

# PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 2 - HEALTH

Friday 14 March 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

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

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The Committee met at 09:15.

### MEMBERS

Dr Amanda Cohn (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Buttigieg

Ms Cate Faehrmann

The Hon. Scott Farlow

Ms Sue Higginson

The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Tania Mihailuk

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell

The Hon. Cameron Murphy

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 Portfolio Committee No. 2 – Health for the additional round of the inquiry into budget estimates 2024-2025. 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. I am Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister 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 thank the Minister and witnesses for being able to very promptly reschedule this hearing, having deferred it last week because of Cyclone Alfred. 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 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, and I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of those procedures. Whilst all witnesses must be sworn prior to giving evidence, I remind the Minister that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. I also remind all other witnesses that you do not need to be sworn as you've already been sworn before this Committee during this inquiry.

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**Ms SUSAN PEARCE, AM**, Secretary, NSW Health, on former oath

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

**Ms AMANDA JONES**, Deputy Secretary, Water Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, on former affirmation

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

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

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

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

**Dr MURRAY WHITE**, Chief Psychiatrist, NSW Ministry of Health, on former oath

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

**Ms REBECCA PINKSTONE**, Chief Executive Officer, Homes NSW, on former affirmation

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

**The CHAIR:** I note that there are witnesses in the overflow seating area today. I would like to remind you that if you come forward to answer a question to please bring your nameplate with you and place it in front of you at the table. This assists Hansard in ensuring the correct witness is identified in the hearing transcript. 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 the departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During the session there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** First of all, I thank everyone for being here, particularly the department staff and staff on the ground that have been helping with ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred. It really is appreciated, thank you. How many full-time staff specialist psychiatrists held permanent positions in NSW Health as of 28 December 2024, and how many are currently employed?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might ask Susan to confirm that the numbers that I have are accurate. I have the workforce headcount. To be clear, there is a difference between headcount and FTE. Many of these people do not work full-time. I have the workforce headcount at 443. As I said, that is not FTE positions; that is headcount. I don't have a breakdown of who is working full-time, part-time and what the structures are. That is what I have the headcount as. Sorry, what was the—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What is the headcount as of today?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The headcount as of today—Susan, if you have that number—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm so sorry, Minister, but the 443—when's that from?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That is my understanding of the headcount that is funded by NSW Health to work across the district. That hasn't changed. We fund a headcount of that. But, as I said, those positions are not all filled at the moment, and they're certainly not filled full-time.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** As of 28 December, how many of those positions were filled?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Susan, do you have that as of 28 December?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** Not as of 28 December. We'd have to take that on notice and come back to you. We can try and do that in the session today.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Do you have any date similar around that in December?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** Not on me at the present time, no.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Do you know how many are employed as of today?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** I'll take it on notice, given that obviously we have had some resignations since that date. We can take that on notice.

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**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Can I ask, Minister, when was the last time you asked what the headcount was?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm constantly receiving information as to how many separations have been finalised and how many have transferred to VMO. In terms of your question about the headcount, there is a difference between a staff specialist and a VMO in terms of the way that we account for that, but actually that is a person who is working in NSW Health and delivering a service. In some ways, what I want to know and what I'm constantly being updated on is, do we have enough people in the system, whether they are staff specialists, whether they are VMOs, or whether they are locums, to deliver the quality of care that we expect to be delivered?

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** But, Minister, I can accept that you may not have at hand the numbers last year, but I would expect that you would know how many full-time specialist positions there are currently either today or yesterday, when you were last updated. Coming to budget estimates, I would expect you would have that information.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I said, we do have information about how many people are working in different roles in different districts, but it is not straightforward as it is in fact changing every single day.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, do you have the breakdown? Specialists, VMOs, locums, do you have that breakdown?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As of today?

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Yes.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Not at my fingertips, but we can see if that particular information is something that you—I do, for example, know that we have people who have transferred to VMO roles, people who are working as locums, separations that have been finalised, people who have deferred their resignation. That broad information is something that we are constantly being updated on, but within the cohort of people who are currently delivering care today across the LHDs, we can try and get that breakdown.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, do you think it's acceptable that you come to budget estimates and you're not fully prepared? You said you receive updates, you have an entire room full of officials and yet you can't answer simple questions of exactly how many people are currently employed.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I said, the reason that is a somewhat difficult question to answer is because we are right in the middle of a well-known situation in which those numbers are changing.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Hence our questions.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We are able to get the information that we need to provide the confidence that we need to have that the care is being delivered as best it can be. But in terms of a breakdown across the districts, across the different hospitals, it's a situation that changes every day.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I didn't actually ask for the breakdown across the districts; I asked specifically for the figure, and you don't know how many people are currently employed full-time in those specialist roles.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** You've changed the question even then to say "full-time".

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** No, that was the original question, Minister.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's actually not straightforward.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I took that on board when you said it was actually about headcount, and I'm happy to change that terminology, but you still can't give me that figure. As a Minister coming to budget estimates, you should be across those details. I might move on. The arbitration hearings next week are formally listed for the arbitration of Psychiatry Staff Specialists Attraction and Retention (State) Interim Award 2025. Clearly the Government's offer of 10.5 per cent wage increase over the next three years and an additional 10 per cent onerous duties allowance was not capable of retaining let alone attracting psychiatrists as specialist staff. Is the Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation's current assertion that the Government has not increased or varied this offer ahead of the arbitration and that in fact there have been no meaningful negotiations ahead of the arbitration correct?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No. That's not correct.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What has occurred?

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We have been meeting with them ahead of the arbitration for a substantial period of time, including more recent meetings since the arbitration was listed. We have made various offers in relation to increases in wages—all of which, I should note, exceed the previous wage cap policy of your Government. But, nonetheless, we've made various offers—base increase in wages, as you mentioned, the onerous duties allowance, various provisions for non-award improvements. We have a whole plan that we are hopeful to work with the psychiatrists on in relation to improvements of things in their workplace outside of award provisions. The trial or the pilot of other productivity savings and work was also put on the table.

I feel as though we have made various offers across the spectrum of wage increases, condition improvements, special allowances and duties, pilots of more opportunities to improve the nature of the work that our staff specialists do. At every single one of those moments where we have put those offers on the table we have been met with, "No, it's a 25 per cent increase right now or nothing." So, yes, that has led to a circumstance where we haven't been able to agree, because, despite everything that I've articulated that we've put forward in good faith to try to resolve this, all we have been met with in return is, "Undo 12 years of wage suppression in 12 months."

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** When was the last time you met and put an offer on the table?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can take that on notice, although I think it was a few weeks ago. I don't have the date; I can check that. It was within the last few weeks.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sorry to interrupt. I want to go back to the figures. You said you didn't have any numbers with you, but we did ask you about this in the House. I think we were talking about the 200 expected resignations and you indicated that about 50 had had their separations finalised. The Premier, in his budget estimates hearing, said there were 52 resignations finalised by 10 February and 72 who'd been moved to VMOs. Is there any further breakdown on those? Do you have any numbers in the last month that you can give us so that there is some data you can provide today?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, sure. As I said, we have a workforce headcount of 443. As you've mentioned, at its peak, we had received 206 indications of an intention to resign. We now have 62 resignations processed and finalised. That is a larger number.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's increased from the last data you gave us.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. We have 38 resignations withdrawn and we have 72 staff who have agreed to transition to VMO roles. As I said, they are people who continue to provide care in the public system—yes, in a different contractual arrangement with NSW Health but, nonetheless, in terms of a headcount of people who are providing care in the public system, VMOs are playing that role. We have 109 resignations deferred. That's the latest. As I said, I am being briefed constantly in terms of that evolving situation. As you can see, Ms Mitchell, the numbers do change. They do.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes. It's just good to get the more updated ones.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Some of those resignations deferred, for example—I'll always be very honest—may well be an intention to resign next week; some of them, I understand, are as long away as November. That's correct, isn't it, Ms Pearce? So that number, for example, is changing. That's why sometimes you will see the resignations processed and finalised increase, because as time goes on some people are choosing to go down that path.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Of the 443—just so I'm clear—you've had 62 have their resignations finalised, 38 have withdrawn, 72 are going to VMOs and 109 are deferring their resignation. All up, that's 281. I respect that, with 38 withdrawn, you could argue that comes back to closer to 240, but it's at least half of the workforce that are involved in this concern at the moment.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, that's a fair characterisation.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And it's slightly higher than the 200 we talked about previously, if you add those two figures together.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Except that the actual comparison, in my mind, Ms Mitchell, is between 206 and 62, because 206 people indicated that they intended to resign—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But in your words, Minister, you've got 109 who could leave next week.

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** —and 62 have done that now. Your basic characterisation at the beginning of your question is that a large portion of the workforce is unhappy with the current remuneration and is indicating, either through resignation, signalling an intention to resign or transitioning to VMO, that they are unhappy with that. I accept that. I've always accepted that these are valid and legitimate issues that need to be resolved. That's why we have met many, many times. That's why we have put all of those offers on the table. Yes, we were unable to reach agreement. That's why we have listed this matter for urgent specialist arbitration next week. We wouldn't have done those things if we didn't take it seriously and think it was serious, and it is serious. It is serious.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Very serious.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, you said 72 VMOs have been engaged. What is the cost?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We don't have that figure because it is, as yet, undetermined. There is a cost—absolutely no doubt that there is a cost—but those 72 VMO contracts are all potentially slightly varied contracts. So, whilst New South Wales has provided—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I might rephrase that, Minister. Is the current salary of a staff specialist in a hospital versus that of the VMO—are you saying that you've varied those contracts so the salary is the same, or are you paying them more?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, what I'm saying is when we engage someone as a VMO that is done at a district-by-district level. The conditions and the wages of those VMOs vary district by district. NSW Health has provided a framework for districts to negotiate those contracts. But I'm correct, aren't I, Ms Pearce, that when we say VMO it's not a single contractor—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** But they do get paid more.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** —a single wage rate or a single framework. It varies.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** But it is fair to say that they get paid more, and what's the average percentage more?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** No, I don't think that is an accurate description, Ms Maclaren-Jones. The rates for VMOs, for example, don't include annual leave and other things that staff specialists attract. The locum rate, again, is a separate issue. We set a rate to prevent any attempt to escalate those rates in the context of this situation. But the point that I would make about this issue substantively is that this is a temporary arrangement; this is not designed for the future. We have made these arrangements on a temporary basis, which is why there is a large number of our staff specialist psychiatrists who've deferred their resignations. A number of those people have taken up the VMO option whilst they await the outcome of the industrial commission process.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, are you actually saying—there are 72 VMOs—you cannot tell us now what that is costing the State Government?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, because—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You can't put even a ballpark figure on it? You have no idea?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We take our oaths to give honest answers here quite seriously. Because this is an evolving, ongoing—albeit hopefully temporary—situation, the cost differential between what we would hypothetically be paying staff specialists and those VMO contracts—which, as I said, vary district by district—is not something that we have a daily—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But haven't you asked? How do you not know what it's costing you? I just find that bizarre.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** And that you haven't asked.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Of course we talk constantly about how we are managing this circumstance—again, district by district—but it varies. It varies.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Give me an example. If it varies—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As an example—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —pick one example: one health district and what you're paying for VMOs.

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As an example, if I were to say, "What is the cost of employing VMOs across NSW Health districts?" and then present that figure as though that cost is associated with this current industrial campaign, that would be inaccurate, Ms Mitchell, because—for example, Far West LHD previously was entirely VMO-based psychiatry. That's correct, isn't it? There were no staff specialists—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But I'm not arguing that with you, Minister. I'm wanting to know—you've got 72 people who used to be staff specialists who are now VMOs. What is the cost? This is not a trick question. You are the Minister for Mental Health and you cannot tell this Committee today in budget estimates what that is costing the State. That is just not good enough.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** You're presenting that as though that is a figure that we would just plug into the system and produce. Those 72 people, as I said, are based across different districts with different contractual arrangements.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Someone's paying them. What's payroll?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** They're not all full time.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, that's not my question.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Some of them are working one day a week. Some of them are working five days a week.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are they getting paid, Minister, at the moment?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** They are.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Then what are you paying them? What's the payroll costing you? Surely you know the answer to that.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Of course we can give you information about that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's what I'm asking for. This is a farce.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** For example, we could provide information about what the standard VMO rates are.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That'd be a start.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Ms Pearce, did you want to provide some—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's taken 10 minutes to get that.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** —information on that?

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Secondly—and I'm happy for you to take it on notice. But, of those 72, how much are you paying and what are the overall costs to the State?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** We can take that on notice for a point in time, but I'll restate the point that I made earlier. VMOs can be employed in different ways. They can be employed for sessional arrangements. They're employed fractionally. It's not necessarily a like-for-like situation. There are complexities. But we're happy to provide on notice what we're paying VMOs in these circumstances. As I also said, we were very clear about the locum rate. We've made this point publicly a number of times—of \$3,050 per day for locums, which are separate to VMOs, in an effort to avoid a situation where we were being, frankly, price gouged around the use of locums.

The other point that I will make is that we've recruited 72 locums during the course of this dispute. We have deployed 27 of those. We have plenty of reserve in respect of locums for the system should they need it. We're in constant contact with the health system in that regard and we've worked very hard over these months to ensure that we're deploying staff where they are needed. We have made it very clear to our staff specialist psychiatrists that they're valued by the health system. I've personally written to them three times asking them not to go through with this. But the current issue for us is that it is in the place that it belongs and that is in the industrial commission and we look forward to participating in that hearing over the coming weeks.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What is the cost of the virtual hubs that have been set up?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Do we have a cost of that?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** We can take that on notice. We already had virtual arrangements in place, so I'd make the point—again, to be very clear about the care of mental health patients in this State, we do not seek to single out mental health patients in the way we arrange our budget. We have virtual services right across the State

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for all manner of things, including children, adults et cetera. Whilst we can seek to understand the proportion associated with the virtual hub, what I would say to you is that those technologies, which became very important to us during the pandemic, have continued to evolve across the State and will continue to evolve.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I can understand that, but you can see our concern. We've asked a number of questions. This is budget estimates and the Minister is unable to provide basic answers in relation to budgetary matters and it's extremely disappointing—shocking, actually.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, you've recently confirmed that part of your contingency plan to cope with the resignation of the staff specialist psychiatrists includes considering declaring private hospitals for the admission of involuntary patients. How can you ensure that care is being provided through the least restrictive means when there is a profit motive for the admission of those patients?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might ask Ms Pearce or Dr Wright to comment as well, but I would say that my understanding, Dr Cohn, is that, whilst that is a part, as you acknowledge, of the contingency planning that we have put in place—again, to reiterate, I wish we didn't need contingency planning. This is a temporary response to the industrial dispute that we are having. My understanding is that at present no private facilities have in fact been gazetted to receive involuntary admissions. In terms of the question that you asked, which is how, in an at present hypothetical scenario, were that to occur—and, because we are in the commission next week, I'm obviously hopeful that we will not need to activate that part of the contingency planning. At present, we have not and I'm hopeful that we do not have to. I might ask Dr Wright to talk about what we have done to ensure, if hypothetically we did need to do that, that our commitment to least restrictive care was core to that arrangement.

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** In the build-up to the process of a declaration in a private facility, there's an awful lot of work that goes on between the regulatory part of NSW Health and any service provider in the private sector. There are two broad elements there. One is about the appropriateness of the facility and the support services in that facility because, you'd appreciate, there is a very high standard of facility design that's required for involuntary care. But there is also a very high level of standard of care and accreditation that has to happen, and that gets run past our legal branch and our licensing branch in consultation—and this is also important—with the local health district within which the private facility sits.

I'll describe a scenario, which might help. It is not a process of any person who might be needing inpatient care being suitable to go into that sort of environment. The scenario that I would be thinking of is an individual who, for instance, might have a very, very serious and potentially life-threatening depression, who is requiring ECT as part of their treatment. They are still at risk, and they are considered as an involuntary patient because they are not sufficiently attending to their needs in terms of food, drink et cetera. They are recovering, and they are considered suitable to be looked after within a private setting. Many of our private facilities in Sydney have excellent and well-regarded mood disorder services.

**The CHAIR:** Dr Wright, I'll interrupt you. I'm happy to come back this afternoon to the level of staffing and facilities, which is important, and I understand there are concerns about that. But while we've got the Minister, I'm specifically interested in this issue of conflict of interest. If you look at the schedule 1 form—and I've brought a copy if other Committee members are interested—there's a specific section which requires a declaration of pecuniary interest in a private mental health facility or in the admission of a person. What actually happens if a doctor fills it out and says, "Yes, I have a pecuniary conflict of interest; I will receive a payment from the Government for admitting this person against their will"? My understanding is there is nothing that actually links this form to the Act to say that that person then won't be admitted.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Again, I might ask Dr Wright to comment. I understand the point you're making, Dr Cohn, but I have to say that I don't think the assertion you are making that all practitioners who work in private practice are motivated by profit is a fair characterisation because that—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Minister, I need to correct you because that's not the assertion I've made. What I'm trying to do is establish safeguards for least restrictive care for people. As you would know, that's a serious concern for people living with mental illness.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I do understand that, and Dr Wright has talked you through that, but those conflict of interest provisions are related to specific pecuniary interests that medical professionals might have. Your suggestion is not that. Your suggestion is that any doctor administering care in a private facility to a public patient has a broad profit motive, and I just don't think that is consistent with—

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I need to correct you again because you're commenting on what you think I have asserted. My understanding is that, under your contingency plan, the Government is remunerating psychiatrists employed by private hospitals per patient per week for the care of public patients. Is that not the case and is that not a profit motive for the admission of involuntary patients?

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Again, I can ask Dr Wright or Ms Pearce to comment. We have longstanding and ongoing relationships between our public health facilities and our private health facilities. That's not new.

**The CHAIR:** For voluntary patients.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's right. As I've already indicated, your questioning, while valid, is on a hypothetical scenario that we have not activated and we hope not to activate. But I do want to assure you that, in the development of these contingency plans, the issues that you have raised around how we might manage that circumstance has been the subject of significant discussion and deliberation amongst our team because of the issues that you've raised. We do take them seriously. Did you want to comment, Dr Wright, specifically on the schedule 1 form that Dr Cohn has raised? She will be able to ask you questions this afternoon, but do you have something on that?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** I think it goes to the issue of governance. We've had these very discussions within the group of directors of mental health who we're meeting every week to discuss these things. The governance side of this is that we would anticipate that, if this comes to fruition, the admission would occur by way of referral from within the public sector. The first thing is that we would decide that this was an appropriate thing to occur, and our expectation is that our service stays in very regular contact with the private facility and has some say over what happens while the person is in the private facility. So it is not a referral which is instigated by the private facility; it is instigated by our services and then it is managed—

**The CHAIR:** Can I just clarify something, because I think this is really important. Are you saying that if a private facility is declared for admission of involuntary patients, they won't be permitted to admit directly into that private hospital and they would have to come through the public hospital first?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** Not under this situation. This situation is about us managing the scenario where we don't have the bed capacity because of a loss of staff. That's what the contingency is there for.

**The CHAIR:** I understand that but, under the declaration, would the private hospital be able to directly admit involuntary patients?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** No.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That is not our expectation or intention. To be very clear, as Dr Wright said, this is a hypothetical situation which we have not encountered and hope not to. But, in the contingency planning, because we took the contingency planning very seriously, this was contemplated as an option in that scenario. As Dr Wright has said, it would be because a public facility, unfortunately, was not able to deliver that care because of a lack of bed capacity, and we would manage a transfer and oversee care in a private facility in an involuntary arrangement. But, as I said, that has not happened. In fact, no gazettal has even been made to allow that to happen, and we are hopeful, with the arbitration to occur next week, that we can avoid that scenario.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I just wanted to quote you, if I may, in the context of private prisons in New South Wales. You have said:

Privatising prisons is bad policy ... Private companies should not be able to make profit from the incarceration of people. They are fundamentally incentivised to get more people into prisons, more profit from the bottom line, when the public policy goal should be that an experience in prison is a fundamental circuit-breaker for someone who was on the wrong track and that every effort is made to ensure when that person is out of prison their life is changed and they do not turn around and commit more crime.

I appreciate that involuntary mental health patients are not criminals; I'm not making that connection. But you can see the analogy here: This privatisation of inpatient mental health care is analogous to private prisons. How do you deal with that hypocrisy in your policy?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I stand by my comments in relation to private prisons and am very proud to have been part of a government that has brought Junee and Parklea back in house. But, in answer to your question, this is not a policy position that the Government has adopted and promoted as a proactive change to the way that mental health care is delivered in New South Wales. That is not what is happening. This is a reactive, temporary contingency to what we hope is a short-term dispute. I obviously would prefer—and happy to be on the record. We would like that care to be delivered—if, indeed, involuntary admission is necessary—in a public facility. That is our preference. The only circumstance in which that is even hypothetically contemplated to not occur is because we literally cannot deliver that care because we do not have the psychiatrists available to manage those patients and those beds. Thankfully, despite the industrial issues, that hasn't occurred, but it is very different to me deciding this is something we want for the public system. That's not what has happened. This is a very narrow contingency for a circumstance that was not of our will, not of our creation and not of our desire.

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**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Good morning, Minister. This Government and the previous Government have committed to developing an Aboriginal Water Strategy. The consultation paper was on public display last year. It identified six principles, including economic benefit. Are you committed to the six principles, particularly in terms of economic benefit to Aboriginal people through the access to water?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, we are.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The water sharing plans, I understand, included an objective for Aboriginal cultural outcomes. The performance indicators to achieve those outcomes relate to—the first is the extent to which native title rights are able to be exercised consistently with any determination of native title or Indigenous land use agreement and, secondly, environmental outcomes. Wouldn't it make sense for the water sharing plans to be amended to reflect strategies and performance indicators to achieve economic benefit for Aboriginal people? Because they're not in there at the moment.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I have no reason to think that that would not be a potentially sensible amendment. I suspect that part of what is happening is we have not yet finalised the Aboriginal Water Strategy. Part of that is because we are very committed to working closely and in partnership with First Nations people, and their feedback and engagement on that strategy is critically important to me. To be perfectly honest, Ms Faehrmann, I could have just grabbed a dock, done a bit of light-touch consultation, put a nice design on the cover, put it out, ticked that box—I didn't want to do that. I wanted to make it a strategy that was deeply owned by Aboriginal people. That has taken more time. But, in answer to your question, we are always open—and, in fact, going through remake of a number of plans now—to amendment in the public interest, which, as you know, can happen outside the remake timetable.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That's good. I'm getting to the water sharing plans, in terms of questions. The water sharing plans, as you know, were amended in October last year through the Water Sharing Plan Amendment (Omnibus) Order 2024. One of those amendments related to conditions on the specific purpose access licences for Aboriginal cultural access. It says:

... any commercial benefit obtained by the taking or use of the water is only ancillary or incidental to the purpose for which the water was taken.

Why were the water sharing plans amended last year to explicitly deny commercial benefit arising from the use of Aboriginal cultural water access licences?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't feel as though that is a fair characterisation of that provision. It does not explicitly exclude that. What it does is suggest that the primary purpose of that take should not be commercial. They are not intended as commercial licences; they are intended as Aboriginal cultural water licences. In fact, the provision does recognise that there may be a commercial or economic benefit. That is allowed for, but that needs to be ancillary. I'm quite comfortable with that, Ms Faehrmann.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What does that mean? What's an example? Who advocated for that, in terms of that amendment last year?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I am not sure of the answer to that question of who advocated for that. Ms Jones, do you have an answer to that? As I said, I understand this issue that you're raising. I am across the desire of Aboriginal communities to have increased ownership of water and to be able to use that ownership to deliver economic benefits to their communities, and I am supportive of that. But that does not mean that the primary purpose of those licences should be commercial. As I said, we—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Why not?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Because the primary purpose is to deliver cultural benefit to those communities. When I talk to First Nations communities, as I'm sure you do too, whilst they are interested in using that ownership to deliver economic benefit—and I'm supportive of that—their primary interest is to reflect their cultural connection to water and land.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** But why would you explicitly put in legislation—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It is not explicit.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** It is explicit that it has to be ancillary or incidental. Can't we leave that to them?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I said, my view of the interpretation of those provisions is that it appropriately reflects the fact that the purpose of those licences is cultural benefit—access to water at special places, at watering holes, or delivering water to cultural sites that are of significance to First Nations people, and

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I fully support that. I accept that part of that may deliver economic benefit, but that isn't the primary purpose; it is indeed ancillary to a cultural outcome.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I need to move on, unfortunately, because of time, but I appreciate that. Minister, who is the New South Wales environmental water manager?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That would be someone within BCS, I imagine—someone within Minister Sharpe's area. Is that correct, Ms Jones?

**AMANDA JONES:** That's correct.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Is there an individual who holds that title under Minister Sharpe?

**AMANDA JONES:** Not the actual title, but the function is managed in Minister Sharpe's portfolio.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Therefore, in terms of the Minister responsible for ensuring that obligations are met under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, that's also—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think that would be a shared responsibility. Yes, Minister Sharpe is responsible for the management of environmental water within New South Wales. I also take meeting our Ramsar wetlands obligations very seriously.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I heard from some water stakeholders that there is a little bit of passing of responsibility between the two offices. I want to get on record—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's fine. I'm happy to place that on record.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** —that it is the environment Minister that is the environmental water manager.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's fine.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, you will know that the water sharing plans for regulated valleys in the New South Wales basin contain three limits on water extracted for irrigation: the Murray-Darling Basin cap, the Basin Plan SDL, and the long-term average extraction limit. How important are those limits to managing how much water is extracted in those valleys, and is it possible to manage water extractions without those limits?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** They are very important, and no, it is not.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** You also know that the water sharing plans for regulated valleys in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan have recently been amended to give effect to the plan. Given the importance of the limits in managing water extractions, why have all volumetric limits been removed from the amended water sharing plans—every one except the Namoi, I understand?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might ask Ms Jones to clarify. We have a quite significant piece of work that the water group is undertaking to move towards finalising those volumetric limits, but it is not straightforward, particularly on the long-term average extraction, the LTAAELs. It is not straightforward. It is a significant piece of work, and rightfully informed by updated science on climate change and all of those things.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Who removed the volumetric limits? Why were they removed? The Natural Resources Commissioner isn't happy about it.

**AMANDA JONES:** I'm not understanding the exact question.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** My understanding, Ms Faehrmann—and we are happy to take this on notice—is that there are not volumetric limits in the plans, and there never were. In terms of LTAAELs, the commitment we have given over time is to introduce them, and certainly the Natural Resources Commission have signalled that that is what they would desire us to do. But no volumetric limits, in the way you have described, were removed from the plans. That's not my understanding.

**AMANDA JONES:** If this is in regard to the inland unregulated plans, it is that up to now, there has been a description of the limit; there hasn't been a volume. That's because these are areas where there is very low metering and very low extraction, actually, of water.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** These are regulated rivers.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We may have to take that on notice, Ms Faehrmann. As I said, I am aware that there is a desire from the Natural Resources Commission for us to move towards more clear volumetric limits in relation to some of those extraction thresholds.

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**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** In relation to the Murrumbidgee regulated river, the Natural Resources Commissioner said that a fundamental role of a water sharing plan is to establish limits on the volume of water that can be extracted, and then said that the issue of plans that do not include numeric long-term average annual extraction limits for the water sources they govern creates a material risk that the water sharing plans are not achieving their intended outcomes—that's Murrumbidgee and others.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Just to clarify, I'm aware of that. The limits were not removed; they are not present. The Natural Resources Commissioner is correct about that, and we are across that. We are moving towards that, but it is a significant piece of work that involves substantial analysis and modelling—in fact, much improved metering than we have. I've been clear that that is something that I am committed to moving towards, but it is not as though there were those things in the plans that were removed.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Thank you, Minister. I'll come back to that.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** On 13 October 2023, you received a joint letter from the Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation, the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists highlighting the psychiatry workforce crisis. You've had 15 months to address this issue, yet you haven't. Why not?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Because, despite the fact that I've had numerous meetings with representatives of those groups, and put what I consider to be a wide spread and breadth of offers on the table—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** When did those meetings first commence? Was it 15 months ago or more recently?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** They commenced some time ago. I can't recall the first time that I met with representatives of that group, although it was some time ago. I will openly admit that I have been meeting with representatives of the college, ASMOF and AMA for some time about this matter. The reason that, despite the length of time and the number of meetings, it has not been able to be resolved is that we've made offer after offer after offer and every single time we have been met with a response of "No, the only thing we will accept is a 25 per cent wage determination right now." I have been clear that is not something the Government can reasonably accede to. It is unfortunate to me that it has not been resolved. I wish it had been. But it is not for want or lack of trying on our part. I genuinely believe that. In negotiations, you put things forward, and the expectation is that the other party—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, we're aware of this. We've heard. Can you take on notice when you first met with them following that piece of correspondence from October 2023 to discuss this issue—not broad meetings, but to discuss this specific issue—and when you began to put offers on the table?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I will take that on notice. I also indicate that in 2023 the Government delivered a 4.5 per cent pay rise to all public servants, which was the largest pay rise—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, we are asking about this particular crisis—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** —that staff specialist psychiatrists had received in over a decade.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** —which you've known about—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's clearly not working.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We were signalling from that point in that year our willingness to do more to support our public servants. But yes, I'll take on notice the exact meeting date.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** With the impending mass resignations, do you think it was appropriate that both you and the Minister for Health took gazetted leave from 11 to 20 January this year?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I've discussed this matter in the Parliament before. I just reiterate my point that yes, I do think that in the circumstances my taking a holiday with my family in early January was appropriate. The reason that I think that is—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** But, Minister, it's about both yourself and the Minister for Health. Did you raise with the Minister for Health that you would be away and that there was this impending crisis in your portfolio?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I absolutely have discussed this matter with the Minister for Health.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** And you thought it was appropriate that both of you would be out of the country or away, allocating someone else to deal with your mess?

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There was, in fact, a very short period of time in which both Minister Park and I were away. Both of us had acting Ministers to perform our duties in that time. Other Ministers have been actively engaged in this conversation, for example, the Minister for Industrial Relations and the Treasurer. But, as I said—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** The Treasurer was also on leave.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No-one was here.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I do think that it's reasonable, with all of the work that we did to put contingency plans in place to manage the circumstances, that I took a period of leave with my family in early January. I have young children. I don't wish them to be strangers to me.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** But those contingencies are not working, Minister. That is what the sector is saying.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to continue on a little bit in that line of questioning. Did the Premier talk to you about taking leave and whether it was appropriate at that time? Did you have a discussion with him about it?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm not going to go into the private conversations that I had with the Premier. Although, I will say, of course I reassured the Premier, as I always do, that when I take a short period of leave from the exercise of my ministerial duties, I have plans in place to ensure that the work that I am working on—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. What were the plans you put in place when you went in January, then, knowing that this was an impending mass resignation? Who was acting for you? What did you tell them? What did you put in place? What work did you do?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Minister Harrison was acting for me during my period of absence, so we briefed her in terms of the development of the contingency plans if indeed the mass resignation did occur.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If you briefed her to say "if they did occur", are you saying that when you went on leave you actually didn't know what the outcome was going to be but you still went on holidays?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's accurate. As you can see, Ms Mitchell, at its peak we thought potentially—and had plans in place to manage—206 psychiatrists submitting a resignation letter on a single day. We had plans in place to manage that. That's not what occurred, as you can see from the description that we've already given. In fact, now here we are in mid-March, and 62—and that number was not 62 to start with—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But when you went away, Minister, you didn't know that. It could have been 200 the day you came back from holidays.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I said, we had plans in place. Your question was, "What did you do to ensure that the people that were acting in my portfolio"—and Minister Park, who was not acting for me but obviously was involved—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When both Ministers aren't there it doesn't send a great message.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We had already developed the full suite of contingency plans. That work was underway by NSW Health. I briefed my colleagues on that. I was being regularly updated on that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** While you were away were you being updated?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I was receiving updates while I was away.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What kind of updates did you get while you were on leave?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I received information about how the development of the contingency plan was proceeding to give me confidence that that work was well underway, which it was. I was also receiving updates about any potential opportunities that may present themselves for a direct engagement with ASMOF and the college to try and avert this situation. That opportunity did present itself in mid-January, but not in early January. I suspect many of the representatives from those organisations were also away, although I don't know. I don't want to comment on that. That opportunity didn't present itself in early January, but it did present itself in mid-January. I was being briefed on that.

That's when, as I have discussed previously, I made the decision to come back from leave because I was being briefed on the potential that there may be some scope for an engagement to avert the situation that we are in. I made myself available for that. Unfortunately, we were unable to avert, partly because we met once again,

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and the Government reiterated its position once again about the full suite of things that we were willing to do to try and make sure that our staff specialists remained engaged with NSW Health. Once again we were met with, "It's a 25 per cent wage determination or nothing."

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What you've publicly said, I think in the media, is that that's unreasonable. Is that correct?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. It is unreasonable.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I just want to go to some of the specifics around some other commentary in relation to managing this issue. I would hope you would appreciate, and the officials with you, that we understand that these are serious issues. We don't want people to think that they can't get good mental health care in the State, and so they're not questions that we ask lightly. You have made some comments, Minister, about doing a system redesign—bringing in nurses to manage health care, psychologists, OTs and social workers. Do you think that messaging that effectively—they are trained professionals, but it is not within their scope of practice to do the same job as a psychiatrist. Surely you can see that it is a bit problematic to tell people that others will be able to step in and fill that gap in the same way. That's not actually accurate, is it, Minister?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, that's not an accurate description of what I said.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you have. You've talked about having to do system redesign not just involving nurses but also general practitioners, peer workers and 2,000 health professionals, including OTs and social workers, to oversee case management and therapy. That's all been in the media. You haven't talked about others taking on additional roles if you do have concerns?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You haven't said that at any point?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Your suggestion to me is that my description there of the opportunities presented by system redesign—and I actually note today in the newspaper the coalition of nine peaks representing nurses out there saying publicly, "We think we should have an increased scope of practice." Not only do we—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You've also got the Nurses and Midwives' Association saying publicly:

It is completely unacceptable and ludicrous that the government expects nurses to step in and fill the gaps in the wake of the psychiatrists' resignations.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** You're conflating—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's your messaging, with respect.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** —a description of system redesign, which does include the potential for, for example, nurses to work to their full scope of practice. Again, reported in the paper today, a third of nurses in Australia rarely work to their full scope of practice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's not what I'm asking about, Minister. When this was happening and you were getting media pressure and questions about how will you manage, you very publicly talked about other health professionals stepping in and taking roles. It is very publicly reported. Are you saying you didn't say that?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's right, I am.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You didn't say that ever?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** You're verballing me to suggest that I used language like "step in and take on the role of psychiatrists". I never said that, and you will not find that on the record. I absolutely did talk about the opportunity for broader system redesign, practitioners working to their full scope of practice, which, as I said, I stand by and in fact endorsed yet again today that that is not occurring. But not only did the nurses come out today and say that they're not working to their full scope of practice, they are talking about having an increased scope of practice. They are talking about that. That's not me.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And that's fine, but if that's in the future, great, no-one is disputing that there are amazing nurses who can be doing more if they want to and that's obviously a matter for them in what they're working through. But my concern is a lot of the public messaging that was being reported at the time was, "Don't worry, there are others that will manage it." You talk about system redesign. You talk about peer workers.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, system redesign.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you're doing that because you have a mass resignation of psychiatrists, and the concern is then—the sentiment is—there will be substandard care for people in this State.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I said, I feel as though you are either deliberately or ignorantly mischaracterising what I have said. I never talked about other professions performing the role of psychiatrists. I recognise that psychiatrists play an incredibly valuable role as highly trained specialists in the system. That has been reiterated constantly by myself, by Ms Pearce, by Dr Wright. We have constantly said that we value and acknowledge the role of psychiatrists in the system. That is why we put the contingencies in place to manage their absence. That is why we have made an effort to transfer many to VMO roles so that they remain active participants in the public health system.

But I think that the mental health sector is capable of understanding that, yes, that issue of the resolution of the industrial dispute that we're having with psychiatrists can competently sit alongside a broader conversation about how care is delivered broadly in mental health and whether or not there is increased scope for other forms of care through, yes, peer workers, or psychologists, or social workers. They can and should be part of that. My view, having talked to sector stakeholders, is that they welcome that conversation and they are capable of having that alongside a conversation about resolving the industrial matters with the psychiatrists.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I might come back to that a bit later. I want to move to a different issue now, Minister, in relation to your North Coast responsibilities. Obviously, we were delayed a week because you needed to be doing your role as Minister, particularly in relation to some of the impacts of ex-tropical cyclone Alfred. I'm wondering if you can tell us since the end of last week what you have been doing in your role as Minister for North Coast in relation to that issue.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, sure. I also want to thank the Committee for the rescheduling. Since last Friday, I have been doing a couple of things. I should say I went up to the North Coast on Sunday.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Where did you go, specifically?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Where did I travel?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** To Lismore, to Mullumbimby, to Murwillumbah, to Tweed. I think they were the four places that I went when I was there. I've also been in regular contact with the mayors of those places, but also Ballina and Byron, which I didn't visit during my trip, although I know Minister Scully has been there.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What about Clarence, Minister? You know that they have arguably been impacted the most. You didn't go there?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I didn't get down to Clarence.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Have you spoken to the local member for Clarence at all?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I did. I have been in touch with Richie.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Really?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I sent him a message to check in with him early on in the event.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can you take on notice when that was, if you don't mind?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Sure.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What did you do when you were there on the ground? Were you there for the day? How long were you there for?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I was there for a few days. I visited the evacuation centre at SCU Lismore; I visited the emergency operations centre, which is also at SCU Lismore; I visited the Mullumbimby Safe Haven; I visited the Mullumbimby neighbourhood centre, which was very involved in supporting the Mullumbimby evacuation centre; I visited the Murwillumbah evacuation centre; I met with Tweed council; and I visited the SES headquarters in Lismore and in Tweed. I think that's probably—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I accept that that's quite a few visits. Obviously there are operational responsibilities that fall with other Ministers, but it's a role that you're obviously taking quite seriously, as North Coast Minister, to be an advocate for that community.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I try to be. I did a radio interview when I was on the North Coast with some Grafton radio. They also pointed out that they were feeling under the pump with this weather event. I am aware and I am engaged in that conversation around the Clarence and Richmond valleys.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's good, because that's what I wanted to take you to. Obviously, there have been announcements for hardship payments for a number of communities and LGAs, but there are many impacted communities, particularly in the Clarence and Richmond valleys, in places like Coraki, Broadwater, Woodburn and areas around Grafton and Maclean—there are many others; that's not an exhaustive list—who have been heavily impacted but who have not had that Disaster Recovery Payment extended to them. Why is that, Minister?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I have to say, my understanding of the personal hardship grants that the New South Wales Government was funding alongside the Commonwealth is that it did extend to all of the LGAs—in fact, down to Armidale. But I will take on notice if my understanding is incorrect.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It didn't include the Clarence. Richie Williamson, as the local member, has been quite vocal in his support for his communities. You may not be aware but the Federal emergency Minister, Jenny McAllister, reached out to Richie and said, "We're happy to look at support for your impacted communities, but the State Government has not provided us the data yet." Why is that the case?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I have to say, I'll follow that up with Minister Dib. I'm not familiar with the fact that that data—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You did not know that was an issue—that areas had missed out on payments?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I said, my understanding is that LGAs that were covered by those personal hardship grants did extend all the way down to Armidale. But as I say, I'll take—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The problem is, Minister, you've missed communities. There are select towns within the Clarence LGA, but there are many others that didn't. Like I said, that list that I read out was not exhaustive. There are other communities who have been impacted but are not getting the support, and that is a problem.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I accept it's a problem. I'm not trying to argue that. My understanding is that the provision of that support is by LGA. My understanding is that the LGAs to which you were referring are included and, in fact, all of the LGAs in the North Coast, Northern Rivers and down to Armidale are included. I'm not familiar with this issue that you have raised about different towns.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Richie Williamson is the local member. I'm sure you will take him at his word.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I have to say, I'm not familiar. I have not been informed that part of the barrier, potentially, to the provision of that support is that data from the State is required. It may be, Ms Mitchell, that that data is the SES impact assessment work that they are currently undertaking. I don't know. It may be that that is what needs to occur. All I can say, if indeed that is the case, is that the SES is working very diligently to do that work right now, and that will be available. But I don't know. I will take on notice what that data gap might be.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Just so I can be clear—and obviously there are members of the community who would like that certainty—you are now aware that this is an issue, that some communities have missed out, and you're happy to take that away as Minister for the North Coast to advocate to see them get the support that they need?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** There is also some concern from primary producers in that area that they haven't been made eligible for any payments. Obviously, there is quite a bit of impact to them. What will you be doing to ensure that our primary producers get support?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I am familiar with that—full credit to Geoff Provest, the member for Tweed, who did put that issue on my agenda when I met with him in the Tweed. The commitment that we've given is that we will work through that. I know that the farmers' federation has also raised that. It is just a circumstance, Ms Mitchell, of needing to work through the various stages of support. The sole traders, the small business people—there have been grants made available there. Personal hardship grants have been made available. But I am aware that primary producers have expressed concern about impacts on their business. We have taken on working with the farmers' federation to assess that and to see what support might be able to be made available.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, in response to my questions earlier, you clarified that you don't want to be privatising the mental health care for involuntary patients, but that that is still on the table if required. You have previously ruled out actually paying the psychiatrists what they're asking for. Can you clarify to us that it's your

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preference to privatise involuntary mental health care over paying staff specialist psychiatrists parity with other States?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, it is my preference to resolve the pay dispute that we are having with psychiatrists in a way that sees them feel valued and as though they are willing to either continue to engage or re-engage with NSW Health. That is my preference. I don't think it's reasonable for the way that that is to be resolved is for staff specialist psychiatrists—or, in fact, any group within the public service—to come to Government and say, "This is our demand. This is our only demand. We will not negotiate on this demand," particularly when the demand is to make up 12 years of wage suppression in 12 months, "or we will walk away from the system." If that is how negotiations are to be conducted—not just with staff specialist psychiatrists but across the public service—we're in dire straits, Dr Cohn. That can't be the way that these disputes are resolved.

**The CHAIR:** Can I clarify, you've asserted just then that the ASMOF and the college of psychiatrists had a singular demand and weren't willing to negotiate. They've been very clear multiple times that they have been negotiating with you for many, many months now. It's your assertion that they're not negotiating?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's my assertion that, in those many meetings that we've had, I feel as though we've put on the table a number of options, pathways and negotiating points to try to resolve the dispute. Dr Cohn, it is my assertion that, in those meetings, the royal college of psychiatrists and ASMOF have said, "The only thing that we will accept to resolve this dispute is a 25 per cent wage determination." In a way, I can respect and understand that. That's their position. That doesn't mean that I have to agree to it, because that can't be the way that these issues are managed more broadly. They're not obligated to put other options on the table. They're not obligated to step down from that or find other pathways forward. But, when they don't do that—and it is my assertion that they haven't done that—we're in a position of being left saying, "We can't agree to this thing that you've demanded. We've put all these other options forward. We're at a stalemate. We're not in agreement. We need to break this deadlock. We're going to use the independent umpire for that purpose." That's what it's there for.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, there has been lots of discourse already about the impact of resignations on patients and their families. But I'm also particularly interested in the impact of both the resignations and the transfer of staff specialists psychiatrists into VMO roles or locum roles on more junior doctors, particularly psychiatric registrars—doctors who are training to become specialist psychiatrists. What work have you done to ensure that their training can actually continue and that they're safely supervised?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think that is a fair question. We have a very clear line of sight on that issue. The work that we've done is we have met with not just the college and ASMOF, who've raised that issue, but also representative groups of trainee psychiatrists themselves who have raised those issues with NSW Health and my office in relation to their concerns. We've listened to them. As part of our contingency plans, we have put in place efforts to try and ensure that that supervision and oversight of those trainee psychiatrists can continue. In some areas that is more straightforward than others. To be honest, it's a sort of hospital-by-hospital situation, where in some hospitals that has been relatively straightforward to manage and in others it has been more difficult. But we have been very clear that we do recognise that that is part of the challenge that has been presented and put in place measures to try and ensure that that supervision and that support can continue.

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate that you're aware of the issue. You've said that efforts were put in place to ensure supervision can continue. What were those efforts? What have you actually done?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Dr Wright, do you want to talk about some of the things that have been done to try and ensure that that supervision can continue?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** Certainly. The point I made at the beginning is that the provision of supervision for junior medical officers, including registrars, is precisely the same as the supervision of any staff. The contingencies that we've been talking about—and I know you're aware of the range of contingencies—they're all directed at ensuring maintenance of safe care and part of that is the provision of supervision. I'm sure you'll appreciate that, if the junior staff don't have access to a senior supervisor, that can potentially jeopardise the safe care.

The supervision and safe care are not mutually exclusive and the contingencies have been entirely directed towards trying to make sure that, even in the event of a depletion of psychiatry numbers, we have access to the care and that includes the access to the supervision. This is where we come back to the conversation about rearranging the responsibilities of the psychiatrists so that supervision and review of clinical care are right up the top of their responsibilities and looking for ways to reduce some of the other responsibilities that have accumulated to psychiatrists that can actually be done within scope by other practitioners. The safe care and supervision, in my

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opinion, are right up the top and they're of equal importance. It is a dynamic situation and there are challenges in some of our services.

The other thing that we've done is that, by creation of a mental health emergency operations centre within the ministry, we have a daily review of the performance in all of our districts, the performance in our emergency departments, the numbers of patients, how long it's taking for them to be seen. We are also monitoring any reports of incidents and we are very responsive to any concerns that get escalated within the services by anybody, including the registrars or other staff, about whether the contingencies are sufficiently meeting their needs. We have to respond to those and we have to adapt on the run. That's what we have been doing.

**The CHAIR:** In areas where staff specialist psychiatrists who were primarily responsible for supervision of a registrar have resigned and they've either left or been re-engaged as a VMO or a locum—so they're now on, for example, a part-time arrangement or an ad hoc arrangement—is it your view that it's sufficient for registrars to be supervised by a different person each shift or each week, and how are you actually ensuring that they have a long-term relationship with a senior staff member?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** For starts, I think that we've been very clear from the outset that, if someone has been working as, for instance, a 0.6 FTE staff specialist, we are very comfortable with that person coming back as a 0.6 VMO. The idea that that person is not available to provide the supervision, that's not true. For those psychiatrists—and I'm so grateful to those psychiatrists who feel strongly about this issue and have returned as a VMO to help support our system—there should be no disruption in the continuity of supervision. When that does occur and we do have to cobble together cover and supervision from a range of psychiatrists, if that causes concerns about the quality of the supervision, then of course we respond to that. But when we lose fractional—

**The CHAIR:** Specifically, Dr Wright, what does that responding to those concerns look like? As I'm sure you can appreciate, those concerns have been raised with me. That's why I am asking the question.

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** I'll give you the example. There were concerns raised in Sydney LHD a couple of weeks ago and the service general manager sat down with representatives of the trainees, went through what the concerns were and dealt with them one by one. That's the response. It's at a local level.

**The CHAIR:** And dealt with them in what way? What was the resolution to the issue in Sydney?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** My understanding is that they dealt with them to the satisfaction of everybody.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We can potentially take on notice some of the specifics but, for example, as you know, Dr Cohn, when you look at the supervision requirements, they're actually incredibly detailed: two practitioners on at this time and this many hours. They are incredibly detailed requirements, as they should be. What Dr Wright is saying is that there was a huddle where they sit down and talk through every single element and say, "How can we do this better and differently or improve that or meet requirements on that?" That is, in fact, what has been happening. If there are particular circumstances where, at a district level or at a hospital level, you have received information that that hasn't occurred or if you are worried about gaps there, we are happy to take that on notice. I don't think we necessarily have every single line of issues that may have arisen and how they've been resolved at our fingertips, but we're happy to get that information for you.

**The CHAIR:** I'll come back to it this afternoon, but I'm sure you would be concerned to hear that registrars are also now considering leaving, and are leaving, New South Wales.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, of course I'm concerned. I'm concerned about the psychiatrist situation. As I said, I take it very seriously.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, I want to go back to our previous line of questioning around the long-term average annual extraction limit plus other volumetric limits in the water sharing plans. You said that they weren't in there originally. I think Ms Jones confirmed that.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think that there was a description of numeric limits.

**AMANDA JONES:** That was in the unregulated plans, Minister, yes. The LTAAELs are not a volumetric limit. They're not a set number. The LTAAEL is a moving measure of the impact of water extraction over time. It's model-to-model comparison, and obviously with every weather event in each year the volumes of water available change. What we're doing is measuring over time a model-to-model comparison, a point-in-time model to current conditions, and we're making sure that water is taken within a range. The LTAAEL itself is not a volume. They were removed from regulated river water sharing plans about five years ago in response to stakeholder feedback that it was confusing. Parliamentary Counsel's advice was that it made the water sharing plans complex and we should change that drafting. NRC—you are correct—are looking to move to sustainable diversion limits, which is what the Minister referenced as the work that we're progressing.

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**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The calculation of the long-term average extract limit includes the water storages and water use development that existed in 1999-2000, plus the level of development for plantation forestry that existed on 1 July 2009. And the maximum crop area and the crop-planting behaviour for the Murray-Darling Basin Cap is 1 July 1994. Is that correct?

**AMANDA JONES:** The baseline model for comparison is 1999.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The question was whether the long-term annual average extract limit that I just read out, Ms Jones, is correct. It is, isn't it?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes, for some catchments, that would be correct.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, given that, is there any monitoring of water storages or the level of development or the cropping area, for example, on an annual basis?

**AMANDA JONES:** Absolutely. That's the other model that it compares to. It's the current conditions model, which includes all of the most relevant data from each water year. It's a long-term measure. We have a baseline model and then we compare that model to conditions—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Excuse me, Ms Jones. The question I'm asking is—there's the long-term annual average extract limit, right? It's a limit. It doesn't shift and wax and wane; it's a limit.

**AMANDA JONES:** It does. It changes year to year, and that's—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It does, Ms Faehrmann, because it is a long-term annual average. A long-term annual average does change, based on climatic conditions.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** In Gwydir, Namoi, Macquarie and places like that, where the maximum crop area in the baseline diversion limits, for example, increased by 50 per cent compared to the maximum crop area under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. How are things like that possible? It just seems as though the limits are increasing and increasing, doesn't it?

**AMANDA JONES:** The maximum crop area is a reference to how floodplain harvesting licences are calculated. That is a really specific subset of water extraction in particular catchments. The important thing about the long-term extraction limit is that it is that average over time. We do take the baseline of a line-in-the-sand, historic, 1999-2000 set of conditions, and every year we add to that information with the current conditions model. It's the comparison between those two models that gives us the long-term average, and we need to make sure that the overs and unders of that modelled outcome are not exceeded.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** And, to be fair, Ms Faehrmann, I accept that that answer, which is a description of the way that we currently manage some of our decisions around extraction, does have quite a lot of scope to go up and down. The dissatisfaction you may have with that answer is why moving towards sustainable diversion limits is so important, because that limit and that decision around what is sustainable as a diversion and a limit on that is a very important principle. Yes, it is a source of frustration to me, as I'm sure it is to you, that we do not have that for all of those plans yet, but that's the commitment that I have given: That work is being done and is a priority, and we are deprioritising other work to ensure that can happen.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** In terms of the Natural Resources Commission's *Final report: Review of the Water Sharing Plan for the Murrumbidgee Regulated River Water Source 2016*, the plan amendment recommendations from the NRC in relation to the long-term annual average extraction limit state that clause 16 of the previous plan, which is the LTAAEL—notes that it doesn't have it in this plan and that stakeholders have called for inclusion to increase transparency, which seems to be contrary to what you just said, Ms Jones, that stakeholders wanted it out.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think that's different views from different stakeholders.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Exactly. Which stakeholders were you just representing, Ms Jones, when you said that? Big irrigators, potentially?

**AMANDA JONES:** I can't specify which—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That's what you said.

**AMANDA JONES:** —but it was five years ago, under the previous Government.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Also, just to be clear, before Ms Jones was in charge of the Water Group.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Sure, but I think it is important.

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't think it is fair to pin us for decisions made five years ago. My understanding is that, yes, what Ms Jones and you have described did occur—that those figures were still in the plan, potentially, as a note, is my understanding. They were not removed entirely but, yes, the changes that you have described did occur. But I'm also happy to indicate that our view is that, for the purposes of transparency, as you note, they will go back in. There is no fundamental disagreement from me, as the Minister, and Ms Jones, as a witness, to the proposition that you were putting forward, but I do want to indicate, once again, that the primary piece of work is SDLs clear across the board.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Another question to illustrate what's happening: There was a research piece that was released in April by ANU scientists in the *Journal of Hydrology: Regional Studies*—peer-reviewed—“Effects of long-term meteorological trends on streamflow in the Northern Murray-Darling Basin (MDB), Australia 1981-2020”, by Long Chu and others. It said that about half of the decreased flows in the northern Murray-Darling Basin this decade is due to increased extractions. I'm sure you are aware, Minister, it's the latest body of work that shows that. What are you doing to address the significant increase in extractions in the northern basin?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We are doing the Connectivity Expert Panel, which has specifically looked at exactly the issue that you are referring to: why our rivers and streams are struggling with connectivity and the extent to which over-extraction is a contributing factor to that. That is one thing that we are doing. We remain committed to implementing that work. We are finalising modelling on that, alongside the NRC and representatives of that expert panel. We have already made decisions. We have already made decisions, for example, in the Namoi, in relation to extraction, on supplementary licences in particular that were over what were sustainable extraction limits, to bring them back down. So we are already making decisions in relation to our new water determinations that reflect a more cautious approach. We are doing that systematic work to try to ensure—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Given all that, I am frequently made aware by stakeholders of applications for new work approvals for infrastructure to access floodplain harvesting for water. One quite recently, in the Macquarie Valley, was an application from Macquarie Agricultural Funds Management for extensive water supply works—channels, pipes and on-farm storages of more than six gigalitres. There's quite a few that keep on coming. How does this get approved? How is it offset? We can't just keep extracting more and more water. There has to be a limit. Are these approvals offset somewhere else when they are approved—that six gigalitres, for example?

**AMANDA JONES:** There are two separate approvals here. One is that the flood works in a flood plain need to be approved under a floodplain management plan. There are criteria around where works can be approved and where they can't. That's a separate decision too. The limits set for floodplain harvesting don't change. The licence limits can't be increased. So even if a work is put in place and it is approved under the floodplain management plan, that doesn't mean the extraction for flood plain harvested water increases—it doesn't.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** You may as well not approve it then.

**AMANDA JONES:** The works are not always for extraction. Sometimes they're to control volumes and prevent destruction of downstream areas.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I understand the point you're making, Ms Faehrmann: “You may as well not approve it.” My view is people are entitled to put in applications to do works on their own land. That doesn't mean they're entitled to use them, and they may not have a licence to actually use water in that work. But it's their own land. If they wish to have work done on it, that's a completely separate question to whether or not water is actually being extracted via that work.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, as acknowledged in the Government's response to the community mental health inquiry that this Committee undertook last year, you acknowledged both the effectiveness and the cost effectiveness of HASI and HASI Plus programs, supported accommodation for people living with mental illness. Will those programs be expanded in the next budget?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't intend to answer questions about the next budget, Dr Cohn. I'm here to answer questions about the budget that was passed last year. It isn't common practice in budget estimates to give forewarning about what may be coming in the next budget; I think I'd get in trouble with the Treasurer.

**The CHAIR:** Some of your colleagues sometimes do.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Nice try but I'm not going to be signalling upcoming budgetary decisions, although I agree with you that those are very important programs.

**The CHAIR:** In that same government response you committed to considering five-year funding cycles for community-managed organisations in mental health. Where is that work up to?

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Absolutely. That's a commitment that we've given across the board. We have talked about how we might move to that. Health, unfortunately, has really been operating on a lot of 12-month budgetary cycles, in some areas. We're trying to move towards longer term contracts. Susan, do you have anything to add, just in terms of, specifically, the renegotiation of some of those contracts?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** Not at the moment.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We'll have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, in terms of negotiations with the psychiatrists, you said earlier that nothing apart from the 25 per cent has been put forward from them. That's correct?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Was there an offer in late January to accelerate junior staff specialists to senior staff specialist roles to help with recruitment? Did that come from the psychiatrists?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. Those kinds of offers were all ways to achieve a 25 per cent wage determination via different methods.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** They also, I'm told, put forward offers to have the 25 per cent over two years, potentially backdated. That was put on the table as part of the negotiations?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Right, so there was back and forth. You said before there was no back and forth; it was just a flat amount. But from the information I have, they have come to you with options.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The split over two years was put on the table at a more recent meeting—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Were you misleading the Committee when you said there weren't actually negotiations back and forth?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It sounds like they did come to you with some options for Government.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Those options are versions of a 25 per cent wage increase. As I said, that's okay. Yes, you backdate one to 2023 and deliver another now—that's still a 25 per cent wage increase right now; it is just calculated in a different way. But the outcome of all of those options is exactly the same, and I'm in the outcomes game. As I said, I respect the right. I'm a trade unionist. I'm a member of a union myself. I have worked for a union. I respect the right of unions to make a decision about what they think is in the interests of their members and put that on the table and strongly advocate for it. No knocks on them for doing that. But it's not going to be possible for Government to accede to those demands in every circumstance. That's not how it works. In fact, if that were to be the case, that would be quite an untenable position for Government to be put in.

As I said, we feel as though there have been numerous efforts made by Government to outline potential paths forward. The position of the psychiatrists has consistently been—and, as I said, I respect their right to advocate their position—that they require a substantial wage increase right now. Whether that is done by backdating 12.5 per cent and delivering another 12.5 per cent now or whether that is done by regrading within the current award, the outcome of all of that is the same, which is a substantial pay increase right now to psychiatrists—one that it is not tenable for us to agree to, and that's why we have gone to the commission.

**The CHAIR:** Are there any questions from the Government?

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Government members don't have any questions.

**The CHAIR:** That being the case, we will break for morning tea now and return at 11.15 a.m.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back, everyone. We will resume with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Just before we do, I just wanted to let Ms Mitchell know that I messaged Richie on Wednesday last week, "Hey mate, rough few days ahead. I know you're in the briefings. If you get in a runaround on something important for your community and want to cut through, always feel free to give me a buzz." He says, "Thanks mate. We are prepared for the time being. Appreciate the text. Talk soon."

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. It's just good to have that clarified.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I did just want to signal that there was a connection with myself and Richie.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, thank you.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Also, I reiterate that I understand that there are concerns around the Clarence and Richmond Valley and them getting the attention that they need.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. I appreciate that clarification. I want to take you now to the Cobar pipeline and the decision to effectively not proceed with that project. Considering the construction of the first 30 kilometres of the Nyngan to Cobar pipeline cost \$9 million back in 2017, how do you account for the remaining 90 kilometres now costing more than \$300 million?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** On that project, obviously we are proceeding with stage one, which is fully funded by the New South Wales Government and the Commonwealth Government—that being the pumping stations. It is a very important project. All I can say on stage two is that the project isn't cancelled; it's paused. The reason that it's paused is because the final business case was done—obviously, I don't write those documents; they are done by expert people who put together that information so the Government can make sensible investment decisions—and that document has indicated that the cost of that project has escalated considerably to over \$300 million. At present, we're not in a position to make that kind of investment decision for a project of that scale.

I do want to indicate that my understanding is that there are two pipelines that service the Bogan shire and Cobar. One of them is older, but the other one, which was constructed in the 1980s, has a functional life that extends some decades into the future. Of course, it was important to me, when pausing that project, to have that confidence that the pipeline was functional and will continue to be functional. That is a confidence that I have. In terms of the cost escalations, all I can say is that's information that was provided to me by the final business case.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Just on the final business case, will you publicly release that?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** At the moment, that has not been finally considered by the ERC and, therefore, is a Cabinet-in-confidence document. But it is always my view to try to ensure that as much information is publicly available as possible. I have committed to doing what I can to explore how much of that business case we can release without cutting across Cabinet-in-confidence provisions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, you said that business case informed the decision to—and I will use your word—pause that project. You're also now saying that you can't release it because it's still with the ERC. How has a decision been made if you haven't been through an ERC process?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I've made a decision in terms of the—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Then why can't you just release the business case that informed your decision?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I have indicated, I am working to try to find how much of that business case we can release. Routinely, government does not release final business cases. I recall this being a source of much contention and many SO 52s under the previous Government. Business cases were not released. They were always considered Cabinet-in-confidence documents. I've always tried—and it's always been my position to try—to ensure that as much information that can be released is released. We're not just—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will you give that commitment today in relation to this particular project?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** To the extent that I am able to make decisions about how much information is released, I absolutely give that commitment. I reiterate that those decisions, in relation to what information is considered Cabinet in confidence and therefore capable of being released, are not decisions that I make on my own. They are decisions that are informed by the Cabinet Office and INSW, which has ownership of some of those business cases.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But for the community's benefit and to have some sort of understanding—because, as you would appreciate, it's quite an escalation in costs for the first 30 kilometres versus the remaining 90 kilometres. To go from \$9 million to \$300 million is a significant increase, and I think the community would rightly expect to know exactly what was involved in that cost escalation. I appreciate what you've said about a business case, but if you could perhaps take on notice what you can supply to the Committee? That would be great.

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I will do that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. You seemed to indicate that this is a project that is not now from what you've said in terms of funding constraints. What is the time frame for it being back on the table as a reasonable project from the Government?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We don't have a time frame present; it is paused. I'm not being coy. I genuinely don't have a time frame. We don't have a time frame in mind.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How can you say it's only paused if you don't have a time frame for delivery? Isn't it off the table?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No. There is value in the project. We've done a business case for the project. Under current circumstances, both the existing life of the pipeline and the economic circumstances of the State do not warrant an investment decision of that scale at this time. That does not mean that that will not be warranted in the future. I can't give you a time frame as to when that investment decision will be made. It is a big investment decision. It is one that will require ERC to approve when it is viewed necessary. I can't be in a position of being definitive about when that will occur.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Have you had any concerns raised with you? I know that the Mayor of Cobar shire has spoken to the media about some of the implications with the Endeavour Mine, which is scheduled to come back online in May, and the decision around the pipeline and what that might mean. Are you aware of those concerns, and is there anything that you're doing in relation to that?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I am aware of those concerns. My advice is that the current stage one of the project and the existing capacity that is there is sufficient to meet community demand, including the demand of the mining sector. I would just use this opportunity to say this: My understanding is that the mining community, which is a really important part of the community out there in Cobar, is a significant beneficiary of these projects and a significant beneficiary of these investments. We want to support the community, and we want them to have access to the infrastructure that they need.

But in a circumstance where the mining industry is a significant beneficiary, we of course approached them to discuss the potential of co-contributions or other support in an environment where I am being very upfront that the size of the investment decision is a challenge for Government, and that was not forthcoming. That did make it more difficult for us to proceed. I am aware of those concerns. As I said, my advice is that our current capacity is sufficient to meet that demand.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You just talked about the size of investments. On the same day, Friday 21 February, that the Cobar pipeline project was put on hold, it was reported in the *Macarthur Chronicle* that WaterNSW was investing \$301 million on Warragamba Dam upgrades for environmental flows. Is there a business case for that project?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm going to ask Andrew from WaterNSW to talk about that project.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Yes, there is. There is a strategic business case that has been put to Infrastructure NSW under the investor framework.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are there any publicly available documents detailing the proposal? We haven't been able to find any, but if there are—

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Yes. There was detailed information provided as part of our pricing submission to IPART recently last year. That information is available on IPART's website.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is there anything on the WaterNSW or Planning websites about it though?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** No, not at this stage.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you maybe take it on notice and provide any of those documents to us that you're able to in terms of what's been in the public domain about that particular business case?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Yes, absolutely. I'm happy to provide that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. Minister, I'll just come back to you. Last year on 3 December, you were talking about the new PFAS filtration plant in the Blue Mountains. You are quoted in the ABC as saying:

There's no price you can put on making sure we have the most rigorous treatment in place.

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Given that you are obviously making commitments in the Blue Mountains, will you also commit to funding a treatment plant at Warialda, which the Gwydir Shire Council says will cost more than \$1 million?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, not at this stage because I've met with the Gwydir Shire Council and, in fact, the request it made to me was not for a new treatment plant; it was for the opportunity to drop a new bore. We did commit to the council to not only fast-track the application for that work but also to provide financial support to do that. The reason that I'm not committing to that is because when I met with them, they didn't raise that with me. They talked to me about dropping a new bore, and we're happy to work with them.

**AMANDA JONES:** That's correct.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I might come back this afternoon with more specific questions to Ms Jones in relation to that. I just want to turn back to your North Coast portfolio quickly. Are you able to tell me exactly which LGAs you cover as the Minister for the North Coast? Where is your remit?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think there are 11 LGAs, and it is going to test me to list them all off the top of my head.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's all right. Do you want to just provide it on notice?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, but it does go, I can tell you, from Port Macquarie to the border. There are 11 LGAs within that area.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You would obviously be aware, I would assume, that regional crime is a massive issue, including in the North Coast. How many meetings have you had in relation to crime in LGAs specifically in your portfolio area since you became Minister?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can't put a number on that. I'm happy to try and take it on notice. I accept that when I meet with, particularly, local government representatives from those LGAs, which I do individually and through various peak forums such as Country Mayors, or Local Government NSW or Regional Cities, that they do raise the issue of regional crime.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What about Kempsey? Has anyone spoken to you or met with you about the crime issues in Kempsey? Have you sought a briefing or looked at any of the data in relation to the escalation of issues there?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I have met on a number of occasions with Kempsey Shire Council, and it has used that opportunity to raise those issues with me. It has also raised a number of water issues with me.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you concerned about the escalation of crime, particularly in North Coast communities that you represent as Minister?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Of course I am.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What are you doing proactively to support those communities as they grapple with this crisis?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** My role as Minister for the North Coast, as I think we have discussed before, is primarily as an advocate within government, and I do take the opportunity to ensure that the lead Ministers in relation to crime, being the police Minister, the Attorney General, the Minister for Youth Justice and others, are aware of the extent to which these issues are present in those communities. I am confident that they are and supportive of them in the decisions that they have taken to try to respond to that. Whether it's in relation to community investment or whether it's in relation to bail reform, I think it's clear from the decisions that the Government has made, both legislatively and at a community level, that we have heard those concerns and we do take them seriously.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, the Premier has made some comments in recent days in relation to the issues of squatters in Lismore in particular and said that he—and I'm paraphrasing a little—effectively wasn't aware of the extent of the issue until he was there recently. When were you first made aware of the issue with squatters in Lismore?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can't remember exactly when I was, but I was aware of those issues.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** For the past week, month, six months?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The past few months.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Have you raised that with the Premier at all?

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I haven't had a personal conversation with the Premier about that issue, no.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You just said your role is to advocate with other Ministers about issues. Clearly there are concerns in the community about what is happening there from all sides, and I appreciate that, but you have known about it, you say, you think for at least a few months but you can't quite remember. But you never raised it with the Premier at all? It took him going up there to see it to take some action.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't want to comment on the Premier's schedule, but I'm aware of it. I've talked to Minister Scully about it on a number of occasions, him being the Minister that's responsible for the Reconstruction Authority. We've worked together through the Reconstruction Authority and Homes NSW to try and engage with that community and resolve their housing needs. I don't perform the job as Minister for the North Coast by every time I have a meeting with a portfolio Minister about an issue on the North Coast subsequently calling the Premier and filling him in. I think that would be—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Isn't that kind of your job as Minister for the North Coast?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't think it is my job to call. I'm having those conversations regularly. I don't think it is my job to call the Premier two or three times a week to let him know, "Just FYI, I've had a conversation with Minister Scully, Homes NSW and the Reconstruction Authority." I'm doing that with the lead Ministers. I don't call the Premier every time I have a conversation with a colleague about a matter on the North Coast—I don't.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** You're the Minister for Homelessness and the Minister for Housing, so you are the Minister responsible from the beginning to the end. You said you've known for several months that there were people who were homeless who were living in these properties, yet you did nothing. You didn't think to forewarn the Premier ahead of the floods that there could be people in danger?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** None of that is accurate. I have been working on having Homes NSW engage with the Reconstruction Authority for some time to try to resolve this issue—including, specifically, conversations between Minister Scully, Minister Dib and myself in the lead-up to TC Alfred about the presence of squatters in the Pine Street community and ensuring that the SES and others were aware of that as they managed the evacuation orders. The only thing that I haven't done that you seem to suggest that I should do is, every single time I do something in my portfolio with another portfolio Minister—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, I'm not suggesting that.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, that is the suggestion, because I've worked on it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** This was a pretty serious issue about squatters, so much so that the Premier went up there and said, "Right, we've got to do something about this. It's not good enough." He has come out and said we need to do something on this straightaway, but you're saying to us that you didn't think it was worth picking up the phone and saying, "This is an issue." That's my question to you.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I did pick up the phone and have been working on it with Minister Scully for some time.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** But, Minister, you implied through the media that these people have not been engaged by homelessness services. You're now saying that for the last several months you have been aware.

**The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG:** Point of order—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm sorry; I missed the question.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, I need to hear the point of order.

**The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG:** On three sequential occasions, members made political assertions instead of asking questions. I thought the whole point of this was to ask questions of the Minister, rather than make political points, so that she can answer the questions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** To the point of order: We're able to put context to our questions, and I don't think that's outside the scope.

**The CHAIR:** Questions are not meant to include argument, but the Minister is able to answer the questions as she sees fit, and the Minister has chosen to answer those questions.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Apologies, Ms Maclaren-Jones. Was your suggestion that I had implied in the media—

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**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** There was a quote saying that these people had not been engaged by homelessness services.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm happy to clarify that we have made numerous attempts—numerous attempts—to engage these people with our services. They have declined those efforts, which I think is unfortunate, but I have been aware of this issue for some time. I have ensured that, as the Reconstruction Authority manages their properties and the decisions they are making around what to do with them, and to the extent that there are people who require housing and homelessness services, we have been very proactive in physically going door to door to try to engage with people and reach out to them. But, at present, those individuals are declining our assistance.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to take you to the Youth portfolio. I've asked you in many estimates about what's happening with the Regional Youth Taskforce. Obviously that has been disbanded. You've said to us a lot that you are looking at a new option around Youth—a new agency, I believe. We are now past the halfway mark of this term of Government. Can you now tell us where is that up to, what will the new Youth agency look like, who will be the responsible secretary, and what have young people told you about the way forward?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We are finalising the structure of that new office. We intend to have it in place by the middle of this year. We have done incredibly deep engagement with young people.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What are they saying to you about that?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** They have said that they want to have more opportunities to speak on their own behalf within government about the issues that are important to them, and we are trying to reflect that feedback in the structure of the new office.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Where is it going to sit in an organisational sense? Who will be the responsible secretary for that agency?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's going to sit within the Department of Communities and Justice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And that has been confirmed?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You will have the interplay with the Advocate for Children and Young People. How will that work?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That is being finalised, but it is my intention that the Advocate for Children and Young People and the office will be an integral part and have a leadership role within the office. But exactly that structure—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will that office keep the autonomy that they have now?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** In terms of the legislative provisions around the role of the Advocate for Children and Young People, it isn't intended that that will change.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I know that the Advocate is in the room and I don't mean to make her feel—but her term is finishing and it's a fair a question to ask what is the process for the appointment of a new advocate and when will that start?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I haven't turned my mind to that. The current advocate is doing an outstanding job, doesn't finish up until the end of the year, is being really present in communities and I don't—yes, the current advocate is finishing up at the end of the year, but we haven't put in place the measures to organise a replacement yet.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But it is intended that you will continue to have that role?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, absolutely.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Good morning, Minister. I wanted to ask you a couple of questions on behalf of Ms Helen Dalton. You'd probably be quite aware of them. One in particular is about IPART, which is going to come down with its draft determination for the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation prices. A question was put to you by Ms Helen Dalton in relation to utilising the powers under section 13 (1) (c) of the IPART Act. I appreciate that you yourself can't write to the IPART, but have you had conversations with the Premier to perhaps write a letter, similar to the letter that he wrote regarding Sydney Water and Hunter Water?

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I understand that this issue was raised directly with the Premier in his budget estimates hearing. He indicated there, and I have no reason to believe that this is not the case, that he is open to that. He is open to using that provision.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Similar to the one where he wrote cost of living and other factors. He has only got a little time left because the determination is coming out by the end of March. Is that right?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's a draft determination.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Yes, a draft determination, but presumably he'd need to write a letter pretty quickly, right?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** He can write a letter even after the draft determination is released. In fact, in the process of finalising the determination—although, as he has indicated and I will reiterate, IPART already has within its remit a role—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Yes, to look at social impacts. That's right. I'm aware of that, yes.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's right—to consider that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But it does help getting that letter from the Premier.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I understand.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Do you support the current Water Administration Ministerial Corporation prices that they've put forward in their proposal?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I understand why the submission has been made in the way that it has. I am very concerned about cost-of-living impacts. I await IPART's determination before—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But do you back that report? They've put price hikes for Murray, Murrumbidgee—everything, even the North Coast. You're the Minister for the North Coast, and right now they've got disaster recovery. Can they cope with these price hikes?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I indicated, I understand the drivers that have contributed to the submission being made in the way that it is. But I'm not—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Do you support the report? Do you support—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The submission?

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** The submission—yes, the report.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't understand what you mean by support.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'll turn to page 8. It's saying in there, "WAMC has secured the New South Wales Government's support to make this proposal to IPART." It's saying that it has your support.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** To make this proposal to IPART. It has my support to make a submission to IPART as it is legislatively—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Obviously that's referring to the substance of the proposal, though, isn't it?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, that's actually not what that sentence says. It does not say it has the support of the New South Wales Government for the substance of this report. It has our support to make a submission to IPART, as it is legislatively required to do. We wait.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Did you raise your concerns about those price hikes, then, with the corporation?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I've continued to raise those concerns.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Did you do that in writing? Is there anything that we can see a copy of? Why would you allow that to go into the report to say that the New South Wales Government supports it? I don't understand that.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I have just indicated, Ms Mihailuk, the support is—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** The support is just so they can write a report, which they're required to do anyway.

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, that's right.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But it's not the substance of the report?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, not until IPART have done their job. I want to be very careful about cutting across the independent remit of IPART. They have an incredibly important role to play.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Hang on, the Premier wrote a letter. He wasn't concerned about writing a letter raising concerns about cost of living for Sydney Water and Hunter Water. He was happy to cut across. What about North Coast? You don't think that there should be some special provisions there? Wouldn't it be a matter of urgency to reconsider these price hikes with the North Coast?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Perhaps, although, as I have indicated, the current status of that work is it is under consideration by IPART. They will release their draft determination. We will make decisions about what, if any, engagement we have between draft and final determination and then, even after IPART makes its final determination, it remains an option for Government to make decisions about how we proceed in those circumstances.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So you'll give a commitment that you may not necessarily agree to these prices down the track. Is that what you're saying?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, absolutely. I'm not making any commitments in relation to our position on those matters until IPART has released its final report.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You'll respond to Ms Helen Dalton in that way then when you answer the question?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Of course.

**The CHAIR:** The statutory review of the Mental Health Commission was due to be tabled with yourself in August last year. Why has it not yet been made public?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Because we're just finalising our response to it. I have received a copy of that report. It makes a number of recommendations. We are finalising our response to those recommendations and they will be made public alongside the report.

**The CHAIR:** When will they be made public?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I hope that that will be able to be done soon, but I can't be definitive and I'll take on notice whether or not we are able to provide you with a specific date. But that is in its final stages.

**The CHAIR:** Similarly, you've previously made a commitment that a summary of the findings and recommendations of the evaluation of the Towards Zero Suicides initiatives would be made publicly available by the end of 2024. Why hasn't that happened?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Dr Flynn, I have to say, I'm not familiar with—

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** The ministry has received the evaluation of the Towards Zero Suicides programs, but we have just commissioned and have even more recently received a Sax Institute international review around community non-clinical suicide prevention initiatives so we can put both of those two pieces of work together and discuss them with the Minister to inform future investment under Towards Zero Suicides. We just need to have a chance ourselves to look at the Sax report. But in a sense our view is that there was an excellent and thorough evaluation done by Taylor Fry but we did want to add to it what does the international evidence tell us, which is a different piece of work. Both of those together will be discussed and presented to the Minister as soon as we've received and had a good look through the Sax Institute findings.

**The CHAIR:** The Sax Institute findings do sound valuable, but can you tell us when that will be made publicly available?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I guess it's up to the Minister to decide when it's public. But, from our perspective, we would be ready to provide that information to the Minister within the next two to four weeks.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I am happy to indicate, Dr Cohn, that I commit to making that evaluation public as well. I see no value in not making that information public, particularly because, once you're aware it exists, if we don't just proactively release it, the powers of the House will compel its release. We might as well save ourselves the fuss.

**The CHAIR:** You can hear what I'm thinking from here. Well done, Minister. Last year we had extensive discussion about the need for an alternative response to mental health emergencies and you're on the

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record agreeing with the findings of this Committee in relation to the role of police in mental health emergencies. You also made a commitment at that time to develop a framework for an alternative model for Cabinet's consideration by the end of last year. Where is that work up to?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The framework is developed. It has not been through Cabinet yet. We are finalising a date for that. It is a not insignificant piece of work. It does involve, obviously, not only my portfolio and the contributions of the Mental Health Branch but also Minister Park, in particular through Ambulance engagement, and also Minister Catley. We are finalising a date to proceed to the next stage of that important piece of work. I think Ms Pearce was letting me know recently that she is meeting with the police commissioner about that. That engagement and that piece of work is ongoing. It is coming to the point where we are taking that next step, which I should indicate to you, Dr Cohn, will involve more comprehensive community consultation. Whilst we have been engaged in interagency conversations, which were necessary because Mental Health Branch, Ambulance and police all needed to come to the table, I accept that we have not engaged with our stakeholders, our community and people with lived experience and their loved ones, and that that does need to happen. That is part of the next step on that work.

**The CHAIR:** I'd like to move on to the Youth portfolio. Following on from the earlier questions from the Opposition, you've made it clear that it's not your intention to change the role or the legislative framework around the role of the Advocate. Is it your intention to change the structure or the resourcing of the office?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The structure, potentially; resourcing, no. It may be that, in the creation of this more central office or agency, some of the structure of the office may change. But that change, which we are currently working through and which involves industrial discussions with public servants and their union representatives—and we want to make sure that that's done in a proper consultative way—would only be intended to strengthen and elevate that work.

**The CHAIR:** In particular, I want to note the Special Inquiry into Children and Young People in Alternative Care Arrangements, which the office of the Advocate undertook, which was the first inquiry under that provision of the Act. I'm sure you would agree that it was an extraordinary piece of work. It obviously led to a change in Government policy and will significantly impact young people. What was the level of resourcing required to enable that kind of independent special inquiry to take place?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might ask the Advocate to comment on that. I'm not aware of any requests that came through me for specialist resourcing, although the Advocate did inform me that she had been working with Minister Washington in relation to the development of that inquiry, and I was extremely supportive of it. Did you want to comment about that, Zoë?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** I'm happy to talk about the funding that was attached to it. We specifically did not request funding from the Government because we wanted it to remain independent and always have the perception of remaining independent. That was a conscious decision of the office to ensure that. The total cost in relation to the special inquiry was \$132,000. That doesn't include the in kind that was given to us through a consulting firm, Deloitte, who provided contributions. A majority of that cost, as you would appreciate, had things to do with ensuring we had a co-chair who was a young person with lived experience. They received payment for their participation in that. We also had a social worker who sat alongside that—and I can give the full breakdown of these numbers as well—and travelled to every inquiry meeting so that they had that support in those meetings. So travel was attached to it.

We also had to make sure that we were doing things in line with the Act in terms of giving notice, and there was a requirement to advertise in papers and all of that, so that cost some money. We also had a law firm that sat alongside it and special counsel, who reviewed every transcript to make sure that none of the questions were leading and that we did all of the things that we said that we could do, and so that they could provide an audit over the whole process to say we did all of the things that we said we could do. In terms of the team, we had to just reprioritise some of the work that the team were focusing on. A senior policy advisor and I were the key people in terms of running all of the interviews with the young people, and we drafted the final report. Then we had members of our participation team who engaged with organisations and young people to assist them in participating in that. But most of that continued with BAU, and there was no additional staffing that came into the office for that.

**The CHAIR:** I have another question through you, Minister, to the Advocate. You frequently appear before parliamentary inquiries and other pieces of government work on behalf of or with young people, and we certainly appreciate that representation. What other structures are in place or how is your office set up to ensure that what you share with government is representative of the views of a diversity of young people?

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**ZOË ROBINSON:** We do regular polling. Every year we do Youth Week polling, and we've also just finalised our strategic plan tracking report, which everyone would have received. There are regular mechanisms in terms of quantitative data we have. When there is an inquiry or a request for a submission, we always start by saying, "Is this something that we have spoken to children and young people about?" If the answer to that is yes, then, obviously, we use all of that material as the basis for it. If the answer to that is no, subject to timing, then we will try and engage with children and young people around that.

Importantly, in some of the most recent inquiries—and I do want to acknowledge all of the committees who have welcomed this and enabled it in a number of ways—we have brought young people to share their lived experience. Young people came and talked about their experience of loneliness. We had a young person who—and thanks to that committee—appeared in camera to talk about their experience with vaping, and we are currently assisting the committee inquiry into pornography to facilitate conversations with young people separate to that so they can hear directly from young people. But it always starts with, if young people have a view on it and we have that work, then we make sure that that's what's informing the submissions.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, following up on work that you are doing to create a new youth agency, obviously, the role of the Advocate themselves is underpinned by legislation, but how are you going to ensure, in such a new agency, that that independence is preserved? I come back to the example of the inquiry into alternative care arrangements, which was so pivotal. It is obviously very important that that office has the capability to be able to criticise government when that's needed.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** To reiterate, none of the existing legislative provisions in relation to the role of the Advocate are intended to change. We want to provide more opportunity and resources. I'm not going to talk about forward budget because, as I've already indicated, that's not the role of this budget estimates. But the intention in the creation of the new office or agency is not to change any of the work that is currently being done; the provisions that underpin that will continue unchanged. It is to provide a broader scope for others to support that work and complement the engagement of the New South Wales Government with young people.

**The CHAIR:** I've been particularly impressed with the Youth Advisory Council, who I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to meet, and by the diversity of lived experience represented there in terms of both life experiences and geography across the State. What was the work done behind the scenes to ensure that diversity of voices, or what's needed, moving forward, to ensure that can continue in a new agency?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Again, the Advocate can talk about how the selection process for the YAC works. In fact, it is a very comprehensive, multistage process where the issues that you have raised are front and centre in the decisions that are made about who is on that group. Again, all I can say is that it is absolutely the intention of Government to continue to ensure that those types of bodies and, in fact, potentially larger, more significant opportunities are provided for young people to directly engage. In answer to a question that Ms Mitchell raised earlier, "What did young people tell you?" that is what they told us. They want to speak for themselves. They don't want well-intentioned old people—well intentioned as we are—to speak for them. The benefit that comes from the current YAC, which, I agree with you, is significant, is only intended to be enhanced going forward. Zoë will be here this afternoon if you wanted to ask her then, but she can talk to you about the—

**The CHAIR:** If the Advocate has something to add, she can.

**ZOË ROBINSON:** In terms of the Youth Advisory Council applications, this is—and I talk about it quite regularly—always difficult because you are trying to get a variety of voices from across the State, and we always know that people who feel comfortable to put themselves forward for an advisory council is about one group, but you want to try and reach those particular people who might not feel as comfortable. In terms of the representation, we work very hard to make sure that we are not only working in terms of the way that government does in pushing out messages in terms of social media but also engaging with the Department of Customer Service about how they might promote it as well. We also go out to councils across New South Wales and schools across New South Wales, so we have quite a large mailing list that we engage in that space. But, in some particular instances, we try and work hard with particular organisations who we know support.

We're conscious of making sure that we're not just targeting some organisations, as an example. We want to make sure we're working across the sector. We also have to be very clear that some people might not want to provide a written application, so lately we have changed—in the last three years, I think—so that you can do a video application as well. In those years, because of the shift, we have seen for example more people who have had interaction with Youth Justice or police applying—that's an amazing step for us because they are, particularly, young people who might not feel like they could be represented in spaces like this; also out-of-home care and ensuring that we have Aboriginal representation there, of course. Also in metro and regional—we're working very hard to make sure that the voice of regional young people are represented. This year it is a six-six divide in terms of metro and regional.

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**The CHAIR:** I'll come back to mental health. In response to a question on notice, I was advised that as of 17 February no fees had been paid to private locum or recruitment agencies for the placement of locum psychiatrists. It's my understanding that, generally, those agencies charge a minimum of 10 to 15 per cent fees for placements. How is it that no fees have been paid at this stage? Is it because they're being lumped? Is it because they're being accounted for differently? Can you explain that answer?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might ask Ms Pearce or one of the officials. I should note, in relation to questions that were asked earlier—for example, with VMOs, one of the reasons that we don't have definitive costs associated with that is that they invoice monthly. In fact, a number of the invoices in relation to the work that they have done—and I'm very up-front that they are doing work—we've simply not received yet. That's one of the reasons why I'm not able to provide definitive information about the costs of those VMOs; we simply do not have that information from them yet. It may be that this is a similar issue, in that the invoice cadence is such that they have not yet landed. I don't know if anyone yet has any other information on that.

**SUSAN PEARCE:** We'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We're happy to take that on notice.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, what's the current wait time for the Link2home service?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The most current wait time is 27 minutes and two seconds.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, I've had representation to my electorate office from caseworkers and also from a constituent that over the last two months on several occasions the Link2home service number has been unanswered.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's very concerning, Ms Maclaren-Jones. I personally have not heard that, although thank you for bringing that to my attention. Ms Pinkstone, are you aware of that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What happens when a call is unanswered? Does it go to voicemail?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No. The call is on a loop, so it should be bouncing between the people in the call centre.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I said, I'm not familiar with the issue of unanswered calls. I acknowledge that for some people in desperate circumstances waiting—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Twenty-seven minutes.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** —even five or 10 minutes is very distressing. When we talked about this at a previous budget estimates that wait time was a lot longer; it was over 45 minutes, I recall. So obviously I'm pleased that we've been able to bring that down.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** But, Minister, when you came into government wait times were around three minutes, if that. Under your time as Minister they've gone up to—recorded—almost 40 minutes. I've had reports where people were waiting far longer, particularly caseworkers, who have got time to wait for two hours. But the general public and desperate people who need housing—you're telling them to just wait for that loop?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** One of the reasons, or in fact the major reason why that wait time has significantly increased is because the number of calls has significantly increased. This is as a direct result of the housing crisis.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What's your solution—just tell them to wait?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No. Our solution is we've already put in place a number of measures that have seen a significant improvement in that wait time.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Is 27 minutes a significant improvement?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's a significant improvement on 45 minutes.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Which, again, is under your watch.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I said, we are dealing with a significantly increased volume of calls. I take very variously the wait times that people are experiencing. We had a direct intervention and engagement.

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If indeed this had been brought to my attention and nothing had happened and no improvement had been made, then perhaps your line of questioning would be valid. But that's not what's happening. We have made a significant improvement.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, I tried to call your office about three weeks ago on a Friday afternoon regarding a pregnant young woman in south-western Sydney who was looking for accommodation. Again, she had tried to reach out to Link2home. No-one was answering her call. She went to an electorate office. No-one answered the call in your ministerial office on a Friday afternoon. I had to go to another district to find someone who could contact this woman. A pregnant woman on a Friday afternoon had nowhere to go because no-one is answering the phones.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** You have my personal mobile phone number. I think it is quite disingenuous to turn up here and present that as though me and my office are uncontactable, when you know full well that any time you want to contact me personally—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** But, Minister, I shouldn't be having to call your mobile.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't know what—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Someone should be answering the Link2home call.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I accept that even 27 minutes is too long to wait, but it has been an improvement. We are continuously trying to make sure that we have provisions in place, including extra staff and additional training, to bring that number down, and the improvement is there. But, yes, in answer to your question, of course we don't want people waiting.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, the department ran the Homelessness Innovation Fund information session last year. In the report, which is all on the public record, they stated that in the 2023-24 period there has been a significant increase in people staying in TA. In fact, according to the department, that has increased by 121 per cent over that 12-month period, with an average of a 27-night stay in TA, with a third of people cycling back into homelessness following being in TA. What's the current length of time that people are required to stay in TA?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There is no length of time they are required to stay; they stay as long as they need to so that we can transition them into more permanent and stable housing.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Again, that's not working, because your own department says they are cycling back into TA from homelessness.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The reason that we are struggling to transition people out of temporary accommodation into more permanent and stable options is because there is not enough social housing available. This is well acknowledged by me. We are on the record about it. We have put \$5.1 billion in the budget to build that housing. We are underway. We are already seeing the benefits of that investment. But, yes, we will continue to see people who are staying in TA longer than they want to, and we want them to until there are more permanent options. But I should also say that one of the things that we have done specifically to provide a better temporary and emergency accommodation outcome is put the Homelessness Innovation Fund in place and spend money to provide supported TA environments. Just the other week, I was—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Which is why I'm asking what is now. You have had the innovation fund. I think rounds one and two have rolled out. So what's your average wait time now?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The average time in TA—do we have that? It is still 26 nights. But, as I said—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Is that as of last year when that report was put up?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's as of December 2024.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Could I get the updated—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, we are happy to take on notice if there is an updated March figure. But we are literally committing money, project by project, to build supported temporary accommodation solutions. Just last week I was up in Tweed announcing another one. We've announced one in Lismore. They are already rolling out across the State. The direct purpose of that investment is to build more supported temporary accommodation to address the fact that—look, temporary accommodation is not an ideal solution. Of course, it's better than an experience of homelessness, but we want to ensure that people have got supported emergency accommodation outcomes. That is the entire purpose of the \$100 million Homelessness Innovation Fund, and there are projects that are already committed and on line.

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**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Happy anniversary, Minister. It is the anniversary today of the closing of submissions on the short-term rental accommodation consultation report. We are a year on. Where are we?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's still under consideration. We have had so much reform that I'm so proud of when it comes to the housing crisis that we face in New South Wales, whether that's reforms to our planning system, rental laws or the Building Homes for NSW program. Short-term rental accommodation is part of that, and—

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** So it is on the backburner, is it?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's not on the—I don't want to get semantic about the backburner, the middle burner, the front burner. It is not the top priority of Government when we're confronting the housing crisis. I'll be up-front about that. The top priorities for the Government, in confronting the housing crisis, are getting our planning system in shape and ensuring that the investment that we have made in building more social and affordable housing is on track for delivery. The potential reforms to short-term rental accommodation are part of that. I don't even know, Mr Farlow, if you would want to assert that reforms in that space are the most important lever that the Government could be pulling right now in resolving the housing crisis.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, when you announced this reform or review, you indicated that it would be complete within the first half of 2024. We're now in the first half of 2025. It still seems that there is no end in sight when it comes to that review and when it will be finalised. Have you got a date for when that will be finalised?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's not as though it's a review that is going to produce a specific review document. It is a review to inform policy decisions.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** It's a review for reform, isn't it?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's right. It's a review for reform. What we haven't made a decision on is the suite of reforms that we want to commit to. The reason we haven't made a decision on that is because there are multiple competing priorities between, for example, really important work to support local economies that rely on tourists and the visitor economy, and, of course—as I've been upfront about—certain local areas where the impact of short-term rentals is more significant. It varies across the State. I should also indicate, Mr Farlow, that throughout the entire process, the door has always been open to local governments who want to use the same pathway that Byron shire did to explore the potential of caps in their local area if, indeed, that is what the local council wants to do. That's always been an option for them. In terms of statewide policy, when we're balancing those various competing priorities and making decisions about what the suite of reforms looks like, we want to get it right. Sitting alongside all of the other work that we're doing, it's not something that we've finalised yet.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, do you think caps work, then, if that's your invitation to local government?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I am TBC on it. I want to see the outcomes of the Byron shire caps. They obviously only came in—

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** What do you mean by "see the outcomes" of that? Have you got an evaluation program or something to assess the outcomes?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No. I understand that there are pieces of work that are being done to look at the impact. My entire goal here is how do we improve the availability of affordable long-term rentals? That's my beginning, middle and end. I am open to any solutions that deliver that outcome. I am unsure, based on the evidence, whether local caps do or don't work. But—happy days—we have an opportunity to explore that exact question in the Byron shire. I think it is relatively early stages. The caps have not been in for that long. We have to cycle through a few summers and winters, I think, to see whether it achieved that outcome or whether it achieved unintended consequences. Were there were perverse outcomes that we did not anticipate? I remain extremely open-minded. I suppose I would say that I'm unconvinced either way.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** So TBC, open-minded—what are some of the assessment criteria you will be using to see whether it was a success or not in the Byron shire?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think the core one is whether it improved the availability of long-term rental accommodation and, in particular, affordable rental accommodation. I will settle for whether, as a result of that policy intervention, the number of long-term rentals available in that community improve.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** You talk about a couple of summers. This is fundamental, in a sense, as to where the Government will go in terms of policy reform. How many summers are we waiting to see what happens in Byron?

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't want to be definitive. I am not an evaluation specialist. I do think you need a little bit of time for the consequences of that policy to wash through before you're making definitive determinations about whether it worked or not. I don't want to say specifically that it's two or three or five. But I do think you need some period of time to make an assessment. Another assessment criteria that you may wish to look at, Mr Farlow, is what impact, if any, did the caps have on the local economy and the local tourist economy? That's a valid question too. For areas of the State that really rely on tourists and visitors, do those kind of policy interventions have a significant negative—or I suppose positive, but more likely negative—impact on that local community, and is that something that that local community is comfortable with? I think that's an unanswered question.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In releasing the consultation report, you said all options were on the table. One of those that's been advocated is a 7.5 per cent tax on short-term rentals, similar to what Victoria has in place. What's your perspective on that?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** All options remain on the table. Industry itself called for a 2.5 per cent levy. There is, from the feedback that I've had, relatively widespread support for that, although set at different levels. I have not yet formed a view. Government has not made a decision about what the reforms will look like in the short-term rental space. It remains the case that all options are on the table.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** After having the position a year ago that this would be done in the first half of 2024, we're now at the position that this will be done when?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The work has been done to inform potential reform pathways in the time frame that you described, but I'm not in a position to make definitive statements about when the Government will make decisions about reforms going forward that don't sit exclusively within my portfolio. I'm obviously a participant and leading on this.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** You're the leader, aren't you, when it comes to this review?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Absolutely, but of course it requires engagement from Planning, from Tourism and others. I'm not in a position to be definitive about when the Government will make those decisions. Suffice to say, yes, this work sits alongside all of the other work we have done in Housing to try and address the housing crisis.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Thank you, Minister. We'll continue to watch this space. Turning to a few reports that have come through and a couple of items from the land audit which are going onto the private market now. There are 11 low-yielding properties that are up for auction as part of the land audit. I'm just wondering why Homes NSW didn't take any of these properties and what those considerations were.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can ask Rebecca if she wants to make any comments. A number of the properties are, from what I understand, individual sites. Our focus at the moment is big, high-yield, big-impact sites. To the extent that we have engaged with the land audit, the obvious one that comes to mind for me—there are two, really. There's the dive site on Palmer Street and William Street, and there's the one over at north Eveleigh. They are larger developments of a significant scale. The ones that I think you are describing are much smaller plots. The answer is bang for buck. We want to maximise that. We want every public dollar that we're spending on housing, including through our building homes program through the land audit, to deliver the maximum benefit.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Will the proceeds of these sales be coming back to Homes NSW at all? How will that be—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** You'll have to ask Minister Kamper about that. He's responsible for the land audit and the management of the sale of those properties.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** From a Homes NSW perspective, effectively you have first dibs when it comes to any items?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We do have first dibs.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** If you forego that, is there any monetary compensation for Homes NSW in terms of the sale or yield?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** You're right that we have first dibs. I've got the sites here. I don't know why we didn't submit a request for 11 Clavering Road, Seaforth, but perhaps Ms Pinkstone may be able to elaborate this afternoon. We do have first dibs, as it were. Landcom has second dibs. If we choose not to use those sites—because, as I've said, most of them here are small plots and single dwellings that do not deliver big bang

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for buck—then Property and Development NSW, under Minister Kamper, manages them in a way that I don't have direct line of sight on.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to the social housing waiting list—this is another position similar to the question that Ms Maclaren-Jones was referring to—we've seen significant growth over the last 18 months. What are some of the things you are doing in terms of being able to attack that social housing waiting list, considering that even with the budget allocation with 8,400 new homes it wouldn't reduce it to a level the same as it was 18 months ago?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'll tell you what we're doing. We're building new social housing as opposed to selling it.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** But, Minister, under your watch this has grown by 15 per cent.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That is because of underlying factors in the economy that are associated with the extreme cost-of-living crisis. It is really hard. It is really hard for people to afford housing right now. The cost of housing, the cost of renting has jumped significantly. That is putting pressure on people such that they are putting their hand up for social housing because they can't afford to buy a home and they can't afford to rent a home, and we are the safety net that exists for them. Do we have enough social housing? Absolutely not. You sold \$3 billion worth of it. We have put more than that back in the budget.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** But the social housing waiting list is jumping up under your watch.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The social housing waiting list is something that is caused by factors that I wish I could control but I can't control. They're beyond the control of government. It is a consequence of the operation of the private housing market and not even the State economy but the national economy, the global economy. That puts pressure on people such that they cannot afford a rental in the private market. Buying a home is completely out of reach. They turn to social housing. That drives the demand. We are doing what we can to meet that demand but, because of the policies of underinvestment for over a decade and billions of dollars sold off, it's a huge hill to climb. We have put the money in the budget and we're getting on with building the homes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, the number of people with disability on the social housing waitlist has increased by almost 1,000. A question on notice was put to you last year asking for details about the number of people with disability in social and community housing waiting for home modifications, of which there weren't any answers forthcoming. Are you able to provide the Committee with an answer today on that?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might ask Rebecca whether she has the specific information about the number of current tenants of social housing who have requested a modification because of disability. I don't have that at my fingertips. Ms Pinkstone may be able to look it up. I do have information that an average of 2,243 properties have been modified for disability modifications every year. Ms Pinkstone may be able, with the team, to see whether that figure that you have requested is available.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I have some documents to table, if that's okay, before I commence some questions in relation to one topic.

**Documents tabled.**

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I will wait until you see them, Minister. I also wrote to you about this issue. This is a matter concerning the Thornleigh Reservoir.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'll have a look at the documents, Ms Higginson, but is this the mapping issue?

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** No, this is about a safety issue. Minister, if you would just have a look at the documents the secretariat is giving to you, you can see there that one is looking at the reservoir status and risk classification. It appears from those documents that Thornleigh Reservoir is operating outside of the safety threshold. In the event of reservoir or dam failure, it has on that document that 147 people would be at risk of death. Minister, in your response to my letter dated 17 January and your response 20 February, you acknowledge that Sydney Water considers Thornleigh Reservoir to be out of risk tolerance due to missing geotechnical information. However, these documents show that the reservoir is operating outside the safety threshold, a classification which indicates a serious structural risk. Can you confirm whether Thornleigh Reservoir is currently operating above the safety threshold?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Where's Mr Cheroux? Despite having so many officials here, we do not, in fact, have representatives from dam safety. So perhaps another one to add to the list.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, does the document in front of you concern you?

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Any suggestion that one of our many dam assets is operating outside the safety threshold concerns me. I'm not in a position, just based on this, Ms Higginson, to give a definitive answer as to whether, as of today, that is accurate information. I don't know whether Mr Cheroux or Ms Jones may have that information; otherwise we'll have to take it on notice in terms of a definitive answer, today, on what is the status.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I'm happy for you to take them on notice.

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I can probably bring some information about the four new reservoirs. This is coming from the fact that there was a study done back in 2024 where the geotechnical survey information was actually missing. It goes back to the construction of the reservoir many years ago. The reservoir, from memory, was built in the 1950s.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Perhaps if I can just interrupt. Are you aware of the document?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Just because we have such limited time, are you able to address whether—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** This document isn't even dated, Ms Higginson.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** The document is from a report. I have the full report. It's a report that, as you say, is the 2024 GHD report. It's an analysis; it's an individual and societal risk rating assessment. Sydney Water has this document. You actually produced the document under GIPAA recently, with this not included. Perhaps you should take some of these questions on notice. The documents indicate movement in the dam embankment and a split in the liner, suggesting serious structural instability. However, your response does not address those issues directly. Has Sydney Water identified evidence of embankment instability or liner failure beyond the missing geotechnical information? If so, why has Sydney Water not acted to mitigate these issues?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** There's no movement in the bank. Sensors have been put in place to check if that was the case or not. It's not the case—so the embankment is not moving. I want to come back to the first question, which is a very important point. The only reason why this dam has moved to the next category is because the geotechnical information is missing. The geotechnical survey is being done. I'm confident that, when it is done, when GHD or another engineering company has the information, then it will move back into normal.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** When do you expect that work to be completed?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** That's going to be completed this financial year.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** By the middle of the year.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** And that will be made public? Is that something that was public?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** In that context, why has Sydney Water not objected to a road at the moment that council is considering bulldozing into that embankment?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** We haven't made our position on the roads. We have said that we were going to work with the council that has expressed a wish to have a road going through the land that is adjacent to the reservoir, but we have also made it very clear to the council that it could not come at any risk to the infrastructure that is existing on the land.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm happy to endorse the point that Mr Cheroux just made, which is that we do try to work with proponents when it comes to infrastructure like roads to see if there are potential solutions. But it's non-negotiable that the safety of our assets is front and centre. Obviously, as Mr Cheroux says, the relevant reports are being finalised, but I can give you an assurance, Ms Higginson, that there is no compromise on those safety principles when it comes to the position of Sydney Water or WaterNSW—which is another asset owner—on safety.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Do you have any idea on this point of what the cost would be if the wall had to be replaced or fixed?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** No.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** You don't have any of those cost analyses at the moment? I'm happy to put more questions on notice in relation to this specific issue. It has raised some real concern, particularly among the residents and the 129 people.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Absolutely. Dam safety is incredibly important. I understand that.

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**AMANDA JONES:** I can confirm, Minister, that Thornleigh is on the list of 17 at-risk dams. The work that Sydney Water is doing is being reviewed by Dams Safety NSW.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, will you be reconsidering financial support to the human nature program in the Northern Rivers that I've written to you about, particularly now?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I will be considering that. I will have more to say in the coming period in relation to opportunities to provide support to them. I did meet with them after you raised that and, yes, there are opportunities upcoming.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** In relation to PFAS, is the North Richmond Wastewater Treatment Plant water being tested for PFAS?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, it is.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What is that revealing?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** It's saying that it is compliant with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The new drinking water guidelines or the current?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** It is compliant with the current.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Sorry—the draft, I should say. I can't say new.

**ROCH CHEROUX:** It is going to be compliant with the draft ones as well.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I understand North Richmond is not run by Sydney Water, so local councils are the authority. Is that correct?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** No, it's run by Sydney Water.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The pipe in terms of Bakers Lagoon—there are various PFAS contamination sources. Somebody from the area has said to me that, for at least the last six years, there's a pipe that hasn't been blocked off in terms of Bakers Lagoon. Is that correct?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I need to take that on notice.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Yes, maybe take it on notice. Minister, in relation to the replacement water sharing plans for the unregulated valleys, which I think are due to be made by June this year, will all the Connectivity Expert Panel recommendations for improved connectivity to the Barwon-Darling be implemented at the commencement of the new plans?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, unfortunately we will not be able to meet that time frame. Having said that, Ms Faehrmann, as you know, with concurrence of Minister Sharpe, I can make amendments to plans at any time in the public interest. We are committed to finalising that work in relation to the connectivity panel—also, of course, the minimum inflows work that the office of the chief scientist is leading, which overlaps and contributes to exactly the same concerns that you have that I accept are valid. But, no, I should be clear: I will not be able to have all of that finalised ready for inclusion in the plans when they are remade at the middle of the year.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** How are you reassuring yourself that those important low flows, which are needed to improve the environmental health of the unregulated water sources, are protected in the new replacement water sharing plans?

**AMANDA JONES:** There is a review clause in the draft unreg water sharing plans that reflects consideration for connectivity work.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** But, also, we have ensured that the provisions in those plans—as they relate to, for example, more cautious targets at Menindee and other areas—are included. Having said that, Ms Faehrmann, we've done that but, as I indicated, once we are clear on outcomes of the connectivity panel work and the minimum inflows work and that other work, it will be included in the water sharing plans. It's just not, unfortunately, going to be able to be done in time.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What methods for measuring those low flows in the unregulated water sources are being considered prior to the installation of gauging stations? I understand there are some places that don't have pump metering requirements, for example. Is anything being done for that?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm happy to take on notice any specific areas. Obviously, we are committed to a proper, comprehensive rollout of pump metering. I recognise that that has been not nearly as

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comprehensive and rapid as both you and I would have hoped. We've done a range of pieces of work. Mr Barnes is here and you can ask him now or this afternoon in terms of NRAR's engagement. Suffice to say, my expectation is that all pumps above a certain size—obviously, the very small ones continue to be exempt, but the ones that we would be worried about should be metered.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I'll come back and have a more detailed discussion with you this afternoon on that, Mr Barnes. The Nature Conservation Council recently undertook a legal case against the New South Wales water Minister challenging the making of the NSW Border Rivers Regulated River Water Source Order 2021. What were the settlement terms of that case?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I will see if I can get that up. I was pleased to be able to settle that matter. It included things like the minimum inflows review. It included regular meetings. It included other provisions. Amanda, are you able to recall those?

**AMANDA JONES:** On our website we've actually got a page that references all of the terms and the status of all of the actions against those terms.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Were there any restrictions placed on the organisation relating to talking about the outcomes of the case or bringing forward any future cases? Was there anything like that?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can't recall that.

**AMANDA JONES:** No, Minister, I don't—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I don't think that there were. I inherited that suit, just to be clear. It was a suit that was initiated against a former water Minister and it was really important to me that we resolved that on good terms and that we, as Ms Jones said, are up-front and honest and transparent. At least one of those terms was regular meetings between myself, the NCC and Minister Sharpe with the opportunity to update on those matters and they have been occurring.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** You'd kind of hope that you wouldn't require a legal case for the environment Minister and water Minister to meet with the peak environmental organisation in the State regularly.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It wouldn't have required a legal case against me but—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** So the documents that were made available through the discovery process of that court case, would you make those documents available publicly?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't know what those documents are, Ms Faehrmann, so I don't want to make a definitive statement about making documents publicly available when I'm not sure what they are. But I reiterate I'm very committed to transparency. If you believe that there are documents that you think should be made publicly available, I'm happy to take information from you about what they are and attempt to make them publicly available. I don't have anything to hide in relation to this matter.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, in relation to longwall mining in Sydney's water catchment, I understand WaterNSW has expressed concerns reasonably consistently regarding the mining in the catchment, in particular around the current activity that is going on in terms of Metropolitan Mine, which is Peabody's mine in Sydney's water catchment. They're currently seeking approval for extensions. Are you aware of those concerns?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I am. I've spoken to Mr George about it and you are correct that WaterNSW has those concerns and has made submissions along those lines.

**The CHAIR:** Have you also made approaches to the planning Minister about your concerns as water Minister about the impact of longwall mining on Sydney's water catchment?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I've made sure that, in the consideration of planning decisions, the planning Minister and his team are aware that WaterNSW has a view and has made a submission along those lines. Of course, my expectation is that that is taken into account. Andrew can talk now or you can ask him this afternoon about what those concerns are. He has briefed me. We have talked about it. Those submissions are publicly available, I should think, Andrew?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Yes.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It is my expectation that they are taken into consideration.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I understand there are two recent reports on Woronora Plateau which suggest that the mine is jeopardising WaterNSW's ability to meet its core objectives and functions in relation to the protected catchment. That's essentially where things are getting at.

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**ANDREW GEORGE:** That would be in relation to our mining principles, which we do publish on our website, which speak to the integrity of the infrastructure.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** There is a legislated obligation to.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Correct. Catchment protection.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That's right. Minister, on Sydney Water and biosolids regulation, it's a slow exercise but I'm slowly going through the 130 boxes that were returned on PFAS under Standing Order 52. Some of those papers and emails that I've seen are suggesting that, in terms of the upcoming regulation of PFAS in biosolids, which hasn't taken place yet, there is going to be something called a soft regulatory approach, phased in over five years. Have you been informed by Sydney Water that if this PFAS biosolids regulation comes in, much of the waste that is currently being applied on agricultural land in New South Wales as fertiliser will be deemed hazardous waste?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I have had discussions with Sydney Water in relation to, as you say, the upcoming regulation of PFAS in biosolids. I am aware of that issue and I'm aware that it presents a challenge to Sydney Water in not dissimilar terms to what you have described. Obviously I'm concerned about that. I'm engaged with Sydney Water on it. We await the framework that the EPA will put in place. But, yes, you are right to raise it.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Given that, as water Minister, have you taken it upon yourself to potentially lobby for the phase-out of PFAS and a banning? We've been approached by many stakeholders suggesting that's really the only way we can deal with it.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I haven't taken that on as yet. I have been very engaged in the management of the exposure of our drinking water and our biosolids to the risk of PFAS. I don't want to pretend I have been out there actively lobbying in relation to the matters that you've raised, but I understand that, fundamentally, your point is valid. We can do what we can do to manage the risk; it would be better if these forever chemicals were not present in our environment.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, in September 2023 when you cancelled the plans for the redevelopment of the Argyll Estate, you outlined that there would be a new local area plan to deliver housing for those in need in the Coffs Harbour area. What is the progress with that plan to date?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We've engaged significantly with the local community. As you rightly say, the local community were very clear to me that they did not support the previous proposal in relation to the Argyll Estate. It would, in fact, have delivered fewer social housing bedrooms than were presently available on the estate. Clearly, that was not an acceptable outcome to me. We have done things like a lived experience survey of the community that has been underpinned by broad community consultation. We are identifying opportunities for social housing investment in the Coffs Harbour area. We hope to have more to say on that in the near future as we work through both our own processes for capital expenditure and our engagement with the Commonwealth under the Housing Australia Future Fund. Suffice to say, the community is on board with the approach that we are taking, which is quite different to the circumstance that we inherited.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, you outlined the number of bedrooms and the like, but one of the issues that was flagged as part of the 2021 LAHC Coffs Harbour LGA analysis identified that there was a large supply of three-bedroom social housing cottages that exceeded the current demand for families on the waiting list and, particularly, that there was a need for two-bedroom dwellings. Is that still the case in the Coffs Harbour LGA?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't have information to hand about the current demand profile in the Coffs Harbour LGA, but I'm happy to take on notice whether the information that you just provided remains accurate.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, last year I asked in budget estimates about 14-year-olds presenting to specialist homelessness services alone. You advised:

In the Client Information Management System, the pop-up alert warns the user that the support period being created is for a child under 14 years on their own. This alert is not stored and therefore data is not captured.

I'm sure the staff are aware that the child presenting to an SHS is a minor. I asked you then about data collection, and you indicated that the HIF could be used to improve data development. I would like to know how much has been allocated out of the innovation fund specifically to capture data around young people—and these are 14 and under—presenting to SHSs.

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**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might have to take that on notice, unless Ms Pinkstone has that to hand. The HIF relies on applications being made, so we would need our partner organisations who run specialist homelessness services to be willing to put forward applications under that, although, as I indicated, we would absolutely consider them. I do know that some—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** You are basically saying it is their job when, in fact, you are the Minister. You have children under 14 presenting alone, and the only thing that is available is a pop-up alert to tell them what they pretty much clearly know.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** You sort of suggest there is some arms-length—our NGO partners deliver specialist homelessness services. We work with them, but they are organisations that we don't run and control. They are non-government service delivery organisations. We love them and value them but, no, we don't tell them how to make applications to the Homelessness Innovation Fund. That's a decision that they make, and I welcome that. But, as I said, I'm happy to take on notice the specifics in relation to whether any applications have been made or approved along the lines you suggested.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I just wanted to come back, in the time we have remaining before lunch, to private hospital care. I understand that is currently only happening for voluntary patients.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have an understanding of the rates currently being paid to the hospitals and to the private psychiatrists for care of public patients?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't have that on hand. I do have information that suggests that there are currently 17 patients being cared for under those provisions—obviously, as you mentioned, in a voluntary capacity. I don't have those rates. We will have to take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** I have asked this as a question on notice. The answer that I got was that the cost per patient per day is determined by the contract between the private hospital and the LHD; the daily rate would vary depending on the contract and the operator. From your perspective as a Minister with statewide oversight, is there an approved range for those contracts? Is there a cap on those contracts? I appreciate there are some variation, but can we get a sense of the quantum?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** We can further deal with that on notice for you, Dr Cohn. What I would say is that we've worked a lot with private facilities over the past number of years. We have sought to have arrangements where we have some consistency in the rates that we're being charged for the use of any private services. I'm sure we'll be able to provide you something on that, so long as it's not a commercial-in-confidence arrangement.

**The CHAIR:** To clarify, I'd be very interested in a range or a cap or some indication of the quantum without breaching your commercial arrangements. Similarly, you've very helpfully answered some questions this morning, Minister, about the status of the resignations and how many psychiatrists were in what status at the moment. I'm interested to understand if you have specific numbers for forensic psychiatrists, noting that's a very specific role. I think it was reported back in January that they were anticipating at least 30 resignations of forensic psychiatrists.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I may have that. I do accept I have information as of—we will have that information at the beginning of the next session. I don't want to waste your time right now. We do have that information broken down specifically for forensic. As of Wednesday, we have 30 resignations that were indicated, five separations finalised by HealthShare, eight withdrawn, 15 deferred and 16 transitioned to VMO—that's just within the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. That's helpful.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I wanted to let you know, Mrs Maclaren-Jones, and I suspect this will not satisfy you entirely—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** You can try.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We have seen that the Link2home average wait time as of the end of February was 16 minutes. I think March to date—which we're only half way through—is 12. So, yes, 12 minutes is too long to wait, but we are improving.

**The CHAIR:** It is 12.45 p.m. Are there any questions from the Government?

**The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY:** Government members do not have any questions.

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**The CHAIR:** That being the case, thank you for your attendance this morning, Minister. We'll see the rest of the witnesses back after the lunchbreak.

**(The Minister withdrew.)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

**Ms KATE MEAGHER**, Deputy Secretary, Delivery and Engagement Group, Premier's Department, on former affirmation

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back, everyone. We will start with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I might just do Water questions. It will probably be through you, Ms Jones, but potentially some of your other colleagues as well. I want to ask for an update on the Lostock Dam to Glennies Creek Dam Pipeline project. The final business case was due in the second half of 2024. Do you know if that has been completed?

**AMANDA JONES:** The business case is completed or near to completion. It's up for review.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you have any indication of a time frame for a decision on that project?

**AMANDA JONES:** Not at the moment. It's not gone to INSW or ERC as yet.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And then another project: the Malpas Dam wall. Detailed design and tender documents were expected by the end of last year. Do you know if they've been completed as well?

**AMANDA JONES:** No, I'm not aware of the Malpas Dam project. I can take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great. The Water Administration Ministerial Corporation and the WaterNSW 2025-30 pricing proposal is currently with IPART. Some of the information that I have is that there would be higher water bills for high-security customers, and quite significant increases on the Peel, the Lachlan and the Murray. Is there any indication of what customers would be getting in return for those price increases?

**AMANDA JONES:** The WAMC component—I should explain WAMC. It is the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I wasn't sure how to pronounce the acronym, so I'm pleased. Thank you, Ms Jones. The WAMC?

**AMANDA JONES:** It doesn't roll off the tongue, like many things in Water. That entity is actually the department, plus NRAR as the compliance agency, and a part of WaterNSW that does part of the licensing and approvals. That is the WAMC part. The WAMC part is all about setting the rules under the statutory plans, making sure the rules are complied with and making sure that these transactional services that go with that—licensing approvals—are undertaken. That component of the bill actually appears as part of the bulk water bill from WaterNSW. I think the question you're going to about the pricing impacts in particular valleys, I might ask Andrew George to speak to.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** So in terms of what do customers get for the increase?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Obviously our pricing proposal to IPART details, in quite a bit of detail, what contributes to the make-up of those bill increases. But obviously it varies by valley around the Murray-Darling Basin, largely because of the different levels of entitlement in each valley. The large valleys, particularly in the southern basin, have a lot more entitlement or customers compared to, say, the Peel and Namoi, which have a much smaller customer base to spread costs. Now, our costs in those valleys—our pricing submission was based on the costs in the revenue required to meet our obligations over the next five-year period. The pricing outcome is by applying those costs through the IPART economic regulatory model—the building block model. It's not that the prices have been recommended. The prices will be determined by IPART. What's been put forward are the costs. More than half—about 55 per cent—of the increases in costs are due more broadly to the broader macro-economic environment. We're going off a low base from when the last pricing determination was made, when interest rates were at historic lows, to the current environment, where interest rates are a lot higher.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm asking you about the return for customers because my understanding is that in the pricing proposal there's a reduced expenditure and there's about \$860 million in capital projects that have been deferred and a reduction in operational costs. I'm trying to marry up an increase in cost but arguably less investment in things like capital projects. How does that play out in practice?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Great question. Our objective through the consultation we undertook with customers over the past 18 months to two years was to try to strike the balance between significant upward pressure on bills because of the broader macroeconomic environment and the amount of risk we take on in managing our assets. When we ran through our typical asset management process, we had a very long list of candidate projects. If we had put all of those projects into our pricing submission, we would've obviously contributed more significantly to the price impact on customers. We had a conversation about the level of risk that we take with our assets, their availability and the amount of redundancy in the systems. There is good redundancy in a lot of our systems. We took the decision to defer that \$860 million in capex to try to take the pressure off customer bills. We did the same with opex, driving a fairly significant cost-saving program through the business to try to reduce the amount of operational costs that get passed on to customers.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I will move on from that and go back to the \$300-odd million for the environmental flows that I asked the Minister about earlier. I am happy if Mr George or anyone else answers. In terms of WaterNSW's individual projects in your capital expenditure program, where does that one rank? Are there others that are bigger? What is the next big project after that particular one?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** From memory, that is the second-largest project. The largest one in our pricing proposal in the Warragamba climate resilience project to address the climate change and the associated dam safety risk.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Other than the Warragamba one and the one in the Hawkesbury, what else is on the list for priority areas?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** The next largest program of works is around the proposed fishways in regional New South Wales. We have significant investment proposed in digital technology, particularly for water market systems, data governance and cybersecurity.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** This question may come back to Ms Jones. In the February estimates last year, we asked about the prospect of raising the storage at Burrendong Dam. I'm sorry I am jumping all over the place geographically. I have a list that I am trying to get through during my time. I think it was about lifting the proposed storage to 120 per cent of the current full supply level. I know that it's something that the western councils have been raising with the Minister and with the Government. Is there any plan to look at that project?

**AMANDA JONES:** I think that's a change in the water sharing plan to lift the availability for water to take up the mitigation space. That's not determined. It's still under consideration as an option.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Okay. Is there any sort of modelling that indicates, without significant or consistent in-flows, how long it takes for Burrendong to get to the high levels of capacity? Is there any work in that space?

**AMANDA JONES:** I'm sure that we do have modelling on different rain event forecasts and different assumptions about the impacts of that option. I can't bring them to mind right now, but if you want us to take that on notice, we can provide that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, that would be good. The other side of the question is that at the moment, I think Burrendong is listed as being at 52 per cent capacity. From a departmental perspective, is there a figure that you use when you start to consider Burrendong to be low and when you start to get concerned about water supply? I guess that's the opposite side of the coin. Any information you can provide on that would be useful.

**AMANDA JONES:** Can do. Andrew, do you want to make any comment?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** We do have drought response plans for all of the valleys in regional New South Wales and Greater Sydney. In those regional drought response plans, there are triggers for implementing actions, which relate to other regulatory instruments within the water management framework more broadly.

**AMANDA JONES:** We have the Extreme Events Policy. Obviously, when drought is declared in a catchment, the priority in the water sharing plan flips basically to towns.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If you can provide something around the modelling on notice, that would be fantastic. I am wanting to move now to the SDLAM, which, again, I think we've last about at the last few estimates hearings as well. I am particularly interested in the 2026 deadline for the accelerated projects.

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Where, again, is that up to? My understanding is that there was tendering for a managing contractor but then that didn't go ahead. I think we might have even talked about that last time. Where are we at in terms of those deadlines and meeting them?

**AMANDA JONES:** You are correct. We did look at a managing contractor approach, and we determined that that wasn't going to offer value for money. As recently as last month we've held industry briefings in Moama and in Deniliquin. Instead, the department is taking on more of the oversight risk and management of those projects.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Instead of having a managing contractor?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes, instead of having a managing contractor. There is about 77 sites for these projects and they're very dispersed. We're very concerned about work health and safety, so we're making sure that we're geared up to manage that aspect as well. We've held industry briefings in February in Deniliquin and Moama. We're in the process of procuring, and we have awarded a number of contracts already for some of the projects. Those are all moving forward, and our absolute intention is to deliver them by December 2026.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I appreciate that the Government decided not to proceed with the managing contractor, but do you have—and I'm happy if you need to take it on notice—a costing for what that tender process was? Not actually the cost of the tender, but presumably there was some cost involved in running that process before a decision was made to change approach.

**AMANDA JONES:** Those costs are only internal management costs. We didn't pay tenderers any costs. Yes, I'm happy to take it on notice

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If you can take it on notice that would be fantastic. I appreciate and know it is a different issue, but I was asking the Minister this morning about increased costs around the Cobar pipeline. Obviously we know rising construction costs have an impact on all agencies and industries, but have you done any work as an agency in terms of whether the \$311 million that's been budgeted for the SDLAM acceleration projects and the Reconnecting River Country Program will be enough money to be able to deliver what you need, based on the current budgetary situation?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes, we have. At the moment we're confident about that. To your question this morning about the Nyngan to Cobar pipeline, you gave the example of, I think, \$9 million to build a section back in 2017.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes.

**AMANDA JONES:** Construction escalation is about 30 per cent since that time. I think, more importantly, the project you referred to was quite a simple construction of pipeline in sand. The scope for the 110-kilometre replacement of pipeline includes valves and other parts continuing the water pump through the system. It's clearly a lot longer distance, and it's through different topography and different soil types and conditions. The scope is probably not comparable in addition to construction escalation.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But just now, in terms of the SDLAM, you're not concerned that the budget is not enough to deliver the projects for those?

**AMANDA JONES:** No, we're not. Not at the moment, no.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When you said that you're going to do—I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but rather than going to an external contractor more will be done internally on those projects.

**AMANDA JONES:** The project and program management will be done internally because that was what the managing contractor would have done. We are procuring local and more regional construction companies, including First Nations companies, to actually do the work.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will you be engaging any additional staff within your agency to help work in that space as well?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes, we will. We'll have about 100 staff internally to manage this. There will be a mix of ongoing staff and temporary contracts. We expect to generate about 300 jobs in the contracts that we let for the works.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you have a breakdown of those 300 jobs and how many will be located in which regions?

**AMANDA JONES:** Not here.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Possibly on notice?

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**AMANDA JONES:** We can provide some estimates.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I am interested in the Riverina, Murray and other regions where the work will be undertaken.

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** As best as you can, and if there's a breakdown that would be good.

**AMANDA JONES:** That's why we have done the industry engagements in the regional centres.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sydney Water, a couple of questions. Sorry, I might get Mr Cheroux to come up to the microphone. Nice to see you again. I just wanted to ask you about the accounting error that was in the annual report. At what point was that error fully understood and what was the process around that? The 440.8 million I'm talking about.

**ROCH CHEROUX:** The error was not in the annual report. It was in the numbers that we sent to Treasury.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The half-yearly review.

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But it delayed the annual report. Is that correct?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Not really, no. What happened is that in November 2023 in the numbers that we sent to Treasury there was a misclassification between deferred tax and current tax. The tax number was right, which is the number that you look at, but the misclassification was between current tax and deferred tax. What happened is that Treasury took the current tax as a revenue for the Government, as they should, and deferred tax for future revenue for governments, and that had an impact on the revenue for government, so it inflated the revenue for government.

When we discovered the misclassification, we had the discussion with Treasury and then it was reclassified in the right way, and that's when it created actually a decrease of the revenue for government. If you picture the tax which is a revenue that we pay to government, the overall tax number was correct but the current tax, which is what's coming in the forward estimates, was inflated. The deferred tax which comes in future periods was reduced. That's what happened, and then we corrected the error and consequently the revenue from government decreased.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I just wanted to pick up on the issue of the annual report. My understanding is that it was due at the end of November but it was released on 25 February, which is sort of a three-month delay. That might be a matter for the Minister rather than yourself.

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes, it's a matter for the Minister. We submitted the annual report by the deadline, but we have to submit it to the Minister.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And is it your understanding—and I appreciate if you can't answer this—that dealing with that sort of accounting error might have been a reason for the delay? Or is that not something you're able to answer?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** That's a question for the Minister and the Treasurer.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's fine. In relation to the IPART determination for stormwater costs at the Mamre Road precinct, are you able to tell me how the costs compare to other similar precinct developments in terms of stormwater management?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes, I am, even if this scheme is very special in the sense that usually when we talk about stormwater in New South Wales, and most commonly actually across Australia, we're talking about stormwater that are on-lot stormwater. So it means that a commercial customer, a warehouse for example, on their lot will have to use part of their land to construct a basin to store the stormwater, and that's usually what we consider as a typical scheme. Mamre Road is actually very different. The idea behind Mamre Road was to say, well, actually there is a better way to use the land and instead of having a basin on each piece of land, it's probably better to have a number of basins that would be shared between the different landowners. That's a way to have more land for development. It's beneficial for the developers, but at the same time it creates a situation where they have to contribute to the assets that are shared between all the landowners.

That's exactly what's happened at Mamre Road. The cost that we've got, which is currently the infrastructure contribution, let's call it \$850,000 per hectare in 2024 costs. You would compare that to a typical on-lot scheme. That would be probably between, let's say, \$600,000, \$800,000 or \$900,000—meaning about the

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same cost. But on an on-lot solution, you don't have as much land to develop. When you look at it from a community perspective, you're giving more land to develop for commercial activity and it's costing sometimes slightly more but, more or less, the same cost. Overall, there are a lot of benefits to doing things that way.

**The CHAIR:** I might come back to Dr Wright and Dr Flynn, please. I had questions this morning about the declaration of private hospitals for involuntary mental health care. I interrupted you to focus the Minister on the conflict of interest issue. Could you detail now the other considerations that you're making in that regard?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** I think we were talking about some of the governance processes. Particularly what this contingency is about is that, in the event of a loss of bed capacity in our system, the purchase of private beds, including declared private beds from the private sector, is something that we want to have available. But it's not about initiating referrals from within the private system; it's about initiating referrals from our system. It would be a referral done via one of our psychiatrists. The governance of that would mean that there's an expectation of ongoing monitoring of that person's progress, and agreements around the duration, the treatment, managing the outcomes and, quite often, a transfer back into the public system when the bed becomes available.

The other comment that I would make is that anybody who is an involuntary patient, in any part of our system, whether it's the public or the private, would be under the jurisdiction of the Mental Health Review Tribunal which, as you know, is an independent organisation that monitors the appropriateness of care for those individuals. We have, we believe, both from within our system and outside of the system, checks and balances to ensure that the treatment decisions are in the best interests of the consumer.

**The CHAIR:** You mentioned in that answer the ongoing monitoring of someone after they'd been transferred to a private facility. What does that involve? What powers does the public system retain?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** I think there will be a contract at the back of it. It's about active contract management across the whole system. But there would also be a treating team that would have had some involvement with the individual from the public system. Our expectation is that they maintain contact with the treating team within the private system. It's not a one-way street. Ideally, if those two systems work effectively together, there's movement backwards and forwards, and there's communication between the treating teams backwards and forwards.

Occasionally it's possible that the transfer into the private system turns out to be less than ideal, so then the option would be for that person to move back into the public system. We would totally expect very, very detailed communication—especially if we were rolling this out for the first time—between the respective services. We've had conversations with our directors of mental health and our clinical directors about ensuring that, for those who have private facilities who've shown an interest in this, they are having very, very active conversations with them about what these arrangements might look like.

**The CHAIR:** For those private facilities that you're saying have shown an interest in this, what confidence do you have in their staffing, expertise and experience in looking after involuntary patients—not just psychiatrists but the whole team? It's obviously a very different style of delivering care.

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** The point I would make is that the process to pass muster with the licensing authority and to have a sufficient degree of comfort on both sides is that there are quite a few hurdles to overcome. There's quite a significant due diligence on our part. That can involve doing site visits and having detailed conversations—a bit like mini accreditation visits—to ensure that the built environment is adequate and that the staffing levels, the skill set and the responses to clinical deterioration are appropriate, and also the processes to escalate and to re-engage with the public system if that was necessary. We would expect our clinicians and our senior managers to be very, very closely involved in making sure that was suitable.

Overall the point I would make is that in other jurisdictions this is not an unknown thing. There are other States in Australia where private facilities do actually have people who are under the Mental Health Act. Some of those organisations also have private facilities in New South Wales, so it's not like they have no experience at a national level. Essentially, some private facilities have shown an interest and others have not. That's a reflection of their sense of readiness and whether they've got the appropriate facilities.

**The CHAIR:** As part of the work that you're undertaking at the moment in terms of due diligence, has any external consultation happened in terms of understanding what people with lived experience or their families might need from a private facility being used for this context?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** I don't think we've even got to the point of a firm proposal from any of the facilities that they're ready to go. The point at which there would be inclusion of a broader consultation would be if there was a readiness to go. We've been talking about it for a couple of months. It is not fast, and I don't want it to be fast. I think it's a very, very detailed, thoughtful process. I think that once there is a level of comfort from

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both the provider and also from us—the purchaser, if you like—then that would be a time to develop the clinical pathways, which would include consultation with consumers.

**The CHAIR:** I've also got some questions about the virtual care hub that I understand was set up as part of the contingency planning for the resignation of the psychiatrists to give decision-makers a view of system needs. How does that care model actually work in practice?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Can I just check if the question is about the virtual psychiatry hubs?

**The CHAIR:** The information that's publicly available about both and either is actually unclear about what the distinction is between those two things. There is a lot of information provided about virtual hubs that were not for clinical care around January, if I recall correctly. Please correct me if I'm wrong. I understand that there are also hospitals being provided virtual psychiatry services. One of my questions was whether or not this is even a clinical care model, so I think your question is actually getting to answering that.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I'm happy to answer that. NSW Health has a lot of virtual models across general health and across mental health, and has had for many years. Perhaps what has been mentioned in the media is specifically the virtual psychiatry hubs that have been stood up specifically in response to the issues with the psychiatric workforce late last year and early this year. I'm happy to describe that and, if it's not answering, please let me know. The issue is the potential lack of senior clinical decision-makers, particularly in metropolitan areas, should this resignation action eventuate in more actual resignations or places now where there is a relative diminishing in the number of consultant psychiatrists and where that has not been able to be filled by locums.

There are some districts that have signed on to this model. The model, the way that it works is it's hosted by both Western New South Wales and Hunter New England local health districts, which were chosen because they've really got a lot of experience and expertise in delivering virtual mental health assessments and decision-making across large parts of the State. They also have the technical infrastructure set up to be able to do it. This hub and those two districts as a part of it host a statewide model. I'd have to take on notice the exact number, but I believe it has employed somewhere between six to eight VMOs who, I understand, are all locums—sorry, are all VMOs who have not previously worked in New South Wales. When I say "locum", they're on a VMO determination as I understand it.

The usefulness is that, if there are services where there is a senior decision-making capacity that's not there or is diminished, the psychiatrist can speak to—it's generally clinician to clinician. For example, it would help an emergency department, a nursing staff member, occupational therapists, a psychiatry registrar who needs to discuss a consumer with a psychiatrist but might not have access to that locally. It's not a replacement for in-person psychiatry coverage, but it's largely being used for clinician-to-clinician advice. My view—and many people share this view—is that, in a distributed State, in a networked service that we have, it's actually a direction that we should be moving in in any case because we have a very—whether or not they're currently public or currently private or currently elsewhere employed, most of our psychiatrists in New South Wales live in Sydney and, obviously, the need is geographically across the State.

We're not saying it's going to replace face-to-face psychiatric care, but it is a really good measure in providing that capacity if it's not available. It's a contingency plan, but it is something that strikes me as something that potentially could be quite useful. We're also very interested in looking at this model to make the lives of our existing staff specialists and hopefully future staff specialists much more satisfied and keener to stay with our services by using the model to mitigate some of the on-call demands. When you talk to psychiatrists around New South Wales who have been or are still in staff specialist roles, one of the things that is the most challenging is the very high volume of calls out of hours for making decisions about consumers, usually in an emergency department. We're very interested in exploring this model as a way to offset and to mitigate what has been a longstanding concern of our staff specialist psychiatrist group.

**The CHAIR:** What is the feedback you've received so far from hospitals that have accessed the virtual model?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** It's early days. There were some teething issues that I'm aware of at one district in Sydney and I think the issue was a technical one. What I have heard—although there may be others who have more details around it—is that there were ED department mental health clinicians who were having trouble accessing the hub because it was apparently reliant on one phone or one phone number. I'm happy to get back to the Committee if any further information is needed, but I understand that issue has been sorted. So there was some difficulty initially in accessing. There was also some—it's a brand-new model, literally weeks old, that has been stood up in the middle of a significant workforce issue so it's not unexpected. There are early concerns, but it is now very clear that that service can see consumers who are involuntary, can see consumers who are voluntary and

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is predominantly based towards giving other mental health clinicians or general health clinicians clinician-to-clinician advice.

**The CHAIR:** It's heartening to hear you say that it's not intended to replace a psychiatrist in person or seeing a patient directly. There are obviously areas at the moment in the crisis that you're in where there isn't a service onsite now and this sounds like mostly a secondary consultation type of service. Certainly as a former clinician, I appreciate there are many cases where that's a useful tool. But in terms of the consumers and their families and the clinicians who are accessing this, have there been any issues where a secondary consultation is not appropriate? What then happens if a patient actually needs to be assessed directly by a psychiatrist?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** In that case, they would be, and that's where our locum psychiatric workforce comes in. The virtual psychiatry hub is a part of the issue, and it's trying to address the concerns around other clinicians having a psychiatrist to speak to, to escalate clinical issues. But it is not directly seeing consumers, for example, in a unit or a more complex consumer in an ED who may need that, where that service is provided by psychiatrists in person. If there has been a localised workforce shortage because of the industrial issues, then that is usually supplied, at the moment, by a locum psychiatrist, which we hope is a temporary solution.

**The CHAIR:** I've also got some follow-up questions. We had a discussion this morning around the impact of the resignation on psychiatric registrars in particular. I've got some questions where the answers are going to be numbers, so I appreciate they may need to be taken on notice. I'm interested in the number of advanced trainees who have completed their fellowship in the last few years and how many of those were successfully recruited into staff specialist positions. I think we'd all agree there's a goal to retain these people in the public health system.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** We definitely would agree.

**The CHAIR:** How many of them are still here?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I'd agree with you—that's a goal. I'm not sure if you've got any different information, Murray, but I suspect we'd need to take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** To clarify, I'm interested in the number of recent fellows, say, in the past three years, that were subsequently recruited as staff specialists and how many of those are still here working for NSW Health.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes, that's fine.

**The CHAIR:** I've also got some more questions coming out of the community mental health inquiry that this Committee undertook last year. There was a recommendation around data collection and information sharing, and in the Government's response it said that NSW Health was finalising technical work for the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to support the regular sharing of aggregated State and national mental health services data.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Can you give an update on what has been done?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I would have to take that on notice because the data management falls outside of the mental health branch. But we're very happy to get back to you around that.

**The CHAIR:** I have a follow-up question that I imagine will be sent to the same person. Particularly with the question of data, there's public data that would be held by NSW Health in terms of mental health but also a significant amount of data from community managed organisations, because they're providing a large quantity of care in New South Wales. I understand that their databases generally don't interface with other systems, including the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data. The second question is whether there's any work underway to ensure that data from those community managed organisations can be unified in whatever work is being done.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I do recall—and you can correct me if I'm wrong—the Mental Health Coordinating Council giving evidence to that effect at the inquiry and concerns around non-government data sharing. I would have to take that on notice and am very happy to get back to the Committee around progress against that recommendation.

**The CHAIR:** I've got a couple more questions that I anticipate you won't be able to answer off the top of your head, so please feel free to take them on notice. Are you collecting or aggregating any data around length of stay in ED for psychiatric patients?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes, we have live real-time data on length of stay for all patients who present to an emergency department. That includes people who are either initially or subsequently, during their stay in

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emergency, found to have a what would be primarily determined as a mental health presentation, noting that sometimes that's, as you know, unclear initially. We do collect length-of-stay data. Again, I'm not sure if it's pertinent to your question, but one of the things we are very interested in, in the middle of the contingencies that NSW Health has had to stand up, is whether or not there's any indication of data performance dropping off. We have not seen that statewide, which has been heartening.

**The CHAIR:** Are you able to provide that data to the Committee?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I would be able to provide that on notice, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I appreciate you taking that on notice. Rather than jump to a whole different portfolio, I might go back to the Opposition.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Mr Cleary, I'm interested in the consultancy spend of Hunter Water. Looking at your annual report, it seems like Hunter Water spends a bit in excess of \$15.2 million per year on consultancies. Is that correct?

**DARREN CLEARY:** That was the number for last year. It's important to point out, in terms of the reporting, there was a change in how we've been reporting our consultant spend. For last financial year, we included in that reporting not only consultant spend from our operating budget but also relating to capital works, and that's why there has been a material change in the numbers that we've been reporting. That's following Treasury guidance. There are new guidelines out, so we've undertaken reporting which, for last financial year, was optional, but it will be mandatory for this financial year.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How many users does Hunter Water have?

**DARREN CLEARY:** How many customers?

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Yes.

**DARREN CLEARY:** It's 270,000. That's properties, but 600,000 people is the population we service.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to that consultancy spend of \$15.2 million, you're saying the increase on the previous year was as a result of those Treasury changes. Is that correct?

**DARREN CLEARY:** Correct. From an operating cost perspective, it's roughly in line with what we'd seen in previous years.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** What were some of those ones that were now captured—those consultancy spends, perhaps in excess of \$50,000—that weren't captured previously?

**DARREN CLEARY:** For example, we had a Belmont desalination project that was going through the design phase. There are components of that design work which are considered advisory. One example would be advice we had regarding our planning approval, and it's actually a requirement of that process that we get independent advice on some of those matters. We've had work on dam safety that we were undertaking, and that required independent expert review. That was included. There's a range, but the advisory nature of some of those engagements were along those lines. Often it's either seeking expert advice interfacing with a regulatory matter, or it's getting expert advice from technical experts in preparing our designs to go to market.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Mr Cheroux, with respect to Sydney Water, on consultancy as well, I noticed yours was considerably lower, at about \$1.13 million overall for consultancies. Had you implemented the same changes, in terms of Treasury guidelines, for recognising consultancies in infrastructure?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes, the guidelines are the same.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** So you're implementing the same guidelines, are you?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** So, effectively, it's comparing apples with apples when you're looking at consultancy spends.

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I would think so, because the guidelines are the same. We've not exchanged notes with Hunter Water and compared what we put into these numbers.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How many customers does Sydney Water have?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** It's about 5.4 million.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** We'll finish with Water and come back to Housing now. Ms Pinkstone, with respect to the budget allocations when it comes to social housing in New South Wales, the Department of

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Communities and Justice or Homes NSW was allocated \$1 billion for this financial year in the budget. I'm just wondering, to the mid-year point—saying we're at mid-year estimates—how much of that has been spent to that point?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I'll take the exact number on notice. That budget is for homelessness projects, new supply and also upgrades to our properties. It's the full suite. I can take the exact budget allocation from, say, December, and I can get that number back for you.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** We're in this position where we have Homes NSW as the umbrella but we still have the Land and Housing Corporation and we still have the Aboriginal Housing Office operating. How is that working within the organisation? What are the discrete roles for each of the organisations, with Homes NSW now being in a position, as well, to outlay capital and the like to build homes?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We also have another statutory authority, the Teacher Housing Authority, as well. We have three separate entities that deliver housing. Now we have the ability, with the legislative change, for DCJ to also have that capacity. We operate, essentially, under one division within DCJ. Broadly, the Housing portfolio team that were called the Land and Housing Corporation before are responsible for maintaining public housing properties and building new public housing properties. The AHO do the same for Aboriginal community controlled housing and Teacher Housing Authority for teachers' housing. Now we have the capacity to bring that money through to DCJ to look more holistically at some of the partnership projects that we have in place with community housing providers and also the development industry around large-scale redevelopment as well.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** That's a very good segue there because my next question is, in terms of that budget allocation, is it correct that 30 per cent is earmarked for the community housing sector?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** At the moment, the sector comprises about 30 per cent of the system in New South Wales, but we're looking to exceed that in our partnership approach because we need to also take into account the fact that we have Commonwealth funding coming through, and that's largely through the sector. So I anticipate it will be larger than 30 per cent by the end of the program.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In terms of that funding, how will that be provided to the community housing sector? Will that be through grants, land transfers or tenders for managing properties that are built by New South Wales government agencies? Or all of the above?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** All of the above, really. Yes, absolutely. There'll be a number of pathways to deliver those partnership projects. Some of the larger scale developments will be in partnership with developers. Community housing providers will have a role there as take-out parties of the social and affordable housing in those developments. There'll be a number that Land and Housing Corporation or the Housing portfolio deliver themselves. They will be managed as public housing, but there'll also be the capacity for smaller organisations that perhaps don't have the development expertise to become take-out partners in that. So there's a variety of mechanisms. We also have a grant approach that can help smaller organisations that are bringing land to the table, to do new developments for social and affordable housing. The scale is such that we need to have all of those levers. We need to engage organisations of different sizes in that program as well.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** What outreach have you had so far in terms of community housing providers in working how this delivery will look over the next four years?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We've had significant engagement with the sector around the development of our program. They've also provided written advice to us about the learnings from other past programs and how we could improve. Most recently, we've been in tender negotiations around projects that the State has put up under the housing affordability future fund, so significant engagement with that part of the industry to make sure that they're ready to take up the opportunities. Obviously a big part of that falls on Homes NSW. We have access to a lot of land and we have a lot of ageing properties, so we want to work with the sector to revitalise that portfolio. They'll have different roles depending on their scale and size.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to the land audit and—we were talking about dibs before, first dibs for Homes NSW. With respect to those properties that you do manage and as a result of the land audit, will community housing providers have any role, potentially, in the management of those properties?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Absolutely. We're being quite strategic about the land audit sites. As you know, the major issue for us when we're trying to redevelop a portfolio is where we relocate residents to. We're trying to identify land audit sites that strategically help us unlock our own portfolio for redevelopment. A number of those sites are of such scale that they would warrant social housing, affordable housing and market housing on the site. That's definitely the pathway: to partner with community housing providers so they can bring that external capital into the project and work with us on that site.

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**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** As close as you can to the present, what's the current number of social homes in New South Wales?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I've got that data for you. The 2023-24 figure was 155,905, and that includes public and community housing and Aboriginal housing.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Do you have figures on how much of that total is currently inhabited?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Not at the social housing level across all of those categories. For those that are public housing—let me just look at that for you.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** What is the public housing number?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I have it here somewhere. Our occupancy rate at the moment is 97.2 per cent, and I can get you the exact numbers on notice.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** That would be great. What's the status of that 2.8 per cent? Do you have a breakdown in terms of how much of that is being repaired, being refurbished or being identified to be demolished, for instance?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can get that breakdown for you.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** That would be good—and otherwise vacant, of course. The budget announcement is that there is \$5.1 billion to provide 8,400 new social homes. That still remains the number?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Yes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** At the end of that period, what's the projected number of social homes in New South Wales? I imagine that some of that figure will be replacing stock as well.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can get that as a proportion of our entire portfolio. The main issue at the moment is that we will be going out to tender for those sites. The breakdown between community housing versus public housing—I'll have to take that on notice. It would be a modelled number; it wouldn't be a reality number. But I can certainly get that for you on the model.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In terms of that profile—I know the Minister made mention in terms of the Argyll Estate and reduction of bedrooms and the like. Have you got any modelling in terms of the number of bedrooms we currently have, and how many there will be at the completion of that period?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We will preference smaller dwellings. A number of those sites that we've earmarked for redevelopment take ageing stock and larger properties, and then we're creating residential flat buildings on those. I can get that for you at a broad number of what we're aiming for.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How many development applications have been submitted for new social housing properties since 1 September 2024?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can get that for you. Some of those, as you're aware, we have self-approval powers, so I can get that breakdown.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** That was going to be another question. Since you've had those self-approval powers, how many properties have you approved using those powers?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can get that for you.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** I might put that one on notice more specifically in the breakdown, and also for the Land and Housing Corporation Aboriginal Housing Office as well, with those self-assessment powers. I'll return to the questions I asked the Minister with respect to the land audit and those sites, noting that several of those sites were vacant blocks of land. I take the Minister's rationale. They didn't have enough bang for buck—I think that was her assessment. Some of those sites, however—I think the ones that were on Lilyfield Road, Rozelle, were actual terrace houses. Why was it determined not to take those properties?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I suppose our strategy, as the Minister said, is how can we maximise the amount of housing that we have for the budget allocation?

Rather than just purchasing sites or smaller sets of dwellings, the way that we can do that is through larger scale redevelopments and also ensuring that the housing is fit for purpose. For us, it's always a value-for-money question: Where should we spend that money? I know that it can give an immediate response but, for us, us constructing those new homes on our property is usually the most cost-efficient way.

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**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** I take it that there is a financial equation that is at play here as well? To buy it—I shouldn't say "buy"—you would need to transfer money from Homes NSW to Property and Development NSW in order to secure those sites?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Yes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** It's not necessarily a free property, so to speak?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No, we have to purchase those sites.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In the process of purchase, I take it that is with a valuation from the Valuer General?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's exactly right.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Great. With respect to some of the other properties that have been identified as part of the Building Homes for NSW program in Rydalmere and the rezoning initiative there, there is a fairly large bang-for-buck site at 26 Kissing Point Road and 266 Victoria Road in Rydalmere. On 1 December 2024 there was a media release from Minister Kamper. The Minister wasn't on that release. Just to clarify, is that a Homes NSW project?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No, not at this stage.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Has Homes NSW been in discussions about that project at all?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to the Telopea "Three Sisters" site, how many residents so far have moved into the Wade Street towers?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** They are still undergoing a refurbishment and getting ready. There are no tenants on site at the moment.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** What's the target in terms of the number of tenants able to move into the property?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Across that area, there are 148 homes in the Wade Street towers. We are looking to get them online as quickly as possible.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Do you have a target date in terms of when you will be able to welcome tenants back in?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** At the moment, we are looking at the end of this year—as quickly as possible.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How much is budgeted in terms of the renovations there?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can get that for you on notice.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In terms of that renovation and that use, is it the intention that the towers will remain as is or is there further consideration of development on that site for further public housing usage?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** The whole site is subject to a master planning process. At the moment, my priority is getting them upgraded and refurbished to move people back in. Then there is the broader work within Telopea in terms of planning. We are proceeding to do that within Homes NSW. But at the moment the real focus for me is those 148 and getting people into those vacant homes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to the agreement to dissolve the partnership with Frasers Property Australia when it came to the Telopea urban renewal project in October 2024, was there any compensation paid by either party as a result of that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In terms of the assessment the department does, how many new public—I think the Minister mentioned a target of 850 this year—houses are there?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Eight hundred and twenty-four this year, yes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Eight hundred and twenty-four this year. Is that public housing rather than social housing?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's all housing combined.

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**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** What was the figure for the last financial year?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can get that for you on notice. Sorry, I can't find it here.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Of the 824 for all housing, what is the breakdown for public and other housing—for want of a better word? I am happy for you to enlighten me as to what it should be.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Public housing is right. I'll take that on notice. At the moment, the target within that for Aboriginal housing is 165 homes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to page 2-9 of the Infrastructure Statement, it states under LAHC capital maintenance:

\$700.0 million of this—

being the \$1.3 billion for maintenance—

will be met from proceeds of land transfers from Homes NSW in the Department of Communities and Justice, sourced from the \$4.0 billion new funding for new social housing.

Can you explain how this process will work in terms of meeting those budgetary inputs from those transfers?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's the reason that the legislative change was brought through. The funding is going to DCJ but in effect, because Land and Housing Corporation as an entity is separate, we need to be transferring it to that entity. That picks up on those issues you referenced about different statutory agencies within DCJ.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** It's not in terms of any sales that will be funding that maintenance for the LAHC?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Technically it is a sale transfer, but in practice—

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** It's an internal transfer and nothing is actually moving?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right. It operates in the same way as between other government agencies.

**The CHAIR:** Before I come back to the Advocate for Children and Young People, I had one more question for Dr Wright and Dr Flynn. In our last discussion, you mentioned the pilot of redesigning after-hours work for staff specialists. I understand that the staff specialist psychiatry pilot was part of an offer that was made by the Government in the negotiations with ASMOF and the college of psychiatrists. Were there other aspects of that pilot that have proceeded?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Thanks for the question. All of the aspects that were related and are related to reducing on-call burden are very reliant on a piece of work called the Psychiatry Workforce Plan. It's now four to five years old, and it has been refreshed last year. That is being developed with input from the college; with input, from memory, from ASMOF; and certainly with input from multiple psychiatrists. I'd have to go back and take on notice what may have been part of the Government's position for an efficiency package. I certainly would say that we are very interested in making that role, separate to whatever happens at the IRC, a much more attractive role to improve recruitment and improve retention.

Some of that is, in our view, trying to support people in terms of making sure that the psychiatrists' time is used most appropriately and that their expertise is used in a way that is not duplicating the clinical roles of others and is actually trying to make the day-to-day life of a consultant psychiatrist in the system much more attractive to improve what has been a long-term vacancy rate. Certainly that includes on-call, but it also includes what lots of our psychiatric colleagues tell us, which is that the nature of the role is being asked to independently see every consumer when sometimes that's not required and often to work at times with little administration support. There are things that we can do around that. They are the sort of things that we are very interested in doing to build a robust workforce, noting, of course, that the wage policy is for Government.

In terms of what the system needs, we're very keen to design a role that is attractive and really becomes— we can't compete with a lot of the private remuneration that's out there, so what we want to be able to do is say, "This is a role where your expertise will be valued. You won't be on call 24/7. You will have the opportunity to work in a multidisciplinary team. Your expertise, as well as that of your colleagues, will be used throughout its full scope." It's a significant piece of work, but it's something we're very, very interested in doing. And it's a part of what we've been trying to communicate for many months now, which is that the role of the psychiatrist is and will remain central to mental health provision in this State and none of the mental health clinical roles are interchangeable. They're complementary, so we'd like to see all of our clinicians be able to operate through their full scope, appropriately supervised and feeling well supported in the work that they do.

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**The CHAIR:** Is my understanding correct from that answer, then, that there's a substantial part of that productivity and efficiency proposal pilot—whatever you want to call it—that is actually progressing alongside, or despite, the wage negotiations?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Separate to the wage negotiations, there are multiple things that we are looking at. We have had to look at contingency plans. We didn't ask the psychiatrists involved to leave. I understand many, many psychiatrists in New South Wales have had to make difficult decisions—difficult decisions to leave or difficult decisions to stay—and we recognise that and we acknowledge that. But we emphasise that there are things we want to do to improve the role itself to make it more attractive, and that's a separate issue to the IRC because, as many of our colleagues involved in this action would say, it's not about money. That's often said, and if that's the case, what it really becomes about is designing a role that optimises our services and gives the community the care that they need and deserve.

**The CHAIR:** Are you able to get back to us on notice with some of the detail of that?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Around what, sorry?

**The CHAIR:** Around some of the detail of that.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes, certainly I can. Around anything that was offered in terms of an efficiency pilot?

**The CHAIR:** Yes. You hesitated in my first question, presumably because of the current IRC negotiations. But I'm trying to separate those two things and understand the work that is being done alongside it.

**SUSAN PEARCE:** If I may, Chair, the workforce action plan that Dr Wright and Dr Flynn have been engaged in can provide quite a bit of detail to you on those very issues that were underway before the industrial process commenced.

**The CHAIR:** Sure. But when you say "underway before the process commenced", I understand there was a specific productivity and efficiency pilot that was offered as part of the negotiations. I'm interested in those particular offers.

**SUSAN PEARCE:** Some of those things from that plan, though, got picked up in that, so there's some overlap between the two things.

**The CHAIR:** I might come across to the Advocate. You would have heard the discussion this morning with the Minister about trying to include a larger and broader range of young people's voices speaking directly to government. With your existing expertise in doing that kind of work or facilitating that kind of work, what would your recommendations be about how to do that on a larger scale moving forward?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** Firstly, to note that the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People—our age limit is zero to 24, and that's very different to some of the other commissioners in other States in terms of age ranges. There are over 2.5 million children and young people in that range. Making sure that you are doing parts that children and young people can engage in regularly is obviously very important. Since the office and certainly the things to highlight—during that time, for example during COVID, we were doing two-week surveys with children and young people to understand how they were faring during that time, and that material was provided directly to the Secretaries Board for people to understand and agencies to understand what was going on. There are consistent ways that the office itself has been engaging with children and young people.

In saying that, they themselves will be very clear about how they want to receive information and who best to receive that information from, for example. In the last strategic plan tracking report, they talked about having great trust with their peers, and we've also seen that increase in terms of the adults in their lives. They talk more about receiving information from peer to peer and then also the trusted adults in their space as well. They have specifically said to us, unsurprisingly, that government websites or apps are not something that feature in terms of where they would go for information, and we've seen that as well in terms of COVID and in, for example, the work we've done in disaster recovery about making sure you're using the platforms that young people are on. That also becomes complex when you can't access that under the age of 16 and all of that kind of stuff. There is some complexity around that. The key thing that they'll say is "Meet us where we are."

That means that it can't just be a government website; it can't just be one agency doing it. It means that you have to have a consistent plan about being in those places and having those conversations repeatedly with children and young people, and not waiting for young people to come to you to raise those conversations. I think that's a really key thing. Just because we have an agency—and I reflect on this as the Advocate—that doesn't mean that that creates a space for children or young people to walk into; you still have to go to them to ask them about the things that matter to them. That's why, as an office, we're consistently doing that polling every year for the

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strategic plan, the work we did throughout COVID, but also the Youth Week survey, to make sure that there is consistent tracking of children and young people's sentiment.

Then, if there's something particular going on that we need to talk to children and young people about, we're doing it in a way that means we're going out and having cost-of-living conversations where they are and having those qualitative conversations as well. I don't think, from my experience, and having this role for six years now, that there is one way that you can do this. I think you have to engage where children and young people are. That's in social media and it's also in a number of places, and you have to use the avenues that they say they trust. That means peer to peer and also the trusted adults in their life.

**The CHAIR:** You mentioned the children and young people who are outside of your statutory age range. Do you see any particular barriers or opportunities to engage those young people in whatever new agency is created?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** I think there is a particular interest in ensuring that that range—that is, 24 to 30—is particularly engaged. I'm not suggesting that ACYP should be doing that as well. I think we are fairly stretched as it is. But people are experiencing things like cost of living very differently, so making sure that if that is still the number one issue—and it is in the latest Youth Week poll, which isn't out yet. I'm sharing with you information that you will all receive soon enough. Cost of living still presents as the number one thing, so that means you need to be making sure that you're dealing with that for the age groups and where it's hitting differently. Interestingly, that is also being reflected in the younger age group. Younger people are talking about cost of living among 15- and 16-year-olds. That's why I think it's important to have an age range. Where it becomes difficult is when there are legislative changes or policy reforms that divide those groups. So you see 0 to 12, 12 to 18, and 18 and above. That is where, for contracting and other things, it becomes really difficult with different conversations, because somehow you're dividing a group where, globally, if you're under 18 you're a child, but we now have children and young people, so it just gets a bit more complex in that space.

**The CHAIR:** You provided a fair bit of detail this morning about the work that went into the special inquiry into alternative care arrangements. I want to ask a similar question around the work that you've done on vaping. I understand you were part of an inter-agency panel and provided some advice to the Ministry of Health and the Department of Education. Can you share with the Committee the process at the back end for you that leads up to that process and the work that you actually did to engage young people?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** It was something that I would say was underway in the thinking of many places, and then that conversation started to happen where children and young people—obviously it's recognised as being one of the biggest issues they're facing. I would not say that our office was the first port of call, but when we came into it, it was very clear that we were needing to work very closely with all of the people that were doing that work, and that includes the Cancer Institute, Health and schools. That was one of those examples where we hadn't done qualitative work, so we immediately went out to schools and sat with young people and asked them about their experience. It gave us a really great opportunity to test some of the ideas government had at that stage with children and young people in terms of potential solutions.

It was a parallel process to things that were going on, but we then had young people who assisted in designing the health messaging that went out and also provided input into the app that is to be launched soon. I feel like I have an invitation to attend that, so it must be soon. Young people have now consistently engaged in that process. We sit on the steering committees and all of the government mechanisms, but young people have provided some really great insight into that, as well as that young person attending the in-camera session and sharing with a committee their very real experience of their three-year addiction to vaping, providing some amazing insights into that—which could only happen if it was done in camera, because they didn't feel comfortable sharing that very publicly.

**The CHAIR:** I also understand you've done a lot of place-based work, most recently specifically in the Northern Rivers. How did you go about establishing that as a need or that that would be the location for this kind of work?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** In 2021, when I first took on this job, there were bushfires. That was when we first did the report on the voices of children and young people in disaster. We specifically included a variety of things, not just those bushfires—but obviously that had been what happened—but drought-affected areas and flood-affected areas. In that, we heard specifically from children and the community that they wanted place-based responses for them as individuals and their experience of what they had gone through, but also that that needed to be embedded in the community and be consistent, and not that "go in for three months and hope that that helps in a school and then come back out."

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When what happened in 2022 happened, we worked very closely with Resilience—as it was then known—and the Commonwealth to identify that young people needed a different response. I think at that stage there were six pillars. They were things like infrastructure and health but there wasn't one specifically referring to the needs of young people so, together with our friends at Resilience, we worked very hard. We got that joint funding between the Commonwealth and the State. We also made a conscious decision to make sure the people we employed were people who lived in that community so that we didn't just have people who were coming from Sydney going into the community. We wanted to employ people who lived and worked in that community, which has its complexities as well.

They started three years ago, I think—maybe two years ago. They were going to be based in schools but then schools said to us, "We are okay with the kids here, so we want to take care of them." That's when we went to the pod villages. The numbers of pod villages—there were, at this stage, over 300 children and young people who were living in pod villages throughout that period of time. That has obviously gone down. That was about making sure that we spoke to them and met their needs. We had a round table with those young people. We invited Ministers in to hear directly from young people about their experiences but, importantly, their ideas as to what should happen next.

That team remained on the ground providing, I suppose, a form of case management for those young people who had specific needs to make sure we were connecting them in with the services that they needed at that time. That service now finishes on 31 March this year. We're in the process of winding that up and making sure those young people are being supported in community by other services. We were actually there two weeks ago as part of the Advocate's tour. Communities and schools had asked us to come back into that. That was just as the cyclone was hitting. We sat with children and young people and had very different conversations as well at that stage. That was unexpected, obviously. You could see that there was obviously still a clear need about their own feelings of what they wanted in that moment.

**The CHAIR:** Given that the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events is increasing with climate change, what aspects of the work that you did in the Northern Rivers do you see as replicable in other contexts, and what parts of that were unique?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** I'd like to think a core of it is obviously the community-led response, and community-based response is so very important. I think some of, to their credit, the legacy pieces of what's happened as a result of the team being on the ground is we've now helped Ballina shire to come up with its own response in terms of specifically for youth—making sure the youth voice is on that space, which I think is amazing. I think the things that are easily—that government should take on board is those things in terms of the systems responses that we do—for example, the payments that are coming out right now. There are things we know about people under the age of 18 who might be living independently that can make it difficult for them to access those payments. Things that we've learnt about the structure of our responses are things that I think Government is doing a very good job, I should say, of taking some of those on board.

I think the difficulty is obviously every community has its uniqueness as well, and the things that they're doing in response to the things that might be impacting on them. In bushfires—for example, down south—the things that they were focused on was Aboriginal-led environmental care responses, and they really invested in that. I'm not saying that hasn't happened in the Northern Rivers, but it's a different response when you're looking at bushfire regeneration versus a flood response. The flip side is also that young people helped design the library as it was rebuilt, so there's a youth corner that exists in Lismore Library that didn't exist before. That was because young people were engaged in that process and feel like they can own that space. I think there are core system things that can be rolled out broadly in response to disaster that children and young people need. But then I think you also have to respond to the needs of that community and what the children and young people are specifically asking for in that moment too.

**The CHAIR:** That's very helpful. I might come back to Ms Pearce just for a moment because you mentioned the vaping app. Is there news or progress on this?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** I'd be very happy to report on that—perhaps at a later time, noting that it's new. I think, again, it's something we're doing along with our partners in this regard, noting the seriousness with which our whole organisation treats the vaping scourge that is in society. But, yes, I'd be very happy to provide you some more advice on that, Dr Cohn.

**The CHAIR:** I'd also be interested in any feedback or evaluation on the public health messaging that has gone out so far with regard to vaping—for young people but also for the broader population.

**SUSAN PEARCE:** As Ms Robinson said, it is clear that getting those messages right for young people is something that we're also focused on—about how we best communicate with them, noting that government

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sources aren't their favourite place necessarily. We've certainly been looking at our social media activities around that, in addition to, obviously, all of the other work we do around vaping every single day out there, trying to get them off the streets.

**The CHAIR:** I'm interested to understand, since the ban on social media for young people, what kind of avenues are being looked at. How is that public health messaging being targeted to try to meet its audience? Is your nodding taking that on notice?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** Yes, thank you. Sorry, I've become non-verbal as the day has gone on.

**The CHAIR:** That's all right. I've got to clarify for Hansard, because the transcript doesn't show the nodding.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Pearce, I wanted to ask about contingency planning in terms of the psychiatrist workforce. I appreciate the Minister gave evidence earlier about the IRC with the industrial relations processes. But from your agency's perspective, what else are you doing in terms of contingency planning? I know you can't hypothesise on what the outcome will be of the industrial process, but is there any more information you can give us about what else is being done to prepare for if some of those 100 pending resignations become real? What other work are you doing?

**SUSAN PEARCE:** Yes, happy to respond to that. I think we've talked about virtual today, so I won't go over that. I will make it clear, though, that that is just one element. Again, to restate the point that we are never seeking to replace human-to-human contact with virtual mediums—but that does play a very important part of our health system and it will into the future. We have a range of things. The locum work that we've done to attract locums for deployment has been part of it. Again, we're not seeking to have a locum-ised—if that's a word—workforce in psychiatry. But locums play a very important part in our system each and every day in many specialities.

We've advertised for psychiatrists both here and overseas, noting that, through the work that I've also been doing along with my colleagues across the country with the Health Workforce Taskforce, there is an expedited pathway for psychiatrists from the UK in particular into the country that opened up in December last year. Again, none of these are designed to be a silver bullet. I'll state again: I have personally written to our staff specialist psychiatrists three times. I've met with representatives. We've asked them please not to proceed with resignations and to stay with us while we work through this through the appropriate process and it has been very pleasing for us that the great majority of those people have hung in there with us. I think that's important to note, as Dr Flynn and Dr Wright have already touched on.

The redesign piece I do want to touch on. Again, it's very important for me to state on the public record that this is not designed to replace psychiatrists. Psychiatrists have a role, will always have a role, in the New South Wales public health system. That is very important. We've made this clear to them in our communication. I have personally addressed the nurses' association head office and made it very clear to them that we will not be asking nurses to work beyond their scope of practice. But nurses already perform highly specialised roles. We have 540 clinical nurse consultants in mental health across the State. We've got dozens of nurse practitioners, all of whom are well equipped to perform highly specialised roles, along with allied health professionals, peer workers and so on.

The redesign piece that we've been doing includes psychiatrists at the table. Indeed, it includes the college of psychiatrists at the table and consumers, who will be a very important voice as we continue to work through this challenge. We've looked at the international evidence in regard to these models of care so that we can understand whether the current model we have here in New South Wales can be further improved from learnings overseas. That is a bit of a list, if you like, of some of the things we've undertaken.

I just feel like I need to restate it: There is no one silver bullet that we have sought to utilise during this period. We did not ask the psychiatrists to resign. We want them in our workforce and to be contributors to our workforce. Frankly, everything we've done with respect to contingency planning has been in the interests of keeping our patients safe, and that includes the use of private beds where necessary. I will say that that has been minimal and should not be overstated. We have worked with our private hospital partners across many challenges over the years, including during the pandemic. They're an important partner to us, as are our colleagues in Aboriginal medical services, NGOs—the list goes on. I think we have a very robust contingency plan in place, but we've been clear from the start that if the full 206 psychiatrists resigned, it would be very challenging. We have been open about that from the get-go, as has the Government.

**The CHAIR:** I'm still on mental health as well. The gap analysis report was done in December 2023 and was provided to the Mental Health Alliance mid last year. It's my understanding that there's a second report

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underway using the National Mental Health Service Planning Framework, looking at quantifying those gaps in more detail. Can you speak to the progress of that work?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes, I can. That work has now been completed and is with the Minister. I obviously can't speak for the Minister, but I'm grateful to our team who have used the National Mental Health Service Planning Framework and also the Sax Institute clinical services planner. Remember, the first gap report was really qualitative responses from the sector. I think that was presented at the inquiry, from memory. I hope I'm not getting my timelines mixed up. The second one is very much a quantitative piece, and the Minister is currently considering that. That was just discussed with her last week or possibly the week before, but in very recent times.

**The CHAIR:** There'll be a supplementary question for the Minister about when that's going to be released. Thank you for the information you've been provided. Can I clarify that was done using internal resources at NSW Health to complete that work?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes, it was.

**The CHAIR:** You've mentioned a couple of those frameworks that were used. Is the actual data underpinning clinical gaps coming out of electronic medical records, or what was utilised for that?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I'm going to describe this the best way I can, but I will defer to some of the experts in our team who work very hard on this. Just describing some of these instruments, the National Mental Health Service Planning Framework is a nationally validated measure of what the framework believes is the reasonable resource allocation for mental health services. It's impossible not to comment that no Australian jurisdiction has met that, with the exception of it being partly met, as I understand it, by one jurisdiction. In absolute terms, it's an excellent goal, but it's probably more useful in relative terms for us to look at where there are less-than-average or less-than-comparable services available within our services and also to compare them to other jurisdictions. Some of the absolute workforce gaps and differences are already public knowledge on the AIHW website, so it's actually quite useful in terms of assisting the Minister, I guess, with investment decisions.

We think it's a useful piece of work. We are conscious that not everybody loves the framework. I think all modelling tools are useful and none are perfect, but we chose it because it actually maps against the national strategy, it's well established, and it's really quite rich in some of the data that it can describe. But I would be the first to admit there are alternative ways to do that. There are other models out there. We did also use the Mental Health Commission's commissioned Sax tool as well. I hope that assists.

**The CHAIR:** It does, and I'm interested in your views on what the alternative frameworks would be.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** There's an alternative framework, and I know the acronym—I'll have to take the full understanding of the acronym on notice—DESDE, which comes from Canberra. There's some excellent work done in Canberra around national mental health planning. That's an alternative model. It has benefits and, I guess, limitations, like all of these models. One of the things that we have heard from partners is that people would like to see more lived experience and carer and consumer voices in all of those tools. Just an observation, but I'm not sure that that's the case, as much as people would like, in any of them, to be honest. There's a narrative around what's useful about them and what the limitations are for all of those.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. There being no questions from the Government, we will break for afternoon tea.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back, everybody. We'll start with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I might start with some questions around Link2home, particularly relating to veterans and whether there have been any changes to procedures following the royal commission into veteran suicide and how veterans experiencing homelessness are managed or allocated.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Not directly. As you're aware, we have the Rent Choice Veterans product that is specifically for veterans. Also, as you can imagine, veterans experiencing homelessness are prioritised through the system—that's the top of the priority on the social housing queue.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In relation to the 8,400 social homes over four years, I think 50 per cent would be allocated to women and children escaping domestic and family violence. I just wanted to get an idea of numbers and how that's tracking to date and forward planning.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I'll take on notice for the new supply 824 and come back to you with that.

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**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In relation to disability homes, you'd be aware that there are around, I think, 804 disability—they're managed by DCJ through disability services. I'm interested whether you've had any discussions around transfer of any of those homes that are currently used by disability providers.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I haven't. That's actually managed by a different part of DCJ, through Strategy, Policy and Commissioning. I can take that on notice for you.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In regard to the Mindarie Street social housing development in Lane Cove—are you familiar with that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No, I'm not. Is that the one that is being undertaken by Link Wentworth?

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** It could be.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I don't know the specifics of it, but I know that there is a development underway with Link Wentworth.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I'm happy for you to take on notice whether or not commercial premises at that site has been considered. My understanding is Homes NSW has had dealings in relation to 86 apartments that have been built.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Let me take that on notice for you, in terms of the commercial arrangements.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** And whether any discussions have been held or if it was considered to have any commercial development on the site. In relation to Homes NSW and also DCJ's implementation of the domestic and family violence New South Wales common approach to risk assessment and safety, when it comes to housing and homelessness services has any work been done in your area?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Not at the moment. We're part of a response across DCJ. We're doing some work at the moment to review our domestic violence policy within Homes NSW for public housing, and that's obviously taking into account the work that's underway more broadly in government.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Is there a time frame for that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can get that for you. I think it's before June this year—so, absolutely.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Is that forming part of the Homelessness Strategy?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** It's not forming part of the Homelessness Strategy. We've got a major review of all of the major policies and procedures that have been raised by housing and homelessness peaks directly with us, through our governance, and a priority forward for those policies to be reviewed—so not specifically the Homelessness Strategy, but more around governance for the whole system.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In relation to trauma-informed training provided to Homes NSW staff, is there actually training provided?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We do trauma-informed training—both online training and staff can also seek to have that face to face as well.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Does that also cover specific training for dealing with young people under 18?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I'll have to take that on notice for you.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Also, the protocol around engaging with a young person—specifically if a young person presents who has said that they're experiencing domestic or family violence—what are the protocols about contacting parents or guardians?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Can I take that one on notice in terms of the procedure?

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Yes. Could you explain to me what it means when it's described as "closed for temporary accommodation access due to disengagement". What does that mean?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I don't know—where have you—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** It has been raised with me that some Homes NSW staff will actually advise clients that are reaching out that the accommodation is closed due to disengagement.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I'll take that on notice. I haven't heard of that.

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**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** And also, if that is an option, what are the factors that make someone choose to advise a client of that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Absolutely, yes.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I have a couple of questions around the Homelessness Strategy. The action plans—I understand there's one due this year.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We're aiming to have the action plans in. The time frame for the Homelessness Strategy is we completed the external consultations on 14 February. We're now taking that information, including finalising the strategy, and developing those action plans for the next financial year. We've received significant feedback from homelessness providers and also from people who have used homelessness services to inform our approach around the action plans, which will be quite specific around target groups, including young people and Aboriginal people, but, more broadly, how some of the themes of the Homelessness Strategy, including place-based initiatives, work in the broader system.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What's the time frame for the final strategy to be released?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** For next financial year.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** So any time from June onwards?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Or July, sorry. In regards to the homeless outcomes measurement and reporting framework, what will be looked at in relation to that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** There has been significant work internally to look at the outcomes that we're seeking from homelessness services, and there's been engagement to date. We're looking at that work in parallel to recommissioning and working through services. At the moment, we don't want to put extra reporting burdens on services that are already stretched in the middle of a housing crisis. They're really on the front line. We're looking at how we think about that through recommissioning and embed those within a contracting framework that makes sense for services to be able to respond to, and for us to track the outcomes of their engagement.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Has any work been done around flexible funding models at this stage, which was referred to in the draft strategy?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** What we're doing is basically—there's two elements of that. There's the core service funding that goes to the specialist homelessness services to run those services across the State, and then there are other buckets of money, like the new money that came in. The Homelessness Innovation Fund is a perfect example of that. Let's set up some funding that enables services to look at their own service models and things that might need to change—but they don't have the financial capacity to do that—and to work with us on priorities. As you know, the big priority for us is moving out of hotel and motel accommodation and into supported homelessness services. Creating a flexible bucket of money that can respond to both individual service needs but, if there is a need in a particular location, those services can come together and apply for funding jointly under the HIF—it's really important.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** The final one in relation to the strategy is the homeless register. What will be recorded on that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We're doing some work at the moment. There is already, as part of the End Street Sleeping Collaboration, a tool. We're looking at how we can take the principles of that tool and embed it so that it enables other communities across New South Wales to really track rough sleeping and be able to get live, up-to-date information about people when they're on the street and their status in terms of whether they have a homelessness housing application or whether they were housed by us in the past. That work is underway. There have been various negotiations between local non-government organisations about who is best placed to manage that tool. We are also now meeting with those parties to say what the role of government is in resourcing the tool and making sure that it has a broader applicability outside that one area to broader communities in the State.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I'm happy to put the rest of my questions on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We are happy for the Advocate, Hunter Water and Sydney Water to be excused, Dr Cohn, if there is no more questions for them.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, thank you.

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**(Roch Cheroux, Darren Cleary and Zoë Robinson withdrew.)**

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Don't worry everyone else, we might be out of here early for all of you. We'll see how we go. I probably have one or two for you, Mr Tidball—and it might be for Ms Meagher as well—in terms of the earlier questions I was asking the Minister about the youth agency coming in under your leadership and direction. Do you have any more information about what that will look like? The Office of Regional Youth staff, who I believe are still employed through the Premier's Department at the moment—or, if they're not, I think there is still a number who are employed. I'm just not sure how many are still there and what their transition will be.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** The target date is to have this done by 1 July. I think a couple of principles are fundamental. The first is to remove fragmentation to have an integrated office for youth, but in doing that to ensure that there is no incursion into the integrity of the Advocate. That is well understood. In terms of detail, I know it's mid-March and there is a lot to be done between now and 30 June in terms of that function elsewhere in government. That is still being worked through, but it will be worked through in coming weeks.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are there still, as best as you are aware, Office of Regional Youth staff employed?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Where? Are they in the Premier's Department?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** No. They are in the regional agency of government.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will they then presumably be transitioned to the new agency, or is that to be determined in the work that is happening?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** I think that is being worked through.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. In that case, I probably don't have any questions for you, Ms Meagher. You are probably free to go as well unless the Chair needs you for anything.

**(Kate Meagher withdrew.)**

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to come back now to Water for the rest of the time that I've got in relation to the Reconnecting River Country Program. Firstly, can you tell me what the budget is for compensation under the Landholder Negotiation Scheme, and is that ring fenced?

**AMANDA JONES:** There isn't a budget as such under the Landholder Negotiation Scheme for compensation. The Landholder Negotiation Scheme is more consultative than the just terms Act. The objective is not to have to rely on any compulsory acquisition. From modelling we've done, we're assuming that there are a greater proportion of landholders who will be minimally affected. The Reconnecting River Country Program is a little confusing in that there is potentially a decade of work in the whole program, but what we're looking at is what's to be done in the next two years. Until the end of December 2026 is what the Commonwealth has actually funded. That program is a smaller program. It's really looking at being able to run the Murrumbidgee water sharing plan at its full flow rate and then a couple of other projects which are about raising bridges so that there's access during any inundation event. It's a smaller set of potential flow easements that might be required.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You just mentioned the Murrumbidgee work. Is there a business case for that? My understanding is that was meant to be completed already.

**AMANDA JONES:** The final business case for the Murrumbidgee was completed in January, and it has been through the INSW review and it has also been submitted to the Commonwealth. It has been endorsed by both INSW and the Commonwealth, and we've had confirmation of an additional \$123 million for that phase of work which I just described, which is the Murrumbidgee flow under the water sharing plan and the two other early works projects.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Just back very quickly to the Nyngan to Cobar pipeline, I appreciate what you said earlier about the complexity of stage two of the project and also that the Minister endeavoured to provide what she could on notice in terms of the business case. But just following on from that, is it possible—and I'm happy if you need to take it on notice—to get some sort of indicative breakdown of that \$300 million estimate? How much of it is engineering costs in terms of material, construction, labour versus regulatory and compliance, planning and admin costs?

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**AMANDA JONES:** As the Minister mentioned, the Minister has asked us to look at what we can release, and that's what we're endeavouring to establish. So, of the estimated cost, how could we present that information?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great.

**AMANDA JONES:** I should mention that stage one of the work, which is currently in progress and is about \$48 million or \$49 million, is about replacing the pumping stations and the electrics that support those pumping stations.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That was going to be my next question.

**AMANDA JONES:** That work, together with the assessment we've done of the two existing pipelines—there are two parallel pipelines—confirms that there's at least 10 to 50 years of life, if you like, in those two pipelines. Our first focus was making sure that Cobar's water supply was secure. Stage one we're confident about that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** With the two pump stations, will they be operating below capacity because there won't be the new pipeline or will there be an impact there?

**AMANDA JONES:** No. They will operate with some capacity. They're being designed such that they can deliver the demand that is the current demand and a little more. They'll be fit for purpose.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And I think you just said but, just for clarity, you're not anticipating any implications on other sort of upstream projects.

**AMANDA JONES:** The demand of the mines as well as the demands of Cobar will be absolutely supported by the new pumping station capacity.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What about the Dubbo to Nyngan pipeline or the Lake Rowlands to Carcoar Dam pipeline? Is there any sort of implication there?

**AMANDA JONES:** No.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The draft water sharing plans and prescribed wetlands, which I know the Minister I think last week put out an updated media release in relation to that work, are you able to just tell me how many proposed prescribed wetlands have been removed from water sharing plans across the State?

**AMANDA JONES:** What we're talking about are water sharing plans that are still draft and on display. What we have done is extended the consultation period, identifying that a data layer that was first published in the first consultation period had errors in it. There have been a significant number of wetlands taken away from the new maps that were published recently. We had a webinar just this week, and the consultation on the new maps that have been published runs to 23 March. I could tell you, catchment by catchment, the difference in maps.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you want to take that on notice? That might be better.

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes, but I just do have that information here if you want to know.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** One of the concerns that has been raised with us is from a landholder perspective, in terms of making sure that everyone is aware of the proposed prescribed wetlands. I know you just said that the consultation process will be extended, but are you confident that all landholders will have the information they need as part of the process?

**AMANDA JONES:** I'm confident that the revised maps that we've published—they're interactive maps. You can go in and you can check exactly what wetlands are being included. The categories of wetlands that we're proposing to include in these new draft water sharing plans are Ramsar wetlands, the wetlands in the Wetland Atlas, significant wetlands that have been identified through public consultation through the floodplain management plans that we have been doing—Murrumbidgee in particular—and if a wetland was previously identified in that water sharing plan. They're the categories of wetlands that are now in the new maps that are on public display.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Just lastly on this one, the aim is to finalise the plans by 1 July. If, after that date, an affected landholder might discover that there has been an area of wetland that has been incorrectly mapped, what's the mechanism or provision for that to be looked at post that 1 July date?

**AMANDA JONES:** The Minister could make a decision, if it's in the public interest, to change the water sharing plan so that that wetland wasn't referenced. But I think the Minister is waiting to see what comes back from this extra consultation on the wetlands to make a decision about how she goes forward. I should also

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mention the Minister for the Environment has concurrence, as you know, on all the wetlands, so those decisions are yet to be taken by both Ministers.

**The CHAIR:** I might ask two questions about mental health again. As you may or may not be aware, the Ramsay Clinic in Thirroul that used to operate the specialised trauma service for women is no longer a specialised trauma service. It's my understanding that there used to be one bed made available for a public patient at that facility. Since that change was made, has the Minister asked you to do any work looking at a centre of excellence for trauma-sensitive care in New South Wales, or finding a replacement for people who might require inpatient care specifically for trauma?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I think the answer is no. I can certainly double-check and for anything else we could come back on notice, but I'm not aware of any requests around that.

**The CHAIR:** My final question is about the Nolan House inpatient unit in Albury-Wodonga. Albury Wodonga Health is operationally considered a Victorian health service but, of course, it's still a gazetted mental health facility under the New South Wales Mental Health Act and it's physically in New South Wales. I had significant difficulty getting documents from Albury Wodonga Health, including through the powers of the Legislative Council to compel documents. In particular, I had sought service policy reviews that had been recommended by a coronial inquest.

In response to that order for documents, rather than being told that they were confidential, privileged or Cabinet in confidence et cetera, I was actually told that there were no documents in the possession of NSW Health. Since then, the Minister's office has assisted in obtaining some of the requested documents, but not all of them. But it raises an interesting oversight question. This is a gazetted facility under the New South Wales Mental Health Act that is physically in New South Wales. How is it possible that documents relating to the governance of that mental health unit are not in the possession of NSW Health?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I am aware of the requests that were made. I can't speak for any documents that the Minister may have been able to provide through their office. I do recollect that the Ministry of Health did—under an SO 52 request I think it was, from memory—explore what documents we had, and we had a nil response. I can understand the nature of your question. I'm also conscious that, operationally, it's a Victorian service under the MOU. I guess that's as much as I can answer. But I was aware of the request and I can't speak for what the Minister's office separately may have been able to obtain or to forward to you.

**The CHAIR:** I'm really pleased with the Minister's cooperation in obtaining some of those documents. I suppose it raises some questions about the MOU itself if, as a result of that MOU, NSW Health is not in the possession of—some of these were very basic policy and procedure documents for the mental health unit, which operates under the New South Wales Mental Health Act. Have you been tasked with any work to actually look at how well that MOU is working and your level of oversight of Nolan House?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I might take that on notice and, if there's any further information, we can get back to you around that.

**SUSAN PEARCE:** Happy to come back. The MOU does require them to follow NSW Health policy, so we can certainly come back on it around the oversight function, if that's what you're seeking, Dr Cohn.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. To clarify, the nil result for the call for papers has given me concern that you're not able to exercise appropriate oversight under the MOU as it stands—seeking your view or your clarification of that, please.

**SUSAN PEARCE:** Understood—sure.

**The CHAIR:** With the consent of the Opposition?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, we're happy to put it on notice on Friday afternoon at four o'clock.

**The CHAIR:** We will.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Dr Cohn, I just have a couple of responses to Mr Farlow in terms of data that he was asking for. The Telopea budget for the upgrade of the towers—\$20 million has been set aside for that work. In terms of self-assessments since January 2024, LAHC has self-assessed 37 projects—that's about 400 dwellings—and the AHO, since 2023, 40 homes. Finally, just in terms of the data you were asking for around the vacants, as of 31 December 1,490 public homes were vacant and undergoing restorations to be returned straightaway into allocations for tenancies. That's about 1.6 per cent of the public homes. Then the remaining 1041, which is around 1.1 per cent, were long-term vacants related to redevelopment or major structural repairs work or fire damage.

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**The CHAIR:** I appreciate all of the time that you've given up today to answer our questions, particularly noting it was very hastily rescheduled from last week because of Cyclone Alfred. Thanks so much for your time.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**