PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 2 - HEALTH

Wednesday 28 February 2024

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

WATER, HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS, MENTAL HEALTH, YOUTH, AND THE NORTH COAST

The Committee met at 9:15.

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MEMBERS

Dr Amanda Cohn (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
The Hon. Greg Donnelly
Ms Cate Faehrmann (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Scott Farlow
Ms Sue Higginson
The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones
The Hon. Sarah Mitchell
The Hon. Emily Suvaal

PRESENT

The Hon. Rose Jackson, *Minister for Water, Minister for Housing, Minister for Homelessness, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Youth, and Minister for the North Coast*

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. 2 held for the additional round of the inquiry into budget estimates 2023-24. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Dr Amanda Cohn and I am Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Rose Jackson and accompanying officials to this hearing.

Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Water, Housing, Homelessness, Mental Health, Youth, and the North Coast. 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 encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of those procedures.

Welcome and thank you for making the time to give evidence today. Minister Jackson, 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. Most witnesses who appeared at the initial budget estimates hearing before this Committee also do not need to be sworn today. Witnesses who were not present during the initial hearing round or who are appearing in a different capacity will now be sworn.

Ms AMANDA JONES, Deputy Secretary, NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water – Water, affirmed and examined

Ms REBECCA PINKSTONE, Chief Executive, Homes NSW, affirmed and examined

Professor HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE, Chief Scientist and Engineer, affirmed and examined

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

Mr JONATHAN WHEATON, Acting Deputy Secretary, Regional NSW, on former affirmation

Dr BRENDAN FLYNN, Executive Director Mental Health Branch, NSW Ministry of Health, on former affirmation

Dr MURRAY WRIGHT, Chief Psychiatrist, NSW Ministry of Health, on former affirmation

Ms DEB WILLCOX, AM, Deputy Secretary Health System Strategy and Patient Experience, NSW Ministry of Health, on former affirmation

Ms ZOË ROBINSON, Advocate for Children and Young People, on former affirmation

Ms FAMEY WILLIAMS, Chief Executive, Aboriginal Housing Office, on former affirmation

Ms ANNE CAMPBELL, Deputy Secretary Strategy, Policy and Commissioning, Department of Communities and Justice, on former affirmation

Mr ANDREW GEORGE, Chief Executive Officer, WaterNSW, on former affirmation

Mr ROCH CHEROUX, Managing Director, Sydney Water, on former affirmation

Mr GRANT BARNES, Chief Regulatory Officer, Natural Resources Access Regulator, on former affirmation

Mr DARREN CLEARY, Managing Director, Hunter Water, on former affirmation

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.. We're 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'll 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 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. I also note there is currently a hearing for Portfolio Committee No. 8 happening in another room at the Parliament that I am required to attend. With apologies, I will be in and out of this hearing today and my colleague Ms Cate Faehrmann will be chairing parts of the session. We'll begin with questions today from the Opposition.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Thank you, Chair. Minister, you would have seen the reports of serious abuse and assault of patients and injuries to staff at Cumberland Hospital mental health unit.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I have seen those reports.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What actions have you taken to protect patients and staff at Cumberland Hospital?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's an excellent question and thank you. I was very concerned to see the reports about both staff and patients at Cumberland Hospital not receiving a level of care and support that I expect. What I have done is ask the chief psychiatrist of New South Wales, Dr Murray Wright, along with an eminent leading psychiatrist, Dr Karin Lines, to conduct a review that followed up on a deeper piece of work that had occurred in 2021 in relation to the Cumberland Hospital. Dr Wright may be able to talk in more detail, but they interviewed over 100 staff as part of that review. It was a very comprehensive and deep piece of work. I thank them for doing that. They presented the findings of that to me last year. All of those recommendations were accepted by me and we are in the process of implementing them.

As well as that, we have actually done some revision of the leadership of mental health at the Western Sydney Local Health District. There is a new executive director of mental health there that's come on, I think, late last year, and we're very hopeful that with that comprehensive review, the implementation of the findings and that new leadership, district-wide, that we will be able to make some change there. I will say this, though, Ms Maclaren-Jones, these issues are serious, they have been ongoing for some time and my fundamental view is that the long-term resolution of the challenges that we've had at the Cumberland Hospital is the relocation of the facility to the new modern facility at Westmead. Cumberland is, I think, the oldest, continuously running mental

health facility in Australia and that history—even though, of course, models of care and modes of practice have been updated—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Thank you, Minister. Can I ask when you first heard about the allegations of assault at Cumberland?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can take the date on notice, although it was last year. It was sometime around the middle or—sometime last year. I'll have to take the exact date on notice, but it was last year.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: When do you plan to have all the recommendations implemented?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's an iterative and ongoing process. As I said, the end of the line is the relocation of the facility and that's in 2026. Many of the recommendations, in terms of the short-term things that we can do, have been done. If there are ongoing pieces of work, Dr Wright or Ms Willcox may be able to speak to that. But, as I said, I don't want to mislead people—that I don't believe it is going to be fundamentally possible to really deliver on the very high expectations that I have for patient care and staff support until we relocate to that new facility in 2026. But I am very hopeful and confident we have a plan to do that.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Did you say that facility will be built by 2026?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I think that that is the time frame that we are working towards, is it not, team? Yes, the officials are nodding.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, how do you expect that the toxic culture at Cumberland Hospital will be changed just by relocating to a new facility?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, the relocation to the new facility is the end of the line. The two other things that I believe will contribute to addressing what I accept has been an unacceptable situation there are the new leadership in the district—as I said, a new executive director of mental health, a fresh pair of eyes in the leadership position there—and the implementation of the findings and recommendations from Dr Wright and Dr Lyons. I'm happy for Dr Wright to speak to some of those findings and the work that he has done, if you're interested in hearing about that?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: We definitely will this afternoon.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I assumed so.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, has NSW Health complied with the PID Act when responding to whistleblower reports of abuse and assault?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I expect that they have. That would be my expectation.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Have you asked that question?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: My clear direction to NSW Health on every matter is that they must comply with their legislative obligations.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: But in relation to this matter—you're aware that the whistleblowers are from Cumberland Hospital—did you ask the question?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't need to ask a question as to whether the—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You are the Minister.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't need to ask my officials whether they comply with their legislative obligations. They are very clear that my expectation is that they do.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And you're confident they have complied?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely, I am.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are there any other incidences where whistleblowers have accused NSW Health of not complying with the PID Act?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not that I'm aware of, although perhaps there are.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Have you asked that question?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Have I asked NSW Health if there are—no, I haven't asked them if there are other allegations. As I said, in relation to mental health, in relation to Cumberland Hospital, I haven't.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: But aren't you concerned about the allegations made by whistleblowers?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely. I'm extremely concerned and that's why I asked Dr Wright and Dr Lyons to go in as outsiders and conduct such a comprehensive review—as I said, over 100 interviews, a serious piece of work. If I had heard the reports that you refer to and done nothing, then this line of questioning would be entirely valid, but it's not, because not only did we ask the Chief Psychiatrist of New South Wales to do a comprehensive piece of work, he did that, I've been briefed numerous times on its findings and implementation, we've put new leadership in at the district level and we have a long-term plan for resolution. So I don't think it's fair to suggest that nothing has been done. In fact, quite a lot has been done.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I didn't say that. I was asking about whether you were confident that the department has complied with the PID Act and, if you are, could you please produce that report?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Well, as I said, my confidence is based on the fact that I could not be clearer in my expectations to NSW Health and to all of the agencies. They should understand their legislative obligations and I expect them to comply with them.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Frankly, Minister, you should be asking the questions.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, my expectation is extremely clear for all of the agencies. They know their legislative obligations and I expect them to comply.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: But you never asked. Minister, are you confident that no current or former staff member of Cumberland Hospital has suffered detrimental action following the reports of assault or abuse at the hospital?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, to the extent that I don't want to offer an opinion in relation to former staff. As I said, Cumberland is the oldest continuously running mental health facility in Australia. I couldn't possibly express confidence in relation to any former staff member there and what action may have been taken against them. It's not reasonable. However, I will say this: In relation to current staff, I have been—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are you saying you don't care about a former staff member who may have been or who was a whistleblower?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. I absolutely care. Your question was, "Am I confident that no former staff member—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Or current.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, I'm differentiating between former staff, where I'm just indicating that as a facility that has been running for 100 years or so I couldn't possibly express confidence in relation to the treatment—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, you know I'm not asking about staff 100 years ago. I'm asking about staff in the last 12 months, since you've been the Minister.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: In relation to current staff, yes, I am, and I have been so clear, to the leadership of NSW Health and the Western Sydney local area health district and directly in my public communication to the current staff, that I understand it's hard to speak up sometimes about things that you're concerned about. I get that. But I have their back. And there is absolutely no room for current staff who have issues that they want to raise feeling as though there's no space for them to do that, and I use this again as another public forum to reiterate my full support for staff. And, in fact, we need that. I welcome it.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: But you're actually not asking the questions or actually taking any action.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, again, in relation to the current circumstances, the current staff, I've regularly made clear to NSW Health and expressed the expectation that this is passed on, that current staff, in terms of the current culture and the work that we're—I don't want to do the work of the review and its implementation in vain. We're only doing that to make things better, and I accept the point that an engagement and a dialogue with the staff on the ground there is an essential part of that feedback loop. So, as I said, in relation to current staff I am very confident that everyone who is in a management position understands my expectations for improvement and support for staff who want to provide feedback in relation to where that's going well and where that's potentially not going well.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, I move on to the new integrated mental health complex at Westmead, which you said is replacing Cumberland and you indicated will be completed in 2026.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's my understanding.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Will you update the website—because it hasn't been updated since last year—to advise of the time line so the community know exactly when the project will commence and when it will be completed?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes. If we could pass down the line for someone to jump on the website and update it. You've asked me about websites. I don't regularly check.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, you have people in the community that are asking about Cumberland Hospital. There are concerns, from staff, from patients, about Cumberland Hospital. You say your solution is a new facility, and yet your website doesn't actually indicate when that will be built. You can understand why the community is concerned.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can understand why the community are concerned, and I assure you it's got nothing to do with the website. It's got everything to do with a long history of poor staff culture and poor treatment of patients, which I readily accept. And I've clearly articulated our plan.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Your solution is a new facility—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Your solution is a website—sorry.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: —and you have not communicated that properly to the constituents. Minister, I might move on to the Nowra matter of Alexander Pinnock and the tragedy that occurred in January this year. The media has your spokesperson saying:

> … there was "significant room for improvement in how we respond to a mental health crisis" and that the government would "review and consider any recommendations" from the police.

Has this review been completed?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, it has.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What were the findings?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The police have provided a report that we only received earlier this year. We're considering it. The findings were—the "too long, didn't read" version was the current arrangements aren't working. My conclusion, that I'd drawn and articulated in those comments and others, is that the way that we currently respond to mental health patients in the community, which is primarily and almost entirely a police-led response, is not delivering the best outcome for police or for patients, and I was pleased that police came to that conclusion in their review as well. We've now kicked off a comprehensive memorandum-of-understanding renegotiation between police and Health as to how we can improve that situation.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What exactly is that MOU?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: MOU stands for "memorandum of understanding".

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: No. I said, "What's in it?"

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's a comprehensive document that explains—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What's in the one that you've entered into with New South Wales police?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's a pre-existing document that talks about when mental health—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: So it's not a new MOU.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: This is an old one. What have you done in relation to this incident?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: In relation to that specific incident or in relation to—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: To that incident. That's the one I'm asking about.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I asked for the circumstances to be reviewed, which—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And you said the review has been concluded.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: My apologies, Ms Maclaren-Jones, I was referring to a bigger piece of work that the New South Wales police have done to comprehensively—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, I'm asking about a very serious incident that occurred. We had an individual who was known to the police who was mentally unwell who was shot. I asked what you have done as Minister in relation to this matter.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I was explaining, that terribly tragic incident is not the first time that we've seen those kinds of circumstances. Every single time a critical incident like that occurs, there is a review to establish if anything—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And I just asked you, Minister, has that review been—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, it hasn't been. Sorry, that specific incident review has not been completed.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Have you met with the police commissioner in regard to it?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: In relation to that incident?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not in relation to that incident. However, I have met with the police commissioner and deputy commissioners multiple times in relation to the broader problem that we face. As I said, that incident is indicative of an unfortunate pattern of incidents in which people who are mentally ill in the community are subject to adverse outcomes in their interactions with police. I accept that that's not acceptable.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to this incident, when will you have the review completed?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not sure if we have a time line on that critical incident review. Perhaps Ms Willcox or Mr Wright may have that, or we may have to take it on notice.

DEB WILLCOX: Take it on notice.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, you would be aware of the results of the people matter New South Wales public sector employee survey in regard to the Mental Health Commission of New South Wales.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I am familiar.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What was your view in relation to those findings?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That they were extremely concerning.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What action did you take?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Obviously, I spoke to the former mental health commissioner about it.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: When was that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: December 2023. She assured me that there was a piece of work within the commission in relation to the outcomes of that survey. That satisfied me partially but not entirely. I agree that those results were extremely concerning and unacceptable. I will say, Ms Maclaren-Jones, that in addition to those survey results I had individuals contact my office to express concerns in relation to the commission. Obviously, that made me even more concerned to ensure that the commission was—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: So you were aware in December last year, and you were also contacted by individual staff. What action have you actually taken? We're now almost in March.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, I discussed the matter directly with the former mental health commissioner. She described to me the piece of work that the commission was doing in relation to engaging on those issues. That satisfied me partially. I felt as though there was a direct response from the leadership of the commission. In addition to that, I discussed the matter with the Secretary of the Premier's Department in relation to what options I had to initiate a broader investigation into what was occurring at the Mental Health Commission. Prior to that commencing—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Have you commenced that investigation?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, because prior to that commencing, Ms Lourey submitted her resignation.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: So you're saying that it's all the former commissioner's responsibility?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I'm not. But I am saying that the investigation that I was intending to conduct was linked to the feedback that I had received, which did specifically raise questions in relation to Ms Lourey's leadership of the commission. As I said, I want to be very clear that I'm not passing any judgement in relation to that. I'm saying concerns were raised with me. I'm saying I initiated a piece of work to investigate that. But prior to that commencing, she resigned. We now have an acting commissioner, and I'm waiting to see if that provides the fresh start that I believe the commission needs. I'll add that on top of that we are conducting the five-year statutory review into the Mental Health Commission at the moment. That bigger piece of work has also been kicked off and is an opportunity for us to ensure that the structure and culture of the commission meets the expectations that I have and the community has about its performance and its leadership.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: So, basically, you're saying to the current staff who have concerns about bullying, "Just wait and see"?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I'm not. I'm saying to them, "I hear you. I heard your concerns. I saw them expressed to me directly. I saw them expressed through the people matter survey. I spoke directly to Ms Lourey about it. I asked the Secretary of the Premier's Department what options I had for broader investigation." But those concerns did relate to—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are you asking for regular updates?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely. It's a regular topic of discussion, partially because, as you say—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: How often do you get a regular update in relation to the commission and the work?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Fortnightly.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, in the Infrastructure Statement 2023-24 budget, $20 million has been allocated to residential accommodation for those with longstanding mental health issues. Can you clarify what's being constructed and where those projects are?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I believe that that refers to the PCLI program, the Pathways to Community Living. No?

BRENDAN FLYNN: I think that may be the Haven—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Oh, apologies. Yes, that relates to the election commitments we made—thank you, Dr Flynn—in relation to the construction of three facilities in partnership with the Haven Foundation. Those facilities, the first of which will be based on the Central Coast—the other two, we have not yet finalised the location of, although they will be based on an assessment of need. We just want to get one moving before we decide the locations of the others. The latest briefing that I had on that was last week, and my understanding is that we have identified a site and are very close to securing the land.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: So the Central Coast. Any others?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, the other two we have not decided the locations on.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, I understand the new child and adolescent mental health service unit being built in Nepean Hospital will be for young people between the ages of 12 and 17. It'll include single bedrooms with a communal area. What safeguards have you put in place to ensure that people as young as 12 will be protected in that unit?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: All of our child and adolescent units are subject to the most rigorous safeguards in relation to patient safety—consumer safety. That is our core principle, so every single element of design, of the model of care and of staff training is directed towards that goal.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, you've asked about those procedures and safeguards? Can you outline what they are?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I have articulated, that's not the only child and adolescent mental health facility we have in New South Wales. I'm extremely concerned to ensure that every single one of our facilities, with its design, with the model of care for consumers and with our staff training—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, are you aware of what procedures are in place to protect girls as young as 12 who are in mental health units with, potentially, men who are 17? Have you asked that question?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We did have a discussion last year in relation to reports that I believe Ms Cohn asked me about where, not just in relation to child and adolescent facilities but in relation to all facilities, there were alarming reports of sexual assault. As a result of that, we asked Dr Wright and others in the NSW Health team to look into ensuring that our processes were up to date. I don't know, Dr Wright, if you wanted to give an update about how we have been looking to ensure—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, since it was raised last year, have you actually done anything apart from having a discussion last year?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, Dr Wright and the team at the mental health branch have been leading a piece of—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Have you asked again for an update in relation to that matter, or have you just again passed it on to someone else?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Dr Wright and the team at the mental health branch—he himself is the eminent—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: But you are the Minister for Mental Health. I know you have a very large portfolio. Are you across the details of your portfolio in Mental Health?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I am. As I said, we have initiated a piece of work to ensure that our policies and procedures in relation to patient safety for children and adolescents, and for adults, is up to date. That piece of work is ongoing.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: When do you expect it to be handed to you? Are you aware of the report and when it's due?

MURRAY WRIGHT: This calendar year. The policy review is across this calendar year.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, Dr Wright is saying the policy review is being conducted across this calendar year.

The CHAIR: Good morning, Minister. This Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into community and outpatient mental health services. I assume that's something that you've been following?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely, and I congratulate you on your good work. You were in Lismore recently, I understand.

The CHAIR: We were. I'm glad that you've been following. You would have seen that this month we heard evidence regarding the specific needs of people who have experienced trauma, and particularly chronic and complex trauma, such as victim-survivors of family and domestic violence. I understand from that evidence that there's currently only one specialised inpatient program—in Thirroul, run by Dr Karen Williams—providing specialised care for this cohort of people. Do you think that that's meeting the need for that kind of service?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I don't. I thought Dr Williams' evidence to your inquiry was excellent. I, in fact, had intended to visit the facility, I think a fortnight ago, but that was when that terrible road accident happened on the Bulli Pass so I was unable to get to Thirroul. However, I did meet Dr Williams the next day and had a long discussion with her about her work. She reiterated a number of the things that she provided in evidence in the inquiry. It was an incredibly enriching and fulfilling conversation for me, and—no, I don't. I see the value of the work that she is doing and I don't think it is broadly available enough.

The CHAIR: Will you be expanding or replicating that program?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Look, we'll see. That would be my hope. I think one of the key things that Dr Williams talked to me about when we met was the availability of suitably trained staff—psychiatric staff—to provide that level of support. Yes, the facility as a bricks and mortar place is important, and we will look to ensure that the existing mental health facilities we have can deliver that level of care. But I think there is a challenge, Dr Cohn, in that what she is articulating in terms of trauma-informed care is not necessarily well understood by the existing workforce. She has had a fantastic conversation with Dr Angelo Virgona, the head of the college of psychiatrists. I also talk with him regularly and know him well. One of the key things that Dr Williams and I committed to doing as a result of our conversation was looking at what we can do to ensure that there are staff available, because I think that is probably the biggest barrier to the broader rollout of those

services. Are there people who are trained with that level of understanding of the way that trauma can have those consequences, and how to treat it? At the moment, I'm not sure there are.

The CHAIR: I'll come back to the training issue in a second, because that is important. But in the immediate term, I understand that only one of the beds at the current facility is actually available for public patients. Will you be increasing the number of public beds in the immediate term?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, if we can. Although the reality is—and I think that this is important—that's a female-only facility. Most of our other facilities are not female-only or male-only. And so, as we look to ensure that that type of care is available, we have to be mindful of not putting pressure on the system that is already under strain. No, I can't commit to delivering more public beds of that nature in the short term. That isn't something that is in our immediate planning pipeline. But I can assure you that, as we do our broader statewide mental health infrastructure rollout and we look at the way that we are updating our facilities, those types of models will inform the decisions that we're making.

The CHAIR: Coming back to the training issue, I firstly should acknowledge that there are some very skilled people currently working in NSW Health with excellent skills in trauma-informed care, but we have heard from some people who access services that they can't always access trauma-sensitive care in mainstream services. What is currently being done to improve the level of trauma-informed care that people are getting in mainstream services?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I just want to say I agree with your assessment that almost all of the people in NSW Health who are delivering mental health care are excellent individuals who are desperately trying to do the best for the consumers that they work with. Having said that, knowledge changes and times change and practice changes and, even within the lifetime of some of our existing clinicians, the way that we treat people with mental illness has changed substantially. It would be within the lifetime of the senior leadership of NSW Health that we were still institutionalising mental health patients in conditions that are completely unacceptable by modern standards. As times change and knowledge changes, I expect that the level of care provided by our clinicians changes too. And we have comprehensive training programs to ensure that that is updated. I can ask the officials now, but I imagine you'll want to talk to them in the afternoon, so I understand that you can do that then.

The CHAIR: I will—I'll come back to it. But if you're going to go to the officials, can I just be really specific about what is proactively being done to actually support clinicians to do that training, noting the extraordinary time pressure that they're under.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes. Perhaps, Dr Flynn, you might briefly answer.

BRENDAN FLYNN: Thanks, Minister, and thanks, Dr Cohn. There are three aspects to this. There is a Health sector-wide recently launched trauma-informed care framework which is really designed to help clinicians and to inform any training they get around the importance of recognising and responding to individual trauma and to making sure that the work that happens in the health sector outside mental health, including emergency departments, surgical wards—everywhere—that it considers someone's identity and their personal history. It minimises the opportunity or the possibility of doing harm by replicating what may have happened to that individual previously.

It also talks about how to escalate concerns, so that's a general health sector response. Within mental health services there are two other components. One is individual curriculum for staff, and I take the Minister's point that over the lifetime of a clinician, information and knowledge can change, so we are making sure that our doctors and our nurses and our allied health staff have updated training around that. But the second part is that sometimes, particularly—not always in response to an incident but it certainly raises the importance of this—we might take a multidisciplinary team and provide them with often a lived-experience-led trauma-informed care module. Sometimes that can be a workshop, sometimes it can be a presentation. It's an increasingly prominent part of the world of mental health services at a district and a network level. I hope that assists.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Dr Flynn, I might come back to you this afternoon.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, come back in the afternoon. I would just add, Dr Cohn, as an example, things like seclusion and restraint can be red flags, can indicate to us that the level of care that is being provided at a facility isn't in line with our expectations. When we see seclusion and restraint data that suggests to us a facility is not necessarily providing the level of support we expect, we have a direct intervention to support them to turn that around.

The CHAIR: Can you give an example of a direct intervention that you've taken?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I think—I don't know about naming the districts, but perhaps we should, where we've seen some of our seclusion and restraint data not meeting our expectations. Perhaps,

Dr Wright, you might talk about some of the districts where we have had some concerns and we've partnered with them to ensure that the staff have got the training that they need to deliver care without needing to resort to seclusion and restraints at some of the levels that we've seen.

MURRAY WRIGHT: Thank you. One of the initiatives that came out of the seclusion review in 2017 was to fund the Clinical Excellence Commission to run a Mental Health Patient Safety Program specifically designed to deliver contemporary improvement practices around seclusion and restraint as a priority, and also suicide prevention. That's evolved as a program which is targeted towards those—it's not just districts, it's more about facilities.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Apologies, I think Dr Wright is correct. It's more of a facility than a district level.

MURRAY WRIGHT: We get quarterly reports on seclusion and restraint, and we can see and engage with all those services about trying to understand why things might have slipped, what processes are in place and then what engagement they have with the patient safety program. We have seen, in a number of places over time, some good results from engagement with that team. It's a very small team. They can't possibly be operating across the entire health system all the time, so it has to be quite targeted. I should add that the issue of maintaining effort and improvement in regard to restrictive practices is an enormous challenge for our services and the level of vigilance that's required is incredibly high, and so sometimes—

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Dr Wright. I don't want to diminish the importance of the issue and I'd love to discuss it with you this afternoon. We just have so little of the Minister's time this morning.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Understood, Dr Cohn.

The CHAIR: Minister, while we're talking about evidence that's coming out of the mental health inquiry, it's very clear that there is greater community demand for peer support and a peer workforce than what is currently being provided. What are your views on a peer workforce in mental health?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I couldn't agree with you more. The workforce challenges that we have across health are applicable in mental health. They are significant and they are a major barrier to the delivery of the services that we would love to see the community be able to access. A key component of that in mental health is what we can do around peer support, and I think there is massive untapped potential in relation to the opportunities of peer support. We have at the moment—I've met with numerous peer support workers and representative organisations for peer support workers. A key piece of work that we're doing at the moment is two things. One, we're recruiting. Have we recruited the peer support coordinator within the Mental Health branch?

BRENDAN FLYNN: Not yet.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not yet? We are in the process of recruiting a dedicated peer support coordinator within the Mental Health branch to lead exactly the kind of work that you have described. The other thing that we are doing is, through our peer support committee, we're looking at, essentially, how we can update the employment arrangements for peer support workers to ensure that it is a meaningful career pathway for people. That started before my time as the Minister, stalled and wasn't really going anywhere for most of the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023. We have reinvigorated that now, and that committee is meeting again regularly. I'm quite hopeful that it is going to provide a framework for employment of peer support workers that values their work, remunerates them properly and shows them what an important part of the system we consider them to be.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Minister. I look forward to an update on that at the next estimates hearing. On a different topic, I'm sure you'd also be aware of the changes being made at a Federal level regarding vaping, which I would describe as, essentially, a prohibition approach to recreational vaping, and I'm really concerned about the large community of young people who are going to suddenly not have access to vaping products. What is the Government doing to ensure support for those young people?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely that is something that I am aware of not only through the work that the Federal Government is doing but that issue has been brought to my attention. I pay credit to the Advocate for Children and Young People—who is here as well—who has done an excellent piece of work informed directly by the voices of young people in relation to exactly those issues. I know that NSW Health is across that. I know that they're committed to the principles, broadly, of harm minimisation and of supporting people—not just young people, I should say, but people more broadly—to transition safely from vaping. Obviously, Dr Cohn, it is underpinned by the fact that vaping is a very dangerous thing for a young person to do. We don't want young people—I'm the mother of a daughter in high school. I don't want my daughter getting into vaping culture. We need to do something about the fact that many, many young people are becoming addicted to

vaping. It is harmful to them, and over the long term the consequences are harmful and unknown. The danger to their young bodies is unknown. I am committed to the work of trying to stop young people vaping all the time.

However, I accept your point that, as we manage that transition, we have to be thoughtful about the voices and the experiences of young people. As I said, NSW Health is directly involved in that. I can ask them to articulate or you can ask them yourselves this afternoon, but they are across the fact that people need to be supported to find other healthy outlets for their anxiety, whether it's sport, whether it's healthy eating habits or whether it's social behaviour. We don't want young people to build a culture around vaping and use that as their social connection.

The CHAIR: To be clear, I'm a former GP.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I know.

The CHAIR: I am also really concerned about the health impacts of vaping and have supported many people to quit smoking and deal with other addictions over time. What I'm particularly concerned about is that, at the moment, young people are being encouraged by NSW Health, if they want support with vaping, to either contact their GP, to download and pay for one of two vaping apps that aren't free or to call the Quitline. Are any of those services actually specifically catering to young people?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I understand that some of the apps that are available are specifically dedicated to young people. I have to say I'm not aware of those particular apps that you're referring to, and it does concern me if the only access to dedicated young people's support requires you to pay. That is something that would concern me, and I'm more than happy to talk with NSW Health about how we can make access to freely available services. But, yes, my understanding is that some of the online and digital platforms are specifically catering to the needs of young people and, to be perfectly honest, in the list of things you have described as advice to young people, my experience with them—they're not calling the Quitline and visiting a GP. You know more than anyone, finding a GP and getting an appointment—I don't actually think that's necessarily the first entry point for a young person to access advice either. Online services and digital platforms that are specifically dedicated to them are probably the most effective way to help them manage that transition. But I accept your point that if, currently, the only ones that are available, you have to pay for, that's something that we should look at.

The CHAIR: I've got a few questions about specialised homelessness health services, which is something I asked you about in Parliament earlier this month. Given the increasing demand for those kinds of services in the current housing crisis, are you expanding these services to ensure that they can meet the growing needs of the homeless population, particularly for mental health support?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, we are looking to see what more we can do in terms of specialised homeless health services. We have the excellent model at St Vincent's. I have met with them, and I have met with others, including physicians who run a service out of St George Hospital, to discuss what more we can do. We have recently re-signed a memorandum of understanding between Homes NSW—our housing team—and the Mental Health Branch. That's a good start, but I'm keen to put meat on those bones, and a big part of that is expanding dedicated homeless health services. Homeless health services obviously provide more than just mental health support, although I will note that when I met with St Vincent's, and they talked about the broad range of services they provide, I said to them, "What's the thing? What's the crux?" They said that it's mental health that keeps them up at night. It is really important to note that is a core component of the provision of specialist homeless health services.

The CHAIR: You have mentioned the excellent services at St Vincent's and St George. I'm particularly concerned about the increase in homelessness, and particularly hidden homelessness, in rural and regional areas. In my own community in Albury-Wodonga, we're seeing increasing people couch surfing or living in cars. Is any of that specialist work actually outreaching into rural and regional areas?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: One of the things that we've done through St Vincent's is the creation of some mobile homeless health vans. There have been preliminary discussions about what we can do with those in rural and regional areas. At the moment, that would be a mobile outreach-type service, which can meet some need, although I accept your point that, in some particular communities, we may need to look to establish more longer term, permanent facilities. Another one that comes to my mind is the North Coast and the Northern Rivers. At the moment, we don't have any particular plans for that. But as I said, we have an over $700 million mental health infrastructure pipeline to build new facilities across New South Wales. Looking to embed these kinds of services in that is absolutely part of the future planning.

The CHAIR: You're saying that embedded within the infrastructure upgrades for rural and regional New South Wales, you're going to include specialised homelessness health services?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I'm saying we're going to look at that. In some areas, to be perfectly honest, that probably wouldn't be necessary or wouldn't be recommended. But in some areas where, as you have identified, we have this intersection between growing forms of homelessness and the opportunity to deliver new health facilities, there may be a chance to ensure that some of those services are co-located.

The CHAIR: On a very similar note, in Parliament earlier this month, you spoke about mobile cooling stations for people experiencing homelessness during extreme weather conditions. One of the benefits that you mentioned was the mobility—that they could be taken into the regions. Where have those mobile cooling stations been taken outside of metro areas this summer?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: They haven't been taken out of metro areas this summer. We only just started them this summer, so they've been based here. But one of the benefits, now that we have them established and up and running, is that we hope to be able to take them into different locations over time.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Good morning, Minister. Are you serious when you say that you're against water buybacks in New South Wales?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you explain to me why, in your NSW Alternatives to Buybacks Plan that was released a few days ago, it states that this "does not eliminate the prospect of water buybacks in New South Wales"? They are going to happen under your watch, aren't they?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know, because I don't intend on buying back any water. As I've said repeatedly, at the moment, the water market is a private, freely accessible market. If the Commonwealth chooses to participate in that activity, I can't stop them from doing that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But, Minister, you just said "if the Commonwealth chooses". You know full well that that is going to be a part of what happens under the Murray-Darling Basin—but you've said in this document, page 7:

> … we recognise that they will likely be part of the suite of measures the Australian Government will seek to use …

You know it's going to be a part of what happens and communities are going to be impacted. You have to admit that.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know that, but I am concerned about that. That's why I've put that report out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you've said here that these will likely be an impact. You're looking at different communities that you know will have that socio-economic impact of a water buyback. So, surely, your evidence has to be you are expecting that this is going to happen in New South Wales.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: If I wasn't concerned that the Commonwealth may do that, I wouldn't have put the report together and put it out there. The entire point of doing that work proactively is to demonstrate to the Commonwealth that there are alternatives. Absolutely, I'm concerned about it. Absolutely, they—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's an admission that it's on the agenda. This very report and the wording in it indicates that you know that this is what the Commonwealth have as part of their plan.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I've said, I'm not the Commonwealth water Minister. If you—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. As we talked about in the last hearing, you have no power to stop water buybacks. It's clearly part of the agenda from the Commonwealth Government. It's all very well and good to put out a brochure and say that we don't support it, but the fact is it is going to happen in this State, under your watch.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know that, but I am concerned about that. That's why I put out that report.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It is a 23-page plan in quite large text. Can you tell me any of the new projects that you've identified in this plan.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The key pieces of work that that plan articulates are the acceleration of our SDLAM projects, and I think that there is a lot of potential there. A key reason we signed on to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan was because we thought that there was a significant opportunity in those projects. So—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But they've all had their dates pushed back though, haven't they, Minister.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's right. We now—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So that's not going to happen any quicker under your watch as Minister. It's going to be delayed to 2026.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, not necessarily. We now have more time to complete those projects, which is good.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You say "more time". When were they due for completion? When do you estimate that they will be completed?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: They were due for completion in 2024. That was not when they were actually going to be completed. The problem that we faced was that was when they were due but there was zero prospect of that deadline being met.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So it's moved from 2024 to 2026.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, that's right. What that means is that we now have access to substantial additional funding from the Commonwealth to get them moving. We have until 2026. A key part of that Alternatives to Buybacks Plan is the opportunity for us to accelerate some of those projects—I think there's something like 36 SDLAM projects; there's a number—to get them moving. There's a number. Another key component of that plan is looking at rules-based changes to contribute environmental benefits and water recovery. An obvious example of where we'll be starting that is around the Menindee Lakes. I've been clear that I'm not satisfied with the current rules as they exist between New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority in relation to the management of the lakes. We're keen to change that. We're keen to have a conversation about how we may better manage inflows and outflows into the lakes and, as a result of that, potentially, deliver environmental benefits and water recovery that would minimise the impacts of buybacks.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I take you now to the Wilcannia Weir project, which is, obviously, part of the Better Baaka program. That has been significantly scaled back, hasn't it, Minister?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. I would not describe it as being significantly scaled back. I would describe—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's what the community is saying. They're not happy.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I absolutely share the community's frustration. That project was announced in 2018. It's now 2024, and almost nothing has happened. I am extremely sympathetic to their frustration. They have been stuffed around for years, with nothing happening, with projects announced, re-announced, rescoped. So my commitment to that community is to get it moving.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If I can just redirect you, Minister. There was a design agreed to in 2022. That's correct, isn't it?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I understand there was an EIS process in 2022.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: According to both the State and Federal local member, there was a 2022 design that was agreed upon by the community. It was going to see the weir a metre higher. There would be gates. There would be fishways. They've now been told that it won't be raised by an extra metre, no gates and just a simple fishway, and that the design has been significantly scaled back without proper stakeholder consultation. What do you say to that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: My understanding—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know that detail? Is that correct, that information?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Sorry, in relation to—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That it's not going to be a metre higher, that you're not going to have the gates anymore. Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. My understanding is that there have been some changes to the project's scope in order to get it moving.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So what are the changes to the project's scope? Can you tell us what they are?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Perhaps Ms Jones might have the detail.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might come back to Ms Jones this afternoon. Do you know what they are?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can check my note, if you want me to get into Wilcannia Weir.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, so you're not sort of across it.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: You say I'm not across it—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Minister, this is a really big issue.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It is a big issue.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a community that you should know, and what's happening.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I do know.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'd like to know what consultation was done in the lead-up to that decision.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I think the consultation that was done was relatively cursory. I've expressed—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, what do you mean by relatively cursory?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have expressed my frustration—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I'll redirect you. What do you mean by relatively—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know what redirect means. I'm trying to answer your question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That to me indicates that there wasn't a lot of consultation. Is that what you're saying?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I think the consultation wasn't ideal.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Right, thank you.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: And I've accepted that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So what will you do to improve that process? But also, as I said, you've got a lot of very angry community members and both the State and Federal MPs saying this is not what the community was expecting in 2022. Why has the scope of the project changed? Is it because it's cheaper to do it the way that you're progressing? Is it a money issue, that you've run out? What's the problem?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. The problem is this project has been dragging on for far too long and I want to get it moving.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but you've got an agreed-upon design and you're now changing that. So how are you not adding to the length of the delay? Why don't you just get on and complete the project that the 2022 design foreshadowed?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Because my understanding is that that design—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you don't even know what the change is.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —had not—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can't tell me.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: My understanding is that that design had not been through an EIS process—had not passed through the gateways in order to be approved. And so—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So if you had better community consultation—and you've just admitted that it wasn't particularly thorough. If the community comes to you and says—as I said, both the State and Federal MPs and local representatives say, "Minister, we want the 2022 design", will you listen to them and go back to that original plan?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: If we can get it approved. As I said, my key thing—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What do you mean "if"? You're the Minister. Why won't you deliver what the community wants?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't manage environmental impact approvals. That's not my job. You'll have to ask the Minister for the Environment about that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Right, so not your job.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm subject to the same approvals in relation to planning and environmental processes as everyone else. My key thing is to get the project moving. I'm extremely sympathetic to the idea that this has been dragging on and on and nothing's been happening.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: My key priority is to start the work.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you explain to me, then, the difference? In your *NSW Alternatives to Buybacks Plan*, page 10, you mention both the Yanco Creek Offtake Regulator project and the Menindee Lakes Water Savings project, saying that they weren't viable in their current form because they didn't have community support and that you've worked with the communities to rescope that project. Why won't you do the same thing for the Wilcannia Weir project?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That is what we're doing. And, as I said—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But they're not happy. You completely walked away from the old design and they're furious with you, Minister.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. As I said, I don't accept your characterisation of the rescoping. I do accept—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You didn't know.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I do accept—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You couldn't even tell me if it was changed.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't accept your characterisation of the rescoping. I do accept that community consultation wasn't ideal, and I have given the commitment to the community and to the local members to lift the game on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, we'll be watching that very closely. Minister, how many Murray-Darling communities have you visited since becoming the water Minister?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: A number. I have some here—some list of the places that I have visited. I have visited Menindee. I visited Broken Hill. I visited Deniliquin. I visited Albury. I could take on notice the other places that I've visited.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you been to Wilcannia?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not since becoming the water Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you go back out there and meet with the community on these issues?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Great. Obviously, we're very conscious of how devastating potential water buybacks would be for rural and regional communities, and we have spoken about that in previous hearings. Your plan does say that you're looking at analysing which communities will be the most vulnerable to those socio-economic impacts, as I said. What work have you done around structural adjustment packages for communities who might be impacted by buybacks?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: What we have done is we've done our own report. We commissioned it. It was done by Aither in relation to the socio-economic impact of buybacks on communities. None of that is going to be information that shocks people who have been following this for some time. It essentially concludes that there will be negative socio-economic impacts.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Of course. You probably don't need an analysis to know that.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I actually agree with that comment, although this provides some heft to that conclusion that—I accept your point—is well known. We'll be, obviously, submitting that to the Commonwealth to demonstrate what we have been saying to them for some time, which is that there is a potential negative impact. In terms of the detail of structural adjustment, we haven't gotten into that yet, for two reasons:

One, I maintain my view that there are alternatives to buybacks and I do not want the Commonwealth to engage in activity that is going to hurt New South Wales.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They're clearly going to, Minister.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, I've done the homework for them. We've put together our proactive plan, I've submitted it to them and my expectation is that they thoroughly consider those alternatives before—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But if they don't, when are you going to start work on structural adjustment? If that happens in a community, time is ticking in terms of that sort of financial support. Surely, you can walk and chew gum at the same time. I appreciate what you're saying, but it's pretty clear that the Federal Government is going to be looking at buybacks. I think everybody knows that.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, I really don't want to give the Commonwealth any wriggle room on pursuing alternatives to buybacks, and my concern is that if I start doing the work for them on "this is what structural adjustment for communities is going to look like", they may take that as some kind of indication that I'm accepting of that outcome—which I'm not.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that, but you've admitted that it is not within your purview to stop that, and we understand that. But if you don't do the work in the interim, those communities will literally be left high and dry without government support. So when would you look to do structural adjustment packages?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The one thing that I will say, Ms Mitchell, to your point, is just last week, I think it was, I had an excellent meeting with RAMJO, the Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation of councils, and they were making many of the same points you're making. I don't deny that the sentiments that you're articulating are felt by communities across New South Wales. They asked me, in relation to structural adjustment packages, would we partner with them and co-design those packages with local communities. That is a commitment that I will give—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, great.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —because I don't want to go down the path of particularly the Commonwealth but even the State Government making decisions here in Sydney about some hall that needs upgrading or some sort of very light-touch investment in the community that isn't based on that community's view about what their future is. I think that principle of co-design of those packages is a very sensible one and a very smart one, and that's the way that we will pursue that work.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You'd obviously commit to doing that with other JOs or other councils?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Of course. Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And then, the findings that you're going to present to the Australian Government in terms of the impacts to communities, will you make that public as well?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I will.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Moving on now to boil water notices, can you tell me how many have been issued in New South Wales since the start of December last year and which communities have been impacted?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not off the top of my head. Ms Jones may have that information; otherwise we can take it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'll come back to Ms Jones this afternoon. But you're, obviously, aware that there have been several?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm aware of a number. I can't give you a definitive list.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. Obviously, I'm assuming you're across the current situation at Yass, where you have a town of 7,000 people who have been told that it's not safe to drink the water coming out of their taps?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I am, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does that concern you that it's a community less than an hour from our national capital and yet they don't have access to safe drinking water?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It deeply concerns me.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What are you doing about it?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We are working on the ground now with council, who are the local water utility and are responsible for the provision of drinking water in Yass, to ensure that they are able to move off that boil water alert as soon as possible. We've been providing them with ongoing technical support and my understanding is that they are in the final stages of just reticulating and flushing the pipes so that they should be able to move off the boil water alert in the next few days. That's what we've been doing in the short term. In the long term, we've made a $13 million commitment to upgrade their water treatment plant.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you spoken directly to the mayor or anyone at council?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I've met with Yass council.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Recently?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, not—late last year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you visited Yass?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not since becoming Minister but previously, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Given that, obviously, they're feeling the impacts of not being able to access water readily, which, if this was happening in a metro area—I mean, you can understand why regional people often feel a bit like second-class citizens. I don't think anyone in this room who lives in Sydney would not expect to be able to turn on the tap and drink the water, yet that is literally what's happening in Yass. Would you go and meet with the community and talk about the issues?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely, I will absolutely do that. I visited their water treatment plant. I've walked around it—it old. It is a facility that you go there and it smacks you in the face that this thing needs upgrading. I can understand the frustration of the community that they were promised that in 2019 and absolutely nothing has happened for the past four years—almost five years.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you tell me where you're up to with the business case for that project? How far away is it?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We are in the stages of final independent assessment of the business case that has been submitted to us. We're very confident that that will be finalised soon. Once that's done, obviously, we've made a $13 million commitment towards that project. Yass council will need to make a contribution too but, in my meeting with them, they are understanding of that. Then we will be submitting that to the Commonwealth for a contribution from them as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, so it's still a little way away.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It is. As I said, I think the community is rightfully incredibly frustrated that this has been going on for years. But I say to them that since becoming the Minister, we have moved as quickly as we can to ensure that the long-term solution to the water problem there that has been going on for a long time is moving as quickly as it can.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think my colleague has a couple of questions on this too, but just a last one from me: Would you consider working with the Minister for Health to look at transporting bottled water in? My understanding is the local supermarket is struggling to keep up with demand. Is that something that you would look to do, literally today or shortly, to alleviate that issue?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely, yes. We do do water carting in areas where that is required. As I said, obviously our goal is to support the local water utility to get the water back within drinking water guidelines. But we do have a program of water carting to support communities where that is taking time and they are unable to access water.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you look at that for Yass? Obviously you're here this morning, but could you take that on notice?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: If the request is made, absolutely.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, my understanding is that the council has provided the final copy of the business case to the department and also your office was advised. Your office also advised them that the additional funding—the $18 million that you're aware they need—would need to be obtained from the Federal Government. Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. We're providing $13 million of funding. There is obviously a gap between $13 million and $18 million, and that is the portion that we would seek to secure from the Commonwealth through the National Water Grid Fund.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Then why did you not prioritise that in the last funding round—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Because the Commonwealth guidelines—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: —when your office advised the council to make a submission?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, we didn't. The Commonwealth National Water Grid Fund guidelines require a final business case, and they don't have a final business case yet. However, I'm pleased to say—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are you saying that the business case that was provided to the department is not the final one?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, it is the final business case, but round one of the National Water Grid Fund closed on 5 December and the final business case—it still actually has not been independently assured, although that is occurring right now. But I'm pleased to advise you, Ms Maclaren-Jones, that we're very confident that that will be done for round two of the grid.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: So you will be prioritising this in that application for round two?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, we will.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, I wanted to ask you about a plan for regional water security. Have you got anything in place in that space?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, and it's risk based. Our primary focus at the moment is ensuring that the towns that we have identified as having the highest risk are prioritised. Those towns are Tamworth, Orange and Bathurst. More broadly than that, we are seeking to ensure that every single project committed to funding under the Safe and Secure Water Fund is moving. Some of those projects have had funding commitments dating back to 2019 that have not secured any advance. Again, seeing that kind of drift frustrates me because I do accept there are real water security issues in regional New South Wales. I'm very confident we've put a bit of a rocket under that program to ensure that those funding commitments that have been made to those communities are actually delivered. But, as I said, there are broader pieces of work in relation to the towns that we have identified as the highest risk. I'm sure that you can understand why we might take a risk-based framework when making decisions about how to prioritise funding and activity. But we can come back to it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will.

The CHAIR: Minister, just before we ran out of time we were talking about the mobile cooling stations which you said you hoped to take to regional areas but you don't have any concrete plans to do so. As you are well aware, places like the Northern Rivers and the North Coast have higher numbers of rough sleepers than Sydney. Is this something that will be included in the next budget?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not sure that it will necessarily require a budgetary allocation. It will be included in our future plans for the provision of services in those communities. As I say, we have a number of the vans now. It's merely a matter of considering where they might be needed and how we might ensure that passage up to regional communities. Certainly, in terms of, say, the Northern Rivers and the North Coast communities that you've identified, one of the key things that I have done since becoming the Minister is expand our assertive outreach. It was previously only in Tweed; now it is right across the Northern Rivers and the North Coast. Once we have those assertive outreach teams established—there are registered nurses that sit within those teams, so the provision of health services amongst the assertive outreach is an incredibly important part of that project—that's an opportunity for us to identify where mobile vans, whether they're cooling vans or other mobile health vans, may be able to go out with that team and provide health support.

The CHAIR: I look forward to asking you in future where the vans have been. The Advocate for Children and Young People recently released a report following consultation with young people on the cost of living, and that report included a number of recommendations related to your other portfolios. That included things like accessibility to community youth health services and renters' rights advocacy. How are you responding to those recommendations to address the cost of living for young people?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I am familiar with that report—excellent work again by the advocate. I've met with the youth action committee on a number of occasions and they have reiterated their concerns. All I can say is one of the key driving elements of the cost-of-living crisis for young people is the cost of housing. That is one of the major contributing factors to their increased costs, and the Government has a comprehensive piece of work to address cost of living, whether it's cost of housing, whether it is through our reform in the rental market or whether it is through our planning reforms to deliver more housing and, in particular, from my perspective, more affordable housing. Bringing down the cost of housing is core business for government and consumes a substantial part of the work that we're focused on.

The CHAIR: A number of those recommendations were about health services—for example, expanding public dental services and free contraceptive options for young people. What meetings have you had with Minister Park or with Health as the Minister for Youth to advocate for those recommendations?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I've ensured that all of my ministerial colleagues are across those recommendations. That's one of the key roles that I see, as Minister for Youth—yes, Minister Park in relation to health services and Minister Haylen in relation to transport services. There are other findings and feedback that I have received in relation to the cost of transport services. Ensuring that my ministerial colleagues are across that is a priority of mine. I can assure you that the Government and all of the Ministers are not under any illusions that the cost of living is the key issue in the State right now and that young people are absolutely bearing the brunt of that. My ministerial colleagues are aware of my concerns in relation to that, and I've put those conclusions in front of them. I don't want to stray into other people's portfolios and make statements in relation to their priorities, but they are aware that cost of living is a major issue and that it has a major impact on young people.

The CHAIR: Finally, before I go to Ms Faehrmann, I'm interested if you have advocated specifically for the recommendations around expansion of public dental services and contraceptive options for young people?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I haven't advocated specifically in relation to those conclusions. However, as I said, I have made sure that Minister Park and all of my ministerial colleagues are aware of the findings and the voices of young people as articulated in the work of the advocate and asked them to ensure that they are mindful of that feedback as they're developing policy priorities in their portfolios.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Good morning, Minister. In relation to the agreement of Murray-Darling Basin Ministers to deliver the Basin Plan in full, how much funding has the Commonwealth committed to New South Wales?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We're about to finalise that. We have not landed on a final, publicly announced figure yet, but I understand it is imminent. It is in the realms of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I would've assumed so. Within the next week or two—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I imagine so.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: —or month?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: My understanding is that we've concluded all of the work that we need to conclude at our end and that we're just waiting on the Commonwealth to do the same.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I suppose this is in relation to that in terms of timing, but what is the New South Wales water recovery target within that 450 gigalitres?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't think we have a clear line of sight on that yet. As I said, we have committed, with the Commonwealth, to a piece of work going forward. South Australia has done the same. Victoria, at the moment, has not done that. Whilst there are some things that we are able to finalise at the moment, Ms Faehrmann, there are other elements of the plan going forward that are still unknown. It goes back to Ms Mitchell's questions about the willingness of the Commonwealth to consider our alternatives. As you can see from our exchange, my expectation is that they do that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'll get to that in a second. That's my next round. To be clear, it sounds like you'll get the money before the specific recovery target is known within that 450 gigalitres. New South Wales will get the money but, at that point, New South Wales won't have said, "We'll contribute X number of gigalitres as part of this 450 gigalitres"?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Let's turn to the buybacks plan. I have some sympathy for you, Minister, sitting there and getting questions from The Greens on one side and questions from The Nationals on the other side. They're completely different questions that you've got to prepare for today, but that's the game.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's the gig.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's the joy of being the water Minister.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Sorry, not the "game"—the business.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: "Joy" is definitely a term I would use in relation to my water portfolio.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In relation to buybacks, what's interesting about the research is that Aither is looking at the evidence—they're looking at a socio-economic impact study of buybacks. Are they looking at other socio-economic issues and conditions such as, for example, bank closures, lack of rentals as a result of short-term holiday lets—don't get into that now though, Minister—or the centralisation of services away from some regional towns? Are they looking at all of that? And why aren't you also looking at the benefits of buybacks to downstream communities, for example?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: They're not looking at that. I accept the points that you're making. This piece of work was a more narrowly construed piece of work.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It sounds like it's a piece of work that is being done for a predicted outcome.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have to say I don't disagree with you. As I said to Ms Mitchell, the conclusions were not ones that would surprise anyone who has been following this. It was a piece of work to clearly demonstrate to the Commonwealth what I already knew, which was that when they completely unstrategically participate in widespread water purchase, it has a negative impact on our towns. I already knew that. This report does come to that conclusion. I will publicly release it. You may be—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But it comes to that conclusion because it doesn't look at the impacts and, potentially, the benefits on downstream communities, does it? If you're looking at just the negative impacts in terms of socio-economic impacts within a particular community, that's what you're going to find. Unless everything else that's hitting some of our smaller regional communities, in particular the ones I rattled off before—how can you separate that? It does seem as though this research has been produced to deliver a particular political outcome?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's not a political outcome. It has been conducted to back in the conclusion that I had already reached, and the findings that the New South Wales Government had already made, that previous rounds of Commonwealth water purchase have hurt New South Wales communities.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: How much does that research cost?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not sure. I'll take that on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. It's to back up a predetermined outcome. This is in a similar vein. Has there been any analysis on the economic cost to New South Wales communities as a result of water traded from New South Wales to Victoria and South Australia?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not sure if that research has been done, although we are very engaged in the road map for water market reform, and so there may have been some research done in association with our work on the road map, but we could take that on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, I wrote to you about the Bloomberg article that appeared in January, that was very, very critical, had a lot of information about the impact of water trading on the whole Murray-Darling Basin but New South Wales particularly, New South Wales being one of the worst players in all of this. That article found that, over the last decade, 576 gigalitres of allocation water was traded outside of the New South Wales Murray. How is water sold to the Commonwealth more harmful than 576 gigalitres of water traded to South Australia and New South Wales?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I do acknowledge that you wrote to me about that and brought that article to my attention. To me, there are two things that flow from the consideration and analysis of that piece of work. One is the separation of land and water and the establishment of a private water market where those interests can be traded. That is a longstanding and pre-existing state of affairs which it is not really within my purview alone to change. That arrangement—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I do have a few questions on that later, Minister, for you because there are some things that your Government could be doing.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That arrangement, Ms Faehrmann, underpins all of the issues that you have raised. And, as I said, my views on that are—I'm happy to discuss it with you—almost irrelevant to the extent that that is such a longstanding and pre-existing arrangement so as to—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: How is that potentially not being factored into this socio-economic impact study that is being undertaken for a predetermined outcome to say buybacks to the Commonwealth are so bad, when all of the water trading to South Australia and Victoria isn't?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not saying—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: This just sounds like Aither, whoever they are, have got a nice chunk of government money for probably not telling us anything useful.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not saying that the other water trades that you have referred to are particularly optimal or acceptable either. I agree with some of—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But you're not looking into that—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I am looking into that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: —in terms of commissioning research, for example.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, we are committed to the road map for water market reform that the ACCC set out and are ensuring that we're working with the other States. I really want that to be a national piece of work because if we start—as I said, it's a national market. It has been a longstanding private market in relation to the trading of water. That's not something that I would prefer to have differential regulations in New South Wales alone. But I want you to know, Ms Faehrmann, that I do think a number of the points that you are making and the conclusions that have been reached are valid and that we are working on the road map for reform.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, I think what I'm getting at is what seems to be this ideological stance that NSW Labor brought into this Government, based on what the National Party took before the last election: coming in, being absolutely opposed to buybacks, actually based on—you're creating evidence to justify this ridiculous stance, when there are so many other things impacting regional communities. When it comes to water, selling water to the Commonwealth is the least of people's worries.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I don't think it is the least of people's worries. I accept your point about there are other stresses in regional communities, but my view is that there is incontrovertible evidence, clear evidence—it's not pretend. It's not manufactured for a political conclusion. It is based on—clearly, previous Commonwealth buyback engagements in New South Wales have hurt New South Wales communities, and I don't think there's any denying that, and I don't apologise for being proactive in trying to avoid that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you also look at the benefits to rivers? You've got Water, obviously, as a portfolio. It's not just about socio-economic impacts, as you know. It's also environmental benefits. Where do you as water Minister then factor into this, in terms of that study, whatever it is, the huge environmental outcomes that, again, in terms of your legislative requirements, you have to take into consideration as well?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I absolutely do, and that is why we are deeply engaged in delivering the outcomes under the plan. To be honest, Ms Faehrmann, the option was available to me to do what the Victorian Government had done and just wash my hands and say "no more". That is a bad outcome; it's a bad outcome for New South Wales and our rivers. I am committed to delivering our commitments under the plan, but I genuinely believe there are ways to do that that minimise negative impacts on New South Wales. I am concerned that the Commonwealth will take the cheap and easy route, which will be detrimental to our communities.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'm not sure about "cheap", given how much has already been spent.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm determined to not let them do that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I want to ask you about rules-based water and the water recovered through rules-based water, which is this plan you've put together. Will it be quantified by a long-term average equivalent factor so it can be compared to other water recovery volumes?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's the intention.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you for the very detailed responses to my questions on notice after the last budget estimates. I put on the record that it's very good to have your department and you actually providing us useful information. That's very rare and I really appreciate it; I don't think it happened in the last Government. I'm curious to know how a rules-based change will achieve more than the equivalent amount of water that could be recovered through a buyback, if they're both calculated using this long-term average equivalent factor.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I think, to be honest, the question of how we would deliver that outcome and whether the Commonwealth would accept it is not finalised, so this is new work. This is the New South Wales

Government trying to engage with new thinking about how we can deliver on our commitments under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and avoid buyback. Exactly how we manage that—the outcome of those rules-based changes—in a way that is acceptable to the Commonwealth in terms of their framework is not finalised work, Ms Faehrmann.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The main reason I'm asking this is that I can't work out from that how it means additional water into the system. That's the whole point, right? I think my fear is that there's creative accounting going on here, and ultimately what we're not going to see is additional water put into the system. That's the whole point. How is it possible, through the changes you're talking about—the alternatives to buybacks, which are here—to achieve more than the equivalent amount of water that would be recovered through a buyback? Again, if you're using this long-term equivalent average factor, are you assuring us that that is possible, firstly?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Am I assuring you that it's possible? No, I'm not assuring you that we will be able to make that land, but what I am assuring you is that work that has not been done before to consider these arrangements will be done now. I cannot give you a guarantee or an assurance that it will all line up. I can't. But I should say, as well, it's not necessarily about delivering a quantum of water that is more than buybacks. That's not actually what my goal is. My goal is to deliver a quantum of water that we are legally obligated to deliver to the Commonwealth under our Basin Plan commitments and that is sustainable.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is there any indication of any indicative volumes that are being considered for those rules-based recovery proposals or projects? Do you have indicative volumes overall? I don't want individual ones at this point—maybe later in the day.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not that I necessarily have been briefed on. Amanda, is that indicative work something that the department has done? I'm certainly not at the stage of being briefed on that level of detail, but—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I just feel like you would need that to get to this point. The whole point is the amount of water that's going to be put into the system, and it doesn't seem like anybody knows how much water is going to be put into the system by this.

AMANDA JONES: Ms Faehrmann, we're modelling outcomes. The rules-based changes are really about—depending on what the water availability is, so depending on the weather and whether it's rained upstream, really—when you can take water and making sure that, when water is taken, it's the optimum time to take it or restricting it if it shouldn't be taken, like the section 324 rules after a drought has broken. We can modify rules in water sharing plans to make sure that we're optimising allowing water for the environment.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: After a drought has broken—I think people might want the water to be more assured throughout the drought, as opposed to waiting for section 324.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: But I think what Ms Jones is trying to articulate is that these are the examples of the work that we are doing. Ms Faehrmann, I understand that you want—not just you, the community wants—detail and assurance. I want that too, but we are not yet at the stage of having done that. Partly that is because we're not yet at the stage of even knowing if the Commonwealth is willing to accept these principles. They indicated that they're open to it. That's fantastic. I am pleased that they've opened the door, but we are at a far too early stage of this work to be at that pointy end. Yes, you're wanting us to reach there and wanting that assurance, and we want that and the community wants that. But in this area, particularly when we're unpicking numerous water sharing plan arrangements and water resource plan arrangements to see where we might be able to make adjustments to deliver these good outcomes, it is not as straightforward as it might seem.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I have a couple more questions on this. You were talking before about structural adjustment packages. I take it from that there is consideration of compensating irrigators if this new rules-based water scheme—whatever—is implemented? Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The conversation that Ms Mitchell and I were having about structural adjustment was actually in relation to communities, I had understood. I just want to be clear, that is what I understood we were discussing. However, your point in relation to compensation for irrigators if there are rules-based changes is also a valid one. That is a legal requirement.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Will any determination of reduced reliability and compensation—whatever happens there—be subject to public scrutiny and consultation?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, absolutely. There will be. That's part of the reason that we cannot be more definitive than we are, because, yes, there will be the opportunity for the public to engage.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I think people are concerned and need certainty or assurance that these rules-based water savings will provide greater certainty and transparency around how water is used. At the moment it's pretty appalling, as you know. How will that be enhanced and how can the community be guaranteed that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I wouldn't be doing it if it wasn't going to deliver those outcomes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But how, Minister?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: How are we going to provide it? One, we will do comprehensive community consultation. It is a bit challenging, in a way, Ms Faehrmann, to be asked, "Be incredibly clear and provide all of the detail about this outcome that you're going to deliver", but at the same time there's an expectation that you do comprehensive community engagement and consultation. The only point of doing that would be to inform the outcome. Of course I'm not going to jump to the outcome without having done the work, but I assure you that that work will absolutely be done. It is a legal requirement that it is done—that we fully consult publicly on any changes to plans—as it should be, and I welcome that opportunity. And yes, the entire point of doing that will be to have clearer, more certain rules about who can take water and when and at what volumes. I certainly have heard the feedback that you have heard. I was in Narrabri, Gunnedah and Moree last week, and, once again, water users were telling me how opaque the system is, how challenging it is and how uncertain their licence arrangements are. I accept that. That's a clear commitment that we've given in relation to that piece of work: to try and simplify that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Coming back to Yass, can you clarify? You said before that the business case is being reviewed by an independent consultant. Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Is it a consultant? We do an independent review of business cases. That may be them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that through the department? Is that the normal process?

AMANDA JONES: The department will review the business case. The business case is done by the council.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Who pays for the that independent review? How does that work?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Apologies, I think it's independent to the extent that we are doing it independent of the council. The council have done that work; we are now doing an independent review.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So there is no third party?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, apologies.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, I just wanted to clarify that. Also, just going back to the water security projects in Tamworth, can you tell me what the latest update is in terms of that industrial water recycling plant?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes. We are obviously going flat chat to try to get the business case done. It's going to need to go through the INSW Gateway because it almost certainly will end up being over $100 million. We are hoping to try to have that done this year. It's a big project. Business cases for projects of that scale can't be turned around super quickly but we're—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you do the business case this year, it's going to be some time before there is a treatment plant for that community. Local businesses—you would have seen Baiada—are building their own because you're taking too long. How long is it actually going to be? You said a town like Tamworth is your priority and it's a risk-based assessment, yet there won't even be a business case completed this year for that project.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, we do hope to complete the business case this year. I met, just the other week with Mayor Russell Webb and the leadership of the Tamworth council, and Baiada, to talk about potential paths forward. As I said, we are trying to get that business case done as soon as we can, but there are other options on the table that are articulated through the Namoi regional water plan and we are considering those too. We don't have all of our eggs in the advanced water treatment basket. I think it's a great project, I think it delivers multiple benefits and I'd love to see it happen, but I think it would be a mistake to do Dungowan Dam 2.0 and put all of our eggs in one basket. We have a suite of options we are considering under the regional water plan, and we're pursuing a number of them.

The CHAIR: The member's time has expired. Are there any questions from the Government? There being no questions from the Government, we will now break for morning tea.

(Short adjournment)

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Welcome back, everybody. We'll go straight to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Good morning, Minister. With respect to the land audit, the Premier indicated in May that that process would be completed in months. Minister Kamper indicated the other day that that was an unreasonable time frame to be considered—that it'd be finished within nine months. What's your view on that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm keen for it to be done as soon as possible. I understand from Minister Kamper that that's the case. Certainly our agenda is get it done, get it moving. We've got Homes NSW ready to activate opportunities. I think Minister Kamper does understand and his team do understand how urgent it is, but it is a big piece of work so they're trying to do it as comprehensively as they can. But I'm hopeful it will be resolved soon.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, are you frustrated with the time delay?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm frustrated just with everything that is happening in the housing market right now. I'm frustrated that we're coming off such a slow start. I'm frustrated that there's no momentum. I'm frustrated with constraints in the construction industry. I'm frustrated with the planning system—I'm open about that, too. I'm frustrated with some local councils—not all of them. Sure, I make no apologies for the fact that I use my role as the Minister for Housing to agitate in every forum that I am given to get things moving as quickly as I can. But, having said that, I also accept that I perhaps can be a little bit impatient and that that has its benefits, but that rushing things doesn't necessarily always lead to the best outcomes as well. So that dynamic with the stakeholders and the community and my colleagues of ensuring that there is pressure to get things done, but also quality work being done and the time taken to do it properly, is just one of the dynamics of this Government.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, have you or Homes NSW been given any time frame for when the first parcel of land will be handed over to you to be able to start the program of development on these portions of government land?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have not been briefed on a definitive time frame. Obviously, we are working within the time frame of the next few months. Rebecca may have a definitive time frame.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Thank you, Minister. Minister Kamper indicated as well in those estimates hearings, with respect to selling that land to private developers, "That's a decision to be made later on, through the process"—and that's a quote. Is that your understanding?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: If that's what Minister Kamper said. I'm not involved in those decisions around the disposal of that land or what to do with it. My involvement is that Homes NSW sits on the LAWG, the group managing decisions around the future of how we activate government land. We're in there, fighting our corner, trying to get access to as much of that as we think we can use. Then it comes over to us and we take the opportunity to build social and affordable housing. But in relation to what is otherwise done with it, that's not something that we play a role in.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But, Minister, as—as you say—an advocate for social and affordable housing and for being able to have more housing in government control, it would concern you, wouldn't it, if this land was being sold off to private developers?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It would concern me if there was land suitable for the delivery of social and affordable housing that was not being delivered to Homes NSW for that purpose. But I have full confidence that every parcel of land that we identify as suitable for social and affordable housing, we will be given the opportunity to deliver that outcome.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, with respect to the 30 per cent requirement, is it your understanding that that 30 per cent affordable housing requirement will be on each parcel of land, or will it be across the whole suite of the land audit?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The finalisation of that policy has not occurred yet. That's still being worked through, and exactly those kinds of questions that you have articulated are the ones that are exercising our minds at the moment. I mean, it's easy to say, "Thirty per cent of housing delivered on government land will be social and affordable housing." I know it's easy to say it; I've said it a lot. Making the decisions about how to actually do that, as you say, parcel by parcel—do you group the land? How do you group the land? Even the distinction between social and affordable housing is a significant one. I mean, social housing is extremely important to us. It requires a much heavier subsidy. We want to do everything we can to deliver that. But we're also keen to grow the market for affordable housing. I think it's an important contributing factor to our attempts to confront the housing crisis. All I can say, Mr Farlow, is that they're good questions. They're exercising our mind at the moment. But we just haven't made those final decisions about what the framework will be. And that's not a decision that I, myself, am making. Obviously, I'm making that in collaboration with Minister Kamper, Minister Scully and the Treasurer. It's a collective Cabinet-level decision about how that policy is activated.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to that split between social and affordable housing, does the Government have any indicators at the moment in terms of how much of that land will be used for social housing and how much for affordable?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We don't.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to when the first parcels of land are handed over to Homes NSW, what's your anticipation in terms of when they can actually be turned into homes?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I indicated before, we don't have a definitive time frame of when we'll be able to access that land. Once we know that, we then need to figure out are there pre-existing structures on the land that need to be removed? What is the current zoning of that land? Does it need to be rezoned? The early effort is to identify land that already has suitable zoning, but we can't be definitive that that will be the case, so is there a rezoning process that needs to occur? What is the scale of the building that we may be able to do on the land? Those are some obvious questions that I can't answer that are going to impact the time frame. All I can say is that the entire effort with the land audit and with our work so far has been to look for that low-hanging fruit. It has been to look for that land that has suitable zoning, that is close to services, that is construction ready and that we can get moving on. That's our hope, that's our intention, but until we know what the parcel of land is, I can't give you a time frame as to when the final buildings will be available.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Have you had input into the selection of those parcels of land and their suitability?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. In terms of the conduct of the audit, that has been done by the team at Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, led by Deputy Secretary Walker. Our input has been, once those parcels of land have been identified as surplus, do we think that they're suitable for our purposes? As I said, what is the zoning? What are the services that are around? We have had direct input in those questions. I will say, the only input that I have had is a more broad input. I don't, again, make apologies for the fact that I have gone around and hassled my colleagues to make sure their agencies are fully cooperating.

There are historical reasons why agencies may want to hold on to parcels of land that they're not really using and are not identified as surplus and, therefore, subject to the audit. I didn't want to see that happen, so I did talk to a number of my ministerial colleagues who had substantial landholdings within their portfolios to encourage them to make sure they were saying to their agencies, "Get real about this. Get your land in this." I'm pleased to say that Minister Park, Minister Haylen and Minister Car, who are some examples, understood why I would be advocating to them to talk to their agencies about making sure that they were fully participating in the project.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So it's health, education and transport that have been the naughty children, so to speak, in this case?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: "Naughty children" is your term.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It is.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, there are valid historical reasons in relation to the way that—to be honest, my understanding is that under the previous Government, agencies were given targets and KPIs in relation to the disposal of land and activating that to support their own budget bottom line. Those historical reasons have led them to be somewhat defensive around their landholdings. I wouldn't use a term like "naughty children". I'm not trying to criticise them; I'm trying to say that's the reality. We're trying to culture-change. We're trying to show how important housing is and encourage that from departments. The good news, as I said, is that I do think,

with a little bit of leadership from the Ministers, there has been good engagement from the departments to say, "Okay. We really are going to make sure that we're identifying every opportunity and putting that in the process."

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect, you called for a national definition of affordable housing. What would you like to see that definition be?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: National.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We'll take that as a given.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'd like to see it as a definition that gets that balance right in ensuring that it's a tenure type available to people who are really struggling in the private housing market. I'd rather not have it so broad as to not necessarily provide a pathway to stable housing for people who really need it. But also I accept that we cannot have it so as to be an inhibitor on feasibility on each and every project, and that's a balance. If we set the definition of affordable housing to be so tight, then it may be the case that it's the difference between projects starting and projects not starting, and I don't want that. I want to lean in favour of feasibility, in favour of projects happening, but I also want to make sure that it is a genuine pathway into housing for people who need it.

There are a couple of questions there: How long is it affordable? Obviously, my preference is always in perpetuity; that's always my preference. But, as I said, there are feasibility questions there. I think anyone who's trying to have a sensible conversation about housing has to accept that. That's my preference. And my preference is that it's not linked to market rent; it's linked to some sense of an individual's income. But, again, how we deliver that is challenging. We're working through that. We had a really good update at the ministerial council last week, as I said. We're trying to do this nationally. Every State does it differently. It's a dog's breakfast at the moment. It's chaos out there in Affordable Housing Land—a new, emergent market. But I feel like progress was made, and those questions that I have just articulated that you are asking about are the exact questions that the officials across the States are now working on.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I must say you've answered my two follow-up questions to that one.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, I will be clear about my preferences. I know you ask these questions in good faith. I'll answer them in good faith as to my preferences. But I do caveat it by saying I don't want the definition to be one that then means a number of projects become unfeasible. That would be a bad outcome from my point of view. And finding that balance—that's our job. That's what we're working on, but that's where we're trying to get this definition to land, and it's not landed yet.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Thank you, Minister. Minister, being up-front, you've been up-front in calling out councils—and I quote from you—"being hysterical and fearmongering" and then another quote "peddling ridiculous low-rent nonsense". Does this include the Canterbury-Bankstown mayor Bilal El-Hayek as hysterical after he said his local streets will be turned into rabbit warrens, bottlenecks and frustrated drivers? Does that include Mr El-Hayek's comments?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I am not going to get into the business of naming names at the local government level. I don't think that's helpful. I make those comments to try to be helpful because I do think that, in the context of the public discourse that is happening right now, the fact that there are local government elections this year cannot be discounted as a feature that may motivate some local government leaders to make statements that, I think, are hysterical and misleading. Me getting into a war of words with individual councils and individual mayors—I don't think that's helpful. I don't. I'm not going to do it. I've been clear in the past, Mr Farlow. I don't play politics here. I have been critical of Labor councils. I've been critical of Greens councils. I've been critical of Liberal councillors—and independent. My criticism is across the board to anyone who doesn't show an interest in partnering with us, but I actually accept as well that I need to reflect on the extent to which I'm engaging in that distraction. I want to call it out. I want to make sure that we lift the level of debate. But naming councillors and getting into that game—that's me perpetuating the problem, and I don't want to do that. I do want to be part of the solution.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: This is a nice period of self-reflection here at budget estimates. Minister, while you say that in terms of not calling out individual councils, in Parliament on 18 October 2023 you actually did call out the Hills Shire Council, and you said:

> I call out specifically The Hills council.

That may be another area of reflection. The Mayor of the Hills Shire, Dr Peter Gangemi, has said there is already enough land zoned to accommodate an extra 100,000 people in the Hills by 2036. Isn't this the correct approach to be following in terms of identifying land that is already zoned and being able to actually accommodate more people?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, and good on him for that. I have called out individual councils. I called out Bayside Council. I was very frustrated. I am on the record about the project that we had in Botany that we tried really hard for five years to get over the line, only to have the whole thing deferred because of the intention to create a Botany master plan that, to me—it saddened me and it frustrated me, because I thought it was a good project, well located, that was going to deliver more social housing. As I said, I accept your point that I have and probably will still, on occasion, do that. But, in general, my intention is to try to get past the petty politicking. I mean, sometimes my instincts aren't great and sometimes my bad instincts get the bet of me. But fundamentally here, what I'm trying to do is say "good on Hills Shire Council for a constructive contribution"—that, I welcome.

Of course, there is a difference between a general comment such as, "We have a substantial amount of suitably zoned land" and the individual decisions, week after week, month after month, that councils are making to frustrate the delivery of housing. So, I continue to call on councils to live up to the rhetoric that they have used about wanting to be partners in a solution by delivering the planning pathways that those individual projects need to come out of the ground.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So when it comes to the Hills, again, living up to the rhetoric, this is a council that has exceeded its housing targets. It's a council that is expected to deliver more than 13,000 homes over the next five years. Isn't this an example of a council that is actually doing the heavy lifting when it comes to delivering more homes?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Good on them for that. I'm obviously not going to criticise them for those good things. I am going to criticise them when they make comments about additional housing ruining the character of areas and those kinds of comments, which I think are an unhelpful contribution. But as I said—if the intention of these questions is to get me to be complimentary about the good work that The Hills Shire Council has done, I welcome the opportunity.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I'm sure they'd be very grateful to hear it.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: They probably don't care what my opinion is on them, but good on them for the good work that they are doing.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Keep going, hey? Minister Jackson, you are leading the short-term rental accommodation review for the Government. That's being conducted by DPHI. Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, in conjunction with Treasury.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of that review, have you canvassed any potential taxes that may be applied to short-term rental accommodation?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We haven't canvassed anything. What we've canvassed is the community's opinion. And so, as you've mentioned, we've launched a discussion paper. All options are on the table. What we want to know from the community is what they think. Are they concerned about the impact of short-term rental in their area? Do they welcome it? Does it make a fantastic contribution to their local economy? Are the small businesses there reliant on the tourists? On the other hand, what's it like living next to one? What's it like having five in your street, houses that are vacant most of the time? Or, people who live near well-known and well-established party houses—how does that affect the residential amenity of the area? There are lots of crosscutting, challenging questions about this new and emergent market and we welcome the community's view about how they think the Government could be better regulating it.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, has the Government conducted an economic analysis regarding the impact of STRA on the New South Wales economy?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: There has been some economic analysis done and that economic analysis—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: By the New South Wales Government or independent of the New South Wales Government?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'll have to take on notice who conducted it, but I'm happy to advise you of that. The economic impact is absolutely something that has been and will be considered in relation to future regulatory changes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, with respect to the short-term rental accommodation review, will the Government provide an update on the status of discussions with industry stakeholders so far, and community representatives, regarding the discussion paper?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: All of the key industry stakeholders have been engaged in the process of the development of the discussion paper. They were all informed of its content. They were informed of its imminent release. I have met with most of those organisations since my time becoming Minister, and I am meeting with the peak body for the short-term rental sector tomorrow, in fact, I think. They have been engaged, both by the department and by me directly, to canvass their views.

The CHAIR: We'll go to questions from the crossbench. Ms Sue Higginson.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Apologies, Chair. If I may, because I had intended to do it prior to Mr Farlow's questions, I just wanted to let Ms Maclaren-Jones know that the date we are expecting the critical incident review in relation to the tragic Nowra incident is 14 April. There may be a coronial inquest subsequent to that as well. Apologies, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We'll start the clock now.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Good morning, Minister. What proportion of social housing in New South Wales is public housing?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I think it's 75 per cent.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What proportion is community housing?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Twenty-five per cent.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So within your classification of social housing, you have public housing, community housing, and then you consider Aboriginal housing as separate?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I think Aboriginal housing is—some of it is delivered by the AHO, which is in the public housing component, and some of it is delivered by Aboriginal community housing providers, which is within the community housing component.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Okay, so Aboriginal housing is part of the social and part of the public.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are the housing services provided by DCJ and non-government organisations interchangeable?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: First of all, the housing services are provided by Homes NSW now, although Homes NSW sits within DCJ. Yes, I sort of think that they are interchangeable, would be my top-line conclusion. My view is that the support services provided directly by Homes NSW and the support services provided by our NGO partners are equivalent. To be honest, Ms Higginson—historically, at least—I have to say I think some of the support provided by the community housing providers may have been better than the support provided by DCJ Housing.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I was going to ask that—so in terms of the level of service you are seeing, there are similarities and differences?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, similarities and differences. Of course, amongst the community housing providers, there's a range of different organisations and they're not all identical. But in general, as a generalisation, they are interchangeable, they are comparable and my expectation is that the level of service provided by both Homes NSW and the community housing providers is as high as possible. I think we're doing better, but I'm not quite sure we've reached the standard that Rebecca and I would like to see.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you confident, therefore, that the information provided to you by the non-government community housing managers is accurate?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, and they are heavily regulated, including through the Registrar of Community Housing.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Have you undertaken or attempted to undertake an audit of organisations to ensure that they are providing precisely the services they say they are?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I haven't, although, to be honest, that's because I've not had any specific incidences or concerns in relation to that not occurring raised with me.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What oversight do you have, then, to have that degree of confidence?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, we have the Registrar for Community Housing. I have met with him on a number of occasions and he provides direct briefs up to me. I have regularly raised with our team

my expectation that not only do they lift the level of service that we're providing but our community housing partners do the same. I see the point that you're trying to make, which is that, when we partner with NGOs to do a job for which we are responsible, I take responsibility for the people who live in properties managed by community housing providers but who would otherwise be public housing tenants. My expectation is that the level of support and service they receive is equivalent to or better than they would receive from Homes NSW. I want to make clear to you, Ms Higginson, and anyone else, if there are concerns in relation to that, please raise them.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: When you say you want us to be doing better, what are the current limits on public housing and government's capacity to do better?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Resourcing. When I say we want to do better—and Rebecca and I are working on this—we want more direct client service officers on the ground to provide the support that vulnerable people who live in public housing need. It is something like one person for up to 400 tenants at the moment. Rebecca and I have discussed the fact that that's too many. Homes NSW has literally come online in the last few weeks. We have this new CEO whose values—I am very pleased to say—align with mine in relation to this work. We want to see more client service officers, because they are the ones that check in on people who may be in rent arrears, antisocial behaviour, what's going on and why is that happening.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is it fair to say these are case managers? No? Different?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. That's right; they are different. Certainly, a case management load of what I have just described would be completely unfeasible, but they are the ones that can ensure that if someone does need case management they're linked into a service that can provide that. Not everyone does. A lot of people live in public housing happily and successfully.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: What is the case manager turnover in government housing for the first quarter in the last 12 months?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That I will have to take on notice.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. In estimates yesterday, with Planning, there was a very clear sort of language that's developed with the Government that all public, community and Aboriginal housing is referred to as "social housing". That's the nomenclature that's being used. Do you think it's sensible of your Government, at this point in time, to be not understanding and consistently communicating the difference between public housing, community housing and Aboriginal housing?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's not a deliberate thing. That is a nomenclature that has developed over many years and we have adopted. I do understand the point that you're making, and I try, at relevant forums, to articulate when I'm talking about public housing and when I'm talking about community housing. But fundamentally, Ms Higginson, apart from it being a bit of a word salad to have to go through "public" and "community" and "Aboriginal" all the time, we use the catch-all term "social" for the deliberate reason that it is hopefully a bit more clear and understandable. I see that this point is made occasionally—that somehow the use of community housing to deliver tenant management services on behalf of the Government is a problem. I don't accept it. I don't, and I'm not going to accept an argument that our community housing partners are somehow a suboptimal part of the system. I want more public housing. I want more housing managed by us and managed better, but I also want more community housing.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: In terms of public housing, is that our greatest need at the moment?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Is that our greatest need? Yes, it is.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Would it not be more beneficial for you, advocating for the thing you've identified that we need most in the State at the moment to help our most vulnerable, to just use the words "public housing"? Potentially we are losing the understanding, the messaging, the need and therefore the delivery of strong public housing. Perhaps it's just something I'll put to you.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: So it wasn't a question. Okay.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: It was. Can I just ask you to think about it perhaps?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I will think about it.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you, Minister. In relation to Aboriginal housing, reforming the housing sector, obviously, is critical to ensure Aboriginal community housing providers can provide viable, culturally responsive—and that the Aboriginal Housing Office has equitable access. How do you plan to properly support the sustainable growth of that sector?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: For starters, when we talk about social housing we refer also to our Aboriginal community housing partners. I appreciate the point that you just made, but I am actually committed, particularly in Aboriginal housing, to having—to be honest—less housing managed by the Aboriginal Housing Office. Famey and her team do a wonderful job—because I want to support the Aboriginal community housing sector. It literally runs directly counter to the point that you're making. These non-government Aboriginal-led organisations are incredibly important partners. What are we doing? As I said, we're trying to ensure that they have their capacity built up.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: In the acceleration, what's your time line? What's your plan?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: A critical piece of work at the moment is delivering the $130 million or so to directly build up Aboriginal housing as part of the accelerator. There is an EOI for our Aboriginal community housing partners in March. We have engaged a lot with them to make that EOI as straightforward as possible. Part of the issue, Ms Higginson, as you have well identified, is that previous efforts to do that have been unbelievably complicated and have wasted a whole bunch of time and money for organisations that don't have that. Famey and her team have done a great job to make that EOI really straightforward. I'm very hopeful that we will see a large number of expressions of interest from our Aboriginal community housing partners to spend that money building up their capacity and delivering more housing.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So little time.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We can always talk offline, Ms Higginson. We're not under oath, but I'll still always tell you the truth.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'd like to turn to the Barwon-Darling. How often will there be opportunities for floodplain harvesting in the Barwon-Darling in terms of years—every however many years—to your understanding?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That depends on how often it rains. I have not personally been briefed on the long-term meteorological outlook for the Barwon-Darling and our anticipated rainfall.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Roughly, historically, it's every one in three or, say, three in 10 years. Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Does that roughly equate to your view?

AMANDA JONES: I'll confirm that.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Ms Jones will confirm that. As I said, using historical rainfall, yes, I accept your point. You also know that can be dicey in terms of the unpredictable climate future that we're facing.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know when it's going to rain, but I accept your point about the patterns that we've seen so far.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: At the moment, are you aware of what the long-term average is in terms of the baseline diversion limit, the BDL, for the Barwon-Darling?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know the Barwon-Darling BDL off the top of my head, but Ms Jones may be able to look that up.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: On the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's website, which is where all of this stuff is held, the Barwon-Darling watercourse is 17.7 gigalitres. Do you know how many gigalitres of floodplain harvesting licences have been issued in the Barwon-Darling?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know it off the top of my head, but I know where this is going. You're going to suggest that it is higher than that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It's 51.3 gigalitres.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I appreciate that point. As we've discussed before, there is a difference between the licensed volume and the take that is authorised in any water year. So, yes, I accept that we will need to continue the very close active management of water take under floodplain harvesting licences, and under all licences, to ensure that we remain compliant with our BDL in every annual water year. You are right to put it on our radar. I have put it clearly on the department's radar. They know there is no tolerance for exceedence on our legal limits.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You've also got the 500 per cent carryover, which makes it even higher, potentially, for any given year. Five hundred per cent of water access licences can be carried over—something that you supported, I think, and the Labor Party supports—so, technically, it's possible. If we go back to that just over 51 gigalitres and the 500 per cent carryover, technically, even though you've got a 17.7-gigalitre BDL—going back to that figure—we can have something in the order of 256 gigalitres being taken from those flood plains. I just want to know how it's possible to allow that, while also trying to keep within the legal limits—the BDL of 17.7 gigalitres.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The technical possibility of a full 500 per cent carryover being activated in one water year in the way that you have described, I think, is so far beyond the realms of what is realistic.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Even 200 per cent is pretty over 17.7 as well.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, I think that is so far beyond the realm of what is realistic as to be a substantial risk. I am absolutely open to reviewing the operation of carryover after we've had a number of years of the floodplain harvesting licensing in operation. I think that the principle of some carryover does make sense in relation to floodplain harvesting licence. I'm not completely dismissive of the point that you're making, Ms Faehrmann, and I can see a world in which, after a number of—I mean, this is all very new, this licensing. After a number of years of it being in operation and a number of floodplain harvesting events occurring—as you say, it's a bit unpredictable. If it is the case that, despite my expectations of take being within legal limits, the operation of those rules is such that we are seeing consistent patterns where the operation of carryover is either making that difficult or we are consistently exceeding that, I'm absolutely open to review of those rules. I don't want a system in place that delivers that outcome.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That is very good to hear, Minister. If it looks like there is activity that goes over a certain period of time, which the Inspector-General of Water Compliance—I want to go back to Barwon-Darling-Baaka. The report that I'm sure you're aware of into SDL compliance found that for the Barwon-Darling-Baaka, they exceeded the valley limit by more than 20 per cent for three years to '21-22. In fact, this is super scathing. This is really, really scathing for New South Wales.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I am familiar with it. I have read it.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It is just all about New South Wales, actually. That's already happening.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Just to be clear for people who may not be familiar, this was not the time in which I was the Minister for Water.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, I know.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I think that's an important principle.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Exactly—and you are now. I really appreciate the sentiment that you're often expressing in wanting to get on top of things and bring back water take within legal limits. But, for example, this one—this was obvious when you came in.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: This was obvious straight away. The allocations to the Barwon-Darling have been 100 per cent for class A, B and C licences for three years. The SDL was exceeded by 71 gigalitres—40 per cent—during that. What have you done about that? It's just for people in the community who are concerned about this to trust you. And I'm not saying there's a—but when you say that you'll get things under control, here's one that it has been obvious for almost twelve months now to get this under control in terms of the Barwon-Darling. What's happening with that? Why can't you act for this?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Well, I mean, we are. A couple of things—the review of the Barwon-Darling water sharing plan is due to commence this year. That is my understanding. We do have Professor Hugh Durrant-Whyte here in his capacity as the chief scientist, but I refer to the fact that the NRC is now playing an active and leadership role in that to ensure that the work that we are doing over in DQ water delivers on those outcomes. The department understands and has had clear direction from me in relation to ensuring that our takes in all valleys come back within legal limits, and I have confidence that that has been done.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Within the water sharing plan process, in terms of when you're saying "coming back to within legal limits"—that's this new water sharing plan review, are you saying, Minister?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. That's within more direct active management annual water determinations year on year. Yes, obviously the water sharing plans need to be updated to ensure that the

rules-based framework in which we're operating is optimum, so that has to occur. But, no, I wasn't just referring to that. I was referring to the more specific determinations that occur on an annual basis.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Let's go back, because what has been determined relatively recently—and I understand still needs to be in terms of the Namoi, maybe; we'll get an update on that too—is the 269 gigalitres of floodplain harvesting licences issued in terms of over-extraction, and then over-extraction through other licences as well. So, just to be clear for the Committee, how is the Government bringing those over-allocations or over-extractions back to within legal limits? Outside of the water sharing plan, what is being done? What can we see in the next six months or 12 months, for example?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We are working on the process of our annual water determinations for the water year that will start in July. And I point you, Ms Faehrmann, to the fact that one of the early things I did as Minister for Water was take direct action in relation to Namoi, where there had been examples of growth in use, to bring those licences back within legal limits. I am still in court about that one, but I make no apologies about it because that is my job. Those legal limits are the principles by which water is shared fairly.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Let's go back to this over-allocation and this kind of furious report by the inspector-general, who welcomed the compliance of Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory—100 per cent compliance, no issues there—just calling out the failure of New South Wales to deliver water resource plans and other things. It highlights what I just highlighted about the Barwon-Darling take. On 1 July 2023, though, when you were Minister, the allocation of the A, B and C class licences for the Barwon-Darling was still issued at 100 per cent. Why is that the case? That surely was the opportunity, when you were Minister, to bring that back—to reduce the allocation and reduce that over-extraction, because it had been many gigalitres for at least three years. Why didn't you do it then?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Partly because one of the reasons that that issue had consistently arisen was that there was not a clear understanding between the New South Wales Government and the Commonwealth Government inspector-general in relation to the modelling that was being used. We wanted to let that process resolve itself. My understanding is that that is now resolved, which is a good thing. I know, Ms Faehrmann, that you do try to acknowledge—on your comment in relation to the lack of compliance in relation to water resource funds, I mean, absolutely. I draw you to the fact that we've now submitted 19 of our 20 water resource plans and are on the path to full accreditation. It's a big turnaround in relation to some of the criticisms that the inspector-general made. You referred earlier to how can the community trust the commitments that are made. Because it's not just words. Because we've done the work to show that we're trying to bring the system back into compliance.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, I want to ask you a few questions about your responsibilities as Minister for the North Coast, but also where they overlap in terms of you being Minister for Housing. You said in answer to a question on notice earlier this month that you haven't set any targets or plans for housing in electorates literally from Port Stephens up to the Queensland border. Why not?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Because I don't want to set targets that are not based on reality, and the reality is we haven't gone through this year's budgetary process, we haven't had the NAHA finalised and we haven't finalised the 30 per cent social and affordable housing on government land policy. Until that work is done, it's extremely difficult for us to know what housing we can feasibly deliver, but I assure you that that work of setting targets is a priority for us. We just want to make sure that when we do that they're targets that we can deliver on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When would we expect to see some targets for the North Coast, particularly?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We're hoping this year; that's the time frame for the strategy. As I said, we need those few key pieces of work done—the NAHA, this year's budgetary process, the 30 per cent social and affordable housing. The HAF is another one—excuse me, how could I forget? The HAF is also a key component.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just to be clear, you're hoping to have those set by the end of this year. Is that the time frame that you're working towards?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I think we'd probably aim for earlier than that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, but you can't give an indication?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I don't want to give a definitive date on when we will have the targets.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My concern, though, Minister, is that particularly before the election you were very vocal about the need, especially around social housing on the North Coast. Almost a year in, we're

now hearing that hopefully you'll have targets set at some point this year. That's not a lot of action, for the first almost 12 months—and potentially two years—of you being the Minister, for those communities who aren't very happy that not much is progressing.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: What I would say to you and those communities is I haven't been wasting time setting targets that are not based on reality. We've just been getting on with the delivery of housing, and I would draw you—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you give me some examples?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I will. I will draw to you the announcement that I made alongside the Premier and the planning Minister in relation to the Resilient Lands package in Lismore: $400 million as a partnership between SCU and Landcom to deliver housing, with mixed tenure—some private market, some social and affordable. I'll draw you to projects that we have been doing with social ventures up in Lismore.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And they're all new under your watch?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes. Again, there are 18 units there that we're delivering in Lismore, in combination with the housing—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Social Futures.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Social Futures, excuse me—thank you, Ms Higginson—in relation to 18 units there. I'll draw your attention to the $20 million commitment that we made to deliver build to rent on the northern beaches—the Northern Rivers region.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think the northern beaches probably don't need that.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: They don't really like social and affordable housing there. They love it in the Northern Rivers.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: We do. We love it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Coming to the issues around flood recovery, I know you mentioned some things in Lismore and those areas, but can you tell me how many people are still currently living in pod villages in the Northern Rivers?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can't give you the exact number off the top of my head, although, I do know that we still have a number of people living in pod villages. I will take the exact number on notice, but most of the pod villages are still in operation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for you to take this on notice as well. How many people are currently being housed out of their home town or their area? My understanding is there is a little bit of displacement as well, depending on the location of the villages.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I will take that on notice. Although, again, I accept the principle that the pod villages are still in operation and, in fact, are likely to have their time extended, that they are housing people in suboptimal housing situations for a range of reasons—including the one that you have identified, that people are being housed disconnected from their local community—and we are working through the solutions for each of those individuals. Sixty per cent of those, the latest briefing that I had, were people who would require some form of social housing. They did not have a private market solution that would be available to them. That does go back to your original premise, of course, which is there is a big piece of work to deliver more social housing on the Northern Rivers. I mentioned a couple of the projects that we're already doing, but I don't disagree that we need to do more.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the residents in the pod villages, are they being charged rent?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that going to change?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: There is no brief that's before me in relation to that. That also I'm not sure would be a decision that I would be the one making. I'm not across that, but they're not at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You just said that you expect that they will be there for some time. I appreciate the complexity of what's happening there, but would you anticipate that those pod villages would likely still be in operation by the end of this year?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I turn now, quickly, to some questions about your Youth portfolio. You might recall that I asked you last time about the Regional Youth Taskforce and you were considering that, but it's been scrapped, hasn't it, Minister?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, we're still considering what the future is going to look like for youth engagement in the New South Wales Government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But, specifically, the Regional Youth Taskforce. The last time that we spoke about it applications weren't open, they were due to expire—their term. I think you were due to meet with them shortly thereafter. There is not a new one, is there?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, there is not a new one. That's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there an intention to have a new Regional Youth Taskforce, a specific regional body of young people to provide feedback and guidance to you as the Minister?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We just haven't made a decision on what we're going to do in terms of the structure—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's the delay? It's been months.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The delay is we're looking at a broader re-engagement with young people and the way that the Government interacts with them. At the moment, you are right, we have the Office for Regional Youth with the Regional Youth Taskforce over in the Department of Regional NSW, we have the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People with the youth advisory committee over in DCJ, and we have another small youth policy team that sits separately in DCJ. I don't consider that to be a functional structure for youth engagement. It is fragmented. It is siloed. I want to see what we can do better.

The reason that I haven't been definitive or clear about what that looks like is because I want that to be co-designed with young people. If I was sitting here saying, "No, this is the new structure, I've made all these decisions", that's perpetuating exactly the kind of exclusion that I'm trying to overcome.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. I agree with you that having young people at the table as you co-design is absolutely the best way to do it, but my concern is that it has now been some months since we asked you about this and you're still considering the position. I know there was an announcement, I think at the Sydney Summit, about having a central youth agency. I acknowledge that. But the concern is, particularly from my perspective, for regional young people who have been used to being able to participate in a Regional Youth Taskforce—I certainly met with them and they are amazing young people, as are the Youth Advisory Council—it seems there is a vacuum at this point in time, with no clear time frame as to when something new will be established and how these young people can continue to have a voice. I would love some sort of clarity from you today about what time frame we're working on, or you're looking at as Minister, for that co-design, so that it's not just stagnant.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We're looking to do that over the next few months. I would say, by the middle of this year, we will have some clarity as to what the new structure might look like. I take your point and I imagine it will be one made directly to us by regional young people—that they want to see a particular and dedicated voice for them and space for them. I'm not actually denying, as we listen to and engage with young people, that is feedback we may well receive. But I'm not going to be definitive at this point about what that new structure—those new committees, taskforces, forums or councils—might look like; how many young people will be on them; what their composition will be; whether we can look to move a little bit beyond the kind of roundtable model that has its benefits but, also, I'm not really sure does capture broad community sentiment; and what mix of engagement platforms we might use. At the moment, that's up for discussion.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think that the concern is that, as I said, while there is now this period of inertia—you had a youth taskforce that's finished and you'll make some decisions, hopefully, you're saying, within the next few months and by the middle of the year—what happens now? How are you getting that feedback from regional youth if you don't have a taskforce in operation?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Of course, all of the work that we do in an ongoing way engaging with young people in regional New South Wales through, for example, the youth community coordinators in the Office for Regional Youth, who I had another joint meeting with just the other week—that is ongoing. I'm not defending that as optimal. I am not saying what is happening now—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can fix it; you're the Minister. That's the frustration.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm trying to. I'm trying to come up with a new and better model. As I said, I don't suggest that the current arrangements will represent the way that we engage with young people into

the future, but I ask young people to work with us in designing what that will look like. And I assure them that, whether it is through engagement with the youth community coordinators, the regional young people who are on the Youth Advisory Council as well—there are regional young people who are on that, and I am very interested in their views always. As I said, none of that is saying, "That's it; job done. Tick; I consider that adequate." But in answer to your question, those are ways that, at this stage, we are hearing the voices and feedback from regional youth, and we will look to finalise a model that provides that direct space and voice and engagement as part of the broader work to lift and elevate the voices of young people within government.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Following on from the comments about the central youth agency, I'm interested to know: How do you plan to bring in the Advocate for Children and Young People, or YAC, or are you looking to abolish that? What was your idea when you made this announcement?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: TBC. It's the similar answer in relation to the questions Ms Mitchell was asking. We are looking to see how we can do engagement with young people better. Obviously, the Advocate for Children and Young People is a statutory appointment, so I'm not intending to abolish it. Even if I wanted to do that—which, to be clear, I don't—I'd have to pass legislation to achieve that outcome. I have no intention of doing that. But I do think there is potentially a way for them to deliver their important statutory role alongside a complement of other work that sits more centrally and is a more elevated opportunity to engage with young people in New South Wales.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Have you got an idea of a budget that this agency will have?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I don't have that yet.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the pod villages, you said you're not involved in the decision in relation to extending their stay and also the rental arrangements. Which Minister is?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's managed by the Reconstruction Authority, so Ministers Dib and Scully.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are you aware of the latest data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare that has shown around 36 per cent of young people aged between 15 and 24 have been turned away for specialist homelessness services, which is almost double the national average?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I am.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What's your view in relation to it?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It is completely unacceptable. The turn-away rates in general from specialist homelessness services are unacceptable. I think we're close to 50 per cent of people having their accommodation needs unmet for an engagement with an SHS—not acceptable. In particular, the issue you raise about young people—the deep problem with that is, when a young person presents asking for help, that's an opportunity for a crossroads in their life. We can meet that need and set them up for success, or we can fail them and they'll probably have a lifetime of cycling in and out of various facilities.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you know how many women and children escaping domestic violence have been turned away?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't have that figure off the top of my head, but we could get that for you. Any number is unacceptable to me, but we can get that.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Last time, I asked you about the capacity and the workload of SHSs. You said at the time, "I imagine all of them are above capacity." On reflection, have you had time to look at ways of measuring how the SHSs are going and capturing that data?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We have, as part of the work that we're doing on the homelessness strategy. A big part of that piece of work is better capturing data from our SHSs and using that to be flexible about where to direct resources. From the conversations that I've had with the SHSs and the peak bodies in relation to that, they're up for it. But I am mindful about the fact that they don't want substantially more administrative burden. Any kind of data questions about the way that we're capturing and reporting data does need to be done in a supported way, because they're already under the pump. Having additional data-reporting requirements has to be done thoughtfully. But I think that is something that we would look at.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Have you met with Homelessness NSW about options on how to gather that data? Did they say it was too complicated?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have met with them multiple times. There was feedback that they provided to the SHS evaluation that had been done. That evaluation talked about the need to do data better and to improve the level of data capture and reporting. As I said, I accept that. They did provide some feedback, as did Yfoundations and DVNSW, exactly to the point that I have just articulated. There's some nervousness about the already smashed workload of people in SHSs and then us saying, "Here is a substantial—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Just to clarify, are you collecting data? Do you intend to collect it? When will you start collecting that data?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We're collecting some of that data that you have referred to in relation to people with unmet accommodation needs.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: How often is it to be reported to you? Is it going to be on an annual basis?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: There are various data collection points. I receive quarterly briefings, I think it is, from the DCJ, from the FaHCSIA team, in relation to some of the data that they're collecting.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Quarterly data in relation to the number of people turned away from SHSs? Is that the data you're being provided? What exactly is the data that you're getting on a quarterly basis?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can't remember all of the data points from that FaHCSIA set. As I said, it's useful. I have no defensiveness; we can provide you with this data. I'm open to people seeing the data. It's useful, but is it—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, will you commit to publicly providing that data quarterly?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes. If that is something we can do, I'm more than happy to have that publicly available.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to a question you were asked about providing additional funding to SHSs, your response was:

> The Department of Communities and Justice budget for homelessness services is fully committed for 2024/25. DCJ will be seeking additional funding from Treasury to maintain current SHS levels and respond to unmet need from 2024/25.

Does that mean that SHSs will not receive any additional funding until at least 2026?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. What that means is that the budgetary allocation that we made in the last budget, which did include additional funding for SHSs, is fully allocated and, in fact, not meeting the needs of the community. As I said, we accept that. As part of the 2024-25 budget process, we will seek to ensure that we do our very best to secure the funding that we think those services need. Obviously, I can't pre-empt that. That's not a decision that I make on my own. And it's not just that. I should add that we're directly engaged in the NHHA negotiations as well. I call out to the Commonwealth, if they're listening—I doubt they listen to New South Wales budget estimates.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They're all listening.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I am very clear that the Commonwealth has to lift its game as well. If we are able to deliver funding through that process, we will.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: But you have put in a budget bid for more money?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: You're referring, I think, to SHS recommissioning. That starts in 2026.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: No, I'm referring to the fact that they have said quite clearly that they need more funding. The former and the current CEOs have said they need more money. They've asked for a 20 per cent increase. I'm asking whether or not you've put in that bid to increase their funding, on top of what they're—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not going to talk through the details of the budget process that we're currently engaged in. It is obviously subject to Cabinet in confidence. We're in the ERC process. We're going through the Cabinet. I'm not going to talk through that, other than to say I accept that there is a significant unmet need in the provision of homelessness services.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You've got children and women being turned away. You've got SHSs that are closing their doors because they can't provide a service.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely. Not only that, we have SHSs that aren't closing their doors but that are providing service 20, 30, 40 per cent beyond what they're funded for. So they're keeping their doors open—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yet your Government is not looking to give them more money.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I don't think that's a fair characterisation of what I said, Ms Maclaren-Jones.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Well, hopefully we'll see something in this budget. Minister, do you know what the current wait list is for temporary accommodation?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We don't really operate a wait list for temporary accommodation. We can't always meet the needs of everyone who seeks it. Sometimes there are just really genuine capacity constraints, like literally we cannot find a motel room for them.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Shouldn't you keep a database or a record of, again, unmet need for TA, considering there is a demand-driven—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Do we—well, Rebecca is saying we actually don't at the moment, but I think that's a good call-out. As I said, we don't operate a wait list because we intend to meet the need of the person right then, but I have no problem with the idea that we would record data on how many people's needs for temporary accommodation we were unable to meet.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Would you also be willing to look at doing an audit, as has been recommended by Homelessness NSW, of current accommodations available, whether it is accessible to people with disability, accessible to families, particularly when escaping domestic violence, and what is that unmet need?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I would be open to conducting an audit. I should say, at the moment, I am well aware that the quality of some of the temporary accommodation that we offer is pretty substandard. But we are literally up against it to find enough places for people who need it. So, of course, we will always look to make sure that the temporary accommodation that we are providing meets the dignity and the respect that we should show to an individual who has come into our care through temporary accommodation, but the biggest problem at the moment is there's just not enough spots available. This is, for all of us, the kind of confronting reality of the housing crisis: that we have seen a significant spike in needs for emergency accommodation. A lot of the time, Ms Maclaren-Jones, it's because people who have never had experience with the homeless service system before have received an eviction and cannot find a new place to live, and they're relying on temporary accommodation. It is very sad.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, your connectivity panel that you spoke about during the last budget estimates—where is that up to in terms of presenting its findings to you?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I think they've met four or five times—they've met a number of times—and I'm expecting a preliminary report from them in March and a final report from them by the middle of the year.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Last year when I asked this question, I think you said by the end of last year and more detailed findings to you by early this year. Is there a reason why there's a delay in their work?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I mean, look, the reason is it's complicated work. They are deep in the detail of how we can change and update our rules in our various rules-based plans to deliver that connectivity. The expert panel—you have the details of the membership. They're absolutely the people who are on the detail.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Sure—which you said last time.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have not asked them to delay their work. They've asked me for a little bit more time so that they can get it right, and I've acceded to that request.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Are they considering the total extractions within the total valley take? Is that part of their work?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I think that is within the terms of reference, yes.

AMANDA JONES: Yes, that's open to them to consider. If I could perhaps also, Minister, just report that for the 2022-23 year, when the inspector-general puts out his next report, it'll show that the Barwon-Darling is in credit, and that turnaround is really the department working with the MDBA to fix data and fix metered information about the bodies.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you, that's very good news. It will be interesting to see by how much, but that's very good news. The Gwydir water—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I did know that, Amanda, but I wasn't sure it was publicly available, I'm sorry.

AMANDA JONES: It's not publicly available.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I didn't want to be getting into trouble again with the Inspector-General for—

AMANDA JONES: Yes. Correct, he hasn't produced the report yet.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It's out there now. I will move to a different issue, just because of time. I will come back to this other one if I can. In early January I wrote to you about the Bloomberg article, which I've already mentioned in these budget estimates, titled "The Water Trade is Booming—and Sucking Australia Dry". In that article, it reported the situation with Murray Irrigation Limited's account where that irrigation organisation carried over one-half to two-thirds of the total valleys' carryover. This was during a time of incredible drought, between 2018-19 and 2019-20 when there were so many distressed farmers and landholders in that region. A lot of people in the community had no idea. This was completely hidden from the community. That's what Bloomberg uncovered. You replied to me on 8 February and said that your department was looking into that, it was investigating. What's the status of that investigation?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Amanda, I might ask you to give Ms Faehrmann an update.

AMANDA JONES: The carryover that you refer to is actually allowable under the water sharing plan and under their licence—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Who have you spoken to as part of that investigation, firstly, Ms Jones?

AMANDA JONES: I'll have to take that on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It's a question as to whether any of the people who were mentioned—whether Bloomberg was contacted in terms of how they got that information. Maryanne Slattery from Slattery and Johnson was quoted—I think she was the one who discovered that carryover—plus others were quoted in that article. Did the department speak to them to work out what was going on?

AMANDA JONES: I think, Ms Faehrmann, that the carryover wasn't an illegal carryover. As I understand it, the carryover was allowable under both the water sharing plan rules and their licence.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: But in terms of the work that the department did and perhaps is still ongoing to explore that and come to that conclusion, I'm not sure if Ms Jones would have knowledge about who did that and who they spoke to. Perhaps you might take on notice—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Okay. Hang on, we can come back to that. If that's the department's response, that "it was allowable", I think we'll go back to the Minister, because now it becomes a policy issue, doesn't it, Minister? You said to me in that letter that the department was investigating. They seem to be saying, "Nothing to see here", it's fine that Murray Irrigation Limited held massive quantities of water during a drought where people had no water available to them, had to sell up, had to sell their family farm—huge distress, probably worse in some parts. That's a policy issue in terms of the lack of transparency around these irrigation companies. There are some things you can do at a State level. What have you looked at/explored as a result of these revelations?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: You are right, essentially, I think. We have looked into it. Ms Jones may be able to provide more information this afternoon. But essentially, from our investigations, what has occurred there is legal. There is no evidence that we have uncovered—perhaps Mr Barnes may have a view on it too, but there is no evidence that we have uncovered that something outside the rules has occurred. Yes, that leads to the conclusion, as you say, "Well, are the rules adequate?" Certainly, in terms of the regulation of the irrigation infrastructure operators, I share your concerns about transparency and accountability.

I have asked the Energy and Water Ombudsman to explore whether their jurisdiction may be expanded to include the independent irrigation organisations. They have accepted my invitation to explore that and are currently doing that, and will get back to me. If that is an option, I will pursue it. If they come back to me and say that they're unable to do that, that's not the end of the story for me. I will look at other opportunities. This is one example, Ms Faehrmann. There are other examples that I am aware of, and that you may be aware of too, of questions about the size and market power of these private irrigation organisations. They play an important role

but, honestly, considering their scale and their market power, I don't think that the current level of regulatory oversight is necessarily adequate.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Okay, so what can we expect from you? That was a whole line of questioning that you have just answered for me, which is good. Ministers sometimes say it's all up to the Commonwealth, but I understand they're not doing enough to ensure that, for example, all of the information which people on the boards of these IIOs have is available to everybody. It's essentially insider trading, as you know. Just to increase transparency, can we expect anything from you this year around, making improvements to IIOs?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, absolutely. As I said, I've asked the Energy and Water Ombudsman to look at what the capacity of their jurisdiction might be. You can expect me to try to move the IIOs into their jurisdiction, if they're amenable to that and we can make it work. If they're not amenable to that, we'll look at what else we can do. Do you want to add anything, quickly?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, just that the Commonwealth legislation will require that by 2026 the internal trades are transparent.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, I'm aware of the Commonwealth legislation.

AMANDA JONES: But it's what can we do in the meantime.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We support that, but I agree we want to do our own thing.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, I want to go to the extent of the Harris family's take in terms of floodplain harvesting. You're aware, of course, that you can suspend or cancel licences if the holder of the licence has been convicted of an offence against the Water Management Act and its regulations. Bloomberg's incredible article—I think they researched this for six months, by the way—indicates just how lacking our media investigative powers and resources can sometimes be. Bloomberg reports that the extended Harris family has been found guilty of various offences against the Water Management Act for illegal water take. I understand the extended Harris family received 12 per cent of the floodplain harvesting licences. Considering that they have been found guilty under the Water Management Act, why haven't you considered cancelling or suspending the licences on that basis?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That recommendation has not been made to me. I take the independent role of NRAR as our compliance agency incredibly seriously. Grant may want to comment in terms of the work that they are currently doing but also the work that I am supporting NRAR to do to ensure that it has the capacity, the teeth and the resources to do its job properly. But I will say this: I don't really want to get into the game, Ms Faehrmann, of naming individuals. There may well be ongoing legal matters in relation to that, which I'm nervous about cutting across in a parliamentary hearing. Nonetheless, individuals who do the wrong thing are subject to the sanctions that are available to us under the various pieces of legislation. That is entirely appropriate. Once that's happened, to then go and cancel people's water access licences is a huge step and not one I'm going to take lightly.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It is a huge step. But when people are found guilty under the Water Management Act, just in terms of sending a message and making an example of someone, I think a hell of a lot of people in this State really feel like that's what the Government should be doing. You're obviously a new water Minister, clearly wanting to do better than the National Party did on water. Nothing has happened, basically.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, I'm not really sure about naming individuals and talking about making an example of them. That's not how I make decisions.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I mean, they've already been all over the media.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I make decisions in the broad interests of the State of New South Wales, and that's my focus. I will give you, already, an example of something that I've done to ensure that the sanctions under the Water Management Act are appropriate, which is review the value of water under section 60—thanks, Grant—to ensure that when we put fines in place it accurately represents the value of water, as opposed to what you and I both know, which is that some organisations are able to account for the cost of illegally taking water in their business model. So that is already a piece of work. It's not about targeting any one individual or one person; it's about putting in place rules that are applicable statewide to ensure that the system is fair. So that's already one thing that I've done. But also, as I said, there is an ongoing piece of work with NRAR to ensure that it has the tools at its disposal to ensure that there is compliance.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, in the last estimates I asked you the financial value of the floodplain harvesting licences issued and you were unable to provide that. I put in questions on notice and

supplementary questions asking the same question, and the department was unable to provide that then. Have you calculated a financial value yet?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Have we done that, Amanda?

AMANDA JONES: No, we haven't. We can come back on that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is there work being undertaken—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Is that partially because Namoi is still unresolved?

AMANDA JONES: Namoi is still unresolved. So we have four of the five valleys licenced at this stage.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You announced a 40 per cent reduction in floodplain harvesting licences to be issued in the Namoi. What is being reduced in the upper Namoi versus the lower Namoi? Do you have that information?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I actually don't have that on automatic recall.

AMANDA JONES: If you're talking about the shares to be allocated in Namoi—there'll be roughly 50-50 per cent of shares in the unreg and reg, but that share allocation is the step that we are up to at the moment.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Just to be clear so you can confirm, this is the unregulated, obviously, Namoi?

AMANDA JONES: There's unreg and reg Namoi.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: For the unregulated Namoi, just to confirm that water extractions are not measured, there is no hydrological model for the valley. Is that correct? Just to get that on the record.

AMANDA JONES: No. There is a hydrological model for the Namoi.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's a source model.

AMANDA JONES: It's a source model.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: For the unregulated Namoi?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes. We're using the source model.

AMANDA JONES: It's an updated model.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's been a process. It's been a journey, that model, but I think we're there almost.

AMANDA JONES: Yes, almost, Minister. There's a new methodology as well, which is a bit more conservative for that valley, as well.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I might explore that a little bit in supplementary questions. The Healthy Floodplains review project, with respect to that—I think you mentioned it last time. We talked about this last time. You said you were undertaking a review. This is being undertaken by consultants. Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: By a law firm.

AMANDA JONES: We completed that, and I think the outcome is on the website. We employed a law firm to review all of the decisions taken, and the report is on the website.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Those consultants—how were they chosen?

AMANDA JONES: They weren't consultants. It was actually a law firm. They took a probity approach and looked at—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Who chose them? Did the department recommend those?

AMANDA JONES: We did. Yes, we did.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The terms of reference written by the department, was it?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Wasn't written by me, I have to say. I did not personally write the terms of reference.

AMANDA JONES: But I should say that what they were checking against was the terms of reference for that committee.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Were there various iterations of the report that came to the department? Were you able to look at it, to review the report?

AMANDA JONES: I'm not aware that there were iterations of the report. Basically, it was done with and the committee was run with the probity advisers. We asked the law firm to take all of the paperwork, all of the record of decisions and for them to review those and form a view.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Just to be clear, did anybody within the department—were they able to suggest changes to the reviews before they were finalised?

AMANDA JONES: Not that I'm aware.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I would hope not.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you able to just take that on notice?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Just to do that research would be good. Thank you. Has there been a review of the total take, including the new floodplain harvesting licences, being within valley extraction limits? Has anything like that occurred?

AMANDA JONES: There are four of the valleys licensed at the moment, and what I can tell you is that at the moment we're modelling outcomes because there's a 12-month lag before metering is required. But, for the model floodplain harvesting outcomes for 2022-23 for all valleys, it's 433 gigalitres. This is about 8 per cent of surface water take under all of the SDLs across New South Wales, and it's 19 per cent of surface water take in the northern basin.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'll come back to that. I am very conscious of time. I'll go to my colleague now—Ms Sue Higginson.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. It's very difficult to talk about the North Coast today, but we're doing it. We're all bracing and doing it.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm sorry. Yes. It is, of course, the two-year anniversary, Ms Higginson. I do accept that and extend ongoing love and solidarity to your community.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. I'll hold back. As you know, Minister, you're responsible for the North Coast. Do you see your role as currently advocating for some of those organisations that are not just housing but that are recovery organisations? They're not government organisations. These are the community organisations that have been born through the disaster and some of which have grown through the disaster. There's a bunch of them. They're incredibly important, and some of them are facing a cliff. Is your position to advocate for them?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, it is. I do see my role as the Minister for the North Coast primarily as an advocate. I don't have a direct budget and I don't have direct legislative oversight.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: If I was to name the Women's Outreach Trauma Health Service, the Northern Rivers Women and Children's Services, Human Nature, Flourish Australia, WardellCORE, Plan C and, of course, Resilient Lismore—are they organisations that you are aware of?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes. I have met with a number of those—not all of those. WardellCORE, definitely I have. Resilient Lismore, definitely I have. I think, another one of those organisations that you named, I have met with.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Will you go into bat for them in this next cycle—just anything that they can be given? I think all of us are banding around saying, "We need these organisations to survive." We want them to thrive, but we've heard very recently they are facing closure and we need them to keep going.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I do see meeting with them, engaging with them and advocating for them as part of my role. Obviously, I don't have a budgetary allocation I can make for them, but the point you are making is valid. You are right to put it on my radar. There is a cliff that we are facing in relation to the packages of immediate flood recovery support that were made available. We know that the community has not fully recovered—that the job is not done.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Frankly, in some circumstances, it is quite the opposite. There are people who are just now displaying and coming out and have found the strength. I think the experts advised us that this is what we may face. In particular, with these organisations, they are services that government will never be able to support or never be able to take over. They are also organisations that are modelling what they've pioneered that will be replicable in other places as we walk through our changing climate and so on. They will need to carry on, as

you've identified. We want them to carry on, because it's desperate. With the 11 pod villages, what about the 724, as of last November—I understand from the RA; they don't know what that number is. They were the people, in November, still desperately in need of accommodation or some form of housing. Are you aware of them?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I am. I think it's a challenging conversation I've been having with the RA. I'm sympathetic to the scale of the work that they have, but I have been a little bit frustrated with what I consider to be the somewhat limited engagement with that group. I agree with you; I'm not even sure that we have a level of confidence about what that number is.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: We don't.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That is, at the very least, what we should know: How many of those individuals are still in an unstable and unacceptable housing situation and essentially consider themselves on the waiting list for some kind of support? I don't even want to express to you confidence that number is in fact the number.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Will you undertake to that find out?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I will. I am aware of that. I have been to the RA about it, and I will undertake to follow up on that.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: The Together Home program interim report has shown it has been quite successful. I understand you've got another report coming up. What assurances can you give the sector that the Together Home program will continue to be funded in the next budget?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't want to be definitive about the next budget, so I'm not going to provide any assurances about what's in or out at this point. As I said before in relation to SHS funding, I am just not in a position to talk through what is going to be in that budget. We are just not at that point yet. But I accept the point. Despite my occasional criticisms of the previous Government, Together Home was a great program and it changed lives. My view is that the principles that underpinned it should underpin more broadly our approach to homelessness.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You are aware there are providers at the moment who have got staff that are employed, and their funding will run out on 30 June.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I am aware of that.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: They've got to be thinking about leaving and finding new jobs if they don't get any assurance before 1 July.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I am aware of that, and not just that, Ms Maclaren-Jones. There are individuals who were chronic, long-term rough sleepers who are now settled in stable accommodation—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You can understand why I'm asking for some assurance today.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —who would, if the program was not continued, be essentially "You're on your own." Neither of these things are acceptable.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: So basically you won't commit to the funding.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, it's a shame that the Together Home program was not previously funded for the long term but the reality is it wasn't.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, you could have done that in the last budget. I'll move to my colleague.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, you floated previously turning office space into residential housing. Have you made any progress on that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have, and it's more challenging than it might seem at first blush. The current unoccupied office space is very difficult to move into residential housing, and often that's to do with quite technical things around ceiling heights, access to bathrooms and those sorts of things. However, I have done a big piece of work on that. I've explored it and we've had briefings with experts about what our options are. God, I wish that it was easier than it is, but it's not. Actually doing that transition is complicated. The thing that I think is really now where the game is focused is, particularly in the city, that there is a pipeline of commercial space that is looking to come on line. I don't know whether the market is there for that pipeline anymore. Whether we can transition some of the new build, essentially, that is intended commercial to residential in some of our big centres—that, to me, is where my focus is.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Queensland has undertaken a program recently where they've been going ahead and buying up hotels, effectively, to transition to public housing or social housing. Minister, is that something the New South Wales Government is considering?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, we're considering it. I think it's a great project because it provides accommodation in the shorter term. Whether we can find suitable places and whether we can find the money to buy them, I cannot give guarantees, but we're absolutely looking at that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Ms Higginson, do you want to go again?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: On the Aboriginal Housing Office and the work that's happening there and the acceleration and the injection for the delivery of Aboriginal housing, what mechanisms are you putting in place, and how are you doing it, to ensure that it's delivered in accordance with the Closing The Gap commitments?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We met with the Closing The Gap steering group or the CAPO team—

FAMEY WILLIAMS: NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —specifically in relation to this twice recently. I personally attended both those meetings so that I had that level of assurance. There has been a deep piece of work with the AHO and the NSW CAPO and the Aboriginal community housing industry to ensure that that outcome that you have articulated is met. We ring fenced that money for a reason—because we knew that there needed to be a direct injection into Aboriginal housing. We then asked the AHO to work with those partners to ensure that the delivery of that money met the Closing The Gap principles. The key priority—priority one—is supporting the ACCOs and supporting the non-government organisations. We know that. I think the AHO do such a great office and Famey is a great leader, but we're clear that a big part of that is to capacity-build the non-government sector and to give them access to the resources so that it is ACCOs that are making those decisions. That's core work under Closing The Gap. I can assure you, Ms Higginson, that we have a very clear line of sight and a direct, regular engagement on ensuring that's the case.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Thank you. I'll take some questions up later.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, I wanted to go back to the Natural Resources Commission's review of unregulated water sharing plans between 2021 and 2023. He criticised the plans for not including qualified long-term average annual extraction limits. Since then water sharing plans have been revised for New South Wales valleys. They also, as I understand it, don't include the long-term average annual extraction limits. Why haven't they been included in this latest round?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Primarily because our goal is to have our water resource plans accredited so that we are in compliance with our sustainable diversion limits. That's the game here. That's the whole point of all the work we've done on water resource plans, our recommitment under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. I have been in the discussion—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I am just wondering then—final question—how can stakeholders be confident that extractions are managed and being managed within valley limits if those limits aren't included?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can assure those stakeholders that as we get our water resource plans accredited—and I think we're up to nine of 20—those operational legal limits that we have under our Commonwealth obligations come into place, and I welcome the opportunity for the inspector-general to do compliance on them. We're nine of 20; we will get to 20 of 20.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. Are there questions from the Government members?

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: No questions.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Can we go home?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We're at 11 of 20. Apologies. That's right—I got the letter from Ms Plibersek about that the other day.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The videos are starting on the members' phones, so I think we're ready for a lunch break. Thank you very much. We appreciate you making yourself available, Minister, for this latest round.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. We will start this afternoon's session with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If I can just start, Mr Wheaton, with a few questions for you. Obviously, you would've heard me ask the Minister about the Regional Youth Taskforce and how there's been the announcement by government to have that central youth agency. Can you provide any information in terms of those who are currently working for the Department of Regional NSW in that youth community engagement—

JONATHAN WHEATON: Youth community coordinators.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What are they working on at the moment, and what is their future going to be in terms of the new arrangements?

JONATHAN WHEATON: That team had been stood up with temporary funding to run a temporary funding program that was a response to COVID and then natural disaster recovery, so the footprint of that team actually covers both regional and metropolitan in some local government areas. It is co-funded with the Commonwealth and so, at the moment, that team are still in place. The team do engagement with youth both directly and with youth servicing agencies right across regional New South Wales. I think we've got a footprint —not specifically for that program, but almost for the whole of the current youth team that we have across the State—in around 20 locations. They are supporting the delivery of many funding initiatives that have been funded under that program that was from post-COVID and natural disaster recovery.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy if you need to take it on notice, but can you tell us how many staff you've got under that and where they all work as well?

JONATHAN WHEATON: I have that. There's 25 in total around the State for that program. This will be total across our Office for Regional Youth. We have three in Armidale, one in Bourke, one in Broken Hill, three in Coffs Harbour, one in Dubbo and one in Gosford. Would you like me to continue? I can table it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

JONATHAN WHEATON: One in Goulburn, one in Lismore, two in Maitland, four in Newcastle, one in Nowra, one in Orange, one in Port Macquarie, two in Queanbeyan, two in Sydney, three in Tamworth, four in Taree, one in Wagga and two in Wollongong.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. It saves having to take it on notice if you give it to us now. Always happy to do that. Then in terms of the funding—and I appreciate what you're saying in terms of it came out post-COVID for that community engagement piece—is that funded up until the end of this financial year?

JONATHAN WHEATON: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Then beyond that, obviously, it will be up to decisions of government whether those roles and those individuals will continue in those positions?

JONATHAN WHEATON: That's correct. They are employed under temporary contracts up until 30 June this year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Then in terms of the wider piece that the Minister was talking about about wanting to engage with young people about a co-design of what the new model will look like, is there any support coming from your department in relation to that? What does that entail?

JONATHAN WHEATON: Yes, so we're actively working with the advocate, the office of the advocate and Youth NSW, so the three main parts the Minister referred to this morning around—the Minister has been quite clear that, in her perspective, as Minister for Youth now who has coverage of the whole of the State, she wants a more centralised model of how she's supported in that portfolio and she intends to then co-design what that central agency that she has announced looks like. That discussion is ongoing across our Office for Regional Youth, the office of the advocate, Youth NSW and the Minister's office of what that would look like. The Minister has said that then the time frame for when we're working together on that is over the next few months. As part of that we will be looking to design an engagement strategy, a joined-up approach and the co-design process the Minister had mentioned.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is to you, but I'll ask it to Ms Robinson as well: In terms of that co-design process, how are you intending to engage with young people on the ground? Is it going to be round tables or online? What's that framework that the Minister has asked you to operate? Specifically, the next three or four months is what I'm interested in.

JONATHAN WHEATON: That is yet to be determined, but it may be a mix of all of those things that you've just mentioned.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might turn now to Ms Robinson. It's a similar question. In terms of your role in the formation of that new advisory body for young people, or whatever that will look like, what has your role been in consultation with the Minister around both the central youth agency and that voice for young people in that process?

ZOË ROBINSON: We have had conversations with the Minister around what that might look like and the role of ACYP, being an independent statutory officer, and what that means. As Mr Wheaton has said, we have had conversations across all of the groups that are dealing with young people right now. Obviously, our remit is children and young people. That's an important distinction to make. We have and will continue to suggest that if all of the voices of children and young people in New South Wales are lifted, that's very important. There are already existing mechanisms in which we can utilise that for that particular purpose.

You may be aware that we do Youth Week polling. Youth Week is coming up, so we will do that, and we can ask children and young people themselves what they think about what government should be doing. We have asked that over a number of years already. We have Youth Week activities that happen in regional areas and in metro areas. We have provided those examples of existing mechanisms in which the Minister can engage with young people to understand what it is that they might benefit from in terms of a central agency.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: My ones are actually more about reports and things. Ms Robinson, I have a couple of ones in relation to your vaping report. At the last estimates, we asked the Minister about whether or not she has met with you in relation to that. I just wanted to follow up. Have you had a chance to meet with the Minister to discuss that report? Has the Government provided a response?

ZOË ROBINSON: I'll take on notice whether we received a formal response from the Government. We have engaged across health and with our Minister around that particular report. The Minister most recently met with our youth advisory council. I don't think vaping was discussed at that youth advisory council. But I can take on notice whether it was an issue raised before. As she suggested this morning, those recommendations, she is taking those forward with her Government colleagues. I would say that we're working with health in that key response around providing children and young people with cessation support and the supports that they need, and with the Department of Education in terms of some of the work that they're doing around implementing some of the recommendations around schools.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: My other question is in relation to the special inquiry that you're doing into out-of-home care. I understand submissions closed late last year. How many submissions did you receive? What is the time frame for reporting?

ZOË ROBINSON: I'm going to say 12 written submissions, but I can take it on notice. I'm sure I'll get a text immediately about that. We are in the process of doing our private hearings. Our Act affords us the ability to do private hearings with young people, which we think is very important, considering the situations that they're in. At this stage, we have interviewed 12 young people who are currently in alternative care arrangements. We have five more next week. At this stage, we have committed to releasing an interim report in March. We think that's important because it's important to urgently hear some of the voices of these children and young people. And then there will be a final report tabled in late May.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'll just foreshadow, Chair, that we don't have any further questions for either the advocate or Mr Wheaton. I understand some of the crossbenchers do. But when you're done, we're happy for those witnesses to be excused.

The CHAIR: Thanks for letting me know.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I might start with a couple of straightforward ones. The NSW Homelessness Strategy, I'm interested to know about the time frame of when it will be released.

ANNE CAMPBELL: I think I caught that question. I think the middle of this year, so pre-July 2024.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What is the consultation process?

ANNE CAMPBELL: It'll be released for consultation—the strategy. In January we ran some round tables with specialist homelessness providers and other key stakeholders and peaks to inform the strategy going forward.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Will there be an opportunity to provide feedback before the final report is released?

ANNE CAMPBELL: Correct.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What's the time frame for that?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I'll just have a double-check. The SHS contracts were extended from June 2024 to June 2026, so new contracts would—recommissioning would start from 1 July. I'll take on notice the exact time frames in terms of the final report, but certainly we want to do that really early in the lead-up to the recommissioning.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Sorry, no, I was talking about the consultation on the strategy.

ANNE CAMPBELL: I'll just take that on notice, and I might be able to come back towards the end.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That's fine. In the budget, $4.37 million was allocated to the Aboriginal homelessness sector growth program. Could I get an update on the details of that program, if all funds have been allocated and where to?

ANNE CAMPBELL: My understanding is there are four new ACCOs that have been funded to deliver that program, and there are six ACCOs linked to that. I can give you in a minute—I'll try to find it for you—the actual locations and the time frames, but the funding has actually gone out to those providers. It's new funding that's come through—the homelessness program.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: The other one is in relation to the EY report. I understand the interim report was provided last year. Based on a question on notice, the final report in relation to SHS evaluation was received mid last year. Is that correct?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I think the final evaluation report was received later last year, and we're just in the process of providing advice to the Minister on that.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: So that advice hasn't gone to her office?

ANNE CAMPBELL: Not yet, no.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Was there a reason the interim report wasn't released publicly?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I'd need to take that on notice.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And if you could also check—has it been provided to the sector or any other organisations?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I don't think that's my understanding with an interim report.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Could you provide an overview of how the CIMS database operates and what data is actually collected?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I might have to take some of that on notice. It is a mandatory system—it's called the Client Information Management System—where SHS providers that we fund have to provide certain data in terms of number of people and outcomes. I know there have been some new measures added to that as well, but I'm happy to take the rest on notice.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes, if you can give an outline of what data is collected, particularly in relation to accessibility indicators. I understand that was a modification that was going to occur. I'm interested to know whether that modification has happened and, if not, what the time frame would be.

ANNE CAMPBELL: Yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Is the homeless registry progressing?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I think we're looking at all options at the moment. As you know, the Minister announced something a couple of weeks ago, so I think "we're exploring options" is a fair way to say this.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: When you say "options", what does that mean?

ANNE CAMPBELL: What's the best mechanism, what other data systems are around, so that we're not reinventing the wheel.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Is there a time frame for when that will be—

ANNE CAMPBELL: Not at this point.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You probably will need to take this on notice, but previously I asked about how SHSs were tracking. Could you give an update of how many have been accredited, if there are any outstanding and if they're on track to all be accredited by 30 June?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I'm happy to take that on notice. I think I said last time it was about 60 per cent. I think that's gone up quite significantly, so I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I understand the street count is occurring at the moment, so you won't have that data, but is it all being completed this month?

ANNE CAMPBELL: Yes, it is.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you have the number of locations for this year compared to last year?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I know this year. The street counts occurred between 1 February and 1 March 2024, in 77 LGAs. As at 20 February, 57 counts—that's the last data that I've had—have been counted. For last year, I'm pretty sure it was maybe one or two LGAs less, but I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Is there a reason why the LGAs didn't participate?

ANNE CAMPBELL: No, it's gone up this year.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Sorry. That's good. When will the results be released?

ANNE CAMPBELL: Obviously, we have to do—we usually put out a technical report, so I would say within the next couple of months.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: The $11 million that was announced for temporary accommodation in the budget—have all those funds been allocated?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I might hand over to Ms Pinkstone.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: They have been allocated and they're addressing the temporary accommodation assistance at the moment.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And where have the funds gone to?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We have a number of additional requirements around TA in terms of the accommodation offered and we also have supported accommodation providers that provide additional assistance to people that are in different temporary accommodation options.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: How was the decision made as to where those funds would be allocated?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I can take that on notice for you and come back to you.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Is the Housing and Mental Health Agreement still in operation between NSW Health and DCJ?

ANNE CAMPBELL: It is indeed.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: How often are reports provided on the progress of the agreement?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I will take that one on notice, just to look at—I know we recently, last year, signed an updated agreement, so I just need to find out where we're up to in terms of reporting.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Okay. I might move to some mental health questions, following on from some that came out of this morning's session. In relation to the mental health complex at Westmead, the Minister said it would be complete by 2026. When will development commence?

DEB WILLCOX: I will take that on notice and give you specific milestones. The preparatory work is underway for the site, but in terms of the actual construction steps, I'd have to take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Could you also provide the time frame—so when each stage commenced?

DEB WILLCOX: Yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In light of the Minister's comments this morning, particularly around and following questions from my colleague about housing and the concerns of construction constraints, how confident are you that the complex will be built at Westmead by 2026?

DEB WILLCOX: We do our best endeavours to give an appropriate date that we believe is true to the milestones and the construction and getting labour and materials and the like. Obviously, there are some things that are external factors sometimes out of your control, but at the moment the planning is on track for a late '26 completion of the project.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I also wanted to ask about the PID and how that is managed, particularly in relation to Cumberland. Who is ultimately responsible for managing any of those complaints or dealing with whistleblowers?

DEB WILLCOX: In general terms, complaints made by staff are dealt with under a policy, a NSW Health policy, which we are required to comply with, and there is, as you would expect, a detailed procedural fairness component to that and the gathering of evidence and how those decisions are made. I don't have particular details in relation to any protected disclosures, so I could take that question on notice, that component.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I asked this question of the Minister this morning and I just wanted to confirm with you. Are you aware of any other incidents where whistleblowers have made any allegations against NSW Health?

DEB WILLCOX: In recent times?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes.

DEB WILLCOX: No, I'm not aware of any.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are you aware of any current investigations by SafeWork in relation to Cumberland Hospital?

DEB WILLCOX: There were some initial matters brought to the district in around 2020 from SafeWork and some provisional improvement notices which came as part of—which led into the cultural review work, but I'm not aware of any that are current. But again, I can double-check that and come back to you before the end of the session.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That's fine. The Minister indicated that she provided a report last year in relation to Cumberland with a number of recommendations. Are you able to outline what those recommendations were, and have all those recommendations been implemented?

DEB WILLCOX: Yes, certainly, and I might throw to Dr Wright because Dr Wright was one of the co-authors of the report. He undertook that with Dr Karin Lines. They were requested by the secretary to go and have a look. There'd been some previous culture work initiated in the local health district, particularly for the mental health service there, and the work that Dr Wright did was to look to see progress on those. The good news is that most of that work had been completed, but Dr Lines and Dr Wright committed to provide some additional recommendations to continue to reinforce that work. I might throw to Dr Wright, perhaps, to talk a little bit about the report, and then I can come back and tell you about the recommendations.

MURRAY WRIGHT: The original work was done in 2021 and Dr Lines led that. There were a number of recommendations arising from that review. Our purpose was to follow up on the progress against that review. The terms of reference were really against the original review, and I think the key for us was that there had been some substantial progress against what I would have seen as some of the foundational aspects of that review, particularly in trying to improve the culture. What was striking to us were the improvements within the culture of the nursing staff in particular. There'd been a number of changes to leadership and senior personnel, and some of the metrics that you measure staff happiness with, which includes turnover—there was actually quite a low turnover of staff that they talked to us about. As the Minister said, we did discuss with a large number of people over the course of that review how they felt things were going.

You're going to challenge my memory to give you in detail the actual recommendations we made, but you would appreciate that things like culture change—there's not really an end point to that; it's an ongoing process. We did talk about upscaling some of the initiatives directed towards the culture change. We thought there were some good ideas and some good work which should have wider application in the service, and we also made some recommendations about the levels of integration of the mental health service with the rest of health service and the supports from the district executive for the mental health service. One of the challenges of a relatively isolated site is the risk of a disconnect between the mental health facility and the rest of the hospital, and I think that's something they've been wrestling with for a very long time. As the Minister said, that will ultimately be

resolved by bringing the mental health service into the broader health campus, but, in the meantime, there need to be specific efforts aimed at addressing that. That's really the intent in a number of the recommendations that we made. I hope that gives you a bit of a picture.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I think my time has run out, but I can come back to it.

The CHAIR: I have some questions about the LGBTQI+ health strategy, particularly relating to mental health. In the strategy document there's commentary about the relatively difficult access that people in those communities have accessing mental health services due to limited specific clinical mental health services. What work is being done to address that access?

BRENDAN FLYNN: Thanks, Dr Cohn. The first thing I would say is, I agree that, historically—and this is something we hear from LGBTQI+ consumers: They have had, at times, difficulty either accessing or feeling safe in those services. So we do want to make sure that we do two things. The first thing is to make sure that all of our services are welcoming and are conscious of the specific needs of individual cohorts of consumers, remembering that people can belong to, at the same time, different population groups that we specifically try to serve. The other thing that we do is engage in specific initiatives, and, in this case, for the LGBTQI+ community, there are a couple of specific programs that we have underway.

One of them is that we fund ACON for crisis support and counselling, and it's actually a fairly longstanding relationship. I heard ACON give evidence at the upper House inquiry—obviously, you would've heard that yourself as Chair. We are aware there are improvements that we could make. I think it's very powerful to hear from the community, around what works and what doesn't work. Part of what we need to do is to make sure that that information comes back into evaluation of those services. There is another package that's funded under the Towards Zero Suicides funds. That's a community response package that I probably need to take on notice to give you some more details around. If I could just step back with that first thing, about trying to make sure that our services are welcoming, a part of that is also just ensuring our staff are trained, and we also invest in community suicide prevention training, and Twenty10 is an organisation that specifically looks at suicide prevention training in that community.

The CHAIR: You mentioned the funding for ACON for the community-based suicide prevention aftercare services?

BRENDAN FLYNN: Yes.

The CHAIR: It's my understanding that those services have been delivered in Sydney and Newcastle in person and that that service is then virtual for the rest of the State. What feedback have you received or what evaluation has been undertaken about how effective those virtual services have been in meeting those specific needs?

BRENDAN FLYNN: I will take that on notice, and it's important information that we will need, as well.

The CHAIR: Coming back to the strategy, the strategy document repeatedly references the need for, particularly, mental health services to respond to emerging issues that are impacting LGBTIQ+ health and wellbeing. Are you able to explain either what those emerging issues are that are identified at the moment or how those issues are identified and informed?

BRENDAN FLYNN: I think a service like ACON are probably better placed to explain what the issues may be in an overall community level. Certainly, individual consumers—and I'm a clinician, and I meet consumers who identify as one of those groups, who will tell me that their concerns relate to previous stigmatisation, feeling unsafe, feeling not listened to, and one of the challenges we have in Health is to try to put those important pieces of personal feedback into words, into a document. But we actually have to make the document be effective, and part of that is trying to make sure that, as I mentioned, our staff and our services are attuned to the needs of different populations—training, consumer feedback, lived experience and expertise in designing models of care.

The CHAIR: I appreciate your comments about responsiveness as an individual clinician, but is there a process for that feedback on emerging issues to actually be formalised and input through into NSW Health? Are you just getting that feedback from ACON? I'm trying to unpick what the system is.

BRENDAN FLYNN: I think I would say the strategy—I'd have to take the feedback pathways into the oversight of the strategy on notice because that's not something I have direct oversight over. But, to come to the first part of that question, I think it's really important that our staff are aware and our consumers are aware of what pathways there are. That includes surveying, listening to lived experience and listening to our staff and their concerns around whether our services need improvement.

The CHAIR: You also mentioned the funding that went to Twenty10 for suicide prevention skills training. And I understand that Twenty10 reported it successfully reached its target training audience of gender-diverse people, which is excellent, but also that 97 per cent of that training was delivered in major cities. Now that the COVID mental health recovery package funding is expiring, what's being considered for targeted suicide prevention training in the next phase? How will that training be delivered regionally?

BRENDAN FLYNN: I would firstly mention that the training will sit—and, again, I'd need to take on notice the specifics around that package. But it wouldn't necessarily be under COVID time-limited funding. We do fund suicide prevention training under the Towards Zero Suicides initiative, but I accept that there were some aspects of that in the COVID package as well. I was not aware that 97 per cent was metropolitan. I would only state that we would feel that it's very important not just to make sure it wasn't metropolitan but that there was as much face to face, and then virtual, if required, to cover the State.

The CHAIR: I look forward to that answer on notice. I understand there was a budget commitment of $21 million over four years for 36 Aboriginal mental health worker positions. Could we get an update on those positions and whether they've been filled?

BRENDAN FLYNN: Yes. I'm very happy to take that on notice. That's under the TZ money? That's the towards zero—yes.

The CHAIR: I'm also noting the $700 million mental health infrastructure program and that part of that funding is being allocated for Albury-Wodonga. I'm interested in a detailed breakdown of what that infrastructure is going to provide in Albury-Wodonga.

BRENDAN FLYNN: The statewide infrastructure plan for mental health included Albury-Wodonga. Those funds relate to moving, as you would be aware, the standalone Nolan House to an increased bed number in an integrated build, which is 32 beds in the new hospital. But, equally important, it's an opportunity to look at a contemporary model of care, listening to the community around what's needed and taking the opportunities. I think we touched on this earlier, around what a new mental health facility build can create in terms of transformation of services. I think it's a good news story, but there's work to be done to work out how we listen to the local community and work out what is the best evidence-based way to provide those services.

The CHAIR: My last question—I have only got one minute—is for Ms Robinson. It's related to the vaping report again. Following on from the discussion this morning around where young people are directed if they identify that they want support—and I know in your report it talked about young people feeling really isolated because they don't feel comfortable going to parents or teachers about vaping addiction and that they need youth-specific avenues to look for support, so young people are sent towards sites like headspace. I have followed down this pathway. When you go to headspace, the only option there for addiction is under a header of "alcohol and other drugs". From the young people you have spoken to, do you think they would identify their concerns around vaping under that header? Would that be accessible to them?

ZOË ROBINSON: I think, in their own words, when they talked about vaping, they talked about how it was sometimes in relation to anxiety and those kinds of concerns. What we have heard is the need for a youth-specific online tool that is free and accessible, so there have been announcements around the design of that. The Cancer Institute and NIB are funding a design around that as well. We are contributing to that conversation, and young people themselves are contributing to that conversation. Children and young people themselves said that they want holistic responses to this. A subheading on a website might not be the logical place to go. Peer to peer, which you discussed earlier, is such an important thing as well—so how we're working with the young people themselves to assist each other to find appropriate tools that can help them.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Ms Robinson, I'll start with you. I have got a couple of questions, and then some for Ms Williams. And then I think you get to go, perhaps. How many young people are currently in the pod villages in the Northern Rivers?

ZOË ROBINSON: Three hundred and twenty-four.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: At the moment, is the indication that there is significant concern about their wellbeing and how they're coping in the temporary villages?

ZOË ROBINSON: We have a team that works up there in the Northern Rivers. They've worked alongside the community now for a year. Some of the things that have come to the attention of that team are seeing increased suspensions from some of the young people who are in pod villages and the need to have access to services on site and available in those pod villages. I acknowledge that we work with the Reconstruction Authority and provide this information to them and all of the service providers that are in those spaces.

We operate what is a form of referral service. We currently are working with around 18 young people who have some potentially specific needs and trying to connect them into the services that they might need to support them. We have seen what we call often in government antisocial behaviour, but I would suggest that it's probably in relation to some experiences some of these young people have had, acknowledging the two-year anniversary and that there is still some need for stability and access to supports that they need.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you cognisant or is it visible that there is insecurity or that there are unique problems that are resulting from the uncertainty of what happens next in terms of their housing?

ZOË ROBINSON: Depending on the age group that you were talking about. There are some young people who would be potentially able to be living independently outside of pod villages, and so they obviously want to understand what is available for them. I'm surrounded by people who are well in this space and doing amazing work to ensure that we have access to housing for all people in the State of New South Wales. But you can imagine some of the concerns that some of those young people might have in terms of transitioning and what that looks like and access to private rental or what that might be.

We had a particularly remarkable young person who participated at a round table and who voiced their own concerns about some of what might be available to them, and what areas it would be in, and if it's close to work and all of that. When you're talking about littler children and their families, again it's the need for stability and certainty around what happens: access to their schools, access to programs and the friendships. I was up there two weeks ago and it's amazing some of the amazing, beautiful friendships that young people have made.

I was talking to two young people in particular who didn't know each other and, because of where they live, now know each other and have developed a great relationship. They are little people and so they asked me questions like, "I don't know what happens if we're not here together, whether we'll see each other." They seem like perhaps insignificant things, but when you're talking about a six-year-old who has developed a friendship over two years in a particular space, I think it's very significant. And so making sure that when we're thinking about a transition and what it could look like for community, thinking about the particular needs of young people and children in this space, I think, is very important and we welcome those conversations with our colleagues often.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Finally, on that point, are you able to communicate to these young people at this point in time what their next plan is, or we just don't have that available yet?

ZOË ROBINSON: I don't think that my team have that information, necessarily. I also think that having the community of people who are around, noting that there are still some needs in terms of access to supports—there are a lot of people who've been working in this space for a long period who have probably developed relationships with those families who would be in a position to have those conversations. But at this stage what we're doing is doing the things that children and young people are asking for: activities, helping them in the things that they need. One of the things I would highlight is potentially working around the engagement in schools and making sure that these young people in these particular circumstances are given the opportunity to be engaged in schools if they are disengaged at this stage.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: One completely different topic with young people—and this is about the very vulnerable, at-risk young people. Do you have any visibility on whether young people coming into contact with police officers—just general duty police officers—whether there is any impact of the fact that they are carrying weapons? Have you got any lens on that—whether it's helpful or unhelpful? Is there anything that you've come across?

ZOË ROBINSON: Noting that we haven't done specific work on that, we have done a lot of work with young people who are in Youth Justice and who have come in contact with police. I do want to acknowledge the relationship that we do have with police and the fact they are often—and Youth Command—working with us to ensure that the relationships they have with young people are good relationships. As you would appreciate, anything that is an intimidating relationship or a shift in power can be very confronting for a young person. Young people who have had a variety of experiences with the system would already have a view on any time they're coming in contact with any government worker or a police person.

I think that to work on relationships between young people and police—noting there have been a lot of conversations in budget estimates around crime and youth crime particularly—I think we need to talk about the relationships and the imbalance of power that can exist in that. But, also, how do we work with young people to understand the roles and responsibility of police and the part that they have to play? And, also, how do we work with police to understand the vulnerabilities and complexities of some of the young people that they may be coming into contact with—and weapons can always appear intimidating. I think anyone at this table—when a police person walks into a room, we all get a little bit nervous. That's not to say they're here for any other reason

than doing their job, but I think it would be unfair to assume that it's just something that is special or unique to young people. But those who have had contact with the youth justice system or police—I think we need to consider how we can work with those communities better.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Ms Williams, in relation to the changes that are taking place at the moment with the Aboriginal Housing Office and the building of capacity amongst the Aboriginal community housing providers, the Minister referred to work that is happening to make sure that that's happening in accordance with the Closing the Gap target initiatives. Are you able to identify what are the top lines that you're seeing and where we need to be doing more?

FAMEY WILLIAMS: It's a good question but also a difficult one around where we need to be doing more. But for the AHO, within our portfolio, we work quite closely with New South Wales CAPO around priority 9a. There are a number of initiatives under that that we work with those partners to deliver on, and we meet quite regularly to understand how we can improve engagement and improve the capacity and capability of providers to engage in a space that's wider than the AHO. We definitely do our best within the AHO but are looking towards how can they play in other spaces as well. For us, the registration is a key pathway for that. It's not just AHO that our providers interact with. Registration allows for wider opportunities.

We also have functions such as the Social Housing Accelerator fund, looking at providing grants to our sector in order to build the new supply or to bring untenantable properties back on the market for them. We also have great relationships such as our sector reform steerco, where we work with New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council and our housing peak, ACHIA—the Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association—around a sectored development, so a 10-point plan around how we can work collectively to achieve the aspirations for the sector that we all want to see, which are Aboriginal services delivered by Aboriginal organisations.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you content or satisfied that the way the Aboriginal Housing Office is working now is taking place in a culturally appropriate, safe environment?

FAMEY WILLIAMS: Yes, definitely, and I think it's only going to be enhanced by our inclusion in Homes NSW because there is that shared focus and drive for social outcomes, which I think will only help that and increase opportunity for the sector.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Just because of where I sit, I suppose, I've received a bunch of concerns about leases that will now be transferred to the Aboriginal Housing Office. Are we seeing an increase in the transfer of those to the office through the system that's happening now?

FAMEY WILLIAMS: Yes, we were approved by Cabinet to transfer Aboriginal-tenanted properties from Land and Housing Corporation over to the AHO.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Sorry, I'm running out of time. Have you got a rough idea of—

FAMEY WILLIAMS: Yes, it was just over 3,000. I think our next tranche will be in May, so that's 1,109 in May. The opportunity with that is we can attract Commonwealth rent assistance, and we're looking to put solar and air conditioning on all those properties too. There's quite a large program forecast to bring those properties to well maintained.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are there things that you are able to do as the Aboriginal Housing Office if a lease is coming to you and there is some fear around what that will happen? Are there ways of communicating that to provide that—

FAMEY WILLIAMS: Yes, definitely. We have a lot of information sessions. We work closely with our other colleagues in Homes NSW, our housing services team, to actually manage that with tenants that are impacted, because it is a great opportunity for them. They're going to get a lot more by being in homes that are managed via AHO. We do often hear people—there may be anxiety about that, understandably. People have been with a provider for a long time, and the anxieties that can come with change, but we are open to supporting the community through that. We have, as I said, a number of community events where people get an opportunity to voice their concerns. We often get representations through local members and different things when people have concerns, so we address those on a case-by-case basis.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Ms Williams, I will continue questioning you at the moment. The upside of that is that we hope to get you out by the break. It is all part of the service!

FAMEY WILLIAMS: I don't mind sitting. I planned to be here all day.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I think Ms Mitchell is indicating that Mr Wheaton—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: We can deal with that later.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of the Aboriginal Housing Office—and these are questions probably, Ms Pinkstone, you might want to add to as well—with the establishment of Homes NSW, the AHO remains a statutory body with its own independent board. That's correct, isn't it?

FAMEY WILLIAMS: That's correct.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How is this going to operate in terms of the Homes NSW dynamic? Is there any operational understanding between the two organisations?

FAMEY WILLIAMS: I think, with the announcement, before Homes NSW, it was very clear that AHO remains its own statutory organisation. It's something that has contributed to a great deal of the success we've had, having that level of autonomy. We are supported by an amazing board. None of that is going to change. If anything, I think it will be enhanced, and the opportunity for the board to lean into opportunities for Homes NSW—these are conversations I know, just last week, Rebecca was having with our board when we met. I might hand the Homes aspect over to you, but—remaining the same.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: With the transfer, with the AHO forming part of the Homes NSW division, it's our intention to keep that board as an advisory board and a strategic board oversighting the work of the AHO. We think that's very important for Homes NSW not only in the way that the AHO operates to grow the Aboriginal community controlled sector but also the knowledge and learning that we can bring into Homes NSW as well. There's been a significant amount of work done with the new supply program through the AHO in terms of designing for country, and, really, how you can embed those architectural principles into the way that you deliver your new homes. I think there is a lot of potential for Homes NSW and the property division to learn from that work. I think, while we're maintaining that autonomy, there's also the opportunity for us to learn in Homes NSW around delivering better homes for Aboriginal people, given the amount of people that we do house in mainstream public housing.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Ms Williams, you indicated that Ms Pinkstone attended the last meeting of the board. Is that something, Ms Pinkstone, that you will continue to do? Will that be on every board meeting, or are you looking at attending every couple?

FAMEY WILLIAMS: I think it was quarterly, they discussed. The board said if they could have a quarterly update.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to the next budget, will the Aboriginal Housing Office continue to be its own line item within the budget, or will it be all under Homes NSW?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No, we will have a standalone budget for the AHO as it operates now.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Will that be the same for LAC as well?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No. The portfolio team is going to be integrated. Public housing will have its own line item though.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: While you're here, Ms Williams, I'll ask a few questions with respect to self-assessments, and I'll ask those to you as well, Ms Pinkstone. Has the Aboriginal Housing Office made any self-assessments so far under the new provisions?

FAMEY WILLIAMS: Yes. We've completed seven and there are five currently in progress.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: There are five in progress and seven are completed.

FAMEY WILLIAMS: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Okay. With respect to the Homes NSW?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that on notice. I do have it in this book. I will have a look for you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Maybe after the break, if you've got the numbers. Otherwise, we're happy to take it on notice. I think that's it with respect to the Aboriginal Housing Office—thank you, Ms Williams—but I will continue with Ms Pinkstone on some other questions regarding housing. Prior to the establishment of Homes NSW—I'm sure it's under your domain now—is the announcement with respect to the app from the Minister. What's the future of the eRepair portal online now with the introduction of the MyHousing app?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: As part of the new maintenance contract, where a big component of that is, how do we make it easier for tenants to be able to report repairs, that functionality will be integrated into the app.

Tenants will be able to go online, log their repairs and, also, we're hoping to have the functionality for them to track that live over time so that they won't have to call the maintenance line. They'll be able to do that and it will be integrated.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Will there be a feedback provision in the app as well?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Absolutely.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: At what stage of development is the app at present?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: In terms of percentages—we're going live with the new maintenance contract from 1 July this year, and we're hoping to have that on track to go live at the same time. That's our time frame.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That will be "live" live, not just beta testing or that at that stage?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: There's testing underway, and we're doing that work at the moment. It's the integration with the MyHousing app that we're looking at.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Will all maintenance be available to be requested through that app?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: At the moment, yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Absolute suite of maintenance?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: At the moment we are anticipating that that can be done.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Have you had any discussions with Service NSW about integration of the app at all into their platform?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Not at this stage, that I'm aware of.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Thank you very much. Has Homes NSW or any of its predecessors conducted modelling outlining the proportion of social housing tenants who will be ageing while living in social housing?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that on notice, that work, and if it's happening now.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Do you keep any data in terms of the age cohort of social housing tenants?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We do.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What is the data showing you at present?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: It's showing us that our tenants are ageing over time in the properties. I can get you the exact percentage.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That would be great.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: But it is growing, and it's a big focus for the agency in terms of accessible housing, obviously.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Do you have data in terms of the waitlist as well and the age profiles on the waitlist?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes. We can get that data for you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to the modular housing trial, we learnt at the last estimates that the trial provided for 20 homes at approximately $500,000 each. Has there been any exploration of increasing this funding at all?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: At the moment, we're looking at all the options around the modular housing trial, and we've been talking to—other agencies have been using modular housing as well within New South Wales. The other element that we're looking at is how we can support New South Wales construction companies to develop that modular—it really is a pilot for us to learn. Once we see that implemented and we evaluate it, then we'll make a decision about how that's rolled out or not.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In a release of the Minister on 27 November, it was said that the cost of modular housing is expected to decrease as we scale up and achieve efficiencies of scale in manufacturing. Has the department done any modelling or gotten any information with respect to that at all from its preliminary discussions?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Not at the moment. We're in the early stages of doing that work and really scoping out who would be the suppliers and how they compare with other government departments that have done that work as well.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Would you be looking at exclusive supplier arrangements or a range of suppliers if the department were scaling up in this regard?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I think that we'd look at all the options available. It's only a pilot at the moment. We'd need to look at all of those options if it became a new supply program.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I know these aren't your comments, but last time in budget estimates Mr Wheaton informed us that the first step is to assess what forms of modular homes are most appropriate to pilot and to prototype. Have you assessed those modular homes yet? What sort of form?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That work's underway at the moment.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Thank you. Last time in estimates, we were discussing, as well, possible sites and the assessment of those sites. Has that completed yet? Or is that still underway?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No. That's underway at the moment. We're in the scoping phase.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How many sites are you considering?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: At the moment, we have for modular housing a target of property numbers, and then we'd be looking at the properties that we have available that would be suitable for modular housing. So I wouldn't be able to tell you the exact sites yet—overall numbers only.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What's the time frame that you're working towards in terms of—

REBECCA PINKSTONE: The scoping's to be completed by the end of this financial year.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With homes to be delivered by 2027, is it?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's right.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to maintenance of social housing, there's a lot of attention that's provided to the maintenance system last year. How is the progress going to establish the maintenance hub?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's underway at the moment. We're due to go live with the new maintenance contract on 1 July, and what we're looking at now is how the hub will fit within the Housing Contact Centre that's administered already through the Department of Communities and Justice. So the work is underway to scope out what that team would look like and the technology to support that team to go live for contract commencement.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So 1 July is the time line you're working to?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How much will the maintenance hub cost to launch?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What's the interaction between the maintenance hub and the maintenance app?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Both of those will be administered by the department. At the moment, what we're envisaging through the maintenance hub is that, obviously, our tenants will be able to call us and that work will then be taken by the team within the maintenance hub and allocated to the contractors. Similarly, with the works that will come through that maintenance app, those works will be able to be logged centrally by the Homes NSW team and then allocated to the relevant contractor in that area.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How many staff are there in existing call centres for social housing maintenance?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that on notice from the Housing Contact Centre.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I have a range of other questions on this, but I think it's probably best to put them to you on notice as well.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Sure.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I am interested in housing with mental health support. I think we had a brief discussion on that before, with the Haven indicated. When will that program be delivered, when it comes to the Haven?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We're aiming to have the contract with Haven signed by the end of this financial year. I can take that on notice as well and just get the overall time frames for delivery for you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of this program, what are the criteria and conditions for somebody to be eligible for this type of housing?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: For the Haven program?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Yes.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I can take that on notice for you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I might put the rest of those on notice to you as well. With respect to the expert housing panel, the tenure expired in December 2023. We had some discussion about this at the last budget estimates as well and it was indicated that the Minister was finalising her plans with respect to the expert housing panel within the Homes NSW environment. Has that panel now been renewed or is there something that is substituting this panel?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Work is underway to look at what the expert advisory panel will look like now that we have the whole agency established, including different components that have been brought over from other different agencies. That's underway at the moment.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is there a time line for that panel?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No, I don't have a time line for you at the moment. I'll take that on notice, if there has been something agreed.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of Homes NSW, will it have a net zero target for its housing stock?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that on notice to see how it fits with our guidelines.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What's the number of new social housing dwellings constructed so far in this financial year?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We have an overall target of 750 and at the end of December, 180 have been completed.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I might ask the rest of these on notice, because I suspect you won't have the figures at hand. Could you provide me with the amount of unoccupied properties that there are within the social housing portfolio in New South Wales?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: From 1 January we had 2,842 properties that were vacant across the portfolio.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I might ask some questions now of Sydney Water. Mr Cheroux, how are you?

ROCH CHEROUX: I'm very well, thank you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: My questions relate to the input that Sydney Water has had with respect to the Transport Oriented Development Program so far. What information did Sydney Water provide to the Transport Oriented Development Program conducted by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to support them in their assessment of that program?

ROCH CHEROUX: We provided all the information necessary for the department to do their job, meaning what water and wastewater services were available for the eight priority precincts and the 23 second priority.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: When did you give that information? There was an assessment done of 305 transport locations. Did you provide input to that assessment of 305 or only once sites were finalised?

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes, we did. We did work closely with the different departments on providing all the information that we had available, to give them information about what capacity we had, spare capacity, or what work we needed to do to have the housing development in these areas.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to that, did that assessment take into consideration the age of the infrastructure and the maintenance schedules?

ROCH CHEROUX: It does but, most importantly, what it takes into account is the capacity that we've got available. These assets are already in service and existing and used to service existing customers. So we obviously look at the age, but in a case where an asset is coming to the end of its life and we know that it's going to be renewed, then it's planned anyway.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of that renewal, is that stage at all changed or altered by the demand on that infrastructure?

ROCH CHEROUX: No. Actually the analysis told us that there was very little work that we needed to do on the existing assets to provide services to the TODs.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to that analysis, did you conduct any assessment of the number of bursts that had taken place within that infrastructure?

ROCH CHEROUX: Not specifically for this analysis because this is something we're doing across the network all across Sydney.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I ask one question of Sydney Water while we're on the topic? Have there been any new resources or support provided particularly to help Sydney Water cater with the demand for housing? One of the things that we certainly hear is that obviously being able to have the infrastructure and connections is important to get that housing underway. Has there been any more support from government in that space?

ROCH CHEROUX: We are a State-owned corporation, so we've got a level of autonomy. When we've got these requests coming from government or coming from developers—this is actually now in our Act, to provide the services, so we do it on our own means. So, no, there's no additional support coming from anywhere.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mr Cheroux, with respect to Sydney Water, again in terms of that housing piece, I've received quite a few concerns from hopeful residents of the Oxford Gardens development in Ingleburn specifically related to the approval process for a temporary pumping station and the issuance of a section 73 certificate by Sydney Water. They state that this has been going for four years, which has been delaying the development and impacting 80 families who've been associated with the development. Could you please provide any insights into the approval process at Sydney Water for the proposed temporary pumping station to support the Oxford Gardens development at Ingleburn?

ROCH CHEROUX: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Can you take on notice as well when was the temporary pumping station proposal submitted by the developer, what has been the duration of Sydney Water's assessment and at which stage of the approval process does the proposal currently stand? Can you provide an estimated time line for the approval and the time line for the issuance of a section 73 certificate for that development as well?

ROCH CHEROUX: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Ms Pinkstone, I might turn back to you with the minute we've got remaining. Did Homes NSW have any role—or its predecessors, I should say—in the identification of the TOD locations at all?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that on notice for you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I might have some more for you on notice there as well. With respect to the infrastructure funding, or for new infrastructure and new homes that you have, you indicated there are 750 projects to be completed this year?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's right, 750 this year.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is there complete funding within the budgetary allocation for all of those properties to be delivered?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes, those properties are being delivered on existing Land and Housing Corporation sites and upgrades.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to social housing tenants, on 31 December 2023 how many social housing tenants were there in New South Wales?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I have that for you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Or the closest figures you've got.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Let me come back to you in this session. I've got it here.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Great, thank you.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I do have it.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: You've got that?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mr Tidball! There we are.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I've found my voice. I've had a very quiet day. I must say, it's been—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Off the bench you come.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We can fix that if you'd like; we're trying to share the love.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: It's become quite stressful! I'm probably wrong, but my notes are 92,124.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Sounds good to me.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: And that was at the 31—

MICHAEL TIDBALL: At 30 June 2023.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Are there any more updated figures?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: No, not to my knowledge.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Before I kick off, I can give three people an early mark. It is a funny thing to announce. Mr Wheaton, you are free to go. Ms Robinson, you are also free to go.

ZOË ROBINSON: Can I just clarify some questions I had that I can quickly answer? Eighteen submissions, one video submission—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, let me just get rid of the third so that people aren't just left hanging. Ms Williams, you're also free to go.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Can I mention, if I may, Chair, that I believe that another committee may require me at 4.30 p.m. I don't know if that's certain, but I believe that was negotiated—which is Minister Dib's.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's why it says that you're only here until 4.30 p.m.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And on the other one it says you're there at 4.30 p.m. Just never question the secretariat.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I hate to tell you it's 3.06 p.m. at this stage. We will wait until afternoon tea, I believe.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We won't take it personally when you leave.

ZOË ROBINSON: Just in response to the Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones' question, 18 written submissions were received for our special inquiry and one was a video submission as well. The Minister, on 18 December when she met with the Youth Advisory Council, spoke about the vaping report and reiterated the commitments to the recommendations.

JONATHAN WHEATON: I will just also clarify, sorry, my team have said—I think I mentioned that the Youth Community Coordinator funding was Commonwealth and State. The Commonwealth portion of that funding has been utilised. It's just solely funded by New South Wales at 30 June.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thanks for that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Excellent. Thank you.

(Jonathan Wheaton, Zoë Robinson and Famey Williams withdrew.)

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I've got a question. It would be for you, Mr George, I think, or maybe Ms Jones. It's about what's happening at Menindee at the moment. I'm hearing from constituents about more fish dying. Ms Jones, have you got an update on that?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, I do. There's a multi-agency working group that has been managing the situation at Menindee for really a year now. It also involves the MDBA. The water agency chairs that group. It does involve WaterNSW, but also EPA, BCS—a lot of other government agencies. What we can do with water is manage the dissolved oxygen levels for fish health. So far, and including this summer, we've been able to avoid at least the potential of eight incidents of potential mass fish death there by using the water that we've been using. To date, over the last year, we've used nearly about 250 gigalitres of environmental water, so the environmental water holders have been part of this work. But at the moment, over the last few weeks, there have been not mass fish deaths but hundreds of fish dying, presenting with parasites. This is something that Fisheries have the lead on.

Fisheries have been out at Menindee this week, last week and the week before actually collecting fish samples. The toxicology reports from those samples are yet to be finalised. We expect them in the coming weeks. There's some hypotheses around what might be the cause, but the truth is we don't know the cause at this point in time. But it will be a whole-of-government response to that situation and whatever is indicated that we might need to test—for example, sediment testing in addition to the water quality testing that we're doing.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Professor Durrant-Whyte, have you heard anything in relation to the fish? What's killing them? Of course, people that I've spoken to have said, "Yes, there is this parasite but usually it doesn't kill fish in this way." That is what I'm hearing from some people. Of course, you are very familiar with the water quality and lack of oxygen issue at Menindee. I wondered if you wanted to contribute what you're hearing, after Ms Jones.

AMANDA JONES: I might just add that it's particularly golden perch. Golden perch are bottom feeders, and there are hypotheses around the very heavy sediment load given the numbers of fish that died during the last mass fish death.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: As you're aware, we did the report earlier—it ended last year—which was a lot to do with dissolved oxygen and lack of oxygen in general. This is not to do with that, I think it's fair to say. We are being kept informed but, technically, we're not involved in dealing with it or managing it. It's with the water group in Environment.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: While you're there, in terms of oxygen and lack of oxygen and the impact on fish, I understand there have been reports of a trial to pump oxygen into the Barwon-Darling to improve the conditions for fish. I'm wondering, Professor, whether you are aware of that trial and have been involved in any way.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: Recommendation 4 in our report was to basically look at doing that. It's been done in Western Australia very successfully, and a number of other places, and so we're pretty pleased that it's been undertaken. When you look at the dissolved oxygen profiles, a lot of the issue is the variability during the day. Oxygen is removed at night because algae use oxygen at night, and it's made, I understand, quite a significant difference to the variability in dissolved oxygen.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is that a solution because there's not more water flowing down the river? Pumping dissolved oxygen into the river is probably the less ideal out of the two options compared to putting more water down. Is that why it's happening?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: No, it's more subtle than that. It's not a water volume issue, in my view; it's a water quality issue.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Ms Jones, do you know what the costs of that trial are?

AMANDA JONES: Andrew, do you know the costs of the trial? It started in February and it's actually being run by WaterNSW.

ANDREW GEORGE: Chair, I will come back to you with the cost of that trial today. I don't have that in front of me right now.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In terms of pumping the oxygen, is it at different points throughout the river? How is that operating? Are you aware of that?

ANDREW GEORGE: Yes. This trial is just one location, and it's not aeration like we've done in the drought, where we introduced water bubbles into the river. We are actually saturating water offsite and reintroducing that water back into the river, which has been, if you like, supersaturated with the oxygen. That's what's helping improve the dissolved oxygen in that location of the river. The trial that we're undertaking is looking to see how widespread the benefit of the re-oxygenated water is. Fortunately—it's Murphy's Law—the conditions have been somewhat improved since we started the trial, so we are trialling different approaches so

that we can get good background readings to understand the effectiveness of that oxygenation trial against the background conditions and the monitoring that we've done previously.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: How long did you say that was going for?

ANDREW GEORGE: We implemented it a few weeks ago, it was initiated. We're thinking we'll need a few months of data to properly understand the benefit and the extent of the benefit of that trial, but early indications are positive.

AMANDA JONES: We are still releasing about 750 megalitres of water quite regularly through that section of the river. It's a combination of initiatives that are trying to keep, from a dissolved oxygen perspective, the water fit for fish health. Unfortunately, this current situation is not related to dissolved oxygen.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Can I also get a sense of the resources provided? People I've been speaking to in the Menindee community have said that it just seems that nobody is on the ground. I asked the fisheries Minister this the other day. She originally did say it was a Water issue. However, that was clarified by one of her departmental staff who said it was, in fact, their issue. What resources have been put in from WaterNSW—DPIE Water as well, potentially—to support the effort, or is it all Fisheries?

AMANDA JONES: The current situation or the whole situation?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The current situation which has got everybody very alarmed, as you can imagine.

AMANDA JONES: Absolutely. Fisheries is very active over the last three weeks. Ever since fish started to die with this parasitic infection, Fisheries has been active. The first weekend, part of the report that the office of the chief scientist made was that the water group should have someone actually employed at Menindee. We do have that staff member now in Menindee. In the first weekend, it was her. She collected samples. But every weekend since, it has been Fisheries staff, and Fisheries has been out the last couple of weeks collecting samples. They have toxicologists from Charles Sturt University involved. They also, last week, were available. They spoke with individuals in the community, and they also had a drop-in session at the civic hall last Thursday evening—or Wednesday evening, it could've been. Our staff member was also there.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I was going to ask about community meetings.

AMANDA JONES: Also, all of the community updates are available on our website. We publish them and they're very regular. If you wanted to look there, it's a diary of what's happening at Menindee.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. This morning the Minister indicated that 19 of the 20 water resource plans had been submitted to the MDBA. Is that correct?

AMANDA JONES: That's correct. Eleven are accredited and nine are still in assessment. There is one to be—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Which is that one?

AMANDA JONES: The one that is needing to be resubmitted is the Namoi surface water.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The Gwydir has gone in now—the Gwydir surface water?

AMANDA JONES: The Gwydir alluvial.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's part of the nine. When were they submitted? Are we expecting an outcome on them within the next few months in terms of that time line?

AMANDA JONES: A number of the water resource plans have been with the MDBA for a period of time to be assessed. I can get you when everything went into the portal.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That would be very useful, thank you.

AMANDA JONES: Yes, I can get you those dates and times, but it's not detail that I have here.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I wanted to ask about the reconnecting rivers team. I understand they're working on the relaxation of constraints for the delivery of Commonwealth environmental water in the Murray River. You are aware of that team. Is that a team that is working cross-border with the Victorian Government? How are they working?

AMANDA JONES: The Reconnecting River Country Program is funded by the Commonwealth. We have funding to May of this year, and we're seeking to extend funding. The work in the Murrumbidgee is somewhere where New South Wales has total influence, but the work in the Murray is somewhere where we need

to coordinate with Victoria. I'm not aware of any issues in particular at the moment. In fact, to complete the regional water strategies for Murray and Murrumbidgee, we have good cooperation with the Victorian Government in that we have access to their data for the purpose of climate-risk modelling. I'm not aware of any issues.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The rescoped Menindee Lakes water savings SDLAM—whatever that looks like—are you envisaging that will be to the degree that it does require legislative changes or changes to the agreement?

AMANDA JONES: We have already negotiated changes to the Federal funding agreement. We needed to do that so that we were ready to start those projects again.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: To the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement?

AMANDA JONES: No, these are Federal funding agreements.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Sorry, I should've been clearer.

AMANDA JONES: Sorry, I misunderstood the question.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The changes to the scope—because we're unclear what that looks like at this stage—is it envisaged that it will require changes to the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement itself when it comes to the operation of the Menindee Lakes?

AMANDA JONES: I'm not sure if it requires changes to the agreement so much as, perhaps, the guidelines and regulations that are attached to the agreement. It's an issue that we've raised through BOC—the Basin officials council. I can clarify whether it's the agreement or other guidelines that need to be changed.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Barnes, we've talked about this before, but I've noticed that the NSW Irrigators' Council has done a submission to the review of the implementation of the non-urban water metering policy. As you know, they've said there aren't enough duly qualified people to implement meters. You've acknowledged that yourself at previous budget estimates and, indeed, when we've had our conversations as well. What is the update on that, please?

GRANT BARNES: It's encouraging news with respect to tranche one, for those users with works greater than 500 millimetres. Most of those users have met their obligations to upgrade their meters and to have them validated by DQPs. You'd expect that to be the case three years after the deadline. In tranche two, so the northern users, it's more of a mixed picture. Those that we'd deemed high-risk users by virtue of how much volume of water they're entitled to take, they're the ones we're focusing on. We do encounter, often, times when there is insufficient evidence to show that those users have understood their obligations and are taking those steps.

There are those others who are in the pipeline who have commissioned a DQP to install meters and have them validated. In those instances, there's evidence that they are encountering challenges with DQP availability. They'll sign up with a DQP, but that's with a number of other clients that the DQPs need to manage. So the time from start to finish is continuing to increase, and that's something that the Minister and officials are now looking at through the non-urban metering reg reviews to see what can be done to unlock those supply constraints.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In other words, some of the solution isn't just trying to find more duly qualified people to install those meters. Can I get a sense of what the options are when you're looking at regulatory changes to reduce the level of qualification needed to install meters? Is that what you're referring to or implying?

AMANDA JONES: Make it less prescriptive so that there might be a number of tradespeople who could do that installation.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Where is that up to?

AMANDA JONES: The discussion paper was out late last year and I think we've now had responses in. It's now about considering the responses and preparing the report and advice to the Minister. Particularly for the last tranche of water users to be metered, we're looking to remove the market barriers, which include access to technology as well as qualified persons, and to make the regulation less prescriptive so that it's easier to comply with. We want compliance to be more rapid and we want it to be easier for people to comply with so that that occurs. It could be a matter of flipping the onus onto individuals to attest, in some cases, and we're looking at different models as to how to do that and making it operationally implementable.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, and to enable that real-time auditing that we have talked about too, Mr Barnes, in terms of the types of meters and who installs them—obviously with integrity—so that the data can be accessed extremely easily by authorities and by you. Is that correct? Is that what we're expecting?

GRANT BARNES: That's right. The regs at the moment impose an obligation to collect that information and then to report that information through what's called the data acquisition system. That, as Ms Jones just mentioned, is one of the challenges that the DQPs are confronting—the complex telecommunications that are required to connect a meter up to the cloud.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Barnes, are you aware of any floodplain harvesting licences that have been issued above the volumes that have been recommended by NRAR itself?

GRANT BARNES: I'm not aware, but I also would say that NRAR would not have recommended any volumes. We're the agency that ensures the conditions of licence approvals are complied with. We don't set the rules or have any role in implementation.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But you've also had a look at what different irrigators can store on their properties for the Healthy Floodplains Project, correct?

GRANT BARNES: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That was the work undertaken by you. Has there been any work done, from your perspective, from your agency, that has had a look at what you've recommended to the department and then, ultimately, what was handed out?

GRANT BARNES: There are three elements that we were involved in with floodplain harvesting monitoring. The first is the eyes in the sky program. We know the on-farm storages that have been licensed, we know their rating curves and we are able to use satellite imagery to show changes in storage volume. We have staff—boots on the ground—who are inspecting those licensed locations. The third element is, then we connect the information that the meters or the measurement devices are recording in floodplain harvesting. You triangulate those three and you are able to determine whether the take is in accordance with their entitlements.

As the floodplain harvesting licences are progressing, it is in the border rivers and the Gwydir where the primary deadline for measurement devices has now passed. We're in contact with all of those users. We are seeing good progress with some and that they've done what they're required to do. Some are in progress. A small number are yet to start. We've been very clear with those who haven't yet met their obligations that we're watching, and if they were to take overland flow, we would know it and we would come to them with respect to investigations. These users, licensed as they are, are actively monitored by NRAR.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: We will go to questions over here.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Chair. The first question is to Sydney Water. I wondered if there was an update on the WaterFix program that was doing the water efficiency audits and also discounted fittings and installations. Do you have any figures in terms of how many consumers took part in that and got that tangible water-saving hardware delivered?

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes. I will find the numbers and get back to you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Both Hunter Water and Sydney Water piloted, over 2022 and 2023, some inefficient washing machine replacements for social housing tenants, a pool cover rebate and also a Hydraloop trial for re-using grey water. I'm wondering if there were any outcomes from those pilots that you could share with the Committee.

ROCH CHEROUX: I was going to mention the Hydraloop. The Hydraloop trial is still continuing. We've got a number of devices that have been installed—in small developments usually—and the trial is continuing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there anything from Hunter Water on those?

DARREN CLEARY: We're not participating in the Hydraloop. We are obviously closely watching the outcome from Sydney with the washing machine rebate. That program has been implemented. I can take the number of rebates provided and installed on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. The pool cover rebate—has anyone got any data on that? I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

DARREN CLEARY: With Hunter Water, we didn't have a pool cover rebate. It was the washing machine rebate only.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For Sydney Water?

ROCH CHEROUX: Same.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Same thing? On notice? Fantastic. I've only got 25 seconds. I will wait because I want to get on to regional water and it is going to take a bit longer than 20 seconds.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Barnes, from your previous statement—this might go to Ms Jones as well—what have you alerted the department to in terms of that handful of irrigators or landholders who you've said are holding out and who are not as enthusiastic about metering? Have you notified the department of that, or not yet?

GRANT BARNES: Is that with respect to non-urban metering regs or floodplain harvesting?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

GRANT BARNES: The former, yes. We formally reported to the board our experience ensuring compliance against those regs about eight months ago and also to the Minister, and that was the catalyst for the Minister directing officials to commence a review earlier than what was scheduled.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's a review. But what else is available? Is the department doing anything in terms of contacting those landholders? Or it's all in your court at the moment, Mr Barnes?

GRANT BARNES: An expert non-urban meter?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes. It's the same line of questioning.

GRANT BARNES: We have a monitoring program tied to tranche one. As I said before, we are satisfied with the level of compliance we're seeing for those big users. We're actively in the field at the moment in both the north and the south with respect to tranches two and three, and that is where—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I take it Border Rivers and Gwydir, a small handful, as you said, are not cooperating, not moving.

GRANT BARNES: That's with respect to floodplain harvesting. In the Border Rivers and the Gwydir, they have now the primary measurement device obligation. If I think about Gwydir, there are 12 entities that we're actively engaging with at the moment that hadn't satisfied us they'd taken any steps. Seven of those say they won't be installing devices, as they maintain that the size of their allocation is not economic, and they are going to declare those works inactive. Others have encountered challenges installing gantries to which the measurement devices are put in place. Where challenges have been presented to us, we're very clear, though, that they are encumbrances on them actively taking floodplain water. They cannot do so lawfully. And, if they do, we will detect it, and we will follow up with enforcement action.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. That's very useful.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Chair, we'll put the rest of our questions to Sydney Water and Hunter Water on notice. So we're happy for them to be excused. But up to you, obviously, if you've got more.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I have Sydney Water questions but not Hunter Water. Sorry, Mr Cheroux.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just trying to help where we can.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's everything, Mr Cleary. You are able to go now. Thank you.

(Darren Cleary withdrew.)

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: We can't do that for anybody else, I'm afraid.

DEB WILLCOX: Chair, if I may, could I respond now very briefly to two questions that Ms Maclaren-Jones raised, that I've got the information now, if that's appropriate?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

DEB WILLCOX: The first one was around our expansion of Aboriginal suicide prevention and mental health wellbeing. Out of the 18 FTE that were committed under that enhancement, 11.5 FTE, not headcount, but the establishment, have been recruited to, so there's still a few more to go. On the second point, around the Integrated Mental Health Complex at Westmead, planning approvals have been completed and approved, and the design work is done. The early works will commence at the middle of this year. Once they're completed, the main works and construction will commence.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. We'll now break. We'll be back at 3.45.

(Short adjournment)

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Welcome back. We will proceed straight to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to ask some questions in relation to the Belubula Water Security Project—so probably through you, Ms Jones. I note the uncanny timing of a media release this morning from both Minister Jackson and Minister Plibersek in relation to the final business case for that scheme. Are you able to provide any information in terms of when you anticipate the final business case will be complete? Is it still working towards a mid-2025 time frame?

AMANDA JONES: I'd say that it would be later in 2025, the funding having just been confirmed. It's for both the Belubula and Macquarie-Wambuul. Both these initiatives come out of the regional water strategy for Macquarie and are related to the Lachlan Regional Water Strategy, which is just about to be finalised.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the business case, particularly focused on the Belubula water security scheme, so not sort of mid—later 2025, is that the time frame?

AMANDA JONES: I know this release does say mid-2025, but we'll target mid-2025, but it could be late 2025.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of how long from that business case being finalised until a decision would be made on the various elements within that project, or within that scheme, I should say—any time frames on that, that the department would work towards?

AMANDA JONES: We will make recommendations, and I think it's fair to say that it will depend on funding availability.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Who is undertaking that business case work?

AMANDA JONES: The department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So it's all internal; there are no external contractors working on those?

AMANDA JONES: Well, I'm sure that we will need to employ consultants for particular facets of the work, but it will be led by the department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for you to take it on notice at the moment, and obviously I appreciate that this has just been announced today, but are there currently any contractors working on the business cases, or not at this point in time?

AMANDA JONES: I don't—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

AMANDA JONES: There were previous business cases that were started, but the projects were rescoped as there was more identified in the regional strategy work, and that's why there's new funding. We're looking at more options in these cases, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for clarifying that. I want to turn now to issues around flood mitigation, particularly in the Northern Rivers. I know some of my colleagues and the Minister mentioned it today, but obviously we are aware that today is the two-year anniversary of the terrible flooding events in Lismore. I think everyone would agree it has been a really tough time for those communities across a range of measures. I wanted to ask specifically about the NSW Flood Recovery and Resilience Grant Program, which I understand is open for applications now.

AMANDA JONES: That's not something that the Water department monitors.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There's no involvement? Okay. Are there any other sort of flood mitigation initiatives in terms of preventive measures, particularly in the Northern Rivers?

AMANDA JONES: Flood management is actually, in the urban area, the council's responsibility. In regional areas it is BCS. What the Water agency does is floodplain planning, and we've done the Northern Rivers—well, the northern basin and we are moving to the southern basin. What we will identify are structures that are illegal in the landscape that could create more issues in floods, and we'll start to recommend removal of some of those works and modifications. Works require licensing, and that's also what we manage.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm trying to understand, I guess, the interplay with the different agencies and how everyone has their role. So you said you've already done the northern basin.

AMANDA JONES: The northern basin, which was part of the floodplain harvesting work as well. We also did work on floodplain planning.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Then, in terms of that work, is that then presented to Government? Is that made public? What's the process?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, those plans are available on our website and it helps WaterNSW in licensing actual approvals of works.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I apologise; part of this is probably my ignorance because it's not my subject matter of expertise. From what we saw, particularly with the flooding events in the Northern Rivers two years ago, is there any work that you have done—and I'm also happy for Mr George or anyone else to answer—that would help, if there was a further flooding event, to mitigate risk to community through what your agency does?

AMANDA JONES: Not directly through what we do, no.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. I'll go now to some questions in relation to the Murray-Darling—actually, I want to do Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies first. I apologise; there might be a little bit of overlap between some of the questions that I know Ms Faehrmann has asked as well.

AMANDA JONES: I should probably mention, in Northern Rivers it is the Reconstruction Authority who's looking at that kind of thing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The main body, yes. I'm just trying to understand the interplay between all the different agencies as well. For the draft Murray and Murrumbidgee water strategies, my understanding is that there was some further consultation last year and there was a webinar that came out in October with the discussion paper and modelling, inviting feedback. That process indicated that there would be outcomes released in early 2024 and a shortlist of options to be released beyond that. Is there an update that you can provide in relation to that particular water strategy?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, we should have options identified by midyear, and a follow-up.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the outcomes from the October-November community consultation, is that something that gets released publicly by your agency?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, there should be a "What we heard" report available. There would be a feedback report about that consultation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And that's publicly available?

AMANDA JONES: I'll double-check but it should be on our website.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Thank you. In terms of the *NSW Alternatives to Buybacks Plan* that I was asking the Minister a few questions about earlier—that, again, was released, I think, within last the few days—are there any budget implications to some of the initiatives that are listed in this plan?

AMANDA JONES: I think New South Wales would expect that the Commonwealth will pay for its reforms. I think we'd definitely, as a State, be looking to the Commonwealth to fund the initiatives out of that program. It's early days, in terms of the Commonwealth legislation only having passed in December, and all basin States are having discussions with the Commonwealth about what framework they will use to identify the criteria for projects, such as in that alternate plan, and even the rules-based initiatives that Ms Faehrmann was talking about this morning.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So presumably that's just something that, over time, there will be discussions between both governments in terms of funding and how that will actually flow—pardon the pun—for those water-saving projects?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I know that Cate asked about this too, but was there any sort of consultation around rules-based changes? I know that that's mentioned in that report. What does that process look like in terms of community input?

AMANDA JONES: It's to be determined. We're still talking to the Commonwealth about even what criteria they'd use for valuing any rules changes as well as other projects. I'm certain, though, there will be a community process involved—a consultation process in any of the programs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I know it's dependent on those interactions with the Commonwealth, but is there any sort of time frame in terms of, particularly, rule-based changes in the northern basin from your discussions with the Commonwealth?

AMANDA JONES: Everything needs to be in place by 2027, so there's an end point. But I'm not aware of any other dates at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I wanted also to seek some clarity in relation to the Yanco Creek Offtake Project. In the Alternatives to Buybacks Plan, it said it was discontinued, but the department website now says that it is being rescoped. I just wanted some clarity around that.

AMANDA JONES: There are two Yanco projects. One is the Yanco Creek Modernisation Project, which is continuing, and the Yanco offtake is the one that's not continuing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What was the advice to government around why that one wouldn't continue?

AMANDA JONES: There are two reasons, really. The community didn't like the option. It involved the raising of a regulator by 2.5 metres and other aspects which the community weren't happy about. But in addition to that, we did some modelling and identified that it wasn't going to save any water. It wasn't going to deliver any water. That was the fundamental reason why it was withdrawn.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for clarifying that. Again, I know you were here when I asked the Minister about Wilcannia, but is there any information you could provide in relation to the weir and the change from—

AMANDA JONES: Absolutely. The Wilcannia Weir design that went out in the EIS in mid-2022 was a design that—the department became responsible for this project at the very end of 2019. That design was a design we inherited from previous work done by Public Works, I think. Unfortunately, of course, we then had COVID and we had a lot of flooding. Rather than delay the project any further, we went out with an EIS that had only a concept-level design. Because we couldn't do any work in the river—we couldn't even get near the river while the river was flooded—we couldn't do any more technical reviews to refine the design.

What has happened is we've had the EIS displayed, we've had feedback from the community and we've also done a design review. In addition to that, I have to say, the weir is one aspect of the whole of the need for Wilcannia. We have completed stormwater works recently, but we're also looking at the water treatment plant. It needs to be upgraded. The wastewater plant also needs attention. We're trying to take a holistic approach to the whole water and wastewater system in Wilcannia and work with the Central Darling Shire Council to deliver that. With regard to the weir, the weir design is much less complex. It will be more efficient in terms of O and M costs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, what's O and M?

AMANDA JONES: Operations and maintenance. It won't require a power supply and things like that. It won't have gates. From an environmental impact perspective, it has less impact on bank erosion, for example. There's also a cultural and heritage aspect, so it will inundate less of the sites that are important to local Aboriginal people. I think the fish ladder is much simpler. It is a fish ladder, rather than the baffle fishway that was part of the EIS exhibited design. That's important because it's easier for fish to use. For fish health, it's a better outcome. When we did the design review, we involved both Fisheries and WaterNSW, who will be the asset owner. The redesigned weir is the preferred option, particularly for environmental and fish outcomes, as well as for ease of management and operation.

In addition to that, we had feedback from the community that did vary, but I think the fundamental difference is that the one metre lower weir—so it will be a four-metre weir, as the original weir was, but five kilometres downstream—makes absolutely no difference to the size of the weir pool in normal operations. The one-metre rise is only relevant when there's been more water in the river and it extends the weir pool by 18 kilometres. But that weir pool is shallower, it'll be subject to domestic take and it'll evaporate quickly. From a town water supply perspective, that additional 18 kilometres is really not relevant. What we're looking at is, for drought security for Wilcannia, we've identified—this is work that we also did post the EIS—that there is an opportunity for another groundwater bore, which will provide Wilcannia with greater certainty in drought because the groundwater bore is separate, from a watertable perspective, to the surface water.

So we're doing a combined package of works for Wilcannia, and we think that's the right balance. We do need to upgrade the water treatment plant so that it can easily move from surface water treatment to groundwater treatment. So we're looking at a whole package of works here. Absolutely, I think what's happened for some people in the community in particular is that we put out a design that was concept, we've done a whole lot of work since, we've come back with a different proposal and we absolutely need to spend time in the community, as we are this week. Our project team are out in Wilcannia this week, talking with individuals, and we're back out again in a couple of weeks, having a number of community sessions.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. It's good to get that clarity. Particularly, I want to know what consultation took place with the community between the original concept design and the new decisions. I appreciate the reasons you've given why that has been the advice to government around that. But how and when were community consulted in that interim period?

AMANDA JONES: There was an intense period around the EIS and then we've been back out in the community to help—we had workshops in November-December to design the river place. We've been out there to do the stormwater works as well. But in terms of going back to the community with a response to the EIS, that consultation has started now.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate what you're saying, but certainly what I've heard from the community is that a lot of them were quite unhappy or taken aback by that change.

AMANDA JONES: That's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's different to what they had originally anticipated.

AMANDA JONES: There are definitely people in the community that are unhappy and it's definitely on us to go back and work with the community.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you've got staff there now and that will continue into the coming weeks as well, in terms of that?

AMANDA JONES: That's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there any update in relation to the Murrumbidgee optimisation project—a proposal? Is there any analysis on that happening within the department?

AMANDA JONES: I think that that's in the alternate projects list. No, we had a range of projects that we were wanting to talk to the Commonwealth about before the legislation change and what we have to do is really do that work with the Commonwealth as part of this new discussion.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But that will be part of the discussion as well?

AMANDA JONES: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I also wanted to ask about the proposed expansion of Burrinjuck Dam. Has there been any indication from the Government as to whether or not that would be part of the Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy?

AMANDA JONES: I think it's an option identified, but it's not progressed beyond that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I suppose the reason for the question is that the proposed expansion of Wyangala Dam wasn't part of the shortlisted actions under the Lachlan Regional Water Strategy and the community is wondering whether, through the Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy, whether Burrinjuck Dam will be in a similar position. But that's—

AMANDA JONES: There is work to be done.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —obviously, a matter for the Government.

AMANDA JONES: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that. I have one minute and 45 left, so I'll try to go to a new area that is a little bit more complex—coastal harvestable rights, which we spoke about at the last budget estimates hearing. I think the Minister indicated that the agency would be doing work over the next period of time to work with landholders. Is there an update you can provide in relation to that?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, there is. We've got five stages of that work. I think I explained at the last estimates that one of the challenges for setting sustainable diversion limits—which the Natural Resources Commission has been recommending we do since about 2018—on the coast is that outside the metropolitan areas there is very little metered data and there are very few dams. We've identified a method. That's the first stage of the work—how could we, without the metered data available, start to do this work? So we've identified a method and we're now in the second stage, which is we're developing a detailed project plan. That was the commitment last budget estimates. It's that by June this year we'll have a detailed project plan, and that will be able to indicate, catchment by catchment, the priority order in which we'll go about doing this work.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you anticipate that that work will be completed by the middle of this year?

AMANDA JONES: No, the project plan will be known by the middle of this year. The actual work to get sustainable diversion limits in place for every catchment will then take up to another two years, but we'll have a priority order in which we'll go about the work.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So by the middle of June we should know the priority order of the catchments?

AMANDA JONES: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I do have some more questions but the bell is going to go, so I'll wait until my next turn.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I want to turn to some questions about the chief scientist's report into fish kills. Firstly, Ms Jones, within the department and within the agency, how is progress towards those recommendations being tracked?

AMANDA JONES: I can update you. We made an initial response to the report in November, and all of the actions that we've undertaken so far are in relation to that set of recommendations. As I mentioned, we have a staff member in Menindee. The connectivity panel is set up and will report. If we needed to use temporary water restrictions, the Minister has indicated she would do that. We have the additional dissolved oxygen water quality monitoring in place; we have four additional monitors in that section of the river, and they've been absolutely essential for the water group to do their work. We're looking at temporary fish passage options. We've got the nanobubble trial happening. Fisheries have undertaken the fish surveys, and in December last year the EPA completed an incident response plan so that we could manage through summer. That's the list of recommendations that we've responded to so far. The second stage of the report is due in the middle of the year. That is our report back on the rest of the recommendations.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Professor Durrant-Whyte, your finding 5 states:

> Explicit environmental protections in existing water management legislation are neither enforced nor reflected in current policy and operations.

Do you think that enough has been done so far or that you're seeing enough movement to start to reassure you that you might not make that finding in the future? Are we seeing changes within the department?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: I think the first thing is the nature of what the chief scientist's office does is to do the science report, consider it, deliver it to the Minister, and then it's up to the Minister to implement those. In theory, we don't have anything more to do with it beyond that. Of course, we have a strong interest in it because we've spent a long time visiting the area and being involved. I do think action is being taken on all of these. I will point out, though, that we always envisaged a zero- to 12-month plan—which is really what we're in now, including the oxygenation—to avoid a similar event this year that we had last year, which I think actually has been achieved. But then there are the mid-term and longer-term things, which are more about enforceable legislation than about water quality, and the systems-wide thinking. Although again, as I've indicated, we're not theoretically involved, in practice we engage considerably with Water and with the Minister to see that those are being done, and I believe they are.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Throughout your report you did talk about extractions as well, not just drought or low rainfall, if you like. Earlier in this session I asked the Minister about floodplain harvesting in the Barwon-Darling. I think her response was something like, "Wait a few seasons and look at the impact before taking action". Do you believe the river has that long to wait? Would you like to see the floodplain harvesting take reduce before then?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: I think our report was pretty clear that the health of the river has deteriorated substantially in the last 40, 50 years, and it is significantly governed by a water quality issue, not particularly just a water volume issue, and that the resetting of things needs to involve that whole-of-system quality approach. This is not something that's going to happen in, frankly, one year. I think we are—sorry; I'm not a "we" in this case. I do see that people are beginning to talk about the whole system. I know I have seen a report on river quality that's been delivered by the water group, and I genuinely think people are beginning to get their heads around what needs to happen here.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you feeding into the connectivity panel in any way? Have you met with them to talk to them about your findings in the report?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: I'm here as the chief scientist. If I was here as the chief commissioner, the answer would be yes. Because, clearly, one of my staff is chairing it.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'm conscious that I can't ask you questions in your NRC capacity, which is slightly frustrating, to be honest. That's all my questions for you, actually, Professor, and I'll just see whether—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. We're happy.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. If you were here for the NRC, I might keep you a bit longer, but I can't do that.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: You have an opportunity in six months.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, we do.

(Hugh Durrant-Whyte withdrew.)

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I just want to ask questions of you, Mr Cheroux, if I can. This is going on to your executive and senior management recruitment processes, how you're competing in the broader sphere to recruit people. Do you benchmark executive and senior management salaries, firstly, to ensure that they are in step with the New South Wales public sector and the public water sector nationally? Are they benchmarked?

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes, we do.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: They're benchmarked in terms of comparative or are they higher?

ROCH CHEROUX: No. We usually benchmark below market. We benchmark ourselves to a number of different organisations: the public sector, the water industry and the broader industry in general. Because, when you look at our executives, they are coming from all sorts of different industries.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Saying that you're benchmarking against the industry, that's not just benchmarking against the public service, that seems to me, because the industry would be paying more highly. You said you are benchmarking a couple of things there: the public sector plus the industry. Who else are you benchmarking?

ROCH CHEROUX: You've got probably three tiers. You've got the public sector. You've got the water industry. And then you've got—I'm going to call that the industry in general. When we want to recruit someone who's a qualified lawyer or legal counsel or company secretary, they are functions where we will compete with industry in general. That is why we benchmark very broadly so that we can have a good idea about the level of the market.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: How long have you been in the position?

ROCH CHEROUX: It's a bit more than four years now.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: During that time, let's say, within the past five years or even a decade—I can put these on notice, as well. Do you have a fair idea of have they stayed relative to—yes, CPI, but have those salaries of senior executives within Sydney Water stayed reasonably aligned to where they were five years ago, accounting for CPI? Or have you seen a bit of an increase as a result of this change in benchmarking?

ROCH CHEROUX: It's probably very similar to what we had during the last five years. We are below market, that's for sure. And that's the difficulty of attracting good people into the corporation.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you engage in national and international recruitment efforts to fill those executive and senior management roles?

ROCH CHEROUX: National, yes. International, not really, no.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Who makes the final recruitment decision for—

ROCH CHEROUX: It depends on the level.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: —senior executive appointments?

ROCH CHEROUX: That would be all—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: For example, let's go managing director and members of the executive leadership team. Who makes the decision? There are two things. There's the recommendation that comes from somewhere in terms of a panel for all of the executive leadership. Who makes that decision?

ROCH CHEROUX: All of the senior executive team will be approved by the board. That is a decision by the board for the managing director and for all of what we call the general managers, which are all the people reporting to me.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The general managers, that's senior executive, I assume, if they're reporting to you.

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Who makes the recommendations to the board around who gets those positions within that general management team? Is that you or someone else?

ROCH CHEROUX: That would be a combination. All of the executives—for the recruitment process for the senior executive, so the GMs, the panel is actually made of myself and two board directors. There will be two non-executive directors and the managing directors making a recommendation to the board.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: With the board members who are part of the executive team, are there conflict-of-interest declarations and are they rotating members?

ROCH CHEROUX: No, sorry, the board members are not part of the executive team.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Sorry, I should have said part of the recruitment team. Are they part of the recruitment panel?

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes, correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: How is any conflict of interest managed?

ROCH CHEROUX: The vote will be by the rest of the board, and the directors that are on the panel will not be voting during that time.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's good to know. The question was in terms of declarations of conflict of interest for the recruitment panel itself—so you or the two board members who are on the recruitment panel. Is there a conflict-of-interest declaration process? Is there a transparent process for that?

ROCH CHEROUX: It's completely transparent. The rest of the board will know which director will be on the panel. Then, when we have the board meeting and the board decision, these directors will abstain.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: There isn't really any other conflict-of-interest declaration process?

ROCH CHEROUX: There is a conflict-of-interest declaration, in a sense, but noted at the board.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It does go to the board, for example, if someone is acting in a position?

ROCH CHEROUX: If someone is acting in a position, no, it doesn't go to the board.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So there is no conflict of interest?

ROCH CHEROUX: If someone is acting in an executive position?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

ROCH CHEROUX: I will make the decision myself.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: When people from the board go onto these recruitment panels, there is no formal conflict-of-interest process that Sydney Water puts in place for the members of that recruitment panel to declare conflicts of interest and not be a part of that panel if they need to declare something?

ROCH CHEROUX: There are different questions here. Are you talking about a conflict of interest to be on the panel and to not be able to interview people they know?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes. That's one question.

ROCH CHEROUX: Obviously, yes, that exists. That's in place. And the second question is, when the decision or the recommendation comes to the board, the directors that have been on the panel will not vote with the rest of the board.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Then the question around people acting in positions, acting in a role, in terms of declaring that conflict—

ROCH CHEROUX: Are you talking about someone acting in an executive position when we have a vacancy?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

ROCH CHEROUX: If I've got one of my GMs that is away for only days or something else, then, in that case, I will appoint someone acting in the position. It doesn't go to the board.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Who oversees that whole process? Is there any kind of probity or independent oversight to ensure that the appointments to senior executive positions are, as much as possible, free from any interest, if you like? How do we make sure that this is a transparent process within Sydney Water? Who oversees it?

ROCH CHEROUX: That's the internal governance of the board and the rest of the company.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So nobody? There isn't—

ROCH CHEROUX: No, there is no independent probity or anyone like this. It is all done in a very transparent way, and when there is a conflict of interest, then it's registered in the conflict of interest register.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I might have some questions on notice for you as well. But is there a project within Sydney Water called the planning partnership?

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes, there is.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What is that planning partnership?

ROCH CHEROUX: The planning partnership—I'm going to step back. We've got a large capital investment program at Sydney Water. We have got a capital program that is about $2 billion every year, so it requires a lot of planning and design of the projects. To give you an idea, we've got about 2,000 projects ongoing at every point in time. We have our internal resource working on the planning and the design of the projects, and this internal resource is supplemented with planning partners that are external companies that are embedded into the planning department. So that's what the planning partnership is. It's having people from two different companies that are embedded into—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes. Those companies are—Arup and Aurecon? I can just help you out, because time is limited.

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you know how many contractors or staff are being employed from Arup and Aurecon?

ROCH CHEROUX: I'll take that on notice. That's a difficult one because it varies, depending on the projects that we've got ongoing.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Arup and Aurecon, for example, would be involved in things like developing business cases for some of these—you said something like 2,000 projects? Is that correct?

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes, that's correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: These companies are writing the business cases for them?

ROCH CHEROUX: They would, yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: To submit to Sydney Water?

ROCH CHEROUX: To submit within the internal process.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Do you have an example of one or two that they would have done in the last couple of years, in terms of business cases—any examples?

ROCH CHEROUX: No. I mean, there are probably many, so I don't have specific examples. Now, just to be very, very specific, they are not doing it. They are part of a team—of the planning team or the design team doing it. So it's not outsourced; it's a partnership between Sydney Water employees and the partner's employees.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I see. So you could have staff from Arup, for example, working for Sydney Water in this planning partnership big unit—I assume it's a big team.

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That could be working and writing on business cases for some of these projects. Do we see Arup then tendering for those projects? Does that happen as well, or are there separations here?

ROCH CHEROUX: No, we exclude—there is a separation, in the sense it's just good governance. If they are part of the planning, they can't bid on the construction. That's just normal governance that we have.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It doesn't happen everywhere. If somebody from Arup writes or is part of putting the business case together, then automatically Arup can't tender for that project?

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes. I'll probably go a step further saying that any company, because sometimes we also contract with external partners to work on a specific business case. Every company that is working upstream on a project—so basically doing the planning, the design—cannot work downstream, meaning when we start the construction of the projects. That's just normal governance.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In relation to the use of those consultants within this planning partnership, is there potentially a limit in terms of how long they're being engaged for? It does sound like this planning partnership of 2,000 projects is a never-ending thing with Sydney Water; it's not a short-term project.

ROCH CHEROUX: Correct. So the way it happens, we went to market—that was before my time, so that was about five years ago—to select the planning partners. I will come back with the precise number but I think it's five-year contracts, so the team is preparing to go back to market and do the process again.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Going back to the sustainable harvestable rights for the coastal catchments, can you provide any information as to how you're working out which catchments you'll prioritise in terms of that rollout?

AMANDA JONES: It'll be a risk-based approach but it'll also be where we have the best information to start.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Can I jump in? Mr Tidball—if we don't need him now he can actually go. It's 4.26 p.m.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I just have another commitment.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Actually, Mr Tidball might be able to contribute just quickly on this question. This is to Ms Pinkstone, but Mr Tidball might have further information to add. The DCJ Your Choice, Your Future program has provided additional leaving care support for young people transitioning from care to independence until they reach the age of 21. I'm just interested as to whether this support also includes housing support through Homes NSW being available.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: No, it does not. It falls in Minister Washington's responsibilities, obviously, but, no, it does not.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So there's no housing support available under that program?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: No, there's not.

ANNE CAMPBELL: I could add there is something under the Youth Initiative, which formerly was called the Premier's Youth Initiative, which really focuses on young people leaving out-of-home care and can provide accommodation and wraparound supports.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Thank you.

(Michael Tidball withdrew.)

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Ms Jones, back to you. The risk-based approach for the catchments and the prioritisation of those—in the past when I've asked the Minister about this in the House too, she's talked about potentially some of those catchments that've gone back to 10 per cent may be increased again up to 30 per cent depending on that work. Is the advice from Government to you as an agency that you would look at providing potential increases as you do that work, or will you wait till you get through all of the assessments of all catchments before making any changes to that percentage?

AMANDA JONES: The Minister hasn't advised the preference but I think we would advise that as we establish the SDLs in each of the catchments, you could do it as did that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You could do it. So you are not going to have to wait for all of the work to be completed?

AMANDA JONES: To the end of the process? No.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You'll go catchment per catchment and if you can make increases based on that evidence and the risk-based assessment that's what the advice will be?

AMANDA JONES: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for clarifying that. Back to some of the media today, particularly the Burrendong Dam to increase water supply in the flood mitigation zone—that is something that

I know is being looked at as part of that final business case. There has been a call from the Alliance of Western Councils to look at raising that storage to, I think, 120 per cent of the current full supply level. Can you confirm if that is being investigated as part of the business case work?

AMANDA JONES: That is the option being looked at. Of course, the trade-off there will be if you utilise the flood mitigation zone for storage, you don't have it for flood mitigation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But that is being investigated as part of that?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, that is.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just a couple more for you. I know that Ms Faehrmann had asked questions already about Menindee, but my understanding is that there was some evidence given to the Senate committee on 16 February in relation to the State Government trialling some new arrangements for managing water through the Menindee Lakes. It came from Dr Davis of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and he said that New South Wales has a new method for calculating environmental water coming into Menindee at the top. Do you have any information in relation to that evidence and methodology?

AMANDA JONES: I'm not sure about the latter comment, but there was a period during which the Murray-Darling Basin Authority was drawing water from Lake Menindee and we agreed, so that we could benefit the stretch of the river where we are having the dissolved oxygen issues, that we drew the water from the upper lakes—Lake Pamamaroo—instead of Menindee, so that we made some temporary arrangements to support the fish health in the river during this last summer. But I'm not sure about the other comment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a new method for calculating environmental water, or was it just that?

AMANDA JONES: I'm not aware of another method.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine; it's just good to get the clarity. In terms of department staff, when there are issues at Menindee, do they come from Sydney, or do you have Broken Hill staff who go out?

AMANDA JONES: That was one of the recommendations from the chief scientist's report, that we have someone based in Menindee. We employed somebody late last year and they started in January.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Cold Water Pollution Strategy that's talked about, particularly with regards to the Better Bidgee program—are there any updates you could provide on the development? Have any funding or resources been allocated to help the development of that strategy?

AMANDA JONES: No, I can't update that at the moment. Do you mean part of the SDLAM projects?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. My understanding is that there has been an indication that there will be some work done for cold water pollution, particularly in the Better Bidgee. I've seen it on the website, so I was just curious about that. I'm happy for you to take it on notice. It's quite specific.

AMANDA JONES: Yes, I will.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any updates on phase two of the Town Water Risk Reduction Program, which believe is underway this year.

AMANDA JONES: The Town Water Risk Reduction Program?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

AMANDA JONES: Yes, that program is a mix of things. One of the key challenges in regional towns is actually not having skilled staff to actually do the water operations piece. We have seen that in Walgett and other towns. We have provided 900 free training places that are certified training places through the Training Services NSW. I think that of those places, we have had 465 places that have been taken up. The department also provides training, which is not accredited, but it's skills-based development training. We hold 12 sessions a year and they are always over-booked. We also are looking at dam safety work for local water utilities. I think, probably the most sought-after assistance is that we are providing additional operational support to local water utilities. We have been doing that in Yass, Walgett and other places. We are using things like virtual headsets too, so that we can have remote support. Someone in a treatment plant can actually wear the headsets, they can walk around, and our engineers can give them advice. That's the second phase of the program. It's $23 million over two years, and we are into the next financial year of that program. That's what we are rolling out.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I might begin with a couple of questions following on from questions to Ms Campbell before about SHS recommissioning. Have you started the process of engaging with the sector?

ANNE CAMPBELL: Yes, we have—very early days, obviously. You asked a question earlier today about the EY SHS evaluation report. We have sent a draft of that to the peak. We are actually consulting with them at the moment and then we will prepare a report for the Minister.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What's the time frame for consultation with the sector in relation to recommissioning and the deadline of when contracts will be sent out?

ANNE CAMPBELL: We want to have contracts in place by 1 July 2026. You talked earlier about the homelessness strategy, because that's sort of linked to the SHS recommissioning. There will be a final of that by July this year, and consultation with the sector is happening in March and April this year.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the NHHA, which expires 30 June this year, how are discussions with the Commonwealth going in relation to finalising a new agreement?

ANNE CAMPBELL: They're progressing, Ms Maclaren-Jones. There was, as I think the Minister said earlier this morning, a meeting last Friday. Certainly, we have seen a bit of a draft of the plan, but not a lot of detail at this point.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: The other two questions are in relation to the funding that was provided. I understand $1.7 billion was given to the States and Territories for the extension. How much of that went to New South Wales?

ANNE CAMPBELL: About $516 million.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And then, in relation to the 187.5 that the Australian Government provided to States and Territories through national partnership payments for housing and essential services and remote housing programs, how much was set aside for New South Wales?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I'd need to take that on notice. I don't think we get much on remote housing in New South Wales. There used to be what was called the NPARI many years ago, but about eight years ago or nine years ago New South Wales cashed out on that and that went into the Murdi Paaki agreement that was signed by the then Government.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to mental health, the Minister recently announced $7.5 million, I think it was, for mental health support for young people on the northern beaches. Previously it was budgeted for $11.4 million. What's happening to the $4.5 million that had been originally marked for adolescent mental health in that area?

DEB WILLCOX: Thanks Ms Maclaren-Jones. The period of time we've been working with Healthscope and the Northern Beaches Hospital and with Northern Sydney Local Health District to try to get the best configuration of services, in the main, didn't require much in the way of capital. The Northern Beaches Hospital has four beds available for admission for young people who require admission, but we have enhanced significantly our community-based mental health services at Brookvale in their child and adolescent mental health service there.

Part of the announcement that you've mentioned looked at some increasing in terms of a safe haven at Brookvale Community Health Centre, as well as some enhancements to the Northern Beaches PACER team, which has been a very effective police and health co-response, that you would be aware of. So at the moment there is some remaining capital funding. We're working with Northern Sydney Local Health District just to see what other options we may have that could go directly to child and adolescent mental health services. But at the moment we've just gone this far with the recurrent expenditure, which is largely community based, as well as the four inpatient beds at Northern Beaches Hospital that are available for admission.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Those four beds are currently interim beds. Will they become permanent?

DEB WILLCOX: No, they're permanent.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: They're permanent?

DEB WILLCOX: Yes, they are permanent. The initial announcement looked for a capital solution to create a pod. That wasn't possible just within the designs of the hospital itself, but they have allocated four available beds for young people who may require admission. Any young person that is extremely unwell and would require beyond a couple of days, they would probably be transferred to the Brolga unit, which is the child

and adolescent mental health unit at Hornsby, because northern beaches is part of Northern Sydney Local Health District and access to all of those networked services is available.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You mentioned you are talking with Healthscope about the additional funding, the $4.5 million. Will there be broader consultation with the community and particularly with the local members of Parliament, State and Federal?

DEB WILLCOX: The consultation at the moment is actually with the local health district, just to look at and work in, because they have the contract with Northern Beaches Hospital. There will be a joined-up discussion to see just what would be a helpful and useful use of those additional funds. In terms of consultation, there has been a fair amount of consultation with the community around the child and adolescent services. It's obviously a big issue for the community up there in the northern beaches. Certainly, if there is going to be further investment around the capital, we would be very happy to engage with the community and the youth up there who engage with the mental health service.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You said that there's been consultation—that it has occurred. Is that in the past 12 months, in relation to this recent decision?

DEB WILLCOX: Yes. I haven't been directly involved in it, but the local health district has. I would have to take on notice, in terms of Minister Jackson has some engagement with members of Parliament and some families who had a direct interest.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: If you can also take on notice who organised that consultation and why the State Liberal members were not consulted or invited to be part of that consultation process.

DEB WILLCOX: I'm certainly happy to do that.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the Eurobodalla family practice, which is one of the specialist homelessness providers in the area, in response to a question that was given we were advised that their funding is until 30 June this year. What has been put in place to ensure that they have additional funding moving forward?

ANNE CAMPBELL: I'll need to take that on notice.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: My final question is in relation to the Together Home program. This morning the Minister didn't commit to extending the funding. I'm just wondering what the process would be to engage with the sector moving forward, considering there is some concern that the program won't continue from 1 July.

ANNE CAMPBELL: Look, we're actively engaging with the sector. Obviously, we are going through a budget process at the moment. We will want to be able to notify those services as soon as possible, as well as the people that are impacted by it. But I know the Minister is very keenly advocating for that program.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Is there a time frame of when the providers will know?

ANNE CAMPBELL: Not at this stage, but happy to see if we can provide that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Ms Pinkstone, picking up on another successful program, which I found has a lot of support within the sector—the Community Housing Innovation Fund—what are the Government's plans for that fund at the moment?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: At the moment the Community Housing Innovation Fund provides seed funding for new social housing that is developed or spot-purchased by community housing providers. We have been able to continue to supplement that program through funding that we receive through the Social Housing Accelerator. At the moment community housing providers are delivering around 113 homes out of that funding through the CHIF, and it's part of the ongoing budget. We know it's a successful program and we are looking at how we would fund that into the future on an ongoing basis.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Going back to the Land Audit Working Group, can you tell us a little bit about Homes NSW's role as part of that group?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Homes NSW is represented on that group through our portfolio area, the old Land and Housing Corporation staff. The process that I understand is that sites are brought forward and then considered by Homes NSW, in terms of their suitability for social and affordable housing, based on our design guidelines and also our requirements around access to services and public housing and other concentrations of housing in the area as well.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to that, you said Homes NSW is represented by a LAHC official. Without a name, what kind of official from LAHC is sitting on there?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: A senior officer.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Does Homes NSW have first dibs, so to speak, in terms of any site identification?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We're certainly involved in the process and we are putting forward our views strongly around the suitability of those sites for social and affordable housing.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Further to that, with respect to the transport oriented development sites, does Homes NSW, across those 31 precincts that are covered by the TOD SEPP, have any properties within those precincts?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that on notice for you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: And if you could also take on notice whether you've had any assessments as to what are potential plans for those properties within those 31 precincts, that would be appreciated. That's probably it from me. Sarah, have you got anything?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm not ready for it, because I thought you were going to take the whole time. You've only got two minutes left.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I have a question. The Mental Health Consumer Subcommittee—is that still in operation?

BRENDAN FLYNN: It is. But I should explain that there are numerous consumer committees that the branch works with. You may be referring—and I'm happy to be corrected—to a group that has not met for some time, that we are keen to refresh and have as an advisory group to the branch for all of our policy pieces. We do have separate consumer advisory groups for safeguards. We have got a younger persons advisory group. We've got multiple ones that are, if you like, program based. But we do want to renew and refresh the branch-based one that, as I understand, has not met for some time.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Can I get a list of all of the consumer subcommittees that you were referring to?

BRENDAN FLYNN: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I have one follow-up question from Ms Maclaren-Jones in terms of Northern Beaches Hospital. In terms of those beds, you said they're not interim beds. But is acute care required to be provided at Hornsby hospital or can that be provided at Northern Beaches as well?

DEB WILLCOX: When you say "acute care", do you mean for a young person who—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Yes.

DEB WILLCOX: Yes. They have a psychiatrist service there and they have a consultant liaison service, as well as mental health nurses and allied health professionals.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: At Northern Beaches?

DEB WILLCOX: Yes, at Northern Beaches Hospital. But if a child or an adolescent needs a longer admission and is very unwell, the Brolga is a highly specialised young person and adolescent mental health service.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: And that would be provided at Hornsby, within that region?

DEB WILLCOX: Yes, that's correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I've got some questions to Sydney Water about the Parsley Bay issue. I understand that the community has been calling for, essentially, a reassessment of that project to ensure that Sydney Water conducts an environmental impact statement that hasn't been conducted for the whole project. I think you might be, as a result of the community concern, relooking at some of it but not undertaking an entire environmental impact statement. Where is that up to in terms of addressing some of the community concern around Parsley Bay?

ROCH CHEROUX: Parsley Bay is a project where we started to engage with the community back in 2018. This is the last outlet in Sydney where we have wastewater going back to the ocean untreated. We did an REF, a review of environmental factors, a few years ago. We had feedback during the exhibition from the

community that they wanted more, and we did additional investigation on some of the fauna and flora. That demonstrated that the project we were undertaking was not impacting the local flora and fauna. But most importantly, when we did the work with the community, we were able to reduce the impacts on the local environment by about 80 per cent. When I'm talking about impact, that's the number of trees that we need to cut and the footprint of the pumping station. That was a really constructive process—a good outcome.

We continue to talk to the community. There have been many engagements. Again, last weekend the team was out there talking to the community. Talking to the team on Monday, the feedback that they gave me was that the sentiment from the community was very supportive. These are obviously measures that we are going to put in place when we start the construction of the pumping station so that it doesn't impact the environment at all. I just wanted to also clarify the fact that this project doesn't affect Parsley Bay; it's within in the reserve, quite far from Parsley Bay.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Just with time, I will move on. Thanks for that response. Is there an update in relation to the potential Pooncarie Weir? I understand the community requires the security of that for town water when the next drought hits and certainly wants an update on that, as they don't want to run out of water again during the next drought. Ms Jones, have you got an update on that?

AMANDA JONES: I don't have an update on that, but I'm happy to take that on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: While we're talking about weirs, I understand the Government has received Commonwealth funding for consultation on a fish passage on the main weir at Menindee. Is that correct?

AMANDA JONES: I'm not aware of a fish—we'd certainly welcome fishways in that section of the river. Yesterday it was announced that we have an additional $112 million to continue with the SDLAM projects that we have, so that brings that total up to $446 million for those works.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Okay. I'll get some clarity on that and put those on notice. I was under the assumption it was funding for consultation for that main weir, so I'll get back to you about that. In relation to the impacts of mining on water supply, water quality and what have you, which staff within the water agency are involved in assessing mining applications? Within the organisational chart, talk me through who does that work—in terms of positions, not individuals, of course.

AMANDA JONES: What the water group looks at is any State significant development mining applications, not all mining applications. They're referred to us by Planning. Basically it depends on what the application is. It could be a combination of the policy team as well as the water planning team. It depends what the application is.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is there anything that would allow the water agency staff—the hydrologists that are considering SSD applications—to consider the cumulative impacts of any mining interception of surface water or groundwater on individual river catchments? Do they have the ability to do that? I understand it is project by project, and that has been a frustration for many people, but how do they do the cumulative?

AMANDA JONES: All of those applications, depending on which catchment it's in, would need to be considered under the LTAAEL and under the SDL, so any impact that would affect those—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But that's take. That's a quantity—a volume.

AMANDA JONES: That's take. Sometimes mining companies are looking to build a dam in a river. If it interferes with—so that's a form of take as well. Some of the tailings dams and the structures that they build are actually a form of take, so they need to be licensed. Considering whether they can be licensed needs to be taken into account within the available water.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So with the additional interception, for example, any policy statements that governments make—I'm just wondering in terms of the advice provided by the agency staff. If governments make policy statements—such as the former Government, which made the *Strategic Statement on Coal Exploration and Mining in NSW*—is there any capacity for consultation that's undertaken with that particular group of people within the unit?

AMANDA JONES: We wouldn't consult with the—we have an assessment team, and the aquifer interference policy does require consideration of cumulative impact.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The *Strategic Statement on Coal Exploration and Mining in NSW*, for example, probably didn't go that far. If you're saying the impact on the aquifer takes into account cumulative impact, I'm pretty sure that didn't happen there—or did it?

AMANDA JONES: That sounds like a broader policy piece. What we assess is particular applications for mining works that might require a licence. That take and that licence must be looked at in terms of cumulative impact. I'm not sure of the policy that you are referring to, but it sounds like it's a higher-level policy. But I don't know that we would've—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It's John Barilaro's policy but still applicable, still current. Incredible. Ms Jones, sticking with water and mining, has the agency raised concerns with the department about the impacts of mining on the catchment and particularly Woronora Reservoir? Has that happened, to your knowledge? This is in relation to the Peabody Metropolitan Colliery. Mr George, will you take that?

ANDREW GEORGE: We made submissions to Planning as part of their assessments and their public submissions. They reflect our mining principles, which are published on our website.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I understand that the chief scientist has made recommendations that the mining companies make public their data on water in the catchment. That's been a longstanding recommendation from the chief scientist. Is that happening?

AMANDA JONES: These are issues really more for Planning to consider, to take into account. The water take for this catchment is really for the urban supply for Sydney. Anything that affects that, we would provide advice on, but Planning would be doing the assessment.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: For example, public water monitoring, any of that, is a planning issue?

AMANDA JONES: Sorry, which?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: For companies such as Peabody to provide data around exactly what's happening with water in the catchment as a result of their activities, where does that sit?

AMANDA JONES: If that was a requirement of a planning approval, then Planning would put that requirement onto the approval. But—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It's not a requirement. I think the question was whether that was happening as a result of those chief scientist recommendations quite some time ago now.

AMANDA JONES: Are you aware, Andrew?

ANDREW GEORGE: I don't have a specific update in front of me today.

AMANDA JONES: We could take that on notice, Ms Faehrmann.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. I've got a couple of questions for Sydney Water. We've been contacted by a constituent who's having issues in relation to the very old sewerage infrastructure in inner Sydney, and what I understand is the system of private properties in inner Sydney functioning with this system of shared sewers, so to speak. Are you aware of that, Mr Cheroux? I'll put a question in on notice about how many properties there are with these shared sewers, but you're aware of what I'm talking about?

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes. There is probably different cases where sometimes we've got actually our sewer going through a number of properties. In that case, we've got an easement, and the customers will have access to a sewer. And sometimes, yes, you've got private sewers that are owned by different property owners and, at some point, they will connect to our network.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What's the process for the upgrade of these sewers over time?

ROCH CHEROUX: They are private assets.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I assume there's an action plan and time line for—

ROCH CHEROUX: No. If they are private assets, they have to be maintained or renewed or replaced by the asset owners.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: When you say they're private assets, that's what shared sewers are, is it? It's between private and Sydney Water.

ROCH CHEROUX: Yes. That's why I was making the difference between the two. Sometimes you've got our pipes going through properties. In that case, we would look after the maintenance, the renewal, replacement et cetera. Sometimes you've got a group of properties, for historical reason, that have decided to put their own pipes within their properties and then to connect outside this group of properties, to connect to our network. And, in that case, this pipe is their pipe. Therefore they have to maintain. They have to replace it when it's—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Just to be clear, is that what the definition of shared sewerage systems are? The combination of the private and the Sydney Water?

ROCH CHEROUX: I don't think there is a definition for shared sewer.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's just the language that's come to me with these questions from this constituent. In terms of dealing with this issue, it doesn't seem like a great situation for very frustrated people—some of these people who live in rentals; sometimes they obviously own the property as well—having to deal with this situation. Is there any potential policy changes or work that Sydney Water has done around recommending a different approach to what sounds like an incredibly frustrating, complicated sewerage system with all of these privately owned sewers? Has any work been done on that in the past? Is there any scope for improvement? I'm coming quite new to this issue, from this constituent who's talked to us about it.

ROCH CHEROUX: We are having discussions with our customers when it happens. There is always the question about it's a private asset so if Sydney Water would then take over and replace this private asset, that would be all our customers paying for it. So there is a principle of equity that we need to be very, very careful of because this is a private asset, basically. We're having this discussion with a number of our customers when they come to us and this constituent can—we would be very happy to talk to them and see if there is a different solution to make it work for them.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: We are talking a lot of private properties, I assume, in inner Sydney? Is it extensive?

ROCH CHEROUX: Not many, no.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan quarterly progress reports for Q3 and Q4 last year don't seem to be on the website—don't seem to be online. Is there a reason for that?

AMANDA JONES: I'm not aware so I'll take that on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It goes up to the end of June last year. I was speaking to you earlier, Mr Barnes, about the metering situation. I understand that for Gwydir and Border Rivers it was by 15 August last year, I think. The action plan was suggesting that that was the date which all telemetry equipment to measure floodplain harvesting was in place for those two valleys?

GRANT BARNES: Those two valleys are 15 August 2023.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So they missed that. You mentioned certain data and you mentioned information before in terms of—I don't think you said the numbers—landholders that have met those requirements. Is that available publicly? Do you put that on your website?

GRANT BARNES: So we have that information. We haven't yet published it. We've conducted audits of every entity in the Border Rivers and the Gwydir who have a floodplain harvesting licence and an obligation to install primary measurement devices.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Does that become public? Is it up to you to publish that?

GRANT BARNES: It will be. We'll incorporate it into our quarterly reporting of compliance rates for New South Wales.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So the quarterly compliance rates—that's what I was talking about before, right? The progress against Q3 and Q4?

GRANT BARNES: I think I understand what you're asking. We report our compliance rates in the Q3-Q4 and those results were published a couple of weeks ago.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: For Q3-Q4?

GRANT BARNES: Yes, for the period October through to December 2023.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I've have got a question about Macquarie—whether it will be fully equipped by 1 March 2024 as required under the action plan, as well as Darling-Baaka River, which I understand is 1 April 2024. How they are going?

GRANT BARNES: With the 1 March deadline having—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Oh, yes; that's this Friday.

GRANT BARNES: So that's this week. A couple of weeks ago we were in touch with those rights holders. In addition to that, we've undertaken a media campaign to get the message out. What we're doing is taking

a very strict line here. If you haven't installed your primary measurement devices by the deadline, we know, and we are making it very clear it would be unlawful for you to engage in floodplain harvesting whilst those measurement obligations are not met. That message has been generally well received by water users.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Just to be clear, what does that mean in terms of the 1 March deadline? You are extending it a little bit to ensure that everybody is equipped, or you don't think that that is going to be met?

GRANT BARNES: Those measurement deadlines are staggered across four of the five valleys. Macquarie is 1 March, Barwon-Darling is 1 April—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, I have got those. The question is will the Macquarie River—it doesn't sound like it will be fully equipped with the floodplain harvesting telemetry requirements by 1 April. What deadline are you giving them? When are you hoping—

GRANT BARNES: On 1 March.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You are saying 1 March?

GRANT BARNES: It is very clear in the licence what the conditions are. We are making it absolutely transparent to the public, but directly to water users, what we expect.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, and you're confident in ensuring that everybody is going to meet that within the Macquarie River valley by 1 March?

GRANT BARNES: If they have not equipped themselves with those primary measurement devices, they cannot legally take floodplain harvesting water. That's the message. Here is your obligation. This is what you're required to do. If you can't, we will know.

AMANDA JONES: Chair, if I am able, I can reply. You asked about the Menindee weir fish passage. That's something that the business case is being led by Fisheries. Sorry, that's why I didn't know about it.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Okay. At least I wasn't completely—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Finish that sentence, Cate.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Maybe not at this time. Do you still have questions?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I have a couple more. I think probably to you, Mr George, just in relation to the works that WaterNSW is doing for the risks at Warragamba Dam. I think in June last year there was a bit of media in relation to the impacts of climate change. I know it was a minimal geotechnical risk, but I understand that there was some work underway. Is there an update you can provide to the Committee on that?

ANDREW GEORGE: Yes, sure. We have indeed been undertaking much more complex computational modelling of the dam under those conditions, including under three-dimensional analyses. That work is very close to being finished, and we're now also modelling what response to those risks will be to confirm that they will address the risks. In parallel, we are writing a strategic business case that we hope to have submitted to the Government and Infrastructure NSW for a gateway review in May this year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously, pending outcome of your work—I am just kind of keen for time frames. But that will go to government and then they will make their considerations around what work may need to be undertaken at the dam. Is that the expectation?

ANDREW GEORGE: The obligation is on the dam owner under the Dams Safety Act. That will be in the first instance a decision for the board on the steps that we take. We are doing that, mindful that it will need to fit into our pricing submission to IPART, which is due in September this year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We might come back to this at a later budget estimates hearing, as there might be a few more updates throughout the course of this year, by the sounds of it.

ANDREW GEORGE: I certainly hope so.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Excellent. Back to you, Ms Jones. I think, again, Ms Faehrmann has asked a couple of questions on this one. The non-urban metering review—my understanding is, in the public consultation last year, there was a commitment to the "What we heard" report and a recommendation report coming out. My understanding is "What we heard"—that report has been very recently released, but the recommendations haven't, from what I can see. Are they coming soon?

AMANDA JONES: That's correct. The "What we heard" report was released on 21 February. We're now considering the advice we will provide to the Minister in the first instance. And then, depending on her decisions, that will form part of a regulatory program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When would you anticipate providing that advice to the Minister?

AMANDA JONES: I think in the coming month.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There was some expectation that would all be published by December last year, but I appreciate that there has been machinery of government changes within your agency. Is that the reason why there has been a bit of a delay?

AMANDA JONES: When we actually got the feedback from the consultation paper, there were some other complexities we wanted to think about as well. So I can't blame the machinery of government change. I just think we just needed to take more time to consider some of the issues.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's it from me. Does anyone else have anything for the last 50 seconds?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That is excellent because I don't have questions either, and I didn't want you to take them.

AMANDA JONES: Chair, if I could, can I answer a couple of questions.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes you can. Ms Jones will take up the remaining time.

AMANDA JONES: You asked about when we had submitted the water resource plans to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. December 2022 was the Gwydir alluvial and Namoi alluvial groundwater plans. August 2023—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Ms Jones, I might just get you submit that on notice.

AMANDA JONES: Okay.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: If it's data like that, it is probably easier.

AMANDA JONES: Absolutely. The other thing I wanted to come back to: You asked about the economic analysis for the value of floodplain harvested water. While we don't have enough data to really do market analysis, because not all licences are in place and there aren't trades that we can look at, but we did undertake an economic evaluation in October 2021, and it is on our website. It is called the *NSW Floodplain harvesting economic analysis*. It looked at the value of floodplain harvested water as a modelled value. The median value before reform—so the value of the water—was $873 million. The reduction from making the reform—that is constraining take—is $126 million, but that report is on the website. This is looking at a present value over 10 years. I also think I might have misspoke, if that is a correct terminology.

With regard to the Namoi unreg floodplain harvesting, the model applies to the regulated river, but it's a methodology that's applied to the unreg. This is for the Namoi. The methodology is actually set out in clause 23D of the reg. It is basically that the unreg floodplain harvesting amount is calculated through a method using a specific crop area of the licensee and then the existing unreg and groundwater entitlements. So we take into account the existing groundwater entitlements as well as the unreg entitlements, and we take away the amount of crop area and the water take required to have a yield from that crop area. It is a reasonably conservative methodology, but that is how we identify the shares and take for the unreg.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. That is very interesting.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: No questions from the Government.

The CHAIR: No more questions. Thank you for appearing, for your time and for the work you do. The secretariat will be in touch about the questions you took on notice and no doubt supplementary questions.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.