to have a close look at—what happens in Junee when we go over to the public sector.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: It's pretty important, I'd imagine. I know what happened in Cooma when the jail was shut. I am also further advised—this is my second question—that the likely unlock hours for

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the inmates will reduce from an average of eight hours to between two to four hours per day because that is what's consistent with the New South Wales Corrections model.

KEVIN CORCORAN: No, that wouldn't be the case. What we were looking at was providing exactly the same operation at Junee as occurs now in terms of hours out of cell.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So your unlock hours would be what? What's the standard?

KEVIN CORCORAN: If you look at our standard in maximum security, we are just shy of eight hours around the State—higher in minimum security. Some maximum security facilities are up very high, but it depends on the staffing levels and so forth. What we would be doing is replicating what is going on at Junee at the moment.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Commissioner, when this happens over the next 17 months, and it's taken over, then we should absolutely see that the average of eight hours for unlock hours for inmates will continue at Junee? That's the question I'm asking.

KEVIN CORCORAN: That might come down a little bit because the private sector have a capability of having different shifts than the public sector. But, in general, we would be very close to that eight hours.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I am sorry to press you on this, Commissioner, and I really do understand the position this that you are in, but I need to ask the question. Can you guarantee that those unlock hours will remain the same after it is nationalised?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I can't guarantee 100 per cent that they will, but we will get as close as possible to that figure, given our shift configurations that we've got.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Secretary, this might be more appropriate for you, but I think serious concerns have been raised—that's not meant to be an opinion; that is meant to be a statement of fact. When we are asking these questions about staffing, about food services, about HR, about vocational services and then about hours of being locked up as opposed to not, how will Corrective Services NSW guarantee that these prisoners, the community of Junee and everyone are going to be better off? Because I can't see any evidence of that.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Can I answer it this way? The accountability to the oversight bodies, who are the Inspector of Custodial Services and the Ombudsman, as well as the benchmarking and the data and a series of measures from across the system—those things are monitored and they are comparatively monitored, and that will be the case with Junee, to ensure that, in terms of standards and care, all of the evidence points to the prison working as it should be.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: But, Secretary, your job, as you said, will be to implement the government of the day's decision. So you have a job to do and you have a directive to take, but this is going to be a very difficult thing to guarantee, and this is going to be very difficult on a community. Can you guarantee that, under the State system, there will be the same level of investment in things like building and funding a new dog park and other social investment infrastructure that this company, which has been, for all intents and purposes, a very good global citizen and a very good citizen in Junee—will those things continue, under this nationalisation, for this community?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: It would be irresponsible for me to make any guarantees, and I refer to my previous answer.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: All right, Mr Secretary. I guess what I am really struggling with is—and I really do genuinely appreciate the position you are in, and I don't mean at all to be difficult—it's just very difficult to see why we are trying to fix something that clearly isn't broken.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Perhaps this question is for Ms Mildwater. What work had been undertaken by the Modern Manufacturing Commissioner over the last 12 months or so?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: The Modern Manufacturing Commissioner started in around September last year, 2022.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Since then, what she had been doing is getting out, consulting with manufacturing industries and starting the early work on our modern manufacturing strategy. Her appointment was one of the actions taken to follow on from the Modern Manufacturing Taskforce work last year.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Has that strategy work been published anywhere?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: No, the strategy work hasn't been completed. She has done early work on it, and it will now feed into our broader industry policy, in the middle of next year.

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Will her work be captured in that strategy?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When you say she was consulting, what did that look like?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: She actually went out and met with a lot of modern manufacturers around the State. She got them better connected, set up some networks for them. Some of that work will continue now but is handed off to other organisations. So that's a lot of the work that she did, as well as just gathering information about modern manufacturing around the State and working with colleagues in other parts of government on particular pieces of procurement, such as in Transport which is now being carried forward by Transport.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Those stakeholders that she was engaging with, will they have a single point of contact now? How does that work?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: The manufacturing focus of our work now is slightly different. Obviously Minister Houssos has now been appointed with a focus on government procurement and domestic manufacturing, and we will support her in that, but she has other parts of government supporting her as well. We're also in the restructure of Investment NSW that Ms Knight was talking about. We have a team focused on industry support, and that will include people who focus on manufacturers across the State.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Have those stakeholders been informed that the Modern Manufacturing Commissioner is no longer acting in her role and there will be no role and they've been given someone that they can get in touch with?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I believe Ms Emerson has been in contact with those stakeholders, yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So she was responsible for telling everybody that there is no more position?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: She wanted to lead her own stakeholder communications, and so she did that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: She sounds like a fabulous commissioner.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: We did some other comms but she wanted to be the one to let stakeholders know.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: That's very good of her.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: That is very good. Very professional. Will the work that she did be credited in the strategy?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: How do you mean?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: As in, all the work that she has done over the last 12 months that goes into that wider strategy. Will her work be specifically credited to her?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: We work in teams. We don't actually have individual people write reports unless it's an independent report. Her work was done alongside other people so we will definitely use that work, but how it appears in the final stage is a few months away.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But will she be acknowledged, for example, in a report by name?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It depends on what the form of the final report is.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you for that information. Moving to, I guess, similar matters. You obviously referred to Minister Houssos there. She, in her budget estimates, was saying that some of the questions that the Opposition was asking would be better directed to Minister Chanthivong. I just wanted to understand why that is. What is the separation of responsibility there?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Between the two Ministers?

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I can certainly explain it as it has been communicated to us. Minister Houssos is focusing on the Government's procurement activity mostly, and so how to stimulate domestic manufacturing with a government procurement focus. That does mean she'll also be looking at how that procurement in particular can be used to create jobs and stimulate industry, whereas Minister Chanthivong comes at it from the policy end, so leading industry policy, identifying target sectors under that and what we might do

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and then any industry interventions that are needed following on from that. So any programming, that would be led by Investment NSW and by Minister Chanthivong.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So essentially Minister Chanthivong would kind of be directing Minister Houssos?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: No, they're focusing on different aspects of manufacturing. Minister Houssos is driving on the procurement lever and Minister Chanthivong is leading from the policy end and programming.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I understand. How are you working with Treasury to develop those plans or undertake this work?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Everything we do, we work with colleagues across government. In particular on the policy work, we work with the Cabinet Office, who now lead policy, but Treasury is a key stakeholder.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So it's more with Cabinet than Treasury to develop this?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: We always work with Treasury, but if it's a policy piece of work then it's the Cabinet Office who are now sort of the lead partner agency.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Was that always the case?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It's been the case since Department of Premier and Cabinet moved into the Cabinet Office and Premier's Department a few months ago.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But prior to that the work was with DPC? Or was it more with Treasury?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Treasury have always been involved and still will be, and on the procurement piece, for example, they will be a lead in that. I think it has been in the reshaping of the Cabinet Office and the Premier's Department that the focus on policy out of the Cabinet Office has—

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Has been more centralised.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Who are those relevant senior officials in your department that are dealing with the industry policy? Perhaps just their job titles.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: We are still in the process of obviously rejigging both Investment NSW and a central policy team, but Ms Knight can—

KATIE KNIGHT: It will be the Executive Director of Industry and Investment.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But that position hasn't been formally created yet?

KATIE KNIGHT: It has been created. It has been filled.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay.

KATIE KNIGHT: We don't normally announce it.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: We're sort of mid-appointment process, if I can say that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I appreciate the discretion. In terms of investigating the ways of implementing the Government's policy commitment to redefine value for money to better capture wider economic benefits, job creation and industry development, what work has the department done to align with that election commitment?

KATIE KNIGHT: I'd say that's probably—I know Treasury is looking at the procurement guidelines and the value for money framework forms part of those guidelines, so that's probably a question really for Treasury.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I suppose that probably the same is true of putting into law mandatory requirements about tender weightings for local content?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Yes.

KATIE KNIGHT: That's correct.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: If I could ask the Building Commissioner again, you have a budget, I think, of \$27 million to establish the commission. How is that going to be spent?

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DAVID CHANDLER: About \$23.8 million, actually.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Okay.

DAVID CHANDLER: It's not \$27 million. There is a list of published items, and I can just refer to those by breakdown with you. That is going to fund additional people. It's going to fund the building of additional capability in digital and it's going to support the next phase of Project Intervene. You need to see all that in the context of the fact that there's about 410 people coming from Fair Trading into the building commission, so they're bringing their funding with them. The building commission will have about 450 people in it from 1 December onwards, so there's additional funding to stand up some additional capability, but the lift and shift will basically be about 410 people coming out of Fair Trading, bringing their budget with them.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: It won't be a temporary allocation, it'll be—

DAVID CHANDLER: The first, or the \$24 million, is what's called the down payment on setting up the building commission. I think that's a viable amount because we'll have between December and June next year to put those measures in place. The next phase of that will be the 2024-25 budget, so we'll start our preparatory work on that. But I think the big task we've now got is to absorb 410 people—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes. It's a lot of people.

DAVID CHANDLER: —work out we're going to better utilise those people, actually go through line by line and have a look at the expenditure that comes with them. This will be an opportunity to do a roots and branches review of (a) what people are doing and (b) what's being spent.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you expect those 410 people would be existing staff that are seconded or are some from Fair Trading or newly recruited? How long will they be employed for? What is their tenure?

DAVID CHANDLER: These are permanent public servants, so 410 will be moved across to the building commission. Of course at any one time there are vacancies, so I think they're sitting in the order of about 40. We'll progressively backfill those, but it will be just a case of taking existing public service Fair Trading inspectors and staff related to building and moving them from Fair Trading into a building commission.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: So absorbing, not additional?

DAVID CHANDLER: Sorry?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Absorbing them, not additional; they're existing FTE that you're absorbing?

DAVID CHANDLER: Correct.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So temporary.

DAVID CHANDLER: It's my view that when they're in the building commission we'll probably restructure our strategic priorities. I want to make sure that we can extract the best outcomes from those resources before we go back knocking on the door for more money. I think we really have a duty to say, "Are we deploying? Can we get better outcomes?" I wouldn't be saying that we need more people at this particular juncture.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Restructuring strategic priorities, that means you're going to—and sorry for my basic language—absorb all these positions into this next silo, so same number of positions, same amount of FTE. Then you're going to restructure and reorganise, so you might be getting rid of some of those people—

DAVID CHANDLER: No, I don't see that.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: —or you might be restructuring or changing their job description, so if they don't like what they're doing then they'd go, but you'd replace that? Sorry, it's a bit confusing.

DAVID CHANDLER: The position descriptions already exist. People are being matched in Fair Trading to all the positions. Most of them will carry their existing position descriptions with them. But there is an opportunity for us now to use the legislation that we've been benefited with over the last two or three years to actually become far more front-end focused with where we apply our resources, rather than back end. Really, the RAB Act, the Design and Building Practitioners Act and the building and developer certifiers legislation—all of things have occurred in the last two years. What we've got an opportunity to do is to take an organisation that's really been doing business as usual prior to that legislation and saying, "We now have these new powers and these new capabilities, so let's just align ourselves with those." I'm quite certain the outcomes are going to be quite different.

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The CHAIR: I've just got some further questions about animals in Corrections. We were talking before about the Greyhounds As Pets program. I want to know how that works in practice. Where do the greyhounds actually live? Do they live onsite or are they brought in?

KEVIN CORCORAN: They do live onsite. There are kennels on the site at Dillwynia. I'm not 100 per cent sure if they're still at Hunter. There was an incident there involving a greyhound biting someone.

The CHAIR: What happened in that incident?

KEVIN CORCORAN: A dog bit someone. I'm not sure about that program, whether we are still running it there or whether we just put it on hold for a little while. But there are certainly kennels inside both those facilities.

The CHAIR: Would you be able to find out for me what's happened with that program?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Sure.

The CHAIR: I know you said that the safety of everyone is under Racing NSW in these programs. Did Racing NSW have any kind of report or follow up from that incident?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, we'll take that one on notice too.

The CHAIR: If there is a report, could we have that tabled to the Committee? I've got the same question around the Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Program and how that works in practical terms.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes. We can take that one on notice as well.

The CHAIR: Are the horses onsite and kept there?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Sorry, the horses are onsite, yes. It's a large farm and the horses have got their paddocks that they run around in.

The CHAIR: Are the inmates full-time caring for those horses and greyhounds?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, and we have officers that are there full-time. They are the ones that interact with Racing NSW personnel.

The CHAIR: Are they in charge of caring for those animals when Racing NSW are not at the facility?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Correct.

The CHAIR: In regard to research, earlier this year Corrective Services NSW called for expressions of interest regarding a prisoner accessible digital platform that's being established in New South Wales correctional centres with the ambition of transforming prisoner rehabilitation. Can you tell us a bit more about this work and what is hoped to be achieved through it?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I guess you're referring to the tablets that we have in the correctional centres?

The CHAIR: It was just called the accessible digital platform. I assume obviously it would have to do with the tablets, but I'm not sure if it was broader than that.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Do you know anything about that?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: No, I don't know that term.

KEVIN CORCORAN: I'm not familiar with the term, sorry.

The CHAIR: It was something that came out through Corrective Services NSW. There was an expression of interest that closed in June 2023. Maybe take that one on notice?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, we'll have to take that one on notice. Sorry about that.

The CHAIR: That's alright. My question is can you let me know a little bit more about the work and what it is hoped it achieves? Also, has any further work been progressing on that project or any funding been distributed for the work?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Okay, we'll take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. I'll turn to Ms Sue Higginson.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Commissioner Corcoran, what happens at the Special Programs Centre at the Long Bay Correctional Complex?

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KEVIN CORCORAN: That's a particular facility where we house people who are under witness protection generally, so they're not identified by their names in that facility.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: How many people are held there at the moment or approximately this period of time?

KEVIN CORCORAN: It has a capacity of 60 and, at the moment—as of 1 October—there were 37 people in there.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: In relation to access to programs within the Corrections facilities, there is a lot of advocacy around having access within cells to psychological programs, assisting programs. I know that Corrections offer programs and often those programs are delivered in groups and with Corrective Services staff. Has Corrections looked at the program MindSpot? Is that one that you are familiar with and that you've assessed?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I'm not familiar with it. But what would be good is if we could get Deputy Commissioner Martin up here, who is certainly an expert in this field.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes, thank you very much. Your time has come.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Yay, I get a question.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It's such an important topic and, yes, we'd really appreciate it. Are you familiar with the program MindSpot?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: I'm familiar with MindSpot, yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is that something that you've assessed as to whether it would be appropriate or is there a comparative system or service?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: We've been looking at a range of different external agencies. MindSpot's one of them that we've been looking at in terms of how they could be made available to people in cell, and definitely we also need to look at what additional supports might be in place for such a service being made available into the future. Information from groups like MindSpot is available but we're not having a service through tablets at this point in time. It's something for the future that we'll consider.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: How far into the future and what is the criteria that we're working on to assess when or if that will be available?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: Some of the things that we consider with all the services and education on the tablet devices are security related in terms of access for a service to be beamed into a cell. We also need to look at should any conversations which occur with the professionals in a cell cause trauma, distress, anxiety. What are the wraparound support services available at that location to be able to assist the person? Because that might be available at any time of day or night, we need to look at that too to ensure that other risks aren't inadvertently raised that can't be responded to.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So is MindSpot something you are considering?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: MindSpot and similar agencies are things that we are considering.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I know that there are organisations that have done really, really comprehensive and good audits of these using expertise. MindSpot has what might be referred to as passive resources—they're locked in and there aren't any dangers in terms of external access. When you say "into the future", what sort of timing are you looking at to assess whether something like that could be used and rolled out to tablets to individuals?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: I can't give you a specific time at this stage. I can say that, in terms of the passive responses or interactions that you've referred to, during COVID we did have information like that made available in cells through the tablets. That includes different physical exercises, relaxation, meditation—generally coping with anxiety from an educational point of view. But I'm not aware of a specific time line around bringing those in right now.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If we had them during COVID, why can't we have them now, those more passive ones?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: I'm talking about not through the internet or beaming in a professional service. What I'm talking about is those education materials. They're still there on their tablets. What I'm talking about is the internet access—beaming in professional service delivery.

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So at the moment there's no direction on you, as Corrections, to say, "Hey, by this date we should be looking at having this to deliver to inmates?" Is there any framework like that at the moment?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: There's a whole wealth of information available on the tablets and the scope of future services sits under Deputy Commissioner Luke Grant, who's not here today. I'm not personally aware of particular time lines, but we can take that on notice.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That would be great. No disrespect, obviously, to anybody in this room, but I know I was asking similar questions at budgets last year. I know the person who was in my role before me was asking them the year before and the year before. I'm just wondering whether the future is beyond my lifetime when we will have these things. I'm sure it's not. I'm not sure who this is most relevant to, but I asked the Minister earlier about whether there is a statewide alcohol and drug strategy for Corrective Services. There was a report, apparently compiled by an Alison Ritter and Liz Barrett, that was a stocktake of all of those services offered by Corrections and Justice Health and where there could be improvements. I'm wondering, is that something you're aware of? Is anybody here aware of the work that was done or where it was up to?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I'm not aware of it, but Anne-Marie can give a rundown on all the programs and initiatives that we've got operating in the correctional service at the moment.

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: I'm not aware of that particular report. I do know that we are currently working with Justice Health around a collaborative strategy going forward. In terms of the particular initiatives available to people in custody, there are a number of those. Obviously, we've got the compulsory drug treatment centre. We've got our intensive alcohol and treatment programs—the IDAT program—that's available to women as well as men on the Windsor complex. The Sydney Drug Court expansion is another initiative that's rolling out. Amongst our particular criminogenic programs are programs that target the areas that have led to offending. We've got programs that are specific for alcohol and drug use, including a program for people on remand. We also work closely with—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Sorry, can I interrupt? With the remand program, is that new?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: That's been in operation now for a couple of years, actually.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Okay. I wasn't aware of that.

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: It's a little bit different because our criminogenic programs generally will require somebody to talk about their offence, so we haven't offered them as a whole for people on remand. Often people that have abused and misused substances have engaged in that behaviour for a large period of time, so we can talk about trends and drivers without asking them to talk about a particular offence and cause issues in the court process.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What do you assess—in terms of the uptake, is your understanding that the uptake is high? Is it good? What are the factors that drive inmates to uptake those programs?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: The number of hours for our high-risk offenders participating in treatment has increased. I do understand, in terms of the cognitive behavioural—the programs targeting behaviours and thoughts associated with behaviours has reached a large number of people, including over 10,600 people in the community over the 2022-23 financial year, as well as over 3,200 people in the community. It's continuing to be pushed out and being made available.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I briefly touched on with the Minister earlier about what we do when people are leaving custody and particularly leaving to a safe place with shelter. Where are we tracking with that across the State?

KEVIN CORCORAN: It's not something that's our responsibility but we are actively looking at that from a whole range of perspectives. There's a number of programs that are in place but we're also looking, in our long-term planning, at having an enhanced case management program pilot occurring where we will be looking at working with people in custody to look at what their housing situation and employment situation is like and tracking them through their custodial journey into the community corrections space and beyond, utilising possibly NGOs. We're just going through that process at the moment to determine what it's going to look like in a final design bureau for that pilot. We hope to have around 300 people on that pilot, with a control group as well, so we can really establish how effective that would be. We've been looking at what's been happening in places like South Australia, for example, and some great success that they've had in that area. It's something that's very much on our radar.

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Which is good to know. Do you have any way of knowing now, as a snapshot, what it looks like in terms of people exiting? Is there a question asked, "Do you have somewhere to go? Do you have secure housing?" and what do those stats look like at the moment?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I couldn't give you those stats right—I don't have them here, but we're certainly very aware of people coming into custody and whether they're going to be homeless when they leave custody because of their situation. We're also engaged in a project to provide digital IDs to inmates as well, which has been something we've been working on for many years, but it's only just starting to come to fruition now with Customer Service and Transport being our main allies in that very difficult space about getting ID for people coming out of prison. Almost 50 per cent of people are leaving prison without an ID in their property so it makes it very difficult to access any services. We recognise that and we're actively trying to make sure that we can upgrade the number of people leaving custody with ID.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So you collect all that data, obviously. What does that look like in terms of—I'm really interested in how many people whose position we need to improve on leaving, in terms of where we're at now. Do you know how many people, say, over the past two years, have left a correctional facility and will be homeless? How many of those who left without an ID, for example?

KEVIN CORCORAN: We do know, as I said, there's about 50 per cent leaving. I think last year something like 39,000 people left the prison system, so you're looking at 70,000 or 80,000 people that we would have to track in terms of where they were going.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you ask the question, when somebody is leaving, "Do you have somewhere to go?" or do we just open the door and say, "See you, mate"?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, that's probably closer to the mark.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes, I thought so.

KEVIN CORCORAN: But it is something that we are really keen to understand. For example, in John Morony, we have a situation there where it's mainly a remand centre. We have a five-day induction process so that we really try to understand what's happening with that individual and what we can do for them to link them up with services. A lot of people might not be homeless, but they might be couch surfing, for example.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So at John Morony—why do you pick that one? Are you saying because—

KEVIN CORCORAN: I picked that because that was one of the centres that we market tested against the private sector, but we won that—the public sector won it. We won it, I think, primarily on some of the innovative programs that we were looking at there for remand inmates.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But is that because we were in a comp to win—

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That's what I mean. If we are benchmarking John Morony as well, that one won, what are we doing to bring up to standard all of the others? We've got a lot of them. There are 30 of them.

KEVIN CORCORAN: We do have a lot of them. A lot of them are mixed, sentenced and remand. When you look at John Morony, not only are we doing a lot of the programs—those remand programs that Anne-Marie mentioned—but we're also employing a large proportion of those inmates in jobs that wouldn't normally be the case in a remand centre. It's quite a different approach to remand facilities, but, obviously, it's something that we will be looking at rolling out in other areas down the track.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm going to run out in one second. An inmate from Lithgow asked to put my office phone number on their thing, and they were denied. Is that something that would surprise you?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I don't know of any policy issue that would deny them. Are you aware of that, Anne-Marie?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: I am aware of that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I'm sorry for all the letters, by the way—no, I'm not sorry, actually.

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: No, I am aware of that. There were some concerns around the broader implication, should that be moved across the system, in terms of being able to appropriately respond and give information to deal with concerns that might be raised—happy to further review that. I know that the time has run out, but if I may add on to a couple of the comments that the commissioner just made in terms of the needs on release, I would just say two things. One is that upon intake into a correctional centre, we ask a series of questions. One relates to housing, which then triggers off a whole service and communication around whether that house

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can be maintained or not. The other is at the back end of a custodial sentence. We have an initiative called NEXUS, which provides conversation around a range of needs in terms of housing, finance, employment supports—a range of specific substance abuse-type treatment needs. The person in custody then has follow-up conversations around how to have those particular needs met.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I wanted to go back to the funding for the startup hubs. I just wanted to understand the budget for the Western Sydney Startup Hub as well, if that's okay.

KATIE KNIGHT: I can confirm that the Western Sydney Startup Hub has ongoing funding of \$2 million over the next four years.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What's that comparison to the previous—that was \$2 million?

KATIE KNIGHT: It has only just opened, actually, but we fund that out of our OpEx budget.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: When was that announced? That was announced under the Coalition, the Western Sydney Startup Hub?

KATIE KNIGHT: Yes, that's correct—the opening of the hub, yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Yes. I presume there was some money that was put aside to fund that set-up?

KATIE KNIGHT: It's just part of our operational expenditure budget through Investment NSW.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: The Sydney Startup Hub has cuts that are essentially worth one-third of their budget. I was just wondering how that will affect their operations.

KATIE KNIGHT: There'll be no change to the hub opening. We will continue to provide that affordable accommodation to our founders, to our startups and to the existing tenants we have in the building—so Fishburners, Tank Stream Labs and Stone & Chalk. What we will need to do is just be a bit more targeted with our programming that we provide, but we'll continue to provide the Tech Ready Women the support I talked about earlier and the other programmatic support that we have.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you know which things won't be available?

KATIE KNIGHT: We're looking at the moment for our forward plan on—the programs that have been announced and that are ongoing and contracted will continue. There's no change to those. But with respect to our future programming, we're currently looking at that. A number of our programs go over two years, so we're looking at the future plan.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I mean, \$6 million is quite a lot and is a third of that budget, as I said. I am just trying to understand what the impact of that \$6 million loss for founders and startups actually is.

KATIE KNIGHT: The decrease of \$5.6 million, I think, will still allow us to do quite a lot of work with our founders across the Tech Central Scaleup Hub as well.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: As I said, it's quite a lot of money, so what happened with that money that won't happen now?

KATIE KNIGHT: I honestly can't see too much of a change to the programming budget at the Startup Hub.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So what was that \$6 million doing?

KATIE KNIGHT: That money was used for programs and events and providing accommodation to our startups, but we will just provide a little bit less of that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So essentially a third less?

KATIE KNIGHT: We'll still continue to cover the things that we have agreed to cover and announced. They will still be ongoing.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I'm just not really understanding how \$6 million won't have a material impact on the programs and the services that are provided there.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I think the other thing to add is the budget is relatively new, so we're still working through, across Investment NSW and across the forward years, how we will deploy the budget. It might be that we can't give you specifics right now.

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The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: In terms of the grants process in general, would you acknowledge that there's been a lot of industry confusion since the Government came in about what grants are available, for how much, when they are closing and opening, and how application processes are working?

KATIE KNIGHT: I don't think I'd characterise it like that. The programs were put on pause. We've just reopened MVP Ventures, as you're aware.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you have a complaints or concerns process that you're tracking?

KATIE KNIGHT: We receive correspondence from the market, from industry, around various programs. We also receive lots of positive feedback, but we don't have a complaints-handling hotline as such.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you think it would be useful for the department or Investment NSW to essentially have a tally or some sort of record-keeping mechanism to understand where and when founders aren't actually very satisfied with what's going on?

KATIE KNIGHT: We have listened to the feedback of the founders. You'll note that MVP Ventures—the guidelines, the way the applications are working going forward, has changed as a result of the feedback we received. We now have a two-stage process, which will hopefully reduce the administrative burden on applicants. But, yes, we continue to receive that feedback and incorporate it into the way we do things going forward.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But there's no actual understanding of how many concerns are being raised or about what programs, or any sort of quantification of how founders are feeling about their dealings with Investment NSW?

KATIE KNIGHT: Yes, we interact with founders in multiple ways at events—at the Spark Festival, at the InnovationAus Awards—in lots of sorts of environments, in forums and also by email. There are lots of avenues, and we deal with that feedback as and when it comes in.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But you're not really worried about any trends or finding information that—

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: I think that's a bit of an unfair characterisation. We're not talking about millions of applications here. As Ms Knight said, we do take quite seriously the feedback we get. We have teams that are very outward facing every day. We do take quite seriously the feedback that we've been getting, and we have adjusted our processes where we can. We'll continue to make recommendations based on what we hear.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: But doesn't the fact that those programs have been changed suggest that the feedback that's been provided is less than fabulous?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: You can always improve grant programs and grant assessment processes. As Ms Knight said, one of the pieces of feedback we have taken very seriously is the level of work required by a startup to put in an application, and we have heard that. To the extent that we can continue to communicate with applicants and we can make it easier for them, we have been doing that and we'll continue to take that feedback into account.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: It does seem fair to me that an application process would be simpler, given that the grant value itself is possibly almost one-tenth less than what it was previously. I do appreciate that and I'm glad you could clarify that for me. I just wanted to ask about this Innovation Blueprint ideas summit and really try to understand what that process is. What's the work that's going on behind that at the moment? What is the ideas summit and why can't it happen in a month's time or why couldn't it happen in April? Why does it have to take 12 months?

KATIE KNIGHT: I can't speak to the 12-month period but I can let you know that we want to do this properly. We want to consult in a meaningful way rather than doing it in a really short space of time.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What does that consultation look like?

KATIE KNIGHT: The ideas summit will be in February and it will be the first of the series of engagement we have with the various parts of the sector, whether it is academics, whether it is founders, incubators or accelerators in the ecosystem. The plan is to bring everyone together and then we'll share with them a lot of the work that's already been done and then break off into various groups, depending on the stakeholders involved.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: You said that the ideas summit is the first in a range of stakeholder engagement processes. What are the other processes that are suggested?

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KATIE KNIGHT: In connection with the Innovation Blueprint—it's all tied to that. We're still working through the planning stages for that but it will be hopefully a really meaningful process for the community to get involved and hopefully bring everything together and look at a range of ways to support the innovation sector.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: So the delivery of the Innovation Blueprint and that plan hasn't been finalised yet?

KATIE KNIGHT: We're working on that now in the next couple of months. But then we head into Christmas and January and the shutdown period, so February is really the first available time that we can hold the summit.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Usually budget proposals by departments are getting prepared in October. You really want them to be in pretty early in the new year, at the latest. How are you planning, as a department, to actually put proposals forward to the budget process, when this ideas summit Innovation Blueprint situation is blowing out to apparently well after the next budget?

KATIE KNIGHT: We're still able to work on budget proposals now before the summit takes place. We're working on those ideas and on areas that we may put forward for budget submissions.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: What are you basing that budget proposal on?

KATIE KNIGHT: As I said, we're working through those at the moment. We have a number of programs in the market. We've got some great data that we'll continue to put forward for budget submissions as required.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I go to the Building Commissioner again about building certifiers. During the election the Government promised to introduce new stricter requirements on certifiers, limiting their work from a single building or developer to 50 per cent of their total income. Have you been given any indication of when these requirements will be legislated?

DAVID CHANDLER: A lot of things get discussed during an election. Of course, when policies come forward, they come forward for advice from the officials. In regard to private certifiers, we've really had to make it very clear that the performance of private certifiers has come a long way in the last three years and that we also have gone out of our way to disabuse local government of the fact that a return to local government for certification is not practical or viable. So there's a capacity issue again. If you tried to put those constraints on, you'd have a capacity issue. We have also done an audit of 25 local-government-certified projects, and I can tell you that the results of those have been somewhat disappointing. So we've taken that up with local government. We're working across the whole performance areas of certifiers. I just wanted to say to you, though, there's been really quite a significant shift in the role of certifiers in New South Wales. They really are focusing on the game much more than they perhaps were before the reforms started in New South Wales.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Just on that, how many complaints in relation to building certifiers have been received and then investigated and, in that, compliance action as a result?

DAVID CHANDLER: Most of the certifier performances actually come from our own investigations and our own referrals to internal investigations. I just can't tell you how much, the depth. When we're lifting and shifting these people from Fair Trading, we bring a lot of momentum across with us at that time. Since the RAB Act started, in September 2020, there's been 446 audits, affecting 29,000 apartments. Since the DBP Act, there's been 101 audits, affecting about 10,000 apartments. All of these have been the basis of informing a completely new cohort of certifiers we'd never seen before, and I can tell you that there's quite a number of certifiers that are currently being performance reviewed.

You will have seen regular reporting on the Fair Trading website and, in fact, an increasing number are losing their certification. But I don't want to hit all of the certifiers on the head when they misstep, because some of them are very, very talented and they've just simply lost their way. So I'd rather reset them, rather than push them out of the industry. But please be aware that there's been a huge amount of momentum built. So, when we lift and shift these people from Fair Trading, they're well into building the momentum, and we'll build on that going forward.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Just on that question, can I open it up. Would the complaints also go through Fair Trading and then be referred?

DAVID CHANDLER: If I just deal with that. All of this is currently in Fair Trading, so this will all come across to the Building Commission. Don't forget that we've had our staff, in the office of the Building Commissioner, of under 20 for the last four years, and so really we've been an influencer, but now we'll be running the show in terms of the building inspectorate. So this is bringing together, I guess, a concerted effort from both the office of the Building Commissioner and the momentum that's been built up in Fair Trading over the last three

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years, and the results are coming through. So I can tell you that there's been a significant shift in the number of reported defects in new builds since the legislation has come through. We'll talk more to that in the coming month, but I can tell you that the work that's been done by these folk that are coming across has really started to change the dial.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you know when the strict requirements will commence?

DAVID CHANDLER: The first thing we did, back in 2021 I believe, is we got Michael Lambert to come in and completely review the certifiers practice standard, and we've produced a certifiers practice standard which is now the standard against which all certifiers are held accountable. That's created a new performance benchmark for all of them, but that's been very well received and it's had a significant impact. Up until then, there hadn't been a standard. There is now. We've just extended that standard from class 2 into class 1. So I expect to see the same sort of rolling impact of that into class 1.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Because I've got limited time, I wanted to now turn to Corrections. I see, from BOCSAR, a little graph: Prison population has reduced by 1.4 per cent from, say, September last year to this year. But what is concerning is that the remand population has increased and so has the First Nation population. So I was just wondering with the remand population—you mentioned programs before. When a person is in the community and subject to a sentence assessment report, they can go out and voluntarily engage with different service providers. How can someone who's on remand engage so that they can address some of their behaviours?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: As I was mentioning before, we have to be really careful with people on remand that we don't ask them to talk about matters that are before the court.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: No. But if they knew that something—say, alcohol or drugs or mental health or any of those areas—do they have access to services? Someone in the community can go voluntarily but they can't when they're on remand.

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: When a person comes into custody on remand—that's the group we're talking about now. Well, everybody that comes into custody is seen by services and program staff, as well as Justice Health. As a result of that, they identify some immediate needs as well as longer-term needs that the person might have. Some treatment available through our colleagues in Justice Health related to alcohol and substance abuse includes pharmacological treatments, say for somebody that is dependent on opioids, for example. I mentioned the addictions remand program before. That is something that we do offer. We do have psychologists employed by Corrective Services that are available. People on remand can volunteer to participate in work. We have been seeing some great results by participating in vocational training and work, including a BOCSAR study on that, which has identified some significant findings associated with that. In terms of allied health services, remand substance abuse, willingness to engage in employment, work and associated training with that, they're available to people on remand.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In terms of Indigenous male, what is Corrections doing in Closing the Gap? It might be something that you can't address because it's prior to them entering custody, but I would like to know, in terms of when they're in custody, what is happening?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I was going to suggest that, Mr Thomas, you're available. Brendan Thomas is the Deputy Secretary for Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes. His role extends arterially right through all of these services and the activities of DCJ, including Corrective Services, and he works very closely with the commissioner.

BRENDAN THOMAS: Your observation around the trends in prison is right. The Aboriginal prison population has grown through the course of the year and 100 per cent of that growth is remand. The likelihood of people being sentenced to prison following a conviction has actually dropped. Over the last two years there's been fewer people sentenced to prison. Through that time we've seen an increase in the number of people prosecuted by police to court, so that decline is actually bigger than it looks. But there has been a reasonable increase in the number of people on remand.

There's a whole program of work going on to try and close that gap of people coming into the prison system through increasing ranges of diversion, particularly drug treatment and mental health treatment at courts. So access to drug treatment programs like MERIT have expanded, there's expanding mental health liaison services at local courts and we know they're diverting Aboriginal people from court at three times the rate of courts without those diversion programs. The Drug Court has doubled the number of Aboriginal people participating in it over the last 12 months. That's a significantly important program that keeps people out of prison but reduces reoffending. The work the commissioner spoke of earlier that Corrections are doing is really heavily focusing on how to prepare

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people better for release and support them once they are released. The return to prison rate in New South Wales is considerably high. For us to close the gap we really need to bring that rate down.

In conclusion, one of the key factors that has led to the increase to the prison population in the last 10 years has been people sentenced for breaches of court orders, ECOs and parole orders. There is a significant body of work happening in Community Corrections looking at all of their policy and procedure around how to manage offenders and really managing offenders in very different ways that directly engages family and community to try and keep those people from breaching their orders. I meet regularly with the Deputy Commissioner of Community Corrections, every couple of months. We track the performance by each COMCOR office about breach rates, looking at how we reduce the breach rate, increase the number of people successfully completing those orders. If we can really crack that, we'll have a good shot at closing the gap. But the big growth area is in remand.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Have you briefed the Minister?

BRENDAN THOMAS: We've provided written briefings to the Minister on Closing the Gap, and there is a meeting with him on Monday about it.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Mr Thomas, if you're happy to stay there, that'd be great. At the moment, across all Corrections centres, is your view that there are accessible culturally appropriate programs for First Nations inmates?

BRENDAN THOMAS: There's a range of programs available variously across different correctional centres. Assistant Commissioner Martin can give you some more detail about which ones are available where than I can. Part of the Closing the Gap plan is to increase the level of participation in those programs from Aboriginal inmates in two ways: One is to increase how many people are getting into those programs, and then to make sure they're successfully completing those programs. There is a way to go to make sure there's more people in those programs than there are at the moment. As we mentioned earlier, a big challenge is the remand population. About 40 per cent of the Aboriginal people in prison are on remand, and just under half of the Aboriginal women in prison today are on remand.

That cohort of people comprises people that are in there for reasonable periods of time and people that are only in there for short periods of time. Often it's not known when a person is going to be released, when they may make a successful bail application and they're out of prison in really short periods of time without a lot of preparation being able to happen. There is a challenge of those people getting into programs. We are working with Justice Health to make sure that there are better health services and diversion services available at the point of bail application so that we can try and get more people appropriately out on bail and into programs at the start.

Our colleagues at the Legal Aid commission have also established a fast-tracked Supreme Court bail service for Aboriginal women to try and get more people appropriately out on bail. And we've got a taskforce about to start in the coming weeks looking at all Aboriginal women in prison and their housing circumstances. It's a taskforce of Corrections staff, some of my staff, housing staff, lawyers and social workers to say what are the circumstances for these women upon release—how many have difficulties accessing housing, either from housing-related debts, black bans and those kinds of things—and to try and resolve those things prior to those women getting out so we can get as many people out successfully and housed as we possibly can. That's about to commence in the coming weeks.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: With First Nations women and remand, obviously I'm sensitive to the issues around disclosing information and putting those women at risk of incrimination et cetera. Are some of the gaps questions of resourcing in being able to better assist those women on remand? Some of the things you're talking about are very good. Do we need to increase those things? Are there barriers to, for example, saying, "Every single First Nations woman on remand is getting all of these things as a minimum"? What are the barriers to that?

BRENDAN THOMAS: Part of the taskforce that we're talking about setting up is to do exactly that. What are the needs of those First Nations women who are currently in custody, not only those remandees but those who are sentenced and looking at getting out? And what can we do to make sure that they get the services that they need, particularly around housing and supports on release? There's increased services in women's prisons for those women who have children in out-of-home care. That service has been quite successful, and it's predominantly providing a service to Aboriginal women. But there's always more we can do, and the work the commissioner talked about, about that pre-release program, which is hoping to commence next year, will do a lot of that work.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are those services mainly Aboriginal controlled organisations or are they not? Is there an absence of them in the space?

BRENDAN THOMAS: It's a variety. A lot of in-house correctional services are the services at the moment.

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: How many First Nations people are employed currently in Corrections?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Three-point-two per cent of our workforce. In our strategic plan, we hope to increase that to 8 per cent by 2030, so we've got a lot of work to do.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is it a good goal? I'm genuinely curious. I know that is a goal of every workplace, and it should be. Has the work been done around the cultural appropriateness of increasing the percentage of First Nations people in the custody system?

BRENDAN THOMAS: I was just going to say it is a tough place for Aboriginal people to work.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Absolutely.

BRENDAN THOMAS: The prison system is very tough. It's tough personally, it's tough from a community pressure point of view. We do have hundreds of Aboriginal people in the correctional system at the moment, and correctional officers are only one of the careers that they're involved in. We've got lots of program-related staff, professional staff and some psychologists and others. We've even got some senior executives. I think there's three Aboriginal governors at the moment.

KEVIN CORCORAN: That's right.

BRENDAN THOMAS: So making sure that those employment opportunities are broad and fulfilling for people is really an important part of recruiting more Aboriginal people into the correctional system. But it is a tough place to work, and it's hard to get large numbers of Aboriginal people to want to work in the correctional system because of the historical experience people have had.

KEVIN CORCORAN: It's something that we need to work with DCJ, because talent acquisition is a DCJ function—the shared corporate services. That's something we're really going to be focusing on over the next few years to make sure that we have appropriate ways of getting people into the workforce—culturally appropriate ways.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is the overarching objective, for you as commissioner, ultimately to be looking at how we can close parts of our prisons down because we don't need them anymore? Or is that something that is just out of your control because you just have to deal with what comes to you?

KEVIN CORCORAN: We do have way more beds than we require at the moment. We have to keep those facilities operating in case we get that surge in numbers that BOCSAR predicts over the next five or six years. Nevertheless, ultimately our goal is to reduce re-offending and that would mean reducing the number of people in prison.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: The last time we spoke at one of these places we were talking about those Victorian-era facilities. How are we going with those? Are we still giving them resuscitation and keeping them going? Or are there parts of those that we're closing down or restoring?

KEVIN CORCORAN: At this stage, they're operational. I have closed certain parts of the prison system, for a variety of reasons, just to make sure that we've got enough staff to run other parts of the system.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: We were talking about—and you were acknowledging—some of the terrible circumstances around the facilities at Goulburn, I think it was. Have we changed that? They were pretty horrendous.

KEVIN CORCORAN: No, they're still in operation.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are we still talking about one toilet outside and that sort of thing? It's still a similar situation or have we improved anything?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Do you mean showers outside?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes, showers.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, there are still showers outside.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: We're hearing inmates complaining about the shortage of clothing. Is that something that happens still?

KEVIN CORCORAN: It shouldn't happen. If that's the case then we would like to be in a position—we certainly have mechanisms for inmates to report that sort of thing through and for us to take action as an agency, to make sure those things are rectified. We do have a Corrective Services complaint line that inmates can access.

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Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What is the current complaint system for an inmate and an officer? What is the procedure, and how do you deal with those?

KEVIN CORCORAN: There's a number of ways that inmates can complain to confidential sources: through official visitors, through the Commonwealth ombudsman. We've got this complaints line as well, which they can complain to.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If I'm in Lithgow now and I'm really impacted, what would I do, and I feel that I can't tell the staff who I see on a daily, weekly, monthly basis?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Those are the mechanisms that I talked but we are, as an executive, looking at how we can improve the capability of staff and inmates putting complaints forward about what is happening in facilities. As you would be aware, we've got that inquiry going on. We're actively listening to everything that's happening and thinking about how, as an executive, we can respond to that as quickly as we can.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So at the moment, if I'm in Lithgow, other than write a letter to my office, genuinely, what could I do? I would have to tell somebody in the correction prison, wouldn't I?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Mail, for example, goes to certain areas that is not able to be opened. They can also talk to their legal adviser, which wouldn't be monitored, and they could get messages through that way.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: There's been circumstances where I've received a complaint and I have then written to you or the Minister. Then I've heard that that person got punished for making that complaint. How do we address that? What do we do?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Those sorts of things would normally be investigated. That's definitely not what we want to occur.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So we just have to go through that process and follow it up?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, follow it up, but, as I said, as an executive we're looking at ways where people can complain without retribution. That's definitely something that is very much on our radar at the moment.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It's happened on a number of occasions and it gets to the point where advising the inmate to go through a particular process, I feel negligent. I feel like I'm causing harm by using these systems and we start to lose trust in those systems. I am suggesting to you that that is still happening. I'm not exactly sure what to do about it other than to keep going and have to live with the fact that I'm probably causing harm to somebody trying to help them.

KEVIN CORCORAN: That's the last thing that any of us want. We would like to make sure that complaints are treated appropriately and dealt with appropriately at every correctional centre. Another program that we're looking at the moment is having a look at how we can change the way relationships occur within correctional centres between staff and inmates, and between inmates and inmates.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: More like cultural reform?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, cultural reform. We have about six centres at the moment that we're working on to really supercharge that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Can I ask which those six are?

KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes, those six are Lithgow, Goulburn, Dillwynia, Hunter, St Heliers and MSPC out at Long Bay.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What is the current stat of the number of officers upon inmate assaults complaints at the moment?

KEVIN CORCORAN: So that's assaults on—?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Inmates.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Staff on inmate, are you saying?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Officer upon inmate assault, and then vice versa.

KEVIN CORCORAN: Apologies, I don't have that here. It's on RoGS. We will get back to you with the data.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you, and, honestly, I don't think anybody expects you to always have all the data we ask for. It's such a random thing sometimes, and we apologise for that, at the outset. It is a strange process. But if it is possible to take on notice—

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KEVIN CORCORAN: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And, perhaps, what the number looks like now compared to a similar time last year, how we're tracking in both ways—assault complaints on inmates and assault complaints on officers. If it's possible, when somebody comes in—the intake process—what are the sort of things, in terms of the criminogenic aspects, that we're assessing? Is there a psychological assessment for every intake?

KEVIN CORCORAN: I might get Anne-Marie to answer this one.

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: Thank you for the question. In terms of assessments on intake, the assessments are undertaken dependent upon the service or the need that a person has, so it's different for a person on remand versus a sentence cohort. For a sentence cohort, we undertake assessments that look at general risk of reoffending. Areas commonly looked at within that are in terms of past offending; did that involve somebody that they know; the pattern or the history of prior offences; did it involve an element of violence; did they generally have a criminal social lifestyle prior to coming in; and what are their levels of support.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Does every single person go through this?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: No, not every single person. In the first instance, I'm talking about people who receive a custodial sentence.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes. Sorry, I meant every single person that isn't on remand. No?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: No. Then it also depends on the length of the sentence that they get because, for most of our programs, we'll need at least three months in order to deliver that in totality. Generally, for a person that has a custodial sentence of less than six months, they get more of a service plan around education and linking them to particular services, versus longer; they can get access to the broader programs that I mentioned before, and the type of program is dependent upon these particular general and specific assessments that are undertaken.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If somebody is coming in for a three-month sentence, for the first time ever, they would slip in and slip out within the three months, do you think?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: It's not a one-size-fits-all approach, so it would depend on the type of offence that they were coming in for—that's one thing—and their history. That would influence when they go in.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Who sets those criteria? When did they get set and who set those? Are they a bit like standard operating procedures?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: In our services and programs area there's a whole triage and framework that enables pathways depending—sentence link, as well as risk, for a plan to be developed.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Before, when you were talking about the programs—and there's a suite of programs—they are clearly not available to everybody, so how many people do you think access programs? What percentage of the entire prison population that wants to access a program gets to access a program, compared to those that there isn't a program available to?

ANNE-MARIE MARTIN: Firstly, it's not really about wanting to do a program because we know from the research that for lower-risk individuals, if you put them into intensive programs, it can actually cause more harm than good. So it is really based on the level of assessed risk, and there is an element of judgment around that. I will need to take that on notice, in terms of the actual numbers, in terms of demand and supply around the question that's been asked.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Because I get a lot of, "I really wanted to do this. I wanted access to that and I couldn't." And it goes on and on, year after year, and somebody just can't access something that would appear to be quite basic. I shouldn't say "basic"—something it would seem that they ought to be able to access. I asked the Minister about a really simple example of somebody who was undertaking a bachelor degree in a university. They had to withdraw because Corrections wouldn't provide them access to printing materials and there was no access online. Is that satisfactory?

KEVIN CORCORAN: How long ago was that? Do you know?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Earlier this year.

KEVIN CORCORAN: No, because we are actively pursuing that higher education in a number of facilities, and Deputy Commissioner Taylor is responsible for that area but he's—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If something like that did happen again and that came to my attention, I really should push that because that's something you're committed to making sure—

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KEVIN CORCORAN: Absolutely. Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Great. I'll call you tomorrow.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I wanted to ask one quick question so it didn't have to go into supplementaries. Ms Knight, with that Innovation Blueprint planning, what kind of ministerial involvement has there been in terms of directing that?

KATIE KNIGHT: We've had briefings with him over the last few weeks on that and we're sort of forming that up and getting his thoughts on who and when and how and what that idea summit should look like.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: How many meetings have occurred about that?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: We have regular weekly meetings in the diary aside from then the specific subject-matter meetings, so it has probably been discussed in separate subject-matter meetings as well as in every weekly meeting for a few weeks in terms of specific logistics planning.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: A few weeks?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Not the idea but the logistics planning has been going on for a few weeks now.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Can I just clarify. You said you had briefed the Minister on Aboriginal deaths in custody?

BRENDAN THOMAS: Sorry, on the Closing the Gap plan.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Have you briefed the Minister on Aboriginal deaths in custody?

BRENDAN THOMAS: No, not specifically.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: But you have done on the previous—sorry, can you just clarify what you have briefed the Minister on in your role? It's not a trick question; it's just an honest question.

BRENDAN THOMAS: New South Wales has what's called a Closing the Gap plan.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I am well aware of that; I honestly am. Have you briefed the Minister on it?

BRENDAN THOMAS: Written briefs, yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And they've got a meeting on Monday.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Thank you for clarifying that.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Just going back to the Innovation Blueprint, who came up with the idea for an Innovation Blueprint?

KATIE KNIGHT: The Minister did.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Did he have a time line that he put to you about the Innovation Blueprint, about the delivery?

KATIE KNIGHT: We've been working through that, I guess, in amongst the policy work that we're working on at the moment—our new trade and investment strategy and industry policy. It has been part of, I guess, a package of policy work that we're doing.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: I actually had a question for Mr Thomas as well about alcohol and other drug rehabilitation programs, and how many are actually created and run by First Nations people because I'm aware that about five years ago there were none. I am talking about specific programs for Indigenous people.

BRENDAN THOMAS: There are very few Aboriginal community controlled drug and alcohol treatment programs. They're almost exclusively funded by New South Wales or Commonwealth Health departments rather than the Justice system. The drug treatment program I referred to earlier is a program called MERIT, which stands for Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment Program. Some of that is provided by NGOs; some of that is provided by local area health services, and it varies from location to location. Some of those MERIT programs do involve people accessing Aboriginal community controlled drug and alcohol treatment services, but there are not a lot of them.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Do you think that that's impacting the outcomes of those programs? Or if that's an opinion, do you think that there is a difference in the success rate of the programs that are Indigenous-created and run?

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BRENDAN THOMAS: If you take MERIT, for example, there was a gap in the referral into the MERIT program, but that has closed in the last 12 months. We're seeing Aboriginal people, defendants at court, referred into MERIT at the rate at which they appear in court, but the completion rates are still lower. So the rate of dropout of that MERIT program is higher for Aboriginal people than it is for the general population, although that gap is closing. It's got to do with a range of factors: the suitability of the program, the availability of the program, the criminogenic factors of the individual involved. I think if there are more Aboriginal people involved in running those services, they would be more successful.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Okay, thank you. Just in the 30 seconds—I'm sorry I'm going back and forth, but just going back to the briefing sessions on Investment NSW and Innovation, that kind of thing, did you brief the Minister on the MPV Ventures grant?

KATIE KNIGHT: Yes. We briefed him during the comprehensive expenditure review process.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And more recently, given the announcement on Monday?

KATIE KNIGHT: Yes. In relation to reopening it, yes.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: And the changes in the requirements and the application and the amount of money.

KATIE KNIGHT: Correct. That's right.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO: Thank you very much. I really appreciate your honesty. I know it's a weird situation to be in when your budgets have been cut and you've got to kind of defend the policies, so I appreciate you coming here and answering so forthrightly.

KATIE KNIGHT: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Ms Higginson, do you have any further questions?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: No. I'm very grateful to everybody. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. Government questions?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: No questions, but only to agree with everyone to say thank you very much. It's been great. Even though we haven't asked questions as Government members, it's been very enlightening, so thank you very much for all the work you do.

The CHAIR: Ms Hogan?

EMMA HOGAN: Yes, Chair. Thank you. Last week you indulged me in my second-last-ever estimates to thank everybody in Minister Dib's portfolio. Today is my last ever—fingers crossed.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Politicians hope the opposite. We're calling you back.

EMMA HOGAN: It would have to be in the next two weeks. If I may just thank all teams across Better Regulation, Fair Trading, the Building Commissioner, SIRA and SafeWork, who have been appearing next door, for all of their incredible commitment and contribution during my time as secretary in the last four years. They really are incredible people and I wanted to note it on the record. Thanks.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: What a poorer place it will be without you, all that stuff you did.

The CHAIR: Thank you to everyone else in attendance today. Thank you for all the evidence that you've provided. The committee secretariat will be in touch if there were any questions on notice or if there are any further questions from the Committee. Thank you all again.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.