

# PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 2 - HEALTH

Monday 9 September 2024

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

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

UNCORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

### MEMBERS

Dr Amanda Cohn (Chair)  
The Hon. Mark Banasiak  
Ms Abigail Boyd  
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg  
The Hon. Greg Donnelly  
Ms Cate Faehrmann  
The Hon. Scott Farlow  
Ms Sue Higginson  
The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones  
The Hon. Sarah Mitchell (Deputy Chair)  
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 first hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 2 – Health for the inquiry into budget estimates 2024-2025. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Dr Amanda Cohn, and I am the 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 Mental Health, Youth, Housing, Homelessness, the North Coast and Water.

I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures. I welcome and thank witnesses for making time to give evidence today. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament.

**Mr MICHAEL TIDBALL**, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, sworn and examined

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

**Mr ANDREW GEORGE**, Chief Executive Officer, WaterNSW, affirmed and examined

**Mr ROCH CHEROUX**, Managing Director, Sydney Water, affirmed and examined

**Mr DARREN CLEARY**, Managing Director, Hunter Water, affirmed and examined

**Mr GRANT BARNES**, Chief Regulatory Officer, Natural Resources Access Regulator, affirmed and examined

**Ms DEB WILLCOX, AM**, Deputy Secretary, Health System Strategy and Patient Experience, NSW Ministry of Health, affirmed and examined

**Dr MURRAY WRIGHT**, Chief Psychiatrist, NSW Ministry of Health, sworn and examined

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

**Mr MICHAEL WHEATLEY**, Head of Housing Portfolio, Homes NSW, sworn and examined

**Ms FAMEY WILLIAMS**, Chief Executive, Aboriginal Housing Office, affirmed and examined

**Ms ZOË ROBINSON**, Advocate for Children and Young People, affirmed and examined

**The CHAIR:** Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon we will hear from the departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We're starting with questions from me today. Last week the Government responded to the mental health inquiry that was conducted by this Committee, and the Government supported 24 of our 39 recommendations. In that response, you stated that Health, Ambulance and the police are exploring options for a future model to ensure people experiencing mental health distress in the community receive a Health-led response. Where is that work up to?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** First of all, can I thank you for the work of the parliamentary inquiry. It was a really useful piece of work that contributed to a range of the discussions we were already having. I think the evidence that you were able to provide was incredibly useful. We have got a senior level officers' group across NSW Health representing both the Mental Health Branch and NSW Ambulance, working with New South Wales police on exactly that piece of work. I stated publicly here at budget estimates and elsewhere that I'm really committed, as the mental health Minister, alongside the health Minister and the police Minister, to leading that response. But there are no tricks or funny language in the response that we've given. We want a Health-led response. We recognise, as do the police, that the current arrangements are not in the interests of consumers, they are not in the interests of carers, and they are not the interests of first responders.

It does take a little bit of time, Chair, because, as we move away from police as the lead responder in—as you know from the evidence that you received—thousands and thousands of mental health responses to a Health-led response, there are resource implications to that. There are training implications to that. Who is triaging the calls and making decisions about what the appropriate response is? Those are not things that can be done quickly when, if they are done quickly, I think they would be done badly. I do understand your concern to make sure that this happens and the urgency that you bring. I want you to know that I share that, but I don't want to leave our police, ambulance and mental health clinicians with a system change that has not been properly developed. But that development is happening right now, and it's happening at a senior level. We anticipate that we will have a new model to go to Cabinet, which it will need to approve because it's quite a significant change, by the end of this year.

**The CHAIR:** The Committee greatly appreciates the commitment you have made to this change. My follow-up question is about those potential resourcing implications. We heard that, in so many instances, the police know that they're not the most appropriate response, but they may be the only emergency service available in a particular rural area or with capacity to respond in other areas. I have certainly had my own personal experience of phoning an ambulance for somebody I found on the street who needed medical attention and having a police car sent to that incident. For community mental health services that are already dramatically under-resourced and understaffed, as part of that work, is any additional resourcing going to be allocated to support those health workers to take on this extra work?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There will have to be a resource consequence to the decisions that we make. That goes without saying. Your point is exactly right. I cannot support a system in which the police no longer respond, and we are expecting mental health clinicians or ambulance to respond but there are no additional resources on top of those already allocated to those agencies to do that work. That is evidently not going to be in the interests of those responders or the consumers.

There will have to be resource implications for a change, which is why it's not a change that can happen quickly. We don't want to lump a whole bunch of additional work—challenging work as well. Responding to mental health callouts is not straightforward. It's absolutely work that should be done by health experts, but it's challenging work without additional resources. So, yes, I accept your proposition: We can't just assume that community or government mental health services that are already stretched will be able to take that on without additional resources. That's what we're working through.

**The CHAIR:** I look forward to following that up at our next estimates. Moving to some of the other recommendations of the inquiry, one of those recommendations was that the Government consider establishing a centre of excellence for research, training, clinical supervision and support in order to deliver specific evidence-based therapies in trauma-informed care. In the Government's response, you cited the trauma-informed mental health care organisational self-assessment tool from the ACI. That's absolutely a good thing for services to be aware of their capabilities, but what happens next when that capability is assessed as poor?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There are two parts to that question: What's happening currently—I do have a lot of confidence in the ACI and the Clinical Excellence Commission and other parts of NSW Health who engage with services and LHDs when there are performance issues. I've met with representatives and the leadership of both those agencies and I know their deep commitment to resolving those kind of issues. I have a lot of confidence in them. Having said that, I think that the recommendation around a centre for excellence has a lot of merit. At the moment, as you know, we're talking about the budget that we've just delivered. There's not money for that proposition in this budget. That's not something that we have resources for right now, but I think that the evidence received by the inquiry and my own experience suggest that that is a valuable idea. I think something like the Chris O'Brien Lifecare model—which provides that kind of comprehensive cancer care service, a place for research, a place for treatment, a place for all of that to come together—has really demonstrated that there's a lot of value in that model.

We do have pretty well-established processes now about how we intervene when we see performance that does not meet the high standards that we'd like. I can ask Dr Wright and Dr Flynn to elaborate on that, although perhaps you might want to go through that this afternoon—I do understand that. But they will be able to talk to you, Dr Cohn, about just how engaged some of those organisations are when we see performance standards that fall below what we would like to see. They can talk to you about that this afternoon. As I said, we have talked about the idea of future planning on some kind of model. The model that we have with UNSW and some of the work that we do around there, the Black Dog Institute, UNSW and Prince of Wales, have elements of that multidisciplinary centre for excellence. I think it works quite well. What you've recommended through the inquiry is an even more comprehensive version of that. There isn't money for that in this budget, but it is an idea that has merit.

**The CHAIR:** Is it something that you'll be advocating for in the next budget?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I advocate for many things through the budgetary process, but I'm probably not going to flag those at this stage. We're bedding down the implementation of this budget; we're not quite in the process of developing our proposals for the next budget. But I take on your view, and the Committee's view, that that model has a lot to recommend it and I'll work that in with the other advocacy that we are doing. Dr Cohn, it is challenging because, as I've readily recognised, there are a lot of things in the mental health system that are underfunded. We would like to advocate for more through the budgetary process. This is one, but we have to weigh that up against our other important priorities in this space.

**The CHAIR:** The Committee also received a lot of evidence around federally funded programs, like the Better Access scheme. In the Government response, you noted that the Better Access evaluation highlighted barriers to access for people in rural and regional areas, older people, and people who are financially disadvantaged. The Government response said that New South Wales will advocate to the Australian Government to enable better outcomes for the people of New South Wales. What conversations have you had with your Federal counterparts about this?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I've had multiple conversations with both Minister Butler and Assistant Minister McBride about these issues, including raising it alongside Ryan Park at the recent joint health and mental health ministerial council meeting. We're not backwards in being forwards to the Commonwealth, whether it is in housing and in mental health. There are huge challenges on the New South Wales budget. You've

heard it all before from my colleagues, but it's genuine and it's real. We have been very clear to the Commonwealth that we feel as though the historical delineation of them funding primary health care and us funding secondary or tertiary health care in the mental health space is failing consumers; that the GP access part of that—the primary health care access part of that—is not adequate, is underfunded, obviously doesn't work if you can't access a GP either because there's not one available or because there's a cost barrier; and that the consequences of that failure are falling more on our services. Our services, whether they are emergency departments or community health services that we fund, are straining, are struggling, to cope with that.

We've been very clear to the Commonwealth that primary health care in the mental health care space is of huge concern to us. I think they hear that. It was a productive and good discussion at the recent ministerial council meeting. There wasn't money put on the table. Of course, this is disappointing to me. I always like to walk away from those opportunities with funding for New South Wales. I'm sure the other States feel the same. The good news was there was a commitment to much more regular specific mental health ministerial council meetings. I feel like this is a positive development. Mental health Ministers have not been coming together for some time. The advocacy that we are doing is very forthright and relatively public. I'm not just talking to them behind closed doors; I'm making public statements about how we expect them to step up and fill the glaring gaps in the provision of primary health care for mental health services.

**The CHAIR:** I'd like to go across to the service plan for people with eating disorders, which was a really excellent and welcome initiative. But, of course, it's due to expire next year. Will you fund this important work beyond 2025?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We are very committed to more work in eating disorders—yes, the continuation of the current service plan but also, potentially, more work. I think that service plan is good. I've had a number of discussions with InsideOut, who are partners with us in the delivery of that, and other organisations like the Butterfly Foundation, about how we can look to do more. I think there are some gaps in the availability of care, even under that service plan. I think our clinicians have made real strides recently but, from what I hear, there's still reticence from some parts of the system to provide the kind of comprehensive care that we would expect for people with eating disorders. I know there's quite a lot of work to do.

We're pleased to be able to open soon our new residential facility up in Charlestown. That's obviously a new thing—a first time that we're providing a public health facility of that nature for people with eating disorders. We're obviously hopeful that's going to be a success. That's going to fill one of those gaps that I've talked about—people who need more than just a kind of engagement, perhaps, with a GP or another clinician but are not necessarily at the stage of needing to be hospitalised. Obviously, we want to avoid that. In answer to your question, yes, we will be continuing that work, but it's not just necessarily about continuing what we're doing now; it's about exploring opportunities to do more.

I should just say that the next mental health ministerial council meeting will have a dual focus. One of those focuses is children and young people and mental illness. I indicated at the ministerial council meeting we had recently that I'd like eating disorders to be part of that. It's obviously not an issue just for children and young people, but it is a particular issue for adolescents. They were very open to that. I'm keen to raise the issue that was highlighted in relation to the inadequacy of funding for research in eating disorders. I know that has been raised with me, and requests made, to advocate for the Commonwealth to have a fairer allocation of research funding for eating disorders. That's something that I'm keen to put on the agenda there.

**The CHAIR:** Can I clarify, you referred to the facility being built at Charlestown. Is that the one that's currently being built with Federal funding?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't know if that is Federal funding. It is Federal funding, Ms Willcox? Yes. Have we contributed money to that, or did we contribute land?

**DEB WILLCOX:** I'll have to come back to you on what the land deal was.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, that's right. It is the one. That is right.

**The CHAIR:** I'm interested in what might be happening moving forward with the eating disorder coordinating positions, which have been extremely well received. I understand that they were funded as half-time positions in 2016, then in 2020 they were moved to full time. As I think you've noted, the incidence of eating disorders is on the increase, and those coordinators that I've spoken to are certainly under the pump in working across really broad regions. Will you look at increasing the number of those positions for eating disorder coordinators?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, we will look at that, as I indicated in my previous answer. We haven't made any firm decisions about what the future looks like. We are continuing to roll out the service plan

as it is currently constructed, but I have also received those very clear responses and that feedback that they are under the pump, that there are gaps and that we continue to struggle to meet the needs of consumers who are experiencing eating disorders. Whilst we are very thankful for the incredible work that those coordinators have done—as I said, the partnership with InsideOut I think has been really positive—I'm not suggesting that there is not more that we could do.

The impact of the residential facility is something I would be interested to see. I think we've talked before about there perhaps being mixed international research about the role of those kinds of facilities. Model of care, I think, is really important there. Are they actually providing the kind of game-changing intervention for consumers who use that that we would hope? We are interested to see that. There is one in Queensland that has opened already and we are opening our own. Is that more of what we want to do in New South Wales? I'm still putting a question mark next to that, because I want to see the one in Charlestown open and the impact that it has. But, certainly, the coordinators have been very well received, so we are open to doing more.

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely. Can I ask specifically about my own community of Albury-Wodonga? As I'm sure you know, because I wrote to you in July, Albury-Wodonga missed out on an eating disorder coordinator because we are a cross-border community. Will Albury-Wodonga Health be provided with an eating disorder coordinator?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I did receive your letter, thank you, Dr Cohn. I'm not able to make a firm commitment today, but I did receive your letter, and I can indicate that I recognise that whilst Murrumbidgee LHD received funding, Albury, as you say, sits separately. Through NSW Health we've reached out to our Victorian counterparts who share responsibility for the Albury-Wodonga community to see whether there might be a willingness to respond to that gap. We are willing to do that. We have already, off the back of your representations, spoken to the Victorians. While I can't give you a commitment today that it will necessarily be successful, I think we should be able to indicate, hopefully in the near future, that is something we are able to provide. That is certainly our intention. Does anyone, just briefly, have any view on the time frame on which the Victorians might be responding to us? I think it's quite soon, we hope, isn't it?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** We are hopeful to be able to put something in place as a proposal for a coordinator for next financial year. I have spoken with Albury-Wodonga Health. I spoke with Murrumbidgee. But we are still to formally get in touch with Victoria Health. We are very interested in seeing what is possible.

**The CHAIR:** Earlier this year in the Legislative Council we had a very constructive debate on psychedelic-assisted therapies, which are a very promising treatment for PTSD and for treatment-resistant depression. As you know, New South Wales has more restrictive conditions than other Australian jurisdictions, particularly the requirement that these treatments only take place in a licensed, private, mental health class facility. This is a significant barrier to access, when in Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and the ACT, this can be provided as an outpatient when that is seen to be appropriate by the treating psychiatrist. During that debate, you committed to explore the refinement of the relevant regulations based on yearly reviews of how effectively the regulation is being implemented. Can you update us?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I can. It continues to be my view that New South Wales is not providing an adequate framework for access to those emerging therapies and I, as you know, share your view that they have a lot of potential. So I've asked NSW Health to ensure that our provisions are aligned with the other States. That is work that is currently being undertaken. We should be able to deliver that alignment in coming months. That is something that is being worked on by NSW Health.

I can ask them to elaborate now, or you can talk to them this afternoon, but my instructions to them as the Minister have been, "I want to see the provisions in New South Wales aligned with those of other jurisdictions in Australia." They understand that is my expectation, and that work is happening right now and should be able to be implemented in coming months, so that, at the very least, consumers in New South Wales are able to access these potentially lifesaving therapies in the same way as consumers in other States. I don't want to hear stories about people who are New South Wales residents having to go to Victoria or Queensland to access treatment, which is expensive and time consuming for them and not available to everyone.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks for that commitment, Minister. I would be happy to hear the response from the department, noting we only have about 40 seconds left.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Does anyone want to add to that?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** I think the particular regulation is in relation to a requirement currently in New South Wales that the treatment be delivered in a private health facility. The background to that is that we have, really, scant data, nationally and internationally, on the safety profile of these treatments. There was a desire, which was supported by the body of psychiatrists and the college, that we should deliver the treatment in the safest

environment possible. We are now re-looking, with our legal branch and in consultation with our college, at whether there are other ways of assuring that level of safety whilst providing a degree of flexibility about the environment that the treatment is given in. It's complicated, because we are balancing access against safety. We're trying to land that in a way which doesn't disadvantage anybody.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Good morning, Minister, and your many officials in your multiple portfolios. It's nice to see you all again. Minister, can you explain the process involved in you being appointed as the Minister for the North Coast?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That is really a question for the Premier. He called me and offered me—well, asked me to serve in the portfolios that I'm currently serving in and I said, "Yes, sure."

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you've not ever lived in that area? There's no other Ministers from that area of the State, are there? So you have to do it from Sydney?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's right; I haven't lived there. I understand, from the Premier, that the reason he asked me to serve in that portfolio was that he was of the view, and it's a view that I share and that has been validated from my engagement with that community, that housing is the biggest issue on the North Coast. It's not that there's not other issues, but that issue really sits front and centre of concerns that those communities have, and that it was a suitable fit to have the Minister for Housing also perform the role as Minister for the North Coast advocating for that community in Cabinet.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We might go to some of the other issues. How many times have you met with members of the Ulmarra community following the closure of their ferry?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I haven't met with them.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Have you visited Ulmarra?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I haven't.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you advocate on their behalf to the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I haven't done that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What about the situation that is happening up at Mount Warning? How many meetings have you had with the local community up there?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I have met with the local Byron and surrounds community many times. I haven't had specific meetings on that issue, but I've met with the local community up and around that part of the North Coast on multiple occasions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you able to tell me who Michael Hampson is?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I'm not.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** He is the CEO of Norco. Have you met with him?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I haven't.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you sign Janelle Saffin's petition to have Norco milk restored to North Coast hospitals?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I didn't, but I am aware of it, and Janelle has certainly raised it with me. So I am aware of that issue, and Janelle has put it on my radar.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will you be doing anything to advocate on behalf of the dairy farmers on the North Coast who are pretty angry about that decision?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I accept the premise of your question, which is that they are concerned, and certainly Janelle is as well. I've spoken to Minister Park's office about it, so I have raised their concerns with the relevant Minister. That is, to be honest, what I largely see my role as the Minister for the North Coast as doing, being an advocate for that community within Cabinet. Minister Park is aware of it. Obviously, you can ask him questions tomorrow at budget estimates. His view is those are challenging decisions that Health has to make, balancing the resource issues that they have and ensuring that they have the funds available to do their core work providing quality health care. But certainly I have raised that with his office and indicated, as you have suggested, that the community up there is quite upset at that decision.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, you were up in Coffs Harbour last week, I understand.



**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I was.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What was the purpose of that visit?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I was doing a couple of things on that visit. I visited and made an announcement—well, made an update in relation to the provision of mental health care at the Coffs campus hospital. They're doing amazing work with emergency department diversion and through their Safeguards Team for the provision of care for children and young people. I met the Women's Shed at the Men's Shed. There's a community campaign up there to provide a Women's Shed for that community, and they're interested in ways that the Government can support them to do that. They obviously don't have one, so I met them at the Men's Shed. I did do a local council campaign event as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Okay, we'll come to that. You just said there was an update to some of the mental health provisions. My understanding is the Safeguards Team has been operating since May 2022 and the Emergency Mental Health and Addiction Assessment Response Team started in February 2023. So was there really anything new, or was it just a visit to see how those programs are tracking?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As you can probably imagine, when we do new interventions, in particular the EMHAART intervention that Mid North Coast LHD is doing at the emergency departments, we don't know whether they're going to be successful at first blush or not. It takes some time for us to see the impact of those assessments. In particular with the EMHAART team—although the same issues are applicable with the safeguards intervention—when those interventions were first made, there was a question mark about whether they would be successful or not. The purpose of my visit was to do the check-in on what impact they had had, and I'm pleased to report to you they have had a really successful impact.

It was about promoting those successful interventions—both to the communities up on the Mid North Coast, to make sure they knew the great work that their LHD was doing leading service provision in mental health, and also to make sure that other LHDs perhaps were aware that these kinds of interventions would be successful for them. I think there was quite a lot of local interest in those provisions. There was local media there. They certainly were unaware, prior my visit, about these particular new and innovative interventions and were really—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** With respect, it's not that new. It's been going for a little while. You talked about EMHAART. Is that funded through Mental Health, or is that through the Ministry of Health more broadly? Who pays for that program?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think it is funded jointly by the LHD and perhaps vulnerable persons funding, which may come through the ministry, not specifically through the Mental Health Branch. Is that right, or is that through the Mental Health Branch?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** That's through the Mental Health Branch, Minister.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It is through the Mental Health Branch. Thank you, Brendan.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You said this was about letting the community know the positive impacts of a mental health program. Was the local member invited to the media conference?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** He wasn't there, so I suspect he wasn't.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But the local Labor councillor was, wasn't he?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, he wasn't invited to the media conference.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** He was there, wasn't he?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** He came along to observe. He did not participate in the local media. He actually just came along, really, as an interested observer. Councillor Judge, who is a councillor on Coffs Harbour council, has a history of mental illness in his family and was just particularly interested in that intervention, so he came along.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But how did he know that it was happening?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Because, as I said, I did do a local council campaign event when I was in town.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, I'm going to put it to you that you went up there to actually launch a Labor councillor's campaign, because, from what you're saying, there wasn't anything particularly new in the announcement that you did at the hospital and he just happened to be there, even though the local member wasn't invited. Can you see how that doesn't really pass the pub test?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, not really. I think it's quite common. I make regular visits to the North Coast.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you don't go to Ulmarra, and you haven't met with anyone at Norco. But you'll go up to re-announce, in Coffs Harbour, a program that's been running for more than two years, and the local Labor councillor happens to be there a week before the election. It doesn't look very good, does it?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, as I said, I make no apologies for my regular visits to the North Coast and Mid North Coast. But you started this line of questioning by suggesting perhaps it might seem odd to people that there is a Minister for the North Coast who doesn't live in the North Coast. I actually can accept that that, at first blush, might seem odd. As I said, I tried to explain the context in relation to the issues of housing. In order to manage rightful community expectations that, as the Minister for the North Coast, I am present, I make regular visits to the North Coast.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You didn't invite the local member, but you invited the local Labor councillor and did a launch, a week out from polling day. Who paid for the trip? Was it through your parliamentary expenses?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** On other occasions when I have been on the North Coast, I have done events with Mr Singh.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Were any other local councillors invited to or at the hospital, or part of the launches that you did, or just the Labor councillor?

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

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who paid for it? Was it paid for through your parliamentary entitlements?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'll have to take on notice whether it was paid for through parliamentary entitlements or other. I'll have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What would be the other way? Did you personally pay for it?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'll have to take on notice how it was paid for. But, as I said, not only did I visit the hospital; I also visited the Men's Shed and met with the Women's Shed there. I make regular visits to the North Coast and the Mid North Coast.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You said earlier that housing is a huge part of your role as Minister for the North Coast, but the Labor council in Coffs has been pretty negative about some of your housing policies, haven't they? How did that conversation go?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's a fair question. Yes, I disagree with them.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So you went to launch their campaign and you want them back in, but they actually don't support your Government's housing policy, even though that's the most important issue for you as Minister for the North Coast.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think it's quite a normal and healthy part of the democratic process that different levels of government have different views on some issues. I have no problems with that. I have no concerns about that. As I said, I actually think it's part of a functional and robust democracy that they might have a view on something that I have a different view on.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We'll be interested to see what happens up there. I want to take you now to the Regional Youth Taskforce. Is there currently still an Office for Regional Youth?

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

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Where are they located now, with the changes to the Department of Regional NSW?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** They're still within DPIRD, or Primary Industries and Regional Development. They're still within that department. We are moving towards the finalisation of our new office for youth structure. We have had thousands and thousands of incredibly positive engagements with young people online, at workshops, face to face and at festivals over the last few months. It's actually been incredible how engaged young people have been. We will be bringing all of that together at a youth summit, which is going to be held on 18 November, where we will be formalising what young people want to see from the New South Wales Government's representation of them.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you going to have a standalone regional youth council or regional-specific program, or not?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** TBC.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I've asked about this now for the last two estimates and it's been TBC, with respect, for quite some time. Young people in the bush are fairly vocal about not having that, with respect, under your Government. We had a dedicated Minister for Regional Youth; we had that Regional Youth Taskforce that's gone. They want to know if it's coming back or what they'll be able to do to have a voice, so what can I tell them?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Go online to have your say and find the survey that we are running—which thousands and thousands of young people, many of whom are in regional New South Wales, have done to have their say about what structure they want to see. I accept the point that you're making that part of that conversation has absolutely been regional young people saying, "We face particular challenges and we want to be heard"—as have young women, as have young people from Western Sydney, as have young LGBTIQ+ people. Young people are really concerned about the fact they look around our Parliament and they don't see themselves represented. They don't see their voices heard, and we are responding to that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But, with respect, you've just said "TBC" in terms of what that will look like. Will I tell them that maybe next year they'll know what they can do in a more formal way than a survey?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** You can tell them that on 18 November we will be bringing together a very large cross-section. If there are particular young people that you'd like to see there, it's not a political event. I welcome the opportunity to have young people's voices heard there. The reason it's TBC is because, as I've said before, I am not a young person. I still claim to have some grasp, as a millennial, on the issues of youth. Skibidi rizz, as my young children would say.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You and me both, Minister. I think we're in the same cohort.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I am not a young person, so I don't want to make decisions with a bunch of other old people—no offence, officials—about the kind of structure that young people want to see from government. That's why we've done the survey. That's why we're doing the summit. I am actually accepting your proposition, Ms Mitchell, that regional young people have an expectation that their voices are heard distinctly. I'm not denying that, but so do young people from Western Sydney and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and First Nations young people. We're trying to bring that together in a way that makes all young people feel heard by government.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We might come back to this in the next estimates. There might be more detail we can talk about. Minister, you'd be aware that the current Commonwealth tender to recover, I think, 70 gigalitres per year in the southern basin closes on Wednesday. Last time, when we had estimates in February, I was asking you about structural adjustments. You said you hadn't gotten to that yet because you didn't want to pre-empt the Commonwealth, but in June Minister Plibersek announced a \$300 million Sustainable Communities Program to be delivered by the State. Do you accept that the work on structural adjustment that we were referring to has ultimately turned into something that is your Government's responsibility?

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

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you not know that at the time?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I was aware at the time. I understood, although I'll have to check the *Hansard*, that we did talk about the existence of those structural adjustment packages from the Commonwealth but that, at that time earlier this year, our primary focus was—and, actually, continues to be—to explain to the Commonwealth how damaging thoughtless, mindless buybacks are.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You had your alternatives to buybacks planned.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We still have that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You have also commissioned—I think it's the Aither report?

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

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It has a number of recommendations. Can you tell me if there is any work being done specifically on recommendations 5, 6 and 7, which really go to issues around structural adjustment measures?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can perhaps ask Ms Jones to speak specifically to the work.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I might ask her this afternoon. I just wanted to know your views, as Minister, on those three particularly.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I would say that the work on the delivery of the structural adjustment programs is being led by Minister Moriarty. That is because, as the Minister for Regional New South Wales, she is best placed to ensure that the funds that are available—as I've said on a number of occasions, including publicly, it is going to be challenging to manage the negative impact of buybacks on our communities but, nonetheless, the funds that have been made available are delivered to communities in the best possible way. As the Minister for Water, I'm responsible for and focused on water infrastructure and water management. I'm not best placed to know how regional communities would like their economies diversified and different investment packages that might be best suited to them. I think partnership with local government is incredibly important to that, I should say, but Minister Moriarty is actually responsible for delivering the funding under that program.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Any decisions around water purchasing, structural adjustment programs, buybacks—are you saying that falls under Minister Moriarty more than yourself, or is she more responsible for the community? It's just not very clear.

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

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** With respect, you are also the Minister for Water, and you're the one who sits at the table in Commonwealth meetings and negotiations and the like. Obviously, the impact is felt in the regions. I'm trying to understand what your role will be in that, as Minister for Water.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** In terms of the decisions around water purchase and buybacks, they're decisions for the Commonwealth. I'm not making those decisions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, but you engage as water Minister.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Absolutely. This is how it works: I say publicly or privately at ministerial council meetings, "Don't do that. That's a mistake. We don't want that in New South Wales; we've got this whole other plan. We're working on it. It's actually making progress." The Commonwealth makes its own decisions. I have to say, I have been somewhat pleased that they have prioritised water infrastructure and non-infrastructure alternatives to buybacks. Nonetheless, I engage with them in that conversation. Ultimately—and I've said this before—I can't take responsibility for decisions that are within their purview and their remit. If people have got concerns about them, run for the Senate and take it up at Senate estimates. Once those decisions are made by the Commonwealth, and they provide funding to New South Wales to mitigate the potential negative impacts of their decisions—very disappointing that it's come to that but, nonetheless, that is for them. Minister Moriarty manages the administration of those funds.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So you go and say, "Please don't do this." But, as you say, they can go ahead and do it anyway. Then it's up to Minister Moriarty to work with the communities in the terms of buybacks. Your role finishes at the point where the Commonwealth, with respect, probably ignores you and does what they choose to do.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'll take that comment with respect, and the answer is yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Have you had any agreements with the Commonwealth to obtain environmental water through rules changes?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, we haven't at this stage. Other than—I should say, perhaps, that we have had agreement to trial shepherding environmental water from the northern basin through to South Australia as part of flush provisions, which were primarily directed to clear blue-green algae blooms from the Menindee Lakes. I'm very pleased to report that was successful. That is a trial of the movement of environmental water from the northern basin.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When you said "at this stage", are you are having discussions about future changes to the rules for environmental water?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We are. For starters, we're having discussions around whether or not we might formalise the trial that I just referred to, to be a more ongoing opportunity for us to move environmental water from the northern basin to South Australia as part of efforts to ensure water quality through the Darling-Baaka. We need to do the accounting. I should say that very clearly. It's not just New South Wales. Victoria, South Australia, the MDBA—everyone is very concerned to ensure that the accounting is done properly. That is what is happening right now. Ms Mitchell, I have to say, the feedback that I have received from communities along the Darling-Baaka, and particularly in the Lower Darling, was that trial of the movement of

the environmental water was very successful. They were very pleased to see the break-up of the blue-green algal bloom that had been a very big concern to those communities.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I've only got 30 seconds. I want to quickly go to the Connectivity Expert Panel report and implications for the northern basin. There was a delay. It was meant to be released on 1 July, but it wasn't released until 8 July. Can you explain the week delay?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can't, off the top of my head. I'll have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will there be any ground testing of the panel's modelling and assumptions?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** First of all, the modelling isn't even done. We are finalising the modelling, particularly in relation to hydrological and economic modelling. Once that's done, we'll make decisions about what the next steps are. Whether or not that involves ground testing, I can't say at this stage. We need to finish the modelling work before we move to any kind of decisions in relation to that.

**The CHAIR:** Back to mental health—how many current vacancies do we have in New South Wales for staff specialist psychiatrists?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I may have to defer to an official on that or take it on notice. It will definitely be a number. Brendan, do you have that?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I do, Chair. There are 416.4 positions for staff specialists in New South Wales, and 121 of those are currently vacant.

**The CHAIR:** About a quarter of those positions are currently vacant. What are you doing to attract and retain staff specialist psychiatrists?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There are two pieces of work going on, Dr Cohn. First of all, I should say I meet regularly with ASMOF, the College of Psychiatrists and AMA in relation to this issue. I'm well aware of the concerns that they have in relation to how difficult it is for New South Wales to attract and retain staff specialists. As a consequence of those vacancies, it's actually costing us a bucketload in locums, which is not an ideal situation. We're doing two pieces of work. One is a range of non-award provisions that we can use to attract and retain staff. Again, Dr Wright and Dr Flynn are heavily involved in that. I can ask them to elaborate now or you can talk to them this afternoon. There are regular meetings between themselves as representatives of the New South Wales ministry and those organisations about on-call rosters, about leave provisions, about advertising of vacancies—even those kinds of things have been raised: LHDs not advertising vacancies in the way that they should be. All of those kinds of things are wrapped up in what I consider to be quite a positive piece of work that is making progress. Again, I can ask them to elaborate now if you'd like.

The other piece of work we're doing is around award provisions. I've always said to those groups—and they have been very positive engaging in our non-award work plan, but they also have been clear to me that they do not believe that there is any real path forward without award revision. That's work that Minister Park is leading. I'm obviously playing a supportive role. It doesn't just apply to staff specialists in psychiatry. Obviously, it applies more broadly. It's tough work. It's tough negotiation. My observation is that Minister Park is doing a really good job working with ASMOF to try and make progress on that. I can't report anything more than we recognise it is a problem. It is costing us money in locums, and there is a formal process that is being engaged with through the mutual gains bargaining provisions. I'm very hopeful that that leads to progress in relation to the award.

**The CHAIR:** I'm glad you brought up the award negotiations. Do you know what the pay gap is, approximately, for a staff specialist psychiatrist here compared to Victoria or Queensland?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can't off the top of my head. I have seen a table that draws out that. You should see the pay gap with WA—it's substantial, Dr Cohn. I can take that on notice and perhaps table that table I have seen. Your point is valid and well made. There is a gap; we recognise that. It's been brought to my attention by those specialists and the numbers speak for themselves. There is no way to fudge it. It's a challenge.

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely. Please do table that for the rest of the Committee. My understanding is, from the figures I've been provided by the college of psychiatrists, with the pay gap to Victoria and Queensland—I'm focusing on the States that neighbour us and where it's very easy for people to move in a town like Albury-Wodonga—that that pay gap is looking like 25 per cent to 30 per cent. Why would a newly trained psychiatrist actually choose to live here in New South Wales when they can earn 25 per cent to 30 per cent more in Queensland and Victoria?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** My pitch to that newly trained psychiatrist is, "Live in the best State in the Commonwealth, and enjoy all of the awesome things that New South Wales has to offer. We have an incredible

team at NSW Health that can really support your career progression and help you to be the best possible physician that you can be, and give you all of the opportunities to do the work that you trained to do changing the lives of consumers." I recognise that money talks, and that my pitch on all of the incredible opportunities that we have in NSW Health for psychiatrists might bump up against some of those realities that you have outlined. All I can say is that the process for resolving that is award negotiation.

That's the well-recognised process that we have when people who work in the public service, including staff specialists, feel as though they're undervalued. That process is being led by Minister Park. He leads on workforce matters. I'm doing everything that I can to support him. As I said, I don't want you to think as though the work that we're doing on non-award matters is a mere footnote. Obviously I'm not trying to deny it—I brought up the award as an issue—but some of that work is substantial. Psychiatrists have raised a number of issues in relation to non-award employment matters that are really important to them. We have a really solid plan to try and resolve some of those.

**The CHAIR:** Notwithstanding your enthusiasm for living in New South Wales, I'm not sure all of our newly trained psychiatrists are willing to take a 30 per cent pay cut to stay in New South Wales. Have you actually done any work to look at the figures of our psychiatry trainees? What proportion of the people we're training are actually choosing to stay on with NSW Health?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm not sure whether we have done that. Workforce branch may have done that, and I can take it on notice. Certainly I'm aware of surveys done by the college of psychiatrists on those questions. I am aware that they indicate that there is a challenge attracting newly graduated psychiatrists to work in New South Wales because of some of those issues. It's not just the issues with pay. Obviously, we have higher costs of living here as well which compounds those challenges. I am aware of that. The good news, Dr Cohn, is that we are training and graduating psychiatrists at a very healthy rate. Unlike some other areas where we have a real pipeline issue, that's actually not so much of an issue in psychiatry. The bad news is we are struggling to bring those people into NSW Health. I will say it's not just the other States and their public health systems.

The issue of the pay gap with private practice is substantial. I have said—including to the college, and they know my view—that is an issue that is beyond our capacity. The fact that an early-year grad psychiatrist can earn \$700,000 to \$800,000 doing telehealth consultations is an extremely significant barrier for us attracting them into the public system. The issue around the comparison with the other States is fairer, to the extent that they're other public health systems, but I think the challenge of the salaries that psychiatrists can earn in the private sector is very significant. We need to talk up how important it is to work in public health and the opportunities that that provides you. You're never going to earn as much money working in public health, but you're going to live a better and more fulfilling life and change peoples' lives. That is worth something.

**The CHAIR:** I would hope as well that our trainees would want to work with NSW Health and serve our public patients. You referred to the survey from the college of psychiatrists. That survey showed that 18 per cent of trainees are choosing to stay in New South Wales. That's 80 per cent of our trainees choosing to leave NSW Health. I am interested to know if this is something that the ministry or department is looking at directly as well.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I will take on notice whether workforce branch is looking at that specifically. I have been briefed on the survey results. I've met with the college directly, and I've been provided with a copy. In fact, I've met with them a number of times subsequent to that survey being done, so I'm across it. Whether we are doing our own work, I'm not sure. Do you know off the top of your head, Dr Flynn, or would you like to take that on notice?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I think we need to take that on notice, Minister.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As you may be aware, workforce branch lead—with Minister Park—these kind of workforce issues and award negotiation issues. Through the Mental Health Branch, we play a supportive role specifically in relation to the areas of our interest—and that's psychiatrists.

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely. I've got plenty of questions for Minister Park about this tomorrow, but noting the particular impact that the shortage of psychiatrists is having on mental health patients specifically.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I accept that, and also that it's actually a bit more profound than some of the other areas of shortages.

**The CHAIR:** I also wanted to ask about the gap analysis that's been promised. The priority issues paper on community mental health that was released on the day of the Federal budget estimated that 58,000 people in New South Wales with severe and complex mental health needs are missing out on psychosocial support. You've

committed to conducting a gap analysis. What does that actually mean? How is that analysis going to be conducted?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There's gaps analyses galore going on, Dr Cohn. The Commonwealth have done their own gaps analysis, which I think is the one that you're referring to—the national one which has now publicly been released. I should say, in relation to the Commonwealth gaps analysis, there are data concerns that I have in relation to that piece of work. I think it's a useful contribution. So that you're aware, Dr Cohn, that analysis assumed that anyone who was receiving psychosocial support of any kind was having their needs met. I think this is a bad assumption. We cannot assume that just because you're receiving any level of support your needs are being met. Nonetheless, it was stark reading even with, I think, that poor assumption. So there's that.

We've done our own gaps analysis. We've released a preliminary paper, and we're now doing more detailed work. Again, Dr Flynn could probably update about where that's up to just in New South Wales. We have our own separate psychosocial gaps analysis that we're doing alongside the Commonwealth's piece of work. There's lots of analysis of gaps happening. I know your questions are going to be, "That's great that you know the gaps. What are you doing about it?"—fair question. We've done some work to try and identify some of those priority gaps. I think the funding that we provided in the budget on the community mental health housing liaison staff was an important part of that. There is obviously more to do. Did you want Dr Flynn to just elaborate?

**The CHAIR:** I do have specific questions about the methodology. You pointed out one of the flaws in some methodology that's been used previously, so I think it is really important to understand what is the method of the current gap analysis that is underway that you're doing.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Dr Flynn, would you like to elaborate on that?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** To clarify, noting there are numerous analyses, we're talking about the NSW Health part two, if you like—the first part being the qualitative work that you'd be familiar with, and the second part is looking particularly at data related to services. What the Mental Health Branch is doing is using planning tools—in particular the National Mental Health Service Planning Framework and also there are some other tools like the Sax Institute planning tool—to look at ambulatory inpatient and, ideally, to the extent of our community partners and PHN services, and using those tools to determine, relatively, where parts of New South Wales fit compared to each other in terms of subspecialist services. An example might be comparing south-west Sydney perinatal services with a regional area. There's also an element of that work that does allow for comparison with other jurisdictions, noting that the AIHW publicly available data talks about significantly different workforces between different jurisdictions.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just clarify? You've talked about comparing parts of New South Wales to each other and comparisons with other jurisdictions. I do love a comparison with Victoria, as an Albury-Wodonga resident, but I don't think any Australian jurisdiction has got it perfect in terms of mental health care. Is there any analysis happening actually compared to best practice or gold standard care? Or is it only relative to other services that are also inadequate?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I don't think that we've actually defined what gold standard care is. What I mean by that is that the national mental health services framework, to take an example of a planning tool, is, I would say, an ambitious tool. It's very well intentioned and it's got some evidence that supports it, but no jurisdiction in Australia is actually meeting what that particular framework talks about, including other jurisdictions that have had significant recent funding injections. I think that, from our perspective, we want to make sure that the population of New South Wales is served equitably within our State and compared to other jurisdictions. I genuinely believe that there are different opinions around what the notion of a gold standard service would be and that's complicated, in particular, by issues relating to wellbeing and community supports, which are quite a far distance from clinical support of people who live with severe mental illness.

**The CHAIR:** You've mentioned the framework. While I can appreciate the value of the interstate comparisons from an equity point of view, is it not also worth, while you're undertaking this quite detailed quantitative piece of work, comparing services to the framework?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** We are using the framework. Yes, I think there is value in that. One of our partners made a very good point that there is enormous utility in checking in how it compares across jurisdictions because otherwise, if we're just doing it internally, we won't have a sense of that.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Just to be clear as well, Dr Cohn, as you probably are aware, we are leading this work but we're doing it in partnership with the alliance for mental health. They are our partners and important accountability mechanisms on how that analysis is being conducted. It's not purely an internal exercise. They are engaged in decisions that we are making about how it is being conducted.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks for clarifying that. Last year I asked about the extremely concerning reporting of hundreds of incidents of sexual violence in inpatient mental health services. I was advised at that time that the decade-old *Sexual Safety of Mental Health Consumers Guidelines* was under review. Has that review progressed?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, it has. I can ask Dr Wright to comment on that. As I indicated previously, we are reviewing and updating those guidelines, but perhaps Dr Wright might be able to provide a little bit of information about where that's up to.

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** Yes, the guideline is under revision. The projected delivery for the publication of the guideline is mid next year. You'd appreciate that there's a wide range of really quite important stakeholders in the revision process. At the same time, we are also looking at the data that we can collect to underscore how we are performing in relation to that guideline. That's a parallel process that we're doing alongside the Clinical Excellence Commission in New South Wales. As you rightly know, it's a really important piece of work. I think it's more than 10 years since it's been revised so it's a large process that we're undertaking—but mid next year.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Thank you, Dr Wright. I should also add, Dr Cohn, it's not just the guidelines that are being reviewed; it's the training modules or program that sit alongside them, which I think is very important as well. We want to have the most up-to-date best practice guidelines but we also need to have some confidence that the training that we are doing to ensure that they are being adhered to by clinicians is also up to date. That is also being reviewed. Of course lived experience and carers are part of that process.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for that update and that clarification. In the interim we've got at least six months to go before even the publication of the guidelines. For somebody who's being recommended an inpatient mental health admission voluntarily, obviously informed consent is part of that process—that they need to understand the risks and benefits of the treatment that's being offered. Is it actually discussed explicitly with patients that they're being exposed to a significant risk of sexual violence by accepting an inpatient admission?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm not sure if that is. Perhaps Dr Wright or Dr Flynn may have a view. Obviously, as you know, risk assessments are done on admission and then updated every 24 hours, so we do take risk management very seriously.

**The CHAIR:** Can I be clear, I understand generally risk assessment in mental health, as a former clinician. I'm specifically talking about this risk of sexual violence while all of this important broader work is underway.

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** I think I should be clear that we do have policy and guidelines and training in place, so we're not talking about a vacuum where there is no understanding or assessment of these issues. The reason we're doing the work is we appreciate that, in the 10-year period, there's been substantial change and there's been substantial improvement in what we can do to reduce that risk. We have always been attempting to carefully risk-assess every single individual, but I take your point that the risk of sexual safety incidents is different to other risks. There is a broad category of risk that we assess on every single person who is admitted, both as a victim and as a potential offender in terms of violence, whether it's physical or sexual violence.

We have a longstanding issue of appreciating those individuals who are particularly vulnerable, identifying them and taking steps to manage that. We don't always get it right. That's why we need to improve the way we're doing things and that's why we need to collect the data. I think that the notion that we're not alive to the risk of any kind of violence, including sexual violence—that's not correct. We are absolutely alive to it and our services are working on that every day.

**The CHAIR:** Finally, to the Minister: Is there a budget allocation for this important piece of work?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The review is being done within existing resources.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Good morning, Minister. Minister, last week it appeared, in a sense, that you threw Sydney Water under the bus when it came to providing timely water and wastewater connections to growth areas. Considering this, when you're stating that Sydney Water is a big problem, what actions is the Government taking?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think if there was criticism that I was making, it was historic criticism that was probably more directed towards your former Government than Sydney Water. But, nonetheless, we can agree to disagree on that. What are we doing? We're making really clear what our expectations are. As I indicated in that media article and elsewhere publicly, I have some confidence that that work is yielding results. I think explicit statement of what the priorities of the Government are and clear communication about our expectations that that is the work that the whole of government is doing is important. And, as I said, I have some confidence that that's working.



**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, with that confidence, and with also stating that Sydney Water are understanding that better now—concerning their role in delivering housing—apart from that statement of expectations, what's changed at Sydney Water?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Leadership is what has changed, and that is at the Executive Government level. Sydney Water—how would I describe it? They have an incredibly important role ensuring the provision of clean and safe drinking water to Sydney and they do that very well. My sense is that, under the previous Government, the relationship between the provision of water infrastructure and housing became very fuzzy and blurry. I think that you can see that failure in what is happening in south-western Sydney. It does my head in that we're trucking sewage out of housing in Wilton.

How has this planning failure been allowed to happen? It is because, previously, Sydney Water were not brought in early on decisions around planning and rezoning. Now, sure, I think they're doing an excellent job playing catch-up, but that is what is happening; shipping out wastewater is catch-up. What we have done is brought them in from the very beginning. For example, the work that we did around the TODs, we ensured that wasn't work that was just done in isolation over in Planning land. We made them have Sydney Water at the table from day one, which they did. And so now I have confidence that when I talk about the TODs, the infrastructure around water and wastewater to support that housing is adequate, because we did not repeat the mistakes of the past of not letting Sydney Water be part of that process.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, given your expectation that total dividend and tax equivalent payments from the PNFC and PFC sectors for Sydney Water are to increase by 164 per cent from this year to \$766 million in 2027-28, how is it going to be able to achieve the water infrastructure delivery that you expect when you're also expecting it to increase its dividends to the Government by 168 per cent?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As you, I would hope, know as the former Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, the shareholder Ministers, being the Treasurer and the finance Minister, manage the dividend payment process for Sydney Water. As the portfolio Minister, I'm responsible for ensuring that the water infrastructure is available and that, as I said, the core business—do we have clean, safe, drinking water available for Sydney residents?—is done. I have full confidence that, through the work that Sydney Water has done to get its infrastructure pipeline moving—and as I said, there has been a significant improvement in terms of that planning and its engagement in that process—it will be able to manage that alongside the dividend discussions it will have with its shareholder Ministers.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** But over the forward estimates the Government is expecting \$2.6 billion, effectively, in dividend payments from Sydney Water. Don't you think this will make it difficult for it to be able to do its job of outlining water infrastructure to be able to service growing Sydney and increased density, as well as growth communities in Western Sydney?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I don't, because—and this is the key difference—the planning has been done. All of the work around where the houses are going to go—and it's not just residential development; obviously, there is the development of industrial land and other work as well. But all of the planning work about where the demands on the growth of the network are going to be, they have been brought into the room from day one. All of the work around the infrastructure pipeline has been done, and that has been done alongside discussions with Treasury around dividend payments. So your question may be valid if those conversations were happening in isolation. To be fair, that is what was happening previously. I think if you look at the amount of the dividend payments that were being paid by Sydney Water in the periods 2017, 2018, 2019, they were astronomical figures.

My view is that sat alongside a failure to properly plan for growth. This came together with the situation we have now, where there are large parts of, particularly greenfield, areas in south-western Sydney where housing development has raced right out in front of the availability of water infrastructure. I have a very clear line of sight on how that failure occurred, and we are not repeating those mistakes. Those conversations are happening in tandem. So I can give you confidence that, yes, the dividend conversation that Sydney Water is having with its shareholder Ministers sits well alongside the necessity of providing water infrastructure to support housing growth.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, given that over 54,000 lots are facing development delays due to lack of sewer and water connections, what immediate will steps the Government take to ensure Sydney Water servicing timelines align with the pace of housing construction?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I have indicated, I can't manifest a wastewater treatment facility overnight. They take time to build. We are doing everything we can to accelerate the provision of wastewater. For example, in the areas that most of those gaps that you have identified are, which is south-western Sydney, we do have the Upper South Creek, we have the Upper Nepean, and various pieces of wastewater infrastructure that we

are doing everything we can to get moving quickly. But this is a failure of years in the making where, during the periods when infrastructure investment should have been made to support the housing growth that is coming online now, that didn't happen. That didn't happen, and so now we are playing catch-up.

How do you play catch-up? You do everything you can to accelerate the delivery of the infrastructure that is needed to support that growth. But you cannot deliver a world-class, high-quality wastewater treatment plant overnight. It's a big piece of infrastructure. It's treating sewage, so it rightfully needs to have proper environmental and human health and other provisions go into its planning and delivery. We would not want a slapdash, done-on-the-cheap wastewater treatment plant. That's not how Sydney Water does its business, and rightfully so. But that takes time. I'm very sad that that work wasn't started when it should have been done, but we're trying to get on with it now.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, will you clarify whether the New South Wales Government will issue directions to Sydney Water to commence detailed design and construction of water assets earlier in the development process to avoid delays in housing delivery?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, if we need to we will. Although, the pleasing news I can report to you is that, by and large because of the more explicit alignment with Government priorities that I mentioned earlier, I consider this to be largely unnecessary. If we do see a repeat of a lack of planning and investment in wastewater infrastructure to deliver the housing that we need, of course, we will intervene. But the good news is that alignment is already happening, and the plans are in place to ensure that we have that work done in a timely manner.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, given that the Government is expecting \$2.6 billion worth of dividend payments from Sydney Water over the forward estimates, is there any view from you to review Sydney Water's dividend payout policy to allow the organisation to reinvest retained earnings into a central growth-servicing infrastructure?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I'm not planning to review that. But as I've already mentioned, I don't manage the payment of dividends of Sydney Water. You should have asked the Treasurer when he was here last week.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** You wouldn't like to see more money within Sydney Water to be able to deliver more water infrastructure sooner?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I would like to see Sydney Water have an adequate provision of resources to ensure that the infrastructure that we need to support housing is there. I am confident that that is the case. In terms of how that sits alongside dividend payments, as I said, that's a matter for the Treasurer. If he has a view about how that could be managed better, I welcome that. That would be within his remit to pursue and advise. I have to ensure, as we deliver housing to support the growth of Sydney, that the water and wastewater infrastructure is there. I have to ensure that. As I have indicated, I have a lot of confidence that we have the plans in place to make that happen now.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, you've been quite strong when it comes to Sydney Water and in your frustration with it holding back new housing. Do you share similar frustration with the Electrical Trades Union and its current protected industrial action against Endeavour Energy and Ausgrid, which has halted the connection of homes to power sources and made it more difficult for developments to continue?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I am frustrated at anything that stands in the way of delivering the housing we need, including your efforts to cancel transport-oriented development. All of that is, obviously, a deep frustration to me. I encourage the parties to that industrial dispute to work together for a resolution. We're not parties to it. I have to say, I'm not across the detail of the log of claims made by the ETU and the response from the energy companies. Obviously, I would be hopeful that they would be able to resolve that, and I encourage parties to negotiate together in good faith. Anything that stands in the way of the urgent need to deliver housing in this city is a frustration to me.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, do you agree with the ETU strike action?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't really know the basis on which they're taking industrial action. As I said, I'm not across their log of claims. I don't know the response from the energy companies. It's not something that I have been personally briefed on. It doesn't really fall within my purview. The delivery of private market housing is the responsibility of Minister Scully. We're not experiencing any issues in relation to our housing delivery at Homes NSW, but of course I encourage the parties to work together to try to find a resolution.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** To that point, no redevelopments undertaken by Land and Housing Corporation, the Aboriginal Housing Office or Homes NSW have been subject to the ETU's industrial action.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm advised that that's the case. There are none that have been held up.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** You are not aware of that action affecting properties at Gould Road in Claymore, part of the transformation of the Claymore Estate that's been subjected to protected industrial action of the ETU?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, that hasn't been brought to my attention. Are you aware of that, Rebecca?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** No issues at all with anything when it comes to Homes NSW, Land and Housing Corporation or the Aboriginal Housing Office?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No. I asked last week if there were issues in the delivery of our housing pipeline, and I was advised that there weren't.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Will you take it on notice, in terms of looking at Gould Road in Claymore?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I will.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How many parcels of land have been transferred to Homes NSW as a result of the land audit so far?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think we're at three. Have they actually been transferred, Rebecca?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Not yet, but they're on the list.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** On the list is three.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** When is it expected that they will be transferred?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Do we have a date about when we're expecting them to be transferred?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We're just doing due diligence on those, so we don't have an exact date. It's going through the land audit process now.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to 301 Samantha Riley Drive at Kellyville, what stage are you up to with that project?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Rebecca, do you want to give an update in relation to that particular project? That's anticipated to deliver around 70 to 80 homes and, of course, as Rebecca indicated, we're doing final feasibility work. Do you want to provide an update?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right. Kellyville—the site is actually next to the metro station. We're currently in due diligence on that site to look at the proportions. It will transfer to Homes NSW. It's important for us. It obviously unlocks a number of nearby public housing dwellings that we'd be able to redevelop in the area and the community. We have been quite strategic around the selection of sites to support the Building Homes for New South Wales program.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Given that the most recent Kellyville and Bella Vista TOD proposes to increase heights to 67.5m with a floor space ratio of 2.2, why is it that only 75 to 83 homes are proposed on that site?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We have a design guide that we focus on to deliver new public housing—social and community housing. We've based the current proposal on our own design guide and what we need to deliver for people on the Housing Register. We also overlay that with the nearby community properties that we have under management. So we've based that on a conservative estimate. Obviously, as the TOD changes come through, we will re-evaluate that based on other priorities for our funding in that community.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, we were advised previously, at another estimates, that that site was formerly owned by Sydney Water. What was Sydney Water doing with the site? Obviously, it's now surplus to their use, but why was it being retained by Sydney Water?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm not sure. Mr Cheroux may know that or can perhaps take it on notice.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** I can come back to Mr Cheroux in the afternoon.

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

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, with respect to sewage overflows into Scotts Creek at Willoughby, what immediate action is the Government taking to address the sewage overflows into Scotts Creek, both from the sewerage lines which run alongside Scotts Creek and from the north side sewage storage tunnel which overflows into Scotts Creek?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I am familiar with this issue. The local member, Tim James, has raised it with me and written to me on a number of occasions about it. Sewage overflow is an unfortunate consequence of a couple of things. One is ageing infrastructure—back to that old chestnut of not actually investing and upgrading the water infrastructure that we need for our modern, growing city. Anyway, it is what it is. Also, there's the kind of weather that we've seen. When we see some of the rain that we've seen in recent times, it's an unfortunate reality that our stormwater system is not always well designed and structured to deal with that level of water, and sewage overflow does happen.

I've met with Mr James and Sydney Water to talk about what options we can take. As soon as there are alerts that sewage overflows happen after storm events, there is an immediate response from Sydney Water in terms of clean-up and remediation of the site. Obviously, we understand that local residents don't like to see that happen. We don't like to see it happen either. Mr Cheroux may be able to add something in relation to that site specifically but, as I said, I can assure you that it's been brought to my attention by Mr James. It is an area where we have historically seen and will continue to see occasional sewage overflow when there are very heavy storm events. We give the community an assurance that we have an awareness of that and will immediately attend onsite and provide clean-up and remediation of the site. Roch, was there anything that you wanted to add on that particular site?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I can add that we also have a program of not only desilting the mains around the sites but also doing inflow control. The inflow control is basically avoiding all the stormwater getting into the network. There are a lot of programs ongoing. Part of it would be rehabilitation of existing assets. Part of it would be also testing the connections at our customers' homes, because sometimes our customers are connecting stormwater to the sewerage network. So we are testing that and discussing with our customers on how to restore stormwater connections—the gutters, basically—to the stormwater network and the sewerage connection to the sewerage. There's a lot of activity ongoing.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, with respect to short-term rental accommodation, you announced a review, of course, into short-term rental accommodation in February of this year. We expected the review to be completed in the first half of 2024. Why hasn't that deadline been met yet?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Because it's a complicated issue, Mr Farlow. You may recall from the debate that we had in the Legislative Council recently—and I thought it was quite a good dialogue—there are a number of priorities that we need to balance here. We are very concerned to ensure that there is adequate housing available for people in New South Wales. We've talked about our changes to the planning system—attempted to be frustrated by yourself. Nonetheless, we overcame that.

We've talked about the provision of \$5 billion to Homes NSW to provide social and affordable housing. Short-term rentals are part of that, but we do need to balance the fact that, for a number of local communities, tourism is a huge local economic contributor. We don't want to disrupt that. We value the contribution of tourism to a number of those local economies, and their local small businesses value it even more than we do. We don't want to make any decisions that are going to have negative consequences for things like local tourism. It is a delicate balancing act, it is complicated, and it's taking time. I make no apologies for not riding roughshod into reform without having done the diligent work of consultation and consideration.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With that being said, when do we expect the review findings to be released?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think there are two questions there. In terms of the review findings, I'm not sure that we necessarily will release findings in that way. I think what you're asking is when will we see a reform package based on the work that we have done? I would be hopeful that we may be able to do that by the end of the year but, as I said, I'm not rushing a process in which I do think there is delicate balancing work that we need to do and potentially different policy responses in different parts of the State. That's complicated too. The issues in inner Sydney are going to be quite different to the South Coast, the North Coast and the Central West. The experiences of people living in Orange are quite different, potentially, to the experiences of people living in Forbes, and even those two communities are within the Central West.

I am hoping that perhaps by the end of the year we may be able to release what we consider to be our reform package. But I'm not going to rush it, because there's a lot of other work going on and, whilst this piece of work is important, I have never pretended it is the top priority in housing reform for the New South Wales

Government. It is part of the suite of work that we're doing, but we want to make sure that we get the settings right, and that's the consultation and consideration that's happening right now.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to those regional approaches, one of those, of course, has been the 60-night cap in Byron, which I believe has actually started this month. How many short-term rentals were there in Byron Shire on 31 August 2024 or the most recent date available?

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

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

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** No questions, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** In that case, we will go to morning tea.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Does the New South Wales Government acknowledge water licences as a property right as per the COAG agreement on the strategic law reform, the National Water Initiative and the 2012 MDB intergovernmental agreement?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. That is the law.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Excellent. Does the Government then accept that any changes in rules or operational conditions, such as a drought of record that reduces the reliability of those property rights, must be compensated accordingly?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. As I indicated, we recognise the law is that a water licence is a property right held separately from the land and that, as a property right, it needs to be dealt with in the same way as other property rights.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Meaning that if something hinders the reliability or the value of that property right then—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There is a legal framework for the way that is managed in relation to water licences. Obviously, we support, and will be adhering to, that legal framework.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** If the connectivity report, as indicates, sets up a process for water recovery for the environment, will owners of that water be compensated appropriately regardless of how much water is recovered under that process?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I would say a few things. One, you've walked a few steps ahead of where we're at and posed a hypothetical. I really want to reiterate, Mr Banasiak, that we haven't even completed the modelling work that underpins potential reforms under the connectivity panel. We will be doing that and we want to get that work moving, but there is a long way to go from where we are now to the hypothetical that you have posed. However—and I have said this repeatedly—if there are any changes to people's entitlements to water as a result of that work, after consultation is done through the proper mechanisms in our rules-based framework for water-sharing plans then, yes, the provisions in the law in relation to compensation will of course be applicable.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** If I take some steps back to where you are now, in terms of the modelling, you haven't even set up the process yet for modelling, or you're going through that process?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. We have commenced some work on the hydrological and economic modelling.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** That's all being done internally—no consultants are doing any of the economic modelling at all?

**AMANDA JONES:** The department's doing that work. We will have completed it by the end of the year.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Is there a specific funding amount for that modelling to be done?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's within existing resources.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** And to be done by the end of?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Of 2024.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Then it will be shared with the public?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. It's our intention to make it public. We have nothing to hide in relation to this. The draft report of the connectivity was made public. The final report was made public.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Am I right to assume, in terms of the economic and hydrological aspects, as part of that you'll be doing a lot of consultation with irrigators who hold water licences?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** If we need to do consultation to inform the basis of that modelling, we will. We want to make sure that that modelling is robust and accurate.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** I guess consultation is probably the wrong word. Will you be seeking input and data from them in terms of how much water they use and what's their economic output from the use of that water?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** If it's required to ensure that the modelling we do is accurate, then, yes. We don't want to waste time doing modelling that is inaccurate and not accepted by people who are part of this process.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** I guess in terms of economics, how else would you get access to that sort of modelling if you're not going directly to the farmers and water holders to say, "How much does this water equal in terms of economic production?" How else would you get that data, if you're not going directly to them?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There are other measures of economic activity and output per region than just asking producers in that region, but I accept your point that they may well have useful information to contribute. As I said, I don't want to waste time doing work so that people who are then part of this process will say, "We don't even accept the fundamental basis on which you make decisions." That's a waste of time. I'd rather bring people into the process so that everyone can accept the ground rules.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** That's our five minutes speed dating round over.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Time flies when you're having fun.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I put on record that three estimates hearings in one day is absolutely ridiculous.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Noted.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** You only need to do one. Minister, will you require all water utilities, including Sydney Water, to do everything within their power to remove PFAS from drinking water?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I will require them to meet the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, which is what they are doing. If those guidelines change, then we stand ready to comply with those amendments. But that is my expectation—that they are meeting Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Considering we know that the guidelines aren't up for review—I think they're being reviewed and they won't be changed until late next year—and that various reports indeed show evidence of PFAS in our water, why wouldn't you look at acting to ensure that the water utilities are putting in place measures to reduce PFAS?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** To some extent they are, in the sense that particularly WaterNSW is a catchment manager and has a range of work that it does to ensure that catchments are safe and clean and that the water that is in our dams and reservoirs and then is treated by Sydney Water is as clean as it possibly can be. But, as I've indicated, we're not experts in what is a safe and healthy level of PFAS for the human body to consume. That is a health decision, and we welcome health experts reviewing and updating that as constantly and rigorously as they can. But all we can do is ensure that, as water utilities, we're complying with those guidelines, and that is what we are doing. We treat our catchments and our reservoirs incredibly seriously. They're very, very precious things. That work is already happening but, beyond that, it's not reasonable for us to do anything other than adhere to the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Are water utilities, including Sydney Water, undertaking any work at the moment, or have they—in terms of the methods by which PFAS can be removed from drinking water? It is put in place different methods across different parts of the world. Obviously, the US has a hugely reduced level guideline in terms of their upper limits now. I know they're phasing it in, but they've started and there are many measures that can reduce the vast majority—in fact, remove the vast majority—of PFAS from drinking water. What are Sydney Water and other water utilities doing at the moment to explore that? If the Drinking Water Guidelines change, you'd want them to be prepared to immediately implement them.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. I may ask Mr Cheroux or Mr George to comment, or you could talk to them this afternoon. I would say a couple of things. We are engaged in work as utilities, also through the

Australian water alliance and other national and international networks of researchers, to explore how we can ensure that our drinking water is as safe as possible. It appals me, as it appals you, that the world is unfortunately contaminated with these pollutants. Big polluters bear a real responsibility for that. Yes, we are exploring what we can do. I should indicate, Ms Faehrmann, it's challenging work. There is not an easy way to remove PFAS entirely from water or from, in fact, any substance. It is not straightforward. However, in answer to your question, both in terms of catchment management and the protection of our special areas that feed into the reservoirs and dams, and in terms of exploring things we can do to treat water in a way that minimises PFAS, of course we are engaged in that, here in New South Wales, nationally and internationally.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I just wanted to get to the bottom of the testing by Sydney Water in terms of PFAS. It was back in June that it was reported that PFAS levels were detected and the results were, I think *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported it as, "put quietly onto Sydney Water's website". Firstly, in terms of that, was that the first testing that had been undertaken by Sydney Water for PFAS?

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

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Was that the first time that PFAS levels had been detected in our drinking water?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might ask Mr Cheroux to come up to the table. I understand that water has been subject to testing since 2015, I think.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** For PFAS?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I understand that is when Sydney Water first started.

**ROCH CHEROUX:** That's correct. We started the discussion on PFAS with NSW Health and WaterNSW back in 2015. The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines are pretty clear about the methodology that should be used in terms of any elements in the water and how they should be tested. So it's a risk-based approach.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** When did Sydney Water start testing, Mr Cheroux?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** The first testing was in 2018, and that was done at that time because we had—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** How frequently? So starting in 2018?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** At that time we had some of our customers near the Richmond base that were worried about PFAS and that is why we tested. The inflow of water is actually about seven kilometres downstream of the intake of the water treatment plant. So we detected some PFAS, but far below the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. So in Richmond it's been tested since 2019.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** How frequently is that tested?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** It's every year.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That's right. You're testing once a year.

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Correct.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What happens to those results once a year? You test at how many locations?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Until this year, we tested only Richmond. Because the risk-based approach of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines clearly says that if there is no acute source of PFAS in the catchments, then there is no need to do testing. We had more discussion this year with NSW Health and WaterNSW. Because some of our customers were asking us, "What is the level of PFAS in our water?", then we decided to test the water everywhere.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** This was this year?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** That was this year, yes. Of course, as the risk analysis was predicting, there was no PFAS levels that were above the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. So all the PFAS detected was under the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** When you say your customers were asking you to test, how were they asking you to test? Were they sending you letters?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** We always engage with our customers and community and that is through all sorts of things. Sometimes we've got people in shopping malls or we've got surveys. We've got discussions and we've got town halls with our customers. Because the question of PFAS was coming up, that is something that we did.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That's what the customers were asking you to test.

**ROCH CHEROUX:** They were not asking us to test—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Why then were the results put quietly on your website and didn't really come to light until the media started inquiring about it and it became front-page news in *The Sydney Morning Herald*?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Our customers were not asking us to test. They wanted to know if there was PFAS, and at what level, and if it was compliant to the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. So that's why we tested, and when the results were available then we put them on our website.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm not quite sure how you can put something loudly on a website, Ms Faehrmann.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I think the whole point is that it was just put on the website, as opposed to notifying those members of the community. If you are saying the community was concerned, and then it was just popped onto the website—I don't know too many people who would continue to look at that. That is the whole point. There is a wide range of communicating with members of the community. How much more frequently now is Sydney Water testing?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** We are testing every year, because, as I said, there is no source of PFAS.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** But PFAS is there, Minister. Regardless of the fact there's no source of PFAS, PFAS is now there. Sydney Water testing as a result of community concerns actually found more PFAS than what Sydney Water was finding. I would suggest it's also probably because we have scientists and their PhD students testing the water and uncovering alarming levels and speaking with both Sydney Water and the community about that.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I would reiterate that PFAS is a pollutant and we are distressed that there is pollutants in our environment. They are not alarming levels, to the extent that they are consistent with Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. Mr Cheroux has indicated that the reason that we didn't do an alert is because the question that was being asked of Sydney Water was, "Is the water compliant with Australian Drinking Water Guidelines?" A valid question, and the answer was yes. I appreciate your concern, and we are in dialogue about a more regular testing regime.

We want to make sure that we are meeting community expectations in relation to the provision of information. We don't have anything to hide here. I take on your feedback, as does Mr Cheroux, about more regular testing. But at the end of the day, it's really important to indicate that every single test we have done so far has indicated that, despite some evidence of trace and in a very, very limited number of circumstances, elevated PFAS levels, there isn't anything to be alarmed about. Our drinking water is compliant with the guidelines, and if those guidelines change, we stand ready to comply with them as well.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I'm going to depart from tradition and ask you in budget estimates about expenditure in the budget.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'm ready.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Brace yourself. So the \$5.1 billion that was announced in relation to social homes—I understand that was 8,400 social homes made up of 6,200 new, and 2,200 replacements over four years. In the infrastructure statement it indicates that \$1 billion has been put aside for this year for approximately 1,025 genuinely new social homes. Is that correct?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. I was following along with your numbers there but, yes, I think that it is.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Does that \$1 billion a year include the Federal amount that came through the HAFF negotiations that The Greens secured, that \$3 billion that then got distributed?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No. The Commonwealth delivered \$2 billion as part of the Social Housing Accelerator. That is not HAFF money; that is called the Social Housing Accelerator. That is \$2 billion, and \$600 million for New South Wales. No, that money is not part of the budgetary amounts that you have described. The HAFF is a different source of money—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That \$1 billion?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Well, \$10 billion in the future fund, the dividends will be divided amongst the States. We've put in bids for round one, and we await news from the Commonwealth as to whether we will be successful. So obviously that is not included, because we actually don't know what we will be receiving.



**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Where has that money gone then from the social accelerator?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That is listed separately in the budget as Social Housing Accelerator. You can see it separately accounted for.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So that is in addition?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's right. That was \$600 million.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** How many new homes will that add to the 1,025?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We are delivering 1,500 homes as part of the accelerator. That is a combination of grants from community housing providers, homes that we are directly delivering and vacant restorations.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Sorry, 1,500 over how long?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** What is the timetable for the delivery of the accelerator? Over three years?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I've got July 2028.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** July 2028, Ms Boyd.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So we are looking at about 1,500 social homes each year?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We are hopeful to receive money from the Commonwealth under the HAFF. But, yes, obviously that is not secured at this point.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Given that we have a current waitlist of 50,000 families waiting for homes, that then comes to about 5 per cent of the new houses required just to clear the backlog. Is that correct?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes and, just to be clear, unfortunately we currently have 56,000 families waiting for homes. There isn't a suggestion from me, Ms Boyd, that the contributions that we have made are going to clear the waiting list. The effort that I am making is to make a significant dent in the priority waiting list. Over the period of the delivery of the accelerator, the Building Homes for NSW program and the HAF, that figure—we are really running headlong towards reducing it.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Okay, but how much? We're still looking at only 5 per cent of the new houses required—a bit under, because you've said there are actually more on the waitlist. NCOSS is calling for 5,000 a year. I understand that you've inherited a lot of this. But if we're just looking at supply and not addressing the multiple other levers that we could be pulling, we are really behind. What are we going to do to increase that amount by a factor of 20? It seems impossible.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I've indicated, yes, we are behind. This is a historic investment. Is it going to clear the social housing waiting list? No. What are we going to do about that? We'll ensure that this delivery pipeline is done on time and on budget, and makes the kind of contribution that I hope it makes, in particular to the priority waiting list. My view is that this work will demonstrate how valuable these investments are and the impact that the government housing delivery program can have on overall supply, and that this will create the conditions for further investment.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** But given that this is comparatively small, and we have—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's comparatively large.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Sure, it's all relative, but it's not going to happen for some time. There are levers we could be pulling right now that would release new homes. For example, empty homes levies, meanwhile use—there's a whole bunch of other things. What is your Government doing to implement other things that would have a much quicker impact?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I'll just mention two briefly for you, Ms Boyd. One is meanwhile use. You are right to identify that as a big opportunity. We have a program to unlock our homes that are vacant, on the path to redevelopment that you have described, for meanwhile use. We've already delivered one of those at a property in Glebe, and there are others on the way. So, yes, we are doing everything we can to make our homes available for meanwhile use, as well as exploring opportunities in the planning system for others. The other thing that we are doing is our work on modern methods of construction, which is a way that we can deliver homes—not necessarily permanent social homes, although potentially permanent social homes—much more quickly. That is part of our new supply pipeline. The AHO, in particular, has done an excellent job of turning around new homes

for Aboriginal people very quickly. Those are just a couple of examples of what we are doing in the short term to address the challenge.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** The New South Wales Government made an election commitment to fund and fast-track a new Yass water treatment plant. We're now 17 months on. What's the progress on that?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We've made a submission, alongside the council, to the National Water Grid to secure funding from the Commonwealth to complete the funding package. I'm very confident about that submission but, obviously, we are relying on the Commonwealth to make a decision. But we've contributed the \$13 million we promised in the election. We've added \$6 million to that in the most recent budget, so we are now contributing close to \$20 million towards that project. That's not the entire cost of the project; it's an expensive project. With Commonwealth funding we will have the full funding envelope, and then we'll get on with delivering the upgrade.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What's the total projected cost?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I understand the total cost in the final business case is—was it \$28 million? I might have to take the final cost—

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes, it's \$23 million and \$18 million, so it's just over \$40 million.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** So \$40 million.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** When do you expect to hear from the Federal Government?

**AMANDA JONES:** End of the year.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** End of the year.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Do you have a plan B if the funds aren't approved at the Federal level?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Find the money ourselves, but that's not straightforward. As I said, we've contributed—we've come up with about half of that amount. We're looking to the Commonwealth to contribute the rest. If we have to find a way to reallocate within our resources to make this project happen, we will address that when we come to it. But obviously, as I indicated, I'm really hopeful that the Commonwealth understand this is a growth community; they've been promised an upgrade for many, many years and nothing's happened; they're not comfortable drinking their water, even though, of course, I reiterate it's completely safe to drink—I understand it tastes and smells a bit funny, and they don't want to drink it. I'm hopeful the Commonwealth understand that this a very worthwhile project.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Will you rule out any increase in water rates for local residents?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Well, I actually don't issue water rates to those local residents. There's a local water utility who does that. I can't speak for them. That's their decision, so ask Yass Valley Council.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, in 2023-24, how many young people transitioned from specialist homelessness services to stable accommodation?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might have to take that figure on notice, but we can get it for you.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** For 2023-24, do you know how many young people were sleeping rough?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No. The best estimate that we have of rough sleeping is obviously the street count. That was about 2,000. I don't think that is broken down demographically, so I probably wouldn't have what I would describe as an accurate figure that represented that. Data capture is obviously a bit of a challenge in homelessness, so we sometimes don't have the kind of data we would like available.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What steps are you taking to be able to capture particularly that hidden homelessness—so people that are couch-surfing, house-sitting and various other types of hidden homelessness?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It is a valid question, and I think you have perhaps moved a motion in relation to this in the Chamber before, Mrs Maclaren-Jones. I've supported your call and the sector's call to find ways to capture hidden homelessness better. We have the Homelessness Strategy that we are finalising at the

moment. Obviously part of that is capturing the data we need to make good decisions. There are ways that we try. Obviously the census is a point in time. But, yes, as you've rightly pointed out, and I agree, and the sector has pointed out, that's a one-night capture in 2021. How can we use that, really, now to make decisions when we know so much has changed? I could ask Ms Pinkstone, perhaps, to talk more or you could talk to her this afternoon about some of the detailed work in the Homelessness Strategy around data capture, but it is something that we are trying to get a better handle on. Is there anything you wanted to add?

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I'm happy to cover that this afternoon.

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

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Have there been any funds allocated in this budget for data development?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We've allocated \$100 million for the Homelessness Innovation Fund. It could well be the case that improving data capture and development is a very good use of some of that money. Obviously a bunch of that money is going to go to direct service provision. But the principle of the Homelessness Innovation Fund is that there are a lot of very good ideas that previously have struggled to get off the ground because of resource limitations, and we want to give them a go. Innovative ways to capture data could well fall into the category of—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** But no specific funds have been allocated?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, but the \$100 million for the Homelessness Innovation Fund is a pretty good start.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, do you monitor the housing status of adolescents entering and leaving detention?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We do have a piece of work with Youth Justice and Corrective Services around people exiting forms of custody and ensuring that they don't enter forms of homelessness. We do have a collaboration with Youth Justice on that.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Do you have the figures for 2023-24 of how many homeless adolescents were detained under section 28 of the Bail Act?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I don't. I'd have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, could you outline what family intervention programs are available to support homeless adolescents on community orders and leaving detention?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think that would largely be managed through Minister Washington's portfolio. Our role is to ensure that if those orders require housing support, we are able to make that available, and we do that. In terms of the management of family intervention orders for young people leaving Youth Justice, as I said, that would either be Minister Washington or Minister Dib. But if, as part of that work, there is a housing gap that is a piece of the wraparound support that a young person needs, we would then ensure that that need was met.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, you announced in the budget \$250 million to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness leaving corrections centres and mental health services. How much of that money will be going to young people?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't have a demographic breakdown. I was very proud of investments that we have made to break cycles of recidivism and re-entry into forms of incarceration.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, this was an announcement you made to specifically address people who are at risk of homelessness leaving detention centres. Will that support young people or is it only for adults?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** My understanding is that it is available for everyone who requires housing and homelessness support, but I don't have a breakdown of how that will be allocated across different demographics.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Is it being managed by you or by the corrections Minister?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** By the corrections Minister but, as I said, we work deeply in collaboration on these issues. Obviously, as you know, Mrs Maclaren-Jones, often the needs—not just of young people but of

everyone leaving incarceration, but particularly of young people—are broad. It is not just housing support that they need; perhaps it is mental health intervention or drug and alcohol intervention or family restoration.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** You can't provide a breakdown today as to how much will support those who are leaving correctional facilities, whether they're adults or young people, nor can you give a breakdown of how much will be allocated for those leaving mental health services?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, I can't provide that detailed breakdown, but I will take it on notice.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** You mentioned the Homelessness Strategy. At last estimates you said that would be released in mid-July. We're now at September. When will the announcement of the new strategy be made?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We're looking towards the end of the year. The reason for the delay is, one, we had homelessness services come into Homes NSW from DCJ. That machinery-of-government change was one that we needed to ensure was successful, which it has been. Two, we had the budget, and the budget is a game-changing intervention for homelessness—not just the \$100 million Homelessness Innovation Fund. Every homelessness service that I talk to—there are many issues but probably number one is a lack of stable long-term public housing.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, I'll just focus on the strategy. That will be at the end of this year. How much has been allocated in this budget to the implementation of that strategy?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Well, \$6.6 billion because—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** To implementation of the strategy.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The strategy goes to all of the issues that we have addressed in our—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I'm asking specifically, Minister, how much has been allocated for the NSW Homelessness Strategy?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The development of the strategy or the implementation of the strategy?

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Forward planning, yes, and implementation. Both the development—is there any money that has been allocated in this budget for the Homelessness Strategy?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. I understand around \$20 million, perhaps \$25 million, for the development of the strategy. That is a different thing to the implementation of the strategy. Yes, we have allocated money to develop the strategy, but the strategy is worth nothing—it's a waste of \$25 million or however much we put it in, and I can get you the exact figure—if, as you say, the implementation is not funded. The \$6.6 billion speaks directly to the priorities of that strategy. There may well be other elements of that strategy that require additional budgetary allocation, and we'll deal with that through the budgetary process next year. As I said, every homelessness service that I speak to says the number one thing you can do is build more public housing, and we've put billions of dollars in the budget to do that.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, will there be a homeless youth strategy?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We are doing a youth action plan alongside the strategy. That decision was made in collaboration with the sector, who wanted a separate piece of work that spoke to the particular issues of young people. That youth action plan is being co-designed with those organisations.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Are there a funds allocated to that plan, or is part of—

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** To the development? The development, I think, is funded within that budgetary allocation for the Homelessness Strategy, because they sit together. The implementation—again, there is budgetary allocation within the \$6.6 billion specifically for programs for young people.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, I've asked you previously about the Link2home service. In particular, we've seen an increase to over 38 minutes from seven minutes in that 12-month period. In the budget, has there been anything allocated to meet that demand?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. The reason for that increase in time is that we have seen over 100,000 additional calls in the last 12 months to Link2home. That huge volume increase has unfortunately had an impact on wait times for the service. Through the budget, we've allocated money specifically to try to resolve the immediate need for accommodation that Link2home primarily meets, and that is temporary accommodation. Many people—

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I'm actually asking about the Link2home service. There has been no change in staff numbers.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There has been an increase in staff numbers. Ms Pinkstone, do you want to speak to that? We did absolutely surge staff numbers to try and resolve that.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What's the current staff number?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** At the moment, staff that are trained for Link2home—because people move around within the call centre—are 252 of the 352 staff.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I move on to the innovation fund. When is the criteria for that fund going to be announced?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Very soon.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Do you have a time frame?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Weeks—within the next few weeks.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** You would be quite familiar with Salt Care down on the South Coast. They've been advised by the local member that they would be able to apply for funding through the innovation fund. Is that correct?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, that is correct.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What criteria are you looking at? We've heard before that it would be quite broad.

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

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** How are you intending to allocate that \$100 million if anyone can apply?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It is quite broad deliberately because we want to make sure that all of the full range of services that might be meeting the needs of the homeless community are able to participate. There are going to be a few things that are top priorities for us. One is temporary or emergency accommodation. We are seeing, literally just following on from our conversation about Link2home, a huge increase in demand for temporary or emergency accommodation. Services that are meeting that need and are able to work with us to manage that, we're going to be very interested in those applications.

The other ones are filling gaps where existing specialist homelessness services and other programs are not operating, or not operating well. Obviously, we're keen to identify them. Then, just creative ideas—my view is that there is a lot of really interesting stuff that the sector has proposed over many years that has struggled to get off the ground because resources have been limited. A number of these ideas have got a lot to offer. Yes, we're going to have to make decisions—there is not going to be enough money for every good idea, but those are the kinds of things that are going to frame the decisions we're making about what programs to fund.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I might examine that a little bit further this afternoon. I move to a couple of questions around mental health. The mental health complex at Westmead—it was originally stated that it would be completed in 2026. That date's been revised to 2027. What efforts are being made to ensure construction will be completed?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The SWMHIP—the Statewide Mental Health Infrastructure Program, or whatever that ridiculous acronym is—is a big piece of work. Yes, Westmead is one of our top priorities. What are we doing? Trying to get on with it as quickly as we can.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** How much has been allocated to this project?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** You have the Westmead figure?

**DEB WILLCOX:** It's \$540 million.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What efforts are being made to ensure that adequate training for staff at the existing Cumberland facility and the mental health complex at Westmead will be ready when it's operational?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I think we've talked about at previous estimates, we have a pretty robust engagement with staff at the Cumberland Hospital. There have obviously been issues in relation to staff

there and we accept that. Based on the work plan that was developed by Dr Lyons and Dr Wright that I asked them to develop based on some of concerns that were raised, that's given us a road map for that work.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Are you implementing all the recommendations?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, we are. I'm advised that the implementation of all of those recommendations is on track. I could ask Dr Wright to elaborate, or you could ask this afternoon. I will indicate that we have a new general manager of mental health for the Western Sydney Local Health District. We have also done some restructuring of the executive leadership at the LHD to meet exactly the need that you have identified. It is a big move to the new Westmead campus. I'm very excited about it. We want to make sure we're well set up for success there. That's why we've done leadership restructuring and reviews of processes, and we are implementing the findings of those reviews. Those recommendations have all been accepted. I have to say, my sense is that things are improving. There are still issues in Western Sydney LHD—I don't deny that—but I have seen an improvement in terms of some of the culture and engagement in recent times, which I think is positive.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** You announced the establishment of three sites focused on specialised long-term housing for those with mental illness and psychological disabilities. One of those sites has been announced for the Central Coast. When will the announcement for the other two sites be made?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We're working with The Haven Foundation, which is our NGO partner, on those sites. They are trying to secure land. It's not straightforward. Land is expensive. We are trying to make sure we get maximum value for money, as it were, for that election commitment. I am hopeful that we will be able to have the other locations identified by the end of the year. I've met with The Haven Foundation a number of times this year to try and ensure that that project is on track. It is difficult for them to secure land that is suitable for the type of specialised housing that they are providing within the budgetary envelope.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** On the Rouse Hill Hospital, is the Government on track to deliver the mental health services there?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I am advised that we are. It's not been indicated to me that there are any challenges. Ms Willcox is nodding.

**DEB WILLCOX:** Not that I'm aware of.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Not that she's aware of.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** How much has been allocated to deliver those services out of the \$300 million?

**DEB WILLCOX:** I'd have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In relation to the \$527 million to address homelessness that you announced this year, is that new money or is some of it existing funds that are carrying over?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's new money.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** How is that being broken down between emergency crisis housing, support services and the innovation fund?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Well, \$100 million is going to the innovation fund. My recollection is around \$300 million or so—I might have to take the exact figure on notice—is for temporary or emergency accommodation. I'll have to take the rest of it on notice, or I can try and find my note, but those are the two top-line elements of that. I'm happy to take on notice the specific breakdown.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Minister, how much in this year's budget was allocated to crisis accommodation?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might have to take that on notice, or perhaps I can come back to you at the end with that figure.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** That's fine.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, I wanted to turn to the issue of Walgett town water quality. I've written to you, as you know—and you've written to me in response—a number of times about this issue. In response to one letter I wrote to you this year, you responded to me on 23 May 2024 saying, "I can assure you that the town water for Walgett is safe to drink." On what basis did you make that assurance?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** On the basis that I was advised by the local water utility, who deliver the drinking water there, that it was within Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The bore water, of course, is what many people are drinking unless they're buying bottled water. Particularly for people with severe medical conditions, it has sodium levels 15 times higher than what is safe for those people. I know there's Drinking Water Guidelines, but then there's others for people with kidney issues and other health issues. How can that be considered safe to drink, particularly for the First Nations community of Walgett?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I said, it's safe to the extent that it is within Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. That is a very important principle. Those guidelines are robust and clear. Drinking water must be within them, and it is. If I did not indicate this elsewhere in my letter to you, I apologise, Ms Faehrmann, because I have indicated several times publicly that I accept that the bore water is higher in sodium, and that can pose a particular risk to some people with particular medical conditions. I accept that. Also, it doesn't taste very good. The community, similar to questions in relation to Yass earlier, are dissatisfied with tap water that tastes bad—they don't drink it on that basis—and that's not acceptable to me. It is safe. I don't want people to think they are going to get sick purely on the basis of drinking the tap water—they're not. But it isn't acceptable to me that the primary water source, which is not bore water for Walgett in non-dry times; it's river water from the Namoi—my expectation is that that water is the water that is being provided there.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I understand that the Dharriwaa Elders Group from Walgett has been working with a partnership with the University of New South Wales and the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service. That project has recently undertaken testing of the water. They've undertaken testing for nutrients, chemical oxygen demand, metals, pesticides and algae in the Namoi and Barwon rivers. They're releasing that report. In that testing, they found nutrients, metals and pesticides. Some results exceeded the levels recommended for healthy ecosystems. As you're aware, there's Drinking Water Guidelines and how the ecosystems are. They do say that three of the pesticides detected are banned in the European Union. These are atrazine, diuron and a mixture of S- and R-metolachlor. Have you heard of this? Have you requested WaterNSW to undertake testing of those rivers? Why is the community having to undertake testing itself? I don't think they've got any confidence in what they're hearing.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** This is perhaps an even more challenging circumstance, Ms Faehrmann. Understandably, they don't want to drink the bore water. It is higher in sodium and doesn't taste great. They should be drinking treated water from the Namoi River. I'm not familiar with that research, but if the treated water from the Namoi River is also problematic, we are in a little bit of a pickle here. I'm not familiar with that research.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I think it's just been completed.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I have met with the Dharriwaa Elders Group and the Walgett AMS in Walgett, so I am familiar with their advocacy. I can ask WaterNSW to comment on the testing, although I'm not sure that would really be—

**ANDREW GEORGE:** No.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Andrew is shaking his head. It's not really something that WaterNSW would do as the river operator. They are not really responsible for that.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Back to responsibility, I suppose, because you have provided assurances in the past. It was, I think, one of the very early issues that you dealt with when you became the Minister. What then, in terms of your responsibility as Minister, can you do for the people of Walgett to provide them, maybe, with the ability to test the water? They're doing it themselves with their own funding or with independent funding. It just doesn't seem right, does it? On the one hand you're saying you're concerned, but then WaterNSW, for example, isn't responsible. How do you assist them?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We work with the local water utility there. In terms of the division of responsibility—I accept these are fair questions. This is the point of estimates in a way—to try and get to who is responsible for what. The Walgett Shire Council, which is the local water utility for Walgett and Lightning Ridge, is responsible for the provision of drinking water, the testing of that drinking water and assurances that it is within Drinking Water Guidelines. WaterNSW is responsible for river operation, not that kind of work that I have just described. If there is a suggestion that the local water utility is failing to do that work, which I think is part of the—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I think that could be fair to suggest that's the case in this situation.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** —then we would look to intervene. We have done a bit of that already to try and support them. Obviously, we funded a water treatment plant for them and we funded a reverse osmosis plant for them. They're not currently operating them, which is a source of some frustration. To be fair to them, there are workforce challenges. We are looking at what more we can do to support and hold accountable our local

water utilities, particularly in far west New South Wales. That's come out of the productivity commissioner's report into local water utilities and other work that we've done. We need to be sensitive. We're very supportive of our local water utilities. A lot of them do a wonderful job. There was a parliamentary inquiry that was led by Stephen Lawrence. That is all really important work but, ultimately, if there is a suggestion that a local water utility is not meeting the needs of its community, there are levers that we can pull and we're willing to explore that.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I've also got information that suggests—I wonder if the Dharriwaa Elders Group has informed you about this. They're concerned that the supply of water with elevated levels of sodium in Walgett and surrounding communities is exacerbating corrosion problems in the plumbing infrastructure, as well as making the water unpalatable to most, if not all, residents, and obviously potentially harmful to residents taking medication for hypertension. That's with the water as it is with the high sodium levels. Have you been informed about that?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I have. To be fair, the issue around corrosion is new to me. The other two issues I have been informed of. I am aware of those concerns. I do not consider bore water to be the primary water source in Walgett for those reasons and, in addition, perhaps the corrosion concern that you have raised. We have provided infrastructure to the local water utility to treat water from the primary water source, which is the Namoi River. It is not being used. As I have said, that is a source of frustration to me. There are workforce challenges. But as we continue to work with them to explore why that is happening despite the provision of that infrastructure—which cost taxpayers in New South Wales millions and millions of dollars and is sitting there idle—we are willing to look at ways that we can more directly intervene.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** There's the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines—which is what you've referred to with the Sydney Water PFAS issue—which sets individual parameters within that. Do local water utilities in New South Wales have to publicly report their drinking water quality data when they monitor it against those guidelines?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** They have to comply. Do they publicly report that information, Amanda?

**AMANDA JONES:** They do report the information. I think we do publish that information.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** So you have a database that is publicly accessible for every water utility where their drinking water quality—the parameters as they relate to the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines—is available?

**AMANDA JONES:** It mightn't be presented exactly against the guidelines, but yes.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I'm of the understanding that that might not be the situation, so I'll check on that at lunch and come back.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We can also take it on notice. I don't have any problem with the proposition that you are accepting, Ms Faehrmann, which is that people in regional New South Wales should absolutely have an assurance that the water that they are drinking is compliant with drinking water guidelines and that there would be some public reporting on that. If there is a slip betwixt cup and lip in how that's happening, we're happy to take that on and come back to you with what we think is being reported and compare that with your understanding and expectation.

**AMANDA JONES:** We report on performance and Health reports on the drinking water standards.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, where within the Government does the overall responsibility for the health of catchments sit?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's a very good question. It sits between myself and Minister Moriarty, primarily, with her responsibility for Local Land Services. The issue that I assume you're going to allude to is the fact that that perhaps is not an optimum state of affairs. We certainly have reflected on the fact that catchment management is not particularly well managed with that relationship between someone being responsible for the river and then, as soon as it goes onto the riverbank, it's someone else being responsible; obviously they're directly linked. One of the things that we've done out of the chief scientist's report into the mass fish deaths was fund a piece of work to better integrate catchment management within government and have more direct responsibilities for that.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What is that piece of work?

**AMANDA JONES:** It's an integrated catchment management framework. It's part of the \$25 million over the next four years that the Government has committed to respond to the fish death report by the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer. As the Minister says, it pulls together Local Land Services, Water in terms of—



**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Just for that catchment?

**AMANDA JONES:** No, for New South Wales.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, for New South Wales—the whole catchment management framework for the State.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** For \$25 million?

**AMANDA JONES:** No, that's the whole package in response. So it's about \$1.7 million and it'll take about two years. It involves the planning department and BCS.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Thank you, Ms Jones. We can come back but I am very interested. Last week I heard you say that you answered questions about Yass water earlier when I wasn't in the room. Last week I visited Yass and spoke to people about the very ageing water treatment plant but also the issue with the catchment, because there's no protected area and everything flows into Yass River in terms of industry, farming. It did alert me to the fact that the catchment action plans that were in place under the catchment management authorities in the previous Government—in fact, I was on the Natural Resources Advisory Council and had quite a bit to do with that, which started almost two decades ago now but was very much in place when the former Labor Government was in. The Coalition Government came in and scrapped the lot. What those catchment action plans did was have science-based targets for riparian vegetation and for monitoring the health of the catchment, and KPIs. A lot of money was put forward. It was integrated. It was a big deal. Then it has come to light that this current Labor Government doesn't seem to be considering that at all.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, we are. Ms Faehrmann, you are absolutely right. I am aware of the history that you are describing. In Victoria they still have catchment management authorities—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** In terms of the targets around healthy catchments, from an integrated way, ensuring that water is protected like what we started to see in the previous Government, what is your Government doing, or what will it do, to get there?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We're developing the framework. Obviously we're not at the point of the targets yet, but we have put money aside specifically to develop the framework. It's unfortunate that we're coming from a low base. As you say, that work was undone; we don't have it. You started your question with "Who is responsible?" There isn't a clear answer to that, but I'm indicating to you I recognise the point that you've made and so has the chief scientist. He specifically identified this lack of integrated catchment management as one of the factors contributing to the mass fish deaths in the Menindee Lakes, so I recognise it's an important piece of work. We have funded in the budget the development of a framework which seeks to rebuild what you have described.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That will take some time because it was also the work of the Natural Resources Commission for a bit to look at that. Now it's all water sharing plans, water management plans in terms of water and, in terms of biodiversity, it's forests. It all seems very disconnected. If you're doing a framework, what are the terms of reference? What has that framework been asked to come up with? Again, this was a whole-of-government, very big government framework with the catchment action plans and CMAs. Local Land Services just don't operate like that—although I know it's the wrong budget estimates to talk about LLS.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** But it is true to say that that is a gap. We don't operate well together. That is why we are developing the integrated framework. Ms Jones can talk a little bit about that now or perhaps you could ask her this afternoon. But I want to assure you that our intention for that work is to create the framework for the kind of integration that you have described and that we are lacking in New South Wales.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I will come back to it and I will be looking at that with a lot of interest in terms of how, and how quickly, that develops. I do want to go to the Yass water issue, though. I am aware that funding has been applied for.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Mrs Maclaren-Jones did ask this. I apologise, Ms Faehrmann. Three estimates on one day is a challenge for you.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Yes. It can't be helped. There are three on.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can't take responsibility for that either, but I do apologise. We will have to work on a plan B. We don't prefer plan B, because that requires us to find the \$18 million from other sources. I reiterate my confidence that the National Water Grid will see the value of this investment, not just for the people of Yass—this is a growing region. I have visited that water treatment plant. It is ageing, you know.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** It is ageing.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It is not a fit-for-purpose modern facility. I have been public in my advocacy for the Commonwealth to look fondly on that application. If we need to go to a plan B, I guess we'll go to a plan B. But at this estimates my position is plan A: The Commonwealth comes up with its portion of the funding.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** And in the meantime? If it is approved, it will take four years to build.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There are other things that we're doing with the council there in relation to cleaning the pipes and other things. I think there is magnesium build-up in the pipes. There are other things that we are doing. Again, perhaps Ms Jones can talk about that this afternoon. I want to assure you, to the extent that we are doing things now we can, that is not going to fix the problem. The water treatment plant is the fix. It is an expensive fix and an important one. That is why we're very focused on that. Did you want Ms Jones to elaborate now on the short-term work?

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** No.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's fine. She can do that this afternoon.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Thank you. Minister, on the McPhillamys mine and Belubula headwaters, have you assessed the impact of that tailings dam from a water perspective? Have you been briefed on what the impact of that tailings dam on the headwaters of the Belubula River, which was going to concrete over 22 springs that flow into the Lachlan, into the Murray-Darling Basin, would mean for that system?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I have been briefed on the fact that the department provided advice to Planning, as part of their independent planning process, which did assess those issues that you have raised and indicated to Planning that there were no critical barriers or issues from a water perspective. That happened prior to me becoming the Minister. But I have been briefed that that rigorous assessment was done and that advice was provided to Planning as part of the original granting of planning consent.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, you said earlier that you're working on the new structure for young people and their voice in terms of State Government. Do you respect the current avenues that are in place for young people in New South Wales to be heard?

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

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Obviously, a key part of that is the Youth Advisory Council. I understand applications opened for those positions some months ago. Is there an update on when the next iteration of that council, its membership, will be announced?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I think it is within the next few weeks. In my diary, in the next few weeks—I can take on notice the exact date—there is an opportunity for me to contact those new members, alongside the Advocate for Children and Young People, to advise them that they were successful.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So would you expect that by early October that would be done and announced?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, I would.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to take you back to water and, specifically, the five accelerated SDLAM projects. My understanding is that the Federal department says the five projects represent a \$445 million investment in water infrastructure. Is that figure correct?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. I can check that figure, but \$445 million sounds accurate.

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes, that is correct.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I also want to talk about the budget papers, just so Ms Boyd doesn't think she's the only one who does. The budget papers quote the SDLAMs at \$281.6 million over the forward estimates and an estimated total cost of \$311 million. Why is there a difference between the Federal amount of \$445 million and the \$311 million in the budget papers?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might ask Ms Jones to comment on that. It is potentially because those funding arrangements between New South Wales and the Commonwealth are subject to various State-Federal funding agreements that are in the process of being renegotiated as part of the extension to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. As we are renegotiating around the delivery of our projects under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, there is still work that is going on between New South Wales and the Commonwealth to finalise some of those projects. I want to reiterate that I'm very enthusiastic to have them finalised as soon as possible, but there is still

some work to finalise and, until that's done, obviously we don't have final executed funding agreements with the Commonwealth for all of that work. Amanda, did you want to add anything?

**AMANDA JONES:** I think it probably combines the six SDLAM projects as well as the Reconnecting River Country Program.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That was going to be my next question. In August the Commonwealth talked about \$274 million through Reconnecting River Country.

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

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So that is part of the \$445 million?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In terms of the funding agreement for the SDLAM projects, the completion date for all of them is 31 December 2026. Is that a hard and firm date?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's currently legislated. That's for the 605 gigalitres. Obviously, the 450 additional recovery is 2027. But, yes, they are now legislated dates, through the Commonwealth.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you comfortable that you will be able to hit what you need to—for want of a better term—by that date, Minister?

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

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** As much as you can?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't want to be on record here, Ms Mitchell, saying, "Absolutely. No problem. It's all done and dusted." That is not the statement that I am making. As I have just indicated, there are elements of those projects where we haven't even finalised our path forward with the Commonwealth. It is going to be challenging. Communities are rightfully concerned and they want us to be clear about what we are doing and when. We are working, through the Basin Officials Committee and the MDBA, on that. But I have always said the reason why I supported the renegotiation of the agreement is that we, obviously, needed more time and more money. We have secured that. Is it 100 per cent assured that that is going to be an adequate time frame and funding envelope to deliver on the commitments that we made under the Basin Plan? It's going to be challenging.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** My understanding is you're currently tendering for a managing contractor to provide oversight for those projects. Is that correct?

**AMANDA JONES:** The SDLAM projects?

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

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

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When do you anticipate that contract will begin?

**AMANDA JONES:** We're anticipating awarding the contract in October, so that the successful contractor can be ready to actually start work in the dry season, by March.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, coming back to you, I appreciate what you say about there being multiple factors. But start March 2025 and all work completed in terms of that legislated time frame by the end of December 2026—do you think that's enough time for that work to be done?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That is the time frame that we have from the legislation now. We are going to do everything we can to ensure that work is done. There are multiple SDLAM projects. New South Wales is responsible for—how many, Amanda?

**AMANDA JONES:** It's six projects, but there are multiple worksites and multiple projects.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** There are 77 smaller subprojects. That's the figure I've been given.

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It's a big piece of work. No, I do not want to be on record here as saying 100 per cent I can guarantee that will all be done and delivered by that deadline. But we do have more time now, and we do have more money now. That is a huge improvement on where we were and gives us a lot more confidence that we will be able to make substantial headway.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How much funding has been allocated for that contractor? Is that a figure you can provide?

**AMANDA JONES:** No. It's a procurement process at the moment.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, once it has been finalised—the procurement process—would you potentially be able to provide that figure in the future?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** If it's information that we're able to provide—it's not subject to commercial in confidence or some other provision that would make that difficult for us to release—I'm happy to provide it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Wilcannia Weir—I have asked you about that in previous estimates. Again, it's currently on hold, I'm told, pending an independent review. Can you provide any more information about that review process? Will it be a panel, consultants or a tender project? What's the latest on that one?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** The intention is to have a panel. We're finalising the membership of that panel right now. I would hope to have that done within the coming weeks. We have been wanting to consult with community as to the membership of that panel because, again, I don't want to waste time doing a review of a project that the community doesn't then accept as a valid piece of work. But I feel confident that we have a short list of names that will be acceptable. It will be a combination of some people with technical expertise and some people with expertise in relation to government processes and the way that decisions are made, because part of the intention of the panel is to assess whether or not it is accurate that some of the barriers that were identified to me as reasons why the original design was not viable are, in fact, legitimate barriers.

I accept the community has genuinely said, "We think you have been poorly advised in relation to those barriers." I have heard that when I went to Wilcannia and sat on the banks of the Darling River for many hours hearing community, rightfully frustrated. That is why we've paused the project and asked for this independent review. I want them to accept the outcomes. I want to have a shared understanding.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** "Them" being the community.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** That's right. I want to have a shared understanding with the community about the outcomes of the review. In a couple of weeks we'll have the panel members, and then we'll need to give them a little bit of time to do their work—I'm imagining perhaps a couple of months.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That was going to be my final question on this one. The time frame of the review—you would hope to have it finished by the end of the year or early next year. What are you looking at?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think early next year is more realistic. Again, I'll need to be guided by the panel members. I'm not going to put arbitrary deadlines on them that will set them up to fail. I do want their assessment of whether or not the barriers that were identified to the original proposal are genuine barriers or not.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have a couple of questions on Safe and Secure Water before I hand to my colleague. Again, we've asked you about this in estimates before: Can you confirm that there aren't any plans to put any additional funding into this program before 2028?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No. I can confirm that there was no additional funding put into the program in this budget. I know you will be well aware, if you have a look at the budget papers, that no additional funding was provided in this budget. That is because we are still trying to get the funding that is there spent and, not unreasonably, while there's still a reasonable amount of money in the fund, we are keen to spend that. I'm not making any commitments in relation to further budgets. If we are able to get those projects moving and on track and the fund actually spent down, then of course we will look at what more needs to happen to support.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Taking your point that the program is not fully exhausted, are you looking at reallocating any of the funds within the program?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** There has been some reallocation in order to try and get projects moving. Yes, that is something that we're looking at.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** At the Local Government NSW water conference last month, I think you said that you were advocating for national disaster funding to be extended to include local water utilities. Is there any update you can provide the Committee on that work?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, there isn't. That's not just advocacy, I should say, that I was making nationally. I've also raised that issue with my State colleagues. There isn't any update on that at the moment, but I continue to be of the view that there is a real challenge for local water utilities who have infrastructure damaged in natural disasters and who are unable to access disaster recovery funding because of the way that those schemes

are set up. It isn't fair on them. As I said, I accept that point. I have raised that not just with the Commonwealth but with my State colleagues as well.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, with respect to the Housing Australia Future Fund, how much money has been dispersed to organisations in New South Wales or the New South Wales Government as of yet?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Zero dollars.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** I understand the New South Wales Government submitted an application for a number of projects to receive HAFF funding last year. How many projects were included in that lodgement?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** How many did we put in, Rebecca?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Three.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Three. Does that include ones we did in partnership, or were they just our ones?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We've led that application process.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We've led three.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** What's the New South Wales Government's expectation with respect to those projects and their funding out of that program?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I think that they're all excellent projects. We were very thoughtful about the submissions that we made. My expectation would be that they are funded.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Have you got any visibility from the Commonwealth Government as to when a decision will be made or when funding will be progressed?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We were advised that there would be some decisions in relation to macro allocations—I think that's State-by-State allocations—in September. I think that probably is late September at this point. No, we don't have a date.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Last week it was reported by the *Australian Financial Review*, in an article, that "social housing offers 8 to 12 per cent infrastructure-like returns". Did you see that article, with respect to the Housing Australia Future Fund?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I actually didn't see that article.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Is that something you would support, in terms of having private sector investment into the social housing space?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Sure, I would. My conversations with private development partners—and I absolutely talk to everyone who's involved in the provision of housing—is that they haven't seen social housing as an investment vehicle that would work for them, because the requirements for government subsidy are too great. However, I would be happy to have a look at that article, and any private market player who is perhaps listening to budget estimates, who would be willing to partner with us and who thinks they can make social housing work, we're open to that. But, as I said, my feedback is that affordable housing is something that private market players are interested in investing in and can see as a viable vehicle, but that social housing is not. We accept ultimate responsibility for the provision of social housing, and this is why we have put billions of dollars in the budget to provide it.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to the Riverwood Housing office, many residents have relied on the Riverwood Housing office for support with housing maintenance issues. Could you therefore explain why the decision was made to close the Riverwood Housing office?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Yes. We moved the Riverwood office, along with another one, to Ashfield, simply because we wanted to ensure that we had better integrated services. I recognise that I have heard a little bit of feedback as well from some residents in Riverwood that they were concerned to see the office relocate. The creation of Homes NSW was a really big opportunity for us to bring our services together and to create spaces where allocations staff, tenancy management staff and maintenance staff were able to sit together and work together.

Some of that has involved bringing staff from different offices together. We wanted to really make sure that we were meeting the needs of Riverwood tenants, so we have been doing a lot of outreach, going to them with pop-ups and mobile visits and really trying to make clear to them that they don't have to come to the office

in Ashfield to have their needs met. We're able to come to them in their communities, on their doorsteps. Whether it's a question about maintenance, whether it's a question about a transfer or another tenancy issue or reporting anti-social behaviour, there's no need to come into the office for that. In fact, that's something that we can come to them and manage through local engagement.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How often are Homes NSW having these engagement forums in Riverwood or having pop-ups and the like?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I might take that on notice, in terms of how regularly that's happening. But I do know that, through ourselves and our community housing provider partner in Riverwood, which is St George Community Housing, that they are there regularly and we are there regularly, and we are funding local community groups and neighbourhood organisations who hold weekly events and weekly barbeques. Certainly, at the times that I have been there, there have been staff around who were able to talk to people about concerns that they might have on the spot and, with our new maintenance contracts, we are able to be a lot more responsive, particularly to maintenance concerns as they're raised.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** As you would be aware, Riverwood and Ashfield aren't necessarily close and are particularly quite challenging to get to via public transport. Are there any other options that you would outline for Riverwood residents in being able to access Homes NSW services in person?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** As I said, we are regularly in the community and welcome the opportunity to engage with residents in any of those outreach services or pop-ups that we're providing. I also encourage Riverwood residents to use the community centre there, which is a fantastic local community organisation that is also regularly in contact with me and Homes NSW. It's a very trusted place where residents can go and raise issues. That is literally onsite, there at the Riverwood estate. There are plenty of ways that I feel residents can contact us with concerns, including in person.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, another budget question—surprisingly. When it comes to the modular housing trial, last year's budget outlined a \$10 million allocation. This year, it's been revised to \$8 million. Why is that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** It's just about the \$7.8 million—it's about the delivery of those that have been announced.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** We haven't cut the budget; I think we spent some of the budget and this is the updated budget figure.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** It's the total budget allocation, which has been outlined. The estimated total cost in this year's budget is listed as \$8 million while the estimated total cost in last year's budget was \$10 million. The allocation for last year was \$1.5 million of which the estimated expenditure in the budget was only \$207,000. It doesn't appear from the budget papers that in some way it's just a re-profiling of what's been spent.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can take that on notice. There's a bunch of figures there in relation to this year's budget and last year's budget, but far from removing funding from the modular housing trial, we're looking to increase its funding. There is a substantial portion of the \$5.1 billion that we're spending on new housing supply that looks to take advantage of modern methods of construction. We're very hopeful that this is going to be a very significant opportunity for us to do more in that space.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, that being the case and given the interest of the Government, why was it that only \$207,000 was spent last financial year rather than the \$1.5 million that was allocated?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It was just the way that we were rolling out the work of the taskforce. As I said, we're hoping to scale this. We're hoping to make this a big piece of work. There was necessary planning work that needed to happen. We're coming off a very low base. As I said, it's nothing more than just doing the work that we needed to do in those early stages to get our settings right and ensure that we don't want to waste taxpayer money if modular housing is not going to deliver the quality that we want and it's not going to deliver the speed that we want. We wanted to make sure that that was the case. That is exactly what the taskforce has been doing. If there's been some budgetary re-profiling that's happened as a result of that, I'm very relaxed because I know that we have a lot of money to spend on delivering housing, and that modular housing will be a part of that pipeline.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Minister, are you aware of the water issues with the Oxford Gardens development at Ingleburn? Do you have any update for the residents there?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I am aware of them. My understanding is that Sydney Water is working with residents and the developer to provide a temporary solution. I mean, this is just yet another example of the failure of the link between Planning and Water that we have already talked about. Obviously, my heart goes out to those residents. They just want to build and live in their dream home and they can't because they can't get section 73 certificates. I don't know if Mr Cheroux has an update other than that Sydney Water is working—he's nodding that Sydney Water is working with the residents and the developers on a temporary solution.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, shifting entirely back across to mental health, we had a discussion earlier this morning about the gap analysis that's underway. You assured me and the Committee that that exercise has been done in partnership with the Mental Health Alliance and that it's not an internal exercise. Concerns were raised with me by members of the alliance that they didn't understand the exact methodology being followed. Could you please clarify exactly which members of the Mental Health Alliance have been involved, and what that work has been?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I was not aware of those concerns. I meet regularly with the Mental Health Alliance, including meeting with them both before and after the recent mental health ministerial council meeting. At the second of those meetings that I held with the alliance, Dr Flynn was online to talk about the gaps analysis. All members of the alliance—I'm going to say "all", but perhaps there were some missing. WayAhead was there, BEING was there, Carers was there, Black Dog was there. I recall that they were all there and were involved in that conversation. If they were not satisfied with that conversation with Dr Flynn and other engagements that they've had with the Mental Health Branch, I'm not aware of those concerns, but I welcome the opportunity for them to let me know that that engagement, which was—

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** On 19 August.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** —19 August, quite recently—didn't provide them the information that they were looking for, we're more than happy to follow up on any concerns that they have.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for clarifying what that engagement has been. In my last couple of minutes, I'd love to ask about peer workers. Your enthusiastic support for peer workers is already on record. I understand from your response to the mental health inquiry that the statewide peer workforce framework is close to being finalised. My question is is there anything in the budget to implement that framework? Is there money for peer workers to be employed?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No. We haven't specifically allocated additional money for that in this budget. That is partly because, as you have noted, we don't have the framework yet. We are looking for that work to be done. We want to make sure that peer workers are supported. We've employed a senior peer worker lead within the Mental Health Branch to coordinate that work. I have engaged with the Health Services Union, which is a representative body for peer workers, to make sure that they understand the process. They seem satisfied with where that engagement is up to. But, obviously, if, as a result of that there is additional funding that is required, we'll need to look at what that is and ensure that those needs are met.

**The CHAIR:** I understand there is already a KPI around recruitment and retention of peer workers in the service agreements. What are the current numbers for peer workers?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I probably don't have that. We'd have to take it on notice. It would vary, LHD to LHD. One of the things that we've heard is that some LHDs share my enthusiasm for peer workers and are very forward in making sure that the positions are filled and that peer workers are valued and have career progression. Perhaps that is not the case with all of them; it can be a bit of a mixed bag. Do you have that off the top of your head, Brendan?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I do have this information, Minister. Dr Cohn, the statewide target is 255.4 FTE. As of 30 June, there were 241.4 FTE employed, noting that there is also 18 FTE in the Aboriginal mental health and social and emotional wellbeing peer workforce.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I appreciate that you had that to hand. You must have known I was going to ask about it. I think there are a couple of minutes left for the Opposition, if you have any more questions.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Work that is being done in relation to the Macarthur region—they've estimated around 300 young people between the ages of 14 and 18 across the area are experiencing homelessness, which is higher than the State average. Yet there is no youth refuge in Campbelltown. Do you think that it's appropriate that a young person is being sent to a motel unsupervised, often outside the area, because there is no youth refuge?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** No, that is clearly not acceptable. I am aware of some excellent advocacy that has come out of the Macarthur region. My colleague Minister Harrison was in Campbelltown recently,

meeting with a range of organisations who presented her with a report on behalf of the community, which she, of course, passed on to me and I have looked at. We, through the work we are doing through the Homelessness Innovation Fund and our other opportunities for funding, want to identify exactly these gaps. As I mentioned to you when you asked about what the criteria for the fund may be, and the second one that I said was "filling gaps", we would welcome the opportunity to partner with local service providers and NGOs to explore how we can meet those needs.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Do you have the data on the number of crisis accommodations that are not available by suburb?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I don't have that off the top of my head. We could take on notice the provision of what data we did have.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Also by breakdown by region as well.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** It would likely be data that we would have broken down by region, as that is how we normally track our data. But whatever data we have, we will take on notice to provide.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In relation to, specifically, youth homelessness, how much in this budget has been allocated to programs and services to support young people experiencing homelessness?

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** I can take on notice whether we have an overall figure, but we have ensured that under our \$5.1 billion capital program and our \$100 million Homelessness Innovation Fund program, the needs of young people are reflected in the allocation of that funding. If there is a specific figure that we are able to bring together—

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Mr Tidball might be able to assist.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON:** Mr Tidball is providing me different pieces of money, but that doesn't bring together the capital program. So I'm going to take it on notice, because I want to make sure that—we've got the former Premier's Youth Initiative, HYAP, Rent Choice Youth. So I have figures for those programs, but that doesn't include some of the other programs that we have newly in the budget. So I'll take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister, for your time attending the hearing. We are finished with your questioning and we will see the rest of the department witnesses back after lunch.

**(The Minister withdrew.)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** We'll resume questioning, starting with the crossbench and questions from me, which are going to be about Mental Health. I was hoping to follow up some of this morning's lines of questioning with the Minister, and there were a number of issues that she suggested I follow up with you this afternoon. The first one of those was the retention of psychiatric trainees when they finish their training in NSW Health. What work is being done on retention at the moment?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I would need to take on notice the figures around retention, which I think is an important part of the discussion. But I can give multiple examples of what work is happening in New South Wales to retain trainees, otherwise known as registrars, throughout what is usually a five- to six-year training program. New South Wales specifically aims to offer a range of metropolitan and rural experiences that are not necessarily available in other States, where people can be, if you like, employed and located in one particular either regional or metropolitan area.

There are three high-quality postgraduate courses including the HETI one, which has recently reduced its fees from the high \$5,000s, I think, to \$1,000 per year. There is a strong desire on the part of services, even when the senior workforce is challenged—and I know that's an issue that's being well canvassed and may even be canvassed more this afternoon—to ensure supervision for trainees. In other words, every time the sustainability of a service is looked at, priority number one needs to be "Does this work for the consumers?" But part of what's working for the consumers and the community is retaining trainees, and so we need to make sure that the terms are compliant with the college's specifications for that. I know that many directors of medical services across our mental health teams are particularly aware of the supervision requirements for registrars.

**The CHAIR:** In the Minister's answer this morning, she mentioned the high cost of locums at the moment as one of the reasons in favour of award reform.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes.



**The CHAIR:** Do you have the figures for the expenditure on locums at the moment?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I don't have that information; I would need to take that on notice. Can I check, Chair, whether you're referring to the locum cost for covering trainee vacancies or senior positions?

**The CHAIR:** I'm interested in locum expenditure for psychiatric doctors—so registrars and staff specialists.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes, that's fine. We can take that on notice. It's a related issue to the things that we're doing in order to sustain retention. The other thing I should just briefly add is protected teaching time is also really important.

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely. The Minister mentioned some of the non-award provisions that have been negotiated.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Could you provide more detail about those?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes. There's a working group which I have been involved with—and Dr Wright and Dr Michael Bowden have also been involved with—which is run and chaired by workforce but is really looking at trying to extend, particularly to staff specialists, everything we can do to make staying in that role attractive or joining one of those roles attractive. Again, specifically, that involves making sure that if we've got a permanent staff member, as opposed to a locum, the permanent staff member can essentially express what their preference is around working either in a community team or in an inpatient unit or both, to make sure that mix is something that suits them professionally and is sustainable.

We're also looking at trying to minimise any barriers to access to protected time, which is part of the staff specialist award, or for training, education and study leave. That's also part of the staff specialist award. We're interested in looking at innovative models for out-of-hours care. A significant issue for many staff specialists in New South Wales is the after-hours roster coverage, which is run differently across districts and, to be fair to the people we heard from in the group, people have different views about. But we are particularly interested in looking at what models would make that more sustainable. A common story that I'm aware of is older staff specialist psychiatrists saying that the after hours is onerous, and that can be a factor in their decision-making.

**The CHAIR:** I think this is going to be a question for Dr Wright. I wanted to follow up on the discussion about inpatient experience of sexual violence. In particular, you talked about some of the work being done by mid next year involving data collection. I'm interested in how that data is being collected at the moment and what those gaps are or what needs to be done differently.

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** The data has been collected for a long time through the ims+ system, which is the health-service-wide incident management reporting system. So the data has always been there but, until we have extracted the data and looked particularly at the reports of sexual safety incidents, we haven't had the opportunity to look at some of the challenges in the reliability of the data that's reported. You probably understand that the ims+ system is a clinician-generated system. If I'm working in a service and I see an incident, then I make that report. Until we have consistent awareness of what constitutes a critical incident or an incident which is worthy of reporting, people will have different thresholds for making that report, and people can report the same incident in different ways.

When the data was extracted the first time around, it was quite clear that there are differences in how people perceive what is the threshold for an incident and how they characterise them. We've experienced this before with other reporting systems, most notably when we first started reporting on seclusion and restraint. It took several years of cycles of reporting until we were clear that most services and most clinicians had the same understanding of what constituted an incident of restraint or an incident of seclusion. It's not until you have that kind of consistency that you can then report the data and do what you really want to do, which is compare what's happening in a service over time or compare between different services.

That benchmarking process is critical for us to understand where we need to put our improvement efforts. What we found with the reporting of sexual safety incidents is that there's a wide variation across the system in how reliably these are reported. What we're doing in the revision of the policy and the guidelines is making sure that there are elements within that and within the training where there's some clarification of what the different sorts of incidents are that we want to have reported and how to define those. It'll be building, I think, a greater level of confidence in the reliability of that reporting.

**The CHAIR:** In all of that work being done around data capture for safety, I'm interested if there's an extension of that to include safety for staff as well. I'm asking because in the hospital in my home town, they

reported an 80 per cent increase in aggression towards staff last year. I recall in my own time as an emergency department doctor that at one point they installed an occupational violence button whose sole purpose was to count instances of occupational violence, and nothing would happen when you pushed the button other than it counting. Are you looking at improving safety for staff?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** The ims+ system captures all sorts of incidents and, again, one of its strengths is that there are no barriers to reporting incidents. If you feel that you've been involved in or witnessed an incident, you make the report and then it's there in the system. With the sexual safety incidents, we're looking at the whole of the health system. We identify whether the victim is a patient or a staff member, because they could be either, and so could the perpetrator. There's no differentiation in terms of—we need to capture all of those sorts of incidents. As for violence of any kind, I would take the same view. They're all members of the community, and violence can happen in all sorts of ways in our health systems, and we want to be able to capture all of those instances.

**The CHAIR:** While I've got you, Dr Wright, I also wanted to follow up the questions I asked this morning about psychedelic-assisted therapy. Your comment was about the need to balance access against safety, which I absolutely appreciate. When something's a new or emerging therapy, of course it needs to be done as safely as possible. In the context of benzodiazepine or first-generation antipsychotics being available not just from outpatients but from first-year intern graduates, when you compare with other jurisdictions, are there any identified issues with safety in an outpatient setting for those psychedelics that you're particularly concerned about?

**MURRAY WRIGHT:** It's an important question. I think the issue that we need to remind ourselves of is that no other jurisdiction in the world is as far down the track of enabling these treatments as is the case in Australia. In fact, in America, as you're probably aware, the Food and Drug Administration has recently rejected an application for MDMA to be approved, on the basis—and it's a very important basis—that they critiqued the quality of the research on which the application was made. They've made some really important criticisms of the nature of the research. The concern that we have—and I'm voicing a concern which is shared by our professional college—is that we've got phase 1 studies, and we've got some phase 2 studies, but we've got no phase 3 studies. It's highly unusual for any medication to be released onto the market without phase 3 studies.

The total number of active treatments of either psilocybin or MDMA worldwide in peer-reviewed journals is less than 500 at this point, so the number treated is actually quite low. We strongly believe that this is a very promising emerging treatment, but the confidence of what the safety profile is, or the risks are, grows as the numbers treated increases. Again, you'd be familiar with a number of drugs which have been extremely well received when they first come onto the market. It's only after a period of time that we appreciate what some of the risks are with those drugs, which has modified their use and, in some cases, led to them being withdrawn from the market. That's something we don't want to see happen with these treatments. That's why we initially have had quite strong restrictions on the places in which the treatment is given so that, if there is some kind of urgent medical event while the treatment's being given, there is a capacity to respond.

I appreciate that the rules, as they've been played out in New South Wales, are different compared to other States. I don't believe they're different to rules in South Australia or Tasmania, but they are certainly different to what's happened in Victoria. But, at every step, we've checked with—there's a working group from the College of Psychiatrists that has put out a memorandum on how they believe psychedelics should be approached within the profession. I have checked with them on the approach that we're taking and they're supportive of our approach. We are interested in seeing whether we can assure the same kind of protections for consumers in terms of unknown side effects without necessarily having to insist on the treatments being given in a private hospital, because it doesn't have to be a private hospital; it's more about the capacity to respond in the event of some kind of urgent medical event during the course of treatment.

**The CHAIR:** My last follow-up for you—or it might be Dr Flynn from this morning—was about trauma-sensitive care. I asked the Minister about the recommendation about a centre of excellence, and particularly what happens for services when their capability through that scoring tool's assessed as poor. Could you provide some of that detail of what current practice is?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I'll try to go first. I would make two points. I think that this morning's discussion covered the fact there is the self-assessment tool but, in a sense, the key intervention that we can offer if someone or a service came to not score well on that would be to make sure there was access. There is significant access, through the ACI, to tools and materials that assist clinicians in updating their skills and knowledge and practice around trauma-informed care. In particular, there's the trauma-informed care framework for change. The intention of this framework is actually to go beyond mental health services and make our entire system aware of what issues and history and vulnerabilities that anybody who meets any of our service providers brings to that interaction; to

think about that and to respond sensitively; and to always be conscious that we actually sometimes have the capacity, if we get that wrong, to do harm.

That's probably the first place I would direct the answer to. The other thing I would say is, even predating the ACI work, it's actually an expectation for health graduates who work in mental health services—including nursing staff, medical staff, allied health staff et cetera—to be very much aware of the importance of a person's narrative and a person's story. I accept that, historically, our services have not always gotten that right. That's why that framework is so important to provide a tool to improve practice across the board.

**The CHAIR:** When that training is provided to a service, you talked about assisting clinicians in updating their skills. Is that then provided to staff on their paid time?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes, the assumption would be that all of this work is done within paid time. There are also some scholarships available: HETI and the ACI fund scholarships for trauma-informed care. The latest data I've got around that is there are 174 HETI- or ACI-funded scholarships that had been offered in the most recent round. In a sense, our hope is that provides a workforce who are particularly aware and current around this information, and who can build capability amongst their colleagues and model safe and sensitive care.

**The CHAIR:** Those 174 scholarships—which, I should say, is a really important piece of work—can you give me the breakdown of what types of practitioners or what professional groups those are?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I would have to take that on notice, Chair. I don't have that information.

**The CHAIR:** Are they made available across different practice groups, or is it, for example, only for medical practitioners or only for nurses?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** No, my understanding is they will be across different practice groups—yes, the whole workforce.

**The CHAIR:** You've sort of half-answered my last question, which was going to be about that specialised workforce. Last year the Minister and I had an exchange about the trauma inpatient facility in Thirroul run by Dr Karen Williams, which was excellent.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I understand that a significant barrier to expanding that service is the limited availability of workforce with the specialised skills that are needed. I was going to ask what you are doing. Obviously those 174 scholarships are one of those things, but what else is being done to develop that specialised workforce in New South Wales?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** My view is that having this discussion—having this discussion in our services, having our clinical leaders draw people's attention to the importance of this, to the materials and resources that are available, including the scholarships and the framework—and also hearing from consumers publicly when this care does not go well is critical because, in my view, our entire system, even beyond mental health services, needs to be trauma-informed.

Conceptually, I would like to see something that addressed this across the board, rather than saying that a specific unit or service would be the place we would send people. Unfortunately, in mental health, as you would know, so many people with so many conditions—and classically we used to think of this as personality vulnerabilities, but increasingly the concordance with early childhood trauma is across the board, even including for chronic psychosis. It is relevant for virtually every individual who we see. I guess our priority is to make sure that message is significantly understood across the system.

**The CHAIR:** Have you got any oversight of that? That service capability—you've explained in detail what happens now, but what is the performance across NSW Health facilities?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** A useful performance indicator would be the feedback we get from our consumers around how they've experienced either the inpatient unit or how they've experienced the community service they might have engaged with. I don't have those figures in front of me, but in general they're very good. I should take the opportunity to clarify this later if I need to, but from memory around 80 per cent of our consumers rate some of their community experience in particular as very good or excellent. Those questions are actually designed to allow people to tell us the whole unvarnished truth. I think it's very important that people do so if they feel that their story hasn't been heard or responded to.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I might ask the advocate to come forward. I have just a couple of questions. I wanted to follow on from a topic that was covered off at the last estimates, particularly around the work that's being done in the Northern Rivers and the engagement with young people that are living

in pod villages, for lack of a better term. I understand you've had forums up there. I wanted to understand a little bit more about some of the findings from your engagement, particularly since our last estimates.

**ZOË ROBINSON:** At the end of last year, we held a round table with a number of young people, and also service providers, who attended that. That was the opportunity for young people to talk about their experiences in those pod villages. The team up there have been working with—at one stage, there were over 300 people under the age of 24 who were living in pod villages. That's everything from working with them to connect them into services if they require different services; or if they, for example, need assistance with school and attendance at school, working with the schools around making sure that these young people can attend schools; also going into the pod villages and holding Children's Week events and making sure that the young people in those villages are connected and being seen by the people that need to. The funding for that team actually ends in June next year. We're currently in the process of making sure that we're working with our colleagues at Homes, and other services in that area, to leave whatever it is that we can that young people have provided insight into. That includes things like providing feedback on disaster action management plans. That includes feedback in terms of their experiences of living in pod villages.

Also, one of the big things that we're working with is, as those families and young people transition out of pod villages, making sure that they feel like they can still be connected to their schools, their community and their supports. That team is in the process of winding down that support service, because the funding is not there beyond June, and making sure they can pull together the recommendations that they've had from young people, including things like what they would like to see in terms of volunteering and young people being able to assist in disasters in community; also, if young people have to live in those kinds of villages again, what they would like to see, including making sure that there's privacy and the ability to have recreational facilities in them as well. There will be a final report that team prepares that will be shared widely.

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

**ZOË ROBINSON:** They will start winding down—it's not a case management service but the support service that they've been doing—this side of Christmas. There will be the opportunity for that to be reviewed, and then, I imagine, in June next year as the funding ends, that will be—although I should say that we are actively saying that we should continue to support young people in that area, and that it's a service that should continue. Everyone knows that disasters don't just end after two years. The impact on young people can be long-lasting. At this stage, it would be June next year for that report.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** You might need to take it on notice, but how much is that funding?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** I do have it in here. This is where you get to shuffle papers. I'm happy to take another question whilst I am going through the folder.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Do you know how many young people under 24 are currently in the pods?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** I'll take that on notice. I'm sure I can get that to you.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Maybe for someone else—with the funds for this service being wound up in June next year, what is being put in place to continue that support of young people?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** At the moment the Reconstruction Authority is responsible for managing the decommissioning of some pods. Those that would stay will transfer management to Homes NSW. We'll be working with the community housing providers that are already managing those locations in terms of the ongoing transition and support—the Housing Plus type of services—that will continue. We would be looking to normalise those arrangements under current contracting that Homes NSW has in place with community housing providers. Those were temporary arrangements. For the ones that will stay in place, we would then go back out to contract and tender for those providers in the area.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** The funds that are currently allocated for those services, will that be rolled over into new contracts or will you need to find funds in existing budgets?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No. We're working on a transition plan with the Reconstruction Authority that looks at the overall operating cost of those villages in totality. That's a process that will go through government, not to just transition over into Homes NSW management. We're going through that process at the moment to really plan out the villages that will stay and then the resources needed to manage them on an ongoing basis.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Thank you.

**ZOË ROBINSON:** I have that data for you. It's jointly funded under the disaster recovery arrangements with the Commonwealth and the New South Wales Government for approximately \$2.2 million over the 2022-23 and 2023-24 financial years. It's worth noting that since March 2023, the team up there have consulted with over 635 children and young people. I do have figures in terms of pod villages as of 20 June, if that's helpful.

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

**ZOË ROBINSON:** In terms of the Coraki and Wardell villages, the total in that, as we understand it, is 116. In the other villages, which are Lismore, Ballina, Wollongbar, Evans Head, Brunswick Heads, Kingscliff and Mullumbimby, there's 166.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** So it has gone down a little bit.

**ZOË ROBINSON:** Yes.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I might move over to asking you some general questions about the types of requests for information or research that you get from all the departments. What is the type of requests that you've been getting over the last 12 months?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** I'm sure we can provide a very detailed list on that. In terms of some examples, obviously the vaping piece of work has been a big one; mental health for young people; cost of living; understanding the education settings and working with the department around things like belonging. The team are also doing a lot of work right now in terms of focusing on refugees and migrants, working with both the department and other services to inform them of some of the needs of those young people. We do work with New South Wales police in terms of young people.

The asks in terms of detail are things like access to the data. We always make our data very transparent, and that's available on our website. Then also there's specific insights. We're supporting the Premier's Department in terms of the social media summit and making sure that young people are a part of that conversation; also supporting the Minister for Youth around the youth summit. That is, one, making sure that children and young people can be part of the conversations; and, two, whether there are any particular insights that we might have from the data or from qualitative work that we've done.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** On the social media summit, in terms of the voice of young people, can you advise, as best as you can, how many young people we would expect to be there and how will they be chosen to participate? Is there any advice in relation to that?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** Yes. There was a public expression of interest that was put out for people to apply to come to that. It is mostly being run by the excellent team in the Premier's Department who are leading this. We have assisted by ensuring that young people can provide advisory support in terms of actually guiding the design, who is at the summit and why they're there. There will be young people who sit across that. The intention is, I hope, that those young people will be able to inform any policy decisions after that summit as well. We have assisted by reaching out to Youth Advisory Council alumni and Regional Youth Taskforce alumni, and working within our networks to ensure that young people are in there.

As I understand it, the hope is that there will be a specific session facilitated by ACYP for young people to come up with their ideas and solutions and present that back. There is also a conversation going on about making sure young people are represented on those panels. It's not just dividing adults and children into different rooms but having them come together and talk about solutions and hear directly from each other some of those things, and making sure that there is also that balance of what we know about social media, but also that there are some positives that come from social media. The last thing is also doing that very important polling around actually what young people themselves are saying in terms of raising the age. That's been work that has happened in the form of a very formal survey. In terms of consultations that our office and the office for regional youth and DCJ are running, we're asking young people in every consultation right now, "What you think in terms of raising the age?"

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In relation to the requests you get from other departments, have you seen an increase in the last 12 months?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** We have seen an interesting, consistent conversation. I think it has been different because this has been a year that has been very much focused on our special inquiry. That has been a huge focus of the office. Unfortunately, due to the restraints of a funding envelope, there are only so many things that we can do. I would say that there have been a lot of conversations where there's been things that have happened and we are part of that conversation. Perhaps an example is the Social Media Summit. That was a conversation that started happening in the media and in other places. We very actively said, "We want young people to be a part of it." There are some that are very proactive from our office and then there are some that are bit reactive.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I suppose that brings us to the next point which is how do you balance what you have to do with your strategic plan plus the requests—I know, from a parliamentary point of view, some of the committees have asked you for input on inquiries or at least developing some of the terms of reference—and then obviously the additional things like the summits? How are you making those decisions within your budget?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** It is always centred on what matters to children and young people. The fact that we consistently do our polling each year to see what those issues are helps us make the decisions on that. In terms of things like inquiries and submissions to inquiries, if it is work that we haven't done, it is fair to say that we wouldn't put a submission in until such time as we've heard from what children and young people themselves have said. I think it's always a priority of our office to make sure that, where there are inquiries or where there are particular pieces of work like the Social Media Summit and the youth summit, that is something we prioritise. It would be ridiculous for me not to say that the team isn't completely stretched, that there is always a need to make sure that we are meeting children and young people where it matters to them and that we are doing everything that we can to be in those places. But we have a small team, so we do our best. I think we are mighty even though we are lean.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Has your budget changed for this financial year?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** For this current financial year?

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Yes, 2024-25.

**ZOË ROBINSON:** I can't confirm our budget for this current financial year yet. It hasn't been confirmed with us, as I understand it.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Is that usual?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** It's not unusual for us because we are part of a bigger machine, and so that hasn't been confirmed.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In relation to the Youth Week survey, what were the results of that that compared with the strategic plan as to what you saw as a priority over the last financial year?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** That highlight that we've talked about a number of places is that children and young people this year seem to be faring well. There has been an improvement in some of the key themes from that. In terms of key data—we are very happy to provide a copy of this—their sentiment in terms of life as a whole has remained stable. Interestingly—this is me giving you an executive summary; I don't know whether this surprises anyone necessarily—young people still feel that the New South Wales Government is out of touch with their generation. I don't think that's reflective of—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Even with skibidi rizz? Sorry.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Maybe you've changed it all, Sarah.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I hope Rose saw that.

**ZOË ROBINSON:** That's not reflective of any of our ages around this table right now at all. We did ask questions in terms of where they go in terms of advice and comfort and things like that, so friendship still remained the priority for them. In this particular Youth Week survey we looked at life skills and the things they're thinking about in terms of jobs and their careers as well, because we thought that was useful in terms of some of the work the Government is doing. We also did some specific work this time in terms of those people who migrated to Australia.

In terms of the overarching issues that children and young people are saying they still face, mental health still features in that, cyberbullying and bullying are still a focus of theirs, cost of living is still something that gets raised—obviously that's with some particular cohorts, but we have heard of that younger generation feeling the impact of that as well. There's also their general advice to government, which is always wonderful for us to hear but it's not necessarily something that we feed them. They talk about having their voices heard and being part of conversations that matter to them.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** On budget, if I may, without interjecting—

**ZOË ROBINSON:** Team, take a note.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** —the budget for 2024-25 for the ACYP is \$4.2 million. It was \$4.2 million in 2023-24 but with actual expenditure of \$3.8 million.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I have a final question around the central youth agency, which was asked about more last estimates. Have you had any dealings with the Minister or the office in relation to the establishment of that and how it will operate?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** We continue to support the youth survey that the Minister touched on this morning. Our office is in charge of reviewing all of the responses to that and providing a monthly report to the Minister about what young people are saying. That is the extent of the conversations that we've had to date. My team do have regular fortnightly meetings but that is focused, as I understand it, on the youth summit and the survey responses.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In the monthly survey responses that you're getting, what are the key themes? Have they changed over the months? From metro to regional, is there much of a difference?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** Interestingly, in the last cut of data that we did—and I will double-check the themes; there was a shift in the themes—cyberbullying and bullying is still featured but there has been a shift in it. I'm sure I could get it to you before the end of today but they have changed a bit. We have worked very hard to ensure that there is representation of regional areas but I don't have the difference in terms of that detailed breakdown. I can take it on notice.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Ms Pinkstone, I'm going to turn to you. In terms of the land audit, does Homes NSW have a projection of how many parcels of land will be transferred to Homes NSW over the forward estimates at all?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** What we're doing through the land audit is tranches are coming through. As those tranches come through, Homes NSW reviews those. We have to do due diligence on all of the sites. At the moment three have been announced but we're hopeful that further sites will be announced that we can use to help us unlock other Homes NSW land for redevelopment.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Four have been announced so far but it's also been identified that there are 44 as part of this tranche that the Government's identified. There are other ones, I take it, that Homes NSW are expecting to be transferred to them as well.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We are looking at other sites on that list of the 44, that's right.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** As I understand from the Lands and Property budget estimates, Homes NSW has got first dibs on sites. Is that a fair characterisation?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right, ourselves and then Landcom.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Going back to that 301 Samantha Riley Drive, Kellyville, site—Mr Cheroux, you might be able to outline this as well—in terms of that land, how large is that site that you are talking about?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can take that on notice in terms of the total parcel. That block of land is also subject to flooding, so we've made an estimation based on that land that would be used for new homes that wouldn't be subject to flooding. At the moment we're looking at between 75 and 80 new homes on that site.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Mr Cheroux, in terms of that land parcel, what was that being used for previously by Sydney Water?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** It's land that's part of the different pieces of land that we've got across Sydney. We've got a number of lands that we keep for future augmentation of the system, so that's typically one of them.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Was that seen as trunk drainage land previously?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** From memory it was seen as stormwater management land.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Ms Pinkstone, in terms of the site and the amount of the site—so I take it is a portion of that entire site owned by Sydney Water. I think you mentioned previously that that site could be used to unlock other sites in the area. What's the plan with that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** For our approach to land audit sites, obviously Homes NSW have significant landholdings and properties under management. The major issue that we face is places for people to move in to, to relocate, to unlock that land. We're looking at those sites as an opportunity to do that in the neighbouring area. Kellyville is one, as is the Camden site, and also, Eveleigh. They provide strategic sites for us to get started early. That would also help us unlock other areas in the area to redevelop on our own land.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** We had a bit of a debate in the Lands estimates about that site. There is a private parcel on that site as well. Is part of that unlocking giving access to that private site as well, or developing roadways or easements or the like for that parcel?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We're at the very early stages of due diligence. As those have come up, the process is that we nominate those sites that we want to do extensive due diligence on, and that would be one of the issues we would consider, as with the flooding within the area and other land use concerns that might be there on the site.

**The CHAIR:** I have one question for the advocate, and then we can let you go at afternoon tea. At the previous estimates I asked about youth-specific tools to support young people with quitting vaping, which is as urgent as it's ever been with the Federal Government's recent changes. You said that you and young people had been involved in conversations about the design of a youth-specific online tool. Has that progressed? What's happening in that space?

**ZOË ROBINSON:** It does continue. We do it with our friends at NSW Health and there is a young person from our Youth Advisory Council and, I believe, others who are working with them around what those tools look like. It is ongoing and it does continue. I do have the themes, Mrs Maclaren-Jones, in terms of the youth survey, which, to your question, includes the fact that vaping has increased as a particular concern for young people in the time. The cost of living, apparently, has gone down, but mental health remains the same. Availability of housing has gone down in terms of a concern—so perhaps, well done, Homes NSW. Vaping and e-cigarettes, drug and alcohol use has gone up, and domestic and family violence concerns has gone up as well.

**The CHAIR:** Can someone here answer the other part of that question about the online tool? Or is that a question for the other members of the department tomorrow?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** It's probably a question for Centre for Population Health, I think.

**ZOË ROBINSON:** I can also check through these notes and come back to you—if there are more notes.

**The CHAIR:** That's all right. We'll have Centre for Population Health with us tomorrow, with Minister Park. Coming back to mental health, I asked some questions at the previous estimates about the LGBTIQ+ health strategy and various parts of work to address that priority population. In your answer to a question on notice, Dr Flynn, you provided some information about an LGBTIQ+ inclusive support guide for child and adolescent mental health services, which is obviously an important initiative. I'm interested in the uptake and the implementation of that guide.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Chair, I do recall mentioning this at the previous estimates. I can confirm that one of the partner organisations that we work with, which is Twenty10, received funds from us to do two related pieces of work. One of them is diversity training and capability improvement for our child and adolescent mental health services staff. That's a \$265,000 investment over two years. The second investment that's related is for a transgender mental health service for young people. That's also Twenty10 who are contracted to do that. That's \$725,000 over three years. Your question around uptake I would have to take on notice. But I can say that I have heard from within the branch that the programs have been received well, and I would emphasise what we would all consider—that it's important to direct programs towards vulnerable populations.

**The CHAIR:** In taking that on notice, I'm interested in the \$265,000 that you just mentioned for Twenty10 for staff training over the next two years. Do you know how many NSW Health staff are expected to be able to access that training with that funding?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** That's what I would have to check. It's not necessarily prospectively two years from now; it's over two years and this year may be the second year. But I will come back with that information.

**The CHAIR:** I also had some more questions about the plans for suicide prevention training. I understand the previous package ended at the end of June.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** That was with LivingWorks?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I'm interested in what's happened since the end of June and what the new rollout is, please.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I would have to take the LivingWorks issue on notice, to come back to you with specifics around that. That's probably the safest thing for me to do, because it was a significant investment and it was a significant expectation around the number of people who would be trained. We did work with LivingWorks as an important partner with NSW Health to try to expand. A couple of years ago we were concerned that that



training wasn't, perhaps, getting to as many people as we wanted. But I'd probably need to come back to you with the plan after conclusion of those funds.

**The CHAIR:** No problem. I appreciate numbers being taken on notice, but I'm interested qualitatively in your answers to questions on notice. Last year we had been talking about LivingWorks. You said that planning, moving forward, was considering the key target audiences for suicide prevention training. What are the key target audiences in terms of regions or priority population groups?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** LivingWorks has a very broad remit, as you would be aware. Key people who we would like to ensure are targeted—originally, there was work done in schools. There were programs offered to parents of young people in public schools. There is also the importance, and I think this is increasingly the case, of people in a community who are identified, often not necessarily officially, as the effective leaders in that community, who people look to when there is adversity or a natural disaster. I guess we don't access that group only through suicide prevention training, but one of the initiatives we have been able to roll out in the past 12 months or so is ongoing funding for the 30 disaster recovery clinicians. Their role is very much around capability building, particularly after a critical incident and particularly in relation to wellbeing and suicide prevention.

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate this one is going to get taken on notice: Could you tell me where the 30 disaster recovery clinicians are located?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I could not. I could tell you that the funds, Chair, are \$23.7 million over four years for those. But I would need to come back to you with the exact locations. They will be based in community mental health teams, so that information won't be by district. Those teams, as you know, normally map to an LGA.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I wouldn't expect you to know off the top of your head. We've been talking about suicide prevention training, which is, of course, only one piece of suicide prevention and, as you know, because I know you were listening during the mental health inquiry, there was a lot of discussion around the question of aftercare, generally, for people with lived experience of suicidality, but also for their carers and their loved ones. Could you provide an update on the work that's already happening in terms of moving towards universal aftercare?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes. I'd be happy to. As you're aware, the universal aftercare initiative is a significant part of the bilateral, fifty-fifty, funded between the Commonwealth Government and New South Wales. The quantum involved is \$121.3 million. We have worked closely, and I think are close to finalising agreements, with every PHN and LHD, looking at how to operate those services, sometimes delivered by partners, in each local environment. As you would be familiar also, there was work done around the model that's used.

One of the key issues, and this is probably less of a data question but more of a reflection from a systems level, is the importance of ensuring that our frontline clinicians, particularly agency staff or locums, and particularly after-hours, know about the services that New South Wales is investing in, because that is potentially a gap that we have seen. There is work to be done in terms of awareness of our clinical staff. The coordinator positions that have been an important part of this program, part of their role in each district is to make sure that that translation of information happens. Also, I just mention, the ACI have also been involved, and this has matured, I think, since the last estimates session, around the model of care that would be rolled out in terms of universal aftercare.

ACI have been working on that and have considered the evidence and spoken to consumers and clinicians. They're just trying to make sure that that model is consistent and safe. There's an older person's extended trial for aftercare that's offered in a small number of districts. The other part of it is the Youth Aftercare Pilot—I think you might be familiar. The Youth Aftercare Pilot is offered in Tamworth, Coffs Harbour, Bankstown and Mount Druitt, and it has had an evaluation since last estimates. The young people told us that they had a good experience with that service and that they felt it listened to them, and there were demonstrable decreases in suicidal ideation and increases in confidence and preparedness to seek help. I know that's a smaller part of this, but we thought that was very good news.

**The CHAIR:** One of the recommendations of the mental health inquiry was the expansion of Safe Havens to 24/7. The Government didn't accept that recommendation. It was something that was brought up by a number of stakeholders particularly, acknowledging that some people either don't feel safe or can't access emergency departments and that that's not the right solution for a significant number of people in crisis. Given that the Government hasn't accepted that recommendation to extend Safe Havens to 24/7 coverage, what other work is happening to provide options for people who may not feel safe or comfortable going to an emergency department after hours?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** If I may just start on the Safe Havens themselves, we have 21 now operational. You are correct in that. A simple Google search for anybody in New South Wales will demonstrate the hours of operation, and we have good access, but I'm conscious that some of the facilities are only open for certain days of the week and for a certain period of time. The issue for us is that, within the existing resources, the first thing we need to do is to make sure that the time that the Safe Havens are open actually matches when the demand is. There has been work around that, and I'm satisfied that each Safe Haven has now looked at the hours that they're open as being the best match for their community in the absence of resourcing for continually being open 24/7.

The second thing I would say about the Safe Havens is that there is an evaluation piece that needs to be done for all of those Towards Zero Suicides initiatives. You would be familiar with the Safe Haven team, the SPOT—suicide prevention outreach teams—and rural counsellors. Evaluation of that whole suite of investment is due late this year. I think that will be important information for the Minister to determine whether or not we're on the path to extending those services. But to answer your question specifically around what else we are doing to assist people avoiding emergency departments, there's quite a lot, but they are often programs that you'd be familiar with hearing about from the inquiry. Examples include PACER assessments; mental health first responder in regional New South Wales, where 85 per cent of people seen do not need to go to an emergency department; the MHAAT team in Western Sydney; and the assertive community part of our community mental health teams.

The Mental Health Line, as it exists—and it will even be better with a single front door—does give people good advice around the things they can do if they don't need to go to hospital and don't need to wait for, potentially, a period of time in an environment that's fairly stimulating and I think, again, all of us would agree, is not really amenable to someone who is having a very distressing time. I would just emphasise that the Mental Health Branch is alive to that issue and, notwithstanding the situation with Safe Havens, we're still working on everything we can do to avoid people needing to come to ED, noting that ED, for some people, is the right place, and we want to make sure that if someone has a genuine, critical, time-important intervention, that that is the right place. I can think of many examples where that's a very important thing, but I can also think of many examples where consumers will say that was not a great environment and I wish I had some option to access something different.

**The CHAIR:** This morning I had a brief interaction with the Minister discussing the Better Access scheme and it's interactions with primary care. Obviously that's Federal, but I am very interested in primary care integration of mental health services and, in the inquiry, we heard about the Uniting Care project by Dr Paul Fung embedding mental health clinicians within general practice. I understand that's very promising. Is there work underway to look at replicating that in other local health districts?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I have spoken with Paul about that program. At the moment, I'm not aware of any work underway to replicate that exactly. But to answer the question around the work that we do in partnership with general practice, that is very much the issue around the partnerships that our districts and networks make with PHNs. I think that's considerably improved across New South Wales compared to five or 10 years ago. I accept that there's always more that we could do. The Commonwealth has worked on co-commissioning guidelines to make sure that when those conversations happen the full needs of the community are being addressed.

But the other example that I might give, if I could, is the Head to Health hubs, where we have tried to ensure that the districts and networks have a stake in the discussion around which consumers are offered that service, what's the best way to access it and what's the best clinical service to offer based on the demographic needs of people within that PHN. I know that doesn't go to the issue of Better Access but, because that's not a lever that we can pull, we are very interested in what else we can do in that link with primary care. I hope that answers that question.

**The CHAIR:** Partly. I'm interested in your opinion that it has improved over the past five years. I think a significant number of consumers see a really fragmented and siloed system. I would be interested in any examples you can provide of recent successes.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I would certainly endorse that many consumers and community members would describe the system as fragmented. The improvement that I see is that our directors of mental health and our PHNs are regularly meeting and working on their joint regional plan and now working on joint projects like Head to Health whereas, previously, many of the clinical activities that happen in each entity were not visible to the other.

I certainly would not contest that the experience of the consumer can still be incredibly frustrating at times, but at least that connection at the level between the district or network and the PHN, in my view, is significantly, across the board—and I can imagine there might be examples where that's not the case, but my observation, across the State, is that they have improved significantly. When we have mental health directors meetings, the PHN work comes up a lot more than it used to five or 10 years ago. I know that's not a data answer.

**The CHAIR:** It's a start. With my last few minutes, I will bring up my last mental health inquiry recommendation for the day—I could do this all day. We made a recommendation around contract duration for non-government organisations, and DCJ has moved to five years of funding. Every organisation that we spoke to that provides psychosocial support for people experiencing mental ill health said that short funding contracts were an issue for job security for their staff, for continuity and for trust with consumers. Are you looking towards five-year funding contracts moving forward, appreciating that the Government supported, in principle, that recommendation?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I will answer and say that I heard that evidence. I see that frustration, again, from staff and leadership at our partner agencies and from consumers. The nature of a lot of our funding is tied to Treasury cycles and tied to arrangements that are sometimes outside of, certainly, the remit of the Mental Health Branch. What I can say is that we are doing what we can and advocating where we can to make sure that those issues are addressed, not only with our partners but even sometimes within the health system, where there are time-limited programs. I think everybody appreciates certainty around the service and around roles. The other side of that that I do have to mention is that we also have to be reasonably flexible should some of our programs not demonstrate, at evaluation, that they are as effective potentially as other models that are out there. But I am alive to that concern and heard that from the CMOs. It is something that does feature in discussions within Health as well.

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely. I appreciate the piece about needing evidence of effectiveness, but when you've got programs like HASI and PCLI that are overwhelmingly effective and cost effective—

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I think that's a point well made, yes.

**The CHAIR:** I'm interested in getting my head around how this was so readily implementable for DCJ and not for Health. What is the difference in how the funding's awarded?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I think that's a reasonable question. I cannot answer it. I can commit to coming back perhaps with some more advice or information around that. I certainly would not want to suggest that for some of our programs—and a good example is HASI and CLS that have international-level evidence—funding is tied to concerns around evaluation outcomes because that's not the case.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Ms Pinkstone, just to pick up on that land audit issue, with respect to that site at Kellyville, it's been indicated that Homes NSW would be developing the site and that 50 per cent are to be social and affordable homes. Do you have a breakdown as to the apportionment to social and affordable?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No, just the target for the 50 per cent.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** I take it that's the same for all of the sites?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Some of them will be 100 per cent. For example, the Camden site is going to be 100 per cent public housing.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to the affordable homes on the sites, who will they be managed by? Will they be managed by Homes NSW, or a community housing provider?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Probably a community housing provider. We'll have to go to procurement for that site.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Will you be taking that across the whole gamut, or will you be doing site-specific community housing providers?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** It will be site specific.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Are there any parameters as to what definition of affordable housing you'll be using, or who those homes will be made available to as yet?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Within Homes NSW, when we partner with community housing providers, we use the NSW affordable housing guidelines. There's a couple of requirements for us: that the properties are held in perpetuity and that they're managed in accordance with those guidelines in terms of eligibility and rent setting.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to the private homes on that site, is there any view as to whether they'll be build-to-sell or build-to-rent at this stage?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Traditionally, it's been build-to-sell underpinning those models.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** And that's what you look to take forward?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Once we've done due diligence, we're really aware of the number of properties and we will model out to see the best delivery approach for each site.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to that site in particular, that's currently owned by Sydney Water and will be transferred to Homes NSW. Does Homes NSW have to pay any exchange for that property?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We do. Under the current guidelines within the New South Wales Government, we do pay for those sites.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** I take it that will be across the board, whether it's a State owned corporation like Sydney Water or whether it's another entity—let's say NSW Health, for instance?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Are valuations being taken on the sites? If so, who's undertaking those at the moment?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We have our valuations through the Valuer General and that approach will stay—the current approach in place to value those properties—and a negotiation around the value.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to the North Eveleigh site, that was previously announced in 2022 for 600 new homes. Now it's been announced for 500. Is there a change of profile in terms of what's expected on the site, or the size of housing?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No. That's another one that, as much as possible, we've tried to leverage off the work that's already taken place, but we're also looking at increasing the mix of social and affordable housing on that site to 50 per cent as well. That will also include commercial and open spaces, and things like that.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Is that site currently owned by TAHE?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right. It's one of the TAHE sites.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** And, as you mentioned, Camden is 100 per cent social and affordable homes to be delivered on the site. It's 10, is it?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right. Ten at the moment is our initial view on how many will be delivered.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Given it's right across the road from Camden Hospital, are you looking at any potential key worker housing as part of that development?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Affordable housing under the guidelines does meet the definition of key worker housing because it enables people who are earning an income to be able to rent those properties.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** The zoning around the site at the moment is R3, which should allow for some density on the areas. Is it thought that that will be a low-rise apartment development or the like?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** It will be. At the moment we are taking a conservative approach around the sites, based on our initial assessment. I think once we've done the due diligence, we'll know if there's uplift available.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** I take it that is NSW Health-owned land, is it?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I'll have to take that on notice. I can't remember off the top of my head.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to the WestConnex dive site at Camperdown, this is one that was said to be delivered in partnership with the private sector. Was Homes NSW able to make an election for the site?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We decided not to select that site. We've got a number of properties but they're much further down and we're also developing in Glebe. We decided that wasn't a priority for us. I understand that leads to another process with Landcom and other parties.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** You made the decision at the time that effectively you had other assets in the area, other homes that you could make available, and other projects that were ongoing, which is why you chose not to make a determination for that site?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Now I will turn to some questions around the budget as well and the social housing investment within the budget. I guess this is somewhat explained in terms of the consideration that

might be paid by Homes NSW to other agencies as well, but in terms of the \$4 billion over four years to fund 5,400 new social homes, including 1,300 replacement dwellings, part of the characteristic as well is for land purchases. In terms of anything that's revealed from the audit, I imagine those land purchases would be part of that consideration and that \$4 billion?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's exactly right.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to the budget allocations, I'm trying to work out in my head the operation of Homes NSW now with the Land and Housing Corporation and also with the Aboriginal Housing Office. This money has been allocated to Homes NSW through the Department of Communities and Justice?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** But there are still allocations for the Land and Housing Corporation for new housing supply and also for the Aboriginal Housing Office. How is this working in terms of delivery agencies and the like?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We're working through that at the moment, having them come through, and the management of sales as well between agencies. DCJ, obviously, has to be considered in that, but we're looking at it from a budget as a whole. We have allocations for public housing; those that will be social housing, so developed in partnership with community housing providers; and then the AHO will have their own budget for delivery of new supply as well as maintenance.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** I guess I understand the distinction between the Aboriginal Housing Office and Homes NSW now, but what's the demarcation you're using in terms of the Land and Housing Corporation and Homes NSW when it comes to new supply? Is it just a continuation of existing programs and the like that'll be undertaken by the Land and Housing Corporation, or is there a specific task that the Land and Housing Corporation are undertaking now as part of the asset portfolio?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No, they'll continue to have their delivery of new supply. We'll also be delivering new supply through grant programs that have traditionally sat within the Department of Communities and Justice. Maintenance will still be administered through the Land and Housing Corporation. In February, we came together as one agency, but we're still working through a number of issues that impact on the budget, including what was traditionally a funding agreement between the Land and Housing Corporation and DCJ. It doesn't really make sense anymore, now that we're one agency, and we're working through that. But it isn't resolved yet.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In the 2023-24 budget, Land and Housing Corporation was allocated \$310.286 million for new supply funding. Yet, in this year's budget, the estimated spending until the end of June 2024 was only \$145.315 million. What's the reason that only 47 per cent of the funding allocated in the last budget was used for new supply under the Land and Housing Corporation?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Let me just have a look. I'll take that on notice and come back to you; that's not the numbers I have.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Would it be possible for you to break down which funding from the Building Homes for NSW program has been allocated by department?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can take that on notice.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How much of that funding comes from the Commonwealth at this stage?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** At the moment, under the national agreement about 70 per cent of funding for housing and homelessness funding comes through the State and 30 per cent, on average, from the Commonwealth.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** And that is the characteristics of that program?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In terms of the 8,400 figure, which is cited in the budget for new social housing, does that include funding from the Social Housing Accelerator Fund, as well?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I'll take that on notice. I think the accelerator is due to complete next year. I can take that on notice for you.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How many homes are projected to be delivered through the Social Housing Accelerator Fund?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Let me just look that up for you. Under the social housing accelerator, we're delivering 1,500 homes by July 2028.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to that, while you've got the page up, how much funding has the New South Wales Government received from the Social Housing Accelerator Fund?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** It is \$610 million.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How much is expected to be received until 2028, then?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's the entire funding commitment.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How much have we received so far in terms of that funding? Or is it a forward funding agreement?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** It's a forward funding agreement, but I can take that on notice and see if we've had it up-front.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Just going back to that modular housing trial, is the Government still on track to deliver 20 homes as part of the modular housing trial?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** The recently announced homes in Dubbo that I think are not necessarily modular housing but are alternative build methods, they're not included, I take it, in that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** They are. They are outside of the 20 homes that are delivered by the Housing portfolio. They are through the AHO.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Is that a model that you are looking at using in other social housing across the State?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** It is. This is very early days in testing that technology. We are piloting it through the AHO, and we will see how it works out and how it stands up after that process. The AHO have already, as well as teacher housing, implemented a number of modular projects and so we've been able to learn from those as we're developing the program for public housing.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect of the modular housing trial, what are the success criteria being used by the Government to assess the success or otherwise of that trial?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** For us, it was about testing a few things with modular. There are two elements of that. There is the modular housing for a whole house that is being built and transported on site. Those are the things that the Aboriginal Housing Office and Teacher Housing Authority have done for a number of years. The work that we did to set up the taskforce was to say, "What are the conditions you need to put in place to have this industry grow, as a whole in New South Wales?" We have seen, in other jurisdictions, MNCs being used a lot. That is not only about whole houses being built, it's also about a kit of parts, so what are the components of a house that you might be able to make in a modular sense that could help build that property? For us it's about a few things. It's obviously speed. It's about reducing cost in rural and regional New South Wales where we know those costs are higher due to travel and getting a workforce.

We're also looking at the environmental impacts and elements of that as well. We've heard, through the taskforce, that there is significant wastage in the current construction of properties, and that MNC has the ability to reduce that waste and also improve environmental outcomes for those developments. There are a few parts to it, as well as looking at what would be required from a pipeline perspective to give industry assurance in New South Wales that they could scale up and deliver. What we've heard is, with the new technologies that are being used under MNC, it is really important to have a line of sight of a pipeline, so that you can be sure that you can scale up your factory, that you can make decisions about the kit of parts. There are a few elements of that under the taskforce and the whole aim of the pilot is to start testing elements of that. Is it actually quicker if we use this technology? What is the environmental outcome when we are building, right down to are there particular parts or components of a building that are best targeted at MNC, I suppose, to other parts? What size of a building is more financially feasible to develop? What type and style of a building can best utilise MNC technology?

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In terms of the budget allocations, nothing would necessarily prevent those 8,400 homes, or a component of those, being MNC homes, if this trial is successful?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** My whole aim is to use the pilot to really test those ideas and in what parts of the program we could best use them.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to LAHC's capital maintenance budget, in the Infrastructure Statement on page 2-9, it states, "\$700.0 million of this"—1.3 billion—"will be met from proceeds of land transfers from Homes NSW in the Department of Communities and Justice". What land transfers are those?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We are currently in the process of working through the program in terms of land transfers. Like other agencies, we are also looking at under-utilised land and land for other purposes. We want to use that money to best effect through the maintenance program.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** That would be effectively land sales to the private market, potentially?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** It could be a transfer between agencies as well.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Let's say, for instance, you had a parcel of land and Education were interested in it, for instance, Education could buy that land from you, just as you bought land from Sydney Water?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** So that is being used to partly fund that capital maintenance budget of the Land and Housing Corporation?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** In part, yes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** It's outlined as well that 2,200 of the stock in terms of new housing would be replacement homes. Just to clarify in terms of that term "replacement home", does that mean a knockdown and rebuild, effectively, or are we looking at the transfer of a knockdown of a house and turning it into an apartment block, or the like, or all of the above?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's exactly what we are looking at. Within Homes NSW housing portfolio, they've done a detailed analysis of the current portfolio that we have under management, the 96,000 properties. We also are working with community housing partners that manage around 30,000 dwellings on our behalf to really identify those properties that have reached the end of their life, or aren't fit for purpose anymore, but have the potential for uplift and redevelopment. For us, that's why the land audit can be useful in some respects—because the major issue is making sure that people can be relocated as much as possible in their own community to enable that to happen. We know that there's a greater demand for smaller units. We know that there's a greater demand for accessible units and disability-accessible properties. The whole purpose will be to actually identify those and, wherever possible, redevelop onsite so that people can stay in community.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Will you be outlining a list of those properties soon? What's the program for that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We are. We've got our current program for this year. We're actually in the process of working through the full program for the four years, which will actually be seven years delivery time. We're leaving some flex in there so that our partners can come to us with ideas about the properties under their management as well.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Is that the community housing providers and the like?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's right.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How many existing properties are you looking at that will be effectively removed from the system in order to facilitate those 2,200 replacement homes?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** It'll be a rolling program across the seven years, and we'll have that detailed program by the end of this year. I'll be able to come back with that detail. At the moment we're working through how many, in what locations and at what time.

**The CHAIR:** Before I go to my colleague, I think the advocate had an answer on notice for us.

**ZOË ROBINSON:** Just in terms of the vaping tool, the Cancer Institute is co-designing it with young people. It's due to go live, I understand, in December, with some updates next year in June 2025.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I've got a question for NRAR, Mr Barnes. I wanted to get an update on something that took place a couple of years ago in 2020. It was the compliance crackdown on blueberry farms. I've seen the reporting from back then, and my office is contacted a fair bit by people concerned about not just water take, which is your issue, but also pollution, run-off and a range of other things. In terms of water take, the compliance crackdown that you did at that time found that 28 out of the 31 farms you inspected around the Coffs Harbour region were noncompliant. What is the update on that? How regularly do you re-examine an industry like that? Has NRAR been back on the ground and had another look in a comprehensive way?

**GRANT BARNES:** We look at irrigated agriculture across the State, and intensive horticulture was a campaign from a few years ago. We are due to have a look at a follow-up on that area this financial year and will be in a position to report back. I would speculate, though, Cate, that there are still noncompliances in that area. It is commonly dams that are well in excess of what their maximum harvestable right exemption is. That is a challenging matter to resolve and one that previously had been led by the former Government in terms of changes, first of all, to the harvestable rights exemption policy itself.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I'm going off *The Sydney Morning Herald* report. I don't have the detail from your website, but it does state that 13 farms were ordered to reduce the capacity of dams among 25 directions. Did all of those 13 farms reduce their dams? Have they all done that?

**GRANT BARNES:** I would take that on notice, if I may, but I can say generally that we have a program to follow up on the outcomes of enforcement actions we undertake—in particular, directions—to ensure that they have been complied with. Where they haven't been, we will consider what additional actions have been taken. Recently a court case concluded where we prosecuted an individual for not following the directions that were previously issued.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** In terms of following up, for example, on a decommissioning or a reduction in the capacity of dams, that in itself is probably a complicated exercise for landholders to do. I'm assuming they've either got to decommission or pump water out when the rain falls. Is that right? Reducing the height of dams, you can't fill half of it in—or maybe you can.

**GRANT BARNES:** Yes, that's right. That's a circumstance where the water user or landholder has been unable to have their dam licensed with the assistance of WaterNSW. Where that is the conclusion, and it's a structure that needs to be modified, that's when we can utilise directions to do so.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** In terms of NRAR actually going back and ensuring that this is done, 13 dams does look like a lot of breaches. We know that the blueberry industry over the last four to five years, and even the last couple of years, is expanding at a rate of knots. If there was an issue back then and NRAR hasn't gone back to closely examine the industry, there might be, as you said, a few issues remaining. You said you'd take it on notice, but what are the requirements for NRAR to go back? I recognise you do have constrained resources, but do you follow them closely and work with them? Do they have a period of time by which to comply, for example?

**GRANT BARNES:** Yes, so a direction would specify what's required and over the period of time that the water user needs to undertake those works. At expiry, we will follow up. That's a common action that we take to ensure that the water user or the landholder has met the directions that were specified. Where that is not the case, we can then take escalated action.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Just to be clear, you'll take it on notice in terms of how many of those orders back then have been complied with, and outstanding matters?

**GRANT BARNES:** Yes, I will.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I just wanted to go back to a couple of questions around mental health, in particular the Living Well mental health strategic plan. It recommends early intervention for mental health for young people under the age of 16. What's being done to provide that level of support? I understand the new strategic plan comes into place next year.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I think the commission is undertaking generating the new strategic plan, yes.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** What work is being done for that particular cohort?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I'll take a very broad approach for suicide prevention and mental health supports for younger people in New South Wales. We have numerous programs that are at the less, if you like, acute end but are really important for access. NSW Health provides \$17.1 million—I think it's over five years; I can double-check—to Kids Helpline, which is a very important investment, for specific skills for operators on that line for younger people. Our Safe Havens and SPOTs are able to see younger consumers who present independently.

The Safeguards Teams, as you'd be aware, are, if you like, an enhancement of existing child and adolescent community teams and have generally been well received. Their role is specifically to look after, in a shorter term model of care—usually for around six weeks—young people who may present in crisis, not necessarily to an ED but possibly to a GP, a Safe Haven, a community team or an ED, with suicidality. Often that's related to a significant personal stressor, and time is provided to provide support, coping strategies and psycho-education. If that young person is suspected or demonstrated to be experiencing mental ill health or a



mental illness, they can transfer over to the community mental health team as well. For people who need more intensive care, we've got a statewide, networked series of child and adolescent mental health inpatient units.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Could I get a breakdown of the budget for last year and this year for each of those programs or initiatives that you mentioned?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** And also how much is being spent on community mental health, both for youth in particular and also overall.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes. I might start with, for example, the suicide prevention initiatives. They are not necessarily delineated on the basis of age, because it's the one service. The Safe Havens are \$45.6 million, and that's a funding package that goes up until the end of 2025-26, and the SPOT teams are \$41.9 million. I don't have separate figures for the child and adolescent community mental health teams. I can undertake to do our best to get those because often they are standalone teams, so that should be information that we can provide. We certainly don't have a separate budget for child and adolescent inpatient care that would fit under a mental health services inpatient unit budget, if that assists.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** My final question around that leads on from the community-based workforce: Has additional funding been allocated to grow the workforce?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** In the recent budget, there was \$30.4 million for 35 new mental health clinicians. There are five that go to St Vincent's to assist with homelessness outreach. There are five mental health homelessness liaison positions. There are also positions for Justice Health for people coming out of corrections. The others are, if you like, universal positions that can be used to boost the establishment at the teams that we've identified to boost the establishment staff profile of with this budget package. All of those clinicians can see younger people. It will depend on where that service needs to utilise. If you're in an area where you're not meeting, or you're having difficulty meeting, child and adolescent demand compared to adults, there's certainly the option to put that position in a child and adolescent team. They're not specifically adult or older person or child and adolescent.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In relation to those clinicians, you said some were attached to St Vincent's. Are any attached to regional towns or hospitals?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Most of the others are attached to regional. I've got a breakdown here. Just looking at regional LHDs, Hunter New England has three of the community and one of the mental health homelessness liaison positions. Mid North Coast has two. Murrumbidgee has two. Southern New South Wales has two. With the Chair's permission, I also have two little further pieces of information that may assist with the previous questions or otherwise: Some 413 staff have undertaken the Twenty10 CAMHS training program. After the LivingWorks contract, each PHN now is getting \$50,000 from the bilateral funds to do that local suicide prevention training in a way where it can be adapted to the local community's needs. I've also got the list of locations of disaster recovery clinicians, but everybody may be happier if we provide that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** I'm happy with that one as a written answer—thank you. That brings us to a short afternoon tea break, with my apologies that I won't be in the chair after the break. I'm deputy chair of the committee that's examining Minister Dib, so I've been running between the rooms today.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** I have been called too. I think it has been agreed that I'll attend the final hour of Minister Dib's estimates.

**The CHAIR:** That's correct, Mr Tidball.

**(Zoë Robinson withdrew.)**

**(Short adjournment)**

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We'll start with questions from the crossbench.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I want to go back to the issue of Sydney Water, Mr Cheroux, in terms of the PFAS testing. Why is PFAS tested once a year compared to other testing that's undertaken? Why is it annual?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Testing will depend on the elements that we are testing and where they're coming from. Take the example of some of the biological contamination. We have to test it every day, and several times a day, because we know that it can happen at different moments during the day. When you're talking about an element like PFAS, we know that it's not going to happen several times a day. You know that, if there is a source, the source of contamination will be there and the contamination will last for a very long time. You can detect that

there is contamination and therefore you can do the analysis once a year. If there would be a risk in the catchments that it could happen, in that case the testing would be more often. The catchment is actually protected. Therefore, if there is a source today, it's existing and it's very unlikely that there is another one coming tomorrow.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Is that the same as other chemicals broadly? I understand in terms of E. coli and what have you, of course. That's what you're referring to.

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** But is it this broader sampling of chemicals that, for all intents and purposes, could be unexpected or could not be—are they all tested annually?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes, that's correct.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The local water utilities, as far as you're aware—in terms of testing for chemicals, do Hunter Water and others all have to do the same: just once a year, they test for this range of other chemicals?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** All the analysis programs are discussed with Health. At the end of the day, this is not a decision from the water utility; this is a joint decision between the water utility and NSW Health. If Health would be asking us to test once a month, then we would be testing once a month. We have one site, which is Cascade, where we are actually testing PFAS once a month. The rest of the sites are once a year. It very much depends on the discussion and the risk analysis that is done jointly with NSW Health.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** With Cascade and Medlow Dam, the media reports were that it was Medlow Dam that was shut off from the rest of the water supply. Is that correct?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes, that's correct.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I'm trying to picture the way in which the catchment works. Does Medlow Dam supply water to households so that, when it was cut off, they've had to—

**ROCH CHEROUX:** No.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** So it goes into the dam?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I should ask my colleagues from WaterNSW, but Medlow goes into Greaves and then you've got Upper Cascade.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** There are five dams in the Blue Mountains that feed the Cascade water treatment plant. Medlow Dam is at the top of the system, which flows into Greaves Creek Dam. Greaves Creek Dam then flows into the three Cascade dams.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Medlow has been cut off for now.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Correct.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What is required for it to be brought back into supply?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** It's been taken offline to support our investigations into trying to determine a cause or source for the slightly elevated levels of PFAS in that catchment. The benefit of being able to isolate it from the supply is that it just removes a number of other variables so we can explore those likely sources and understand what change occurs in the Cascade dams as a result of isolating it from the supply.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What investigations have you undertaken at the moment? I have asked the EPA this question as well—I know the EPA is working on it—but WaterNSW is also undertaking work.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Yes, we are. We're doing more sampling within the catchment itself to see if we can narrow down which part of the catchment these elevated levels are coming from. We are also having those conversations with the EPA, as you indicated, as well as RFS and the other firefighting agencies like Fire and Rescue. We are looking at historical uses in the catchment, historical fires, and trying to understand how those fires in the past may have been put out and whether or not chemicals were being used. There's a bit of an investigation going on historically to understand where this might be coming from.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I was actually in the Blue Mountains in Springwood on Saturday, speaking to a number of locals who are obviously concerned. They did mention that they believed—so this is probably the conversation that is going on up there—that in the fires of 2011-12, that one of them was working in the Rural Fire Service and that PFAS foam was potentially used, they believe, in that fire at the time to put that out. Say if that is the case—we're not going to speculate here, and I'm not going to ask you to speculate on that. But if it is,

with WaterNSW—let's use Medlow Dam or even Cascade—what are the options that you have available to treat that water to reduce PFAS levels?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** It's very difficult to say at this stage. If we could isolate it, in a best-case scenario, to a very small area where it might be found within the soil, for example—we know that PFAS is highly soluble, so it may be when it rains the PFAS is mobilising and flowing into the dam through the tributaries and creeks upstream of the lake. If that's the case, and we can identify exactly where this is, we may be able to put in place remediation activities to remove it from that part of the catchment. That would be a best-case scenario.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That's the best-case scenario. What's happening in the US—where, admittedly, they have a phase-in time, of course, to reduce PFAS in water supplies down to four parts per trillion, I think it is. There's a range of different ways—I was talking about it very briefly this morning—and a range of different technologies that exist. Is WaterNSW looking at what range of technologies exist—and, Mr Cheroux, I'll ask you the same question—in terms of treating PFAS?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** We do work together with Sydney Water and NSW Health and we adopt a "catchment to customer" risk-based approach, so a multi-barrier approach to protecting drinking water. We'll see what we can do in the catchment. As I said, the most preferred approach would be to remediate the site and remove it from the catchment. If that's not possible, then we will look at other interventions as you move down the supply chain until you get to the treatment plant itself, which might be where you're referring to some technology treatment actions.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** It was reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, with this PFAS report, that they spoke with a business that actually treats the water to go back into the river system—they didn't mention what business, but potentially heavy industry—that has to be treated at a level that's a lot cleaner in terms of PFAS, and removing a lot more PFAS than drinking water. It is able to be done. I'm sure that WaterNSW and Sydney Water are aware of what the companies need to do. I know it's potentially an EPA thing, but they are discharging into the water. I would assume, given what's happening with PFAS, you are at least tasking somebody internally to have a look at if you do need to treat it. If the Federal guidelines are substantially improved to reduce that amount of PFAS then you're going to have to act pretty swiftly, aren't you?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I just want to repeat the fact that the water is compliant with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. All the water that goes to our customers is compliant. In case the regulations and the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines would change and would go below the level that we've got—which is already very, very low—then yes, potentially we would need to build additional treatments. The sort of treatment that you build on water treatment plants are well known. In case the regulation would change, then yes, we would go straight into building the additional facilities.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** You did say it's very, very low. It is extraordinary that the US EPA—I've had a look at how they evaluated it and the work in which they undertook 130 new epidemiological studies—has reduced it down to four parts per trillion. Remind us, what is the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines again?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Seventy.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Seventy parts per trillion. Mr George, what is WaterNSW's role, if anything, in the—again, I've spoken with the EPA about this. We've got the EPA, Sydney Water and WaterNSW, and there'll be NSW Health tomorrow—multiple agencies on the health of water in our rivers and drinking water. In terms of the contaminations that have been detected in the Belubula River, what role has WaterNSW played in that particular situation, if any?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** We've had no role to play in that matter.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** With the water storages that you are responsible for across the State—we've got this annual water testing that takes place. Is there any other testing for PFAS chemicals that you've been undertaking, particularly since the last couple of months when this has really hit the headlines?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** We have a very different role to play in the Greater Sydney catchment compared to our role in the rest of the State. Our role in Greater Sydney, particularly in the declared catchments, is around the protection of those catchments from water quantity and quality perspectives. In the Greater Sydney catchment, we are now engaging with Sydney Water and NSW Health on a broader monitoring program. Over the next five weeks, we will be undertaking more sampling in the dams that supply the various water treatment plants.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Just within Greater Sydney?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Yes, just within Greater Sydney. We do not have the same role in regional New South Wales. In regional New South Wales it is the responsibility of the local water utility.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Thank you. I wanted to turn to the issue of water use and water supply to mining companies now. Ms Jones, I think this is probably for you. You would be well aware of the licensing exemptions and the excluded works that mining companies are able to use in terms of water. They do water take that isn't licensed. Say there's a mine with a 3,000-hectare footprint; they are able to take that water. It's not licensed. They don't pay for it, but they use it. You're aware of that procedure and that system?

**AMANDA JONES:** Are you speaking about Dendrobium?

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** No. I'm actually going to speak about McPhillamys, Bowdens, Cadia coalmines in the Hunter Valley and the Central West.

**AMANDA JONES:** Mining companies, if they're doing a development and they're looking to make any works on a site and use any water, it's not that they're exempt. Normally they would need to go through an EIS process for the overall project. But also, if they were building a work—a dam—or they were extracting water, they would need those activities to be licensed.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That's extracting the water. I'm being told that it's not extracting the water, it's the rainfall and run-off figures that go over that land in terms of capturing all of it and it being essentially contaminated, but they're able to use that in their operations. I've got figures here. For example, from McPhillamys gold project, there's 1,971 megalitres; Moolarben Coal expansion, 1,102 megalitres; Bowdens lead and silver project, 954 megalitres; Cadia goldmine, 8,871 megalitres and a couple of others, which brings it up to 12,717 megalitres average per year. This is just in one particular area. The question is in terms of that cumulative impact—that's not water take like pumping out of the river or in terms of groundwater—mining companies or industry are able to get away with that. The question is, is there an authority that approves that take?

**AMANDA JONES:** The overall approval for the mining development is under the planning legislation. If it's an issue around potential pollution or contamination of waterways, that is a licensing issue for EPA. If it's a water take, then it's a licensing issue for the department. If it's a works approval for holding water, then it's also a licensing issue for the department or New South Wales, depending on the amount of take.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Some of these developments, do they have water management plans in terms of their whole operation? I know there are water access licenses but then the way in which they—does the department approve that or is it a planning thing?

**AMANDA JONES:** It's a planning thing.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I've asked this before and I'm going to ask it again. Within DCCEEW Water, is there some unit within the department that looks at the cumulative impact of the cumulative take of water from mines? There's a range of different projects up for approval in terms of expansion. Central West is a critical minerals-rich area, apparently, and potentially many more mining companies will be seeking to operate. Is there a cumulative database of the water which is licensed to mines, as well as this rainfall and run-off take?

**AMANDA JONES:** The water take is looked at under our water sharing plans and the compliance for those plans, either an LTAAEL compliance or an SDL compliance, depending on where the plan is. In DCCEEW Water we have a small team who look at State-significant developments, which mining developments often are. They will be assessing those developments, not from an environmental impact perspective and not from a water quality perspective, but from a water availability perspective. On McPhillamys, for example, all of the department's advice is on the planning website. That advice is all about the volume of water not about the environmental impact assessment.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That's what I'm asking about here in terms of the availability of water. Given that, for example, within the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, there's a limit in terms of what can be diverted and what can be taken, although there's a huge amount of wriggle room, as we've discovered in recent years. With this, that doesn't fall within that water that has been allocated within the plan. This isn't water that's allocated within the plan, is it?

**AMANDA JONES:** Depending on where the mine is—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The Belubula headwaters—let's look at that one—which flows into the Lachlan, which flows into the Murray-Darling Basin.

**AMANDA JONES:** In the case of—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** There's a pipeline or something that has to be built for that, isn't there?

**AMANDA JONES:** The McPhillamys development, basically our advice about that proposal is on the planning website. In April 2022, under the previous Government, a regulation was made for a specific category

of licence—a special purpose licence. That licence hasn't been provided; it's still being reviewed by the department.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The special purpose licence for that particular project?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes, for water take for that project—for McPhillamys.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I've only got a couple of mental health questions. One is, last year additional funding was given to Lifeline to expand into text and webchat support. Do you know if they need to put in any additional safety measures, particularly for dealing with children and young people who might be using that service through that type of communication?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I'm happy to answer that. I'm not aware of whether Lifeline has needed to do that or, in fact, has done that. Lifeline have quality controls around the work they do and are very much a trusted partner in this work. The case was made to expand to media, or a medium, that young people in particular are more comfortable with, but I don't have today full details of any arrangements in particular that might have been made around that. I'd suspect that they would've needed to look at what the model of care for text and webchat would include.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Is an evaluation of that service part of the five-year funding that they were given?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes. Lifeline, in addition to the \$13 million annually, they were given—I think it was \$6.1 million for the text and webchat.

**DEB WILLCOX:** It was \$1.6 million.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Thanks, Deb. It was \$1.6 million. Certainly there's no evaluation that we have received around that. Again, I would need to come back around information, but our expectation would be that Lifeline and other partners providing similar services would be providing evaluation material.

**DEB WILLCOX:** Could I just add, Mrs Maclaren-Jones, we do have the Kids Helpline, which is a \$17.1 million investment over four years specifically for young people between 5 and 25.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** The other one is following on from the Single Front Door Program, particularly around mental health. I understand that it's being delivered through Healthdirect. I was wondering whether you had an indication of whether or not rolling this service out will have an impact on wait times?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** We would expect, if anything, that it would be decrease wait times. In general, statewide we keep KPIs around the number of calls that are abandoned or the number of people who wait for more than two minutes. Statewide the issue with the Mental Health Line has not been so much those performance metrics; it's been that it's fragmented. Individuals have needed to tell their story multiple times, it doesn't have access along the lines of text or app or webchat, so the opportunity with the Single Front Door is predominantly around those things and trying to get a uniform service across New South Wales. Notwithstanding that, there are some situations where people have waited for significant times, but certainly the new contract would include monitoring that.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** And also an evaluation?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes, it would include evaluation.

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

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** The time frame to get the project started initially with the first seven districts or networks is going on in February 2025, with hopefully all of our networks and districts going on by mid-2025. The evaluation would obviously come after that. But as part of running a good program and setting up a good program, we're putting that into the structure at the start.

**DEB WILLCOX:** If I could just add, in terms of healthdirect and our contracts with them, we do, as Dr Flynn pointed out, have KPIs around people not waiting and jumping off the call. Part of our contract management would be to monitor those KPIs, probably on a monthly basis, so we can track performance and make sure we're meeting the needs of the community.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** On the NSW Health website it states:

In 2023 over 400,000 calls were taken through the Single Front Door/healthdirect and over 315,000 people were assessed and triaged. So what happens to the remaining 85,000 people who phoned in?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I think that entry on the website might be around physical health—the Single Front Door that exists already. It's only now that mental health services will be joining that as an integrated service. I'm not sure I can provide information around that.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Has something been put in place to prevent people stepping off the line? Or, if they do, what is the follow-up so that no-one misses out?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Yes, there are safety protocols. The understandable concern that we would all have is if someone waits online and then hangs up. Around that, the work that we do is making sure that whilst people are waiting they've got access to who to call for an emergency, because people ring that service with, as you can imagine, a spectrum of acuity. But we also do collect data around times where the mental health line might drop out for technical reasons. There are contingency plans in place around that as well. We're hoping, and we have an expectation, that the new system with healthdirect would increase our capacity to monitor this and decrease those events, simply because it's going to be a single, integrated, statewide system.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** I'm happy for you to take this on notice. You just said that you monitor those that drop off because of technical challenges. Could you provide how often that has occurred?

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** I could. The one I'm thinking of is the worldwide internet outage a couple of months ago where, on a Friday afternoon, that was a significant concern for lots of people, for lots of different reasons. I certainly could come back with any information around any other dropouts, and perhaps also the duration around that one as well.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** That'd be great. Thank you.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** There are no more questions for the Mental Health portfolio from the Committee members, so we're happy for Dr Wright, Dr Flynn and Ms Willcox to be excused. Sorry, everybody else, we still have more for you. But we're trying.

**BRENDAN FLYNN:** Thanks very much.

**(Murray Wright, Brendan Flynn and Deb Willcox withdrew.)**

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Mr George, I have a couple of questions for you about the tender process for the Upper Hunter pumped hydro projects, specifically the details around the competitive tender process and what exclusivity rights have been given to Upper Hunter Hydro as part of that.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** That process started with an expression of interest a number of years ago where we went to the open market as part of the former Government's Pumped Hydro Roadmap approach. We received quite a range of interest. We had a particular party that eventually came through the process—forgive me, I forget the name at this point in time. It's escaped me. They started going through the process. They were unable to get approval through FIRB, the Foreign Investment Review Board. As I understand it, they effectively sold their interest in the project to Upper Hunter Hydro, who carried on with the project from that point forward.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is it just access to Glenbawn and Glennies Creek dams?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Correct.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is there any information in terms of access to land surrounding those dams, what will happen for some of the local landholders and how that will work? Can you provide any information about that?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** That's a matter for Upper Hunter Hydro. It has been given, if you like, access rights to WaterNSW land for the purpose of its development. To the extent that it needs to engage with or negotiate with private landholders as part of its development, that would be a matter for Upper Hunter Hydro.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Similarly, if they have to look at any compulsory acquisition, that's a matter for the company as well?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Yes, but I'm not sure how a private sector business would undergo compulsory acquisition.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Okay. Do you have any information in relation to the length of the exclusivity of that tender?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Not in front of me right now, but I can take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** On notice is fine, thank you. I want to come back to you now, Ms Jones, in relation to some of the questions I was asking the Minister earlier today about the Aither report, particularly the recommendations that go to structural adjustment measures. Is there any work underway in the department in relation to the specifics of that report?

**AMANDA JONES:** The recommendations you mentioned were 5, 6 and 7. Recommendations 5 and 7 are really about the design of the buyback framework. The reason we commissioned the Aither work was as an advocacy piece with the Commonwealth, as part of alternatives to buybacks. We have advocated with the Commonwealth about taking into account those two recommendations. Recommendation 5 was about that there should be consideration of exit grants for high security licence holders. Recommendation 7 was about looking at opportunities to rationalise networks if licences are being brought up within an irrigation organisation, for example.

The Commonwealth, to date, hasn't actually reflected those kinds of ideas in their current framework, which it has published. However, where it is currently looking at buybacks, recommendation 7 probably doesn't apply. We'll continue to advocate with the Commonwealth that it take heed of that advice. Recommendation 6 is about providing adjustment where impacts occur—providing adjustment payments for opportunities, taking account of where the actual impact occurs. The water right might be brought up in place X but the actual industry effects could be in place B. That idea will definitely need to be considered, and will be considered by Minister Moriarty, I'm sure, when designing the framework for structural adjustment in New South Wales.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Going to that point, the Minister spoke earlier about the role of Minister Moriarty. How is your agency working with the department—the new acronym—in terms of any specific adjustments? What does that look like?

**AMANDA JONES:** There is a steering group working between the two agencies, and we'll definitely support the department of industry and regional New South Wales with any advice and support they need to think about how to frame the program in New South Wales.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** One of the other recommendations from that report—I think it was recommendation 2—was around clearly communicating strategy and intent so that entitlement holders can consider the implications of whether they participate in buybacks or not. Again, is there anywhere, since this report has come out—and I appreciate what you said about it being an advocacy piece—that gives any more information through your agency?

**AMANDA JONES:** From the Commonwealth's perspective, it has published its framework. But from the perspective of how structural adjustment might be managed and communicated, there is absolutely a commitment, as I understand it, from Minister Moriarty—and certainly Minister Jackson supports this approach—that the communities affected will be consulted about the types of initiatives that could provide relief to those communities, should buybacks occur.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to take you now to some of the questions I asked the Minister earlier about the Connectivity Expert Panel report. My understanding is, in terms of some of the data collection, particularly in relation to the northern basin, that effectively, because of the absence of data, there are some recommendations about reducing diversions by an average of 4 per cent across the northern basin and 6 per cent in the upper three catchments. Has there been any work or is any work being undertaken to analyse the economic and social impacts of those diversions across both the northern basin and the upper three catchments?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes. The independent panel made recommendations about both holding additional environmental water for pulsing and also about end-of-system measures as well. They also made recommendations around the operations of Menindee Lakes. There is a road map in the panel's report—I think on about page 115—and it sets out the time frame. They acknowledge that the work needed to be done to analyse the implications, potential benefits and implications of the recommendations they were making. The department is doing the hydrological and economic analysis between now and the end of the year. We're looking to, in March next year, be able to consult on what we've found and by the middle of next year to have a next steps and options analysis piece ready to consult on as well. With regard to Menindee Lakes and the operation of the Menindee Lakes, this is really an issue for the basin. This is not something that New South Wales can do on its own. It needs to be consulted through the Basin Officials Committee and through MinCo, and that's what will happen. We can't change the operations of those lakes without the other basin States agreeing.

I might mention that it's a really exciting but very challenging time over the next couple of years in the water planning space because, while we're looking at the recommendations from the independent panel, we're also—and I think this was referred to this morning—looking at what the minimum inflows should be in seven of the inland surface water plans. They're the plans from which most water is extracted. Setting those minimum

inflow standards also has an influence on how much water you assume is available in those catchments. We have some competing ideas here about how to set rules in water sharing plans to share and manage the water. We really need to make sure that all of this work is in alignment so that we can understand how the assumptions work together or conflict with each other over the next period.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to take you back to the issue around the SDLAM projects. I know that earlier in evidence you were talking about some of the work hopefully starting in the dry season in March but, obviously depending on BOM predictions and what may or may not happen in terms of rain events, is there any kind of contingency built into the projects, given you obviously can't control when it may or may not rain? How do you manage or mitigate that?

**AMANDA JONES:** In the contracted arrangements, we will definitely incentivise for completion of projects. While there are six SDLAM projects, there are 79 sites, and they are all in fairly remote areas. The works are not big works, necessarily, but it's a challenging series of projects to manage from that perspective. Rain could disrupt us. There's nothing we can do to prevent it. That's why we're really focused on getting the managing contractor up to speed so that they are absolutely ready to start with their workforce, with the materials they need in the locations that they need to work in—as I said, there are 79 sites—so that as soon as the dry starts they're ready to work. The way we can best manage the water risk is to be as prepared as we can. But there's no doubt that if we had an extremely wet period that would disrupt the work.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Presumably the intention with the contractor is to be doing as much concurrently as you can across those locations as well.

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes, correct.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The Reconnecting River Country Program and projects under that—are they in addition to the SDLAM projects? Is there any overlap?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes. Reconnecting River Country—the projects that we have to deliver to the end of 2026 are a combination of completing a business case, but also one of the key projects for the Murrumbidgee is looking at how we can run the Murrumbidgee water sharing plan at its full flow rate. At the moment WaterNSW is constrained in being able to release environmental flows because there are about 150 private properties that can experience inundation if that water is released at the full flow rate. Then there are a couple of bridges and other things that we're building to make sure that forests in a couple of places are wet. There's a particular scope of work that we have to deliver by December 2026, and it's focused on those things. The broader program itself, as fully envisioned in the two business cases, would take 10 years to achieve and involve 4,000 landholders, and it's not funded yet. The approach to these water constraints projects is really stage by stage.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are those water constraints projects or is that work prerequisite for some of the environmental water to be delivered as well? Or does it just depend on the project?

**AMANDA JONES:** It supports environmental water being able to be delivered to where it's—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you have to do one before you can do the other, or does it depend?

**AMANDA JONES:** A lot of the water has been bought back or it is held under licence. In these particular catchments, we need to do these projects to allow it to get to the places that need to be wet.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Chair, may I be excused to visit the other committee?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You certainly may.

**(Michael Tidball withdrew.)**

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I just wanted to turn to the independent Connectivity Expert Panel report. After the release of that report—I think it was afterwards, anyway—the Government said it's undertaking detailed hydrological and economic modelling to assess the findings of that panel. What's the scope of work of that? Has any consultant been contracted to undertake that work?

**AMANDA JONES:** No consultants have been contracted that I'm aware of as yet. We are scoping both the hydrological work and also the economic analysis to be done. It may be that we need to contract assistance for both—modelling and modellers are quite in demand at the moment. But also, from the economic analysis perspective, we will obviously consult with Agriculture New South Wales, and we will look to ABARES for the work that they've done. There is likely to need to be some expert advice in that space.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Sorry, "likely to be needing some—



**AMANDA JONES:** Some expert advice in the economic analysis space.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** With the modelling work, I think the panel recommended that it be completed within six months. Is that the time frame?

**AMANDA JONES:** That's what we're aiming to achieve, yes. It's the end of this year, and in March next year we're looking to be able to present what that analysis has shown.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Present publicly?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The panel also recommended that to ensure accountability there should be independent oversight of further assessment to ensure that the intent of the recommendations isn't lost. Is the department or are you looking at ensuring independent oversight of this additional hydrological and economic modelling that is going to take place?

**AMANDA JONES:** Our modelling work is always independently peer reviewed, and there has not been a decision to have anything in addition to the normal oversight of our work. So it's either the Natural Resources Commission looking at the effectiveness of our work, in terms of the water sharing plans, or the independent review of our modelling. Our modelling, depending on its use, is also reviewed by MDBA, and they often get an independent review of the work as well.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** When you said that the modelling is always peer reviewed—I think. Did you say that?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Remind me, who undertakes that, or do you mix that up?

**AMANDA JONES:** It's variously experts in the field and, yes, it is a mix. Actually, on our website we do have a program of updating all of our models. The Namoi model was independently peer reviewed most recently, and I can confirm whether those reports are available.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** With the additional economic modelling, which is obviously separate to the hydrological modelling that you'll be undertaking, you're saying that that will be undertaken internally?

**AMANDA JONES:** The economic modelling? Yes, but we'll probably need to rely on some expertise as well. They'll be interdependent because, to do the economic analysis of impact, we'd need to understand what the hydrological modelling said.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The economic will follow the hydrological?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** With the economic modelling, in terms of the parameters for that—I suppose this is the case when you'll be looking at cost-benefit analysis for particular projects, often the benefits seem to depend on what is being put forward for. But, for example, will you look at things like positive social, cultural and environmental outcomes arising from the recommendations contained in the report and things like the negative economic impacts of the fish kills? Do you expect it to be comprehensive like that?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes. There may be a limit to how much externalities—I'm not an economist, but from the modelling I've experienced with BCR analysis, there is sometimes a limit to the externalities you can take into account. But, yes, we would be looking at both the social and economic impacts of any changes, including, as you were mentioning this morning, any compensatory triggers under the Water Management Act that might happen.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Any economic benefits that may be realised, or can be predicted, to regional communities that greater river connectivity delivers, for example, will be part of it? I think you can see the reason I am asking these questions in terms of some of the socio-economic studies that have been undertaken around environmental flows, buybacks and everything. It seems to generally be a little bit one-sided in terms of the economic and social impacts of that as opposed to the benefits that can also be brought by more water.

**AMANDA JONES:** The social and environmental benefit needs to be valued as part of the analysis.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That will be?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That has been specifically laid out?

**AMANDA JONES:** It's part of the approach. It's part of what we would need to do.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I asked the question earlier about the compliance action in relation to the blueberries in Coffs Harbour. What role exactly does WaterNSW, but DCCEEW really, play in terms of tackling the agricultural run-off? I questioned the Minister earlier about the whole catchment management issues—the fact that integrated catchment management obviously has been lacking for quite some time. But you do work together on that with Agriculture?

**AMANDA JONES:** In terms of actual environmental pollution from run-off, that really is an EPA role and EPA does the water quality monitoring. But with regard to your question previously about the integrated catchment management framework and your observation about what's lost in New South Wales compared to Victoria now in terms of catchment management—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Also us 12 or 14 years ago, whenever it was.

**AMANDA JONES:** The State Water Strategy, released back in 2020, identified this issue. There are a number of initiatives. One of those was to develop a water quality road map, which we have published on our website. That road map really came up with two key recommendations. One was that we really needed to improve water quality governance, which is where the integrated catchment management framework comes from, and the other was we needed to improve data and reporting. You asked also about terms of reference for the integrated catchment management framework. If you go to the water quality road map on the website, it sets out five steps.

The first is a historic desktop kind of review. We've completed that review and it tells you what you would expect: That there's over 30 agencies that have a responsibility for water quality outcomes and about 50 pieces of legislation—so very dispersed, not unified. The framework really needs to address that challenge. By the time we get to step four, which is the governance framework options and analysis, that's when we would start to consult.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Are there recommendations in all of that? That's very useful, thank you, Ms Jones. Are there recommendations, or does anybody say, "Have a look at what the thousands of hours of work that were done to bring together catchment management authorities and the catchment action plans and all the agencies and all the stakeholders"? That work has been done, and I shudder to think what John Williams and others who were part of that original process think now, thinking that it's all going to be repeated for another six years before anything changes.

**AMANDA JONES:** The work in progress at the moment is to look at other jurisdictions and look at the policy and regulatory frameworks available in other places. That will help lead to the options analysis that we will then consult on. So history's not lost to us. We are looking to history as well.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Reminiscing about the old catchment management authority days. I've just got one set of questions—and I think it's for you, Ms Jones—about dam safety emergency plans. Really, I'm just questioning does WaterNSW ever release those plans for the dams that you operate?

**AMANDA JONES:** That's a Mr George question.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Do we release those plans ever?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** The dam safety emergency plans themselves? No, not necessarily. We work, obviously, closely with combat agencies, such as the SES, so there is some information that is publicly available through the SES, such as the inundation maps for dams downstream.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** They are available?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** They can be available, yes. Through the SES, yes.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** I'm just curious. Some constituents have been trying to access the inundation maps and haven't been able to, or the dam plan has been withheld. The concerns stated are for the reasons of maybe combat agencies and for security reasons.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Correct.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** But the inundation plans and maps are generally available, are they?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Yes. You can usually find those on the SES website.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** If they're not available, would you consider releasing those?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** We're happy to take that on advice. I think it depends. We'd have to take that on advice.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** At the moment, Bowral shire council's currently considering a residential development and that would be at risk in a dam emergency. There are constituents who are trying really hard to contribute to that process of exhibition, but they can't properly without understanding the downstream impacts in relation to the inundation related to the dam emergency plan.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** I'm familiar with the development you're talking about. In that example, local government is responsible for producing the inundation maps that relate to development. When a development like this has come forward, which it has just recently, we've provided advice to the council on that development. In that particular instance, we have requested or recommended that they develop a flood inundation map for that development, which we would contribute to. At this point in time, we wouldn't, for instance, be supporting the development in its current form without that flood inundation mapping being done.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** In relation to the inundation mapping from the dam safety emergency plan, is that something that you could release to the community so they can have a better understanding and can contribute more fulsomely?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** I think what needs to be appreciated is that they're different things. The dam safety emergency plans usually refer to catastrophic failure of infrastructure.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** With respect, I do understand that. But I think the community is able to engage at a high level of intelligence and ought to be provided with this kind of material. Would you agree?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** That information would be available through the council, as the development progresses.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** But that is separate to the inundation planning and mapping that you hold, under the dam safety emergency plan.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Yes, and I have confirmed I will take that on advice.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Thank you. Are you aware of the uncontrolled spill at Wingecarribee in 2022?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** An uncontrolled spill?

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** That's as I understand it, in 2022. There was no notification to the residents about that, as it unfolded. There was a 2022 uncontrolled spill.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** I'm not familiar with an uncontrolled spill in 2022 from Wingecarribee, no. It's a gated structure; it would have been a planned or controlled spill, particularly if it was during a rainfall event.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** If it was a controlled spill, then, would residents normally be notified about that? Is that what the dam safety emergency plan would provide for?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** No. That would have been communicated through the SES as the combat agency, if there was a threat to the community or people downstream.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Would it surprise you if members of the community said to you that they weren't notified at all? Maybe it was a controlled spill. I've been informed it's an uncontrolled spill.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** No, it may not necessarily surprise me. Around New South Wales, different SES units have different capabilities, and communication varies around the State.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Would it concern you if people weren't notified?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** It depends on the nature of the spill. I'm not familiar with the particular example you are referring to.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Would you be able to take that on notice and find out for us what happened? Apparently it was 2022. That is the detail I have. I am told that it was an uncontrolled spill and that downstream residents, during that, were not notified at all.

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Sure. I'm happy to take that on notice.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Thank you—as well as to get advice about the release of the inundation? Not the ones generated by council, but the ones you hold?

**ANDREW GEORGE:** Yes.

**Ms CATE FAHRMANN:** Ms Jones, just as we were finishing the previous round of questions you were talking about McPhillamys. You were saying they have applied for, as I understand it, a specific-purpose access licence. Just to be clear, this is because DPI Water at the time, in its advice dated 10 February 2021, stated

that there is insufficient water entitlement available in the Belubula River above Carcoar Dam water source to account for the water-take requirements of the project. The department states, "The applicant has acquired 262 unit shares from a total allocation of 264 shares in the Belubula River"—wow, there's only two left after they've done that—"above Carcoar Dam water source. However, even that amount does not fully account for the project's water take, and the project has a shortfall of around 283 megalitres per year." So they've applied for a specific-purpose access licence. How are they going to get the extra water?

**AMANDA JONES:** The licence was able to be applied for because the previous Government made a regulation to allow them to apply. That special-purpose access licence is being reviewed by the department at the moment.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The licence is being reviewed? Sorry, just to be clear, they've already applied for it; it's being reviewed. But what are some of the options they could do, for example? It's a reasonable amount of water that they've still got to get. A pipeline, I've heard a few people talking about; is that right?

**AMANDA JONES:** I'm not familiar with the pipeline. I can take on notice your question. The application for the licence is still being assessed, so there has not been a decision made.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** So when you were saying that the previous Government introduced a regulation—for this particular specific-purpose access licence for McPhillamys?

**AMANDA JONES:** Correct.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** And that happens for a number of different mines; is that right?

**AMANDA JONES:** I'm not familiar with other mines. I just know that this happened for McPhillamys.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** When was that?

**AMANDA JONES:** In April 2022.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Right now it's before the department. Is it a public document?

**AMANDA JONES:** No, I don't believe it is.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** It's not a public document, so we don't have any idea. I'm asking you the question here in budget estimates for water budget estimates. We don't have any idea exactly what it is that they are proposing to do to get those additional 2,083 megalitres?

**AMANDA JONES:** I don't have any detail about that and it's not a public document; it's just been confirmed to me. I'm happy to take a question on notice about it.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Can I just check, sorry—how often does that happen? How long have you been working in the department?

**AMANDA JONES:** A few years now. But that is the only time I've experienced that happening.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** In another situation—for example, let's take Bowdens lead and silver mine—where they don't have enough water, what do they do? If the Government doesn't pass a regulation to enable this specific SPAL, what is it that other mines do, compared to McPhillamys?

**AMANDA JONES:** I'm not familiar with Bowdens, but if—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Just as an example.

**AMANDA JONES:** It's either purchase water on the market, if it's available—I'm not across the detail of Bowdens.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** It sounds like they got special treatment.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Jones, I just want to finish up on SDLAMs for the moment. If the projects aren't delivered by that 2026 deadline, what are the consequences of that?

**AMANDA JONES:** The consequences are there will need to be a negotiation with the Commonwealth about funding, and the consequences would be that the contribution to the 605 gigalitres may be at risk.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could that mean, potentially, that the Commonwealth could buy back the difference between what's been done and that 605 gigalitres?

**AMANDA JONES:** Potentially.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Just in terms of the expert panel report, is that approach just for the northern basin communities? Or is that intending to be the same approach across other catchments?

**AMANDA JONES:** Some of the recommendations are about connectivity from the northern basin through to the southern basin. So it potentially affects both basins.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So it depends on the recommendations?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I think this one is for you, as well. But if it's better directed to someone else, I'm happy for you to advise me. It's in relation to the Productivity Commission's review of funding models for local water utilities. They obviously suggested some fairly major structural reform. I understand that the Minister made some comments at the local government conference about looking at a co-designed model with consultation expected to begin within the coming months. Is there any update you can provide the Committee in relation to that work?

**AMANDA JONES:** Yes. We are looking at putting out an options paper by the end of the year.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will there be a new unit within your department to work on that model? Or what will that look like internally?

**AMANDA JONES:** No, it's the existing metropolitan utilities unit within the department.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Okay, so an options paper by the end of the year. Is there any other time frame in terms of development or implementation of a new model?

**AMANDA JONES:** Not at this point.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is there any additional—

**AMANDA JONES:** I think the Productivity Commission did make a point about how any change would need to have significant engagement of local government, and that would take some time. The department plans to take that advice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is there any additional funding for that work you are doing, or is that just being met within your existing budgets?

**AMANDA JONES:** That piece of work is being done within the department's budget.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Okay.

**AMANDA JONES:** The town risk reduction program, however, has been extended to next June. That is a support program for local water utilities.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I think, Ms Pinkstone, these questions will be directed to you, but they are quite high level, so hopefully you can help me. I just wanted to ask broadly—the Government has talked about a \$5.1 billion investment in new public housing, and that they are going to prioritise at least half of those homes for victim-survivors of family and domestic violence. Do you have any information about how much of that \$5.1 billion will be invested in regional areas?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Not at this stage. At the moment we have our program, our 800-odd this year. We're developing out the program for the entire period. That will be reviewed at the end of this year by INSW, and then we'll be able to provide a more detailed breakdown across the years and across the locations.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you being asked by the Government to consider regional locations as part of that work, though?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In a similar vein for the \$527.6 million for emergency housing, particularly around homelessness support services—and I know some of this has been touched on—is there any breakdown for regional areas, as well as when, where, how, and what that will look like?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** That's on top of the existing SHS budget, so we're doing a few things to design how we'll fund that. We've set some money aside to just meet indexation rates. Traditionally, there have been different rates between the Commonwealth and New South Wales. We're setting that at the New South Wales rate. We're looking at the Homelessness Innovation Fund, and we're also looking at the temporary accommodation budget to more clearly align it with the homelessness provision in New South Wales. Our aim through the

Homelessness Innovation Fund is to bring forth proposals locally that either address gaps in the service system or can help us move out of hotel and motel accommodation into more supported accommodation options.

That has been designed in consultation with all of the homelessness peaks, and we'll be open across New South Wales to look at those models. We know there are particular regional areas where there are extra pressures around temporary accommodation, and the Northern Rivers is a really good example of that. We want to make sure that, wherever possible, we're looking at those supported models and moving away from motel accommodation. We will be looking at that across the State and looking at our own data at where those hotspot areas are.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Just following on from that, in relation to the data, what are you looking to capture? What data can you capture and what are you looking to capture moving forward?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Obviously we have data that comes through the specialist homelessness services themselves on who they're seeing and who they're turning away within those services. We also collect data through our temporary accommodation, Link2home, so we can see those hotspot areas and the areas where, I suppose, we're getting the greatest number of requests for assistance. We overlay both of those. We also look at the census data when that's available. We also look at data that comes from our housing register and where those demand areas are as well. We look at all of the different data sources. For us, we're saying we already know where the turn-away rates are; we already know where we have great demand for temporary accommodation. So we'll be wanting to make sure that, through these procurement processes, we're really targeting those need areas.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Where are the current turn-away areas?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Through SHS services, it's everywhere at the moment. The rates are 40 per cent turned away, so all of our homelessness services—irrespective of client cohort, irrespective of areas—are struggling with the demand.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Do you have a breakdown between metropolitan and regional turn-away rates?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can certainly take that on notice and get that information for you.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** That'd be great. How much of that \$6.6 billion that's been announced is for homelessness?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** It's the \$527 million on top.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** The Minister indicated this morning that the implementation of the strategy would be drawn out of that \$6.6 billion. Does that mean it would be coming out of the \$527 million?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** At the moment we have a team that's working on the homelessness strategy within Homes NSW. It has come over from within the Department of Communities and Justice to work on that strategy for us. We'll be looking at the budget as a total for homelessness. That includes our ongoing funding. We've extended our services funding for another two years, so there's certainty while we're going through the procurement process. But at the moment that's being led internally, from internal staff resources working on the homelessness strategy.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Just to clarify, there's no line item for the strategy in that \$527 million?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I'll take on notice if there's money to support the modelling work.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In relation to the youth action plan, is there any money actually allocated out of that \$527 million for implementation of the youth action plan?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** We're currently working on that budget allocation. We've got the money set aside for the HIF; we've got the money set aside to meet the indexation rates. We're also working with the peaks on how we will break down the money that's existing for particular programs as well. We really wanted to adopt a different approach around how we were working, and that was to say we know that everyone's stretched and at capacity in many of these services, and we wanted to co-design an approach. We also wanted to learn from the HIF and see what proposals we get that come forward through that sort of strategy. While we're leading this process, we've committed that there be a homelessness action plan, that that would be specifically targeting young people and would be for two years, so that we can learn and refine our approach as we go. In terms of resourcing, that's being led within Homes NSW and the homelessness teams in my area.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** When the strategy is announced at the end of this year, will there be a budget allocated to it?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I suppose the issue that we're looking at is how this money and this funding allocation that's new money into the system fits also with the new supply money, because we're looking at new and different models through the new supply, which may also include homelessness responses. Holistically, we need to look at our whole budget and how we are addressing homelessness across the spectrum, so from temporary accommodation through to long-term social housing, the models that we're using there. We also want the principles of the homelessness strategy to really help us formulate the recontracting approach for SHS, as well, when they're due in the next two years.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** In relation to the innovation fund—and I'm mindful the Minister said an announcement is due in the next few weeks—has it been broken down to be targeted or to have an amount allocated for Aboriginal controlled organisations, youth or regional areas?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No, we haven't targeted at the moment. We're using this first round to really test some of the ideas, so there'll be a couple of streams within that. One will be about addressing temporary accommodation and moving to more supported crisis models, and the other will be looking at new service innovations and models. As you've outlined, Aboriginal community controlled models, young people—all of those client cohorts are a priority. We'll be looking at the results from that first year and what tweaks we might need to make, to make sure that there's coverage of client cohorts and regions.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** The Together Home program, which runs out next year—the last tranche—that would be something that would be considered as part of the innovation fund, as opposed to—

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Absolutely, rough sleepers and housing-first models.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** The other thing is Rent Choice Youth. How many young people were supported in the last 12 months?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Sure, let me just get that for you. Rent Choice Youth—1,021 households.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Do you know how many were Aboriginal?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No, I don't. I can take that on notice and see if we can break it down.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** And also by district or region—whichever.

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Sure.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Do you track the wait time—once an application has been lodged, how long it takes to be responded to or actioned?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I'll take that on notice. I haven't heard of that. We have requirements to review in a certain period of time, but I don't think we keep a record of that.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** Was any funding allocated to collaboration to end street sleeping in this budget?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** No.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** My final question is in regard to the SENTRAL youth agency and where that's up to—whether or not there has been funding allocated to the rollout of that or how it works?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I wouldn't be able to answer that. That's not in my area of responsibility.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES:** No-one can answer about SENTRAL youth?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Mr Tidball has gone.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Ms Pinkstone, with respect to the land audit and the parcels that are transferred across to Homes NSW in identifying a market participant for what may be 50 per cent of those sites—like it is at Kellyville or the like—what's the process that the department is going about in terms of identifying that market participant?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I'll talk about it in theory—the approach we use. What we're doing at the moment is reviewing all of the sites in the entire program to determine where that would be a project that Homes NSW would lead or where it would be a project that a community housing provider would lead with a

developer partner. We're also cognisant of the fact that we have the HAFF funding coming federally and that's led by community housing providers. The team is actually modelling out the entire program. We'll be working through a strategy around why or where Homes NSW would lead that. That can once again go back to the principles of the program. What are we trying to do in terms of unlocking nearby land? Who is the landholder in that area? In some locations it might be a whole-of-location area and the community housing provider actually manages most of the stock in that area. In some areas it would be us just leading the development. For example, Camden, we will keep that and we will manage that ourselves in Homes NSW.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Mr Cheroux, do you agree with the Minister's assessment that Sydney Water has been a "big problem" in the delivery of water infrastructure in new housing?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Sydney Water has always been cooperating with all the government agencies on making development happen. Again, I quote a few numbers. Last year we invested \$1.2 billion in growth, which is a significant number. We have processed about 40,000 requests or applications or demands from customers and developers, and 90 per cent of these requests are actually processed instantly in the sense that it's an online service so you get your response straightaway. There is only one person that has taken about between four and six weeks on average.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Mr Cheroux, following the Minister's outline this morning of a change of direction that she has provided to Sydney Water, what changes have you made internally as a result of the Minister's edicts?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I think that's what I was saying. It's about listening to what the Government priorities are and making sure that we can support the Government in delivering that.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How has this practically changed in terms of your infrastructure plan and the like? Have you changed your profiling in terms of water delivery?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** We have definitely increased the resource and the activity on the development side because there are more developments. Therefore, we need to resource the team a bit more than what it was before.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How has that been applied when it comes to, let's say, infill? I note in the budget it says, more specifically, that Sydney Water is heavily focused on the Transport Oriented Development Program. Have you reprofiled any of your infrastructure spend to those areas rather than necessarily greenfield development?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** We have actually added that. Transport-oriented developments, you've got the eight priority development areas where you can actually provide service without additional investments. The additional 31, which is the second stage, we've actually got very minimal investments or sometimes no investment at all, for these new TODs.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In terms of that program, how much is Sydney Water investing over the forward estimates to be able to support the new development in those areas?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I'll take the number on notice for the infill areas. In total, in the next 10 years, we will be investing something like \$17 billion in growth assets.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to those TOD precincts, you mentioned 31 tier two precincts. Were you asked to consult on the additional six that the Government outlined when they changed it to 37 precincts?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** We have been working closely with Planning and other agencies on the TODs, yes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** With respect to that Oxford Gardens development in Ingleburn specifically, why has the approval process for the temporary pumping station taken so long on that project?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I'm probably going to take that on notice, but this development is one of the developments where you've got two developers willing to develop a piece of land that is far from the existing infrastructure. It's always a fine balance between a discussion with the developer and having the developer contributing to the necessary assets rather than having the customers paying for the assets.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** In terms of this project, when are you anticipating there being some consent being given to the developer's submitted request for a temporary pumping station at Oxford Gardens?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I will take that on notice but, as I said, we're working closely with the developers. We want to make that happen as quickly as possible.



**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I want to go back, Ms Jones, to the questions around the excluded work exemption for mines. You're aware of what that is again?

**AMANDA JONES:** I'm not sure what you're meaning.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Excluded work exemption available for mining operations. They capture surface water run-off. That water goes into different dams. Essentially, it's storage. It's not allowed—untreated at least—to go back into the water. It's quite a big form of take, which are the figures that I was reading out to you before. We are seeing mining expansion. There are expansions of existing coalmines on the books—about 18 or so, I understand. Plus we note this push around critical minerals. Let's say, for example, in the central west—Orana region, I think it is. What is the department doing? DCCEE Water has to assess this, but who is looking at the overall supply of water, for example, to the Murray-Darling Basin? These are big areas. These are big volumes of take that I understand are exempt from a water access licence. It appears to me that each project is just assessed singularly and nobody's looking at the whole take. Would that be a fair assumption?

**AMANDA JONES:** From the water sharing plan's perspective, the take of any licensed holder is taken into account.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** This is unlicensed.

**AMANDA JONES:** I'm not familiar with why that form of take doesn't need to have a licence.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Do you think people within your department, in DCCEE Water, when they're looking at providing advice to planning as whether to approve these mines, that there are in fact substantial water take issues, including in this excluded work exemption, and there should possibly be some work done to assess the cumulative impact of what has been taken?

**AMANDA JONES:** Cumulative impact is normally associated with environmental impact. Definitely, from a water sharing plan perspective, and a water take perspective, any water licence to be taken is absolutely accounted for under the water sharing plan, but the unlicensed form of this take, I'm happy to—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** It's run-off and rainfall that essentially—

**AMANDA JONES:** And re-held onsite.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Yes, because they don't need a water access licence. Can you see what I'm saying? Is it a policy gap there, potentially, in terms of measuring the amount of water that's taken?

**AMANDA JONES:** I'm happy to take a question on notice about it. I don't think so, but let's confirm that in writing.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Ms Pinkstone, can I ask you a question about community housing providers. That's directed to you, I think. In the 30 seconds that I have left, what steps is the Government taking to improve oversight and accountability of community housing providers—this is after the National Regulatory System for Community Housing has been criticised for its limited enforcement powers—particularly in terms of effective management, maintenance standards and tenants' rights?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** In terms of the community housing sector, Homes NSW is responsible for the contract management. There's two streams, I suppose, in terms of oversight. There is the regulatory scheme, and that looks at the overall operations against the regulatory framework, and then there's the contract management approach. That contract management approach sits within Homes NSW, and that's making sure that all community housing providers are meeting the terms of their contract with us and the lease agreement. That includes maintenance standards and tenancy management.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Ms Pinkstone, in terms of the replacement homes program—the 2,200 replacement homes—how many of those will be Aboriginal Housing Office homes? Do you have any figures for that?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** Let me look for you. The total targets for new supply for the AHO are 543 homes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How many of those are replacement homes, do you know?

**REBECCA PINKSTONE:** I can take that on notice for you.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** That would be great, thank you very much. Mr Cheroux, Wollondilly council advised that Sydney Water previously made an undertaking to deliver capacity this year at the Wilton Growth Area for 4,000 additional dwellings through the upgrade of the Bingara Gorge wastewater treatment plant. When do we now anticipate the capacity there at Bingara will be delivered?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** I'll take the exact date on notice, if I may. We're working closely in this area to make sure that development can happen. This is ongoing.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** The date will be taken on notice with respect to that?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** Yes.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** When will the Upper Nepean Advanced Water Recycling Centre offer capacity to service Wilton?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** The Upper Nepean Advanced Water Recycling Centre is in the planning phase. Currently, we're talking about a commissioning in 2032.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** As you no doubt are aware, wastewater is being trucked out of Wilton by Sydney Water. In May, Wollondilly said that Sydney Water had advised that their capacity there was for 400 additional dwellings. As of today's date, how many more dwellings is Sydney Water able to service at Wilton?

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

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Wollondilly council advised that they have approximately 480 development applications on the books for assessment. The Government's five-year housing target is 5,000 new dwellings in that LGA. A portion of these will be in the Walker Corporation Appin development. What is Sydney Water's role in relation to water and wastewater at Appin?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** We are working closely with the Walker Corporation and trying to find a solution that's best for the developers and the community. It's one of the developments that has been brought forward by a very long time, so it's quite a distance from the existing assets. We're talking with the developers on what is the best way to service the development.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** How will that impact the other water programs you have in the area that are still yet to be rolled out?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** That's why we're discussing with the developers.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** I think that might be it for you, Mr Cheroux. Actually, sorry—with my 52 seconds I might return to Willoughby. In terms of Willoughby, what support and communication has been provided to the affected schools, teachers, students and residents? Is there a plan to involve them in finding a long-term solution to the problem at South Creek in Willoughby?

**ROCH CHEROUX:** There is a lot of engagement ongoing with the community, as we do on all of our sites. I can come back with a very detailed list of engagement that has been done. We always engage with our customers and the community on every one of our activities when it impacts the community.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Thank you very much. I think we'll give you a 10-second early mark.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You're very generous. Are there any Government questions?

**The Hon. GREG DONNELLY:** No.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That concludes today's hearing. Thank you all for being here throughout the day. The secretariat will be in touch shortly in relation to any questions taken on notice or supplementary questions. We thank you for your time.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**